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1989 Forces

Peggy Brown

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FORCES

Letter from the Editor

A college journal performs the Herculean task of moving already overworked people to new involvement: professors, red-eyed and tight-lipped; tap reserve energy forces to turn to the wrinkled muse sleeping on the top book shelf; students voluntarily journey to computer labs to revise already graded essays; photography students take out loans to print 6 x 8—no, 8 1/2 x 11—no, 6 1/2 x 8 1/2 prints; latent poems bubble out of brains dangerously tipped to the left side.

A forum, in this case a college journal, serves as a glowing invitation. If I underestimated the need for such a forum, I am now a reformed thinker. The number (over 75) and quality of submissions this editorial staff has received for this initial publication of FORCES justifies its existence. The selections made by the Honors Literature class (by a blind selection process) reflect a talented college community.

The first issue includes various selections: short stories dealing in subject matter from adolescence to old age, from the mundane world to a mythological one; poetry, photography, and drawings that create an interpretive environment on various levels; and essays that defy easy classification: the staff has purposefully chosen unusually creative essays for this first issue. All ideas represented here are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor, the staff, or the College; this is not an official publication.

Since FORCES is an Honors Literature class project, the editorial staff will change each semester. However, since I will remain editor, I will strive to maintain a journal that represents the enormous talent on reserve at Four C's (Collin County Community College). For its semi-annual publication, FORCES will have two deadlines for submission: November 1 and April 1 of each school year. Anyone within the extended CCCC community (faculty, students, staff, spouses, or children) may send submissions c/o Peggy Brown, IDH, Spring Creek campus. Our goal is to publish high level, imaginative works in an artful presentation: an Interdisciplinary Honors journal for national distribution.

The premier publication of FORCES owes its existence, and I hereby express my gratitude, to a number of people. First, to the administration (Steve Ellis and Deanna Wilson) and Student Activities (Scott Stevens) for financial support; to Don Hancock, who provided expertise and hours of immeasurable assistance in transferring the text to Page Maker; to Charles Corry, who offered expert advice as editor of his own journal (*Poetic Liberty*) and typed most of the text; to Mindi Corwin for proofreading copy; to D.V. Morton, member of the Honors Literature class, whose idea for the title, FORCES, was unanimously accepted; to the English faculty who offered support (Sherril Cobb kindly read the class's selections); to June VanCleaf, Cathy Holt, and Rex Reed for helping select and prepare the visual images; to Patty Richards for tirelessly perfecting the cover print; to Jan Coppedge, who volunteered to design the cover; to the members of the Honors Literature class who undertook this extensive class project; and to all others who offered help (Yvonne Johnson, Todd Pferferle, and Aubrey Jones) when I needed it.

A special thank you goes to my mentor, Dennis Kratz, who, as co-editor of the UTD publication *Translation Review*, offered valuable advice in the conception of this journal.

Most importantly, I want to thank all who submitted works. Decisions were difficult, and the limited size of the journal forced the elimination of some excellent submissions. Those may appear in future issues.

Peggy Brown



FORCES

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FORCES is published two times a year by the Interdisciplinary Honors Program of Collin County Community College District, 2800 E. Spring Creek Parkway, Plano, Texas 75074, or 1600 West University, McKinney, Texas 75070. FORCES welcomes all contributions of poetry, fiction, essays, black and white photography, and charcoal drawings from members of the CCCC community. All accepted manuscripts become the property of FORCES. Mailing subscriptions are \$6 per year (regular) and \$8 per year (institutions). No part of the journal may be reprinted without the permission of FORCES.

Leigh V. Salisbury

Thoughts to the North

A Southern wind blows hard
the collar of a denim jacket
flutters against my throat
out of place and season
here in the warm night, air
but its presence is comforting
and memories cool the breeze
until at last the wind feels familiar
in this place where a thousand people
pass by or smile
with the faces of strangers
and even the stars have shifted
leaving me unsure
that I'll ever find my way home.

The turn-of-the-century red granite post office sat atop the highest hill for miles around. Surrounded by shrubs, iron hitching posts, and weathered benches shadowed by rugged oaks, the building was a holdover from a more romantic time. The Grundy post office was also the daily gathering place for retired farmers and tradesmen who shuffled along the scuff-gravel paths in an almost ritualistic fashion, weather permitting, to sit and whittle and swap knives and stories under the umbrellas of the massive trees.

From the post office lawns, those leathery old men held a commanding view of all corners of Grundy, Texas, and the lawn they occupied at any given time depended on the wind, the hour, and the season. During the course of any given day, the troupe, most of whom were World War I vets, might rotate lawns and benches several times to take best advantage of sun or shade. I remember an abundance of lazy summer hours spent sitting quietly on one of the wooden benches with Tommy Joe, my best friend, sipping tall RC Colas and quietly soaking up chilling accounts of the war against the Kaiser. Those crusty old yarn-spinners loved an audience—any audience—and in our presence, adventures of epic proportion rolled like quivering, shaped notes past tobacco-stained grins and grimaces as the old vets enhanced distant glories. In retrospect, I have often questioned the sagacity of my willingness, even at age eleven, to so readily accept as fact many of the colorful accounts of the Great War.

If a stranger stopped for directions in Grundy, a typical reply might be: "Well, let's see, now, young feller, if'n I'as you—ye say it's Uncle Jess Johnson yer lookin' fer?—well, from the post office, I'd take me a—ain't ye one o' A'nt Bessie's gran'kids—I thought ye kinda had a familiar look about ye—"

In defense of the sleepy Texas community, Grundy was not a one-horse town in 1958; there were several horses, as a matter of fact, along with numerous milk cows, assorted livestock and fowl, and almost two hundred people. The buildings of note were the school, the post office, Herman's General Store, and a Magnolia gas station with its flying red horse beckoning travelers from the state highway. Two streets and a farm-to-market road crossed Grundy from east to west, and railroad tracks with a rusty siding (not used since the days when cotton was king in North Texas) ran north and south on the east side of town between the post office and the school. Trains no longer stopped in Grundy; they had not for several years, and the lumbering giants barely slowed and gave only token toots of the whistle to alert local folks that a train was passing through.

The post office with its resident yarn-spinners, the roads crossing town, the Magnolia gas station, the school house, the railroad track, and one Whizzer-bicycle-conversion-motor-scooter that belonged to my teenage brother, Booter, are all central to the story of my eleventh-year adventure. It all took place on a warm autumn Saturday, the first weekend of the Texas State Fair. Booter was gone to the fair with friends, and my parents were visiting a hospitalized aunt in nearby McKinney. Tommy Joe had spent Friday night with me, and we were

Whizzing through Grundy

By Charles Corry

left at home, alone, and on our own.

I had transportation of my own, a classy green and white Firestone Five-Star General bicycle, and although I considered myself quite adept in the operation of two-wheelers, Booter's motor-scooter was strictly off limits. Not only were my mother's admonitions to "stay off that piece of junk" firm and clearly understood, Booter had reinforced the matter with threats of the kind of unmentionable horrors that only an older brother can conjure up, if I ever so much as sat on the seat of his wonderful Whizzer.

But I was eleven. There was an adventuresome autumn spirit in the air. Booter and my parents were gone; and there it was, leaning against the wall of the open garage begging for the road. And in self-justification, I must add, it was really all Tommy Joe's fault, anyway. What eleven-year-old can walk away from a best friend's dare? Besides, I could handle that motor scooter—I knew I could. The only difference between it and my Five-Star General was the motor mounted in the open triangle of the bicycle frame; and, of course, it had a throttle; and, of course, it would go much faster; but the grandest distinction—that which set it apart from the shiniest Firestone Five Star General in the world—was the magnificent "var-o-o-m" sputtering from the rattling, chrome tail pipe. The music was irresistible. So, at Tommy Joe's dogged insistence, in spite of my better judgment, I reluctantly rolled the amazing two-wheeled wonder into the bright autumn morning sun. For a long moment, I solemnly stood beside it in much the same attitude of a gallant knight about to mount his spirited steed. Tommy and I decided that I would do the driving (after all, it was my brother's scooter), and I straddled the seat with all the determination of Snoopy atop his doghouse in anticipation of impending battle with the Red Barron.

The bicycle-conversion motor-scooter, a makeshift fore-runner of modern scooters and cycles, was not equipped with an electric starter or even a kick starter. The only way to get the machine moving under its own power was to take a running start and push it until sufficient compression was reached to crank the engine. With a stout-hearted effort, Tommy Joe ran and pushed and huffed with all his young might while I expertly manned the controls. When the scooter finally awoke to our efforts, Tommy Joe jumped on behind, and we were off.

It was only after we gleefully pattered down the farm-to-market road headed away from town that we discovered that the brakes were not working—at all. At the time, we did not consider being brake-less a major problem. Our speed was sufficiently slow that with the combined efforts of dragging our feet, we could slow the scooter or bring it to a halt, at will; so, we decided to continue our escapade with a ride around the school house, and after several sputtering, giggling laps around the deserted school, I aimed the marvel of modern engineering past my house.

It was magnificent. Never in my life had I experienced such elation. The plan was to go west to the railroad tracks, turn around, return home and safely park the motor scooter. By not going into town and past the post office, we would create little attention, and no one would be the wiser; and at school the following Monday, well! Tommy Joe and I would have tales of adventure that none of our friends could possibly hope to surpass. Little did we know.

As we neared my driveway, however, misfortune bared her toothless grin. The throttle wire broke and opened the gas just enough to keep us from being able to stop by dragging our feet. To compound our woes, as we sailed by my house, my father appeared on the front porch. He stood, silently staring, while we scooted on down the road desperately dragging our feet in a futile attempt to halt the runaway Whizzer. We varroomed around the curve, across the tracks, and out of sight, leaving a haze of sneaker smoke lazily drifting above the asphalt pavement.

Although we were far off any record pace, and without intent to set one, our speed had reached sufficient velocity to where there were but two places in town with a wide enough turn area to accommodate the sputtering, speeding Whizzer without risk of crashing. One was east of town around the curve past my house, and the other was at the Magnolia station west of town where the main streets converged at the highway. From one end of town to the other, from the highway back to the railroad tracks, we doggedly and uselessly dragged our feet without having the slightest hope of bringing the runaway scooter to a halt. On the second pass past the post office, the whittlers began to take notice.

At the east end of the circuit, we whizzed past my house again to the turn-around. By this time, my father was sitting on the porch leisurely rocking in the love seat swing, watching with an air of casual amusement as we fluttered by.

“Having fun, boys?” he yelled above the popping din of the scooter as I sailed on with a white-knuckle grip on the handlebars, staring dead ahead, Tommy Joe glued to my back, ever-tightening the bear-hug around my waist. In a desperate attempt to do something—anything—I leaned forward and reached for the carburetor in an attempt to turn off the gas as we rounded the curve, headed for another run past the post office. My well-intended ingenuity yielded but a new burst of speed as we leaned into the curve.

Once past the insensitive post office gawkers, I made another attempt to shut off the gas, and this time I touched the spar plug. Tommy and I shrieked and shuttered from the electric shock.

We held a quick conference. Considering my unsuccessful attempt at doubling as engineer and pilot, and considering the

successive string of setbacks, we had no difficulty reaching consensus agreement to ride it out until we ran out of gas. At the time, we failed to consider that a Whizzer gets approximately one-hundred miles-per-gallon, and there was a fair amount of gas sloshing around in the tank.

Fate cracked an ill-smile on us that Saturday. On our next eastbound lap across the tracks, I could see smoke rising from a distantly approaching northbound freight train.

“Tommy,” I yelled over my shoulder into the ever-strengthening breeze, “a train’s coming!”

“Oh-o-o-o . . .” was his rattled reply.

As we recrossed the tracks and started back past the post office, it was obvious that all normal activity had come to a standstill. The whittlers, aware of the oncoming train, were lined up on the north lawn, waiting. Things were getting out of hand. Out of pubescent frustration and some deep-rooted primordial urge to avoid horrendous embarrassment at any cost, I made another stab at shutting the throttle down; and once again, our luck ran true to form. We both screamed and jolted in a burst of painful disappointment, and once again, the scooter picked up speed, much to the glee, I might add, of the knee-slapping post office yard birds, hooting as we scooted out of view.

By this time, our overwhelming concern had graduated from fear of facing my father—or even Booter—or even making another embarrassing trip past the hooters at the post office. Our attention was focused solely and intently on the soon-to-be-reached point in time when we would be forced to compete with the train for right-of-way at the railroad crossing. Quick but rough calculations on my part put our speed at approximately the same as that of the train, and the distance of our uncompleted lap back to the tracks about the same as the train’s distance from the crossing. With just a little luck, I felt we could perhaps possibly pass in front of the train on the next eastbound leg; and then, with a great deal of luck—if the train was not a long one (really, it needed to be a very short one)—the train would clear the crossing by the time we reached the tracks on our return westbound round. We needed something to be optimistic about.

On the ensuing westbound trip past the post office we were greeted by an ever-larger crowd, including Mr. Herman, the grocer, two grocery customers, and the postmaster. Commerce in Grundy was at a standstill. All stood waiting with anticipation on the north post office lawn. Excitement over our upcoming eastbound leg was reaching an apex. Not since Ma Ferguson stood on the post office steps while stumping her way across Texas in the 1922 governor’s race had such a furor been raised in Grundy, Texas. Everyone was waiting to see how we would fare in the race for the railroad crossing right-of-way.

On that final eastbound leg, as we rounded the curve that put us on the east side of the post office, parallel with the tracks, realization’s sharp teeth sank deeply in. It was glaringly apparent that my calculations had been in error.

The crowd had moved to the east lawn. The stage was set. As we began the southern approach, we were running neck-and-neck with the second engine. The curious engineer waved genially at the onlookers and gave a little toot of the whistle, as if to celebrate the occasion. Tommy Joe’s head was buried deep into my back. Decision time was at hand. We could not stop. The train could not stop. We had less than two short blocks

before the road turned east across the tracks.

I clinched my teeth and with all the will power I could muster, again reached for the carburetor. Even today, I sincerely believe that I could have held on to endure the murderous voltage until the motor choked down, but Tommy Joe was a lesser man. Immediately, he let out a hair-raising scream and begged me to let go: better to be run over by the train.

Less than a block to go before the crossing. The lead engine had pulled slightly further ahead, and I knew that there was no way that we could miss crashing into the side of that northbound freight train. Then it suddenly dawned on me that there was but one thing to do: abandon ship and take our chances.

After the noise, dust, scooter and our bodies settled, and the train rocked lazily on up the tracks, we got up and gingerly brushed ourselves off and checked the scooter. To my amaze-

ment, it was, as we were, not in total ruin. The handle bars tilted at a queer angle, and the broken head lamp loosely dangled by a wire. But that was all. We were in a similar state of disrepair. Some areas of our bodies were not garnished with bruises, abrasions, or contusions, and in spite of slight limps, we could both still walk. For days, however, we were to wear our battle mementos with much the same humility as a less-than-pure Puritan girl once wore her scarlet "A."

The deepest wounds, however, were to our pride. I will never forget having to push the Whizzer on past the post office gathering toward home and my waiting father, nor the open sport for days to follow in the sleepy community of Grundy, Texas, about "them crazy kids on that dang-blasted contraption." But now, thirty years later as I stare out the window on a blustery, autumn day, I can't help but smile.

Charles Corry

Puberty

I feel the shock of sheer cloth
Slice the dark over satin skin
— Satan's delight — enter
The lion's mouth — desire surges
trembling hands on

I am alive and must — must not
Am I branded the Sinner? — I am

My heart races past thought
The flood in my groin denies God
Dilutes reason with hot lust
Drowns thick guilt in rising
pressure of blood

I am alive and must — must not
Am I branded the Sinner? — I am

**Rachael C.
Borchard**

The Man in the White Suit

He came to church
in a white suit.
March; daffodils not up.
Easter weeks away.
The rest of us wore hidebound
brown or sagebrush gray.
But he strolled down the aisle
in a white suit and sun
applauded in multicolors
through stained glass
for his blond hair, his grin,
his audacious wink, his suit.
The Good Man in the window
smiled—I swear—and raised
His shepherd's crook in salute
to the man in the white suit.

I took my son Earl to the Toyota dealership over on Windsor Road. He wanted a truck. They had a chic model advertised in the morning paper; only slightly used, creme de la creme stuff, loaded, rock bottom price, must sell by sundown. You know the pitch.

"Fine as shit," Earl said when he saw it, running his hands over the racing stripes.

"Racing stripes on a truck? What does it mean?" I asked. He just smiled and kicked the right rear tire. It was a sure sign that he was growing up: all men kick the right rear tire when they like a car. It's a tribal rite expressing affection. I felt my doubts disintegrate; I knew for certain he was old enough now for a vehicle of his own.

"Howdy ma'am. Hep ya'?" He startled me coming up behind us as together we admired the rich upholstery and automatic windows.

"Howdy." I believe in speaking Rome to a Roman. We shook hands and exchanged weather forecasts on the late September heat wave: "Trucks," I said eventually. "They're like luxury cars nowadays."

Mom! Earl said, embarrassed as usual. They gave one another a knowing look and began to talk technical. I'm pretty good about motors and carburetors—I can change tires and oil and lubricate in a pinch—and talk all kinds of car talk. But the truth is, I don't know from trucks. Least of all luxury trucks. I never dreamed I'd need to.

"Well," I broke in finally, "It's a lot of truck for a sixteen year old. Is that the best price you got? \$13,500?"

"Yep," They both looked annoyed.

"Seems like an awful lot."

"Not for this," they said simultaneously.

"It's just a li'l ole truck!" I asserted ignoring their bewildered stares. I figured that unless one of the two of them wanted to write the check it didn't really matter if I offended their sense of value. "It's about twice as much as I intend to spend."

he salesman guffawed. "Twice as much? How much you lookin' to spend, ma'am?"

"Say about six or seven."

He guffawed again. "Ma'am. This is 1988."

"The truck isn't."

"Nope. But it's a hot number, ma'am. It's a fully loaded '86 4x4."

"It's a sweet machine," Earl agreed. "Pewter. I want Pewter or Black."

"It's not real pewter. It's just paint."

Earl climbed in, adjusted the seat, fiddled with the stereo. "Live sound system."

"Sound system? Why would a truck need a sound system? It only has two seats."

"Four," again in unison. They demonstrated how it all worked: the seats pull down in back and so on and so on and

....

"Well, it sure is fine," I agreed. "Now show me what you

Study in Pewter

By Miriam K. Harris

Grey skies
Smiling at you
Nothing but grey skies
Wapa dooooo 000 000 0000
Grey skies
smiling at me
Nothing but grey skies
do I see eee eee eee

have from 1985, or '84, or even '83?"

"Sure. Glad to. Let's just step inside and I'll pull my inventory sheets."

"Sweet as shit," my son muttered longingly.

The salesman led the way up the steps, swaggering a bit, I thought. "Ladies first," he turned, gallantly smiling as he held open the door for us.

SPLAT. Something black and wet hit his arm. A tiny bird swooshed over, landed in the eaves just left of the door.

"Well, I'll be damned." He looked at his arm. So did I. So did Earl.

"Pardon my French, but . . . will you excuse me a minute please." The glob was crusting in the heat, turning sorta grey. Pewter.

Peggy Brown

Observations at 5:00

If I had a red sports car
 I'd drive
it by, back it up,
Park it in front.
Step out casually,
and stroll across the street.
 I'd straighten
my red sweater around my neck,
and
 I'd feel
the change in my pocket.
While
 I smoothed
my shirt
 I'd stroll.
Then
 I'd sit
at the bar, tap my hand and
 They'd watch.
 I'd drink,
looking straight ahead
or to my left through the mirror
to the chick who wouldn't be able to resist.
 I'd light
a cigarette, drop too much change on the bar
and
 I'd step
out to my red sports car.
 It'd start
right off,
Then
 I'd tip
my head slightly
to the left, look behind, and pull out.
And
 they'd all watch.

RRRING-RRRING-RRRING
Rory ignored the alarm clock and continued to stare at the ceiling where a kaleidoscope of bumps and miniature shadows played hide and seek with him. "Now you see me, now you don't. Ha-ha-ha," he whispered.

RRRING-RRRING-RRRING

Footsteps. Someone was coming down the hallway. Now they were at the door. Rory paid no attention to the mystery person because the elephant on the ceiling just winked at him. It wasn't an entire elephant, just the head, but it did wink. "It's our little secret, isn't it, Mr. Elephant?"

RRRING-RRRING-RRRING

The door opened. Hey! It was Dad!
Good old Dad. "Say hello to Dad, Mr. Elephant."

"Rory?"

"Yes?"

"Your alarm clock is still ringing."

"... It is?"

Rory's father reached for the alarm clock that sat on top of the TV and snapped the button down. The ringing stopped, but Rory barely noticed. 'It's soooo quiet in here,' he thought.

His dad was staring at him. Mr. Sandling was all dressed for work; a walking, talking mannequin from a Culwell & Son store. 'I've got a corporate dad,' Rory thought. 'I bet he even has sex by the numbers.' "Hold it, dear, we have to make it for 3.7 minutes, we have to make . . ."

"Rory, are you listening to me?"

"What, Dad?"

Mr. Sandling clenched his teeth. "I said you'll be late for school if you don't get up."

"I'm up, Dad, I'm up. You saved the day, Dad, just like the cavalry in a John Ford classic. Where's your yellow bandanna, Dad?"

But Mr. Sandling had already left the doorway. Sighing heavily, Rory pulled his bare legs from under the sheets and placed his feet on the carpeted floor. He hunched his shoulders as the soreness of the night's rest, imbedded in his joints and muscles, protested his movements. 'Why is it,' he wondered, 'I always feel the worst at the best time of the day?' Pulling himself to his feet, he stretched and shuffled to the bathroom. 'Yet, 7:31 is a darn good time,' he mused as he lifted the seat on the toilet to relieve his extended bladder, 'but 5:47 p.m. isn't too bad either, or 3:42 a.m., and hey, let's not forget good old . . .'

Rory jumped at the noise behind him, splattering the toilet seat and the floor.

"Good job, Corey, real good. I even lifted the seat for you. A lot of good that did."

"Why do you always have to pee with the door open? It's so gross."

Rory flushed the toilet and unrolled some toilet paper to wipe away the stray urine. "Listen, sister dearest. As long as I'm

Tranquility from a Floor Mat

By M. S. Chrisman

subjected to the pitiful scene of you measuring the growth of your thirteen-year-old breasts . . . "

"Shut-up."

"... which, by the way, aren't going to get any larger . . ."

"Shut-up."

"... I will pee with the door open, standing on my head, with my back to the stool, if that be my kinky desire."

"Shut-up."

She was crying now, and Rory had to bite his lip to keep from commenting on that. Corey tried to act grown up, but her tears and petulant pout proved that her maturity was still out of her grasp. "Go on, get out of here," he said quietly, "I have to get ready for school."

Rory closed the door with a soft click and turned towards the mirror. He didn't like what he saw, but he never liked what he saw. He brushed his teeth, enjoying the disappearing taste of old cockroach dung that permeated his mouth. As he rinsed, he saw with distaste blood intermixed with the toothpaste and saliva. 'Jesus, are my gums disintegrating?'

At the shower he turned the hot water knob to allow the water to warm before he took his shower . . . but someone had forgotten to change the direction knob from shower to faucet, and ice cold pellets pounded his head, neck, and back. Motivated by discomfort, he fumbled with the knob and succeeded in diverting the water to the faucet. 'At least I'm awake now,' he decided.

With his shower done and his hair in place, Rory selected his clothes with no real discrimination; he didn't really care what he wore.

When he was dressed, he poked his head around the corner

of the door and looked down the hallway to the kitchen dining table. 'Breakfast is on, and Dad is gone. Might be a good day after all.'

Whistling a show tune, Rory walked casually down the dark hallway, through the shadowy living room, and into the brightly lit kitchen. Thursday was the maid's day off, so the family was subject to Mrs. Sandling's limited culinary skill. The thought didn't discourage Rory as he hungrily pulled out his chair and sat down. He became discouraged when he saw the bowl of papier-mache his mother, with tired eyes, placed on the table in front of him. Rory pursed his lips with interest.

"Mom?"

His mother, dressed in her bathrobe, stood at the sink performing another domestic chore. She didn't even turn to face him. "Mmmmm?"

Rory lifted a spoonful of the quagmire, held it upside down, and watched it ooze grudgingly off the spoon and hang suspended before releasing itself and landing back in the bowl with a resounding "splat." "It's oatmeal, isn't it, Mom?"

"Mmmmm."

"Yeah, oatmeal; my favorite." Satisfied that the puddle had been properly identified, Rory began to shovel it into his mouth. It was cold and lumpy, but he didn't care. 'Oatmeal's good cold; not like spaghetti,' he thought, 'But germs . . .' Rory leaned his head back, eyed the oatmeal suspiciously, and then glared at the cylindrical box on the kitchen counter that the oatmeal had come from. The Puritan pictured on the box leered at Rory; that smug, self-satisfied, sadistic smile most often demonstrated by religious zealots. 'Probably planning a book burning,' Rory thought, 'while dreaming of spanking his wife, dressed up in her nightgown . . .'

Whamppp!!!

The force of Corey's books hitting the table jiggled Rory's bowl (but not the oatmeal) and disrupted, in mid swing, the quaker's firm application of his hand to his wife's buttocks.

"Rory, we're going to be late for school."

Rory tore his gaze from the evil box of inquisition and looked up at his sister. She was standing cocked to one side, with a fist resting on her protruding hip. 'What the hell does she want?'

Rory knew from experience that his mother would speak first and that his sister would throw in a concurring shot.

"Rory," Mrs. Sandling said, and his heart leaped. "Rory, don't you think it's time you display some responsibility and see to it that you get yourself and your sister to school on time? I'm tired of this happening every morning."

Rory turned his head towards his sister with hopeful anticipation. 'Come on, Corey,' he silently pleaded, 'Come on. Please?'

Corey cooperated. "Yeah, butt-brain; act your age."

'TOUCHDOWN!!' Rory leaped to his feet with his arms stretched straight above his head. His mother and sister, having shrunk away to avoid being hit, stared at him with furrowed brows. Mrs. Sandling's stare was one of final exasperation;

Corey's was one of emphatic disgust.

His mother spoke first . . . as always. "Rory, if you don't watch it, you won't be going to the dance on Saturday."

Rory blinked twice in confusion. "Mom, I asked not to go to the dance. Are you offering me an incentive program?"

But Mrs. Sandling had retreated to the sink and was putting the dishes through a ritualistic torture.

Rory spoke to his sister while continuing to watch his mother. "C'mon tiny-tits . . ."

"Don't call me that!"

". . . let's go."

"Just don't call me that anymore."

Corey picked up her books, and they both walked to the front door.

"Why should I stop?" Rory asked.

"Because if you don't . . ." Corey's mind searched and then grasped ". . . if you don't," she said with a spreading grin, "I'll tell Mom and Dad what you really do in the bathroom when you say you're washing your hands."

Rory stopped with his hands on the door knob. He turned to face his sister, his lips set and his eyebrows twitching.

"What?" he whispered.

Corey scanned the ceiling. "Oh, I imagine it must be Karen Schlotsky you're thinking about while you do it." Obviously she was enjoying this.

Rory shook his head and opened the front door. "You're crazy," he told her, but to himself, 'Jesus, I need to be more quiet when I'm in there.'

John Weylund High School wasn't new, but it wasn't crumbling either. It was just worn; worn and comfortable, like a favorite pair of jeans that you are afraid of washing or wearing too much. The bricks were still clean and the floors still shiny. It was a goooooood school!

As soon as Rory put the car in park, Corey opened the door, got out, and started speed-walking towards the building. He was used to it by now. At first he thought he would be a status symbol for Corey; the senior brother of a freshman girl. 'But not me,' Rory thought.

He eased out of the car and shut the door, making sure all the doors were locked. Carrying his notebook loosely in one hand, he walked towards the front doors of the school. A notebook was all Rory ever took home anymore; text books were useless. 'Shiny paper and cardboard crap,' Rory thought.

Springing up the steps to the glass doors, Rory looked up . . . and stopped. Nate Bruchen was lounging by the doors with two of his buddies. 'It's too late to turn around now.' Rory continued up the steps, walking now and with his head down. 'Maybe they won't say anything.' Rory was at the top of the steps and twenty feet away from the doors. 'Maybe he got a good warning from Mr. Brister for last time.' Fifteen feet. 'Maybe he doesn't want to cause any trouble.' Ten feet. 'Maybe I'll make. . .'

"What's up, fairy?"

Rory bit his lip and continued toward the doors, but before he could escape inside, Nate and his two Cro-magnum partners blocked his way. An impish grin spread across Nate's face.

"I asked you a question." Nate's tone was threateningly condescending, and his smile was frozen in place.

Rory tried to ignore the fear churning in his gut and the sweat that was beading on his forehead and upper lip. 'God, all I want is to get to class.' Faraway, he heard the bell ring. "C'mon, Nate, let me by."

Nate's eyes narrowed to evil slits. "Are you threatening me?" The anticipation in Nate's voice encouraged this morning's cold and religious oatmeal to rise dangerously up Rory's throat.

"No, I'm not threatening you, but I do know you're not stupid enough to kick my ass on the front steps of the school." Rory **didn't** know if Nate was that stupid or not, but he hoped.

"Yeah," Nate relented. "Yeah, you're safe . . . for now."

Nate turned and walked away, his buddies wandering behind him like subdued cattle. Rory followed them with his eyes, not concentrating on what would happen the next time they met, merely thankful for his narrow escape.

With his eyes still focused on the spot where they disappeared below the steps, Rory grasped the metal handle of the glass doorway and pulled it open. 'I'm late for history already, and I still have to go by my locker, and what is it we're studying anyway. . .

"Hello, Mr. Sandling."

A squeak of a scream escaped from Rory's lips, and his fingers released his notebook to the tiled floor as he came face to face with Mr. Brister, the principal.

"We're a little late, aren't we, Mr. Sandling?"

"Uh . . ." Rory mumbled as he bent down to retrieve his notebook. 'Why is it,' he wondered, 'adults insist on referring to children as "mister" or "missus" only when they're being a smart-ass? How would they like it if we called them by their first name?' Mr. Brister's first name was Maurice. Rory could imagine the humor of going through life with the name "Maurice." Did his wife have a nickname for him, or did she call out that name while making love? "Yes, Maurice, yes . . . give me more Maurice, more . . . faster . . ."

"Well, Mr. Sandling?"

'Oh, go and stick it,' Rory thought. "I'm on my way now, Mr. Brister. It won't happen again."

Maurice continued to look at him with thunderclouds pasted on his forehead. He didn't say anything; he just stared. "I'm sorry?" Rory tried. "My God, what does he want?"

Mr. Brister clapped a hand on Rory's shoulder and took hold. 'Oh, shit, this is it,' Rory thought. Mr. Brister began to wag his finger at Rory.

"Mr. Sandling, I can tell you that I am less than pleased with your conduct recently, and if you don't shape up, you'll have me to answer to."

'Answer? Answer what?' Rory thought. "I'll try to do better, Mr. Brister,"

Nodding his head and satisfied that he had made the proper impression, Mr. Brister released Rory's shoulder from the death grip it had been subjected to, walked past Rory and through the front doors.

After snaring his history book from his stuffed locker, Rory walked quickly to the classroom, but then paused outside the door.

'I hate walking into a full classroom,' Rory thought. He opened the door and stepped inside. Class was already under way and every head turned to see who was wandering in late, and then they turned away again. Rory was not strange enough to warrant close, disgusted scrutiny, and he wasn't nearly popular enough to command the unadulterated awe that someone like . . . like Nate Bruchen would receive. "Prick," Rory mumbled.

Ms. Chickerlow, the history teacher, glared at Rory through the eyeglasses perched precariously on the edge of her nose. "It's nice of you to join us, Rory," she sniped. "Take your seat, please."

'That's an exquisite beehive you're wearing today,' an internally belligerent Rory returned. Aloud he said, "Yes, ma'am."

"Before we were interrupted," Mrs. Chickerlow said with a last blast of hate at Rory, "we were discussing the bitter fighting in the Normandy region of France shortly after D-Day. Now the British . . ."

Rory's notebook was opened to the page where he jotted his scribbles on history, and his pen was poised to add to the clutter, but his attention wasn't on Ms. Chickerlow's nondescriptive, *Life*-magazine account of the war in Europe. It was on an attractive female sitting one row to the left and three seats up. Karen Schlotsky. He wasn't in love with her; love to Rory was undetermined and undefined, but he was . . . captured by her.

". . . and so the Americans, with more men and equipment, attacked the hedgerows . . ."

Her hair was frazzled and her complexion unsteady, but he wanted her.

". . . so with help from the French resistance, they were able to beat back the Germans . . ."

'What can I do?' Rory begged, 'What can I do?'

". . . and the fighting was pushed even further inland, to the marshes."

The marshes. Mud. His boots made an evil sucking sound as he crept slowly through the slop. Rory was separated from his squad, but he knew better than to panic. He was an experienced soldier of several battles, and he knew what to do. Up ahead . . .
(Rory)

Up ahead there was a clearing and fifty feet into the clearing there was a farmhouse with a young woman in front collecting firewood. Her looks were slightly marred, but she was still quite beautiful. Rory rose from his careful crouch and allowed himself a handsome, lop-sided grin.

'This has possibilities,' he thought. 'But . . .
(Rory!)

But he heard voices. German voices to the left. A German patrol was approaching the farmhouse, and if he stayed where he was, they could surely cut him to pieces, but if he ran for cover in the farmhouse, he would be endangering the girl's life and whoever else was in the house. 'What do I do?' he thought. 'What do I do. What do I . . .'

"Rory!!"

"Ugh?" A startled grunt gurgled between his lips and raised the level of laughter around him. Everyone was turned in their seats laughing at him. And Mrs. Chickerlow was standing, glaring at him with contempt.

'Where do they get this stuff?' Rory wondered. He was in the lunch line trying to select the least inedible of a multitude of inedible items. He finally selected an unidentifiable sandwich, a canned soft drink, and an inflated bag of off-brand potato chips, manufactured in a remote region of Idaho, and paid the lady at the cash register: an elderly woman who had unsuccessfully applied an overwhelming amount of make-up to her weathered face. 'Looks like the Joker on Batman,' Rory thought.

Lunch was Rory's favorite time of the day, at school or at home, because he could be by himself; really by himself. No one to nag me, yell at me, bully me or bother me,' he said to himself.

WHACK!

Or kick me,' his mind screamed as he dropped his lunch to grab the shin on his left leg with both hands. Opening his eyes, he saw a young man who barely came up to his waist with a furious pair of eyebrows. "What did you do that for, you runt?" Rory roared.

WHACK! The other leg.

The pain in his left leg quickly forgotten, Rory grasped his right shin and, with the assistance of a comforting wall, struggled to keep his balance. He appealed to the runt with wounded eyes.

"Watch where you're going," the midget squeaked. "You almost stepped on me."

Rubbing his dented shins and retrieving his battered lunch, Rory limped out of the building and across the parking lot to the football stadium. On nice days, this is where he liked to eat his lunch because no one else went there. And today was a beautiful day.

He started whistling a tune as he walked through the open gate at the back of the end zone and around the track to the bleachers. He mounted the thin, metal stairs softly, savoring the quiet noontime.

Arbitrarily selecting a spot to eat, Rory sat down and appreciated the heat that spread through his buttocks from the sun-warmed seat. Looking forward to his mystery lunch, Rory began opening the bag that enveloped his sandwich when he heard a soft noise. He paused and heard it again, followed by some frantic rustling and then some quiet whimpers, like an animal in pain. Moving soundlessly, so as not to disturb whatever it was, Rory knelt down and peered through the bleacher

slats to the ground below. Directly below him, with their clothes strewn around them, were Nate Bruchen and Karen Schlotsky, locked in a passionate tempo.

Rising as quietly as he had knelt, Rory sat down again and looked at his sandwich. 'Bologna and cheese. I hate bologna and cheese.' Taking a full bite, Rory stared across the field, not seeing the brown, dying grass, but a foggy, French marsh with a lonely farmhouse sitting at its edge.

Demain: A Study in Yellow

by Miriam K. Harris

*So now we will try something else to see
if the look works.*

---van Gogh 1883 Arles

If we take a train to get to Tarascon
or Rouen, we take death to reach a
star. — van Gogh, 1888, Arles.

Vincent van Gogh's masterpiece *Irises* sold for
\$53.9 million on Wednesday—a record price for a
painting. —New York, 1987

If I only continue working hard, it will not be long
before I earn something with my work, but until
then it hinders me so much when I have to think
about too many other things against my will; . . . I
have some hope that as soon as I am quite well
again things will go better than they do now.

The identity of the buyer, who bid by telephone,
was not disclosed. The price includes a 10%
commission fee paid to Sotheby's, which auctioned
the painting.

I am making progress, and I shall learn to make
water-colours, and then it will not be so very long
before my work becomes salable. Mr. Tersteeg
himself said something about it, and when some of
those smaller ones turn out well he will probably
buy. I have completed still further the drawing of
the little old woman of which I sent you a sketch,
and someday it will surely sell.

Believe me, I grind all day long, and I do so
with pleasure, but I should get very much
discouraged if I could not go on working as hard or
even harder. As to the size of the drawings or the
subjects, I shall readily listen to the suggestions of
Mr. Tersteeg and Mauve.

Gasps echoed through a packed auction room at
Sotheby's as bidding quickly rose from the \$15
million starting price. Some of the estimated
1,000 people applauded and cheered when the price
topped \$40 million.

You talk of the emptiness you feel everywhere; it is that very thing that I feel myself. Taking, if you like, the time in which we live as a great and true renaissance of art, the worm-eaten official tradition still alive but really impotent and inactivate [sic], the new painters alone, poor, treated like madmen and, because of this treatment, actually becoming so, at least as far as their social life is concerned: then you must know that you are doing exactly the same work as these primitive painters, since you provide them with money which makes them able to produce. If a painter ruins his own personality by working hard at painting a thing which leaves him useless for many other things, if therefore he paints not only with colours, but with denial and renunciation, and with a broken heart—as far as you are concerned, your own work is not only no better paid than his, but costs you exactly what the painter's costs him; this effacement of individuality, half-voluntary, half accidental.

“The whole world is looking very closely at the sale of this painting.” John Marion, chairman of Sotheby's North America, where the *Iris* auction was held, had said earlier. “Some see it as an indicator of what the art market is doing.”

The more hopelessly you become a dealer, the more you become an artist. And the same is true of me. The more I am spent, ill, the cracked pot, by so much more am I the artist—the creative artist. These are surely so, but this eternally living art and this renaissance [sic], this green shoot sprinting from the roots of the old cut-down trunk, these are such abstract things that a kind of melancholy remains with us when we think that one could have made life for oneself at less cost than making art.

. . . And these painter's fingers of mine grow supple, even though the carcass is going to pieces. . . All it has cost me is a carcass pretty well ruined and pretty well crazed for any life that I might and should have lived. . .

My dear brother, if I were not bankrupt and crazy with this blasted painting, what a dealer I should make just for the impressionists!

A Monet, *Antibes, Vue du Plateau Notre Dame*, sold for \$2.3 million, 1 million more than its expected price.

I think the autumn is going to be absolutely amazing. It promises to give so many magnificent subjects that I simply do not know whether I am going to start five canvases or ten. It will be just as it was in the spring with the orchards in bloom.

I am hard at it, painting with the enthusiasm of a Marseillais eating *bouillabaisse*--which won't surprise you when you know that what I'm at is the painting of some great sunflowers.

The previous record for a painting was set by another van Gogh, *Sunflowers*, which sold for \$39.9 million this year to a Japanese insurance company.

Have you read Loti's "Madame Chrysantheme"? It gave the impression that the real Japanese have nothing on their walls, the drawings and curiosities all being hidden in drawers; and that is how you must look at Japanese art: in a very bright room, quite bare and open to the country. All my work is in a way founded on Japanese art, and we do not know enough about Japanese prints.

Before the auction, *Irises* was seen by thousands—first on a month long, 17,500 mile tour of Tokyo, London, Geneva, and Zurich, then in six days of pre-sale exhibition in New York. It was exhibited through late March at the entrance to the "Van Gogh in St.-Remy and Auvers" exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As for me, I shall go on working, and here and there amid my work there will be things which will last. I hope that after on other artists will rise up in this lovely country and do for it what the Japanese have done for theirs. I have no fear but that I shall always love this countryside. . . . I am convinced that nature down here is exactly what one needs to give one colour.

The fierce bidding for the masterpiece was witnessed in person and on closed-circuit television by an international gathering of about 2,000 collectors, dealers and museum curators. Taking bids by telephone at the front of the room were two Sotheby's representatives, David Nash, head of fine-art sales, and Geraldine Nagler, of the bids department.

If the storm within gets too loud, I take a glass too much to distract me. Cracked, of course, when you look at what one *ought* to be. But in the olden days I used to feel myself *less a painter*. My concentration becomes more intense, my hand more sure. That is why I dare almost swear to you that my painting will improve: because I have nothing left but that. I hope the desire to succeed is gone, and I work because I must, so as not to suffer too much mentally.

Irises, a 28 x 32 inch oil on canvas, depicts a patch of purple irises and one white bloom in a sea of green stems. It is a study of a flower garden

at the Saint- Remy asylum, which van Gogh entered voluntarily in 1889 for treatment of his mental illness. He lived there until his suicide in 1890 at the age of 37. He sold few if any paintings during his lifetime.

I have now done two new studies; a farm by the highroad among cornfields, and a meadow full of very yellow buttercups, a ditch with irises, green leaves and purple flowers, the town in the background, some grey willows and a strip of blue sky. If the meadow is not cut I should like to do this study again, for the subject was a very beautiful one . . .

I have also another bridge, and the side of a highroad. Bit by bit as my blood quickens the thought of success quickens too.

Irises had been owned by John Whitney Payson, an art consultant from Maine, whose mother, philanthropist Joan Whitney Payson, the owner of the New York Mets until her death in 1975, acquired it for \$80,000 in 1947 and hung it over the fireplace in her living room.

Just now I have a sort of exhibition at home: I have nailed all the studies to the wall to finish drying. You will see that when there are a lot of them and one can choose among them, it comes to the same thing as if I had studied them more and worked on them longer; because to paint and repaint a subject on the same or several canvases comes in the end to the same thing. Nothing would help us more to place our canvases than if they could get general acceptance as decoration for middle-class houses . . .

Payson, who is an art dealer, said he decided in late summer to sell the painting "because of the recent and unprecedented spiral in art prices and changes in federal tax law."

If you are well you must be able to live on a bit of bread while you are working all day, and have enough strength to smoke and drink you whack at night—that's all in the bargain—and at the same time feel the stars and the infinite high and clear above you. Then life is, after all, most enchanted. Oh! those who do not believe in this sun here are the real infidels.

The decision came after van Gogh's *Sunflowers* was auctioned in March for \$39.9 million and his *Bridge of Trinquetaille* was sold in June for \$20.2 million — both by Christie's in London.

It certainly is a strange phenomenon that all the artists, poets, musicians, painters are unfortunate

in material things — the happy ones as well. Guy de Maupassant is a fresh proof of it. That brings up the eternal question: Is the whole of life visible to us, or isn't it rather that this side of death we see one hemisphere only?

Painters—to take them only—dead and buried, speak to the next generation or to several succeeding generations in their work. Is that all, or is there more besides: In a painter's life death is not perhaps the hardest thing there is?

Claude Monet, the French landscape painter who is credited with founding impressionism, said of

*Iris*s: "How did a man who loved flowers and light to such an extent and who rendered them so well . . . still manage to be so unhappy?"

My dear boy, sometimes I know so well what I want. I can do without God both in my life and in my painting, but I cannot, ill as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life—the power to create.

. . . In a picture I want to say something comforting, as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize and which we seek to give by the actual radiance and vibration of our colourings. Ideas from my work come to me in swarms, so that although solitary I have no time to think or to feel; I go on like a steam-engine at painting.

The Sotheby's auction room was filled to capacity and bids came fast and furious for the 95 pieces of modern and impressionist art—including works by Monet, Renoir and Picasso—on the sale block Wednesday.

If I painted prettily as Bourruerau paints, people would not be ashamed to let themselves be painted; I think I have lost models because they thought that they will be compromised, and that people will laugh at their portraits.

The head of the postman was done at a single sitting. But that's what I'm good at. I should always do it—drink with the first comer and paint him, and that not in water-colours but in oils, on the spot. If I did a hundred like that there would be some good ones among them. And I should be more of a Frenchman, more myself, and more a drinker. It does so tempt me—not drinking, but painting loafers. What I gained by it as an artist, should I lose as a man?

If I had the faith to do it, I should be a notable madman; now I am an insignificant one . . .

Van Gogh died at the asylum in 1890, two days after shooting himself. He was 37 years old and in his lifetime, he is believed to have sold only one painting.

For my own part, I declare I know nothing whatever about it; but to look at the stars always makes me dream as simply as I dream over the black dots on a map representing towns and villages. Why, I ask myself, should the shining dots of the sky not be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France. If we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star. One thing undoubtedly true in this reasoning is this: that while we are alive we cannot get to a star any more than when we are dead we can take the train.

TOP 10 SALES PRICES FOR PAINTINGS

Here are the top 10 prices ever paid for paintings sold at the world's two major auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's.

- Irises*, Vincent van Gogh; \$53,900,000; Nov. 11, 1987
- Sunflowers*, van Gogh; \$39,921,750; March 31, 1987
- The Trinquetalle Bridge*, van Gogh; \$20,240,000; June 29, 1987
- Mosnier Street with Paviers*, Eduard Manet; \$11,088,000; Dec. 1, 1986
- Adoration of the Magi*, Andrea Mantegna; \$10,499,000; April 18, 1985
- Portrait of a Girl Wearing a Gold-Trimmed Cloak*, Rembrandt van Rijn; \$10,381,800; Dec. 1, 1986
- Seascape, Folkstone*, J.M.W. Turner; \$10,023,200; July 5, 1984
- Landscape with Rising Sun*, van Gogh; \$9,900,000; April 24, 1985
- Woman Reading*, Georges Braque; \$9,504,000; Dec. 2, 1986
- Juliet and Her Nurse*, Turner; \$7,400,000; May 29, 1980

The Dallas Morning News
November 12, 1987

Overheard in an art gallery in Dallas, Texas, November 13, 1987:
"One thing you can say about van Gogh: his work's hotter than a July sidewalk. Hell, you can fry a damn egg on the cash register receipts."

I feel more and more that we must not judge God on the basis of this world; it's a study that didn't come off.

van Gogh————

Excerpts from
Dear Theo by Irving Stone (Signet Books, 1937)
The Dallas Morning News
The Associated Press

Leigh V. Salisbury

Moment

A late breeze is getting chill,
and I shiver just slightly as I watch her.
Not following the conversation,
I keep getting lost in her expressions,
in the way her eyes get intense
when she's speaking of something she loves.
I understand three sentences in a row,
then she tilts her head back to laugh at something
and the unconscious beauty of that image:
 the curve of her throat, high cheekbones
 coloured with the flush of a drink,
 the glint in those night-dark eyes--
is so strong I have to look away
and stop breathing for a moment.

Leigh V. Salisbury

Hallways

A tear that rolls down my face and falls to the pavement
sends echoes through the empty halls of yesterday's dreams.
It opens the way to remembering the used-to-be's and might-have-
been's
the hopes I left lying crumpled in the corner
on the floor of my childhood
the plans and ambitions that I forgot
until one of my gods or another swept them away.
Tears here lie beaded in the dust in these now empty corners
mute and accusing for the waste of a youth.
The echoes now are of a closing door
and footsteps that leave these empty halls behind.

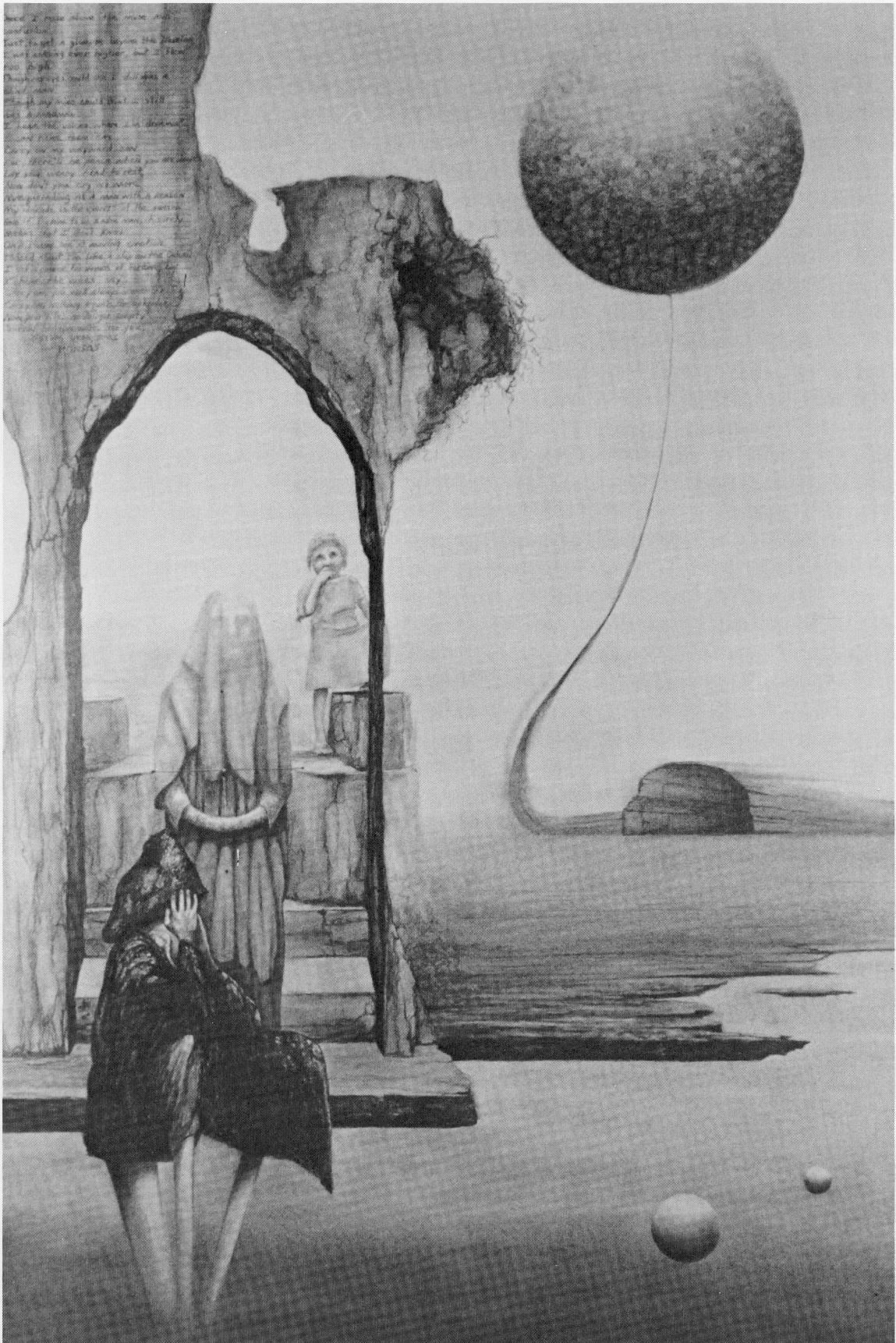


Stay Home Tonight

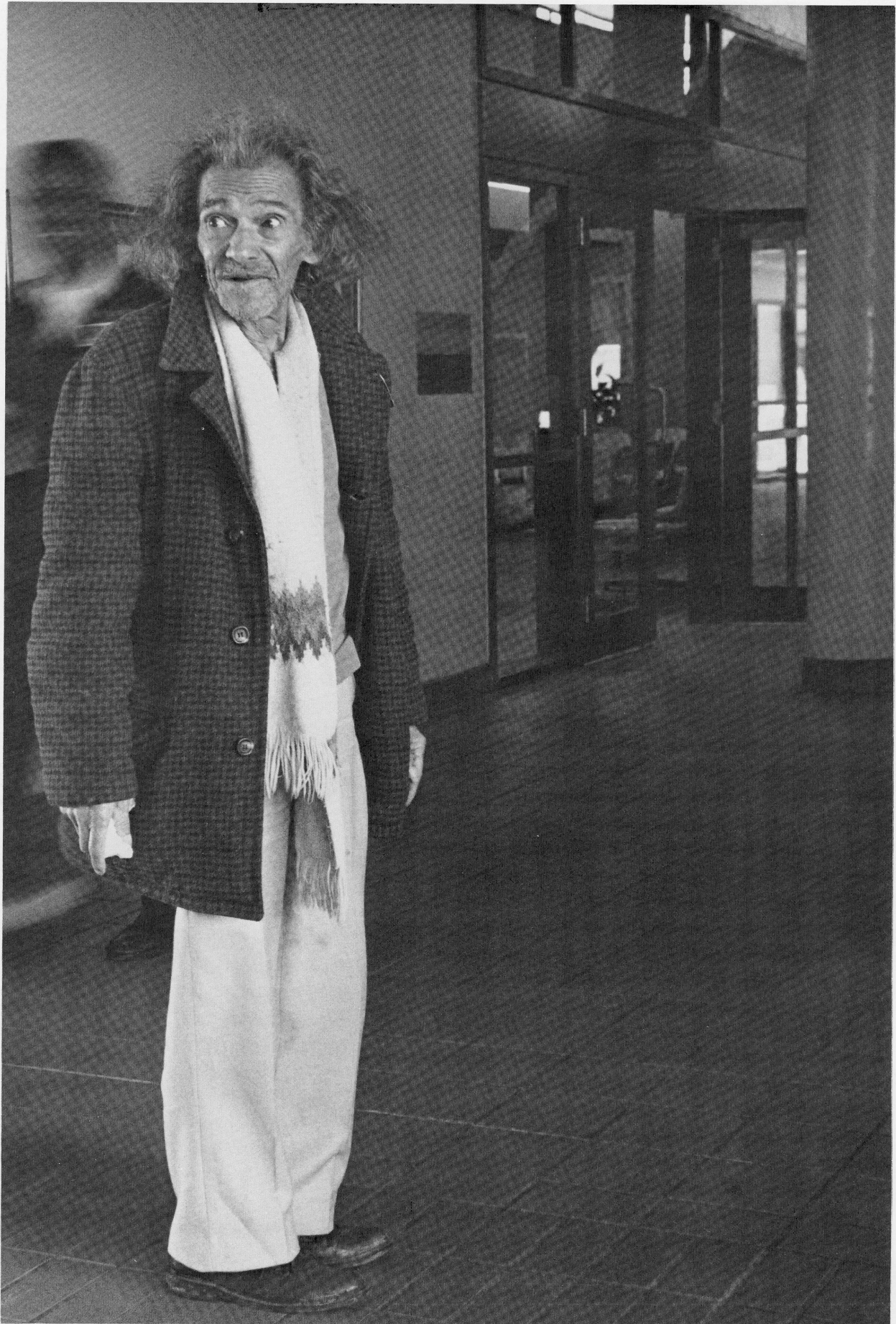
Janice Hirmon



Nelie Tebbetts



Brad Lovett



Charles Corry

The American Heritage of I

I am a free-lance carpenter, union car maker,
shrewd broker, corporate farmer and
peddler of beautiful dreams.

I hammer steel spikes, rubber checks, prod
fatted calves, push sharp pencils and
blow hot and cold with the same breath.

I sport 4-WD pickups, worn-out sedans, sleek
sports cars, bullet-proof limos, shoe
leather and pollute earth, river and sky.

I don bibbed overalls, khaki slacks, faded
jeans, pin-striped suits, nothing and
less than nothing at all.

I work at play, play at work, save hard, spend
harder, gamble foolishly and high-roll
for status sake.

I believe in Jesus resurrected, eternal Buddha,
Mohammed the Prophet, I Am, and make
religion of disbelieving all.

I have one wife, many wives, no wife, hetero-
sexual affairs, bisexual encounters and
homosexual lovers.

I am religiously carnivorous, devoutly
vegetarian, helplessly obese and a crazed
diet addict.

I am red-neck Democrat, silk-tie Republican,
stubbornly independent, intellectually
conservative and compassionately liberal.

I am hopelessly prejudiced, doggedly biased,
blindly forgiving, fanatically righteous
and don't give a damn.

I am Scrooge-stingy, mercifully giving,
abjectly apathetic, as just as Solomon
and greedy as sin.

I love hate, hate love, love blindly, support
abortion, right to life, and make babies
and war.

I protect human rights, serve my fellow man,
heal the ill, kill the well, build bigger
bombs and practice ecology.

I advocate low inflation, self-sufficiency, dole
out welfare, earn my way, expect—and get—
something for nothing and dream of Utopia.

I mind my business, your business, everybody's
business and nobody's business. My business
is nobody's business.

And it makes me mad that you
have the audacity to contradict me,
challenge my integrity, or dare to be
different in my world.

Just who do you think you are!

Issac Havard was a happy man.

From where he sat, Issac could barely see the red Prince Albert Tobacco can on the mantel above the fireplace. Sara put that Prince Albert up there, he thought, knowing full well that nobody around here uses it. He had momentarily lost the story about why it was there. Trying to solve mysteries made Issac tired. Using a long black poker, he feebly punched at several charred oak logs until he had the flames in the fireplace to his liking, and then he settled back in his rocking chair to listen to the radio announcer. The War News was on, and Issac didn't want to miss a word of it. He had forgotten why the United States was involved in the war. But it don't matter, he thought, as he looked up at the red tobacco can, we're in it cause we've got no choice. It's the right thing. Right's right and wrong's wrong. "My memory ain't too bad," he said aloud into the fireplace. But his memory seemed to fade in and out like the radio announcer's voice. He looked at a picture of his father, Fate, hanging just above the red can. "I still know who you are," he chuckled. He looked at another picture to the left of the red can. "I still know who you are too. You're Henry. What became of you, Henry?" Issac scratched his head and looked down into the blazing fire. "Oh well, I don't guess it matters much now," he chuckled. Issac had always been a happy man.

When he was a small boy, his father had told him, "Yeah-yeah lad, you work at what's right and you'll always have a clear conscience; you'll always be able to sleep. Do the right thing—what our Heavenly Father expects us to do—and the Lord will bless you with a happiness and peace of mind like that of a nursing babe." Issac had taken his father's advice: he had always worked at doing the right thing—it wasn't hard—and people marveled at how he could, at any time or place, slip into a deep, peaceful sleep. Once, when he was a young man, he had gone to sleep while plowing a field of corn. Without a conscious guide, the mule had veered from the straight furrow toward the field gate that crossed the road leading to the barn. Issac had wakened when the mule stopped at the closed gate. He had looked back over his shoulder at a curving swath the mule had plowed through the corn and laughed.

The voice on the radio was coming in clearly now. The announcer was saying something about Premier Stalin, something about a Russian offensive, but Issac couldn't quite understand. He twisted the radio's knobs and beat on its dry cell battery. "You're more trouble than you're worth," he muttered good naturedly. I never should have bought you." Issac was not one to spend money foolishly, but his grandson, Frank, had badgered him for days. All Frank had talked about was *The Grand Ole Opry*. And when that subject had worn thin, he'd started in on current events. "Germany and France may go to war," he'd told Issac, "and we might never know it." Issac had reluctantly ordered the dry cell radio from Sears & Roebuck. And now it buzzed and whistled with static.

Issac looked up at the red Prince Albert Tobacco can. Why, that Prince Albert belongs to Billy and Bobby Johnson, he

The Right Thing

by Jerry L. Harris

*Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird,
The birds round about are against her*
--Jeremiah 12:9

thought. Every Saturday night for at least a year after Issac had bought the radio, the Johnson brothers had ridden horseback from Plum Ridge to Havard Hill and listened with Issac and his family to *The Grand Ole Opry*. Issac's son, Tom, had said that listening to the radio was a waste of time, but he had listened just the same; Issac's daughter-in-law, Sara Lou, had wondered how music could fly through the air and be caught in a box with knobs. Issac had never understood how the radio worked, and had never really wanted to. But he had sensed that it was a pretty good gadget—just knowing men had made it to bring music and happiness assured him that people were trying to do the right thing. And the music of *The Grand Ole Opry* was the best that Issac had ever heard. Prince Albert Tobacco had helped sponsor the broadcast. Wanting to help keep the show on the air, Billy and Bobby Johnson had started smoking. Billy had carried in the breast pocket of his overalls the slim red can of tobacco which bore on its side the likeness of a dapper gentleman wearing formal attire and sporting a neatly trimmed beard. Bobby had carried the Prince Albert Cigarette Papers. Every Saturday night at the beginning of *The Grand Ole Opry* broadcast, Billy had passed the slim red can to Bobby, and Bobby had sprinkled some brown Prince Albert Tobacco into a white Prince Albert Cigarette Paper. He had then rolled the paper and tobacco into a crooked cigarette, lit it, and passed the can and lighted cigarette back to Billy. At first, Bobby hadn't been able to inhale the smoke without coughing. Issac hadn't paid any attention to their smoking. He had always focused his attention on what was coming through the radio. He'd been enthralled by the singing of Roy Acuff, and he hadn't wanted to miss a note of it. Issac's grandson had never liked Roy Acuff. "He's too plain; too simple," he'd said. And he'd made the same charge against The Blue Sky Boys. "They're too simple; too hillbilly," he'd explained to Issac. But Issac had paid him no mind. Once, when Acuff was singing "The Great Speckled Bird"

Issac had felt like crying, but he didn't. He had been afraid of what the others might think.

The newscaster was saying something about a shake up in Prime Minister Churchill's War Cabinet. But Issac couldn't quite understand. He twisted the radio's knobs. The radio popped and whistled. "You make about as much sense as Franklin does," he chuckled. About six months after Issac had bought the radio, his grandson had talked him into buying a fiddle. In a short time Frank could play the most complicated fiddle tunes "by ear." When the radio's reception had been good, when *The Grand Ole Opry* had been loud and clear, Frank had played his fiddle along with The Smokey Mountain Boys. The high notes of the fiddle had pierced the thick darkness of the piney woods. And on some of those Saturday nights, Billy and Bobby Johnson had sung along with The Blue Sky Boys on songs like "Jesus Told Me So" and "There'll Come A Time." Billy and Bobby had echoed so well the high nasal harmonies of The Blue Sky Boys that only by the occasional pop and crackle of static had Issac been able to distinguish the singing of The Blue Sky Boys in Nashville from the singing of the Johnson brothers on his front porch.

Issac leaned closer to the radio. The announcer was saying something about Jews in Warsaw, but Issac couldn't quite understand what it was all about. Things were changing, he thought. "Change is always with us," he said to a big yellow cat that lay stretched out in front of his rocking chair. "Change is always with us, and we can't do a thing about it." When the war came, Bobby Johnson had gone to Lufkin and joined the army; Billy Johnson had gone to Beaumont to work in the shipyards. Frank had left—taking his fiddle with him—for college in Huntsville. Sara Lou had left Havard Hill to be with her dying father in San Augustine. Tom had started cutting and selling the pine timber on the place.

Issac never questioned change. Solving mysteries made him tired. And sleepy.

The radio popped and crackled, and Issac's foggy memory cleared. He rocked back and forth, back and forth, remembering the advice he had given his younger brother after Henry learned that he was going to be drafted and would have to fight in World War I. Fate and Isaac had sat on the front porch talking with him. And now Isaac gazed into the flames of the fireplace, remembering that conversation in great detail.

"I got a good mind not to go. I got nothin' against no Germans. Hell! I don't even know what a German looks like! What you think I orter do, daddy?"

"Yeah-yeah lad, when I fought in the War of Secession there was never a question, never a doubt in my mind as to what I should do. The infidel of the North had invaded and defiled our lands. I volunteered. Rode my own horse. Used my own .45. But your case is different. Kaiser Bill is a long, long way from Havard Hill. Yeah-yeah, Henry, this World's War is not your fight, and you've got no business gettin' mixed up in it. I'll give you some money and my black mare. You ride over into Looz-anna till this business blows over."

"You might as well join up, Henry. You've got no choice. If you run off to Looz-anna, they'll find you and bring you back—

and we'd all be shamed. You might as well do the right thing and join up."

"I reckon that settles her then. I'll go."

The radio announcer's voice startled Issac. The memory of the conversation shimmered, then vanished into the fog of senility. Issac leaned toward the radio, trying to hear every word of the War News. The announcer was saying something about President Roosevelt, something about Japanese Americans in California. Issac smiled and shook his head from side to side. "I must need a new battery," he said aloud into the fire.

Henry had died of pneumonia on board the transport ship that had carried him from New York to Winchester, England. He never saw a German. He never fired a shot. He was buried with full military honors in the small cemetery on Havard Hill, and only the immediate family attended his funeral. Fate said God hadn't intended for Henry to join the Armed Forces, but Issac never doubted for a moment that his younger brother had done the right thing.

The voice on the radio was saying something about Adolf Hitler. Issac listened. The War News was on, and he didn't want to miss a word of it. From where he sat, he could barely see the red Prince Albert Tobacco can that lay on the mantel above the fireplace. He scratched his head and tried to remember. He had momentarily lost the story about why it was there. "It don't matter," he chuckled as he rocked back and forth, back and forth in front of the fireplace.

He had always found it easy to do the right thing, and he had been blessed with a happiness and peace of mind like that of a nursing babe.

Mindi Corwin

Inter

Fertile wastelands secretly abide
Where desert rats alone can hide.
Many others, though, have tried,
Seeking refuge, they confide.

Darkened burrows, earthen womb,
Gritty forbearance, living tomb,
Hiding place with little room
We scurry down to outwit doom.

Parched desert rat, cactus flower,
Give deference to higher power,
And impatiently await the hour,
Spring to life from waning shower.

You see, we simply must not allow
Infiltration by those, who until now,
Have always managed to do, somehow
What is expected.

Charles Corry

October Night

Outside the crowded house,
the young woman rested against a tree
and closed her eyes to the shadowy night.
She leaned to familiar strength
and blended with the towering silhouette
in scattered moonlight.

The October night slipped by
on velvet wings. Fleeting clouds
stole through the darkness,
glimpsing, at times, the slender form
beneath the massive cottonwood.

With a wind-driven somber song,
the leaves sang softly
as if in reverence to the lonely girl.
She watched brittle, falling leaves
and wondered if even the trees
silently wept in the dying season.

Desolation swelled in Leon as dust boiled into a small cloud above the gravel road. From the porch, he watched the swelling cloud without noticing the gentle rhythm of the wind chimes, and his smile faded almost in direct proportion to the growing distance between him and the last car pulling from sight. Still he continued to wave, as though to the billowing dust cloud, in a desperate attempt to stay the moment and delay turning into the empty house. A steady stream of people had come and gone, paying their last respects to Annie and warmly consoling Leon, assuring him that he would be all right.

Leon did not notice the afternoon sky; he was unaware of the warmth of spring, the time of year that made him feel more alive. For the past few days he had been bombarded with an avalanche of decisions. It was an uncomfortable role for Leon. There was little time for reflection. Personal indulgences had necessarily taken a back seat to pressing matters.

The marriage of forty-three years had ended with stark finality at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, as Leon sat dozing in the clinical white of a hospital waiting room only minutes after a calm, attractive voice announced over the P.A. system: "Dr. Heart, Dr. Heart. Please come to I.C.U. Dr. Heart." It was the tone of voice one hears paging travelers to airport telephones. Leon hadn't realized that the call was an alert for the nearest doctor to rush to I.C.U. because someone—his someone—was drowning in an un-moving sea of blood.

It was like an extended dream that Leon wanted desperately to awaken from, a foggish nightmare to be swept away by bright sun and spring winds. He wanted to splash cold water on his face and feel the resurging sting of life, of yesterday. But he knew that yesterday was gone.

As the dust cloud settled, Leon turned and mechanically opened the front door. The living room was adorned with flowers and potted plants and permeated with mingled odors of cigarettes and flowers and covered dishes. What would he do with the ivies? He felt obliged to keep them; but if he did, he would have to tend them, and, truthfully, they were unpleasant reminders.

The modest frame house had been Leon and Annie's home for twenty-two years; yet, now, with the noise of people silenced, it seemed alien. The inhospitable quiet lent an uneasy chill to the room, and an empty feeling began to rise in his stomach.

Leon sank in his recliner and, with a deep sigh, blankly stared at the coat rack on the wall. His life had changed, and a close look in a mirror would have revealed a much more haggard face than met his eyes only days before. For the first time, he felt his seventy-one years. Age had dropped on him like a net, and he felt the full weight of its unyielding grip.

Suddenly he was glad to be alone, glad it was all over; yet, being alone frightened him. It was unbalancing, he thought, these conflicting emotions that Annie's death had brought about. Leon needed time to clear the fog, to relegate the events a proper place and unhinge the fear.

"I'll be all right," he consoled aloud, and the sound of his

The Coat Rack

by Charles Corry

voice in the empty house startled him. He was not sure that he would be all right, and he grimaced to hold back tears and sank farther into the recliner.

"What will happen to me?" he softly spoke with an unaccustomed meekness. A conversation not intended for his ears echoed from earlier in the day.

"Poor Leon, he won't last long without Annie. I don't know if he'll be with us another Christmas."

"I know," the other voice added, "It'll be hard for him. His heart's not good, you know."

How would he cope without Annie? His lips tensed and a sense of anger swelled. He was the one with a bad heart; she had always taken care of him. Everyone, Leon included, had assumed that Annie would bury him, and in a way, he felt that she had cheated him by dying first. Frustration etched his face.

"Dear God in heaven," he cried, as the gnawing sensation built, "I don't know how to live alone."

In spite of his resistance, a tear inched across his weathered cheek as he stared at the coat rack on the wall. He felt something else, a sensation he could not put his finger on. Surely, he was just tired, he silently consoled and softly tapped the arm of the recliner.

The room took on a pale orange glow as the late afternoon sun settled into a spectacular sky. An hour passed before Leon realized that he was staring at the coat rack. The longer he looked at it, the more uneasy he became until the reason dawned on him, and unpleasant memories speared through his mind.

"My God," he thought aloud, "how many times did I promise her I would fix it?"

One of the pegs was broken. He had repeatedly promised Annie that he would replace it. Repairs would have been simple: drill out the stub, replace it with a new dowel, and stain it to match the rack. It was a minor thing that would have taken no more than

half-an-hour. Leon had a knack for working with wood and an earned reputation for being able to make or fix almost anything. He took pride in the fact that everyone who knew him brought broken treasures to him to repair.

Everything he needed was in the tool shed. Why had he never done it? He felt a tinge of embarrassment and guilt.

Leon shifted in his chair and mentally began a process of self-defense. What difference did it make? No one ever used it.

"It's nothing but a damned old eye-sore," he grumbled. "Occasionally a hat gets tossed at it, but that's the use of it."

"Humm!" he grunted, "she was always wanting me to do some damn fool thing. Never a minute's peace. Gawd! If I did everything she wanted . . ."

"I should have just told her it wasn't worth fixing, and that's that!" And instantly he knew why he never told her, even as he framed the words. It was easier to put her off. Again he shifted uncomfortably in the recliner.

"Sweet Jesus, she was a sentimental old woman. It was nothing but junk."

Annie's thin, plaintive voice echoed in his mind: "Leon, I don't have many things of Momma's. Fix it. It'll do you good."

Leon looked away from the coat rack in an attempt to dispel the delicate, haunting echo. He set his jaw and pressed his fingers into the recliner.

"I was a good husband," he defended, "a good man. Not like some I could name."

Leon considered his virtues: moral, God-fearing, a church man and Sunday school teacher.

His chin lifted in hard indignation, and with clear steel eyes he glared at the coat rack. He stared at it until in his mind's eye the stub of the broken peg began to quiver.

Leon forced his thoughts elsewhere, and the hard-set expression softened as he remembered the expensive spray of roses he had placed at the foot of Annie's casket.

"Seventy-five dollars! You can buy a goddamn calf for seventy-five dollars," he winced.

Everyone said it was such a wonderful thing he did. He remembered the talk. They said it showed such love for her.

"Yes," Leon nodded, "Annie would have been so very proud, God love her soul."

He remembered how she admired the roses Jack gave to Betty on their twenty-fifth anniversary. Annie always wanted roses like that. Leon had made sure that these were even nicer than Betty's.

His eyes wandered back to the rack. Why had he never fixed it? Maybe he should do it now, as a tribute, so to speak, to Annie. She might even smile down from heaven.

"Fixing it might get my mind off things," he said.

Almost as an unconscious reaction, Leon got up from the recliner, went to the wall, and with his pocket knife, gently pried the rack loose. It came off with surprising ease, and as he held it, he noticed a fine line of dust on the uppermost back edge: a narrow line missed by Annie's dust cloth. He studied it for a moment and then slowly traced it with his fingers, erasing the thin, delicate

grey line.

Leon carried the coat rack out the back door, and, in twilight, walked across the lawn toward the shed. He did not want to repair the rack, and, truthfully, he no longer wanted to see it. As he walked, the heart of his feelings took root, and when he reached the tool shed he paused at the door and hurriedly turned to the iron gate leading to the pasture. Beyond the gate, he walked without hesitation past an oak tree with a tire swing hanging motionless. He and Annie planted the tree over twenty years ago. When he came to the ditch used for dumping trash, he stopped at the edge, gave a last hollow glance at the rack, and tossed it into the ditch.

Leon walked briskly away, and as he passed the tire swing, he gave it a good push. He noticed the smell of clover in the air, and for the first time since Annie died, he was hungry—not for covered dishes—but something different. Perhaps he would try the new restaurant down at the highway that Annie had been so curious about.

His shoulders straightened and his stride lengthened as the gray iron gate clanked shut. As Leon crossed the lawn, he could faintly hear the gentle, crystal rhythm of the wind chimes as the glorious red sky faded into night.

My daughter Sara says it's a pretty house. She's on the phone from California. My ex-wife and her husband have just moved into this new place somewhere up the coast, in Oceanside, I think.

"When do you want me to come out?" I say. I get her for a month over the summer, and it's just about time. I've started to notice, each year she gets a little older.

"Anytime."

"Am I supposed to stay or something?" I say. Last year when I went out, Mary and Will asked me to stay the weekend with them in L.A. I just wanted to get Sara and go back to Texas. Now with their new house, I'm sure they'll ask me to spend some time there.

"Mom and Will thought you'd want to visit."

I grimace. "Mary is very modern. What do you think?"

"I'm sorta glad you're coming."

"What, is there trouble or something?" I think to myself that maybe Will is drinking again. When Mary first met him she'd call me from time to time like we were girlfriends and tell me about him.

"No. I've got my tan already. There's nothing else to do here."

I listen as she tells me about her friends back in L.A. and how she wishes she was sixteen so she could drive the new car back and forth and see them. She goes on a bit more about the house. She says it faces the ocean and that it's three stories. Mary and Will's bedroom is on the top floor, Sara's on the bottom. She says when she gets up in the morning she likes to walk out her patio door, go down to the water, and just stand there in the ocean. I want to ask her where I'll sleep when I'm there, but I decide not to.

Emily comes into the room while I'm still on the phone. She makes a waving motion to me, like she's going home. Emily thinks I'm in love with her. I think that maybe Emily is in love with me. I guess we're just trying things out right now.

"See you in a couple of days," I say to my daughter on the phone.

"Bye, Daddy," she says. Sara is fifteen.

Mary picks me up at the airport. I see her from the end of the concourse, and I'm glad to see her alone. Her hair seems to shimmer or glisten or something. It looks golden. She's wearing a loose white dress, belted at the middle with a red rope. She's wearing sandals.

"Hi, stranger," she says. She hugs me.

"Hi," I say.

I remember last year she and Will came and got me and she held my hand in the car on the drive home. She'd say something to me, squeeze my hand, lean over and kiss Will on the cheek and say something about Sara. I felt like she wanted to include us all.

"Where's Will?" I say.

"He had to do some sketches for a building so he stayed and worked."

"So you've got a new house," I say. We get my small bag off the baggage carousel and I follow her out into the parking lot. It's terrifically hot here. In Dallas it's humid, but it's not like this.

New House

by W. T. Pfefferle

"Yeah, up the coast. Quick trip." she leads me to a charcoal colored sedan. It looks like a BMW, but it doesn't have any markings on it.

Mary drives out of the airport, and we get on the freeway heading north. We jerk around each time she shifts.

"Nice car," I say finally.

"Thanks."

For the longest time we don't say anything. I keep trying to look away from her. Out the side of the car for instance. Looking at nothing. There's only freeway out there and other cars driving.

"What are you thinking?" she says.

"It's really hot here," I say.

"Oh, Tommy," she says. "You're the same, aren't you." She reaches over and holds my hand. I'm not sure if it makes me feel better or worse. We drive in silence most of the way. She turns the radio on once after we haven't spoken for a while. I keep looking around the car for an insignia of some type, but the inside is clean. No markings on the dash, nothing on the glove box. Outside, no writing on the side or on the trunk. No hood ornament.

As we drive into Oceanside, we stop at a little dance studio. Sara is standing outside the place, sweating, talking to another girl her age. I get out of the car when we stop, and she sort of skips or runs over and we hug. She's starting to look like Mary. Her hair is long, and it's the same sort of color, gold. She wasn't kidding about her tan. It's great. It doesn't look phony or too orange. Last year we sat on my couch in Dallas and went through about forty magazines, her explaining to me which women had real tans and which ones got theirs from tanning machines. My daughter's got a real one.

"Let's go to Swen's tonight," Sara says when we're all in the car.

"I think Will was going to cook, Honey," Mary says, looking in the rear view mirror at her.

"I'm tired of that vegetable junk, really."

Mary doesn't say anything for a while, and I look out the window at the town. We drive about ten minutes, and then Mary pulls into a long driveway that slopes down from the highway, through a grove of short trees, and around a corner. That's when I see the house.

"Beautiful," I say.

"Thanks," Mary says.

"Will calls it Zanzibar," Sara says, reaching over the headrest and mussing my hair.

"Xanadu," Mary says.

"Hey," Will says. He comes out of the front door with his arms out like he's ready to hug us all.

"Hi, sweetie," Mary says and runs over to him. He cradles Mary in one arm and starts for me.

"Hey, sport," he says. "How's the publishing game?"

"Fine," I say. He thrusts out his hand and we shake.

"Are you cooking?" Sara says to Will, leaning her body up against mine. She seems taller again. Her head rests at a point just below my shoulder.

"I don't have to," he says, but I see him stiffen.

"Sara wants to go to Swen's," Mary says.

Will looks at me as if I'm supposed to break the tie. I don't say anything. I put my suitcase down for a second and then realize it's all sand down there. I pick it up again.

"Swen's is O.K. with me," Will says, releasing Mary and trying to reach for my bag.

"Let's go inside," Mary says.

It's a good place. Mary takes me to my room, Will puts my suitcase on the bed, and they leave, closing the door behind them. I sit on a little white wicker chair and look out at the ocean. It's about sixty feet to where the water is. I slip my shoes off and rest my feet on the sill of the window. Everything in the house is white. I haven't seen it all yet, but what I've seen has been white.

I see a phone on the nightstand, and I pick it up, listening for a dial tone before dialing Emily's house. She answers on the second ring, and I tell her I'm here. She makes a joke about divorced people meeting in the kitchen at 2 a.m., making sandwiches together.

"Probably not this time," I say.

Before we hang up, I tell Emily everything I can remember of what Sara said to me.

Will's not an architect, but he does something like that. I always thought he was an architect; in fact, Mary told me he was. But he has a different name: Consultant. It makes a difference to him. What I remember about last summer is that they weren't married yet. They got married over the summer while Sara was with me in Dallas. They had taken a cruise and on the way back, about fifty miles off the coast, they got married by the ship's captain. Will has told me the story twice. Once when I brought Sara back after the summer, and then once again on the phone this year when I called. He gets a real kick out of it.

"Hi."

I'm in the wicker chair again staring outside. When I hear Sara's voice I look around. "Come in," I say.

"What are you doing?"

"Just looking out here. Really nice."

"Yeah."

She sits on the bed, reaches for the remote control and puts the TV on.

She keeps the volume down, so it doesn't bother me, I suppose. I keep looking outside. The sun has been setting during the whole time I've been sitting here. It's taking forever, but now it looks to be about five feet off the water. It's been orange for a long time, but now it's getting red. When it's halfway down, I look over my shoulder. Sara's watching me.

"You've really gotten pretty," I say, and slap her on the leg.

"Hah," she says.

"What's Swen's?" I say.

"Steak place. Ribs. Prime Rib." She reaches down and picks at some dry skin on her leg.

I look back out the window, and the sun's almost gone. I hear her move around a bit, and then I feel her arms come around the chair, and she tries to hug me from behind. As we stay that way for a second, I think I hear Will saying something. It sounds like they're outside. Maybe they've been on their patio watching the sun go down. I don't know. I wonder for a second if maybe Sara's crying, and I hope she isn't.

"You ever watch this?" I say, pointing to the TV.

"Yeah," she says. "Pretty funny."

Sara and I sit in the back. Will drives and Mary sits sideways in front so she can talk to everybody. It's been dark for a couple of hours, and the highway back into town is deserted. Will drives very slowly, and it seems to take a very long time to get there. He starts down one street, but Sara tells him it's the wrong one. He answers her sharply, and Sara just sticks her tongue out at him, then punches me on the arm when I don't notice it. I feel bad for him in a funny way. Mary directs him down an alley, and we pull in front of this place that has a neon sign that says "Swen's," inside of a big, white, neon lasso.

I get out my side and Will is standing there, waiting for me to get out so he can power lock everything. He pushes the button, and all the doors lock simultaneously. He keeps looking at me until I smile.

"Nice car," I say.

"Thanks," he says and turns to go toward the door.

I'm glad I said something nice to him. He's an O.K. fellow, I suppose.

Sara is the first one in the door, and she tells the guy there's four of us. Our booth is near the back. I get in one side and wait for Sara to join me, but she walks past and gets in the other side. I look across at her, but she's looking past me.

"Mom, that's Edna over there," Sara says.

Mary looks across the room and then scampers over to a table with about five women at it.

"Mary's tennis friends," Will says, still standing in the aisle outside the booth.

"Take a load off," I say to Will, motioning to my side of the booth. He glances once over at Sara and then gets in next to me.

"Is it hot in here?" Sara says.

Mary comes back, and a waiter comes with menus. Mary says

something to him, and after a bit he comes back with a bottle of wine and some glasses.

Everything goes smoothly enough. Will and Mary eat spaghetti and Sara has the Sirloin. I get a T-bone with a potato. We're just drinking the last of our second bottle of wine when I catch Will looking over at me.

"That stuff will kill you," he says.

"The wine?" I say.

"Meat," he says.

I hear Sara emit a long sigh. I look over at Mary, and she looks back at me gravely.

"What do you mean?" I say.

"The meat. That red meat."

"Well, I like a steak every now and then," I say, hoping maybe this will stop it.

"Doesn't matter," he says. "You take in four ounces of that a week, and you might as well inhale the fumes from a burning tire."

"I had a Sirloin, Will," my daughter says, a bit mischievously.

"I know, Sara, but you're incorrigible; we know that already," Will says and puts his wine glass down pretty hard on the table.

"Sara, don't start in," Mary says, resting her hand on Sara's shoulder.

Will looks over at me. I have about half a cigarette in my hand. "You know, that's not any better," he says, waving his hand at me.

"I don't do it much," I say, and look over at Mary again. It dawns on me for the first time that we've been drinking wine with our meal. Mary had told me that Will had stopped it for good. It seems to me now, too, that I think about it, that he's been filling his glass a bit more than mine or Mary's.

"Smoking and drinking together increase the possibility of esophageal cancer by 150 percent," he says.

I haven't taken a puff of my cigarette since this started, and now I'm afraid to. I look at him more closely and decide that maybe he's a little bit drunk. "I don't smoke much," I say.

"You never smoked much," Mary says.

There's silence for a while. The waiter comes, and Sara orders a piece of banana pie. I've put my cigarette out, and Will has picked up the wine bottle twice, checking to see if there's anything left. His head is sort of hanging down toward the table.

I look across at Mary, but she's looking around the restaurant. One of her friends comes by, and she gets up and they walk to the bar. I reach for some of the french bread that's in the basket in the middle of the table and chew on it while Sara eats her pie.

"Want some?" she says to me.

"No," I say.

She finishes it, except for the crust, and gets up and goes over to a table where a family is sitting. Mother, father, a boy about six or seven, and a girl Sara's age. The father pulls a chair from an empty table, and Sara sits with them. They're all laughing about something that the mother is saying.

Will starts coughing. It's real deep coughing. It sounds like he's almost choking on something.

"You O.K.?" I say when he stops.

"Yeah. I'm going to get some air." He gets up and walks through the restaurant, out the door, and I see him sit on the hood of his car, his head cradled in his hands.

Mary comes back just as the waiter brings the bill. "I'll get it," she says, taking it from me. She looks at it, then around the restaurant. "Where's Will?" she says to me.

"Outside," I say. "He wasn't feeling too hot."

"I don't imagine he was." She puts the bill down and reaches for my pack of cigarettes. She puts one in her mouth, and then she lights it using the orange candle that's on the table. "How's Texas?" she says.

"Good," I say. "I'm going to move over the summer. I was hoping to have the new place before Sara comes out. It's pretty nice."

"Oh, yeah?" she says.

"Yeah. It's about fifteen miles north of the city. It's got a half-acre. Fence. I thought about getting a dog again."

"Really, like Roger?"

"I don't think there are any more dogs like Roger," I say. She smokes about half the cigarette and then stubs it out.

"Lease," I say. "I thought I'd try it out. I've been in condos and apartments for six years. I don't know if I can do the lawn anymore." I think that sounds a little funny.

Sara comes back over to the table and sits on my side of the booth. She puts her arm around my shoulder and smiles over at Mary. "He's a pretty good guy, my old man," Sara says.

I look over at Mary, and she smiles back. "Better check on Will. Haven't seen him take a drink in about two years. He'll be suffering for it." Mary looks out the window. I can tell she's trying to see through the restaurant, out to their unmarked car. See if he's upright or not. She gets up and goes.

I start thinking of stuff for us to do when we get back to Dallas. I think about Emily picking us up at the airport. The three of us will drive out to the new house together. They'll hit it off I imagine.

Sara picks up the check and looks at it sort of funny. I think that in the morning when I get up, I'll go with her. The two of us can just stand there in the ocean.

"They forgot my pie," she says, holding the bill up to my face.

**Rachael C.
Borchard**

Bare Essence

Pen scribbles

naked soul

over page.

Matters not.

No one to

read it.

Spirostella According to Roger

By Leigh V. Salisbury

The following story is an attempt at a creative paper which seeks to illustrate how Greek and Latin word roots can be used to compose scientific names for biological entities. In the story our hero, Roger, has been “marooned” in a parallel universe by a defective *paracosmocentesiss*¹ machine—a device used to punch a precise hole into a parallel universe. In the months he has spent there, Roger has given appropriate names to the organisms he has encountered. The “PCCM” has been repaired from the Earth side, and an old co-worker comes through it to join him.

The electronic buzz-whirl of the PCCM woke Roger with a start, and he sat up in bed, trying to remember where he’d put the damned thing. He’d just pulled his pants on when someone walked out of his closet wearing full decontamination gear. The white helmeted figure stared in his direction, made a one-hundred-eighty degree turn and looked at the closet, then opened its faceplate.

“Nice, Rog. Four point seven billion dollars’ worth of research, and you turn it into a wardrobe.”

“John! Welcome to *Spirostella*²—say, what’s it been now, a year-and-a-half since I punched over here? Nice of you to think of me. John smiled uneasily. “Sorry about that—we had to wait for a part to come in. You named this place? *Spirostella*?”

“Yeah. C’mon, take that silly hat off, and I’ll show you around. I hope you wore a good pair of boots. We’ve got some pretty strange critters out here, and they don’t much like strangers. Wanna see my scars?”

Outside the cabin Roger stopped and pointed to a bunch of small, grass-covered mounds, each with a hole about four inches across at its center. At about ten-second intervals air blew out forcefully, making the grass flutter wildly around the perimeter. During the interim the blades drew toward the center, as if air were being sucked back down the hole. John nodded. “*Spirostella*—the ‘breathing planet.’ I see what you mean. So I suppose you have names for everything here?”

“Well,” Roger began, “I had to call them something, and they don’t quite fit into Terran classifications. Let’s start with the local flora, for example. I refer to one kind of usual group broadly as *mobilis herbae*³—the mobile plants. First, we’ve got *arboris volaticus*⁴—the winged trees. They don’t really move, per se, but my first impression was that they were animated . . .”

There was a loud cracking sound, and John looked up to see the top three feet of a tall tree breaking off and tilting toward the ground. Suddenly two fern-like branches flipped up and caught

the breeze, and the whole section of tree soared off into the distance. He gaped.

Roger grinned. “Now if that wasn’t perfectly on cue, I don’t know what is. You’ve just witnessed the unique seed-dispersal system of an *acopteron*⁵ tree—named for those winglike branches way up at the top. Pretty nifty, eh? Apparently that’s the only way they can spread themselves far enough apart to survive. The soil here isn’t very fertile, so that’s how they cope. And then there are the real mobile plants, like the *ambulofrutices*⁶—the walking shrubs. This is where things get weird. Look--see that red-leafed bush? *Erythrofrons frutex*⁷. Now, it sure looks like a bush to me, but I can’t explain its behavior, and I haven’t been able to catch one yet.”

John looked at Rog suspiciously. “Catch one?”

“Observe.” Roger picked up a stone and hefted it at the shrub about twenty feet away. There was a sudden spray of dirt, and the bush ran away on its roots—like an octopus in a cartoon. John made some inarticulate noise, and Roger huffed. “Makes landscaping kind of difficult, but it serves a purpose. Not only can they get up and move once they’ve depleted the soil in one place, but they can elude predators like the *symbionts*.⁸ They’re kind of an odd pair of animals who live off each other. One of them is an *herbivore*⁹ that eats these shrubs, but it’s not equipped to catch them, so it attaches itself to the second animal—which catches these shrubs, but can’t eat them. So get this—it chases down a bush, the *herbivore* eats it, then the hunter chomps down on him and sucks out some of his blood—its a *sanguinovore*¹⁰, honest-to-God!”

John was beginning to look pale, so Roger relented a bit. “Here. Let me introduce you to something a little friendlier.” He whistled sharply and a furry little animal came scampering out from behind the cabin, looking something like a ferret. “This is Patty—my house pet,” he looked down at the creature, which was now wrapped around his right knee, peeking up at an astounded John. “It’s short for *patellophile*¹¹, because this is his absolutely favorite position—I have to pry him off my kneecap every night. He even goes to sleep that way!

“At any rate, he’s one of the more normal animals here. There’s only one other one I’ve come across that resembles anything Terran, and I can’t say I’m thrilled about it. It’s some parallel-universe version of a skunk. I named it a *dysodiac*¹² because the varmint reeks to high heaven.” The two began to walk along a faint path through the grass as Roger continued his

narration. "Anyway, I'd rather show you some of the uniquely *Spirostellar* beasts. I'm sure we'll find one of the *bivertebrates*¹³ out here somewhere. They're very interesting—they actually have two distinct, separate spines running down either side of their . . . WATCH OUT!"

Roger yanked John to one side just as a large set of jaws shut where his thigh had previously been. The *patellophile* squealed, and all three of them scrambled hastily away from the tree where a well-camouflaged **thing** hung. John would have kept going, but Rog still had a hold on him. "Stop! Wait! Whoa boy—it can't chase us, these things move too slowly! Okay, calm down. You've just met the infamous *omniphage*¹⁴. I have yet to find any living thing that this puppy won't eat, given the opportunity." The scaly, brownish-green beast glared at them from where it had its thick tail wrapped around a tree trunk. It had no visible limbs.

"Luckily, these guys don't travel well—they kind of wiggle across the ground—or I suppose there wouldn't be anything left alive around here. Well, shall we move on?"

John took a deep breath and pulled himself together. "Of course,. Lead on, McDuff."

"All right, we were looking for a *bivertebrate*, and I think I've found one. Look!" Roger pointed down, and John looked up. "Roger. That's a rock."

"Ghotcha! That's a *pseudolith*¹⁵—cleverly pretending to be a rock! You see, it uses its two backbones to create an irregular shape, and combined with its markings and rough skin texture, it makes a perfect false stone. It can hide from its enemies and at the same time wait for insects to wander past for it to munch on."

John began to look more at ease. "Now that's kind of neat. Two backbones!"

If you think that's amazing, let's go see a *radiovertebrate*¹⁶!"

Roger led back up the path, skirting the sulking *omniphage*. "These things have multiple vertebrae that fan out from a central nervous system—kind of a hydra. This particular one I'm going to show you lives down in the tunnel system that connects those blow-hole mounds. I don't know what's down there to protect, but the *endopylars*¹⁷ won't let anything get in. That's why I call them the 'gatekeepers within'—kind of gothic, don't you think?"

They stopped by one of the mounds, and Roger tossed a small pebble down it. Immediately a snake-like head popped up and hissed, showing a mouthful of pointed teeth, then drew back into the ground. Roger peered in, then turned back to John. "I know it's all one creature because if you whack one, all the other ones pop out and make this hideous caterwauling." Starting to walk back to the cabin, Roger suddenly stopped. "Hey, I can go home now, can't I? Wow. Would I kill for a steak. A cow steak!"

"I'll bet. Say, what have you been eating here, anyway?" John asked.

"Oh, various roots and fruits, and quite a bit of *ornithosaur*¹⁸."

"What's that?" Some kind of half bird, half lizard?" John looked puzzled but willing to believe anything now.

"Well, no, it's just a plain lizard—looks kind of like an iguana."

"Then why an *ornithosaur*?" There was a note of disappointment in John's voice.

"It tastes a lot like chicken."

Notes

¹paracosmocentesis: <G *para*—beside, beyond; *cosmo(s)*—universe; *centesis*—surgical puncture.

²Spirostella: <L *spiro*—to breathe, blow; *stella*—star, planet.

³mobilis herbae: <L *mobilis*—mobility; *herbae*—green plant.

⁴arboris volaticus: <L *arbor*—tree; *valare*—winged, flying.

⁵acopteron: <G *aka*—point, tip; *pteron*—feather, wing.

⁶ambulofrutices: <L *ambul*—to walk; *frutex*—shrub, bush.

⁷erythrofrons: <G *erythro*—red; <L *frons*—leaf, foliage.

⁸symbiont: <G *syn*—together; *bios*—life.

⁹herbivore: <L *herbae*—green plant; *vorare*—to eat, devour.

¹⁰saguinovore: <L *sanguis*—blood; *vorare*—to eat, devour.

¹¹patellophile: <L *patella*—knee cap; <G *philia*—affinity for.

¹²dysodiac: <G *dys*—bad; *odia*—smell.

¹³bivertebrate: <L *bi(n)*—two, double; *vertabra*—joint of the back.

¹⁴omniphage: <L *omnis*—all, every; <G *phagy*—eating, swallowing.

¹⁵pseudolith: <G *pseudo*—false; *lith*—stone.

¹⁶radiovertebrate: <L *radius*—rays, spokes; *vertebra*—joint of the back.

¹⁷endopylor: <G *endo*—within; *pylaros*—gatekeeper.

¹⁸ornithosaur: <G *ornithos*—bird, chicken; *sauros*—lizard.

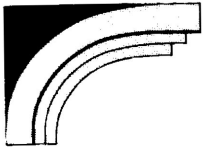
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW SCHEDULE ANNOUNCED

After consideration of the success of the recent appearance by Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmichael) at the John Anthony Theatre, the Collin County Community College Guest Speaker Selection Committee (CCCCGSSC) has announced a revision to its schedule for the next academic year. In the words of one committee member, the Toure visit was "A thousand dollars well spent . . . a bargain at twice the price," and other equally inspiring guests are slated for 1989-1990. This reflects the district's ongoing dedication to presenting the finest in wholesome educational opportunities to the public.

September 19, 1989: Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, "If at First You Don't Succeed"

November 21, 1989: Timothy Leary, "Turning in, Turning on, and Dropping out in the 90's"

January 11, 1990: Moammar Khadafi, "How to get Started in Terrorism"

April 25, 1990: Charles Manson, "Family Life"

July 2, 1990: Ruhollah Khomeini, "America: the Great Satan"

canceled

Former President Ronald Reagan and Reverend Billy Graham both offered to speak at no charge, but their services were declined because of their extremist views.

Leigh V. Salisbury

October

The time of year
just the touch of this wind
like cold hard fingers
drags memories from a time
barely past.
And this All Hallow's Eve
have I my own ghosts
to haunt this wraith-thin soul.

It was not an ordinary morning. The sun had tapped its rosy fingers on the horizon and now tormented two gaunt steers searching for grass just north of town. Clouds of dust rolled across the arid land and, acting more like dry fog, filled the cracked, pitted road in front of the bus station. The bus closed its doors and groaned to a start. As it left the station, headed west, its exhaust whipped the strange fog into a whirling cloud that finally swallowed the grey chariot.

“Don’t stop here much,” drawled the red-complexioned man standing in the doorway as he nodded toward the disappearing bus.

The single passenger, a woman, squinted in the dust, her dress dancing in the wind. Her brilliant eyes bathed the tendrils of auburn hair blowing in her face as she clutched a lacquered, green box.

“Sorry ‘bout the dust. It ain’t rained much this year.”

Turning, the woman swung her long hair behind her shoulder and started down the road toward town.

“Ain’t much of a talker,” mumbled the old man as he went back inside. “But she has nice ankles.” The hinges creaked as he closed the door against the dust and the harsh whispers of the woman’s heels on the parched earth.

Fred Summers slammed the door to his truck and walked around to put a quarter in the parking meter.

“Morning, Fred.”

He turned and smiled at the two women approaching him. Thick ankles and generous waistlines testified to their frequent early morning trips to Sibyl’s Bake Shop. In fact, until today, this ceremony signaled the Monday through Saturday daily routine.

“Well, bless my soul, if it’s not Mabel and Selma. You feelin’ better, Mabel? Missed you at church last night.” Sam Thompson had appeared at the door of Thompson General Store, as usual, to greet the women.

“Oh, go on. Did you really miss me? Why I just had a stomach virus or some such thing, but I feel better today . . . I really do.”

“How’s Demma Lou?” Selma asked, her fat cheeks rolling as she spoke.

“Oh, she’s fine, fine. She’s been puttin’ up some tomatoes, though we barely had enough to pick this year. I don’t know as I’ve ever seen it so dry. Don’t know what we’re gonna do. No, Sir. It’s bad, real bad.”

“Don’t you know it. Why I hear Herb lost his farm, too. It’s terrible, just terrible. But the good Lord has his reasons . . . it’s just . . . Oh, enough of that. We’re on our way to see Demma Lou right now. Haven’t been there in a month of Sundays. We’re gonna take her some nice cinnamon rolls . . . You take care of yourself, now, Sam. You, too, Fred. Tell your momma and daddy we said hello.”

“Sam is such a dear; I bet he hasn’t missed church a day in his life. It’s too bad about their boys. I hear they haven’t been back since they went away to that college down in South Texas. They say Demma Lou’s been taking it real bad. Just wasting away to nothing. Won’t eat anything sweet, and Ellie says she don’t even bathe half the time. Well, you’ve seen her yard. Looks like she hasn’t watered it in weeks. I don’t know what to do for that poor old thing. She was so close to those boys. Lord knows why. Caused her nothing but trouble, what with their constant bicker-

ing and trouble making. Too bad she never had a daughter—once a daughter always a daughter, I always say.” Selma and Mabel shared the lines as they repeated the conversation they practiced each morning. Only the characters changed. At Sibyl’s they turned and climbed the steps to the front porch. The dried wheat wreath with the bells on it announced their arrival.

Reaching the edge of town, the woman from the bus turned up Hyacinth Street. Before her, as if on a canvas stretched to fit an arid frame, cottonwoods shaded the hot pavement lined with wrought iron mailboxes. Anemones filled planters bulging from frequent watering on the porches of white frame houses, their variously colored shutters stippling the scene with rectangles of color. The warm south wind blew steadily over the struggling grass, wafting a minty smell as sprinklers clicked across the

The Front

by Peggy Brown

Oh to
 fly
 dip
 soar
 in capricious winds
 play games by cliffs
 or glide through
 uncobbled
 space
 to drop fearless
 flap and rise
 cross drafts and ride
 wind
 waves
 to mountain shores
 over watchers below
 who say
 "how free"
 as the swallows and I
 dive
 glide
 soar
 and make no judgment

wilting lawns. She walked slowly and deliberately past Rose Street, Crocus Street, Violet Street—Sibyl's Bake Shop.

Selma and Mabel opened the door just as the woman walked by. Startled, they drew back long enough for her to walk past then leaned awkwardly out the door, balanced so that they looked from the street as if they were a two-headed woman.

Sam glanced up from his fertilizer. He had been repackaging it, boxing it for his shelves. The transfigured faces of the two women as they passed outside his window sent him hurrying out to see what was going on.

Jeffery Dale and Jerry Bob had just come out of the drugstore across the street, Jeffery Dale's lathered face half-shaved. The barber's cape drooping from his shoulders, caught in the wind and made him ghost like against the cinnamon red door.

"Who's that?" they all seemed to say at once.

The first light of morning had pushed through the shutters, its rosy fingers tapping the eye lids of one of the sleeping figures. Demma Lou blinked against the glare and rolled to a sitting position, her feet barely touching the floor. Sam snored smoothly, his back turned to the sun.

Reaching for her robe on the bed post, she slipped it on and shuffled into the kitchen. She went to the cabinet for the catfood, opened a new can of Puss 'N Boots, then took both the can and a sack of dry food to the group meowing and dancing outside the screen door. She stood and watched, holding the empty can like a torch, as the four cats fought for position.

Back in the kitchen, she took the can of Folgers off the second shelf of the cupboard and made coffee. As it perked she turned on the small radio she kept on the window sill in the kitchen.

". . . and the low for this evening will be 85. But here's the good news, folks. We can look forward to a little relief from the heat—no rain in sight, but there is a front moving in from the Rockies . . ." She stopped, listening. Appropriate, she thought, why do I only hear the "lows?" Somewhere there must be "highs."

She took the daisy mug off the mug tree Jason had given her for Christmas. Hesitating, she held the cup in her hands. Her thoughts raced to other mornings when Jason had burst into the kitchen, shirt unbuttoned, books in hand. "I'm late mom, don't have time to eat." He'd grab the toast out of her hand and race for the door, the third honk blending with the slam of the door. Kevin would have been gone for thirty minutes. He was the one who liked order. Yet he never thought to bring her the crumpled bluebonnets as Jason would when he came home, exhausted, from his adventures along the drainage ditch at the north end of their property. He was always on some quest for gold, lost sheep, or some such nonsense. She filled the cup and took her coffee to the back porch swing.

The day would be a hot one. Already the wind felt warm against her face. There was an unusual light in the sky, a brightness she felt rather than saw. As she stared out toward the field, the carpet grass seemed to take on new shades of brown, seemed to suck at the dew that dried as its blades turned to the sun, mimicking the sun flowers at the edge of the lawn that strained to follow the sun even as their leaves wilted. She could almost hear the crunch as the boys, locked in a half-Nelson or some such hold, she could never remember, fell to the carpet of green grass and

wrestled until skinned and grass stained they limped in for bandaids and Kool Aid. Even later, in high school, they had parked their cars out back to fix a muffler, build a new engine, or change a tire. She could still see the ruts, even though Sam had filled them in last fall after Jason left for school. Her gaze dropped to the daisy cup on her lap. She had forgotten to drink her coffee.

"You're up early," Sam called, pushing open the screen door. "Get me some coffee, will you?"

Demma Lou hurried in, took Sam's cup from the shelf. It was a brown, thick ovenware piece they had had since they were first married—could it have been thirty years?

Sam came in from the garden cradling six ripe tomatoes and some late squash in his khaki shirt. Under his arm was *The Valley Morning Star*.

She stared at the back page of Sam's paper over bacon and eggs till the lines began to blur, and the boys were sitting at the table.

Jason wore a striped T-shirt; the lines slanted where the shirt had hung at an angle on the clothes line. His brown hair curled into a soft lamb's wool rug flattened over his left ear. His sunburned cheeks puffed out as he grinned at her across the table. That grin always preceded a mischief written in his eyes, and she knew he would be late to dinner that evening. Kevin wore an ironed, plaid, cotton shirt, and she knew it would be neatly tucked in his stretch-ironed jeans. Then Jason spilled his milk, and she leaped up to get a towel. He was so rambunctious. But so full of life. As she reached for the towel she felt a little foolish.

She cleared off the table and started the canning pot on the gas stove. Absentmindedly she washed the dishes as the water came to a boil, and she dipped the tomatoes in the boiling water. Was that to be her life? Since the boys left, it seemed her life was a patchwork of cleaning, canning, and Sunday night socials.

"What's the matter, Demma Lou?" Sam was standing over her now. "You don't seem yourself. Is something wrong?"

"No, Sam." Her voice sounded dead, even to her. "I'm just tired."

"You might be coming down with the flu. I hear it's going around. Better take care of yourself." He kissed her lightly on the cheek and left for the store.

She watched as he went out the back door. His hair had greyed, looked dry. He was getting old, so she must be, too.

Making her way to the bedroom she stared at herself in the mirror, then twisted her hair into a tight knot on the back of her head. She picked up the tube of lipstick (she had forgotten the name of it, the label fell off long ago), then dropped it on the oak dresser. She saw an old woman staring back at her from the mirror, old eyes languishing on its surface. Then she was young and her eyes danced at the sight of Jason in the nurse's arms. His dark hair matted, he seemed to smile up at her. His smile warmed her, made her forget that she'd wanted a girl. She'd always wanted a girl. Would a daughter have left her, too?

She pushed herself away from the dresser and slipped into her work dress. Mabel and Selma would be there in a few minutes, and she needed to straighten up.

She picked up the socks Sam had left by the bed and dropped them in the hamper. The lid slipped from her hand and slammed shut. She jumped at the noise. In fact, she felt weak. Why should she feel weak? It seemed she felt compressed, almost as if her skin might collapse any second. She wiped her forehead with the back

of her hand and went to get a dust cloth. She straightened the chintz curtains she had made when Jason was a sophomore. Jason. Why could she not get her mind off those boys this morning? Actually, she seemed to think of them often. Why didn't they ever come home to see her?

She hurried to dust her oak dresser, fingering the ring left by the juice glass Jason had set on the dresser when he was twelve. He had given her the cracked atomizer he bought at a garage sale to make up. She stroked the memory and left the room.

She walked to the front door: the grass was dying, yet she couldn't bring herself to set up the sprinkler. Her geraniums looked wilted, but she couldn't bring herself to get the water can. She felt distant, unattached to the ritual she had gone through morning after morning.

In the side lawn pitcher mounds and wiener-roast pits had leveled to a quilt of sienna. Now the place seemed lifeless and boring, and she could scarcely breathe in the weight of the air. She turned to go in just before the first crunch of heels on the driveway.

She opened the door at the first knock. It wasn't Mable or Selma but a stranger.

"Yes," she responded, calm in spite of her surprise. The woman from the bus stepped inside.

"So this is it," she said.

"So this is what?" Demma Lou replied.

"I wondered what it would be like. It's different from the pictures."

"What pictures?" The incredibility of the situation challenged Demma Lou.

The woman didn't answer but placed the box on the rosewood table by the sofa. There were no rings on that one; Jason always sat at the other end when he watched TV.

"I think I'll have some tea," the stranger said, heading toward the kitchen.

Demma Lou suddenly grew furious.

"I don't believe I offered you any," she snapped. "Who are you?"

"Do you have any herbal tea? I have this new craving for Red Zinger. Can't get it where I'm from . . . Go ahead. I'll wait out here in the swing."

"First of all I don't have any Red Zinger tea. Second, I don't want you to have tea with me. I . . . you don't even have a cup." Demma Lou very seldom got angry, and the words didn't flow for her.

"Yes I do. It's the one with the pomegranate on it."

"I don't have one with a pomegranate on it. I think you'd better get out of my house."

"Look on the mug tree that Jason gave you last Christmas."

Demma Lou was taken back by the woman's uncanny familiarity with her business, but couldn't resist looking on the mug tree. She knew the cup wouldn't be there—but it was. It was fiery orange with a hot cinnamon-colored pomegranate on the side. She felt a bit weak and leaned on the counter. How did this stranger know Jason and how did that cup get in her kitchen?

"I think the tea is in the cupboard on the left," the visitor directed.

Obediently Demma Lou walked over to the cupboard, opened it, and took out the Red Zinger tea.

It only took a few minutes for the tea kettle to boil. Demma Lou said nothing to the woman but busied herself finding lemon, sugar, a cinnamon cookie she had in the freezer, and a straw. She didn't know why she got the straw, but it seemed important at the time. When the tea kettle whistled she poured the boiling water over the tea bag. The rising steam smelled nice.

She took the small tray to the swing and waited. The woman smiled and took the tea and cookie.

"Thank you. You are kind. Won't you have a seat?"

Demma Lou sat lightly on the other end of the chair swing and folded her hands.

"You don't have to be so proper," the woman said. "Relax."

Demma Lou said nothing but watched the woman drink the hot tea. Demma Lou felt herself swallowing as she watched the beautiful young woman gulp down the boiling hot tea.

"Lonely?" asked the woman suddenly.

Startled, Demma Lou bristled. This woman had a disturbing manner.

"No."

"That's not what I hear," answered the visitor.

"Guess you can't trust your ears," Demma Lou replied, surprised at the sarcasm in her voice.

"Oh, I can trust my ears. I hold them to the ground and hear the pulse of the world."

Demma Lou looked blankly at the woman.

The young woman turned away and looked out toward the field behind the house.

"Your yard looks a bit dry—ever think of watering it?"

"What business is it of yours, I'd like to know," Demma Lou demanded. She deeply resented this woman.

"I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read, 'Live simply that others may simply live,'" the woman offered.

"What has that got to do with my yard?" Demma Lou wanted to know.

Without answering, the young woman got up.

"I want to see the drainage ditch," she announced.

"What drainage ditch?" Demma Lou was confused.

"Do you have any shoes I could borrow. I just brought these heels."

Most likely out of bewilderment at the audacity of the woman, Demma Lou went inside and came back with an old pair of Sassos. She had a newer pair, and she felt some satisfaction in knowing that she had given the worst of the two pair to this smart aleck.

"C'mon, let's go."

"What do you mean 'Let's'?"

The woman took Demma Lou's unwilling hand and pulled her out toward the field.

"This is crazy," she protested, but she followed, stumbling over clods of dirt in the plowed field beyond the yard. Black dirt filled her shoes and felt sticky against her sweaty feet. Dried grass stuck her ankles, made shallow scratches below the hemline of her dress. The wind pulled at the bun she wore, dragged strands of hair into her face. She stopped and pulled off her shoes. The earth felt good to her feet, tender as they were. She quickly found she could avoid stepping on clods by digging her toes into the upper areas of the rows. It soothed her feet when the dirt fell away from her foot—it was cool beneath the hot surface. When they reached the

other end of the field, she stopped, brushed off her feet and put her shoes back on. The woman did the same.

"What's over here?" the stranger wanted to know.

"I don't know any more—haven't been up here for years."

"Let's see."

They climbed over the mound of dirt formed from repeated dredging efforts to keep the drainage ditch functioning. Demma Lou's dress caught on the dead Johnson grass that lay stifling in the drought.

On the other side was a narrow path, grown over with weeds and branches from a volunteer mesquite. The woman stepped over the obstacles and made her way up the path. Demma Lou followed, no longer resisting.

Further on the woman stopped. A few feet below in the clay bank was a small ledge. Turning to look at Demma Lou, she nodded to it and jumped down. Demma Lou followed. There, cut in the bank, was a small cave. The woman knelt down and crawled inside. Here Demma Lou balked.

"It's O.K. C'mon in. It's cool in here."

"I'll get my dress dirty," Demma Lou complained.

"Does it matter?" the woman asked, and Demma Lou crawled in.

It wasn't a deep cave. Likely the boys had dug it when they played up here. The air inside was earth damp and old. It felt heavy on Demma Lou's skin, and she closed her eyes for just a minute. Forgetting about the woman sitting quietly beside her, Demma Lou felt the space of the cave, its thick air bathing her sundried skin. She felt the damp cool enter her, flooding her. She expanded until her skin gave way and she burst free—feeling the fertile air. There she could fly, become like the sparrows that played in the wind. A gust gathered her wings, and she glided up, caught in the thin air of the clouds. Below, the parched earth became a picture dabbled with browns and greens and an occasional red. A bird of reason, she turned and dove, glorying in the sensation of wind whipping the tendrils of hair into her mouth. She breathed deeply, and her lungs felt moist. She hadn't realized they were dry. Her bones became less brittle, as the wind bathed them in cool cloths dipped in the pool of air. Her eye lids, now cool, stopped fluttering against the imposed dark. Her wings supported her in the swirl, and the red patches grew to clumps of raspberries. She became aware of the woman beside her, but still had wings, and Demma Lou opened her eyes. The light from the entrance to the shallow cave seemed overly bright.

"We'd better go," the woman said.

Demma Lou slowly drifted back to the space of the cave, reached back to test her wings, then resigned herself to the present.

They climbed out of the cave and made their way back up the bank. It was slippery, but Demma Lou caught hold of a branch protruding from the bank and pulled herself up. They made their way back toward the house. The sun had gone behind a cloud, and the air felt thicker, almost moist to Demma Lou. She walked easily now, familiar with the earth giving way beneath her feet. As they neared the house she noticed the sun flowers had straightened to follow the course of the sun as it made its way higher in the sky.

The two women left their shoes by the back door and, barefooted, went inside. Demma Lou went to the sink and got two

glasses of water.

"It's time for me to go," the woman said, and she put on her shoes and left. She was out the door before Demma Lou had a chance to ask her any of her questions.

Turning from the door, Demma Lou saw the box. In two steps she had it in her hands and was out the door calling to the disappearing figure.

"You've forgotten your box," she yelled into the wind.

"Keep it," the woman called back as she turned the corner.

Back inside, Demma Lou dropped into the rocker by the door. She held the lacquered box in her hands for a few moments. Then she opened it. Inside was a single narcissus. She closed the box and set it on her lap.

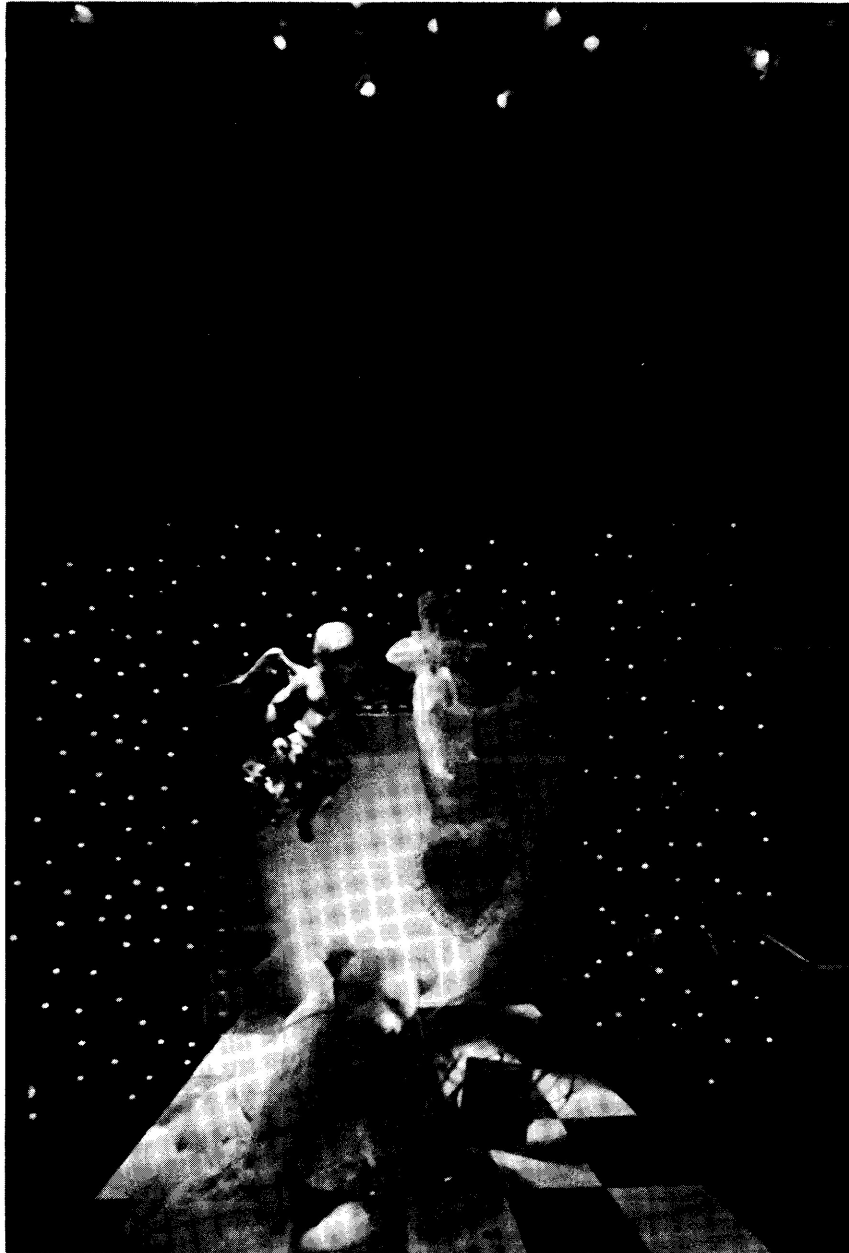
She hadn't been sitting there long when there was a knock at the door. She jumped up and rushed to the bedroom, where she quickly stashed the box in her lingerie drawer. The knock came again, louder this time.

She opened the door, and Mable and Selma stood there with a box from Sibyl's Bake Shop in their hands. Demma Lou stood there, barefooted, her hair falling in her face, her dress torn and dirty.

"Good morning," Demma Lou beamed. "Wish I could ask you in, but I've got some things I need to do. Thanks for the cinnamon rolls," she said, as she took the box out of their hands and shut the door. She thought she heard thunder in the distance as she held the box to her breast, whirled around once, and took a ballerina's pose as she waltzed her bare feet into the kitchen.

PITHY NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Rachael C. Borchard teaches English then writes poetry and other things; **Steve Carroll**, computer operations specialist, writes computer satire; **M. S. Chrisman**, student, can find a link between *School Girls in Bondage* and *Antigone*; **Charles Corry**, student, is living proof that poetic liberty is truth and truth is poetry; **Mindi Corwin**, student, writes philosophy in verse; **Jerry L. Harris** teaches English and makes fiction the "right thing"; **Miriam K. Harris** teaches Humanities and finds art in the parking lot and other places; **Janice Hirmon**, student, enjoys the expressive control and vision of photography--from her couch; **Brad Lovett**, student, explores the imagination (and Kansas) visually; **W. T. Pfefferle** slices life and teaches English; **Patricia D. Richards**, student, finds an exponential learning experience in photography; **Yasuko Hashiura Robinson**, student, finds that photography has helped her to understand overall composition and values in her painting and sculpture; **Leigh V. Salisbury**, Margie's daughter, sends thoughts to the north from UT Austin; **Nelie Tebbetts**, student, enjoys hands-on in her study of Baryshnikov.



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