

# The Messenger

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1989

## The Messenger, 1989

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# The Messenger

## 1989



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## 1989

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<sup>+</sup> denotes prize winners

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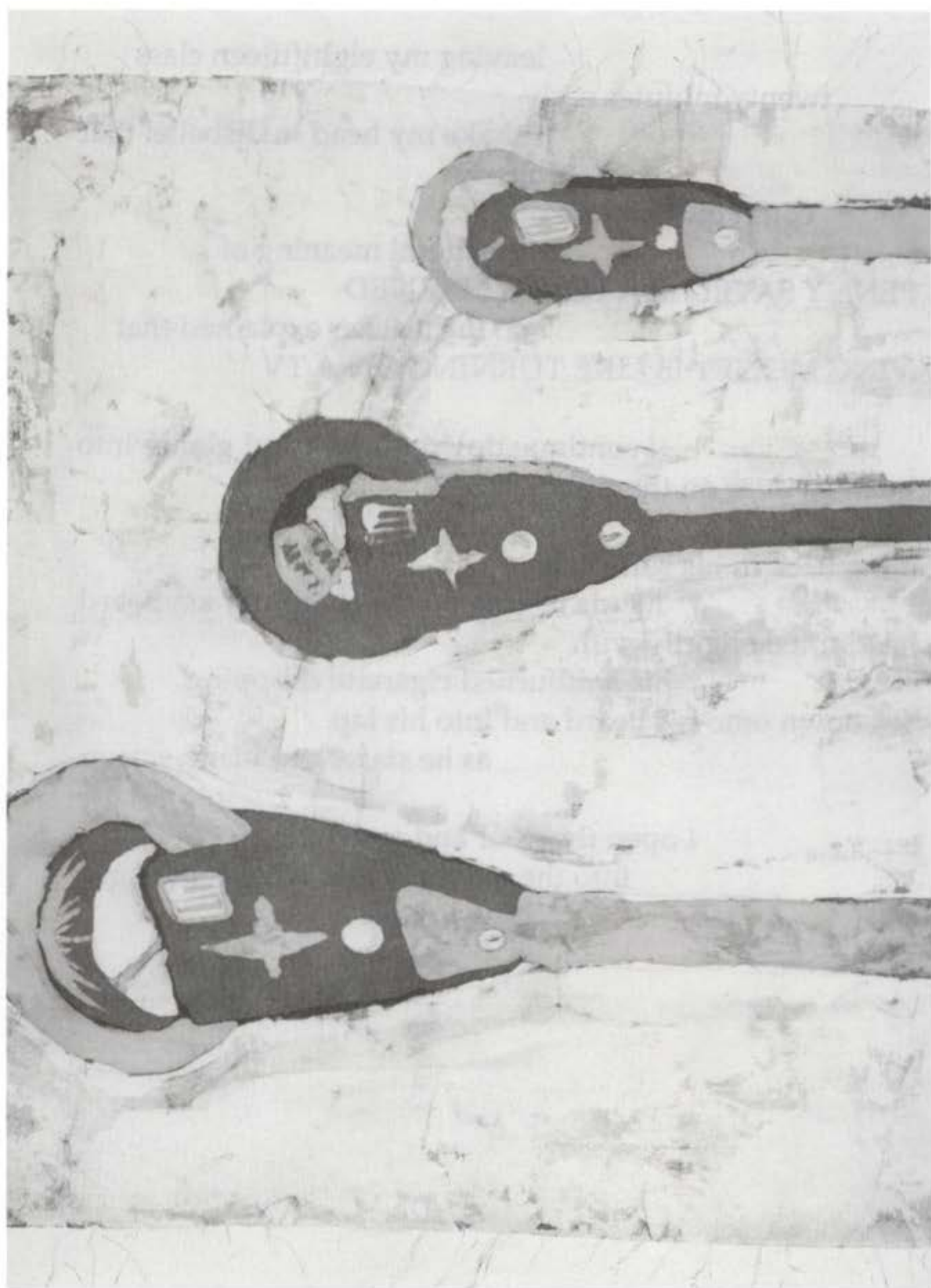
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Alan Loxterman, Dona Hickey, Eileen Lynch- poetry

Joyce MacAllister, Steven Barza, Mike Liebman- prose

Ephraim Rubenstein, Charles Johnson- artwork and photography



apathy

leaving my eightfifteen class  
twenty minutes early  
i shake my head in disbelief that  
Nobody  
could quite figure out  
the literal meaning of  
A PENNY SAVED IS A PENNY EARNED  
so the teacher explained that  
SAVING MONEY IS LIKE TURNING ON A TV

i continue down the hall and glance into  
the third door on the right  
to see dr x  
leaning back in his soft chair  
hands resting on the computer keyboard  
head tilted slightly with  
his halfburned cigarette dropping  
ashes down onto his beard and into his lap  
as he stares at a blank screen

i open the door and walk out  
into the grayness that wont remember  
how to rain

*John L.T. McLoughlin*



## The Problem with the Whole Thing<sup>+</sup>

Angie told me that her brother wasn't going to marry the call girl after all. She told me over drinks at that place -- you know, the place on 3rd? You know.

"He decided Mom wouldn't like it," she said, stirring her drink, examining her fingernails for chips.

"Right," I said. Their mother's like totally loaded. If Mark makes his mom happy for two of three more years, he could stand to inherit one or two big ones. One or two mil, you know.

So then we were riding back to Angie's place in her car, and she said, "But I think he really loves her." Just like that, out of the blue.

"Really?" I said. I mean, it was kinda weird, her saying something like that just out of the blue like that, weird.

"Yeah," she said, turning left past the parked Audi. "That's what he told me anyway."

I shifted in my seat a little. "So he's living in Vail?"

Angie was scanning the block for a parking space. "Yeah. That's where he met her. He didn't know she --"

"Didn't know she was a call girl --"

"Right. I mean, obviously, he didn't know, he just thought she was like this rich girl who liked to ski and probably had a trust fund or whatever --"

"Yeah."

"--and just hung out at Vail, right? But he said he loved her."

She slid the car into an impossibly small space. "When did you see him?" I asked, opening the door.

She got out of the car. "I met him in L.A. about a month ago. Remember, when I went out there?"

"Yeah."

"And that's when he told me about her. We stayed at Dad's house and we're like hanging out by the pool, and -- hold on a sec." She started fishing in her purse for her keys, dug them out, and started up the stairs. "And so he just springs the whole story on me."

I laughed a little. "Just boom -- I'm in love with a hooker?"

"Well, no, obviously not like that, I mean, I already met the girl, before." She slipped off her coat and crossed the room. "Want

a drink?"

I sat down on the couch, picked up a copy of Interview off the coffee table, flipped through it. "Sure, whatever you've got." I could hear her making the drinks, ice clinking on glass.

"So I knew something was up," she said, sitting down next to me, drinks in each hand. I took one and took a sip. "It was just strange. So anyway, he's like 'Angie, this is Fawn,' and I'm like thinking 'Sure, that's your real name.' It was obvious."

"What, that she was a hooker?"

"Yeah, but don't say that around Mark, because he gets like totally pissed. He does not like to talk about it."

"Does Kendall know about it?" Kendall's their little sister. She's like maybe fourteen, fifteen.

Angie sat back. "Oh sure. Kendall's totally hip. She thinks it's great. I mean, she's wilder than me, by far. I caught her and Mark doing lines once."

"Wow," I said.

"I know," she said. "Ever since Dad put her in boarding school in Switzerland she's been totally wild." She drained her drink. "Enough about that fucked-up half of the family, though," she said, flipping her hair back. "Want to go to bed?"

So I met Mark and Fawn when I was with Angie again at this little place right off the park. She was beautiful, but just kind of -- I don't know, kind of trashy, y'know? Just kind of too good-looking, if you know what I mean.

We sat down with them and had cappuccino. And it was like two, in the afternoon, on like a Monday, and they're having drinks. Christ, I'm thinking, I like to drink, but Monday afternoon?

"Mark!" I said, and shook his hand. Mark and Angie's dad and my dad used to play golf together, and I used to go over to their house all the time when I was a kid, so I knew him.

"Hey, Carter," he said. "This is Fawn." I shook her hand too, and I'm thinking, Jesus, she's practically falling out of her dress.

"Mark tells me you two go back a long way," she said.

"Too long," I said. Everybody laughed.

"So how's Mom?" Mark asked Angie.

She took a small sip of cappuccino. "She's fine. I talked to her last week. You know about..." She nodded almost imperceptibly

towards Fawn, and I'm thinking, great, I think I've gotta go.

Mark put his arm around Fawn. "You know we're getting married." Fawn smiled broadly. Angie's eyes just widened.

"Hey, how's the food here?" I said. I guess Mark changed his mind, I'm thinking.

"Mark, I thought that --" Angie started.

"Fawn and I love each other very much. This is what we want."

And I'm thinking, sure, I love scuba diving, but for two mil I'd give that up.

Man, Angie was pissed. I think she's like the peacemaker in the family, trying to keep everyone cool, and she knew that this would be some heavy shit with mom. Not to mention the bills he was shutting himself off from.

"Mark, you know about Mom." She smiled sweetly at Fawn. "Will you excuse us?" Fawn just shrugged her shoulders and got up.

"Don't start that with me, Angie," Mark warned. He sat back and shot her this totally withering look. Man, he was pissed, you know?

"Fine," Angie spat. "Fuck you. Just fuck away the two million." She got up and looked at me. "Carter?" I did not like this at all. I'm like friends with Mark and Angie both, right? So what do I do? Go with the chick? Fuck that.

"I'm just going to finish my cappuccino," I said.

"Fine," she said, and left. So I'm just sitting there with Mark. Not too uncomfortable, you know? And he looks like he's about to flatten me, just for being there. Hey man, I want to say, I just slept with her, it's not like I'm on her side or anything. I don't give a shit. So he cleared his throat.

"What a bitch," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "What a bitch."

So anyway I'm at this party at Reed's house, and it was totally wild. I mean I was fucked up, everybody was, and then Trey tells me that they're doing rails in the back room, and I'm thinking, what the hell.

So I went back there, back in Reed's bedroom, and shut the door. The music's like really loud, and there's a shitload of people,

and the other door in the bedroom, to the bathroom is open. So Trey and Tommy and this chick named Coco, who Trey's going out with now, she's from France or something, are all in there, passing this mirror around. So I sat down.

Well, they were like passing it around, and actually I kind of decided that I didn't want any, so I just sat back and enjoyed the atmosphere. And then I noticed -- I mean you couldn't help but notice -- that I could hear people fucking in the next room, the adjoining bedroom. So I hit Tommy in the arm.

"Tommy, man" I said, "Who the fuck is in there?"

Tommy snuffles a little and says, "Reed, man."

"What are they, fucking in there? Jesus."

"Yeah," he kind of laughed. "Reed's taping it."

"Taping it? Like video?" I said.

"Yeah. Isn't it wild?"

"Yeah," I said, and leaned back on the bed. "Wild." And Trey keeps trying to get me to do a line, but I just waved it on. Sometimes you're just not in the mood, right?

"Tommy," I said.

"Yeah."

"Who's the chick?"

He looked at Coco, and I'm like, no, no. "The chick in there, I mean," I said, pointing to the door.

"Oh," he said, and did another line. "Some hooker."

"Oh," I said.

So after a while, they all just leave, and I just stay in there, smoking a cigarette, and I just want to check this shit out. I mean this was wild. And after a little longer Reed came in.

"Hey, Carter," he said. "Got another butt?" So I gave him a smoke, and he sat down, looked at me, and got this big smile.

"What?" I say. "What?"

He blew some smoke out. "I did it."

"I heard."

"Yeah, man, on tape." His eyes were so fucking red. Jesus, I'm thinking, you are stoned to the gills.

"Reed, I've gotta run," comes this girl's voice, and I look up and it's her, man, it's Fawn. I almost fucking screamed. She looked at me and I looked at her and she was like, please don't fucking say a word.

"Cool," he said. He took out his wallet and gave her two hundreds and a joint. She looked at me again and left. He stubbed out his cigarette and looked at me. "C'mon, man," he said, "let's get a drink."

So anyway, about two months later, I ran into Tommy at this place downtown. He was hammered, and started buying me drinks and shit.

"Did you hear about Mark?" he said. I sat up.

"No," I said. "What about Mark?"

"He did it man. Killed himself."

"What?" I yelled. "What? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"He ate a bottle of sleeping pills, man. Hey, I thought you saw Angie a lot. I thought you guys were doing it."

"Once. What the fuck? When?"

"I don't know. Like a month ago." I could not fucking believe this shit.

"Why?"

"Cause, he was like in love with a pro, and he got himself shut out of his mother's will, and then found out she was still turning tricks, even after she said she'd quit."

"Jesus Christ," I said. I mean, I played football with him, right? That fucking shithead.

"I mean, over a girl, right?" Tommy said. "I can see getting cranked about the scoots, but killing yourself over a fucking girl? Give me a break."

"Really," I said. I was like in shock or something. "Tommy, look, I gotta go."

"You just got here, man. I just ordered shots for us. Look at the tail in this place! C'mon, man, you can't go." But I left anyway.

I call Angie the next day. She was living in the condo in Vail and I wanted to say something, I don't know what, something, like I'm sorry, or how are you, or some shit. I mean, she must be floored, I'm thinking, right? Her own brother. So I call her up.

"Angie," I said. "I just heard."

"What?"

"About Mark. Jesus, Angie, I am so sorry. I really am. You

must be crushed."

"I'm all right." Long pause. "Hey, Carter, why don't you come out here? I'd really like to see you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I really would."

"I don't know, Angie. I mean, I guess you'd like to be alone or something, wouldn't you?"

"No, no, I'm fine now, I'm over it. Come on out."

"You're over it?"

"Yeah, completely. You know what else?" she kind of giggled.

"What?"

"I get the money now."

"Wow."

"Yeah. Cool, huh?" I'm kind of dazed at this point, right?

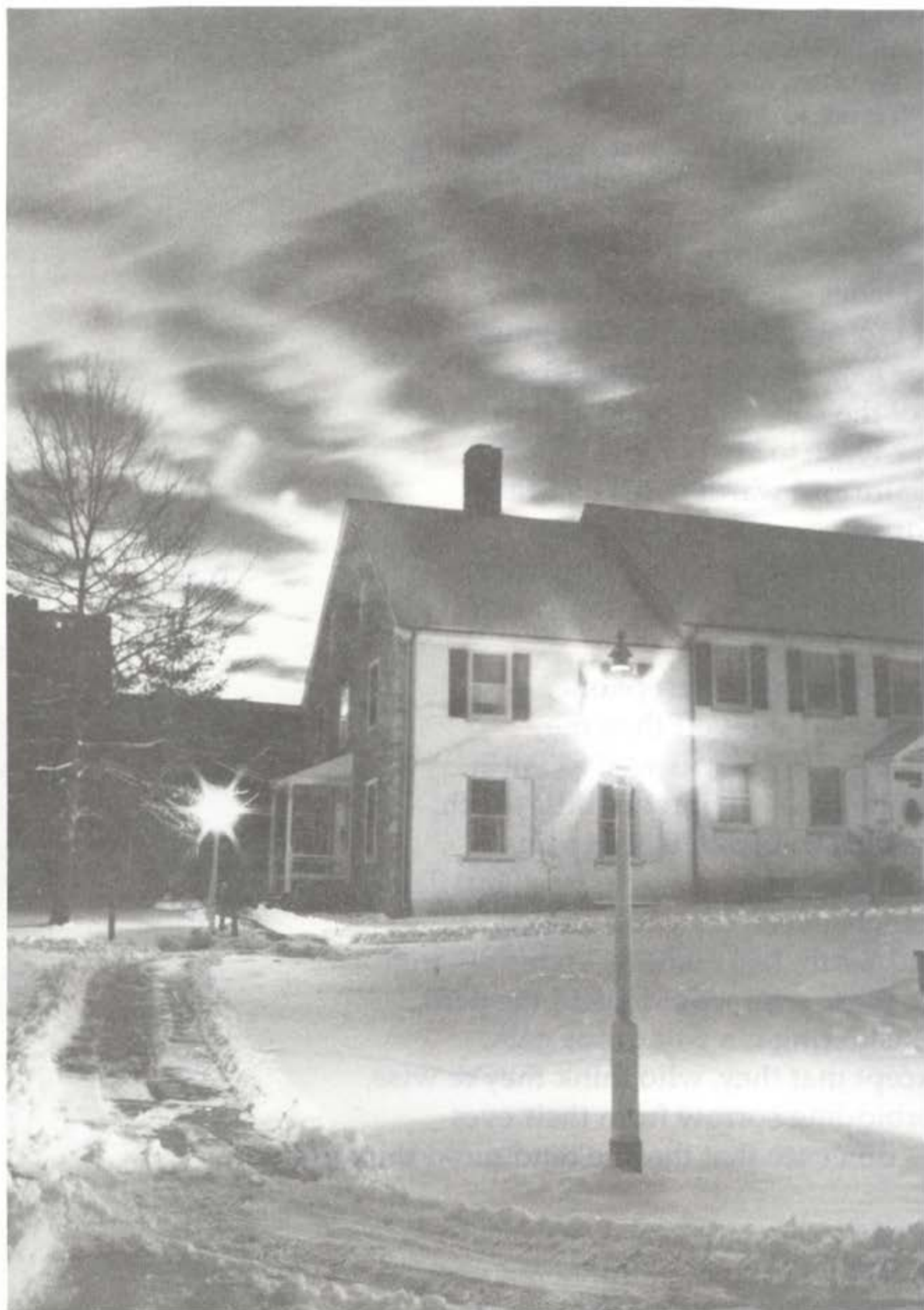
I got a letter from her not too long ago, and I open like this perfume-scented letter, and out falls this picture. And I can't believe this, but it was a picture of her, lying in bed, just wearing this little negligee deal. So I'm thinking, who took the picture, right?

So in the letter it said "Come and see me. I miss you. I bet we could have some fun. I'll pay for your plane ticket. Love and kisses, Angie."

Man, I just threw that shit away. Just threw it the fuck away.

*Ben Vance*

**+Winner of the Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Creative Writing**



## ADDITIONAL WORDS TO PERSEPHONE

Be to her, Persephone

All the things I might not be . . .

Say to her, my dear, my dear,

It is not so dreadful here.

—from "Prayer to Persephone" by  
Edna St. Vincent Millay

Well, Persephone, it's true

In Hades she won't feel the dew

Of morning fresh upon the grass

Nor gaze into the looking glass

of the still, clear, pond at dawn;

Nor wake to see her lover's face,

Secure and warm in his embrace,

Nor shiver as her lover's lips

Brush gently 'cross her fingertips,

drinking in his long, long soulful glance.

Dreadful? Yes, Persephone,

But she is better off than me,

For there in Hell, as well as Earth,

Although she'll find but little mirth,

She'll feel, at least, a little pain—

Hell's beauty is not in frost, but flame.

But I, between the gates of Hell

And Earth, feel nothing—which is well

For those who would avoid the pain,

Considering it a wondrous gain,

Except that they, who think they're wise,

Forbidding sorrow from their eyes

don't see that they've renounced their joy.

So, say to her, my dear, my dear,

It's really not so dreadful here;

Better she be there in Hell,

Than I, outside Hell's gates alone

and senseless in an empty shell.

*Katherine Clark*



## INSIDE THE SUKKAH\*

You may own a house with turrets and gables,  
A mansion of the finest, strongest stone,  
A brick duplex or a Levittown tract house,  
But you always live inside a sukkah.

A small and fragile tent, of straw and twigs,  
Open to the softest breeze or the wildest storm—  
Though you latch one to the side of you house  
For only seven days at harvest time,  
You eat your meals and pray and celebrate inside this tent  
To remind yourself that you have lived in there every day.

The peasants saw the rich fruits and wine  
Through the chinks in the side walls' straw-tied twigs.  
They came with horses and their angry, jealous torches  
To burn you to the ground forever.  
Yet you would not die; you moved away  
To rebuild your sukkah someplace else.

The kings and knights, in a line of shields and swords,  
With their glittering armor and white horses in reins with jewels,  
Took you into their lands and castles.  
But since you could not leave your sukkah behind,  
The blazing gold of royalty would fade,  
And the angel paintings on the ceilings looked dim,  
While in your sukkah, only you could look up and see  
The moon and the white stars swirling in pinwheels of  
celebration—  
Lit by the freedom, power, and infinite love  
That streams from the home of G-d.

*Continued*

You have lived in clusters of sukkahs  
With no room to build to the side,  
So you built upward,  
Your hands and tent poles reaching to touch the dome of the sky  
In the same way that your mind did in the Yeshiva.

You even withstood the guards  
Who peeped inside your sukkah with their guns,  
And the mechanized men holding barbed wire whips  
Who drove Hitler's bulldozers into your sukkah.  
They called their act the "final solution"  
But you have achieved a lasting resolution:  
Though torn and flayed, you still survived,  
And afterward, yet trembling, you still reached  
For the hand of G-d and of all other men.

And your sukkah stays with you,  
An eyesore to some, perhaps,  
But nobody will succeed in tearing it down  
Because your sukkah's fragility enduring  
Reminds all people of the truth—  
They are just like you.

*Alisa Mayor*

\*A sukkah is a small tent built for a week of meals and prayer to celebrate the Jewish harvest holiday of Succoth.



## RE-WRITING THE LOVE RAPPORT

Rain drops freezing on the road tonight

Find our hearts sliding, one into the other, at  
the Happy House on Harrel Street

(if you can believe it, but it's true) Blacksburg,

Virginia the U S of A, by God, and the universe  
as well. Our universe. Inside the

Happy to BE House. Putting felt tip to

Paper towel because the music in the  
living room is too loud, too live and too much

to overcome. I begin with THE interruption got lost  
between the sheets of innocence and trepidation.

That's a poetic idea (in parentheses).

He returns with a word and  
Worldwise abstraction: Eschew Obstrufication.

WHY are men so abstract?

Because it is a more elaborate dance, a more  
impressive mating ritual,  
if you will

DANCE

with the true word of a man

Clinging to (or attempting to grasp) the world  
of autonomy, in the 1980's. A humanitarian,

holding on to the seat edge of

Masculinity,

and knowing better.

I'm wordless.

DAMN right you're wordless.

But on second thought, trudges along with yet another  
pompous, fear-induced vaguity. I break a smile.

Shared empathy for the null set eternally searching for  
a few tangible numbers.

Others call it love.

*J.E. Bostock*

## SEYMOUR SAYS GOODBYE

You, my dear Shandra, may  
take your huffy leave. As  
for myself, I toast the  
view as you go, sip my  
champagne and muse at your anger. Oh—  
take those stinking perfumes,  
the earrings (the ones  
with pins in 'em), the  
yoga books and all the new-  
wave albums.

And dear, don't you dare  
touch my tailored suits,  
my lemon-lime shaving cream,  
my Englebert Humperdink collection,  
the bubbly in the fridge,  
Or any of my evening  
gowns you found in the  
closet today.

*John L.T. McLoughlin*

## THE HISTORIAN

Setting: As the lights slowly come up they reveal an old man, with a southern accent, in his 60s slowly rocking in a rocking chair at center stage.

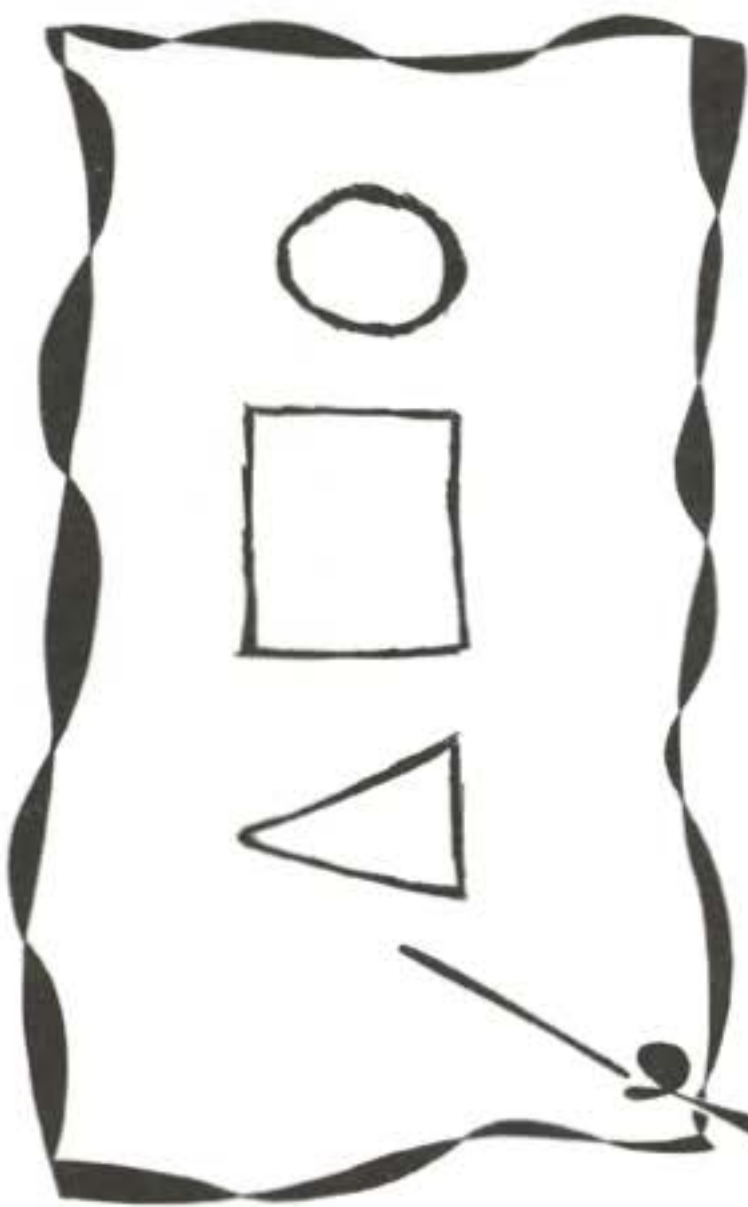
Old Man: Hell yes I remember them two boys. Chester and Timmy was good old boys when theys younger. Course they didn't think as much as most folks, but ya can't rightly blame um for that. (Pause, looks up at sky as if remembering) Let me see now, if I 'member rightly them boys was born in the same hollow up on Turkeycot mountain. An they been hanging out reglar since theys knee-high to a grasshopper. Chester was the leader a the two 'cause he was the meanest. 'Course Timmy was as big as damn 6th year ox but he's as timid as he could be so Chester pretty much ruled over him. Timmy was real slow ya see, and didn't really care much about what he did as long as he didn't have to decide himself. So Chester was the boss a that outfit. (Pause, adjusts himself in chair) 'Course Chester was no genius himself now either. Hell I 'member one time old Chester decided he was going to light a match to the fart of an old mule that had been reliev'n' himself so much that it was going to take Chester all day to finish plowing half an acre. Well old Chester crept up behind that mule and waited for her to hunker down for a good un and just as that mule lifted her tail Chester lit a match to that ass and a blue fire shot outa that mule just like a damn gas stove. And I mean to tell ya that mule's eyes bugged outa her head and she let outa that field like a damn jackrabbit, buckin' an a neighin' an a smashin' all through Chester's daddy's tobacco crop. (Shakes head and chuckles) Well, after Chester's daddy got a hold of Chester's ass it was right sore too as I 'member. (Pause, shakes head and looks down) But I mean to tell ya that won't the last time. I 'member another time back when them boys was going to Mt. Zion elementary down in Kelso and one day they's skipping Miss Annette Burpleson's history class so as they could toilet paper the boys room. Well whiles they's in there smokin' cigarettes and flinging wet toilet paper on the walls Chester gets the idea of pullin' a sink outa the wall so as maybe they'll have to

close the school to fix it; like I told ya he won't no Einstein or nothing. So he gets Timmy to be lookout in case Mr. Hornkins happens to pass by an commences to a tuggin' an a pullin' on that ole sink. Well Chester can't budge it an it don't take long 'fore he gets right disgusted so he calls Timmy over to give him a hand. Well ya know Timmy's a big boy even back then. An he comes over an gives that ole sink a tug an just as it tears outa the wall Principal Gerrold Hornkins comes a strolling inta that privy to relieve himself an gets hit head on with a stream a water comin' outa tha hole where that sink used ta be. (Pause, chuckles to himself) Well I mean to tell ya at right about that point Chester an Timmy were both pretty surprised, sitting in the middle a the bathroom floor with that ole sink 'tween their legs watchin' their principal get drowned right in front of em. Well Chester was the first one to get a hold a himself an he tried to make a run for it 'fore Mr. Hornkins could figure out what happened. But that ole Principal grabbed a holt a that boy's neck before he'd gotten a inch outa that john. An poor ole Timmy just sat in the middle a the floor watching the water rise aroun' his legs. (Shakes head, chuckles, sighs) Well as I recall the boys got two weeks suspension for that trick, but it sure won't be the last. I 'member that time back when they's at Maybird High and Chester had just gotten his car. A 1973 jacked-up, candy-apple red, Chevy Nova it was. Had a 350 four-barrel under the hood and twin I-beam thrusters on the floor. Hell, that boy thought he's hotter 'an cat shit. Well one day Chester was giving Timmy a ride to school and they's late as usual an Chester was tryin' to open a package a nabs he'd bought for his breakfast. Well, while he's a fumblin' with 'em crackers an tryin' to drive at the same time he comes aroun' that blind curve right before Zack Dooley's chicken farm an one a Dooley's cows has done got loose an strayed inta tha road. Well Chester swerves to miss tha cow an hits tha gas instead of tha brake an goes flyin' up that hill in front a Dooley's place an tears through Dooley's fence an his car flips twice 'fore it finally comes ta rest in tha middle a Dooley's yard. Well somehow or another they's both ok, 'cept for Timmy's head which he'd done busted open on tha windshield an Chester ain't got nothing wrong with him 'cept for a couple a bruises. But do you know what that damn Chester Turnblit did next. He climbed

outa his car, hopped up on the hood an finished opening up them damn nabs that had done caused the wreck in tha first place. An he sat there eatin' his breakfast while Timmy wiped the blood offa his face with a dixie flag that Chester had in tha back seat. An they sat there just like that until the cops came. (Pause, shakes head, looks up as if to reflect) I mean to tell ya I ain't never seen two boys as dumb as those two were when they got together. (Pause) Hell, they's ok when they's younger but as ya get older the stakes go up on things. (Pause, speaks more slowly now, not as lively) Few years back Chester ran out on his wife an kids. Some say it's 'cause he missed Timmy or because he knew Timmy couldn't make it without somebody to tell him what to do. Others say it's 'cause he always was a good-fur-nothin' bastard an didn't want the responsibility of a family no more. They say he'd figured it was about time he ruined somebody else's life 'sides his own. (Pause, slowly rocking) Yeah, tha last I heard they's still doing time for that boy they killed while they's trying to rob that convenience store down in Franklin County. (Pause) Yep, it's a damn shame. Sometimes it seems like it might a been better if some folks were never born, the way their lives just don't seem to amount to nothing good. (Long pause, seems to go into a daydream, then suddenly becomes aware of the silence and livens up again) Ah hell! Listen at me gettin on, yore prob'ly half asleep after all my yapping. You're nice to listen though, not many people want to hear my old stories much anymore, guess they done gotten kinda old after all these years. (Pause, strains to get up, then slowly shuffles towards stage left) I reckon it's about time for me to be gettin' on, you say hello to that pretty momma a yours for me now will ya. I 'member when . . . (Lights fade to black and his voice trails off)

*Chris Tharp*





*Aranyosi*

## VASE

He has priced me and bought me,  
the most cunning collector—  
at modest annoyance and considerable fee  
A vase lovely and bright, set out to admire  
and here on my shelf in the darkest of nights  
I wait for him to break me.

*M. Dawson*

## THE ART AND SCIENCE OF POETIC BASKETBALL

The hidden, humble regimen.  
A hard wood floor  
Under a supple, seasoned quilt.  
An inviting glass backboard  
Bare, begging lined paper.  
A leather McGregor and a blue Bic Medium.  
A hundred foul shots,  
A hundred foul attempts.  
Shoot exhausted,  
Write consumed.

A ritual is born.  
Five dribbles, a series of first lines.  
A deep breath, a flash back.  
Bending in some strange, unacknowledged synchronicity  
Are your knees and my wrist.  
Spin the ball, twist the phrase.  
The harmony of flawless rhyme  
Swish – the placid testimony of perfection.  
An agreeable spin,  
Like a line that bids companionship  
(And like all good things)  
Comes back to you.

He idolizes Sidney Moncreif  
I play.  
She analyzes Wallace Stevens  
I write.  
And I sweat too, in my own invisible and internal way  
For an imaginary moment . . . to be peerless.  
Even sex has not equaled this  
But like It, I collapse – spent and emptied –  
And then bathe in my private glory.

*Continued*

Once, I celebrated a love this simple,  
Inspired,  
Moved,  
Infused.  
Let it be.

*Kelly Corrigan*



## EXHIBITION (FOR EMILY)

I run my palm over the stone,  
carved and cold, and am touching your soft  
breast.

I brush against a stack of canvasses  
sheathed in burlap and am smoothing your  
fine, silky hair.

A worker curses his task and your soft voice,  
singing,  
reaches my ears.

Walking into the exhibit hall I glimpse the dull  
light

and we are lying together in the sun.

Pacing the marble floor we roll, laughing,  
on a blanket of orange autumn.

Fixing frames on the white wall I caress your  
cheek.

Amidst critics

and sycophants, my opening is arms and  
my reception is of you

and as I open my eyes to chipped rock and  
splattered color

cold, hard, angular, modern,

I see you

warm,

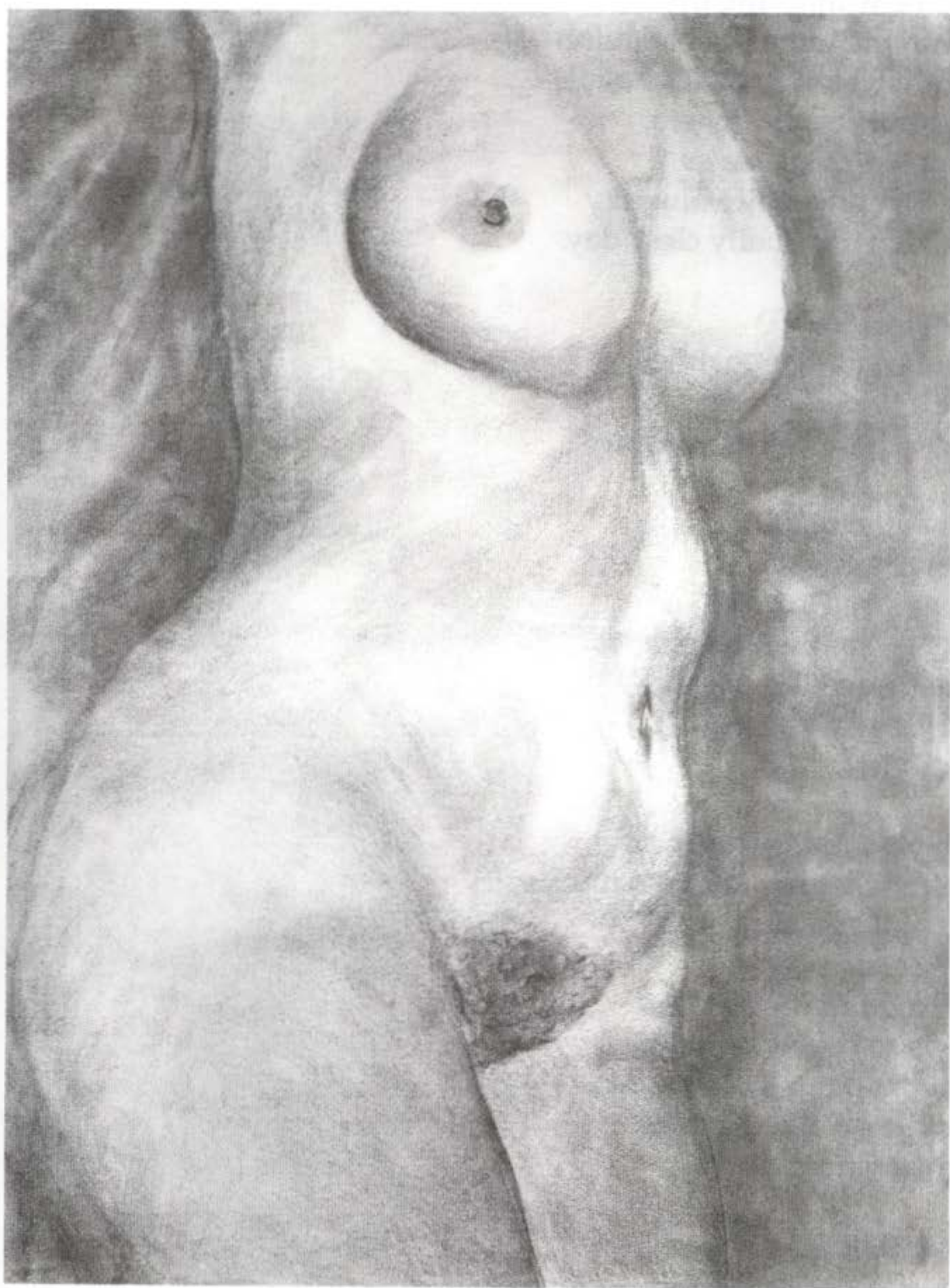
soft,

supple,

timeless,

beautiful.

*C. Bradley Jacobs*



## UPON PHOTOGRAPHING A CATHEDRAL IN LIVERPOOL+

I found it last fall  
while wandering up  
from the Lime Street Station—  
the skeleton of God's house:  
the buttresses' fingers  
reaching for heaven  
in that unusually blue sky  
on that unusually clear day.

That the roof  
had been demolished  
by a bomb or two  
added only to its elegance.

That the bombs  
had destroyed  
what was to have  
overwhelmed the masses  
surpassed the wishes  
of those who had  
built it.

To you, great architects  
who schemed with the priests  
to build so high as to  
scare the people  
into thinking that God  
was so overwhelming  
and making them shrink  
as they walked 'neath  
great vaults

you failed.

Little did you know  
four hundred years later

*Continued*



some bomb-dropping pilot  
would do you no favor—  
by tearing off your promise  
of Life Everafter  
and returning the sky  
to the man who sought Light

and gave a new meaning  
to "the Living Church"  
by letting sun in  
to make all things grow.

To you, regal bishops  
who abused your might  
look now toward your altar  
teeming with flowers  
that smile and whisper,  
"This God is more kind."

Look up from the nave  
to see the sky.  
Now there is no barrier  
between man and his Lord.  
Defiant it stands,  
freed from your threats  
and freed from the dark,  
more beautiful now  
than you would have imagined.

I walked through the apse,  
all full of life  
and thought to myself,  
"This was the way it  
was meant to be—"

*Continued*

Ironic it seemed  
that His Word was heard  
much better without  
the dogma of priests  
or vaults topped with moss.

*C.A. Christopher*

**+Winner of the Margaret Haley Carpenter Prize for Poetry**

## STARGAZER'S SONNET

When compass fails, we look to find our way  
By silver sparks of flame which fret the sky,  
Stars burning free and clear from where they stay  
To guide us through the forests from up high.  
They float and dance within their godly spheres,  
Reflecting in celestial forms the earth:  
The zodiac, and driving charioteers,  
And heroes who have led us since man's birth.  
But beautiful as stars are to be seen,  
Each one consumes the spirit in its core;  
And from exalted places they careen  
To icy space as twisted rocks of ore.  
And though we worship stars for constancy,  
They, too, must fall to all eternity.

*Alisa Mayor*

## blissful labyrinth

God (is that ok today)  
I wish I was chanting in the  
60s, when all was  
Kennedys and Cream (clapton is god) and  
escape any way you can and  
love and  
Canada and  
blacks spilled on the street and  
whatthehell (wherethehell) is  
Nam, Vietnam, and  
death and baring  
 chests to cannons in a futile  
spring of love and  
saying (no, Sscreaming, but it wouldn't be  
right to capitalize here , no) all this madness has got to  
stop and  
blissful labyrinth, which,  
incidentally,  
Jim Morrison promised to  
guide us through.

*Mike Liebman*

## AFTER THE FIRE

Her eyes blinked and twitched. Her hands flew to cover them in reflex. Slowly she opened her eyes, struck by the shaft of early morning light which had reached through the window to gently nudge her awake and warmly welcome her to this new day.

She gazed around the room to get her bearings and her eyes came to rest on a tiny cone of light glowing on her desk. She fumbled for her glasses on the nightstand. She put them on and pulled herself up to rest on one arm.

Now she could see that the glimmer was the remains of a candle she had lit the night before.

Funny how dim and pathetic it seemed in this pure morning light, she thought. In the darkness of the night it had seemed such a force, so full of life. It had danced, flickered, and lit the whole room, defining with its intricate pattern of illumination and shadow the shape and character of every object in it. The glow of that candle had fascinated her so. It had seemed so mysterious, so intense.

But somehow this morning it was not the same. It was overwhelmed by the light of the sun. Its brilliance had dimmed in its revealing floodlighting. It just burned slowly and meekly in the bottom of its holder.

She was surprised it had kept burning through the night. Perhaps that had tapped its energy.

Then she came to a realization. It might have set fire to something and burned down the whole house. Oh, wouldn't Mother be furious if she knew! She had always taught her to think of safety first. Mother was always saying to blow out a candle when leaving a room because next time you turn around, before you realize it has happened, your whole life could go up in smoke.

She jumped out of bed and ran to blow it out. That was better. There was no danger now and Mother would never know. Besides, it had been such a sorry sight that she was beginning to feel a little depressed, despite the pleasant morning light.

This childhood memory was what flashed through her mind at that moment when she was again awakened by the morning

sun and rolled over to see the great fleshy mass beside her.

She fumbled for her glasses in the drawer of her nightstand so as to get a better look at this souvenir of the evening before. There he lay, his body rising and falling with every snoring breath.

Somehow, basking in this shaft of early morning light, his stubble-covered face half-buried in the pillow, he seemed a dim remnant of the thrilling man she had gone to bed with the night before. That night he had seemed such an electric presence, so fascinating in both body and mind. Her whole world, for a time, had seemed to revolve around this man. But this morning he was nothing more than an ordinary guy sleeping off a drunk. She hardly knew him and all of a sudden it seemed there wasn't much to know.

She was intrigued that he had stayed all night. A lot of times that never happened. It must be a rough experience, she thought, because they always look drained and dull like this.

This had happened many times before and every time she had been quick to end it in the morning. Entanglements like this can really mess up one's life. She always snuffed it out before it became a problem.

Safety first, you know. Mother had taught her well.

Now she had to decide if she was going to snuff this one out, too. She stared at his sorry state for a moment. It would be a load off her mind.

Perhaps, however, this time she would take a chance. Maybe it was time she was disobedient – no, independent – and took some risks. Maybe she should let this thing burn. Let it burn with all it's got until it burned out completely.

She just didn't know. She wished there were someone to tell her.

And she rolled out of bed and trudged toward the kitchen to start the coffee.

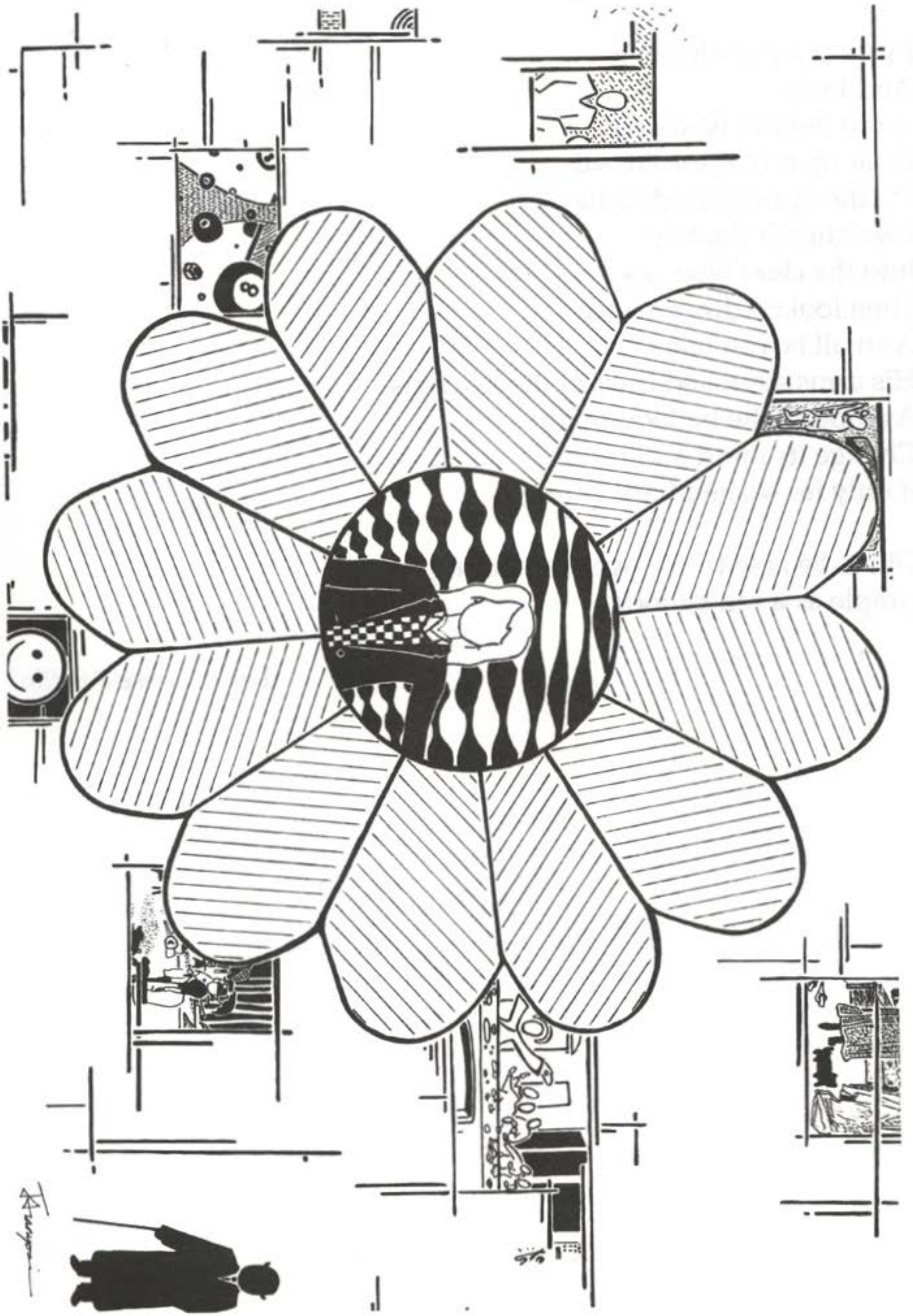
*Laura Grace Pattillo*

## RED BALLOON

I was at a parade once  
And I saw  
A red helium balloon  
Float up out of the crowd  
On the opposite sidewalk  
I watched it float up  
Into the clear blue sky  
Then looked down to see  
A small boy in tears  
His arms stretched toward the heavens  
As though the balloon might  
Change its mind and return  
If only he wished hard enough.

Oh, to be able to cry over something so  
simple as a red balloon.

*Laura Grace Pattillo*





## SHALLOW GRAVE

I dug a hole one day. Placing in it  
faces and feelings that were once  
traumatic, I covered it with  
shame and fear.

I'd show it to you, but  
you wouldn't approve, and I've  
forgotten where it is;  
I suppose I planned it that way.

You seem curious, wanting to brush off the dirt.  
I've tried removing it myself,  
but I mustn't uncover the truth.  
Why think at all, if only to relive  
the anguish and bring to the surface  
pain, so carefully buried in my shallow grave . . .  
Perhaps I dug too deep.

*Diane Turco*

## THE HOLY UNION

Aching for the touch of God  
Longing for the caress with primal urgency  
Lying naked,  
    bathed in the light of pure innocence  
Thoughts wandering to taboo regions of the mind  
Shall Innocence be forsaken  
    for a moment with the Infinite  
For the union to be real  
Blood must be shed  
    Symbolic Crucifixion  
    in the arms of a jealous god  
Preparation in the darkness  
Soon to step in the light  
    to be forever stained by being washed clean  
For God must fill completely  
The lust is never-ending  
The path to the chamber  
    is full of foreshadowings—  
    forebodings of future acts  
Is turning back doom  
    —or going on?

The Light descends.  
The rape begins.  
God achieves the penetration.

*S.K. McMillan*



erotica

### I. Higher Hell

worshipping above me I invite you to land, to become the New  
Being, pierce new depths with pumping wings of life,  
bleed the sweet liquid, scream the soft song,  
parade yourself before the eternal and  
the erotic will,  
purge the boring,  
Become the New Interest,  
live the rage, swallow the milk of  
paradise,  
come to me, your most magnificent  
pleasure

### II. Lower Heaven

Bend down  
to me and

kiss this glistening  
ring, the gleaming  
jewel which is my gift to you;  
entrance into the eternal. Drink the  
warm wine, sing to me alone your lost breath  
and panting gasps and I will save you and you will  
never cease. You will find that the secret  
of satiation is its elusiveness whereby endures hope  
and your spirit of life in  
passion.

*C. Bradley Jacobs*

## VALENTINE'S DAY

I bought these for you.

Thank you. They're so pretty.

It's  
(the least I can do for someone  
as special as you)  
nothing really.

Yes, it is.  
Thank you  
so much.

Isn't it  
(time we said how much we love  
each other)  
a nice day.  
(To walk home,  
Alone,  
Again.  
FOOL!)

Yes, but I really have to go now.  
Thanks again.

I'll see you  
(every night in my dreams)  
whenever.

Bye.

Bye. Happy Valentine's Day.

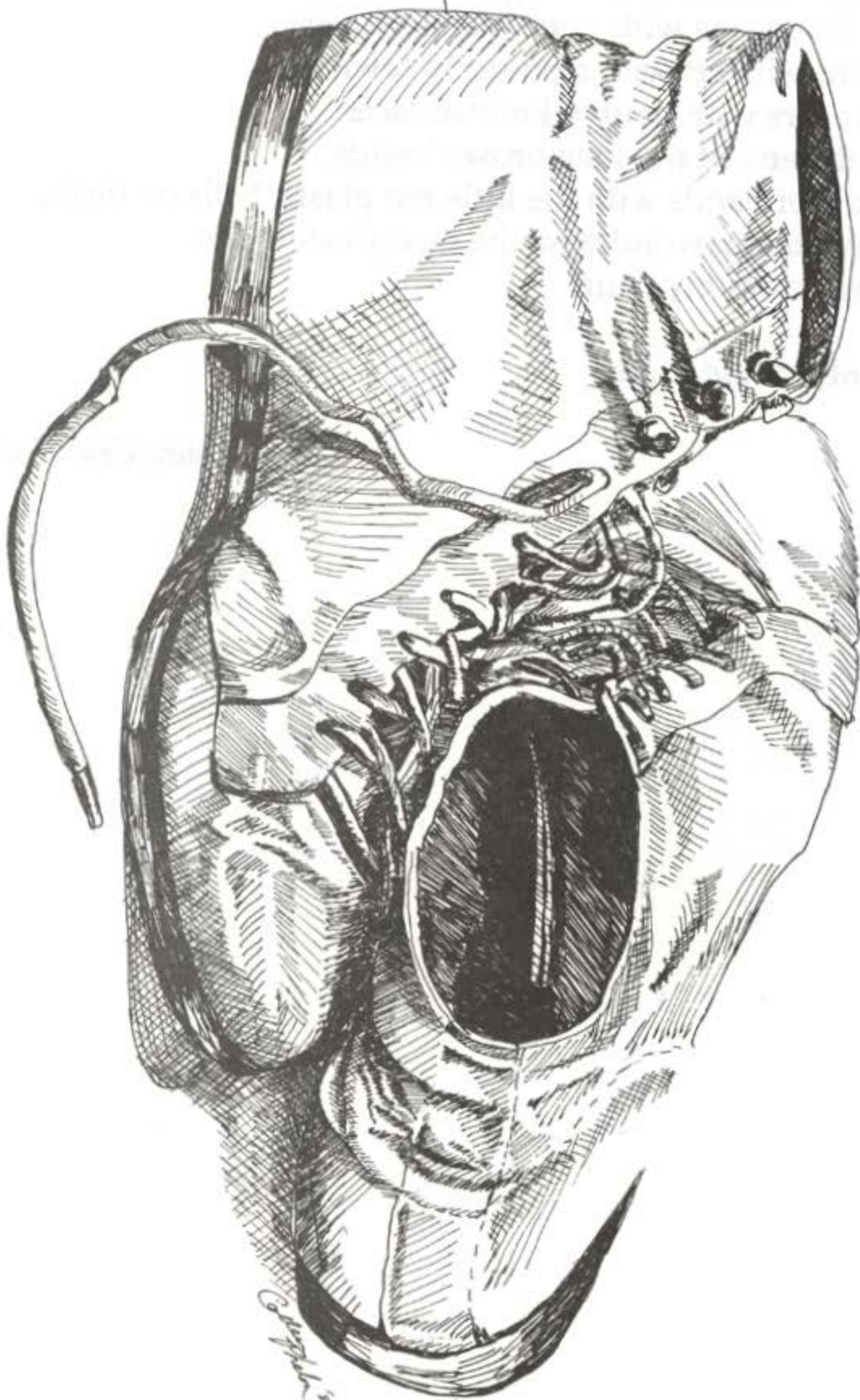
*Kevin Kendall*



I remember sitting in the neighbors' yard  
in light blue jeans with grass-stained knees  
and a white t-shirt with a butterfly sewn on it  
and sneakers with double-knotted laces  
and, at the end of my long brown braids,  
those rubber bands with the little red plastic balls on them,  
my eyes fixed in wonder on the wooly caterpillar  
crawling across my palm.

I remember childhood.

*Laura Grace Pattillo*





## SUNDAY MORNING (WORSHIP?)

The pastor stands behind  
His oaken throne (fortress)  
And shoots his fire  
In a monotone  
And the people  
GROAN  
(Inwardly, of course)  
Or smirk  
Or simply turn off the TV set  
(Except, of course, for little Billy,  
Who is only five  
And is allowed to keep his TV on –  
Channel 7 – the  
Lone  
Ranger  
His favorite)

Emma Jeanne Baxter  
Blows in her hanky  
Bastes the turkey one last time  
Tries to convince herself that she  
Really did  
Turn the coffee pot

OFF  
Dr. Eugene O'Rilely  
Coughs  
Glances at his watch  
Dances with his wife at the Elk's Club  
Then settles down in his favorite  
Easy Chair  
To drink beer and watch the 'Skins  
(They're at JFK today —  
It's a cinch)

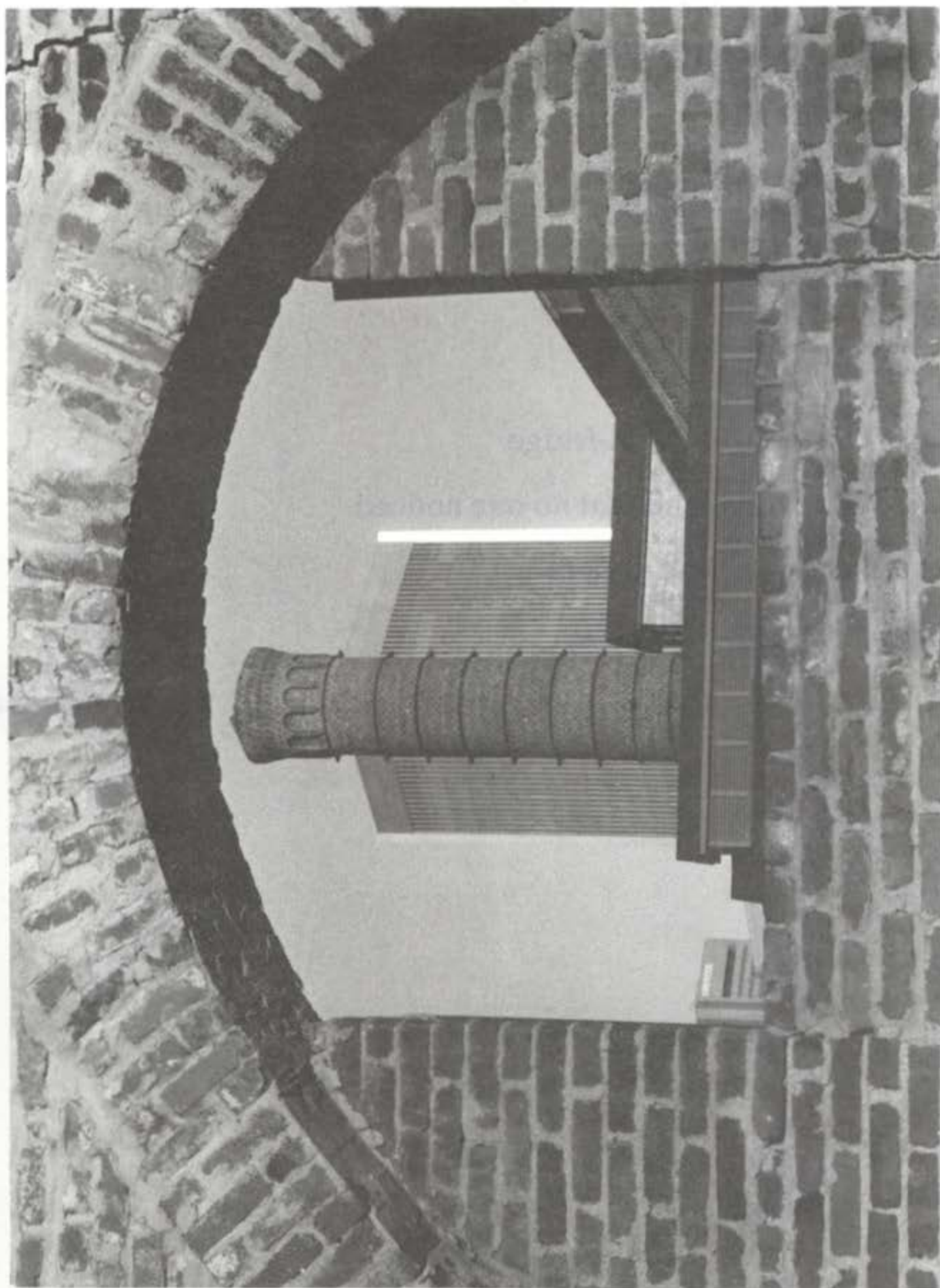
Dianne Shoemaker  
Paints her nails (Starlight Plum)  
Winks at Bobby Brown  
Across the balcony

*Continued*

(Good God!)  
The preacher drones slower  
Than a snail  
CRAWLS  
Little Billy  
SPRAWLS  
(But he's only five so it doesn't count)  
In the Pew  
    (Mother's laps were made  
    for Sunday worship pillows,  
                                you know)

The pastor smiles at his  
Flock  
From behind  
His oaken throne (fortress)  
Stifles a yawn in a  
"Praise the Lord!"  
God  
(Good God!)  
Slips quietly from the  
Back pew  
(God always sits in the back pew)  
And tiptoes out the door  
Goes down to the corner  
    (Fifth and Main)  
Sits down beside Old Man Foster  
And asks for a sip from the  
Holy Brown Bag

*Amy Joyner*



God died today  
and the earth kept revolving  
no one noticed  
caught up in the hustle of  
making money and creating bombs  
but a little girl  
sitting on the doorstep  
saw a star in the night  
and a single lonely tear  
fell from her face  
into a puddle of garbage and  
cigarette butts  
slowly she went inside  
her rat-littered home  
and ate cold beans  
out of her rusted mini-fridge  
turned on the news  
and was frightened that no one noticed  
and no one cared  
that amongst the murders  
and rape  
the devil took over today

*Heidi Ziglar*

## TH' BEER

It was a hot day in th' middle of July  
with the sun bearin' down on God's creation  
like a hammer on a fence post. I'd got a beer from  
th' fridge and was about to sit back down in m' rocker when  
that kid—my grandson—pops outa nowhere an' says he  
didn't guess I should be drinkin' alcohol.

I said that him not bein' even close  
to half my age an' not havin'  
the brains God gave a  
cricket I didn't  
guess he should  
be tellin' me  
what to do.

Well he goes on and on about how many brain cells th' can  
I was about to open is gonna kill an' tells me what  
my stummick's gonna look like when I get old  
an' I told 'im I guessed I was old enough  
that this one beer wasn't gonna make  
much difference.

Well he opens up his mouth to say somethin' else, but I  
cut 'im off (him takin' the fun out of it by now  
an' all) an' threw th' can at th' little  
pecker an' said I hoped his belly  
rotted so bad that when he ate  
apple pie th' chunks of apple  
went straight through 'im  
an' settled in his feet  
so there'd be a  
squishy sound  
when he  
walked.

Well he picked up th' can an' walked back into th' house  
with it, an' didn't even offer me a coke or nothin'.  
I was about to settle back down into my chair  
when I heard th'

*Continued*

pssssshhhhhhhhhhtttttTTT!  
of a beer can being opened.

That-

-was-

-the-

-last-

-straw!

I jumped up out of m' rocker an' ran into th' house an'  
grabbed th' kid's arm an' stole th' beer back an'  
sent it down th' ol' hatch. When it was gone  
an' I was about to smack m' lips, I felt  
this heave. I grabbed my stummick an'  
fell on th' floor an' that little  
thirteen-year-old sunovagun  
started laughin' an'  
laughin' an' sayin'  
I tol' you so an'  
givin' his lecture about beer an' such between gasps for  
breath with tears streamin' down his cheeks, an'  
between my gasps for breath I told 'im I  
didn't see what was so gosh-darn  
funny but he only laughed  
harder an' that got  
grandma in the room.  
Well she realized what was goin' on pretty quick an'  
knocked the little hyena on th' head with her  
thimble an' that made him stop laughin' but  
got me started but between th' pain heaves  
an' th' laughin' I guess I passed out.  
Now I'm sittin' in this hospital bed until September with  
a big hole in my gut while that grandson o' mine  
is in my house, sittin'  
in my rockin' chair an'  
drinkin'  
my  
beer.

*John L.T. McLoughlin*

## Darvon, Kansas

When my uncle died we read his will in the hall because his lawyer, C. Todd, was in a hurry to get to a convention of the Slightly Disturbed in Provo. The Slightly Disturbed is an organization designed to support those who have come close to severe mental illness but not enough to join an encounter group for their specific malady. That's where the S.D. steps in, filling that particular void.

"And to my nephew Roger," C. Todd read, "I leave all my stock in Nostrum, Inc." C. Todd looked up. "That's 51 percent, you know. You control the company."

I was disappointed. Uncle Ray owned a Porsche. "What about the car?"

"The car?" C. Todd asked.

"The car, the Porsche," I said.

C. Todd laughed. "You don't get it, do you? You've just inherited 51 percent of Nostrum, Inc. You're worth a fortune. Go buy a Porsche. Buy three, if you like." He slipped on some Spanish wraparound sunglasses, and opened the door. I followed him out.

"So this Nostrum company ... where is it? What do they do?"

C. Todd's beeper erupted furiously. "Todd, call Marshall. We've got a date," it said. He looked at me. "Pharmaceuticals."

"What, drugs?" I said.

He got into his car. I could see my reflection in his sunglasses. "I think. Ray never said much about it."

"Where is it located? I'd like to check it out."

He rifled through some papers on the passenger seat. "Here we go," he said, producing a business card. I read it. "Nostrum, Inc. Makers of Fine Pharmaceuticals. Ray Trainer. Darvon, Kansas."

"Darvon, Kansas?" I said.

C. Todd gunned the Mercedes. "Right, that's right. Kansas."

"Think I should go there?"

"Sure," he said, dropping it into first. "Check it out."

I couldn't find a flight directly to Darvon, so I flew into Topeka and rented a car. The scenery was nice, but it was far out in the country and I got badly lost on my way there. I stopped at a BP

station by the two-lane highway I was on to ask for directions.

"Darvon?" the old guy said. He was wearing a beaten baseball cap and had a huge wad of tobacco nestled in his cheek, a wad so impressive it seemed he had a tumor the size of a baseball festering beneath his molars. "Darvon, Kansas?"

"Right," I said. "Is it further down this road?"

He spat. "Why you want to go to Darvon?"

"I -- I've got relatives there. My niece, Shirley. She lives there."

"Ain't no one got relatives in Darvon." He leaned closer, his gnarled skull invading my car. "It's weird," he whispered conspiratorially.

"Weird?"

"Yeah, weird," he said. To my astonishment, he lit a cigarette. He was obviously some kind of tobacco fiend.

"Well, is it down the road?"

"Yep."

"And I'll see it?"

He spat, then blew out smoke. Inside his brain, the tobacco-processing center must have been gyrating madly. "Can't miss it," he said.

There it was, about twenty miles farther. The sign said "Darvon, Kansas. Home of the WORLD'S LARGEST TRANQUILIZER. Come see us!" I drove into town.

It was at Estelle's La Grille France that I first noticed what the nicotine-mad station attendant meant. Something was strange about Darvon. Not something glaring, like a bomb crater, but something subtle. Something jst sort of skewed. For example, everything on the menu was preceded by "Le" or "La." It said things like "Le Cheeseburger," "La Pork & Beans," "Le Corned Beef Hash." The waitress had an immense beehive and was happily chomping gum.

I was sitting at the counter, and had a cup of coffee and Le Apple Pie Slice. There was a man two stools over from me, and he began staring me fiercely down, a deep scowl etched on his face. It was making me very uncomfortable.

"You here to see it?" he said at last.

I quickly looked at him. "What?"

"It. You know." He held his hands about a foot and a half



apart, then nodded.

"I don't understand," I said. What? A fish?

"It. The trunk."

"The tank?" A World War II monument, maybe? In miniature?

"The trunk. The tranquilizer."

Aha. "No, not really."

"What, you don't like it?" Estelle said from the end of the counter. "You don't like the tranquilizer?"

"No, no," I said, "it's not that. I'm in town on business."

"Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should," the man offered, and lit a cigarette. Estelle walked down the counter to where I was sitting.

"You know," she said, "you could take some time out to see it. It's just down the street, at Nostrum headquarters."

"Really?" I said. "That's where I'm going. I'm Roger Trainer, Ray's nephew."

The man looked at me. "You kin to Ray?" he said.

"That's right. I'm the new owner."

"That's good," he said. "You like TV?"

"Pardon?"

"TV. You like to watch it?"

"Sure," I said.

"That's good," Estelle said merrily.

I drove down to Nostrum HQ. It was an otherwise nondescript brick building that was painted such a fluorescent shade of blue that it was probably visible from space. With the sun shining on it, I had to avert my eyes as I made my way up the walk. The company motto, I guess, was painted on the door. "There's never anything wrong with Nostrum," it said.

There was a secretary in the foyer, watching a small portable television and blowing on her nails. I cleared my throat several times but got no response.

"Miss?" I said at last. "Hello, miss?"

She looked up. "What?"

"I'm Roger Trainer. I'm the new owner here."

"Oh. Do you want to see it?"

I was onto this now. "Yes, please," I said.

We went back through the grand hallway decorated with huge bronze busts of the various Nostrum products: enormous, gleaming brown-gold capsules, pills, even a six-foot bronze bottle of codeine-laden cough elixir. At the end of the hall was a glass box on a pedestal, bathed in a soft yellow light. There it was, inside a box.

It was resting on a velvet cushion. It was big, all right. About a foot long, a huge capsule, blue in color, with "Nostrum" stamped cleanly on its face. The card on the pedestal said "This is Big Betty, the world's largest tranquilizer. It was manufactured here at Nostrum and is composed of equal parts of diazepam and codeine. A tranquilizer this size could bring gentle rest to the entire population of Somalia. Ray Trainer, prop. A.D. 1978."

"Kind of takes your breath away, doesn't it?" she said.

"Yeah," I said.

"Of course, Somalia was a lot smaller then. It wouldn't do that now."

"Of course," I said.

As I went through the books that Sally, the secretary, brought to me, the whole thing got weirder. I buzzed Sally to come into my new office. Over the desk hung a lifesize portrait of Ray, two of his company's products nestled reassuringly in his outstretched hand.

"Sally, are these just the books for sales in Darvon itself?"

"No sir, that's all of them." She returned her gaze to the small television in her hands. "Isn't Captain Kirk dreamy?"

"Sally, if these are all the books, then the only place Nostrum products are sold is right here in Darvon," I said.

"Really?" she said. I looked at Ray for a while. What, I thought, did you have going here?

I handed Sally one of C. Todd's cards. "Get this man of the phone for me."

She looked at the card. "But this isn't a local number."

"I'm confident the Bell System will accommodate us, Sally. Dial a '1' first, then the number."

"Yes sir," she said, defeated. She buzzed me back a few seconds later. "Sorry, sir," she said. "No long distance."

I sat up. "What?"

"No long distance. We don't have it here."

"Okay, okay, Sally. Just sit tight," I said. I picked up the phone and called the number myself. "We're sorry," the pleasant female recorded voice said, "but there is no long distance. Have a relaxing day."

I left the office and followed Sally's directions to City Hall. I thought the mayor might be able to clear up some of this confusion that Darvon was obviously plagued with. I walked right into his modest office; in a lot of small towns, mayors don't even have secretaries. The Hon. Doyle Pablum was leaning back in his easy chair, intently watching TV. I surprised him and he bolted upright when I came in.

"Can I help you?" he said. He was wearing a plastic nametag that said. "Hello, I'm DOYLE PABLUM," and beneath that, "MAYOR."

"Yes," I said. "I'm Roger Trainer, the new owner of --"

"Nostrum, Inc.," he said, extending a beefy hand.

We shook hands. "Yes," I said.

He sat down. "So you're Ray's boy?"

I took a seat across the desk. "Well, nephew actually."

"Whatever," he said, and started watching TV again. "Good movie, huh?" he said.

"I don't know. Actually, your honor, I'm here for some information. You see, I'm new to Darvon, and I'm just settling in, and, well, to be frank, I'm having a few problems. For example, I think the long distance service at my building is faulty, and --"

"You watch TV like Ray?" he said.

"Well, yes, your honor, but right now I'd --"

"Good." Silence.

"Mayor Pablum," I said, "I'd really appreciate your help."

He looked at me. "Well, sure, son, of course." He rose and switched off the set. "C'mon, I'll show you around the town."

We drove into the main square, a pleasant little collection of early 20th century storefronts and sidewalks. In the middle of the square was a requisite soldier-on-top-of-a-column monument.

"Civil War?" I said, pointing to the monument.

Pablum regarded me in puzzlement. "No, son," he said, "that's our monument to the brave boys who lost their lives defending Darvon from the Communists."

"The Communists?" I said. "When?"

"Did you skip out on history class, son? The Great War in '55. When the Reds invaded. The Darvon Elite Corps held their ground, and saved our town from devastation at the hands of the godless horde, the red menace."

"Ohhh ... right," I said. Then I got Mayor Pablum to drive me back. There was definitely something wrong here, something very wrong, and I thought Ray might have something to do with it. I drove out of town, back to the gas station where I had been before. The tobacco-addled eccentric was gone, replaced by a pimply-faced teenager. I went straight to the phone and called C. Todd at his hotel in Provo.

"What is it?" he said. "I'm late for a Suddenly Schizophrenic rap session."

"Todd, there's something wrong. I'm in Darvon, well, just outside of Darvon, and something's not right here."

He laughed. "No good clubs? Valet parking sucks? C'mon Roger, you're in Kansas, for chrissake."

"No, no, Todd," I said, "it's really weird here. These people are really strange, like pod people or something. They worship a giant downer and get all their information from TV. Besides that, they think that the Russians invaded the U.S. in 1955."

"I think you've been worshipping about 20 hits of orange sunshine, Roger," he said.

"No, Todd, I'm completely straight here. This town is strange. What's more, according to Ray's books, the only place Nostrum products are sold is right here in Darvon. Nowhere else."

"Those people must take a lot of medication."

"Dammit, C., I'm serious. Do you know anything about this place?"

"Not really, Rog. Look, gotta run. I heard voices the other day, and I want to get it straightened out at S.S. I'm sorry, really. Ray just never said much about Nostrum Inc. or Darvon, Kansas."

"Well, do you know anyone here I could contact? Someone Ray knows well?"

"He did mention a name once, some old friend of his who got stuck in Darvon and just stayed there. Name of ..."

"C'mon, C'mon, Todd, I need help here."

"Rille. Royal T. Rille, that was his name."

"Thanks, Todd," I said.

"Anytime. And lay off the hallucinogens, okay?"

"Sure, Todd," I said, "Sure."

I found Rille in a small ramshackle house on the outskirts of town, just off Maple Street. When I knocked on the door, a small, rheumy eye surrounded by forest of eyebrow and whisker appeared at a peephole.

"Whaddya want?" it said.

"Mr. Rille? I'm Roger Trainer, Ray's nephew. His attorney, C. Todd, said you might be of some help to me."

"You want some mary-joo-wana?"

"No sir, I'd just like to talk to you."

The door creaked open and I stepped inside. Rille was a small, bent man, leaning ponderously over a constantly shaking cane. He wore a patch over one eye. "Come in," he said. "Wanna drink?"

"No thanks." We walked into the den. There was no TV, to my surprise, just an elaborate statuary column topped with a gold angel and the legend "KNOWLEDGE" chiseled into its face. Rille hobbled to a nearby table and poured a glass with Yogi Bear on the side to the brim with Old Grand-Dad. He sat down gingerly across from me and half the glass in one fluid gulp.

"Mr. Rille, did you know my uncle?" I asked.

"Sure. Everyone in town knew Ray. Say, you gotta cigarette?"

"No, I'm sorry, I don't smoke."

"Ray smoked, y'know. Like a fucking chimney! Hee-hee-hee!" he cackled.

"Didn't you know him better than most around Darvon, though?" I asked, trying to get the conversation back on track.

Rille grew reflective. "That I did. I knew him a spot better than anyone else on God's Earth, I would say. Fine man. He was warped, twisted, his brain made ill by decades of wrestling with your weightiest philosophical conundrums, but a fine man. Used to fish with him."

"Sir, what do you know about Nostrum, Inc.?" I asked. His rheumy eye perked up.

"Nostrum? I know too much." He finished his immense drink of bourbon. "That's why I'm an exile. I came here strong and

young, ready to run Ray's business, but now I'm defeated and broken. All caused by Ray's twisted notions of the way things should work.

"Exile?" I said. "What do you mean?"

"Look around. See any neighbors? I'm shunned. Shunned! Because I knew! I know! I know now!"

"What?" I yelled. "Know what?"

He hobbled back over to the table and pured another monster cocktail. "I just know," he half-whispered. There was a knock at the door, and Rille looked around in terror.

"They followed you," he hissed. "You shouldn't have come." He glanced quickly around the room. "Hide in there," he said, pointing to the column, and left the room.

The column opened from the side and I crawled in, discovering in the process that the structure was already home to a teletype machine that was on. With the little light available, I made out that the machine was an AP Newswire, and it definitely had power. At any minute the little bugger could come to life and start chattering out the headlines, revealing my position. I prayed for a slow news day.

"What?" I heard Rille yell. "There's no one here! Never!" I heard some muffled voices, then they were gone. I came out of the column just as the teletype sprung to life and began spitting out the latest in news, weather, or sports. I found Rille by the door.

"You must go," he said. "Now."

"Why? Who was that?"

He pushed me out the door with all the strength his feeble little body could muster, and slammed it shut behind me. I could hear his wheezing and the newswire clacking away in the background.

"Who was that, Mr. Rille? What's wrong?"

"Go away, leedle one," he cackled. "I got no mary-joo-wana for you today, Pancho." Then he was gone.

I stopped by Nostrum on my way out of town and secured Ray's personal papers. I stuffed them into a briefcase decorated with a large yellow pill painted in oil on the side. Sally was still at her desk when I came out, even though it was growing dark.

"You see the news tonight, Sally?" I asked.

"Yes sir. It was just on."

I put the briefcase down, and picked up a sheaf of pink message slips. They were all for Sally, written by Sally. "Oh? And what was the top story tonight?"

"Oh, just more about the Brown incident."

"The Brown incident?"

"Yes sir, you must have heard about it. Ed Brown fed his hog broccoli and now it can dance. I'm sure you must have seen it in the news before you came here. It's been the top story of the week."

"Of course, Sally. Say, when do you usually go home?"

"When Mr. Trainer says it's time, sir."

"Oh, very good. Sally?"

"Yes sir?"

"Time to go home."

"Yes sir."

As I made my way back to Topeka, I stopped at La Grille France one last time. Estelle and the Man were still there.

"Well, hi Mr. Trainer," Estelle said. "How about some Le Coffee?"

"Sure, thanks," I said.

"Damndest thing," said the Man, "isn't it?"

"Sure is," I said.

"Never saw a hog dance like that before. No siree."

I drank Le Coffee and started to read some of my uncle's papers. Most were routine, invoices, memos, shipping orders, but there was a sheaf of handwritten pages that proved interesting.

"Life is so depressing," the scrawl said. "The more we can isolate ourselves from the dreariness and despair of the grim world, the happier we become."

I looked at Estelle. She smiled broadly.

"What I want to do at Nostrum," it said, "is provide the escape these people badly need. Hunger in Africa? Not a problem for us, and likewise, should never be one. The only way to ensure that is to seal ourselves off from despair."

"More Le Coffee?" Estelle said. I put the papers away.

"No, thanks, I've gotta run."

"So I guess you're in charge now, huh," the Man said.

"I suppose," I said.

"Well, I've got a suggestion. I want to see some changes in this town. There's something that's been wrong near as long as I can remember, and now that we've got ourselves some fresh blood maybe we can make some changes."

"Really?" I said, my interest was piqued. "What kind of changes?"

He opened his hand to reveal a small blue capsule. "The Nostrum 913. Could you -- do you think you could maybe make it red? We're all a mite tired of blue."

"I'll see what I can do," I said. "I'll do my best."

"More Le Coffee?" Estelle said.

*Ben Vance*



## ONE SUNSET

Shhh . . . for an incomplete tale  
tall off Grandfather's lips is suspended  
in half-light, where Grandmother  
thinks she can rest her eyes  
without being seen and the children  
are weary enough to be kind. Listen.

For talking at twilight  
in the cool, finally, of the day  
brings Mama outdoors, where the last  
energy of Father had attempted  
to mend the as of yet unbroken  
red mower. She laughs.

The murmur of evening itself  
promotes conversation, which in harsher  
light would seem otherwise awkward  
and deepens to treasure.  
And we smile in the midst  
of steamboat lore, fairy rings  
on the hill, and the story of how  
the old store burned down,  
like an orange fire-ball in the sky  
As sunset fall and katydid  
heap the night upon us, unsuspecting,  
lingering on the lawn. Still . . .

And the dew, as it comes  
it chokes us, as tears  
that forecast the dawn all too soon.  
Firefly flicker and chill in the air  
remind us we are not the night-folk of the world  
and we one by one go to bed.

*M. Dawson*

# The Messenger

## 1989

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