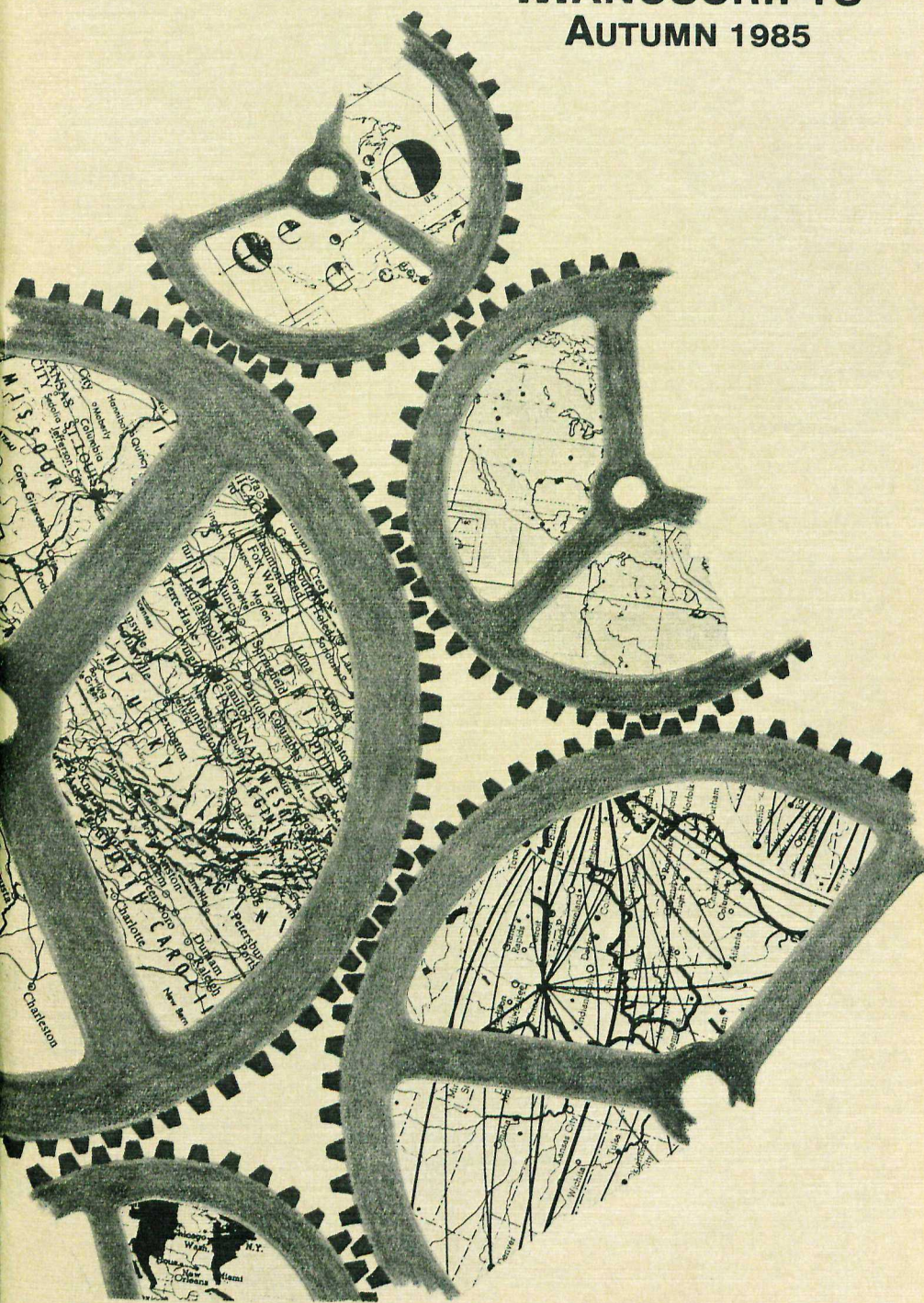
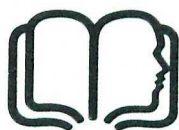


# MANUSCRIPTS

AUTUMN 1985



Words hang like wash on the line blowing  
in the winds of the mind.  
--Rameshuair Das



BUTLER UNIVERSITY

# Manuscripts

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Cover illustration by Rhet Lickliter



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# A Poet Lives in Indiana

by Jay Lesandrini

## KNOWLEDGE

My book-  
shelves are  
empty.

For,  
within my  
fresh grave  
I have

read  
everything.

## MEMORY LAPSE

I opened a book today and read twenty-six pages. I don't remember the title, or even what it was I read. I don't remember anything about it. I do remember listening to Bob Dylan ("Positively 4th Street"). I must have been high.

## EMOTIONAL NEWSPAPER

The newspaper cries every morning as it rests on my doorstep from 6:30 a.m. until I wade out of bed to get it. It cries harder as I read of an earthquake in Mexico, and a rape in Indianapolis. It laughs as **Funky Winkerbean** slides through life, never growing old; and it cheers for the Yankees (only 4½ games out) in their quest for another pennant. I comfort its anxieties by reading its life, and soon it dies: lost in the memory of the 12 o'clock news.

## INTELLIGENT ERASERS

Imagine all of the knowledge  
that is learned by  
a chalkboard.

And then is taught  
to its erasers.

## ANDY GRIFFITH VERSUS MA BELL

The telephone rings quietly as I lay stoned, watching reruns of **Andy Griffith** and eating potato chips. Barney and Otis, the drunk, have just had a run-in, and Otis went home. Andy's talking on the phone, and Opey's at school. Lord knows what Aunt Bee is up to. Floyd hasn't been on all week, and I'm anxious to see the rest of the show. They'll call back if it's important.

## THE SCOPES MONKEY TRIAL REVISITED

Still stoned (a half-hour later) watching **Barney Miller**, the phone rings again—loudly. I look at it as it rings, and debate as fiercely as Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan once did. I answer the phone. It's Marcia; she wants to come over to talk. I want to drink a few more beers—alone. An argument ensues, and I win. Now I know how Bryan felt after the trial.

## FRESCO POETRY

In words  
    too dramatic for television,  
a poet redeems himself in a lost art.  
Just like a fresco  
    his black words mesh with white paper  
to form a masterpiece that even  
    Da Vinci might smile at.

But then,  
    Da Vinci's frescoes  
    aren't worth a damn.

## LIVING ROOM BLUES

Cheap art surrounds my interior like a hated animal not ready to be turned loose in the world. My cheap art has not been tamed by years of expressionless looks, and no replacements. My cheap art knows only the cheap art across the room and has never met a Van Gogh. It's never even heard of him. It only knows Winston Taylor, the cheap artist who cares more about food than art.

## JESUS

On a wooden cross which slides open to reveal holy water and candles, Jesus dies a thousand deaths on my living room wall. I don't notice him often, and when I do, I feel sorry for him. No one should have to die on a cross, at least not on twenty billion of them all across the world. I'll still keep Him on my wall though. He seems happy there.

## MY VOLKSWAGON BOOKENDS

My books are held together  
    by Volkswagon Bookends.  
The rusted hubcaps show the age  
    of my literary lovers;  
and the compact style of my bookends  
    shows the limits of my existence.  
Deep blue on the left, and black on the right,  
    my bookends don't match;  
but they explain my novel lovers  
    as no critic can.  
A sunroof could rejuvenate my bookends  
    with a slight glimmer of sunshine,  
but even the sun refuses to enter  
    my Volkswagon Bookends.  
My Volkswagon Bookends drive thoughts  
    from my mind at obsolete speeds  
While their AM car radios croon  
    Glen Miller tunes until my twilight.  
Permanently parked on my shelves,  
    my Volkswagon Bookends never need waxing.

### AND PARKED GENTLY, THE AUTO OF MY THOUGHTS

Halfway between tomorrow and last week I dreamed of next Easter. Rising above myself, I looked down only to feel my own heart beat, and realize the creation I am. Waking today, I write with vivid realization that never again will I dream such a dream. Tomorrow is another re-statement of the weeks of sorrow that have paved the driveway of my soul; and parked gently, the auto of my thoughts.

### TOMORROW I WILL WAKE UP AND GO TO WORK; AGAIN.

Inside tomorrow there are many new days that shall forever be awaited, new dreams that will not quite be fulfilled, and old lovers whose boredom is overshadowed by great love making. I want to die in the arms of the Virgin Mary, so that someday maybe someone will make a statue of me. But, tomorrow I will wake up and go to work; again.

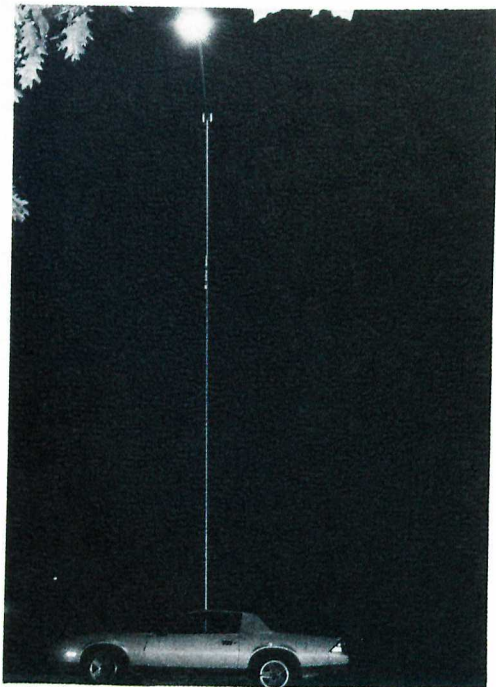


Photo by Ivy Felscher

## A Poet Lives in Indiana

A poet lives in Indiana, where he was born, where he grew up, and where he will remain. He writes not only of Indiana, but of nowhere, and of no time, and of no thing which is not found anywhere, at any time, with anyone. A poet lives in Indiana, dreams in Indiana, and thinks in Indiana; but writes in a universe of expanding ideas within his own pen, within his own mind, within himself, within Indiana.



# On Painting

*by Rhet Lickliter*

- I. Look at what they call hair  
look at what these fingers hold  
I give you cobwebs  
wet and grey  
I give you skin  
pale and smooth  
a mouth  
full curved and quenched  
I give you eyes  
shining deep and black.
  
- II. You know about the nightmare  
you had it too  
for I heard the storm  
inside your skull  
it shook you, in your sleep  
your sweat soaked hair  
like darkening seas  
your skin, white  
like light  
overcast skies.

# Moving Onward

*by Tammy Jo Graham*

If the trees don't change  
fast enough—

Start moving.

If you find yourself  
tiring of the same horizon—

Start moving.

If the rain never seems to cease—

Start moving.

If you are feeling tied down—

Start moving.

Start moving  
and never stop.

If you are tempted to rest  
because the night has fallen—

Don't.

Just keep moving . . .



**Photo by Rhet Lickliter**

# Ideas Fade Into Nowhere, Like the Color of My Blue Jeans

*by Jay Lesandrini*

A fluorescent light buzzes in the back of my mind. My thoughts leap forward to what will be. They slip backwards over twenty-one years of what has been. They avoid what is now—class. My eyes become glazed; and in my trance, lectured words pass by my ears without entering. My closed head allows no new thoughts to enter. Instead, it forces old thoughts quickly out the back door of my mind, until future thoughts have become present ones. And, old ideas fade into nowhere like the color of my blue jeans.

# Blue and White

*by Paul Pinckley*

Blue again.  
 I have blue carpeting.  
 Blue plates and blue silverware.  
 Not silver silverware, but  
 Blue.  
 Blue jeans,  
 Blue work pants and a  
 Blue collar.  
 At my job I must lift heavy stuff,  
 And today I've been told that I'll be going down  
 By the pond to  
 Dig a ditch.  
 I'm not stupid, really.  
 And neither are my blue collar colleagues.  
 Just blue. . . and unenlight-  
 End.  
 Deadend.  
 Dropout.  
 Blue.  
 Blew.  
 I blew it.  
 I blew it, you blew it, He / she / it blew it.  
 Blew conjugates well, **don't you think**, or don't  
 You? Blew.

I love to talk to my professors. The mental exercise leaps in my soul.  
 They may see my buried life; my frustration under an arm load of blue.  
 Once they recognised something that I had written.  
 A mental exercise.  
 A dean shook my hand.  
 So did some old alumni with a cigar and sweaty palms.  
 "Congratulations!"  
 Later, that day, I went back to work. Back to work.  
 I passed that dean and alumni again in precisely the same spot. And in my

Blue collar,  
 They passed me by. Invisible.  
 Zero. No hero.  
 Void. Space.  
 No place  
 Like  
 There's no place like home.  
 Oh, Auntie Em, there's no place like home.  
 Here in my place  
 In the light of my mind.



## The Shady Manor Motel

*By Ivy Flesicher*

His room was quiet at the Shady Manor Motel. As Henry Brookster looked at the small slit between window frame and window shade he could see sunlight seeping through to brighten the grey room. He'd been waiting for this sunshine. Henry turned over to look at his watch that sat upright on the night table next to the bed. 6:58 a.m. The red digits penetrated the darkness of the rest of the room. He could read it easily without his circular wire-framed glasses. He rolled back on his other side. He still wasn't ready to face the day. Putting his hand to his chin, he sat, looking toward the window, mesmerized by the paling neon light that was right above his window. Since the sun was coming up, the sporadic blink that was so characteristic of the motel sign was now just blending into the morning sunrise colors.

Henry had been to the Shady Manor Motel many times before. This was his "target sales region," as his boss had once cleverly termed. The company he worked for was based elsewhere . . . where his house was. But, THIS was his home. This was where he LIVED.

Henry liked the Shady Manor Motel. He always requested this room, too. Something about the blinking sign in the middle of the night made Henry feel that he was among action . . . that this was a motel with hustle and bustle. Of course, he knew if he said this to any of his traveling salesmen cronies they would probably just laugh . . . maybe even think he was stupid.

There were always a lot of truckers that stayed at the Shady Manor. The owner was a real pretty lady who was known to be quite friendly with more than a few of her guests. Some people said she'd been married and divorced five times, looking for a sixth husband who could make her REALLY happy this time. Whatever it was, truckers loved her, and the empty Days Inn across the street was proof enough of their favor for her more expensive establishment. What was a couple more dollars for a smile like Sadie's? The other traveling salesmen could answer that question. They weren't concerned with atmosphere.

Henry liked the truckers. They always seemed a lot more interesting to talk to than his business cohorts. Of course, Henry never actually talked to the truckers, but he could imagine what a conversation would be like. He would sit down at a stool next to one of them at Sadie's cafe, next door. And he'd hunch over his cup of coffee like all the truckers did who were lined up at the counter, just as if he were one of them. Then, he'd kind of tilt his head until he caught the attention of a neighboring trucker.

"God, I-27 is a real bitch out there. Last night I couldn't see the road for all the blowing snow, and there were cars stuck all over the place in the drifts of snow along the road. Jesus Christ, this must be one of the worst winters we've ever seen here."

And then, the trucker might say that this weather didn't bother him. Tomorrow he'd be in Florida. And they could talk about the weather or politics or . . . something important. And the trucker might even offer him a cigar and a light because they ARE a friendly breed. And they'd eat their bacon and eggs from the chipped blue plates in a comfortable silence like good friends should be able to do.

Of course, Henry never quite had enough courage to come out of his

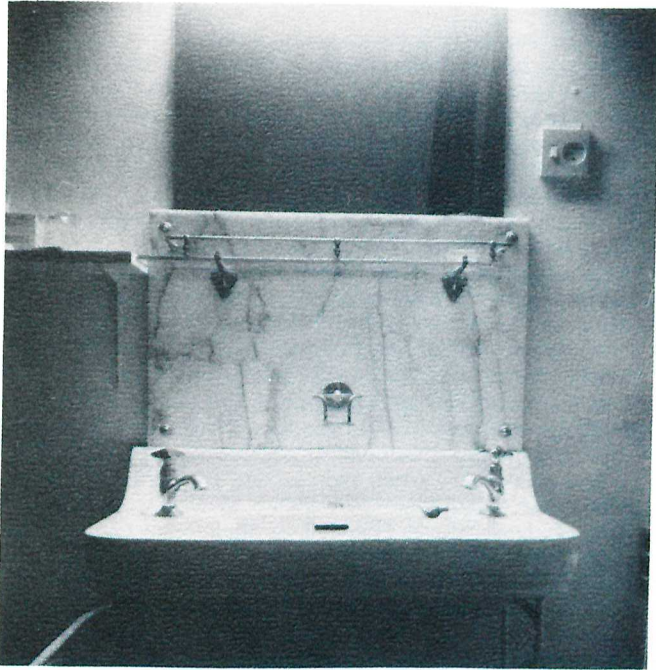


Photo by Rhet Lickliter

booth at the back of the restaurant. He always sat at the one with the green coverlet that disguised a hole the size of a fist so no one could see the aging yellow stuffing. Henry would sit in his booth most of the morning drinking his coffee slowly so Sadie wouldn't get mad and kick him out of the place. He would watch the truckers come in as early as four in the morning from his room window. Then he'd join them in the restaurant about an hour later. The truckers would be flirting with Sadie in that way that only truckers could do.

"Sadie, sugar! Why weren't ya payin' me a visit last night. I reckon you just don't care about your dear ol' Bud anymore."

"Mannnnn, you ARE crazy, boy. I've paid you plenty visits. You know I don't let my Bud go friendless. Remember, I have to keep ALL my truckin' friends happy, honey."

Sadie was a nice lady. Henry was sure of it.

At around nine o'clock or nine-thirty the salesmen might start to drift in, but they usually came in later. Not many showed up here. Henry figured they probably just skipped breakfast so they could hurry home and kiss the wife and hug the kids.

Henry wasn't married.

Today, however, was different for Henry. In fact, today Henry didn't even want to venture from his bed. He was sick of winter, and the sun was teasing him at the window. He'd heard the weather forecast last night, and he knew it was sub-zero cold. Henry could already feel the cold sneaking into the room through the crack under the door and through the thin pane of glass in the window. No, today was not a day to work. Today was a day to think. Today was his birthday.



A knock at the door interrupted Henry's thought. Henry jerked forward, but remained in bed.

Another knock. "C'mon honey. Open the door. It's cold out here, and you don't want sweet Mara Lou's buns to get cold, do ya?"

Confused, Henry put on his robe and glasses and walked to the door. He looked out the peephole at a woman who reminded him of a Woolworth's mannequin. "Mara Lou" stood there wearing no coat, a thin dress and costume jewelry that Henry thought must be weighing her down.

Another knock. "C'mon sugar—I ain't got all day. Ya just called me, so I know ya's here. Ya don't need to be shy."

Henry took a look at the women again. She had a kind expression on her face, like Sadie. Suddenly, he realized the opportunities at hand. He quickly opened the door. "I'm sorry. I didn't hear you at first. Umm . . . howdy Miss. Um . . . it's about time ya got here. Ya damn women are so slow anymore." Henry stood at the door, staring at the woman.

Mara Lou snickered and gently pushed him to her side with her left forefinger. She strutted into his room, looking back at Henry. Mara Lou wore a polyester/rayon blend dress with a big flower print that people were wearing a few years back. When she reached the center of the room, she turned around and finally spoke. "Sweetheart, give me a break. Why don't we just get down to business. It's been a long night." She moved forward and rubbed against Henry who leaned against the now-closed door. "Honey, let's just have some fun, now." She looked at him in the eye and winked.

"Um . . . don't you want to talk first Miss—I mean . . . Mara Lou?" He accented her name with concentrated precision. Henry wished to escape her aggressive hold. Grabbing the doorknob, he maneuvered himself around her, and immediately began fidgeting with his terrycloth robe to make sure no nakedness was visible. "I mean, how's work been?" Henry thought to himself that he wasn't sounding very truckerly.

"How's work been? Man, are you out of your mind? I thought this was just another trick with a lonely salesman. You're one of them shy guys aren't you?"

"No, I'm not shy. I just thought you'd want to be treated like a lady; that's all." Henry cleared his throat and deepened his voice. "Baby, you ain't seen what a man I am yet. Just you wait til we're in bed, and. . ."

"I know. I know. I ain't seen nothin' yet. I've heard it before, and I'm sure I've seen it before. Listen. Henry is it? You are Henry Brookster, aren't you?"

"Well. Yes, I am. Some of the women call me Henry "Hotlips" Brookster."

Mara Lou closed the door with a nudge of her hip and turned back around, facing Henry. "Why do I always get the shy ones? Sugar, I don't know why you're so embarrassed." She snickered. "I had one just like ya last night. He said he didn't call. He even told me that he thought I was working for his wife and was trying to frame him. I laughed. He broke down. He'd called from the pay phone at the end of the walkway. Either that or Sadie arranged it. She does that sometimes for lonely looking men."

"Listen to me. Sugar, let's cut the crap. Sadie said she thought it was your birthday and she thought you might be lonely being away from home and all. If you've changed your mind, tell me. I don't play games. So, why don't ya just act like yourself instead of Mack the trucker. So, ya wanna get to business?"

Henry looked at the floor and then lifted his head to stare at her neck. "Miss. . . I must say I'm a bit embarrassed. I don't think you understand me at



all. I'm trying to tell you that I'm not like these other salesmen you have met . . . you just don't understand me. I hang around with a different crowd; I hang around with the truckers in the cafe. They're my buddies . . ."

"Listen, Henry, is it? Do ya mind if I call ya Hank? I used to be married to a Hank. He was real nice.

"Hank, I have a problem here. Ya see, all you salesmen are alike. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Now, listen sweetie. I think you're kinda cute, and it's your birthday. So, let's just celebrate." Mara Lou put down her purse, and sat on the bed. She began to take her shoes off.

"Miss, I'm very sorry that you have been inconvenienced, but in this case, you really are wrong. Here's ten dollars, now. I really wish you would leave. You are just not my type." Henry fidgeted with his robe and pushed the oily hair that was falling in his face back in place.

She began to laugh. "Ten dollars?"

"Please just leave me alone. Here's five more. Ten. Just go." Henry appeared to be in a panic as a child feels before he is caught by his mother doing something wrong. Mara Lou toyed with the fake big pearls that hung around her neck. She flicked dirt off one pearl and then scrutinized the rest. She looked up.

"All right. All right. Just take it easy. I'll believe ya. Ya don't need to get upset. Shit. I swear you traveling salesmen are the weirdest and horniest breed of man I've ever met." Mara Lou walked to the door and let herself out.

Henry shut the door behind her, locking the knob, the dead-bolt and then attaching the chain. He returned to his bed, took off his robe, and adjusted the pillows. Arguing with the woman had exhausted Henry, so he fell to sleep quite quickly when he finally got into bed. Henry soon began to dream as he tossed and turned in his bed.

**It was Henry's birthday and he was celebrating it with his numerous trucking friends (in the trucking company he now owned). He had a wife who was there too. A pretty lady with curves like Sadie's. She could drive the men crazy! She smiled at everyone, and everyone who walked by her just said hello to her naturally. Henry and his buddies were obviously always together. If it was a convoy, a strike or just a thought about another, they were together and they were a team.**

**Yeah, they were a happy crew and they livened the bar in which they celebrated Henry's birthday. The other men would slap Henry on the back, and he knew what it meant. He was an "all right guy." His friends thought he was the greatest. And no one was toasting this trucker. It just wasn't the thing to do. No, that kind of stuff was left to the salesmen.**

**The men just played their pool and drank beer while the women sipped ale and watched their husbands. Everyone was happy, even Henry. But then Henry noticed a man sitting in a rear corner. The sleeves of a business shirt were rolled up and a suit jacket lay over a chair. The man seemed to cuddle the drink he was staring into. Henry walked over to the man and asked him to join his party, to "meet the guys," and have "a beer on the house." The man in the corner soon joined the crowd so that Henry would have mistaken him for a trucker. His wife now leaned over to kiss Henry and she seemed to purr into his ear. "Happy Birthday, Henry. Happy Birthday to the greatest man in the world. Happy Birthday." And the crowd joined in like a chant until Henry woke up to the continuous drone of his alarm clock.**

# The Feast of the Red Falling Leaves

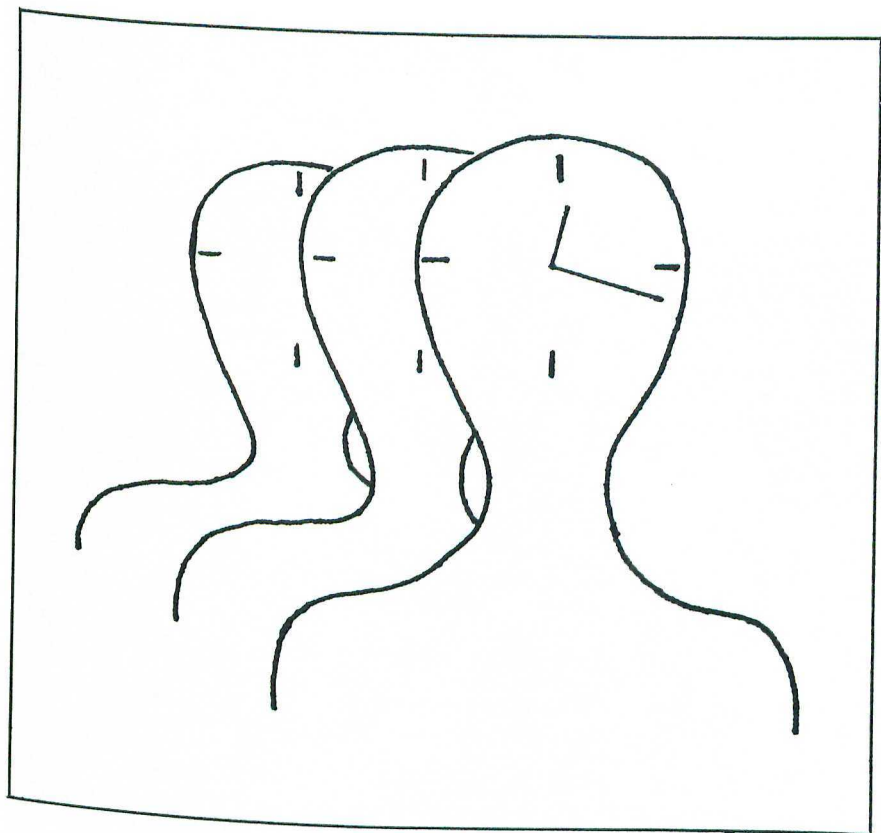
*by Ed Steele*

I sit  
on early-morning  
park benches  
sharp dawn  
winds crystallize  
the dew  
at my feet  
I listen  
for your  
warm voice  
in the cold  
of the yellow-white  
tunnels of sunlight  
and the day  
opens  
like a memory

I rise  
with the sun-fired  
white  
of the lake  
and you  
are there  
sleeping  
in the blue  
of the sky  
and I lie  
next to you  
in our beds  
Time  
has come  
to steal us  
searches our bodies  
then screaming  
climbs the upward  
spinning winds  
but the park bench  
empty now  
is but a table  
for the feast  
of red falling leaves.



**Photo by Ivy Fleischer**



Drawing by Rhet Lickliter

## My Quartz-Dialed Life

*by Jay Lesandrini*

I wear my life  
on my wrist.  
The gold "twistoflex" band  
supports my existence.  
My quartz-dialed life  
never needs winding,  
and it won't stop.  
They say this watch won't lose  
even one second per year!  
Funny though,  
mine's lost about



# In the Basement

*by Maryann Palestino*

The basement of the small house was the last floor to be cleared and swept before the auction. The basement door was kept locked, but the attorneys were kind enough to let June and Michael have the only key that would unlock the door to their Mother's special room. They carried flashlights down with them because their Mother didn't pay the last electric bill before she died. The steps sounded hollow, one by one, and when they reached the floor, they flipped the light switches on and off anyway. The furniture, mostly wicker, looked all gray and the air had the damp odor of rotting things.

Michael, with the help of his flashlight, retrieved a foot stool that he remembered was under the stairs and set it up under a high window. He propped the window open just enough to let a sliver of February daylight in with a touch of cool air. He stepped down and stood by his older sister. Before them were several rows of flower pots and baskets and other odd containers that were capable of holding dirt. Their eyes followed the rows of plants and flowers, now withered and stiff, down and back the length of the basement wall. June stepped back.

"An empty flower pot was like a grave to Mom, wasn't it?" June said without moving her eyes from what was in front of them.

"Yeah, I guess so. I really don't know. Let's get those boxes from upstairs and start cleaning out this place," he said, one hand on his hip, the other rubbing the back of his neck.

"I don't remember her having so many plants down here, do you?"

"No, I don't, June. But, it's been a while since I've been home."

"Me, too," she said. "Look, here's the one I sent her for her birthday last year. She even kept the card on it." There was just a hint of green on its dry stalks and June took the pot from the floor and brought it closer to the window.

"Dear Mother, Have a Wonderful Birthday, Love, June," she read to her brother. "I can't believe she had it so long."

"Are you ready to get those boxes now?" Michael asked. She put the pot back in its place and followed her brother up the stairs to the front porch where they had stacked the last of the boxes.

-----

It was early evening by the time the two had made any noticeable progress in the basement. They uprooted all the dead plants and put them in an old grass bag they found. Later, Michael would toss them in the field out back where he used to toss grass clippings when he was a boy. All the pots were stacked neatly in the corner, except for one. June put aside her Mother's birthday plant to take home with her later that evening. The other containers—the butter dishes, the whipped cream bowls, the tupperware, and the milk cartons were all thrown in the garbage, dirt and all. The black and white checkered floor was swept clean, with little piles of dust, dirt, dried



**Photo by Ivy Fleischer**



leaves, and paper scraps left in the center and in the corners of the room. That job would be left until tomorrow, when it was lighter again.

June entered from the furnace room, one of three small rooms off the basement, with a lighted candle in each hand. She walked to her brother who was resting on the wicker couch, and handed him one. He set it on the card table beside him.

"I found these in the furnace room," she said. "I'd forgotten how soon it gets dark around here." Michael looked at his sister, noticing how the candle-light glowed like a halo around her thin face. He remembered his Mother's face looking that way when he was young, when she was young, too.

"We don't need to come back nearly as early tomorrow," she began. "All we need to do now is sweep the floor, take those old clothes out of the closets, and put covers on this furniture."

She even sounded like his Mother. "Don't forget to sweep your room," she would tell him. "Baseball practice is no reason for not hanging up your school clothes—and don't let that dog sleep on your bed!" His thoughts clung to those words that he heard so long ago, in the corner room two flights up, that was finally swept really clean for the very first time and the very last. Michael wondered what his Mother would think of him now, cleaning all day like he had been.

"Michael. Michael? Are you all right?"

"I'm tired June. What do you think would be wrong with me after tearing this place apart all day?!"

June moved the candle away from her face.

"I'm sorry, she said. "I'm just tired . . . I'm very tired."

"I know," she said and touched the side of her brother's cheek that faced up, away from the cushion. Michael closed his eyes. He was nine years old again on the living room couch with the chicken pox. He was home from school, watching a game show, and had closed his eyes, but was not asleep. His mother had come from the kitchen, smelling like Ajax, and touched his face to see if his fever had gone down, but he kept his eyes shut. The feel of her dry fingers on his swollen skin, the smell of lemon disinfectant, the clang of bells and flashing lights on the T.V. came back fresh in his memory.

"Michael, do you remember the time when you were sick and Mom let you sleep in the living room and watch T.V. instead of staying in your room and how jealous I was because she always made me stay in bed?" June smiled and looked at him.

He smiled, without opening his eyes. "Yes," he answered.

June sat back in the cushion beside her brother and sat forward again. She reached behind her, under the cushion, and pulled out a small round object. A baseball.

"Hey, Michael, do you remember this?" she held the object in front of him. He opened his eyes. It was his old Little League baseball.

"Oh, my God, I haven't seen that for twenty years. Where'd you find that?" He sat up beside her.

"Under this cushion." She handed him the ball.

"You know how this got here? This has been here for years. I hid it under this cushion at my eleventh birthday party when Mom told us we couldn't play baseball in the basement. Wow." He squinted at the ball. This was the ball that his teammates all signed at their last game of the season. And he thought he had lost it all those years.



"Is that the birthday party that John Miley threw up on your train set?"

"No, I think one of our cousins did that at one of our Christmas parties. But I remember that it was in the basement because Mom said that "a living room was no place for a train set."

Michael held his index finger in the air like his Mother used to and snapped his fingers that way she did as a sign to stop misbehaving in front of company.

June laughed. "I remember my birthday parties in this old basement. Mom let me wrap pink and yellow crepe paper around the railings and hang balloons over by the bar. This place seems so much smaller now, don't you think?"

"I always thought your parties were boring. You played the same pin the tail on the donkey, musical chairs, and "wonder ball" games. And someone always went home crying."

"Well, we didn't appreciate you and your squirrely friends spying on us from the furnace room. Mom let you get away with the dumbest things." They laughed.

"I know," he said. "Remember Mom would never let us win any of the games at our own parties because we were supposed to save the prizes for our guests. I hated that."

"I can't believe that was all so long ago. This poor basement. Our poor Mother. We shouldn't have moved so far away after Daddy died," June whispered.

"Our Mother was more than capable of taking care of herself. She was a very self-sufficient woman. It's not like she's the only widow in the world."

"Or was the only widow in the world. No, I don't think she was. But she did tell me once, after Daddy had died, that she wished she had had more children. Can you make sense of that?"

"Why do you always ask me questions like that? Women are too hard to understand. She probably said that when she was going through the "change." Look, June, it's not my fault I had to move away. It was the only job I could find."

"She said she wished she could have had twins—a boy and a girl for each of us to play with . . ."

"June."

The candle light made Michael's face glow like fire.

"But she did say that she felt fortunate to have raised both a son and a daughter—one of each. . ."

"June! Stop It!"

His face wrinkled with rage and made him look older than his sister. He stood up, walking away from her, his arms close to his small body. He wished he was taller than his sister, instead of small like his Mother had been.

"Michael, what's the matter? Didn't you ever hear her say that before?"

He stood, silently, near the corner of the basement, in front of their old kiddie chalk board that now came up to his waist, and he looked at the shadows of the stacked flower pots on the floor below him.

"God, didn't she ever throw anything away?"

"Michael, she told me in the hospital that she —"

"Stop it, June. I don't care—I don't want to hear—"

"No, listen, Michael. She said that she wished she had given us more freedom—"because kids need freedom to become themselves"—that's what she told me. Even if it means going far away from your Mother. She

understood, Michael."

Michael stood motionless. It felt cold in the room. He walked over to where he had set up the foot stool, squeezing the baseball between his hands, and slammed shut the small window. He looked over at the plant June had set aside on the stairs across the basement. The plant looked so thin in the shadows, its only blossom, colorless and dry, hanging from the tallest stem like a broken neck. He drew a breath and turned to where his sister sat lifeless on the dusty couch, looking so much like his Mother that he wanted to cry.

"What should we do with all those pots," he said pointing to them, hoping his sister couldn't see his face.

"I'll take them," June whispered.

Michael grabbed an empty box, the only one he could see, and dragged it to the corner where the pots were stacked like little stone monuments. Even the cardboard box looked like gray stone. A weightless, gray stone. He placed the pots in, several at a time, careful that each was secure in the one before it.

When he had finished, he met his sister at the foot of the stairs, the box wide in his arms. June held a candle, its clear wax dripping in one hand, her Mother's birthday plant in the other and led her brother up the stairs. He followed her, feeling for each step. He was barely half the way up when his sister had reached the top. He heard her jiggle the keys and before his foot had reached the next step, he lost his balance, grabbed the railing to keep his body from tumbling downward, and watched the box, full of pots, thump, step by step, into the darkness of the basement, and crash. He ran down after the box, followed by his sister, and knelt beside the pieces of pottery, cracked and shattered. June stood beside him, her candle bright as a torch, and he looked up at her.

"God, oh God, do you think she will forgive me? Do you think she will? Do you? Do You?!" he cried.

## Deceptive Destination

*by Debbi Schimpf*

Spheres, big and small with a mixture of hues;  
Transparent blues splashed with clear emeralds,  
Silvery pinks intermingled with lucid yellows;  
Riding on a gentle breeze with an unknown destination.  
They float and drop and float again higher  
Surveying the earth from their own unique angles.  
But fate has a way of creeping in  
And just as one is about to take a rest from its sky ride  
It bursts on a blade of grass.



**Photo by John Little**





# If I Wash Long Enough

*by Kathleen Etchison*

Tiny, rainbowed spheres fall softly on my stomach, my forearms, my thighs. Vague, herbal scents ooze from my surrounding waters. Transparently opaque mounds of foamy bubbles — my coat of a new color. I'm melting, blending with porcelain, with living water. Water. The plasma of my bath, its lifeblood. My lifeblood. The soothing suds, nutrients of my plasma-water, come to rejuvenate my body. The healing suds. Yes, they are doing their job well. Music. Balmy music seeps from my transistor radio. I am well prepared. Sing it, Billy! Great stuff, Lionel. Aaaah, Dan, my man, Fogelberg. Shriveled. My toes are wrinkled, my fingers the inevitable prunes. I stretch to reach the stopper with my toe. I am rising, my mistake, the water is falling, draining. I am the great, white prune-whale beached forever on a whiter shore. I am beached and cannot breathe. I have died. Wafting heavenward, homeward bound. Excuse me, which way is Heaven? I climb laboriously from the tub.

The look of corn. The smell of corn. The almost taste of corn. Endless fields of endless rows of endless corn. Everywhere green and gold. Dark, dusty black-green. Heavy, pollen-laden gold. Swarms of grass-green aphids with tiny, black feet. Golden, hazy sunlight filtered through broad, black-green blades of corn. Filmy, yellow dust settled on leaves, on stalks, on aphids... on halter tops, on visors, on cut-off shorts. I heard voices. Faint voices. But I was alone. Voices floated on the golden, dusty air. Through the corn. Above the corn. Wafting heavenward. Female voices, male voices. (Hey Bossman, is it quittin' time?) A forest. The field was a black-green and golden forest, and I couldn't see out. I walked the forever rows, applying endless treatments to endless tassels of endless corn.

A tiny whirlpool lives in the sink. It moves about the basin, yet always returns to its favorite spot above the drain. Toothpaste foam is drifting aimlessly on the outskirts. It's pulled inward by the whirlpool. It is spinning, faster, faster. The whirlpool sucks the helpless paste down the drain. My teeth shine. I look into the vanity mirror. My prune-skin glows. My dark hair hangs in limp, immaculate strands, the part still visible from my braids. Subtle, herbal scents cling to me. I am wrapped in a thick, absorbent, terrycloth cocoon. I am clean — bright as a penny, slick as a whistle.

Sun poisoning. Corn poisoning. I was a puffy blob of itching lumps. My red, blotchy skin was covered with pollen dust. Rivers of sweat made paths in my pollen. Aphids were tickling the backs of my knees. And my braids were too tight. I had a headache. Loose, damp strands of hair kept sticking to my face. A sweatbee had stung my neck. Salty sweat had stung my eyes. The air was heavy, suffocatingly hot. There were huge, white thunderheads, with dark, grey undersides. But no breeze. Barefooted, I walked on the dry, rough clods of dirt. My feet were tough and calloused. But my hands were raw and red. They had lost their morning bandages. It was getting late. There was no air.



The phone is ringing. It's ringing and I refuse to be the one to answer it. Maybe it's Jane. Or Jay wanting to go out this weekend. Or it could be... could be... six rings, and it won't stop. It might be Cheryl calling about Susan's baby shower next week. Omigod, babies. Who would want a baby? I should answer the phone - I'm the only one home. If I don't answer, they'll just think no one's here. But it might be Mom. If I don't answer, she'll be worried. Eleven rings... Jesus, who rings anyone's house eleven times? Maybe it's... Thank God. The damned thing finally stopped. I don't want to talk to anybody.

Blue, blue sky. White, puffy clouds. Emerald green fields of corn with crisp, yellow tassels. Corn waving in the cool, morning breeze. I had felt like waving back. Wearing a garbage bag. I had cut holes out for my arms and head. It kept off the dew. Jay was wearing his yellow slicker. Voices all around. Greg, Cheryl, Jane, Mark Lett, Mark Trag. The Group. Friday, and we were making plans. (Should we go to the Shack, or Micky D's? Maybe cruise town? Hang out with the heads at the park? We can always drink beer in Carter's parking lot.) White, puffy clouds sailed like ships through the sky. Pulling tassels, row after row. Not tired. Didn't even notice the work anymore. Just an excuse to talk all day. And make some money. Don't pull the male tassels! Pollination was all-important. Every fifth row was male, the rest female. Never could tell a male from a female corn plant. No one could. Gorgeous day. (Going out with Jay tonight. I'll roll my hair, no more braids. We'll go to Kokomo to the show. Pizza afterward. Cruise Tipton after that. We'll see the Group on Saturday. Tonight just the two of us.) An iridescent dragonfly glinted in the sun. It moved at right angles, flitting from stalk to stalk. And the cool breeze had felt good on my tanning neck, the warm, summer sun on my back. I had taken off my garbage bag. The dew had dried. Jay winked at me through the corn. And the white, puffy clouds sailed the blue, blue sky. But that had been last summer.

Have to eat. Not hungry. Haven't eaten for two days. They'll eat at six when they get home from work. But what will I tell them? That work let off early so I thought I'd fix them dinner. Do they know I wasn't at work? 5:15. Food. What will I make? Really can't eat. I'll say I already ate. Warm up yesterday's barbecue. But a casserole is thawing on the counter. What is it? Smells familiar. It's that one Mom makes with croutons and mushroom soup and... corn... I'm not hungry. I'm sick. Corn everywhere. Corn casserole, corn chowder, corn on the cob... comes from cornfields... Oh, Jesus, I feel sick. I can't fix dinner. I won't. I'll never eat corn again.

I was in a black-green and golden forest, and I would never escape. The dew was thick, the aphids crawling, and I would be the first person to ever sweat to death. The endless rows of corn stretched as far as I could see. I was alone. (What time is it?) My Timex was dead, murdered by pollen dust. Trickling, tickling sweat. Sweat beaded on my forehead and trickled between my eyes. Sweat trickled between my breasts. Sweat ran down the small of my back. The golden, hazy sunlight was fading, but still hot.

White fuzz. Voices in a tin can. Canned laughter. The screen sharpens. Channel 8. Family feud, a rerun. It's over. They're waving goodbye from their faked family portrait. Commercial time. Dogfood... chuckwagon. Another



commercial. Calgon. . . take me away. Take me away. Maybe I should take a bath. Bubble bath. White, foamy suds. Clean, smooth porcelain. Shiny, chrome taps. Soothing music. I am unclean. (Don't look dirty, shouldn't feel dirty.) I am unclean.

A gaping, black-green hole had swallowed me alive. I would never get to go home. I was trapped, snared. My rows were endless, no landmarks in sight. The corn there was eight, sometimes ten feet high. I couldn't hear the voices anymore. (They must be finished. Maybe they're checking the rows.) My feet burned from walking on clods of dirt. All I wanted was to take a bath and to rid myself of those awful braids. They hurt. There was a thin, zigging track on the ground. A hole under a clod. A snakehole. Cornfields were great for snakes. Garter snakes. Blue racers. (If I step on a snake, I'll scream.) Black blades of corn reached heavenward. And there was no air. And I was suffocating. And I felt I would never escape.

A car is pulling into the drive. Mom and Dad? No, it's 5:30. They're never early. Won't go to the door. Whoever it is will go away. When it ~~is~~ Mom, what will I say? What will I tell Dad? I'll say I got off work early and decided to take a bubble bath. But what will I tell them? Do I look different? Maybe I will go insane — then I won't have to think about it. The doorbell is ringing. But it will stop. And the person will leave when they realize that no one's here. And is anyone here? No, not really. But how will I tell Mom and Dad? They were gone last night. Haven't seen them since yesterday morning. Haven't seen anyone today. The car is backing out. I hear crunching gravel. It's accelerating. It's gone. Oh, God, what will I tell them?

There is something on my leg. Looks like dirt. Gritty dirt. Dirty dirt. Have to wash it off. Quick. Is there any more dirt? Need to take a bath. Wash my hair. Brush my teeth. Cool, blue, cotton washcloth. Lather, lots of suds. I'll scrub that dirt from my leg. Scrub my face, scrub my arms. Is it gone? It's on my shoulder now. It's tormenting me. Won't let me wash it off. It's a reminder, a mark. I don't see it when I look into the mirror. But it's there, it's all over me. Why won't it go away? Leave me alone? I want to be clean. More than anything, to be clean. I'll take another bath.

Photos on the coffee table. The Senior Prom. The weekend at the lake. Graduation. (We were now living in the real world.) Jay and I washing my car. Has he tried to call? Mom, Dad and I on a canoe trip. How will I tell them? Jay's senior pictures. Did he look for me? Grandma's picture with the Garden Club. Great Aunt Marie. They're both dead now. Do they know? Greg, Jane, Jay and I at the Tipton park. Jannming up the curly slide. Did they all not notice that I was gone? They are working today. In the cornfield. They are checking those same rows that I pulled. Walking on the same rough ground. In that same dark aisle. That black-green and golden tunnel. Greg and Jane. Cheryl. Mark Trag. And Mark Lett. And Jay. They are all at work, and they are wondering where I am. Will they work until seven? Eight? It's another stifling day with great grey thunderheads. It will get dark again. How will I face them? I can never go back. Never to a cornfield. Never again.

Evening was setting in. We were working eleven and twelve hour days. From eight to seven. Or eight to eight. Much too long. The corn got blacker

as the evening progressed. I couldn't see anyone. I was alone. Tassels stretched endlessly in front of me. I was pulling two rows. It took so long. I was behind. (Did they forget me? Was it quitting time?) I had to finish my rows. Endless treatments to endless tassels. A noise. Cornstalks were cracking behind me. It was dark. Someone was walking carelessly through the corn. I didn't see anyone. The cracking stopped. A voice said Hello. I did not know the voice. I turned. I did not know the man.

This white, tiled room is my world. I never want to leave. I want to be forever cleansed by the soothing water. I brush my teeth. I look once more into the vanity mirror. But I am not vain, there is an ugly girl staring back at me. I close the cool, blue Venetian blinds. They shut out the golden, hazy sunlight. I do not want to see the black-green grass of the lawn. I glance at the tub. I want that purifying liquid against my skin. I run a comb through my still-damp hair. It is loose and free. I hate braids. Braids remind me of snakes, twisted snakes with minds of their own. And they hurt when they are bound so tight. And because they hurt, I hate them. No, I hate them because they look like snakes, and snakes live in cornfields, and cornfields are where. . . . I cross the room. I run my bathwater.

## Poems by Sarah Hill from This Stone House

i This stone house, this house of stone  
has been carried up, piece by piece  
from the field, rock by dead rock  
has been set into place on the hill.  
And vines and trees, yes, trees are needed  
to hold the air of this place in this place  
to keep the stone cool, even cold, in the summer,  
and the summers are long out here.  
This is the house we have raised with out hands,  
in our arms we have lifted the walls as they rose,  
we walk, we sleep with a solid roof,  
these walls let no sliver of light slip in.

Should we leave, it would be  
only a short walk, a quick run, we  
do not know our neighbor's faces, we  
keep them off by miles in field and fence.  
Were we to go, we would carry still  
in our coats the darkness of small rooms.

We are the people of the stone house  
and where we have leaned for long years  
into old walls, our skins may be cold,  
we may wear them heavy and gray, but we hang  
no mirrors in our halls and bedrooms,  
we know who we are.



ii To walk in dark is to see  
the color of the night open up.  
Just after sunset, the fruit trees  
are sculpted, unfamiliar,  
against the far hills,  
the blackbird a smudge in the branches,  
the red of its wings grown purple.  
From across the fields a child's voice  
calls; it is the jays crying,  
one to another, I have robbed this nest,  
search for another.

What I found here was the flower  
of a tree I had seen in the day.  
Nameless, I could call it nothing,  
it had held out its ripe buds  
like tiny fists, pale green.  
Now, in the dark, they open,  
whiter in the night than day,  
lifting up to the sinking sky  
five small slivers of dark gold.

iii Such apples we have never seen,  
growing as they are this year.  
The flowers fell early in the heat  
of an unusual spring, the dry air  
kept the insects down, Now the apples come,  
swelling the tree, the small bright fruit  
grows heavy before us. Our eyes,  
accustomed to the cracking growth  
of corn, the dusty pods of beans,  
the ever facing downwards,  
swivel up to catch the look of apples  
glowing green against the blue sky,  
and we can feel the juice already wetting  
our summer throats, the juice of apples  
not yet ripened, but coming on,  
growing thick. And we will ready  
baskets to store in our cellar, we will  
bed down the apples in straw for the cold,  
to have, in the dark of winter, the scent  
of the heat, to keep, in the night, our June  
sun burning, to taste.

iv We thought to gather mushrooms  
as an afternoon's sport, a game  
after the morning work. Having no guide,  
we went out with the knowledge  
of a book telling us which to pick  
and which to leave growing wild.  
One after another we found under the trees,  
our basket flowed over with the caps,  
white like flowers that had never known  
light. Then we began to look again,  
and the varied shapes and the dark colors  
of the underside ridges seemed all alike,  
seemed to tell us that some had chosen  
were the dangerous type. We tumbled them out  
onto the overgrown path, held each one  
in our hands and did not know the difference.  
And looking farther under the trees we saw  
more and more still growing, the mushrooms  
bubbled up strange in the green light,  
the taste of them unfamiliar to us, and we returned,  
the basket empty, the afternoon gone, afraid  
that in our eagerness to take all of the best  
we would bring back poison to our own table.

v In the year of the cicada  
we went down in the dark.  
The morning rose a black cloud  
in the east, the wind itself trembled  
above the trees. We, anxious to gather  
what harvest we could, found only  
the bare branches of the walnuts dark  
with bodies; the insects whined thick  
in the air, sang a hungry song, crawled,  
fat, in our hair. Our trees hung empty  
in the sky, wheat fell down headless,  
the windows of the houses blackened.

In the fall of the year  
the crisp skins still clung  
to the trees, to the grasses,  
the blind eye-holes watched  
the frost grow over the blasted fields,  
creep out onto the limbs of the orchard,  
and we, the keepers of the land, were to sweep  
the empty shells from sight, were to find  
some slender streak of green still growing  
in an ashy landscape.

vi

We heard the rain rolling in from the west  
and we rose up out of our dust  
at just the sound of it; the low voice  
of the wind came in with the scent of some thing  
sweet, and we stood, waiting,  
our feet fastened in the dust.  
The first drops were heavy, shattering  
the gray of our garden  
with thick pools of red,  
streaking our faces and arms, taking down the dust;  
our skin was bright where the water ran.  
We waited for the heaviest rain,  
the center of the storm, and when the darkest  
clouds were above us, the wind heaved  
the waters at us, the ground rolled  
in waves with the shower,  
and we freed our feet from the garden,  
running not to the shelter of the dry house,  
but, heedless of lightning, out  
to the open field, where we could watch  
the grass lift itself up after the rain,  
ready to go green.



# Letting the Darkness Out

*by Rhet Lickliter*

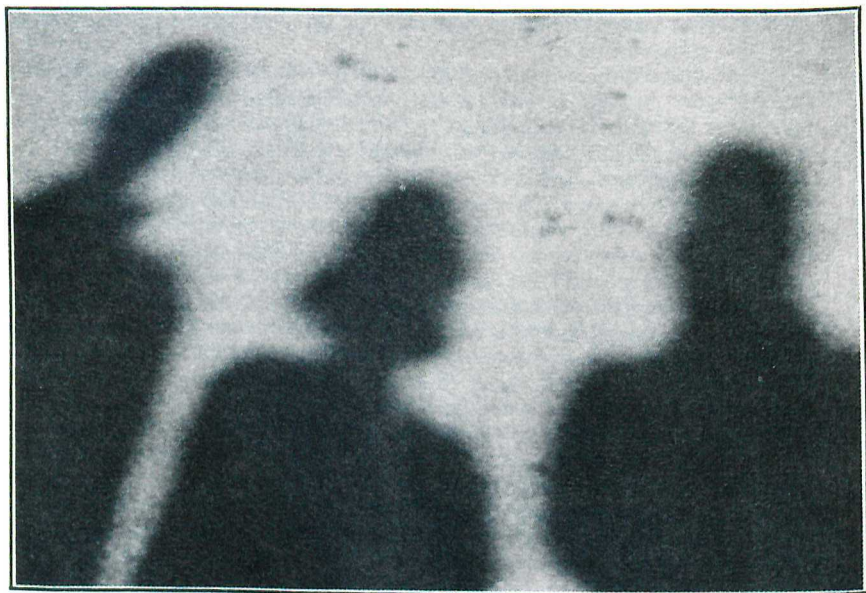
This is what I do.

I watch him. I watch everyone. Through their windows and doors, at night, I watch them, when the lights are on inside their houses. They can't see out, they can't see that I'm there looking in, getting to know them and their habits, learning about their relationships, from outside their dwellings, their shelters, their homes, I stand in yards behind trees or a car spending hours at a window, watching them.

There is the old man who lives alone with his dog. He lives in a small, brick ranch-model. At night he sits. He sits and watches T.V. from a brown, vinyl lazy boy in his den. The room has a large three paneled window which I look through from behind a row of shrubbery. He is a very old man. He has lost most of his hair and all of his teeth. He keeps his denture plates on a small endtable next to his lazy boy while he watches T.V. He is losing his hearing. He wears hearing aids in both ears and has a little, round speaker mounted to the headrest with a wire running down the side of the chair, across the floor and up into the back of the T.V. Every night he watches the television from that chair. He watches the access channels, either the one running a scroll of news headlines and weather or the one running a scroll of the local high school activities. His dog lies in the corner on an old hook rug sleeping. He's a fat little dog, white with black spots. Occasionally, the dog will get up and walk around the room. The old man points his finger and talks to him. After an hour or so the old man and the dog are asleep. The dog on the rug. The old man in the chair, while more high school activities roll across the television screen. I have arrived at the window to find the man and the dog already sleeping, reclined back in his brown chair. I've watched the different news items and weather information from the screen throw coloured light on his aged face. His nearly bald head tilts back and his mouth hangs open. I've watched that scene for hours and I can sometimes hear the faint music coming out of the little round speaker on his headrest not fully deadened by the glass pane.

There is a middle aged couple living in a two story on the corner. I know them because I watch them. It's like a study in perspective, a live, moving study through a grid. She is a small woman with poor, almost arthritic posture. She does needlepoint and drinks. He is average height, firm build. He drinks. She carefully studies the patterns she has made within a little oval frame. He gets up and makes another drink. She speaks without looking away from her work. He says very little. Yet, at times, they seem to carry a conversation. As he sits on a worn sofa and sips his clear liquid, she sits in an overstuffed armchair looking into her lap. I hear nothing but the sounds around me, outside in the darkness, the wind, a neighbor's door, a passing car. And it's odd. I watch their mouths move and become familiar with their gestures, their mannerisms. She rearranges her needlepoint over and over, her threads, her cloth, her frame, as she moves her head from side to side, back and forth as if posing many possibilities. He shrugs his shoulders more than he speaks. He drinks more than he shrugs his shoulders. Around nine thirty, she puts down her craft, turns off the floor lamp next to her chair and

leaves the room. In ten to fifteen minutes, he gets up, turns out the overhead light and follows her path. For an instant, I see myself as a reflection in the glass. And then, slowly, I disappear. The forms of furniture, dark and empty sit alone for the night.



On a small dead end street a block away, is a grassy hill, not a very big hill, but big enough for a house where a young woman lives. Before I reach her street, I step off the asphalt, cross a ditch and move through a small area of brush ending on the slope where her house rests. The window I watch from looks into a hall. A hall with three doors opening on to it. Her son's room is near the window. He is young and I can see his bed from where I stand. I see him in pajamas walking in and out of his room. He is small. His hair is white and thin, eyes large and dark. He carries things in and out of his room, down the hall, out one of the doors, shuffling his cotton covered feet across the wooden floor. The young woman is slender, nearly thin, with the same eyes and hair as the boy. She appears from the same opening as the boy. She

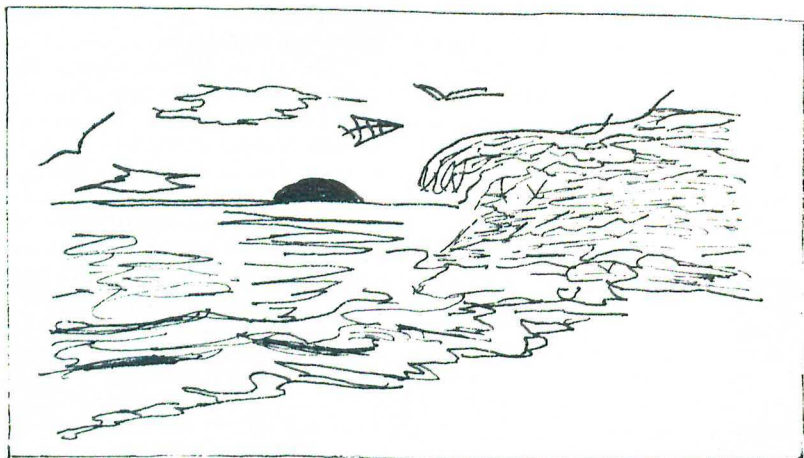


reads to him in his room while he lies in bed with only his head exposed from beneath the cover. Only one light is on. It hangs above the headboard. The young woman sits on the edge of the mattress, one leg up, resting, the other reaches to the floor. She reads from the book showing him the words and pictures, yet he never looks. He stares with blank amazement into her face, until his eyes close themselves and he is asleep. She leaves the light on above his head. She leaves the room, walks down to the end of the hall. The light filters out into the long narrow space and I can see her pick up the telephone and sit down on the almost glowing floor. I watch her talk. I watch her change positions, bringing her knees up to her chest, lying down on her back and looking up at the ceiling. She hangs up the phone in a shadow, walks back down the hall and into the boy's room and turns out the light.

I do watch them. I watch them all, but it's him, he is the one, the one I didn't know about, the one I couldn't distinguish. He wasn't man or woman. He was a form, a shape. And I'm still uncertain. But he is the one that makes me forget, the others. The people I watch and know so well. I passed his house many times, at night, never noticing, always believing no one was home, maybe turned in early, abandoned the house. I never noticed movement within the dark quarters. But since that night, a bright and clear night, when the moon lit the earth and shadows were my disguise, I noticed something new, something inside, something darker still than the unlit room beyond the window moved and led me to a subtle discovery. He uses no lights, at all, at night, inside. He moves about in darkness. It takes time to make out shapes, to see the forms. It takes several minutes for my eyes to adjust and my mind to forget. But soon, he appears within the dark, sparsely furnished house. And I watch him, without knowing. Is he a blindman without the need of light to move about, living his life in Braille. Is he a ghost, lingering here inside these walls unsatisfied with a life once lived. Is he afraid, afraid of what others find security in. Is he a madman, and this his self-dressed straightjacket. Every night is the same. He plays music. He selects a record and plays it on his phonograph. He sits, in a wooden folding chair, and listens, turning over the record when it is finished or replacing it with another. Sometimes when the music plays he moves about the unlit house, slowly, carefully but with full perception of where he is and what is around him, being considerate of his surroundings, respecting the mood, surrendering to it. He disappears into lightless corners. Each night, he runs a bath. He replaces the record, undresses, and steps over the edge into the water. He sits nearly motionless, submerged in liquid and in darkness, what is now an acutely dim visibility. The bathroom breathes steam and the metals softly shine, a dull shine, the faucets, soap dishes, the legs of the sink. Do I hear music. I don't know what I'm hearing. Something waiting, something patiently waiting. He dries. Once again he moves about the house, his frail and darkened house. It is him, he is the one. He plays another record, sits in his chair and looks out of a window. He stares, black into black. And he is the one, so hard to see. I look in through the glass seeing shadow on shadow, admitting its beauty to myself. The delicate veils curve and bend, masking form and thought. It is my mask. I hear the music. It is my music. And now I've stopped wondering. I've stopped making judgments. He is the movie my memory sees. All my pictures are of him. The illuminated doors and windows that border the lives of the others are there only to remind me . . .

The lights are there, but he never turns them on.





**Drawing by Karl McEntaffer**

## Nightsail

*by J. B. Brickley*

Moonlight drifts in ripples  
Black waves slosh and sway  
The whispers are soft  
They are warm  
Lulling

Voices hover, distant  
Fight passing motors  
Fade into murmurs  
We sail on  
Alone

Night's a soothing blanket  
Makes my hands relax  
The wind grows quiet  
Cares and time  
Are gone  
Becalmed

# Lip Balm Heaven

*by Jay Lesandrini*

I bought a new container of lip balm today and came to a startling realization. I've never used up an entire container of lip balm before. I always lose them long before they run out. There must be a place somewhere, where all of the lost lip balm containers go. A sort of lip balm heaven. Anyway, I bought two because I know that I will lose one on the coldest and windiest day of the year. And then five minutes after I've bought a new one, I'll find it. Of course too late to save my chapped lips. Anyway, with one in reserve I don't care if I lose one (I'll never finish it anyway).

## A Ride with Richard Brautigan

*by Jay Lesandrini*

Sitting in the passenger seat  
of a Model A with Richard  
Brautigan,  
I traveled at light speed  
across the desert of reality.  
I saw all that he said  
as it passed before us in  
slow motion.  
While dreaming in technicolor  
and listening to the car radio,  
we both sailed across  
the plains of Nevada  
en-route to San Francisco.  
There, I found myself alone  
in the passenger seat of a Model A.  
His dreams are gone now,  
and I can only remember  
how he dreamed, and hope  
that mine will take me at least as far  
as San Luis Obispo.

**Anonymous**



# The Foo Bird

*by Susan E. Cowan*

Once upon a time, there was a bird called the foo bird. The foo bird was just like any other bird, except for one thing; this bird's shit was deadly. If a foo bird shit on a person, that person would have to wear it for the rest of his or her life. If that person wiped the shit off, that person would die. Needless to say, the foo bird was avoided.

One beautiful morning, Jim Shito was walking to work when disaster struck. While strolling under an oak tree, a foo bird shit on him. "Oh damn," he said. "A foo bird shit on me. If I wipe this off, I will die. Now I have to walk around with foo shit on my shoulder for the rest of my life."

This day was the downfall of Jim Shito. When he got to work, his fellow employees were not pleased. Everyone avoided him because the smell was unbearable. He lost many important clients. When he was just about to leave work, his boss, Mr. Smithers, called him into his office. He said, "Jim, we have a very serious problem. It has come to my attention that you have had an unfortunate incident with a foo bird. I'm sorry, but if you do not remove the, uh, substance from your shoulder, I will have to fire you."

Jim replied, "But Mr. Smithers, I will die if I wipe this off my shoulder!" "I'm sorry Jim, but I am losing important clients. If you don't wipe that mess off your shoulder, don't bother coming into work tomorrow."

Jim left his office very depressed. When he got home, things just got worse. His wife was very upset to see the foo shit on Jim's shoulder. She did her best to ignore the smell, but by the end of the evening, she couldn't stand it any longer. Just as he was going to go to bed, his wife came into the bedroom and gave him a very serious ultimatum. She said, "I'm sorry honey, but I cannot stand that foo shit any longer. You are going to have to wipe that off or I am going to leave you."

"But sweetheart, I'll die if I wipe this off!"

"I'm sorry, but you have to choose between the foo shit and me."

Jim left the house to think about his situation. As he walked, he tried to decide whether to wipe the foo shit off or not. He didn't want to lose his wife and job, but he certainly didn't want to die. After many hours of contemplation, he decided to leave the shit on his shoulder and face the consequences.

Unfortunately, Jim found out that his boss and his wife were not kidding. When he got to work the next morning, Mr. Smithers told him to turn around and walk right back out the door. Knowing that he had lost his job, he went home. When his wife saw the shit still on his shoulder, she picked up her suitcases and left him. Jim sat in his living room and thought, "What have I got to live for? I have lost my job and my wife. I might as well kill myself."

Therefore, with nothing else to live for, Jim wiped the foo shit off his shoulder and died.

The Moral of the Story: If the foo shits, wear it.

# The Knightwalker

*by E. J. Paul*

It had been a horrible year. A few major traumas, but mostly little things that piled up like old newspapers and cluttered her mind. The unexpected death of the grandmother, but she had died peacefully in her bed, in her home that her chafed hands had worked in for so long. Then there were the tears of the father, sad blue eyes blurred and reddened. The money worries: how to send her sister to college? Her mother fretted over that one for many months. The bank hadn't wanted to renew the student loan. In the end it turned out to be the sister's fault, but no one could blame her really; they just did what they could to find a way to send her. Then there was her own internship at the university. Up at 5 o'clock, to bed at 11 o'clock or so, trying to get the work done, to balance the pressure of the job with the pressure of graduating. They told her she was too sensitive. Although she had many of the "qualities necessary for the job, she really should try another field."

Then their dog died.

Hit by a car by the dangerous hill where her family lived. Even though she stayed at school, she was still a homebody, going home to escape the tensions at school. So she found him. The red blood dried to a black streak on the black road. The small eye bulging out too far, too far for that sweet head. Too many burials of friends and dreams, too much pain.

She felt that her mind, her confidence was under seige by phantoms large and small that hammered, or just scratched lightly at her, never stopping, always there, waiting. Waiting like the shades to drink her psychic blood.

At times she imagined the doubts, these small setbacks like flies bothering her on Saturday mornings when she tried to sleep in. But at times the buzz changed to a whir, the whir to the snarl of a chainsaw, the imagined physical pain only an echo of the emotional one from the worst thing of that time, the "betrayal" as she named it to herself. She remembered sitting on the floor, crumpled like a used Kleenex, sodden with tears, discarded, while he, the once beloved, stood, paced, his eyes going to the door, the window, his heart shuttered to her voice, her tears (of course she always looked horrible when she cried, never like one of those maidens of fairy tale fame that were beautiful no matter what they did). He did not answer the question "why?" except with that final statement.

"There is something better out there, and I'm going to find it."

She remembered the back of his bootheels as he went out the door, the winking of the key chain, one (of course) that she had given him in one of her funnier moments; it winked red at her, like a stoplight in the rearview mirror. Then there was that last drift of the betrayer; she laughed at herself for not giving someone she had shared her life with for so long a name, the last lingering scent of him on the pillow where they had lain together for the last time.

And the world almost ended. But it didn't. She got her sense of humor back at times. The world that she had planned with this Judas (again the laughter) sank into the sea of dreams to keep the rest of the shades company. And with the pieces of her broken dreams lay the pieces of her broken heart.

So there it was, the death, the betrayal, and the dead dog.



\* \* \*

So now, a few months later, she worked two jobs, took a few classes, and tried to keep herself busy. She watched movies and read when she had spare time, which wasn't often. She happened to watch *Amadeus*. The narrator felt he was a mediocrity. This kept whispering in her mind; she identified with it strongly. After all, what was unusual about her? "Mud brown hair and eyes," mediocre figure, mediocre intelligence, the only way she had done so well in school was because she had tried so hard; her grades came from determination and discipline, not brains. She didn't have a grand purpose in life, no great career goals, except to have something to belong to. She felt like Miniver Cheevy, who longed for something he could never have. The only thing she had ever done that was good was riding and showing her horse, Hank. She *had* done that well. At least there was something! In her bleaker moments when the phantoms threatened, she felt that she would have made someone a good dog. After all, in her relationship with the betrayer hadn't she shown all the qualities, the dumb trust, the loyalty, the commitment? She pictured a fireside, a kind hand placed on a magnificent Irish setter's head, its coat flickering with the dead emberglow of the fire. No, she thought, I would be a poor mutt that somebody would dump off in some deserted woods. And she laughed at herself for being so silly, but the phantoms said, don't laugh, you mediocre creature, that *would be* your destiny.

Her family certainly didn't desert her. They answered the wailing call and the warning bells she sounded. Her friends answered the sad bells, too, came running like villagers to her aid. *They* came. All except the one that she had cared about the most, the betrayer.

Her favorite class was Arthurian Legends. If a girl was mediocre, unmarried, what else was she to do? Take classes. She had read everything about Arthur that she could get her purse strings to cover, from the *Once and Future King* to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* and anything else she could find. Jennifer thought of him as Arthur, the shining one. One who never, at least in her mind, betrayed anyone or anything. Jenna wanted something to believe in, and he and his kingdom filled the gap that the ebbing pain had left in her. She pictured him in many guises through the help of writers that shared her love for the Dragon. She knew him. So in his own way, Arthur the Pendragon helped her through the times of shadow, just as he had fought the darkness.

Jennifer read *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, noticing how the hero would always go back to the world he left after spending time in the Lands of Fairie. She wondered why he didn't stay, but then the conventions of fairy tales made it impossible for the hero to stay in the other world. She was too dumb to figure it out anyway. She read fantasy stories, how the beautiful girl became the heroine of the story, but Jenna knew that these were special people; they had won their prowess by years of training, of sacrifice, by extraordinary tutors and mages. She was just a mediocrity after all; she wasn't smart enough, pretty enough or talented enough to be anything but an unfortunate bystander that gets killed by the fierce dragon's breath before the princess kills it to save her people. She laughed at herself. The phantoms scattered at this new and lighter laughter, and the Dragon laughed with her.

\* \* \*



And then it was Halloween, her favorite time of the year besides Christmastide. The evening was an unusually warm one as she stepped out her front door to the waiting street. The wind blew through the chimes at the back door of someone's house as she walked past. The stars' light hazed through the night sky; its descent softened by the wind itself. The lights in pumpkins flickered, struggled to stay lit. Their tiny tongues reflecting in the shimmering water in the small pond surrounded by white stones by the houses. Their orange faces growing, drifting to become monstrous, funny and sad. Smoke from the small flames that had given up the battle against the wind spiraled slowly, like a lazy lover's hand, into the night air, reaching to the sky that showed the blue-white tail of a comet racing to meet its mate in some far place.

Fighting against the wind herself, yet loving it as it tugged the edge of her cape onward, she knew the wind. Now rough, now gentle as it blew leaves, their crisp redness crackling along the pavement and its shadowy blackness. Saw the wind swirl a green bag into a monster, a dragon with silent tongue, felt it carry her voice away. Jennifer was in love with this night. Normally she feared the dark, but tonight was different. She had no fear for spirits abroad,



Photo by John Little

nor for the shades wandering in her own soul, for they stirred rarely now, or at least she tried to ignore their vague whisperings and scuttlings.

But tonight, the night itself whispered to her the essence of All Hallow's Eve, the burnt smell from the pumpkins, hot and black-edged. The wind made her beautiful on this night, slipped its soft, cool fingers through her hair, once the color of a mud-washed puddle, now ebon in the night. She took off her glasses to feel the fingers against her eyes, not hurting or gouging, but helping her in some way to become like the night itself, to feel the wind. The royal blue lights from a nearby airfield grew from points of blue to shimmering, gleaming orbs of light without the encumbrance of her glasses. The lights from passing cars grew to small moons, yet somehow intruded on the darkness. But the blue lights fit, like fallen blue stars resting on the field of green, funny, still green grass.

Again she heard the chimes, though distantly. The winds were shifting, blowing mist and the haze that ringed the moon down closer to the earth.

She heard an echo of something like the hooves of horses on the pavement. Jennifer hadn't heard that sound in years, not since the times she had ridden the big bay to town at home. So very far away from home, yet tonight she didn't care. The echo faded, caught away by the breath of some spirit wanting to fly as far and as high as it could tonight, the freedom from the underworld letting it stretch into the oceans of the night, of the stars. She stretched herself to let the phantoms she carried with her, would always carry, feel the freedom. She imagined the leaves that circled her feet were parts, crumbling slowly, of the mediocrity inside her, leaving her. The night, the wind, the lights from the sky, the earth, the pumpkins helping her, just for this one night to cast off her real self, the one that looked at her in the harsh light in the mirror. She kicked the leaves, goodbye, goodbye ugly creature, take your old skin and go away. And she ran with the wind pulling her toward a small hill by the lake.

And stopped, as she caught the echo of ghost hooves on the road, Eee gad! she laughed, it's the headless horseman coming to take my head! And tore down the road by the lake, determined to face this new demon, armed with the essence of Halloween that the night had given her, and ran again and topped the hill.

And stopped. Looked at the moon's light on the water, in places it slumbered, in others misted and swirled. Out the dark jade trees by her side there came a stirring. The air shifted and became slightly cooler like a fickle lover. Across the road a pumpkin leered.

Oh no. Here was one night that she almost escaped the earth, that she almost escaped *herself* and some creature will disturb it, probably some mugger or rapist. The phantoms gained a foothold, but they wouldn't want to rape you, you're too plain. But this night has changed me, she whispered back to them, tonight I'm not ugly, not plain, not *me*. And they laughed cruelly. She ran again, her legs pushing and pounding to reach the edge of the water, running from the stirrings in the trees and in herself. Down closer to the place where the moon cried her silver tears onto the water, to safety, to keep that new self intact, she ran.

Jennifer stopped finally, and stared at what seemed to be a large, dark horse drinking at the waterside. It was hard to see as if some thin shield separated the two. But then she saw him, the young man turning slowly toward her, the silver tears turning to gold on his head.



The wind had quieted now, no longer the boisterous catcher of spirits. Now it was the smell of hot cider, the feel of your own bed, your best friend's arm around you when you cry. It cleared the mist around him.

Jennifer looked at him, noticed the slightly faded jeans, or were they jeans? Some material she didn't quite recognize; mediocre girls don't have any talent for sewing anyway. The shades chuckled grimly, then their voices quieted as if they had caught the scent of the wind. The man's right hand rested on the pommel of the horse's saddle. His left seemed to be groping for a resting place beside his hip. His face was almost hidden by the shadows starting to creep to nestle further into the night. Yet somehow she could catch the glint in his eyes, the merest wisp of color out the shadow-face, blue jewels they were, like fallen stars on the airfield. She wasn't afraid. The young man's hand caught her attention again. A good hand, slightly roughened, the knuckles big with work, a little brown with sun. Light and shadow. A light seemed to come from his ring, a great red ruby.

He smiled as he saw her looking at his hand, and stepped forth from the shadow, extending his hand just enough to let her see the ring more closely. Strange, to be able to see without her glasses, which somehow she had forgotten to put on. Ordinarily she would have been afraid even in full daylight without them. She stepped closer and saw. Saw the smooth face of the ruby, of the man, saw the dragon etched in gold underneath the stone, strong and regal. He smiled into her eyes, the ones that she felt were work-shoe brown, and made her feel like they were beautiful. The phantoms died in the light of that smile.

Slowly, the air again felt different, but the night held on for a while longer. Such nights came rarely when they came at all. But it was still dark, a warm darkness, and for this she was glad.

Jennifer had been staring at this stranger who wasn't a stranger for so long that she just noticed another horse, standing beside what appeared to be his own mount. The horses waited quietly, apparently not feeling the strange pull that she had felt all night, the windblown urgency that had kept her moving until she had run here, where she felt it was the right place to be, for once.

He looked to the east and nodded his head. And again he looked at her. Such kindness in his face, such strength in the clear lines of it. His figure gathered the mist to it like a warm cloak, the mantle of it hung about his shoulders and slightly shifted as he mounted his horse. The gold head glinted in the moon's last light. Then slowly, almost shyly, his hand reached out to her the ring showing warm red fire, his smile and invitation, the hand of her best friend, the eyes of an old soul. And she smiled in return.

\* \* \*

The winds changed close to dawn that day, just before the sun came over the hills and smiled on the lake. The ground breathed up mist to catch the leaves to earth one final time that night. The beach by the lake was empty save for a pile of dead, black leaves. Across the road the last of the pumpkins' eyes went to sleep. And the night left.



# The Road to Hell Is Paved with Good Intentions

*by Paul Pinckley*

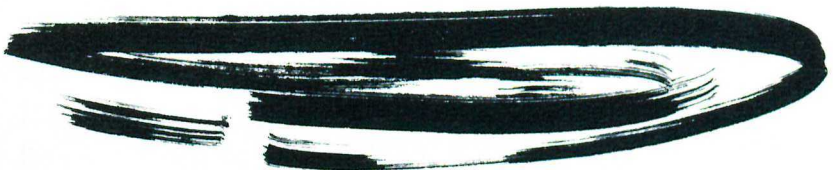
La Nora Kuntz lived in the Garwood Apartments on south Denny Street with her husband "old" Roy. She was a sixty-three-year-old dialysis patient whom I transported in an ambulance (non-emergency) every other morning at 6:00. My partner Barb and I picked her up at her home and took her to Methodist Hospital's 5R ward to be dialysed.

La Nora's kidneys had long since abandoned her. Her skin was as gray as silly putty from the salts and poisons that had failed to wash away. The dialysis machine would clean her tired old blood and pump it back to her tired old body. The treatment took several hours; around 1:00 we would return to take La Nora home. Sometimes we would arrive early, and she would still be on the machine, her blood on spin dry.

After her blood was folded up and tucked away into the linen closet of her veins, we would lift her onto the ambulance cot, wrap her up, and take her home to old Roy. We always had to carry La Nora because she was non-ambulatory. She had fallen outside Methodist Hospital one day and broken her knee. She attempted to sue the hospital for damages, but the attorneys just continued the case; they could stall it forever. They knew that she was a dialysis patient and would probably die in a couple of years.

After she had surgery to repair the broken knee, La Nora was provided with a brace and a physical therapist. The brace was too complicated and uncomfortable for her to bother with, and the physical therapist insisted upon laborious exercises to which La Nora would apply no effort. She dismissed both altogether in a short period of time. She simply lay in bed and watched television. With no support or exercise, her knee fused together as straight as a 2 x 4, one which soon withered to a 1 x 1. La Nora couldn't have cared less. Old Roy was there to care for her, and her outings of every other day were all the excitement she craved.

The ambulance cot didn't fit down the hallway to her bedroom, so Barb and I had to pick La Nora up and carry her into the living room to the cot. She was always eating and smoking in bed. Lifting her up out of the bed, we were usually rewarded for our efforts by putting our hands into spilt food, ashes, — or her excrement. Old Roy was not very good at patient care. He had lost his right arm in some mining accident, and he was an alcoholic. They fought most of the time. She would throw things at him, and he would return fire; he was a



poor shot however—nature didn't intend for him to be a southpaw.

La Nora would be particularly nasty to us if we were late in picking her up. This meant that she would be late in returning home in the afternoon and would miss her favorite soap operas. She had a nasty-little-old lady personality at all times, but missing her soaps made La Nora unbearable. She would pick at Barb, telling her that her hair was disgusting and that she was ugly and up to no good. She would tell me that I was shifty looking and that I acted as if I were on drugs.

Barb and I took abuse from La Nora with smiles, good nature, and oh-you-don't-really-think-so's. But it was not La Nora's miserable attitude that made her so obnoxious; La Nora had been obnoxious in her youth, or so old Roy told us. The renal unit at Methodist Hospital could not stand her, nor her doctors, nor old Roy, nor my partner Barb, nor I. Nobody could stand to be around La Nora Kuntz.

Many of us who had to deal with her caustic, condescending temperament had petty little mechanisms of retaliation, myself included. On Capitol Avenue at 18th Street, in front of Methodist Hospital, there was a particularly bad pothole. When La Nora was being unusually abusive and the act seemed justified, I would drive purposely and maliciously into the pothole. Little old La Nora would give a shriek as I bounced her little old arthritic ass into the air and she was caught by the safety belt across the waist and slammed back down. She would then throw at me epithets found only in the vocabulary of longshoremen. I would apologize with saccharine hypocrisy and then note that we were at the hospital and it was time to go inside.

Being dialysed reduces the blood pressure to almost shock level and holds it there for several hours. One day, while she was on the machine, La Nora's blood pressure dropped even lower. She went into a grand mal seizure and lost consciousness. Soon afterwards her heart failed, and she was in full arrest. The technicians started CPR and administered drugs. They used the cardioverter and after thirty minutes of intense and aggressive treatment, when she was out of danger, we were called to take her home.

When we arrived, no one told us of her episode. (La Nora alone told us of her adventure, when we inquired about her unusually poor appearance.) Normally, when a patient suffers a full cardiac arrest, he or she is admitted to an intensive care ward for a period of recovery, yet La Nora was being sent back to her miserable apartment. I telephoned my manager to ask what to do. He in turn called La Nora's doctor to confirm the order and to make sure that he was aware of her condition.

"Take her home," the doctor said.

We took her home to old Roy and put her to bed.

That night, at 2:35 a.m., La Nora Kuntz died of heart failure.

\* \* \*

A couple of days later, Barb and I, not having to make the early morning run anymore, had a chance to get some breakfast. I had waffles, eggs, and coffee; Barb who was dieting just had half a grapefruit. I had a chance to read the sports section; Barb did the crossword.

Later that day we had to go to Methodist Hospital to pick up some supplies. While we were stopped at the light at Capitol and 18th Streets, Barb and I silently watched as a road crew filled the pothole.



# Pride

*by Monika Armstrong*

She has cloudy blue eyes that I'm sure were once clear. The whites of those cloudy eyes have turned yellow. They remind me of letters that you store away and the next time you look at them, they're yellow with age. The letters though, like her eyes, can always be read.

She has to put drops in her eyes to keep the pressure from going up. At least she caught the glaucoma in time. She has drops for the pressure in her eyes and pills for the pressure in her veins.

Her skin is old. "I can't stay out long in the sun," she says. But she struggles to mow her acre of property in weather that would make a lizard pant. "I get those ugly brown spots that you can't do nothin' about. They sell that junk, but it don't work. I've tried it before."

She gets the brown spots on her hands, too. Her hands are blue and boney, and the veins in them bulge. I think how thin her skin must be.

But no, her skin is thick. She holds on tightly to so many of the things that are usually let go of because time loosens our grasp. She is an anachronism in habit but a pioneer. She is a widow. She lost her husband in the second big war. He was a tank driver who ran over a mine. All that she has left of him are a smashed ring, a few letters, some photos and one son. When she showed me the photos and the printed box of letters with a frayed blue ribbon around it, I felt like I was being initiated into a secret society. I treated the moment with great reverence and handled the pictures as if they were the shroud. "This is Jeffrey's grandpa," she said. "He was killed in the war. He died for me **and** you, you know."

She told me to look at the letters. I couldn't, I told her, because they were too personal. "I don't care, honey. Go ahead and look." I felt wicked, but like Dr. Faustus I wanted to know all there was to know - at least about him. I pulled slowly on the frayed blue ribbon, taking great care not to weaken what remained of it. I felt as if I were defusing a bomb. I grasped the lid and eased it off. In the box were about twenty letters. They were brittle, like old bones, and yellow, but I could still read them.

Was it so wrong to want to know this man who died for me? I justified reading the letters by telling myself that knowing him better would make his death more important. I thought then that this man couldn't have died for me. He was a stranger.

I greedily read the letters - every one of them. He seemed typical, an all-American GI. He wanted to know everything about home, how his son was doing especially. He talked about the war with no fear. He was very matter-of-fact. I guessed that that's how they all were. I had visions of Eisenhower.

I didn't have to read past the first letter. It seemed to me that they all were the same. I found myself getting angry as I read. It was one of those encompassing angers that affects everything you do. I was mad, so mad at this haughty man who thought he could leave a young wife and child behind while he pursued delusions of grandeur.

The anger kept building as I read through the letters. By the time I got to the last one, I was shaking. This hero was by now to me a boy scout after another merit badge.



The last letter was the only one still in an envelope. It had no address or stamp. I could tell that it was once sealed, but time opened the letter for me. I found in that envelope the one and only thing to heighten my anger. It was a telegram from the army. I saw the first seven words, "Mrs. Jenkins, we regret to inform you . . ." A maelstrom of emotions converged in my stomach and rose to my throat. I wondered if he would have been proud of himself if he had seen her get the letter. Oh, God, who did this man think he was? I knew at that moment that I didn't want any part of his death. He didn't die for me. He died for himself. I didn't want any part of this secret society.

That was before.

She tells me about those earlier days — the War Days. She worked in a factory downtown. "I helped make the packs that our boys wore on their backs. I'd get up at five in the morning and work 'til six at night. We'd have an hour for dinner, and that was all." I ask her how she did it. "Oh, you know me. I like to work. I didn't mind it — no, not at all. After I got off work, I'd come home and make supper for the family." She lived in the same house that she owns today. It was her parents' house. She was the youngest of seven children. "Yes, I'd come home and cook for Daddy and my brothers and sisters and my son. You know — Jeffy's dad. Mother was dead by this time, you see."

She was three months pregnant when her husband left for the war. Her son was three years old the first and last time that his father saw him.

"Pete got to come home on furlough when Charlie was three. I'll never forget it," she says with a far-away, reminiscent smile. "We were in the car — me, Pete and Charlie — and Pete reached over to hold my hand. Well, Charlie didn't like that one bit because he didn't know who Pete was, you see. He thought that Pete was going to hurt me or something. Charlie just kicked and screamed. No, he didn't like that one bit." She laughs. "Oh, shoot." She shakes her head. I know that she feels no sorrow, and I am relieved.

She talks about raising a son alone and warns me not to spoil her grandson. "Charlie helped around the house when he was young. He'd clean, oh, sure. He'd even cook. He don't do that anymore because Jeffy's mom spoiled him." I assure her that I won't ruin the next generation.

"Yea, Charlie was a good boy. So helpful. He was always good with people. I remember, though, when he was kind of young — about seven or so — that was about the only time I remember him havin' any trouble with other people." I watch her cloudy eyes become stormy. "It seems that because nobody ever saw Charlie's dad around and because Charlie never said anything about his dad, kids in school were starting to wonder about me. You know, what kind of woman I was and things. They were thinking that Charlie never even had a dad. Well, Charlie finally told me about this. I'll tell you what, when I heard that, I was so damn mad, pardon my language, that I went right down to that school. I went to that teacher and got some facts straight. Well, the next day, Charlie came home from school real proud. He told me that the teacher gave a talk about how some kids don't have dads because they died in the war. He told me that the teacher told those kids that these dads died for them, too. They died for everybody's freedom. The teacher never mentioned Charlie's name, but those kids knew whose dad she was talking about. He never had any trouble after that."

She is such a proud woman, especially of her family. They are an extension of her husband. I am told by her daughter-in-law about the time that her son went into the Reserves. He didn't tell his mother right away. When he finally did tell her, she responded coldly — coldly but proudly. All was well until he came home with pictures of himself in uniform. He laid the pictures in front of her. She opened the first one and immediately slammed it shut. She didn't look at the others. It wasn't until years later that she gave her reasons. She says, "I saw that picture of Charlie all dressed up in uniform. He looked just like Pete in those pictures."

That was the first time that I ever heard of her showing any remorse. I was surprised, and in a strange but not sadistic way, I felt gladdened. I had always wondered until that point if she had felt a loss, or if pride was all she needed. I was relieved that she felt a little of what I did. There were times that I found myself almost angered and very frustrated over her acceptance of his death. How could she not hate someone or something for taking her husband away? Always, always pride was her salvation. At that point, I realized a depth in their relationship that I had never realized before.

I think about the letters. It wasn't all that long ago that she had me read them. I know now, though, that I didn't need them. All I had to do was be patient. She has made the stranger in him less obscure. Through knowing her, I know a part of him. This man went to war to protect a family and a country that he truly loved, and by loving a woman like her, he shows me how proud he must have been. I know this man who died for me better than I know my own grandfather.

I wonder about my grandfather. I wonder if she would have liked my grandfather. I wonder if I would have liked my grandfather. I like him now because I am proud. There is no one to tell me about why he died. There are no letters, no pictures. I know, though, that he was not proud. The only thing I know about him is that he used to come home at night crying. He hated the war that he was fighting, but he had no choice. My grandmother holds none of that irrepressible pride for him that I think he deserves. I take her place. My grandmother told my grandfather that he was crazy. She said that there was no way that her country could do such things.

I still love my grandfather. He was brave, but not brave enough. They tell me that he could have been killed for what he was telling my grandmother. Perhaps if I knew him better, I wouldn't love him as much. Perhaps if I knew him better, I would love him even more. I will never know him, though, because there is a stigma about him that is forbidden.

But still, I am proud. I am proud that he cried. I am proud that he risked his life, not so much with weapons, but with words. This is all I have. I have no pride in his military deeds, nor do I have pride in her husband's military deeds. She does, and that is part of our difference.

She can proclaim his greatness, for it is a national pride. I must measure my words and suppress the desire to say my grandfather was great, too, because one facet of his life, a facet of which he was not proud, renders him evil to so many. This, I cannot explain. This one small part of his life that he hated makes him hated.

Would she still feel the same about me if she knew about my grandfather? After all, he died for me in the war, too. I know that she wouldn't feel the same because my grandfather didn't die a heroic death, or even a death caused by weaponry. My grandfather died even after the war, at least the second big



weaponry. My grandfather died even after the war, at least the second big war. My grandfather died after he was released from a concentration camp, in a war that only he knew about, a war with himself. I am more proud of his death than I am of her husband's because for my grandfather, I do not have to feel any guilt.

But yet, he is a stranger to me. He is another stranger who died for me in the war.

How many strangers have died for me? Too many, I think, and I would prefer that they remain anonymous. I do not want the guilt of someone's death on my head.

I could be like my grandfather. I could emulate that thing about him of which I am most proud. I could risk something in my words. I could tell her about my grandfather. I could say, "A blue-eyed Nazi died for me," but I don't. We both know her husband too well.

I'd rather assume part of the guilty pride of her husband's death and stay in her secret society.

## A Blade

*by Laura Philon*

I am the vegetable fur  
of the earth;  
I am abused.  
My life is cut short.  
I am crowded.  
I am stifled.  
I am walked upon.  
And spat upon.  
There is no love for me.  
There is no shelter.  
There'd be no warmth either  
If it weren't for the sun  
and the cigarette burns.  
People don't notice me.  
I have no friends  
Save the beasts  
And the worms.



Half burnt rusting carcass  
frozen mattress burst into flames  
smolder in snow  
turn black  
charred garagedoor ashes  
melted remnants  
locked up remains  
displayed  
beneath frozen fire hose water  
these things  
washed out the door into the dirt  
the hard ground  
a cold reminder  
night after Christmas  
watch the house drop  
below scorched and ornamented sky.  
Remember mornings  
try and stay awake  
in my old car with coffee  
the driveway has disappeared  
now ashes and ice  
we sat up  
staring through t.v. windshield headlights  
a smoldering show of memories  
we watched.  
They said looters would come  
and steal the plumbing  
the black copper pipes  
ran through rafters of my basement childhood  
let them come.  
I only heard about the unknown neighbors  
I was at work  
while they  
they grew up from the yard like shrubbery  
looking up  
mouths open  
seeing breath and smoke  
the axes  
the men in big boots on the roof  
given the right by badges  
to vandalize  
"save the house!  
the garage machinery bicycle television breezeway artwork"  
all are gone  
they are gone  
transformed by flames  
deformed and melted  
contorted mangled bent limp and broken  
swallowed  
into the cold wet earth  
a steaming archeological find  
let them come.

# The Gift

*by Rhet Lickliter*

# Solitary Man

by Debbie Edwards

I sink my teeth into the frozen mound of rocky road. That's the only real way to eat ice cream.

Ya gotta bite it.

Soft ice cream ain't good for nothing.

God, I hate Wednesday nights. I sit down on one of the wooden benches by the fountain. It's made of slats held together by iron screws. It ain't really wood, though. You can tell by the way the wet stuff beads up on it. Probably some new kind of plastic or something.

Why do they always have water in shopping malls? I mean, all that shiny plastic, concrete, and steel, and then they got this river or waterfall shooting down at you.

Sometimes, I put my hand in the little pool—just to feel the temperature. Or maybe I'll let my hand graze the bottom and pick up a new penny from the blue tile base. The water swallows my hand, wrist,—and watch. God, I *always* do that! I pull my hand out and shake it off. The face of my Timex has gone cloudy, with little bubbles of water on the inside.

I have to switch positions on the bench. The back part never curves the same as your own back; makes you have to sit real low or else straight up. Ain't no in between.

I lie down.

Two pairs of black, polished oxfords cross my line of vision. Squids, you know, sailors from the naval base. All decked out in black, with those real short haircuts, too. Just a couple of square-heads with nothing better to do than hang around Jefferson Court all night.

Man, I'd never let anyone shave my head like that.

I get up and pull a Lucky Strike from the wrinkled pack in the breast pocket of my jean jacket. I let the tube of tobacco hang from my lower lip as I use both hands to search my faded Levi's for a match. I don't use lighters. I strike a light, cup my hands over the dangling end of the cigarette, and gently introduce the two.

There's a right way to do it.

I suck in and shake the fire out before dropping the charred strip to the gray and white flecked floor.

Man, nothing's *ever* going on on a Wednesday night. At least not here. Lots of cars are on the road outside, but they don't turn into the mall entrance. Not on a Wednesday night.

It'd be better if it was a Friday, or even a Thursday, night. I could go on up to Slicer's Pub and sit with the guys. Slicer's is a good place—with good guys, too.

A place ain't nothing if you don't got friends there. Everything's just real easy-going.

But the pub's a good place, by itself, I mean. It's real narrow and dark inside, like a tunnel with only one end open. The open end is right on the mall, and as you go in, it gets darker. On the right wall, there's a white, lighted sign, the kind with the little red and black plastic letters stuck to it. It tells the kinds of

hot dogs, chips, and beer you can buy. In the back, there are booths, old movie posters, and lots of shadows. No plants, though. Most places to eat got plants, but Slicer's don't. That's good, though. I don't like plants.

"I ain't *on* no picnic." That's what I always say, and Dirk and the guys always laugh.

Dirk would never put plants in his place; you can tell.

Everyone there is pretty cool. We always sit right in the front, facing the mall escalator and Page's Jewelers. We sit at these little, square tables that are attached to the floor by black posts. I could lift one up, I bet. Especially if some of the guys helped me. Anyway, we sit at these white topped tables in these olden-time chairs. The kind with the round, wood seats and high, iron rod backs. The iron is twisted in a wavy design, and if you lean back against it, you can feel the way it curves.

We just sit there. We have a smoke and watch the people go by and hang out. Then, someone will get a pitcher. I drink some, too. Dirk just pretends like he don't see me or nothing. He's real cool about stuff like that.

But there'd be nothing happening at Slicer's now, not on a Wednesday night. It ain't close enough to the weekend, and most of the guys gotta get up early to go to work in the morning. When I start working at the mill, everything will be great. Me and the guys can party on the same nights.

I crouch down to re-tie the ankle strap of my boots. Real lead-bottom Army ones with cord laces. Worth two hundred bucks, too. My brother got them from a friend of his who works in military surplus.

As I stand back up, an inch-long ash falls from the tip of my cigarette. Even though I jump back, part of it still hits the plastic decal on my T-shirt. It burns a small, round well just above the eye of the eagle. It feels rough, crusty. You can't really see it, though. Not against the black background.

This guard comes over and asks me what I'm doing.

I tell him I'm just standing in the mall having a smoke.

He tells me that the mall is gonna close in 20 minutes and that I should take my "smoke" someplace else. Then, get this, he asks me how *old* I am.

I take one last drag on my Lucky Strike before grinding the butt into the cement floor.

I don't answer; I just turn and walk away.

I don't believe that guy. I mean, wanting to bust me for curfew on a Wednesday night. And like I should go home so my parents can hassle me, too.

People always do that. They pick at you for nothing, for just being what you are. It's like that at school. I can't wait to get outta that prison. Everyone there is always on you, trying to get you to change and be like them. And do things their way, according to their rules.

But I got my own way. I got my own rules, and they're just as good as any of theirs.

You see, I figure that people always hassle you because, deep down, they ain't sure that they're really in the right. So, they think that if they get enough people to go along with them, play their game, that that *makes* them right.

When I graduate, I'm moving outta the house. Gonna get a job and my own place, too. No more hassles—just like that one old song says. The one about the solitary man.





**Photo by John Little**

I take the last three steps in a single stride. Just one smooth, downward motion. Most people take the escalators, but I don't. Too crowded. Besides, on the stairs you can set your own pace, or even do a complete turn around and go back where you already been.

And nobody's gonna say nothing about it, either.

I turn the corner by the pink shoe store. Man, who would ever buy shoes from a place with pink walls? I look through the window at one of the "dry-clean-only" salesmen. He stars at me—for just a minute. Then, he turns away and starts playing with the keys in the front pocket of his trousers. Don't worry, Bud. I ain't coming into your store. You couldn't *pay* me to go in there.

I light another cigarette and start walking towards the exit. I jam down the coin return lever on every one of the public phones as I go by the locker area. I hear a coin fall.

"Could you please help me, Son?"

I turn around. It's this old grandma-lady. She's real fat, and ugly, too. All hunched over with gray hair and washed-out eyes. And she's got wrinkles everywhere. Even on her hands.

"I seem to have gotten the corner of my walker stuck in a crack. . . . And I've dropped a package over there."

I look back at the line of pay phones. Probably was only a dime anyway.

Sure, I say. I walk over, but I take my time. Her walker's on a slant, so she has to throw all her weight to one side to even it out. She looks all bent up. She tries to be calm, but you can tell she's afraid.

I tower over her. Her hair is short and in really tight curls. She has to tilt her head way back just to see my face. Her pale blue eyes look right into mine. She smiles at me—an ugly smile.

She points to the front-left leg of her walker, and I squat down. She says she can balance herself while I make the adjustment.

I put out my cigarette. It's only half smoked, but I need two hands for the job. I pull out my pocket knife and try to ease the walker's post out of the crack. My knife cuts deep marks into the white, rubber knob on the end of the leg. Little shavings cling to my fingers.

I look up and ask her if she's really steady, and she takes hold of my upper arm. She's not very strong; so I gotta put my arm around her waist, too.

Then, I pull hard—three or four times before the post will come loose.

With my free hand, I set the walker on flat ground and check to see if it's sturdy.

It is.

I use both hands to guide her body into position. Then, I steady the walker once again.

"Thank you, Son. Such a fine young man." She puts her hand over mine. It feels warm and soft.

She smiles at me again, but this time her eyes smile, too.

"Oh, yeah . . . I mean, it was no problem or nothing." I ask her if she'll be okay—to get home and everything.

She says she'll be fine, that she's waiting on her husband to bring the van around.

I nod—and smile—before I turn to go. I release my hold on the walker, but the lady doesn't let go of my hand.

"Could you . . . my package is just right over there."

I say I'm sorry; I forgot about the package. I go over and pick up the black and yellow checkered plastic bag. How do they expect old people to hold on to bags if they don't got any handles?

I hear a shout from over by the pay phones.

"Stop right there, and put that package down."

This old man comes right for me.

"You young hoods . . ."

But before he gets to me, the lady stops him. She tells her husband what a help I was, how kind I am.

I give him the bag, and he says he's sorry. Then, he thanks me.

I tell him it was nothing.

A voice comes over the intercom system and says the mall is closing in five minutes.

The man takes a wallet out of the breast pocket of his suit.

"Just a little something for helping out my wife."

I say there's no way I'm taking any money, and I push the bills away.

He thanks me again.

I walk to the exit.

I press down the metal bar and walk out through the large glass door. The parking lot is dark, and the night air is raw. I do up the copper snaps on the front of my jacket. Then, I turn up the collar.

I walk, my hands thrust deep into the front pockets of my jeans. I stop to stare at the dimly lit highway overpass. It is completely empty.

No, nothing's ever going on on a Wednesday night.

## Untitled

*by Rebecca Lee Horne*

Sweet scented ladies  
on a Southern porch.

Only air moving,  
elegant fans force.

Cool iced tea,

Wet tendrils of hair.

Words are as water,  
pouring from lips fair.

The onset of dusk

Softens the day.

Distress of the noon,  
melts away.



We, the editors and staff, dedicate this autumn issue to a 1927 graduate who has graciously supported the creative writing program with her monetary gift designed to bring established writers to campus. Although she wishes to remain anonymous, we must acknowledge the gift that has allowed for readings and discussions with these writers.