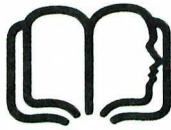




# MANUSCRIPTS



BUTLER UNIVERSITY

# Manuscripts

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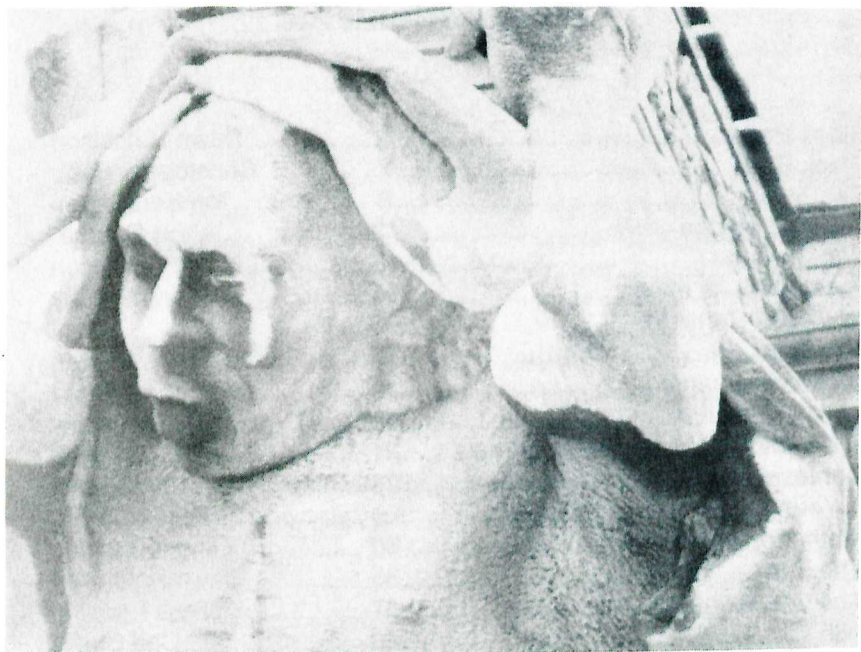
Angie Beumer

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A true critic ought to dwell rather upon excellencies than imperfections, to discover the concealed beauties of a writer, and communicate to the world such things as are worth their observation.

– Joseph Addison

*The Spectator*, No. 291



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The editors and staff wish to thank all who  
have aided in the production of this issue,  
but special thanks go to  
Shirley Daniel and Susan Neville.  
Their constant support and friendship  
is most treasured.

## A Blank Page

by Dawn Hutchison

A page should be left blank. No  
use filling it with old cliches.  
Dirty ink that turns fingers black.  
It all sounds like mush anyway.  
Better to leave the page blank.  
No struggles, no oceans, no lovers.  
Ink reduces all to nothing. Worthless  
words of silly slop. The page  
should just be left blank. A white  
page, unscarred by used ideas.  
Nothing to melt thoughts. Words  
run run run down the page  
like wax and smother.

## Black Rose

by J. Christopher Rahe

I journey through my dreams  
to the gallows of love  
dangling from a rope  
in a land without hope  
I see in the hangman's glove  
a black rose  
This ebony flower  
seems to hold some power  
I stand transfixed  
staring at this dark wonder  
I see the cause of my pain  
I hear the roaring of thunder  
and feel the teardrop rain  
Sentenced to death  
by this botanical tyrant  
black as coal  
That ravaged my heart  
and destroyed my soul  
and yet...  
As God only knows  
whatever its color  
it's still a rose  
I journey back from my dream  
Years older and much wiser  
In my hand  
is that beautiful rose  
turned crimson once again



## The Tower

by Tori Kensington

He looked up. He could see the top, but there was no way to appreciate the actual height of the tower. The lamps were burned out in the top beacon, and now he had to climb up and replace them. It was his job, even though he had never done anything of the kind before.

The antenna at Channel 13 was 1100 feet tall (1846 above mean sea level), and was for several years the tallest structure in the world. It was of a radical new design, when built in 1955, a design which was discovered in 1966 to be structurally impossible.

"The damn thing's just like bees," his boss said. "There ain't no reason for it to work. But there the bastard stands. If it ever fell it'd take those new condos right out. I wouldn't have one. I could never sleep at night knowin' that somebody's bad math could wipe me out in the middle of the night. Don't know how they did it. Of course they didn't have no computers back then to check it out with. Not knowin' no better they just up and built it. I been up it las' fall. It's a good one to get you started on."

His boss, Roscoe, was one of the older tower climbers in the area. He had helped to build many of the earlier super television arrays, but now he mainly did service on beacons and a little painting on the side. He sipped coffee from a stainless steel thermos that smoked heartily in the crisp morning air. He wore a hunting jacket and great boots that laced up to the middle of his calf. The confusion of tools and electronic instruments in his pickup truck was merely an extension of his workshop at home which had overcome his entire house. Because of his age and high blood pressure, he seldom did much climbing of antenna towers, yet he was ever equipped to do jobs that he was now unqualified to perform. He had taken a course in locksmithing he had seen advertised in the back of American Legion Magazine, and occasionally he tried to sell picnic tables and doghouses from his front lawn. All of these attempts to make a little extra money had failed. Between his pension from the Army Signal Corps and his tower work, Roscoe had little income.

From his youngest days, Roscoe had devoted his life to radio and electronics. He was an amateur radio operator in his youth, spending all his money he earned carrying newspapers on equipment, endless nights practicing radiotelegraph code, and studying difficult manuals on electronics, to communicate with other radio amateurs that had nothing to say. He worked very hard at jobs that had no effect on his life.



His doctor had recently told him that he would soon have to give up tower climbing. Yet this simple skill would earn him \$500 this afternoon, and all he had to do was change a lightbulb. He thought that he would hire a helper, and just act as a booking agent. It would be the best of both worlds.

The kid looked from Roscoe back to the base of the Tower. It was freshly painted white with spots of orange which had fallen as the painters had worked overhead. On the side of the tower base the painters had signed their masterpiece. He asked Roscoe why his name wasn't there.

"Well, I just can't get insurance to cover me on a big job like that anymore. As it is, I'm doin' this without any coverage. But that's okay — we'll be done by noon. Wrap those lamps up good in these rags before we get started. Don't want to knock against nothin' an' bust 'em on the way up."

They started to climb. The kid went up the ladder first with Roscoe underneath him. He took the ladder rails firmly in hand, and placed a foot on a rung. He glanced up. From the middle of the tower he could only see a vanishing point where the legs came together. Clouds moved by making the tower seem to lean into the wind. He had forgotten about the wind. "Will it sway much?" he called. "Like hell," Roscoe called back.

The kid climbed up eagerly. This new job had replaced a long string of small meaningless forms of employment. He had worked in burger joints, delivered pizza, mopped floors late at night, while his friends had gone to college or technical schools. They all seemed to have more important lives because of what they were doing. Now he was turning his life around, and each ladder rung was a new success as they both climbed higher and higher.

Soon the climb hurt. His hands and arms were tiring. His legs turned to lead. The ladder rungs cut his feet in two, even through the heavy shoes he wore. After twenty minutes, they arrived at the resting platform. They sat down on a plate of metal three feet wide and over 500 feet off the ground. Roscoe was leaning against one of the legs. He was blue and breathing very heavily.

"How can you do this? You look like you're gonna be sick."

"Don't worry about me, kid. I've done this all my life. Ain't you scared?"

It had never occurred to him to look around very much, but now he did. The early morning sun fell on his face as he looked east. The bright orange frame around him had been white, then orange, then white again. They had passed into the orange section again just a few minutes before they paused. He felt that he was part of something grand and important. Maybe he could be in the command tower at NASA, getting ready to send a space shuttle to the moon. The size of everything was so big that it just had to be important.

People all over the state watched this station. It was an institution. It was as much a part of his life and family as church. And now he was a part of it. His sense of worth was as tall as he was high in the tower. By this new job, he was somebody. "I'm not scared," he said.

Roscoe told him to grab the light bulbs.

They started to climb once more.

He felt the wind now. They were reaching the 650 foot level when he first noticed the sway. The tower was moving almost a foot from side to side. He had heard about freezing, where the tower climber lost his nerve and clung to the framework and wouldn't move until someone literally peeled him away from the structure and guided him down. He wondered if it would happen to him. The wind was going right through him. He could not understand why the wind seemed so cold. It was different from the wind on the ground. He looked down on Roscoe. He was there, panting, clutching to the rungs, looking as if he were in great pain with each reach and step. He turned and looked back up. The top of the tower was discernable. He continued to reach for the next rung, and lift himself up to the next, and after that the next. He looked at his watch. They had been climbing for over an hour.

"I'm doing it," he thought. "I am leaving it all down there, and by this hard work, I am making it! I am finally getting somewhere."

Old Roscoe panted down below.

Suddenly he was aware of music. He could not tell where it was coming from. He called down to Roscoe, asking what was he hearing? Why, it was the Desi Arnaz Orchestra; you can hear the signal right through the tower in certain places, Roscoe told him. It must be time for I Love Lucy.

Roscoe seemed to be getting his second wind. In fact he began to almost race him up the ladder. "Look out and step aside, you young slow coach!" Roscoe had climbed off the ladder and was now scampering up the legs of the tower. In an instant he was back on the ladder again, only overhead and still climbing. He was amazed by the old man. Soon Roscoe was at the top with his safety belt secured. He waited like the king of the hill and gazed about, taking in the view.

Soon he too, reached the tower top and joined Roscoe in his command of the structure. They stood, both leaning back in safety harnesses, with the top beacon housing between them. They were supported by a piece of pipe 6 inches in diameter, which stood vertically with foot pegs running down the sides. They both stood on the same pair of foot pegs. He felt as if this were the most grand act anybody could ever do. He had mastered his fears and something more. All of the small time jobs that he had could never match the magnitude that this one held. He was more than a climber; he was a daredevil. He could reach the sky because he was part of the sky. And in the sky he found his salvation.



He had finally found some work that he enjoyed and gave his life some meaning. Everyone he knew had seemed to find fulfillment through some kind of work. His father had always told him that "the measure of a man is what he does." Something in the kid's nature had always fought this truth leading him astray again and again. Maybe worth comes from somewhere else, he had thought. But since he could never find out where he knew that he must be mistaken. His capabilities were too abstract to be of any satisfactory usefulness.

Old Roscoe watched him as he looked around. "Quite a view, eh kid? I never can resist it. Why, time was that I made a climb just fer fun, just to take in the view. But I got older and I realized that it wasn't such a much." Roscoe squinted into the sunlight. He had calmed down from the climb quite a bit.

"I used to feel that life up here was all that mattered. There ain't nothing on the ground that seems no different up here. Wives and bills and all. There ain't no money worth it, the height I mean. I hate to think that I can't get no more insurance. So I got to remember that it ain't no big deal. It's just a job, and a job ain't nothing but a pain in the ass. And all we're gonna do is change a light bulb."

They carefully opened the beacon housing and took out the lamps. Roscoe inspected the insides closely for water and weather damage. When he was satisfied that the beacon was in good condition, they placed the new lamps in and reassembled it. Roscoe threw the test switch, and the fixture screamed red in their faces. They could feel the heat from the lamps warm their cheeks and lips, while the wind bit through their clothes.

"Well that's it," Roscoe said, "there ain't nothin' else to do."

From the tower he could hear the sigh of the wind and a cat food commercial. "He's too damn old," the kid thought. "He'll never be up here again."

The kid and the old man were indistinguishable from the ground. They were two shadows held aloft by a framework that was mostly sky and mistaken mathematics. But they were up there just the same.

## The Knowledge of Me

by Angie Beumer

I am a library  
Bursting with books that  
No one has read.  
I am much more  
Than a reference section.  
Recreation, fear, sociability,  
values, ideas, whims, and attitudes  
Lie stagnantly on my shelves  
Awaiting someone to select  
A book for its content  
Not its cover.

## Windowpane

by Dawn Hutchison

I don't know what it means but  
there's a drawer missing,  
the Latex paint is peeling, cracking  
and dropping to the grass.  
The paper is folded.  
My shoe has a hole worn in the sole,  
and my feet are wet from the puddle.  
I put the tupperware  
back in the fridge.  
but the light wasn't on  
when I opened the door.  
Wood grain peels  
from the TV top  
and candle wax  
drops  
and melts the Nylon rug  
beneath my feet.



## Sunday Naval Attack

by Linda LeRoy

On Sundays,  
never failing,  
    forty chubby toes,  
along with four pudgy bodies  
    in footy pajamas,  
would romp out of their beds and unite.

As they continued their journey,  
four watermelon colored lips giggled  
while they planned their sneak attack  
for the "room of the two sleeping giants."

Meanwhile,  
the morning sunlight peered through the sides  
of the white shades.

Its rays were warming the sleeping atmosphere  
of the giants' palace.  
Each beam disquieted the peaceful room  
    displaying the particles of playful dust in the air.  
At this moment,  
    the four tired eyes were closed tightly  
    for the purpose of sleep.  
Unaware of the war ahead of them,  
    their enormous backs faced the enemy.

Suddenly,  
they're hit from both sides;  
    a surprise attack!  
Eight knees bend on the cushiony battleground.  
    The four eyes are open, and  
the giants are awakened by laughter descending like bombs.  
A battle begins.

Decisively,  
the low voiced giant outstretches ten thick fingers,  
and the four warriors feel as if they are  
surrounded by a squish of octopi.

Giggles escape,  
but the struggle seems endless  
to the four warriors.

There is only one hope now.  
The four warriors strategically devise  
a plan of action.  
One of the pudgy fingers  
must break through the combat line.  
Their mission:  
press the magic button on Daddy's stomach.

# OF PEASE PORRIDGE, FAT HENS, PIES, AND MORE

by Joanne Keaton

Hey! Diddle, diddle! Have you seen any of your favorite nursery-ryhme characters around lately? Study their diets in Mother Goose, and you'll soon see why they disappeared long ago.

Consider the famous pease porridge. Although a cereal made from meal of peas sounds a little disgusting, it probably was hearty and nutritious. Yes, it could have been healthful, but recall that it was nine days old. There was no way to refrigerate leftovers in those times, and so that porridge actually sat in the pot at room temperature for a week and two days. How many people got sick after eating the stuff?

Remember the dish that was set before King? It was a pie baked with four and twenty blackbirds. Imagine all those beaks scratching the King's esophagus on the way down. Certainly the feathers would have tickled his tummy, and perhaps they'd have caused him to laugh until he cried (or died). If the beaks and feathers didn't get him, there were diseases he could have gotten from the dirty birds.

Handy-Spandy, Jack-a-Dandy had one of our earliest cases of sugar induced hyperactivity; after he bought his plum cake and sugar candy at the grocer's, he came out with a hop, hop, hop, they say. Handy-Spandy was not alone in being intrigued by merchants' sweet wares. A vendor called out to Smiling Girls and Rosy Boys to buy his monkeys made of gingerbread and his sugar horses painted red. Even barbershops pushed sweets, as in the sticks of candy for you and me and Sister Mandy. And dumb as he was, Simple Simon knew that the pieman's offering tasted good, and he attempted to get a freebie.

Sugar was important in child rearing. A mother said, "Hush baby, my doll, I pray you, don't cry," and then offered the kid a custard or a tart if he would shut up. The naughty kittens lost their mittens, and as punishment they got no pie. Another youngster, Jacky, received only mustard when he cried — the treats were saved for a day when he was very good. Perhaps the bad children were the healthiest.

Adult royalty also had a sweet tooth. The Knave of Hearts went down in history as a thief when he took tarts made by a queen of the same suit. While her husband was in the counting house counting all his money, another queen couldn't resist smearing her staff-of-life bread with honey.

Jack Sprat might have been a man for the 1080's, but his wife probably expired young for she would eat no lean. Curly Locks likely got old and fat early; her ardent swain promised her strawberrries if she would marry him, but he planned to load them down with sugar and cream.

Don't feel sorry for Humpty Dumpty because all the King's horse and all the King's men couldn't put him together again. Even if they had the tools of modern medicine at their command, repairing Humpty would have been only a temporary reprieve. That big egg was just full of cholesterol.

Fat was a desired food element in nursery-rhyme days. "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe" talks of a good fat hen. We are happily advised in another rhyme that the geese were getting fat as Christmas approached. No one wanted to eat a scrawny bird.

We aren't sure if Peter Piper actually ate his whole peck of pickled peppers but, pray tell, what else was he going to do with them? It's not difficult to picture Peter's distress after such an orgy — if he didn't die, he was probably hoping he would.

Curds and whey are given a bad reputation by Mother Goose. You may not be fond of that combination, but I think that we'll agree that its not in the junk food category. When Little Miss Muffet sat down to the repast, the sugar-loving author decided to have the young lady scared away by a spider. Wouldn't that be enough to tout any child off of curds and whey?

Water is another of the rare good items for human ingestion mentioned in the little verses. Too bad it is portrayed in such a negative way: When Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water, he fell down and broke his crown. This may have been enough to turn Jill on to harder drinks.

Is it any wonder the dish ran away with the spoon?



## Screaming Banshee

by Christopher Rahe

the moon breaks through the clouds  
a beam sparkles in his eye  
he lets out a blood-curdling scream  
like a god about to die  
enshrouded in the steam  
rising from the lake  
the moon seemed to smile  
as this banshee writhed in pain  
choking on his own bile  
in the blood-red rain  
the spiders growing larger  
eating at his soul  
spraying webs of fire  
across this wretched ghoul  
no he's dangling from a wire  
he's got to get away  
run across the sky  
jump over to the cloud  
they'll never see him die  
as he dons his heavy shroud  
the hallucinations fade  
the cloud's no longer him  
nothing but thin air  
as everything grows dim



## I Think I Cried A Lot

by Darrin Deany

My dad tore down the tree house this summer. He explained to the many kids that straddled their bikes below how unsafe it was becoming, that he was doing it for their safety. Then he chuckled some stale one-liner that fathers are known for, to ease the blow. As I watched from the back window of our house, I couldn't help but feel bad for the kids, but most of all, I felt bad for myself. Because along with the shingles and boards that came crashing to the ground were pieces of my childhood.

I couldn't believe the irony in what I was witnessing. After so many years as the supplier of security and safety to us kids, the tree house that my friends and I built was being condemned for being unsafe. For all those years, our tree house was just that, OURS. No grown-ups were allowed or would even dare climb the flimsy, wooden steps nailed to the trunk of the old oak tree which stood alone in the middle of the vacant lot. Kids from other neighborhoods weren't even invited. The tree house was ours.

The tree house was a place to meet up with the guys, a place to hide from your parents, or at least get away from the stale one-liners for a while. There, we could do all the things that we couldn't do at home. We could cuss, spit, scratch ourselves anyplace we wanted, and even look at dirty magazines when someone was lucky enough to swipe one from his older brother.

It was a nice tree house, as tree houses go. It had tall walls, it was fairly roomy and had a shingled roof to keep the rain out, or at least slow it down a little. It was high enough up the tree to keep even the bravest of girls from even thinking about venturing up, thank God! Not that they had any chance of getting in anyway, because the door was equipped with a deadbolt, and if you didn't know the secret password, you were wasting your time climbing those steps.

There were a couple other rules that had to be followed in the tree house. First of all, any secrets told inside could not be taken outside the tree house. Then there was the "no girls" rule which, as us guys got a little older, changed into the "no fat girls" rule.

As my friends and I did get older, our first voluntary contact with the opposite sex took place in our tree house. We started with games like "Spin the Bottle" and "Truth or Dare" then, becoming more brave, moved to games like "Strip Poker" and "Postman" (one of my personal favorites). All of us owe our first kisses to our tree house. It was the same girl for all of us, Jill sombody, and afterward we all walked home together and laughed about who got the most spit on his lips.

One day, while mowing my yard, I found a new-born baby rabbit. I placed it in a small box and took it up to the tree house. The next two days, I sprinted home from school to see my new little friend, taking him lettuce leaves and pieces of carrots, which for some reason, he wouldn't eat. The third day, I found the rabbit with a bloated belly, making whimpering noises, much like a puppy would. I held him in my hands until late at night, praying he wouldn't die. My dad came out with a flashlight and found me sleeping in the corner of the tree house, with a dead rabbit in my hands.

I remember asking my dad why the poor thing had to die. That night, I don't remember sleeping at all. I think I cried a lot.

These memories, happy and sad, are very special to me and I owe them all to our tree house. Nowhere else could we do the things that all kids should do. Nowhere else could we not get caught doing them. Nowhere else could we share so many secrets. Nowhere else could we feel so independent, so isolated, so secure. Nowhere else was a kid so much a kid, and a parent just a memory.

Unsafe? Maybe, but I couldn't help but imagine myself as a kid, looking up as someone's father tears down the one thing that once protected kids like me from parents like him. For a second I hated my father, then I just felt sorry for the kids around the tree. Maybe there would be more tree houses for them in their futures, maybe just more stale one-liners.

My mother, noticing me staring out the window, asked, "Why don't you go out and help your dad?"

I didn't answer. I walked into my room and closed the door. I was very sad. Sad for the baby rabbit, sad for the kids on their bikes, and most of all, sad because my childhood, so much like our tree house, is gone because of age.

I lay alone on my bed. I think I cried a lot.

## A Downtown Milwaukee Apartment by RSG

A dusky apartment  
Walls filled  
With framed fabrication  
Avante-garde art

"Old black water" sounded  
Two guys  
And two guitars  
We drank their beer

The clock ticked Twelve  
We left  
My new jacket  
Smelled of smoke





## Confessions of a Romance Novelist

by Kim Stamm

"My name is Roberta Crawford and I am a romance novelist." As I spoke this simple sentence at the weekly Tuesday night meeting of Romance Novelists Anonymous, I felt the weight of the world being lifted off my shoulders. I was finally able to admit that I had a problem, an addiction to writing romance novels. Now you may think it's impossible to be addicted to writing love stories, but it happens to hundreds of people each year. Let me tell you my story.

I was like any other kid until I turned ten. Yes, it was on my tenth birthday, January 3, 1972, that my life began its eventual down-hill slide. That was the day Peggy Rogers gave me the book, *Forever*, by Judy Blume. She became my inspiration from that day on. Judy's book turned my whole life around.

Well, after I finished *Forever*, I just couldn't wait to find another romance novel and thank goodness they started coming out with those great books like *Susie's Dilemma*. The story-line went something like this: Should Susie date the dull football player, Jeff, because he's cute and will make her popular or should she go out with the guy she really likes, Ned, even though he's the President of the Math and Science Club and carries a calculator around in his pocket. Or, do you remember *It Couldn't Be Me?* I cried so hard when Julie stopped being popular because her fellow cheerleaders wouldn't let her date the boy she really liked, that my mother threatened to take away all of my romance novels. Oh, how could they have been so cruel to her? I've never truly forgiven Katie, Krissy, and Lindsay for that.

Anyway, to continue with my story. All through junior high and high school I read every heart-breaking romance tale I could find and no matter how many tears I cried, I still kept going until another fateful day in my life, February 14, 1980! For some mysterious reason I bought a copy of "True Confessions" along with my weekly romance novel from the magazine and book section at Wal-Mart. Now I know you're thinking, "She made this date up, Valentine's Day, really," but I swear to you that on that fateful day I found the day that would change my entire life, Dr. I.M. Amorlie. No, he didn't become my lover, but, instead, it was his advertisement in the February 1980 issue of "True Confessions" that first started me on my addiction to writing romance novels.



After coming home after my weekly trip to Wal-Mart (I always went on Sunday so I could begin the new week with a new love story), I sat down in my favorite chair, a pink armchair made out of that stuff that leaves a funny floral pattern on the backs of your legs, and anyway, I stared at the cover of the magazine for about two minutes trying to decide what story I should read first. I finally decided to read "My Boyfriend Left Me for My Twin Sister," first and save, "How I Made Our High School Quarterback Love Me" for later. Well, after finishing the first couple of pages of the story, (I was crying at this point because Shelley's boyfriend, John, had left her for her twin sister, Kelly, and those two heartless people eloped to get married at the Chapel of Love in Las Vegas!), I hurriedly tried to find its continuation on page 52 so I could see how Shelley dealt with her tragic situation, when one of those little, annoying pieces of paper that magazines stick in the middle asking for subscriptions kept me from turning the page. Well, after tearing it out I almost turned to the end of the story when there HE was, staring at me from the pages of "True Confessions." Dr. I.M. Amorie. And he was asking me, yes, me, to begin a career as a romance novelist! The title, "You Too Can Be a Romance Novelist," kept my attention for a while. Finally, I pulled my eyes away and read how I could become the next Judy Blume or Danielle Steele. It all seemed so easy! All I had to do was send in \$50 and Dr. Amorie would send me his 20-page booklet on how to become a professional novelist. After reading the Doctor's guide I could start writing love stories! When I had completed a novel, Dr. Amorie would edit it for \$100 and then he would publish the final work at a 49% commission rate! At that time I thought God had sent Dr. Amorie into my life. You see, I was a high school senior at the time and I really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and since I loved romance novels, I thought this opportunity would give me a chance to create some of the happiness that people like Judy Blume and Danielle Steele do with their novels.

Well, needless to say, I wrote right away for my booklet and I practically camped out by our mailbox waiting to begin what I thought would be a fabulous career as a romance novelist. The booklet arrived in just a couple of weeks and for a naive writer, reading that booklet was like finding the Fountain of Youth! Although I signed an agreement not to reveal Dr. Amorie's secrets, I feel that you should know the tricks of the romance novel trade.

Dr. Amorie began his booklet with the statement, "Anyone can be a romance novelist." At the time that sounded great to me because I really needed to get my career off the ground and start earning a living. After that catchy opening, he went on to give us, his students, the formula for a successful romance novel. He said that our novels should have exactly twelve chapters, not eleven, not thirteen, but exactly twelve. The reason for

that, he said, is that our story should take place in four parts, each containing three chapters. Sounds easy enough, doesn't it? He even went as far as to give us what he called, "Dr. Amorie's Recipe," a brief description of what each part needed to include. Part One must have the boy meeting the girl. Again, easy enough. In Part Two, a love relationship begins to grow, but in Part Three, the lovers are torn apart by some sort of tragic event. (i.e., a wife, a war, or maybe a jealous ex-boyfriend, etc...). Finally, in Part Four, chapters 10-12, the lovers are re-united and live happily ever after! Dr. Amorie was right, anyone could do this. After giving us the recipe, Dr. Amorie then gave us some "ingredients" to throw in. The setting, he told us, should always take place in New York City, California, (Los Angeles or San Francisco, preferably), or a European city such as London or Paris. A good story needs to contain two out of these three locations. Character names were another of Dr. Amorie's ingredients. The girls, he said, should have an unusual or exotic name like Samantha or Gwendolyn, while the boys should be named something like Geoffrey (notice the spelling) or Michael (no nicknames please). Well, Dr. Amorie had given me the hardest parts of the romance novel, the plot, the characters, and the setting, so all I had to do was connect all the dots and create the whole picture. Bits and pieces of the storylines were running through my head before I even finished the booklet so I felt confident that I could produce a romance novel and begin my life as an author.

Now at this point you're probably wondering what my parents thought of all of this. Well, to tell you the truth, they weren't too excited about the whole deal. But they agreed to let me try for six months and if by that time I hadn't written a novel, I would have to go to secretarial school or business college and get what they called a "real" profession.

Well, my first novel, *Desiree's Desire*, was the hardest one to write, (I'm sure you can understand that), but it wasn't long before Dr. Amorie's recipe began to work for me. Soon I began to write a novel every two months or so and the results began to show. You probably even saw my name a hundred times if you ever walked past those romance novels in Hook's or Wal-Mart. My stories were always next to something like "Teen-Mania" and below those little self-help books titled "100 Ways to Lose Inches from Your Thighs." By the time my six months were up, I was able to move out and live on my own with the money from my novels. My first apartment was a joke. It was actually a two-room place above our neighbor's garage. The wallpaper was a huge floral pattern that had turned yellow with age and was peeling in some places, but it was home to me and the mice.

I didn't have a chance to live there long, though, because soon my novels were the hottest things since sliced bread. I had surpassed the level of Dr.



Amorie and I was able to find myself a publisher in New York City. I had hit the big time in romance writing.

I got the first taste of the public life when my publisher arranged a cross-country bookstore tour for me. The number of fans who turned out to see me at these stops was amazing! I didn't know there were so many middle-aged housewives who wore curlers in their hair and actually did go out in public in their pink chenille bathrobes. But, I expected to see that type of fan. What truly shocked me was the number of professional men and women who read my novels. At one stop, in downtown Chicago, I had three lawyers, all dressed in their blue suits with red ties, who stood in line for over an hour to talk to me and have me sign my latest book, *Samantha's Secret*. They said that they read my romances after work every day in order to relax.

It was about this time that I went to the first meeting of the 'Roberta Crawford Fan Club.' The first chapter of the club was in Cleveland, Ohio, and it was formed by the women who lived in a subdivision there called *Legendary Hills*. I was late to the meeting because all the houses looked the same to me and I got lost. I think I counted only three different styles of houses and maybe four different colors of paint. Well, anyway, I was finally able to locate the house just because I noticed about three Buick Regals that had the famous "Mary Kay" sticker on the rear window. I was right, that was the place.

Well, once inside, I wished I was back outside again, wandering through the streets of *Legendary Hills*. The women, who had certainly dressed for the occasion in their polyester pantsuits, acted like teenagers at a Bon Jovi rock concert. They grabbed at my clothes, begged me for autographs, and they all had to tell me how romance novels helped them make it through the day. The secretary of the club, Mary Liz, I think her name was, told me that one day she knew that she would meet some new man who "will whisk me away from Cleveland and together, we'll live on a yacht named *Desire* in the calm, blue Mediterranean Sea." Her pitiful look of hope made me uneasy for awhile but I soon got over it and quickly made my escape from the fan club members in *Legendary Hills*.

Soon, my life began to be its own, life-like romance novel. I became addicted to my writing and the lifestyle that accompanied it. I was now living in Los Angeles, but I flew to New York at least once a week to keep in touch with my publisher. When I wasn't somewhere above Nebraska or Colorado, I was either writing my next romance or creating a social life that would have shocked Marilyn Monroe. Film Festivals, Night Club Openings, and the best parties that L.A. and New York had to offer were all part of my new life. I was becoming so famous that my name was even on the "Wheel of Fortune" under the title "Famous Person." A housewife from

Cleveland got the puzzle right. And, of course, the men were there, too. Blonde, clean-cut, soon -to-be actors who needed to be seen often escorted me to these events, and of course, a few of these became more than just escorts. It was a wonderful, whirlwind life, just like one of my novels, until a famous talk-show host made me see the light.

When the Oprah Winfrey people called me and asked me to be a guest on their show I was thrilled. After my novels, Oprah was fast becoming the hottest thing in the media world. I felt honored that Oprah wanted me to be a part of her popular show, so I eagerly accepted. Well, the taping of the show turned out to be the most eye-opening day of my life. There I was, sitting in a chair, in front of an audience filled with even more middle-aged housewives, expecting Oprah to just glorify my novels, when the camera man said, "Rolling." Instead of hearing praise, I heard Oprah say, "Millions of women read romance novels habitually. They live, breathe, and eat the lives of the characters, and so many times a suburban wife and mother of four will forget she has a life in the real world. She'll become so involved with the romance world that the house goes uncleaned and her marriage falls apart. Today I have two guests whose lives were completely destroyed after they became addicted to these dime-store romances. I also have with me, today, a very famous romance novelist, Miss Roberta Crawford, who is here to tell us what motivates her to write. Please welcome my guests on today's show."

I was flabbergasted! Listening to those women tell their terrible stories made me feel terrible. I never knew that my readers took my novels so seriously! One woman who called in said that she left her home, husband, and kids to move out to California so she could meet the kind of man that I wrote about in all of my novels. When she got to L.A. she was forced to become a prostitute to make money, but she continued to dream. Eventually, her husband went out there to find her and take her home. Now that's a true love story. I began to feel so guilty that I began apologizing for my work. It didn't take long for my fairy-tale career to end after that. After the show aired on national television my career fell apart. Instead of novels, I had to begin writing stories for "True Confessions." Even my fan club in Cleveland broke up.

It was when I was back in my two-room apartment over Mrs. Peabody's garage that I realized I needed help. I was spending every day watching Vanna turn letters ion the "Wheel of Fortune," and after that game show, I watched Bob Barker show his showcases on the "Price is Right." I had reached the bottom, the absolute pits.



I was saved, though. One day, while flipping through the Yellow Pages to find a pizza place that delivered, I came across an ad for Romance Novelist's Anonymous. Realizing that I needed to turn my life around, I found the phone under a pile of empty potato chip bags and called their number (RU4-LOVE).

Well, that was a year ago and it's been ten months since I confessed that I was a romance novelist. I started business school six months ago so I've taken steps to turn my life around. I am now able to realize that I did more harm than good by creating fantasies for people, because instead of simply enjoying them, some people used my love stories as an escape from a somewhat dreary life. I want to apologize and say that your own everyday life is a much better romance novel than I could ever write.

## **A Young Man Named Park**

**by Tess Redding**

There once was a young man named Park  
Who wrote light verse for a lark.  
His words were like honey,  
He made lots of money  
Because he was hired by Hallmark

## Mother or Terminator

by Ginger German

Leigh stood naked in front of her bathroom mirror. She leaned forward over the marble sink. Three blemishes spotted her usually porcelain skin. She lightly pressed her finger around the edge of the one on her chin. It was underneath her skin - the kind that hurts for days, but nothing can be done about it. Her eyes moved downward, to her slender, long neck, her broad, yet bony shoulders.

She looked at her breasts. They were more plump than normal. She hadn't gained any weight, though. They even felt heavier in her bra. Their weight pulled at her lace undergarment, leaving striped impressions on her shoulders and the sides of her breasts. They felt as though she was going to start her period, but the burdening sensation only seemed to intensify as the days passed.

Her eyes moved to her firm stomach, which still had some tan left from her summer of lifeguarding. She placed the palm of her hand at her abdomen and gently pressed in. The pressure of her hand hurt, only it wasn't a severe pain. It felt more like an uncomfortable ache. It was the kind of ache one feels when they have been trying to fall asleep for hours but can't. It was the ache of aimlessly tossing about. It was the kind of ache that lingers.

She continued looking down in the mirror, but couldn't see below the elastic belt of her pink bikini underwear. She fixed her attention back to her blue eyes. Dark circles shadowed them; she hadn't been getting much sleep. Leigh blamed her lack of sleep on worry. She had a term paper on Roman traditions due in two weeks, someone stole her scuffed, yet favorite Reebok hightops, and the letter she was expecting from Dave hadn't arrived yet.

Leigh went over to the toilet, and removed her pink underwear. Damn. Her panty shield was clean. Usually Leigh was early or right on time each month. Never before had she missed a period. For over three weeks now, she continually wore panty shields in hopes that she would menstruate.

She didn't think she had any real reason to worry. She and Dave had used a condom. . . besides, it just doesn't happen after your first time.

The next day Leigh brought home a pregnancy test. A few minutes after she tested her urine sample, the liquid in the glass vial turned light lavender.

"I tell you, your cat . . . Mittens, came in again yesterday with a squirrel stuck in her mouth!" The line was cracky with static, but her mom's volume wasn't diminished any by the poor phone transmission quality.

Leigh twirled the phone cord around the fingers of her left hand, just as she used to with her hair when her mom would read to her from Dr. Seuss. She used to make the worst nests of snarls. One time it took over forty-five minutes to brush it from her long, golden hair.

"There is still blood on the back porch," her mom continued. "Josephine is sick again, and the temporary maid was behind on the chores, so I had to hose that disgusting mess off! I don't know, Leigh, something needs to be done about Mittens."

Trying to untangle her hand from the cord, Leigh started, "Mom, can we change the subj. . ."

"Oh, Your father suggested having her declawed. He even called the vet to get an estimate. It doesn't really matter though - something has got to be done."

Leigh glanced at her Seiko. Nine thirty-four. She sat at her desk, working through her math problems on page 257. She picked up her gold Cross pencil and scratched the paper as she scribbled another answer. "Mom, I'd love to sit and talk about things at home, but I really don't have time. I've got a major test in Math for Business tomorrow and I still need to work through some chapter six problems."

Apologizing, her mom said she would hang up and write her a letter on what they would decide to do with Mittens. "Oh sweetie, I forgot to tell you the most important news yet!" Leigh looked up from her book. Did Mom find a new recipe for chili? Maybe she's decided to throw another one of her infamous parties for the lawyers at Dad's office. Or perhaps she found another incredibly creative interior decorator. What room would she tackle now? Probably the dining room. That hasn't been remodeled for a whole two-and-a-half years.

"Your cousin Jan is pregnant!"

Stunned, Leigh sat silent, listening to her mother rave about Jan's decision to start a family. Leigh tried to cut her mom off, but couldn't speak. The back of her throat was plugged by a heavy cork—the kind in expensive champagne bottles that take forever to get out. Her eyes began to fill with tears. They fell out onto her cheeks.

"Mom," she interrupted. "I have to go. . . I. . ."

"All right, dear. I'll give Jan your best. She's due in June! We'll have to make a special trip to New York to see her and the baby. Take care, dear. Good luck on your math test."



Reaching for the remote control, Dave leaned over the arm of his parents' sofa. "Wheel of Fortune" was over, and he wasn't in the proper state of mind to deal with "Jeopardy." Pushing the channel button, he searched for a better program.

"What are you in the mood to watch?" he asked Leigh. Startled, she looked up. She had been scraping the cuticles back on her fingernails. The ends were still rough where she had been nibbling.

"Oh...I...I don't care, Dave. Whatever you want to see is fine with me." He found "M.A.S.H." on channel 13 and set the remote back on the end table next to the tan sofa. As he settled back next to Leigh, he placed his arm gently around her and gently pulled her closer to him. They sat listening to the introductory song, then watched the following commercials.

"God, I hate this commercial," Dave exclaimed. "Wouldn't you just love to see those Double-Mint twins lose their hats! It'd be great if their hats blew off, fell in a pile of dog shit, and were then run over by a Mack truck! God I'd love it!" Laughing, he turned to Leigh. "Wouldn't that be great?"

Leigh didn't look away from the set. She wondered how old those twins were. Were those guys that helped them with their hats really that cute in person? Quietly, she replied, "Yeah, that would be neat."

Dave turned to her. Her slim shoulders were hunched forward, almost forcing her arms into her lap. Her blond hair fell straight onto her shoulders. Even now, six months after high school graduation, her hair still had that metallic glow from the chlorine in the school's pool. He loved its golden shine, but hated the way it always felt by mid-season.

"Sweetheart, what's on your mind?" A single tear fell onto her cheek. "Oh...come here sweetie," Dave said sympathetically, closing his strong, yet compassionate arms around her. He could still smell a faint hint of "White Shoulders" on her neck that she must have applied before he picked her up that afternoon. "Talk to me, Leigh."

More tears followed the first, and dripped onto Dave's U.S.C. sweatshirt. Her body trembled with silent sobs. She couldn't bring herself to tell him. Maybe she would tell him later.

Leigh rocked slowly in the antique oak rocking chair in front of her bedroom window. Gentle drops of rain formed on the picture window, combining their strength to quickly run down to the bottom of the glass. The clouds never seemed to go away. Leigh tried to remember the last time she had seen the sun. It was this summer when she and Dave had gone to the ocean. It didn't really matter now. Nothing really seemed to matter.

Leigh turned her gaze to the white teddy bear resting on her brass bed. It looked so innocent and helpless... entirely reliant on her tender care. Tears formed again at the corners of her eyes. Blinking rapidly, she attempted to keep them from stinging more than they already did. She could either be mother or terminator. Why should she, a mere freshman in college, be forced to make such a moral choice? Her eyes could no longer bear the rapid, yet steady flow of the salty fluid and they dropped heavily onto her cheeks.

It would have been easier if she had gone away for spring break. Maybe she could still join her Harvard friends at Hilton Head...no. Her mother and father would certainly be suspicious then. Leigh gasped, trying to maintain smooth breathing, but failed desperately as she rapidly exhaled in quick sobs.

It all seemed so perfect - two people in love, sharing their whole selves. All their fears, anxieties, dreams, fantasies, and wonderments were released in that ultimate euphoria. Was this a punishment from God? Was it wrong to be in love and express it through a passionate closeness? How could it be?

Christmas was the first time they had seen each other since the beginning of the school year. Leigh always loved the holiday season, but this year was special. This year Leigh decided against a sweater, watch, gold frame or skis for Dave. She decided instead to give him her complete and trusting love. She remembered how he delicately kissed her, and accepted her Christmas present.

Ten weeks was a lifetime ago.

Leigh rested on the twin bed in her dorm room. Her roommate was still at class and was planning to work on her history paper at the library afterwards. Leigh was going to meet her at 3:00 so they could work on it together. She hated the Romans and their traditions. Why did she have to research something of no relevance to her when so many other things were happening in her life? She turned to her clock radio. Twenty after two. Her blond hair pressed against her mouth and her mouth tasted of sleep. As she sat, a severe dizzy spell swept through her head, forcing her to brace her weight against the small nightstand next to her bed. These dizzy spells were frequently striking her, leaving her tired and lifeless. She couldn't believe that what would normally be the best times of her life would leave her feeling so sickly limp. Her abdomen and thighs were dominated by a never-ending dull ache. She couldn't keep food down, and had lost five pounds. Regaining her strength, she looked again at the clock radio. Two thirty. A foul taste flowed into her mouth from within her dark center. This taste she knew and had grown to expect after sleep. Tightly grasping her



stomach, she stood quickly, and made her way to the bathroom. Kneeling, she leaned over the porcelain statue and waited for the evil punishment to drain from her. She began to heave deeply, but only a slight bit of the yellow fluid made its way to her mouth.

She rinsed her mouth out, but could not bear to brush her teeth. Something in the toothpaste always made those same feelings creep back onto her tongue. She went back into her room and rested once again on her bed. The history paper would have to wait.

After three-and-a-half hours, Leigh was finally in the operating room. The sanitary, alcohol smell was more intense there than out in the large waiting room. Her back ached from sitting in the blue director-style chair for over two hours. Leigh glanced down at the arm from which her blood was drawn. Rh negative. Great. An extra twenty dollars for a shot after the procedure was completed. A small, deep red circle stained the bandage. They had placed Leigh on her back, putting her legs in padded metal supports to keep them apart. A talkative nurse cleaned her with an orange soap. The orange colored her thighs as it dried. Leigh lifted her head and stared at them, wondering if the color would ever come off. The doctor walked in, cracking a joke to make Leigh feel more comfortable. She smiled, but didn't really listen to his light-hearted comment. She felt cold, smooth metal go inside of her. Suddenly, it burst open, holding the entrance of her vagina wide open. The doctor continued to talk, but Leigh heard only mumbling voices. She felt a slight pinch inside of her. Her muscles tightened, responding to the prick of the deadening needle. The metal clasps then slid out of her: relief. The doctor said he would return as soon as the local anesthetic took effect and walked out of the room.

Leigh glanced around the small room. The curtains were drawn, but fluorescent lights brightened the tiny area. Silver instruments sat on two different stands near the table where she was stationed. Nurses walked in and out, checking to see how Leigh was feeling. Each time she told them, "Fine," but felt uncomfortable about having her legs remain wide apart as they casually slipped in and out of her room. Turning to her right she noticed a large, square machine sitting against the wall. A clear hose was wrapped up along the left side of the monster, and a glass jar stuck up from a hole in the top of it. She stared at the monster, and it at her.

The doctor returned with two nurses and began to insert the metal clamps again. Again, the pain returned as it stretched her. The doctor picked up a long silver instrument and inserted it, clanging it against the metal clamps. One nurse held Leigh's hand firmly, the other began to rub her abdomen with the palm of her hand. The monster roared, his fuzzy hum echoing throughout the small prison.

Again, Leigh could make no sound.

## The Fan

by Dawn Hutchison

There was a fan on the ceiling  
Hung over the room  
Spinning, stirring the room.  
The steam of coffee  
warming the breath  
giving the room (the people) depth.  
Streaming stutters  
Uttered  
From stagnant lips  
Coated, covered in gloss and paint  
Into a mesh of conversing consonants  
Licking the steam  
And breathing the smoke  
Of unfiltered cigarettes  
Mixing  
Textured tables of green  
Plastic linen  
Under chortles and chokes  
Churning into butter  
And spreading  
With the spinning,  
Stirring of the fan.





## The City Woman

by Tess Redding

Megan lit another cigarette and finished setting the table. She had been late getting back from church, and Mrs. Oakey would be there any minute. Megan didn't want to be unprepared.

She had stretched her librarian's salary to the limit and planned an expensive luncheon, even though she knew it wouldn't take much to impress anyone from this backwater Tennessee town she had been living in for eight months. Seafood salad, cheese souffle, fresh croissants. "Can this woman be bought?" Megan wondered as she refolded the napkins. Would she marry Taylor if his mother continued to hate her? Would Taylor marry her? "He's sweet and loving," Megan thought, "but he can't stand up to his mother. It's going to be up to me."

The doorbell rang. Megan snuffed out her cigarette and went to greet her guest. She put on her brightest smile and opened the door wide. Mrs. Oakey, a small stiff woman, clutched her large white vinyl handbag, and did not smile back. She looked around the apartment slowly, raising and lowering her eyes and turning her head as if she were an official inspector making a formal assessment. Mrs. Oakey stiffened even more when she saw the two large bookcases overflowing with literature.

"I'm glad you came," Megan said. "Please have a seat." She pointed to the sofa.

"Thank you. I'll sit here." Mrs. Oakey perched herself on the edge of the green wingback chair and held her purse tightly in her lap.

"May I get you something to drink before lunch?"

"I don't drink. None of the Oakeys do." She stared at Megan. "I know that you do though. Don't let me stop you." Her eyes accused.

"Mrs. Oakey, I only drink beer with pizza. I don't think that makes me much of a drinker. Besides, I didn't mean anything alcoholic. I meant iced tea or a soft drink."

"No thank you," was the stern reply.

"Then shall we have lunch?" Megan went to the dining table and pulled out a chair. "Please sit here." Still clutching her purse, Mrs. Oakey moved to the table and sat silently.

"I hope you like what I've prepared. There's shrimp and crabmeat...."

"Where's your kids?" Mrs. Oakey interrupted.

"They're playing next door. I thought we needed to be alone to talk."

"No need to talk much. I know what you want." She paused and looked Megan in the eye. "You want Taylor. You want a man with money in the bank to help you raise your two kids."



"Mrs. Oakey," Megan protested, "money has nothing to do with it. Taylor and I love each other. You've known that for four months."

"He don't know you. You're a city woman. He's not used to women like you, women who already been married and has kids, women who drink and smoke." Megan saw Mrs. Oakey nod toward the dirty ashtray on the sideboard as if she were presenting evidence to a jury.

"I do not understand your objections, Mrs. Oakey. Isn't it important that Taylor and I love each other?"

"He don't know you, and you don't know our ways."

"I have been living in this town long enough to know your ways pretty well. And as for Taylor, we have been together almost every day for six months, and I think I know him as well as anyone. He is open and honest and sensitive. He has let me read his poems and short stories, and he said that soon I could help him write his novel. He has shared his most private thoughts with me."

"That's wrong, can't you see? You encourage him to do that wasteful writin'. It took his daddy a long time to talk him into takin' a job at the factory and now you're confusin' his mind."

"Writing is not wasteful and Taylor has a gift for it."

"You city woman, what do you know about this town, about our lives? You can't make no livin' writin'."

"Maybe not here, but in other places...." The doorbell rang. Megan was grateful.

It was Taylor, his tall, thin frame leaning against the doorjamb, as he wrote in his small, leather-bound notebook. "Hi, honey," he said, sliding his pen into his shirt pocket.

"You're early. We haven't even eaten yet." Megan stepped into the hall outside her apartment and lit a cigarette.

"How's Mama? She all right?"

"She's fine, but, Taylor, she's never going to like me. She doesn't like anything about me and she thinks I'm using you."

"Now, Megan honey, I've told you before that you'll have to be patient with Mama. She means well. I'm sure she'll come around eventually."

Megan looked at him. Her voice came slowly and deliberately. "How long are you willing to wait?"

"You know I can't hurt Mama."

"But you can hurt me?"

"Now honey, nobody has to be hurt. Just give Mama some time."

There was silence between them. Avoiding her eyes, Taylor shifted nervously. Megan waited for a response. Finally there was a sigh of resignation and Taylor walked past her into the apartment.

"Come on, Mama, let's go home. It's time."

Mrs. Oakey paused as she passed Megan. "I'm keepin' my boy at home where he belongs," she said triumphantly.

"You go on, Mama. I'll be there in a minute." Taylor turned to Megan but she had already gone onto the apartment and closed the door.

He leaned against the doorjamb and took out his little, leather-bound notebook. In it he wrote, "Research on city woman ended. For novel, change name to Morgan."



## I-65

by Carl Bohlin

It was night time on I-65 and the windshield was getting pretty bad with all the bugs. Small ones, fat ones, big juicy ones...you name it. My wiper fluid was out and I had to pull off at the Stuckey's coming up so I could clean them off. Talk about gross. There must have been a hundred easy. Up in the distance it lit up the sky, this huge yellow sign with yellow letters. "Stuckey's." I put my turn signal on and pulled off at the exit. It was 10:30 p.m. and they were still open. They never close.

As I pull up to the pump I notice this red pickup in the other aisle. This guy is getting regular. He's big and has a plaid shirt on underneath his overalls. The only other thing about him is this good sized wad of tobacco inside his lower lip. Suddenly he notices me noticing him. He looks right at me, nods, and then spits this brown-colored saliva right into the garbage can. I swallow and smile at him and proceed to get out of my car. There are some pink paper towels in the dispenser but no more liquid in the bucket. The one over by the big guy looks full. I pull out two towels and walk toward him. He looks up again. I say excuse me and grab the windshield cleaner. I shake off the excess fluid. The big guy grunts. He looks over toward the cashier in the window. I look too. She's sitting there watching us with her chin in her right hand. Her elbow is resting on her knee. She's hunched over and all you can really see is her blue "Stuckey's" blazer. He pulls the nozzle out, turns off the pump, and spits in the can again. As he waddles up to pay, I can see his round frame ends at his waist. He has no butt and his overalls are baggy. I bet he weighs at least 275.

The bugs are caked on. I look at my watch again. It says 10:35 p.m. Tubby comes back and gets into his truck. He takes off. I hope I never see him again... the fat slob. What would I ever do if I ever do get that fat? I'd probably choke on a ham sandwich just like Mama Cass. Cigarettes! I need some cigarettes, so I walk up to the mini-mart and enter. The lights inside are so bright, I begin to squint.

"Winston Lights, 100's please," I say.

"Dollar twenty-five; need anything else?" the girl asks.

"Just some matches'll be fine."

She slides the cigarettes over the counter and then the matches like they were pucks in an air hockey game. Then she winks at me. Right, I'm thinking. The Stuckey's chick thinks I'm hot. Forget it.

"So, do you live around here?" she inquires.

"Just passing through . . . going to Chicago tonight." Why am I even wasting my time with this girl. Just get your smokes and get the hell out of there, I'm thinking. The girl has to be around sixteen years old, but I can tell she liked to flirt with the male customers who come into the store. She's tall and has glasses that make her eyes look really big. She also wears a hat. I decided to make a joke about the large customer who just left.

"Are most of the people around here as big as that guy who was just in here?"

"Who, Big Tom? Well I guess he is a pretty hefty kind of a guy. I think that I'd have to say no."

"No about what?"

"No to your question, silly . . . not everybody that comes into the store is as big as Big Tom. He's a sweetie. Kind of on the quiet side, though. Him and Mary Jean been goin' together about a year now. Sometimes they fight like cats and dogs. To be quite honest with you, I don't know what she sees in the man. What she oughtta do is get linked up with a better man, a thinner man. Someone like yourself."

Suddenly, a chill comes over me. I begin to get really warm all over. The thought of Mary Jean, whoever she was, scares me. I can just see Big Tom chasing me around his farm with a shotgun in his hand. No thanks . . . I don't need that.

"Is that your car?" the girl asks.

"Yes, that's my car," I reply.

The car is a good car. Kind of rusty in some spots, but it is capable of getting me from point A to point B. The body is that of a 1978 Nova, which means "no go" in Spanish, I think. I've got mag wheels on the back axle, and on the inside I've got blue fur on the roof with these fuzzy little balls that hang around the trim. I call it the run down cruiser. She lets out a laugh.

"Hey, it runs," I reply after leaving the money. I walk out the door and back to the car. The whole time I can feel her eyes looking at my ass. I don't look back; I would probably turn into a pillar of salt if I did. Just as I begin to open the door to the car this cricket comes hopping out from underneath. Being still a little ticked at the cashier inside, I take my foot and smash the bug to the pavement. I crush him and get into the car. There's this street light near the entrance and the bugs are trying to make love to it. There's a million of them. It's a wonder why they don't collide with one another. I'll probably have to pull off again in an hour after I kill some more with the windshield.

I-65 North. I'm back — on the road again. Visions of Willie Nelson pop into my head. I wonder if he smokes pot? Somebody told me he did. I switch the station to one that's playing some cool music. The song ends.



"Taking a look at the forecast for the rest of tonight: Fair and mild, low around 63. Tomorrow, partly cloudy with a fifty percent chance of showers later in the afternoon. Currently it's 65 degrees in Indianapolis. Coming up within the next hour we'll be hearing from ZZ Top, Lynard Skynard, and from Rush, but right now here's one from the White Album — by request, it's the Beatles on Q-95."

Helter Skelter comes blaring out of my Jensens. Sounds good. Not too much traffic tonight. I don't mind it though. The only thing is that I get sleepy sometimes. I need a smoke. I push in the lighter and pull out a cig — 19 left. That's better. John Lennon shouts out, "I've got blisters on my fingers!!!" Don't tell me those guys weren't on drugs. Up ahead in the distance I can see a figure. There's a bag at his feet. He's got his arm in the air. Wait, it's a girl. A girl hitchhiker, can you believe that? It's eleven o'clock at night and this gal's hitchin' on I-65 — no way. She's pretty. I pull over.

"Where you headin'?" I ask as I roll down the passenger window.

"Chicago," she smiles.

"Hop in."

She throws her bag in the back and jumps in. She doesn't say much except to thank me for the ride. I tell her it's no big deal. Then I ask her what a pretty girl like herself is doing hitchin' on I-65 this late at night — actually hitchin' period.

"I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself," she sneers.

"What are you running away for?" I ask, carefully.

"How do you know . . . what makes you say that? I'm not runnin' from nothin'," she insists.

I put on my turn signal and edge back onto the highway. After traveling for another ten minutes or so I notice these red lights coming up behind me. Just then the guy in the red pickup passes me on the left. He's in a big hurry. I freak out. It's Big Tom. My eyes widen up and I grip the wheel with both hands; I squeeze the wheel. My eyes are glued to the road.

"What's wrong?" the runaway asks.

"Nothing, s'just that big guy . . ."

"What big guy?"

"Did you see that big red truck just a minute ago?" I look at my watch. It's eleven p.m. "There was a big fat guy. He chews tobacco."

"Oh no!" she shouts. "He's looking for me!"

"You are running, aren't you?"

"Maybe I am. You are going to Chicago, aren't you? Just keep driving. Mind your own business and I'll mind mine," she says sharply.



It's Mary Jean. I've picked up Mary Jean. She's cute, seems really nice, but she's the biggest bitch. I hate her. She has on this pink tank-top that reveals some pretty perky nipples; no bra. Her jeans are skin tight. She notices me looking at her.

"You have a girlfriend?" she asks.

Not again, I'm thinking. Not this one anyhow. Is this really even happening?

"Yes," I lie to her.

"Then what the heck are you looking at, creep?!!" she barks.

"I can look," I answer. "Just can't touch," I laugh.

"Weirdo!" the girl looks out the window and the conversation is over for now. She reminds me of the bugs that dirty my windshield. She's becoming a pest. She's becoming an irritable little pain in my head.

Just then a red light flashes on the dashboard light indicator. I can feel the car start to miss. I try to pump the accelerator. It's no use. I don't bother to put my turn signal on because there's nobody following. The big guy has long passed us up. I pull over.

"Great, Just great! There goes my ride to Chicago," she says sarcastically.

"Listen kid, you probably won't even make it to Rennselaer if you don't shut up!" I come back.

I keep a set of tools in the trunk, so I open the door and walk to the trunk to take a look. I open it. Inside are a set of jumper cables, an old baseball glove, some old rags, a frisbee, and a baseball bat.

"Look, man, forget it. I'm just going to get my bag and try my luck with another car. One that runs, I hope," she whines.

So the car stalls from time to time . . . big deal; all it needs is to cool down for a minute or two.

The bat was a Louisville slugger, one that I had got on bat day at an old Cub's game. It had Billy Williams' autograph stamped in the end of it. I grabbed it and looked at the wood grain — the way it had kept so well for so long.

"Just my luck, a loser of a man with a loser of a car. Why meee??" she bitched.

There wasn't a gas station within miles. The road was empty ... I wiped the blood off with one of the rags. There was some on the car too. I took care of that also. My clothes were pretty well splattered. I changed them. I cleaned it up really well — even took care of the fingerprints. Then I left her there with her bag.

"Goodbye, Mary Jean," I said.

She doesn't reply. I drive off. After another half hour there's a Shell station on the right. I pull off to use the bathroom. It's 11:45 p.m. In the restroom, which is wide open, there's some tobacco juice in the sink. I gasp at first then wash my hands. I leave quickly and walk back to the car. Big Tom is talking to the attendant inside, pointing toward the highway. They don't see me. I'm sure of it. Carefully, I put the bat in the back of his truck; the towel also.

I drive off again. I am unseen. I know it. When I arrive in Chicago, it's 12:30 a.m.

# THOUGHTS

by RSG

A No Passing Zone  
Leafless trees in the distance  
Drowsily driving





## Walter Cronkite was My Father: A Post Modern Memoir

by Tori Kensington

Walter isn't my father's  
real name.  
Walter was there though,  
speaking to me in round pearl shaped tones:  
forgiving,  
loving,  
taking an interest:  
telling me  
what was what  
and how it was  
each day,  
each night.

My other father,  
that is,  
the husband of my mother;  
who worked so bloody hard,  
putting food in our mouths,  
whether we liked it  
or not,  
spoke  
at the dinner-table tribunal;  
to the stranger who was his wife.

And he,  
    The Chemical Engineer,  
    Wizard of Wonder drugs  
And she,  
    The Pharmacist with the mission  
    of Better life through Christ  
(or Valium),  
they talked of chemistry,  
of drugs;  
a medical life  
medicated  
with the  
dreams  
of Col. Eli Lilly,  
talking  
not to me.

I, being  
too much in marvel  
to meddle with  
such brilliant banter,  
would search for someone  
to tell me  
about life.....

My other father,  
nodding  
from martini mirth,  
sought sleep from the boar  
on the Gordon's label,  
and coloured his life  
with the rich hues of  
gin.

And so my father came home from the plant,  
ate dinner,  
and went to sleep.

Oh father,  
not even a good night kiss  
to smell your  
warm male smell  
and feel bristle  
on my cheek  
without the boar's bristle on  
on your breath.

This, at least, was the family dinner.  
And we would watch the CBS Evening News,  
at least

I would watch amidst the cacophony of hyperprofessionalism.  
I would watch teevee news  
since no one would talk to me.

And there was Walter.

O Father of Illuminated Phosphoresence,  
O Holy High-voltage Induced Hero,  
you spoke to me;  
you looked me in the eye  
and told me of the world;  
you observed all and criticized none.  
My other father would not  
share his knowledge with me.  
You never failed  
to appear  
with the rest  
of the family,  
and your  
    talking  
    head  
became the head of the family.  
My eye met yours;  
I knew you wanted  
me to hear you.  
I heard your words directly,  
not serendipodously,  
not fearfully that  
I might not  
understand,  
or invade  
into the world  
that would ever be closed

closed

closed



to  
me.....  
No engineer I  
(that was lamentable),  
no mathematician,  
no chemist,  
no use—  
fulness.....  
the Cathode Ray tube of our 24-inch Zenith,  
became my retina,  
connected with  
antenna leads  
to my great aluminium  
    synaptic array  
on the roof  
of our homeless house  
waiting,  
and swaying  
in the evening breeze,  
reaching,  
for your signal,  
to enter  
and stimulate my latent self.  
Your voice,  
your deep eyes,  
so wise  
in seeing  
the greatest history of our century,  
gives you more credibility than any real  
    life father;  
making him  
less real;  
making you  
my real father.

At first I cried  
when you left the teevee.  
Then I admonished  
my selfishness.  
You worked hard  
at being a  
father for me:  
always being there  
when I needed you;  
always talking to me,  
while I was being radiated  
by my nuclear family.

I will always remember your voice  
that spoke to me  
of astronauts,  
far away wars,  
of presidents, kings,  
and killed Kennedys,  
with your perfectly sounded syllables.  
You gave me  
your words:  
pearls  
falling  
over the airways;  
and made language mine.  
And now your  
pearl-tone gifts  
enrich me,  
and I clothe and wrap them around me.  
And I too,  
can shine  
in my inheritance,  
and love you.  
Walter,  
father,  
Walter,  
on thee, 'ere;  
eye follow.

## Sometimes I Get A Feeling Of Something

by Jodi Bloss

Sometimes I get a feeling of something  
so right within my heart that it  
makes me nervous to think such  
thoughts that fate may take a  
part in mapping out my destinies  
until I feel I have no other choice but  
to live out fully what comes my  
way like a sounder without a voice.





## Frank and Beans

by Albro Daniels

I don't know why he's my brother. Everyone else in my family doesn't act like him. He looks like he does everything in slow motion. When someone sees him for the first time they can tell he's different. His ears are big and stick out. On the top of them veins are bulging like some Frankenstein monster. The veins make them look purple from far away. Everyone has a hard time understanding what he says — except my mother. Even my father can't understand him all the time. Dad never gets mad; he gives up and walks away with a tired look. Mom never gives up on Frank. She is always by his side when he is home. Always helping and always paying attention to him. I get angry and begin to hate Frank until he smiles at me.

It's weird how he is five years older than me but acts like I am bigger. I love him. He is always there to play with me. My friends complain how their older brothers leave them to play alone. Frank never leaves me. When I talk to him he looks at me like I am king. He can give me a piggyback ride for a long time because I am smaller and he is bigger. I never ask him for rides when Mom is around because she says they can hurt him. I don't see how because he laughs and begs me to let him be the horse.

The thing I don't like is now I'm in the same school with him. Going into fifth grade means going to a different school. Frank is at my new school because that is where they teach the special kids. I know how people make fun of Frank's classmates. If people find out he's my brother they're going to make fun of me too.

I knew it would happen soon. I was in gym class and I saw Frank standing against the wall. I was going into the lockers when I saw them. I didn't act like they were there — hoping no one would see them.

"Look at those dummies. I thought they would fall on their faces."

It was Pete who said that. Pete, who is always the first to put someone down. We all laughed at his remarks, including me. I wasn't laughing now. The others laughed and I felt fear begin in my stomach.

It happened at lunchtime, the same day. I remember looking for a place to sit. I hate to eat alone. I saw these kids. They reminded me of moving sea grass I have seen on nature programs I watch with my dad. I was beginning to feel bad when I wasn't finding anybody I knew. Then I saw Randy. He's this big kid in my English class. I used to be afraid of him until I realized he wasn't a bully.

"Can I sit with you, Randy?"

"Why not? You can always tell on me if I don't"

I thanked him but I had this feeling that he wouldn't let me sit with him if Mrs. Wayda wasn't around.

I look into my plate to see what I am about to eat. Turkey and green beans with a sticky blob of mashed potatoes. The worst is the green beans. The can it comes in always makes them have a weird taste, something evil, like I swallowed paint. The smell makes me look in the direction of Randy who is busy devouring his green beans. I shiver as I imagine what it tastes like when he chews.

I begin to cut my turkey. It is covered in a pale brown gravy like sandy chocolate sauce. I lift a piece to my lips. Then I see him. He never eats during my lunch period. I feel my stomach begin to tighten like a fist.

"Randy, why are the special kids eating with us?"

"It's activity day. The afternoon classes are short."

I watch Frank slowly go through the line. My food is forgotten. He is talking to a girl in his class. She is ugly but he doesn't care. Those kids don't care about looks. She laughs and hits him in the arm. They're up to the ticket counter. I watch as he hands the lady his lunch ticket. He looks like it's the greatest thing in the world. I see him say "thank you" and the woman looks at him strangely and laughs softly to herself. Frank goes through the food line with the girl behind him. They go out the exit and walk over to the ketchup table. The girl trips over something. The plate goes out of her hands and lands near Frank's feet. The cafeteria explodes with noise. Laughter and yelling mix together like a monster from my nightmares. The girl bursts into tears. Frank looks down at his feet, not understanding what happened. Mrs. Wayda and Mr. Freytag go to her. Mr. Freytag says something to Frank and Frank starts to walk. He is walking towards me. Don't, Frank, please. Everyone is watching you.

He is so close now that I see only him. I forget my stomach pain.

"Adam, can I sit with you?"

"No, you can't, Frank."

I don't want to look at Randy but I do. He makes this strange face like he is surprised and trying to smile at the same time. He looks down the table and spots Pete.

"Hey Pete, Adam knows a dummy." It was like Randy punched me with his mouth.

"Pete, come over here and look at this."

"Shut up, Randy," I said. I looked around for Mrs. Wayda but I could not see her.

"Don't mess with my brother", I added, without thinking.

"Your brother? What did you say? You can't make me stop messing with anybody."

I quickly glanced over to where Pete was sitting, but he wasn't there. I looked back to Randy and saw him looking at me. He had another weird look. I understood what it meant. He couldn't believe I'd told him not to mess with Frank. I was getting worried about Randy.

"Only Adam would know an idiot." I heard Pete behind me. I didn't have to worry about Randy. Pete could hurt a lot worse with his mouth.

"What did I hear Randy say? That the dummy here is your brother." I looked over at Frank. He was hearing everything. I knew he understood what Pete was saying. I didn't think he was upset, then I saw a tear run down his face.

I didn't think about what I did next. I just reached to my plate. I felt the green beans in my hand. I didn't feel the heat because in a second I threw them at Pete. They flew across the aisle like tiny missiles. The pile hit him square in the chest. The juice stained his shirt in a big circle.

"My new shirt," he screamed.

I felt a big hand grab me by the arm. I was Mr. Freytag.

Now I am in the office and I have to write a paper on why I hit Pete with the beans. I haven't done much. I can't write it down, I can only think about it. No one can help me. I'm getting nervous and feel sick to my stomach. All I have written down is:

Frank.



## **Envious Celene**

**by Anne Kaiser-Harryman**

Moonglow

Softens the roses dying in my bedside vase

Six aging beauty queens

Only moments after the pageant.

## **A Lament for Old-Fashioned Poets**

**by Anne Kaiser Harryman**

There once was a time for rhyme,

But now that our verse is free

The poet whose words hold together

Like a fine fitting glove of leather

Is dismayed and worried to see

That such verse will bring her no fee.

## **Society Hates the Night**

**by Melissa Smither**

Holy sunshine hides away  
The nightmares of parents emerge to play

Adventure breathes

Only invited parties dare consume  
A rendezvous beneath the moon

Shadows suggest but do not convict

No rules proclaim the indiscreet  
When steam creeps forth into the street

Beware of starry guidance

When sun appears to cool the burns  
Anarchy varnishes, good returns

It is over 'til sundown

Day holds control within our sight  
Our praises keep us in the light

But darkness hints our true desires

**Society Hates the Night**

## Jack's Life

by Catherine Mason

### In the Morning

Jack wakes up after the alarm clock has been going off for about two minutes, gets tangled in the bedsheets and falls toward the bathroom.

In the bathroom he is met by the sight of his face with its bloodshot eyes, unwashed hair, and two day old beard in the mirror. Climbing into the shower he stays under the water until it goes cold, then goes out, puts on some clothes and forgets to shave.

### Breakfast

In the kitchen Jack burns some toast and takes a beer out of the refrigerator. He leaves the toast in the toaster and takes the beer back to the bedroom.

### The House

Dirty dishes are piled up on the kitchen counter, in the sink, and on the table. There is a dishwasher but it does not work, neither do most of the other appliances except for the television.

Shirts, underwear, pizza boxes-one with a couple of pieces of pizza still in it, and beer cans cover the carpet of every room except the kitchen and bathroom. The house is only one story with no basement and five rooms, so the big mess is spread all over a small area which makes it look even bigger.

### Jack

Jack is tall, thin, and now rather sickly looking although once he was healthy and very attractive. He lives alone and is a very important executive at a very large, very important business firm. He doesn't like to wash dishes or pick up clothes.

### Jack's Brother

Douglas III is Jack's very successful older brother who was named after his father, Douglas II. He is now Vice-President of the family business where Jack also works. He has a wife, two kids, a big house in the suburbs complete with swimming pool, tennis court and three car garage, a summer home in Malibu, a Mercedes and a salary of nearly \$200,000 a year. Jack does not get along that well with Douglas.

### The Job

Jack does not like his job all that much even though he is a very important executive. It starts too early, ends too late, and the lunch hour is not long enough. The business trips are a real pain too.



### Business Trips

Planes are delayed, luggage is lost, hotel computers lose reservations or refuse to accept his credit card, rental cars don't run smoothly, hotel rooms are too hot or too cold, the bed is too hard and Jack had to get up early in the morning to talk to some other important business executive about something he could not care less about.

### Lunch

There is a fancy restaurant on the same block as the building where Jack works which is good because it's really hard to find parking places downtown.

Jack eats with business partners, people from other important business firms, or by himself. His business partners and people from other important business firms like to order martinis or imported beers, but Jack had beer for breakfast so he orders scotch. After ordering six drinks each they forget to order lunch and leave.

### Life with the Parents

The family lived in a big house in the suburbs and had a lot of money. Dad worked as the most important executive in a very important business firm that he eventually took over. Mom stayed home and watched soap operas except on Thursdays when she had her hair done and on Fridays when she went shopping with other wives of important executives. On weekends they would throw big parties for their friends or leave town to go on a business trip. On weekends Jack took piano lessons or played tennis with his friends on the tennis court in the backyard.

### High School

Jack went to a private school that his mother had gone to when she was in high school.

When Jack graduated from high school his father gave him a car and had one of the servants take pictures of the ceremony because he had to go to New York on a business trip. Jack's mother went with his father to New York but made sure Jack's best suit was clean before she left.

### College

After high school Jack went to college like everyone else from private school. His father had gone to a very prestigious college so Jack went there too.

In college Jack studied business because that was what his father had studied and threw parties which his father had never done when he was in college. After college Jack's father gave Jack a job at the very important business firm he owned.

### Bottles

Jack likes bottles, particularly bottles filled with liquids. He buys lots of them and when they are empty he stacks them side by side on the kitchen counter.

### The Family

There's Shirley and Douglas II, Jack's mother and father; Jack's mother's brother who works at the very important business firm Jack's father owns and his wife; Anne and Steve, Jack's grandparents on his father's side who started the family business; Douglas III, Jack's very successful older brother who is the Vice-President of the family business firm; and the German shepard, Boo-boo. Once there was a wife and two kids in Jack's home but they moved out when Jack did not come home for dinner for a third week in a row.

### The Car

When Jack got married he bought a brand new white cadillac with grey interior, electric windows, stereo cassette player, leather covered steering wheel, air conditioning, and cruise control. Now Jack owns an old dirty Cadillac with stained interior, cracked windows, an empty space where the cassette player used to be before it was stolen, rubber covered steering wheel, broken air conditioning and cruise control.

### Accidents

Jack has been in three car accidents in the last two months, all of them occurring after he left one of his favorite hangouts. He has no insurance and a big dent that covers the entire left side of his car.

### Favorite Hangouts

The Alley Cat Bar, Steve's Bar and Grill, The Grass Slipper, and The Cathouse. None of them open before five at night nor close before two in the morning. All of them serve booze.

### His Ex-Wife

Sylvia lives with her two children in a city far away from Jack. She does not like bottles or nightclubs and likes to have the dishes washed and the clothes picked up. She doesn't call Jack very often except to tell him he is behind on the child support.

### Dinner

After work Jack goes to one of his favorite hang-outs and to sit at the bar and order scotch. On the weekend he stays at home and sits in front of the television eating pizza and drinking beer.

### Conventions

Conventions are like business trips except at conventions a large number of very important business executives from a large number of very large businesses get together for several days to listen to lectures on subjects they could not care less about.

There is a business convention being held in Las Vegas during one of the busiest months for the business firm Jack works for. The business cannot afford to send anyone they need so they send Jack.



### Las Vegas

Fancy Hotels, expensive dinners, bright lights, Black Jack, Wayne Newton, slot machines, show girls, wet bars in the hotel rooms and the company is paying for everything. Jack likes Las Vegas.

#### In the morning in Las Vegas

The alarm goes off waking Jack up in time for his seven o'clock wake up call. Jack hangs up the phone, gets caught in the bed sheets and falls towards the bathroom.

In the bathroom Jack's eyes are too blurry to see his face in the mirror as he climbs into the shower. When the water goes cold he gets out, puts on some clothes and remembers to shave.

#### Breakfast in Las Vegas

In the hotel room Jack peels a bruised banana and grabs a bottle out of the wet bar. He takes one bite of the banana and takes the bottle with him to the lecture.

#### Lectures

Saturday 8:00 a.m. Long Range Planning: How to read the crystal ball of business.

10:00 a.m. Computers in the Business: Man and Machine together for profit.

12:30 p.m. Lunch: How to make your business seem more productive than others in forty five minutes or less.

1:30 p.m. Employer-Employee relations: Better communications in the work place.

7:00 p.m. Financial Management: How to do the most within your company's budget.

#### Lectures Jack Went to

Saturday 8:00-8:15 a.m. Long Range Planning: How to read the crystal ball of business.

#### Cheryl

Cheryl is a show girl at one of the fancy hotels Jack visits. She likes dancing, laughing, talking and businessmen that come to Las Vegas for conventions.

Jack likes Cheryl and takes her back to his hotel. The next morning Cheryl is gone. So is Jack's watch, cash, credit cards, and the solid gold cuff links that his father gave him when he joined the company.

#### Getting Home

Jack gets up late, can't find a taxi, gets a taxi to the airport in time to find his flight has been delayed. When he gets home he waits thirty-five minutes for his luggage then takes a taxi directly to the office where the bill for his expenses while in Las Vegas has arrived two hours before him.



### Jack's Expenses

\$10,209 including the \$8,011 Jack lost playing Black Jack and the \$305 he spent on imported caviar and champagne. All items include fifteen percent gratuity.

### At the Office

Jack's father, who runs the business firm Jack works for, is very disappointed with Jack and says it would be a good idea if Jack took an indefinite leave from the company. Jack's name is removed from the office door, the company's employee list, the American Express gold card membership and the guest list for the upcoming family reunion.

### Unemployment

Jack sells his house and moves into a one room apartment downtown close to the unemployment office where he stands in line for several hours every day.

### During the Night

Jack likes the nightclubs more than his apartment so he stays in them sometimes until they close early in the morning. When they close he walks home through the streets alone.

## Life, the Universe, and Everything

by Doug Lunsford

I once met a daring, ambitious young man  
Who came a great distance from a foreign land  
And who told me his goal was to understand  
About life, the universe, and everything

He tried to relate his story to me  
About what to do and what to see  
In the hopes that I'd join him and then that we  
Would know about life, the universe, and everything

He'd sat on a mountain top and sat on a hill  
He'd sat in a restaurant to eat up his fill  
And once he'd sat on a girl named Jill (even wise men get horny)  
To learn about life, the universe and everything

So I asked him where he was going next  
And he said, "A place where my mind I can flex."  
So I took out one of my favorite texts  
About life, the universe, and everything

"Come with me, I'll take you there,"  
I said as I ran my hand through my hair,  
"To answer your questions don't stick your hand in the air,  
Just think about life, the universe, and everything."

So we started with the big picture (We looked at it all)  
And came to the realization that we're really quite small  
Even the tallest building isn't really that tall  
Compared to life, the universe, and everything

Then we looked at our history, we studied the past  
And tried to decide what had died and would last  
And things that really mattered didn't fly by so fast  
And were part of life, the universe, and everything.

We checked out our morals, we peered in at our souls  
We looked at our logic to try to find holes  
And then we took a break to eat food from our bowls  
And forgot about life, the universe, and everything

And after we'd finished he looked up and said,  
"It's all so damned simple once you've used the brains in your head.  
We worry about trivial things, but we're gone when we're dead.  
But not life, the universe, and everything."

So take heart when you're worried or you're all alone  
Everyone's got times when they bitch or they moan  
Somewhere there's a guy with a machine by his phone  
That'll tell you about life, the universe, and everything

But remember that when you give him a call  
The answer may change from spring, summer, or fall  
Time is the key, use it wisely or not at all  
When dealing with life, the universe, and everything



## Connor's Pond

by Carl N. Bohlin

...And their bodies were never found."

The pennies were plunked into the water, one, two, three... They tumbled over and over and over, washed clean and sinking fast. Hank watched as they fell deeper and deeper until they were out of sight. A single tear was beginning to freeze on his pale cheek. He sniffed deeply the cold December air and thought to himself who would be next. Who would Conner's pond devour this year? For it was 1987, and so far there had been no reports of missing children or anyone from Bristol for that matter. It seemed like a lottery in Bristol for those who remembered the headlines. To have twenty years of peace the pond needed to be fed and fed and fed...

By mid-December the Conner's pond had finally frozen over. Usually it was frozen by late November. Evidently, this year's winter was a little milder than those of the past. Bristol was a ski resort town that thrived during the colder months of the year. Without low temperatures there would be no snow, and with no snow there would be no tourism, and without tourism Bristol would be in a world of hurt. It would become depressed as it had back in '47 when one of the warmest winters on record provided only three weeks of snowfall. And it wasn't spread out. It came in one big dump and melted away in one big rush. 1947's heat wave wasn't the only reason Bristol was depressed, however.

The ice on the pond was approximately a foot thick in most spots, but several signs were posted around it warning skaters to be extra cautious and never to skate alone. It was no joke. There had been incidents in the past where people had drowned due to skating on the thin ice of Conner's pond.

Old man Simpson, who had lived in Bristol all his life had some very personal ties to Conner's pond. He didn't get around much anymore, but his memory was still as sharp as it was nearly 60 years ago. He was trusted and respected throughout the small community, yet he mainly kept to himself nowadays. Back in the early to mid 40's he was quite an athlete, winning medals in down-hill skiing and speed skating.

His personal ties to the pond began back in '47 when he lost a brother in an accident. He apparently drowned in the icy depths of Conner's pond when he was walking home from school. It was slightly dark out because of the season and deciding to take a short-cut across the pond would turn out to be the last decision he'd ever make. His tracks were followed in the snow and matched the pair that Hank had on. Old man's real name was Hank...Hank Simpson. When he and his brother were boys and needed shoes, their mother would buy the boys the same brand of sneakers from the same store. They were pretty much the same age, Scotty being two years younger. Hank was 17 at the time, Scotty — 15. His tracks ended at the middle of the pond where there was a patch of cracked thin ice. It had been shattered and the fragments were slowly freezing over the next morning when the Simpsons were out looking for Scotty. He was alone when he fell in because there weren't any other tracks. His body was never found...

Although it seemed his brother was dead, Hank always believed he was in a better place. Skating was always a sport that drew the two brothers closer together. In fact, the bond was so great that Hank vowed never to skate again. It was a tragedy that changed Hank's whole outlook on life. The world was turning rotten, it seemed. The days of a care-free winter-wonderland were being replaced by commercial capitalism. The town lived for it, and so did the rest of the country. Hank could find nothing but sadness in life. It depressed him to see that the times had changed. But some things never changed. The pond was still there and it still scared the old man. It was the one thing Simpson did not trust.

That was a long time ago, and hardly anyone remembered it...except the Simpsons, of course. Hank turned his frustrations into energy by working on his skiing. He excelled at it.

But there were other instances that took place on Conner's pond. In 1967 there was another mysterious drowning accident. The headline of the Bristol Gazette read as follows: "Conner's Pond drowning victims lost...bodies never found. Police suspect foul play." Flipping through his scrapbook, Hank Simpson ran back through time. This was the second time the pond had struck the community.

It was the summer of '67, and there was a drinking party going on at a nearby barn-bash. Two young kids somewhere around 18 or 19 decided to go for a late night swim over at the Conner's pond. A small raft was floating in the middle of the water. It was made out of two-by-fours and 4 large oil drums. Joe remembered the raft while watching a bonfire coming out of the drum outside the barn. He asked Lisa if she would join him. Lisa trusted Joe and agreed to take him up on his offer for the swim.



The two of them walked over the field and into the next acre to find the pond. Joe enticed Lisa into taking her clothes off for the swim by taking his own off and jumping in. She was a little drunk at the time and proceeded to follow Joe's example. Needless to say, nothing physical happened between them except for some innocent kissing and hugging underneath the raft. Although nothing ever happened between them, something did happen to them. Their clothes were found near some shrubs the next day by a group of kids who were coming to the pond to go swimming. Neither Joe nor Lisa were heard from again. The police dragged the pond three times, but still without any sign of the couple.

On the opposite page of his photo album was a picture of his brother Scotty, along with an older clipping from 1947: "Simpson boy lost in the icy depths of Conner's Pond." Time was the only healer that ever helped Bristol. People grew up, or moved away. Generations came and went. Stories and rumors floated around but never really amounted to much. The only real historian on the subject was Old Man Simpson, and he didn't appreciate being bothered by the memory of his lost brother or by the tragedy of the missing swimmers. Hank slammed the scrapbook shut and stood up. Scotty's birthday was coming up in a few days and it would be that time again for Hank to go to the pond and rope the pennies in.

He'd been throwing in a penny for Scotty every year for the past forty years. The two kids from the 60's had been part of the ritual for the past twenty. Since nobody's body was ever recovered, this was one of the only ways that Hank would brave the ice of the pond and walk out to the middle where he would cut a hole as if to ice-fish. He would then drop the pennies into the hole. The first penny, for Scotty, was dated 1947 D. The other two were dated 1967 S. They were for Joe and Lisa.

"Scotty, my brother, what happened to you," the Old Man said as the breath steamed from his lips. "What is it about this cursed pond that sucks people up every 20 years? Where do they go? What becomes of them? Damn this pond!!!" he shouted out. His voice was carried away and was dropped off somewhere else. Nobody heard it, or so it seemed. Old Man Simpson was not afraid. He felt safe being there, for he understood somehow that the pond needed three this time and that he would not be taken, alone.

"Hey Old Man! Watcha doin? Did you catch anything yet? Yeah...we want to fish too." The voices from behind startled Hank and made his heart skip a beat. Hot air steamed out from his lungs. His mouth was wide open as he fell to his knees. "Hey are you all right?" Two young kids — a boy and a girl — ran to the aid of the old man. He began to wave his hands madly in the air.



"Go back! get away..." the words could barely leave his lips. The children did not hear him and finally reached out to touch the old man. It was too late, the ice began to crack and terror began to fill their young and innocent eyes. "The ice is breaking!! Quick! Run! The ice is breaking!!" As the words began to sink into their tiny little heads, the ice had given way and the three of them began to feel the cold water soaking into their clothing. Their bodies were now submerged under the water level of Conner's pond.

The whole time Hank felt as if he were re-living his brother's death. The freezing chill that the water gave, the pain in his chest expanding, and the pity for the two small children was great. As they approached the bottom of the pond it was like they were falling in slow-motion from an airplane. Their arms were suspended by the water and air bubbles were beginning to escape from their mouths. Their hair waved upwardly as they descended deeper. The strange thing was that it was not getting darker as they sank, but lighter. The pressure on Hank's head began to hurt and he was not sure if it was pure hallucination or actual fact at this point. What did it matter, they were drowning and would all be dead soon.

The water was cold and they were now sinking deeper and deeper at an uncontrollable rate. It was as if something were pulling them through the depths of the pond. Unknowingly, they were nearing another surface that appeared to be on the bottom of the Conner's pond. It was still unclear to Hank now, but the pond seemed to have a small opening on the muddy bottom like an open window in which the water from Conner's pond was being sucked out through. Suddenly, the three of them were also sucked through the window and the warmth of the fresh, new water was a relief from the icy depths of the first pond. They all could see the reflections of palm trees and bright sunshine through the clearing water. Finally they were pushed out as if they were dolphins, jumping with their powerful tails. They landed back in the water in what appeared to be another world. They were breathing. They were alive. It was warm.

The threesome swam their way to the shore of the pond and dried themselves in the sunshine. A man approached them from the woods.

"Welcome to the new world, my friends. You have all been chosen. You are fresh. You are reborn. Welcome to paradise. Welcome my brother, Henry..."

Hank stood up. The sand was sticking to his clothes. "Scotty? Is it really you? This cannot be true. I've dreamt of this. I've dreamt of dying and seeing you again. Are we...?"

"Dead?...No, not exactly. You've simply passed through...passed through another dimension. It's quite comfortable, though. I think you'll find it very nice in fact. Please, follow me. There are others I'd like for you all to meet," Scotty explained.

The immigrants marched down the shoreline following Hank's brother. They staggered with almost every step. It was quiet and peaceful. The gentle tide could be heard as it washed the shore's pathway for the three newcomers.

"Henry, I've been waiting for this day for a very long time, yet all along I knew it would happen. It was inevitable. In fact, it would have even been you back in '47. We were always a lot alike, Henry. This world needs people like you and I. Once you've been here long enough, you'll know when it's time to check the ponds for those from the other world," Scotty.

"But we don't want to be here!!" demanded the young girl.

"You have been chosen. Please consider yourselves lucky to have this opportunity," replied Scotty.

"NO!!!" the other one screamed. He began to run back to the pond, trying to jump back in. He was in hysterics. Henry watched as his brother ran after him. He caught up to him in the 3-foot range and brought him ashore. They all walked to the dry sand and sat down. Henry stood back to listen. Scotty explained to everyone the idea behind the new world. The young boy was still breathing hard.

"Look, you cannot go back! The window only opens every 20 years." Scotty looked them all in the eye.

"He's right boys," Hank nodded to Scotty. "The pond took Scotty when he was 15, and it took two more in 1967. It's 1987 now and the three of us are here. It now waits for four more, but not until 2007. It's a curse that we have no control over." said Hank.

But it was not a curse, as Scotty explained. The new world was just like the old world. It had blue skies and warm breezes. It had plenty of food and existed in peace and harmony. It was neither heaven nor hell. It was another dimension — the only differences being that there were no deceitful governments, no tainted religions, no rent to pay, and no wars to fight...only paradise to enjoy. They had all been reborn and would soon be learning the pure trust which acted as law in the new world.



They were led to a beautiful village near the edge of the woods where many people were seen wandering about and working on their land. They were welcomed by Joe and Lisa. Hank was still in shock. He gasped as he shook their hands. The six of them then proceeded up a path to find the statue. Ahead in a circular clearing stood a great, white, marble statue of a dove. On the base of the statue was an engraved message which read, "World peace, in a world where pure trust in the goodness of mankind is given in the hearts of all, for the pond will not accept those who will abide. The windows will shut down on the non-trusted."

"Scotty, what does all of this mean?" asked Hank.

"It simply means that we have all been called for. We are here to start again what had, unfortunately, become an unsafe and unhealthy world. It starts now. It starts here. Ours is not the only pond. There are others with windows just the same. We love it here and would not want to go back for anything. We trust you will feel the same way in 2007. By then you will feel honored to be here and not in a world which no longer exists.





## Previews

by Susan Benson

"You drive, okay?" David says.

I think how he used to demand that he drives whenever we went somewhere together, and how I always teased him about this being his singular male chauvinistic trait.

"All right. Is your leg bothering you again?" I ask, offering him an excuse.

"No," he whispers, pressing his thin, leather key case into my hand. His intense blue eyes lock with mine, insisting on the truth. "No. That's not it."

David gazes pensively out his window as I drive. Flecks of light from passing cars shimmer on his thick, silver streaked hair. When he feels my eyes on him, he turns. The corners of his mouth pull back into soft folds of skin at his cheeks, revealing a gleaming and genuine smile. His nose is slim and straight. His forehead is smooth and high with a slight ridge that deepens the color and keenness of his eyes. He is elegant. I cannot think of him in any way less than this.

We arrive at the Connors' only a few minutes late. They both greet us at the door as always. Playing bridge with them on Sunday nights has become our way of stretching out the weekend. Donna and Brad, like David and I, have a considerable age difference between them, which makes the friendship a lot more comfortable. And we all enjoy the relief of superficial conversation almost exclusively about bidding rules and strategies of bridge. But lately David has grown agitated and inattentive. He'd even mentioned begging off the game tonight, but we couldn't do that at the last moment, we decided.

"I'd kind of like to just sit and listen to some music with you guys tonight," David announces while Brad hunts for cards in the desk drawer.

"What! And deprive Donna and I of our greatest pleasure in life—killing you and Jane at bridge?" Brad is grinning and holding up a box of cards, "Nothin' doin'. I've located the weapons."

"No, really, Brad, I'm serious."

Donna Connors intervenes, sensing David's raw mood.

"All right, David," she says warmly, "let's pick out something you'd like to hear." She's holding David's hand and agreeing with him, "I think it might be a pleasant change."

"We can do both, then," Brad says, scurrying to the stereo. "What shall it be?"



David feels challenged by Brad's compromise. His face flushes as he cannot now recall a single piece of classical music. Not a title nor a composer.

"Well," Brad coaxes, "some Chopin, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky —"

"Yes, Tchaikovsky," David cuts in.

"Which piece?"

"It doesn't matter! Surprise me." David's voice snaps electricity into the room.

"Could I review the bidding again, please?" It is the third time David has asked about the same hand. He bounces his leg nervously under the table.

"Sure, of course," Brad says enthusiastically. "If there's one thing bridge players don't do enough, in my opinion, it's asking to review the bidding. I'm always trying to get Donna to do more of it, right, Hon?"

Donna just cocks her head to one side, shooting a warning glance at Brad. She knows her well-meaning but tactless husband has said too much. Her look goes unnoticed and Brad continues, "Let's see now, it went: one club, pass, one heart —"

"Cut the crap, would you, Brad! I really hate your patronizing me like this," David blasts. "If I lived and breathed bridge like you do, I could remember every bid and card played, too! But who the hell wants to!"

The four of us sit in agonizing silence. I wonder if this will be the end of our last remaining friendship.

Moments later we're at the Connors' door. David's still apologizing and explaining how extremely stressed he's been. Brad and Donna understand, they say. We're all really tired.

David stays in the bathroom long after the shower stops running. I listen, and can hear him swishing creamy whiskers from his razor through water in the basin. Finally, the water gurgles down the drain, and I envision his whiskers there, still clinging to life at the sides of the bowl. The small drawer where he keeps his razor opens and closes. Two metallic slaps against the tile wall tell me he's bent over drying his face without removing the towel from the ring. He does this because he has trouble hanging it back up the way I do. I feel especially close to him, and I wish he would come to bed so that I could hold him, and tell him this. But I know, having watched him many nights through small openings left in the bathroom door — I know that he's standing deathly still, staring at himself as if at a stranger in the mirror.



...

I feel a glow on my cheeks from walking briskly through the old cold of London's jigsawed streets. This is a benevolent cold, I muse. It's like a thermostat control on the heat generated by nearly seven million people competing for life in a space about the size of Maine. Like a dewy, cold poultice that soothes and suspends the decay of the ancient and aging buildings and people it touches.

This trip is going to be good for us. Even though it's business for David, the change of scene and the nights to ourselves will be a relief.

"It's not here, mum," sniffs the clerk.

"But I left it this morning on my way out." I'm sure the room key is not in my purse, but I juggle packages and feel around for it anyway.

"Couldn't I just have a duplicate?" I ask. This is a mistake. I must now suffer a lecture about how duplicate keys are contrary to the hotel's policy. I am curtly reminded that the dropping of keys at the desk when leaving is for my own protection and convenience. The clerk makes a notation that number 256 has been issued a second key. He says something about an additional charge which I only half hear over the rustling of my packages while I run to grab the elevator.

I hear conversation as I approach the door. Then laughter. It's canned laughter coming from the T.V. Could David have beaten me back to the room? I pull off my left glove with my teeth and knock.

"That jerk at the desk!" I huff past David to the unmade bed to unload my packages and my irritation. "He just ASSUMES I've lost my key. I'll bet he's the same clerk who gave it to you. Gerald? I think that was the name on his badge. Short, thin, with a weird little moustache that looks like he fills it in with eyebrow pencil." I notice David. He's been standing there in his underwear. His eyes are red.

"Where have you been?" he asks simply, like he really doesn't know.

"Sightseeing. You know, the castle tour. I mentioned it last night and told you not to expect me until about six, remember?"

"But it's after seven now."

"Yeah, well, despite the incredible romance of sharing my toothbrush, I thought you'd kinda like to have your own. I also got you some aftershave and a hairbrush." I'm dumping the items out of the bags and holding them up for his approval.

David's shoulders sag. I know he is thinking about his shaving kit on the sink at home. He had taken it out of the suitcase to use before leaving for London and forgotten to replace it afterward. He is thinking about the garment bag left in San Francisco, and the time he neglected to check out of the hotel in Chicago. And then there was today.

"When did you finish up at the hospital, anyway?" I try to eliminate concern from my voice. We have come to London so David can observe a new procedure only being done at St. Mark's. "And I can't believe you've been watching T.V. You hate T.V."

David is now seated on the bed. He's been watching me flit about the room putting things away and starting to undress. He catches my hand and pulls me down close beside him on the bed.

"It happened again today," he says.

It feels like a match has been struck in my chest. My insides grow hot.

"We finished up early, just after one. We hadn't stopped for lunch so I headed out to find a nice pub. I don't know how long I walked, but finally I came to a sort of fancy looking one." He gently pushes the hair on one side of my face back behind my ear and follows the curve of my neck with his fingers. "I ate. And when I went back outside, nothing looked familiar. I started down the street in one direction, but that didn't seem right so I changed direction, but that didn't seem right either. I got panicky. I must have gone back and forth I don't know how many times before I thought about hailing a taxi. I could just ask him to take me to the hotel. Yes, The Hotel...I was sweating. I couldn't remember the name of the place. Then I felt the room key card in my pocket. It has the hotel name on it, you know." David smiles wryly. He picks up the new toothbrush from the nightstand where it's laying and taps my head with it. "So, I've been holed up in this bed, with the T.V. for company, waiting for you to take me out."

We cling to each other in a rocking embrace. The canned T.V. laughter is in the background. Later we walk the streets of London together in the dark.

• • •

It is our anniversary and I am to pick David up at his office at six thirty. We have dinner and overnight reservations at The Hotel Canterbury, where we met four years ago, and where we have sentimentally celebrated each anniversary since that meeting.

I savor my afternoon-long preparation. Soak an hour in the tub. Shave my legs, my underarms, pluck my eyebrows. Apply lotion, powder, or perfume to every inch of my being. Curl my hair, and polish my finger and toe nails — I use the clear, colorless kind that is his favorite. At five o'clock I slip on his favorite black silk dress. It's the one with the button flap over the left leg. I leave the last two buttons at the bottom unfastened. A few more strokes of mascara and some shimmery lip gloss and I'm ready to go. I check myself in the long mirror in the entry way one last time. I smile, pleased with what I have done, and I'm high with romantic expectations.



When I get to his office I find him at his desk, engrossed in a recent medical publication. He extends his arm to me, but without looking up he urges, "Come here, honey, and listen to this." He reads slowly, carefully, "According to the most recent studies, a person with a family history of Alzheimer's disease stands a ten percent chance of inheriting it. That means that same person has a ninety percent chance of NOT inheriting the disease. And", he continued, finally looking up at me, "they're working on tests that can tell whether that ten percent chance even exists in a person." Now he is on his feet embracing me, "Isn't that great, sugar!" he whispers in hushed excitement. He holds my face tilted toward his and repeats the words, "a ninety percent chance that I won't have Alzheimers." He pulls me closer, his arms tightening around my waist. "You look gorgeous, by the way. Let's go celebrate."

...

We see her before she sees us. She's doddering back to her room, head bent over the plastic bag she carries. Spit runs from her mouth in long foamy strands. Her eyes stare after it, watching the foam dissipate as it mingles with older saliva in the bag. David's grip weakens about my hand as he groans, almost inaudibly, in anguish at the sight of his mother. And now I feel him converting his anguish to spendable anger with faster and heavier steps toward her. "Damn it, Mother! You don't really have to do that — you can stop that. Why do you drool like that!" She lifts empty eyes to her son saying, "Well...", in a vague, questioning tone. Like she had a reason all ready to give, but can't recall it. Then her eyes liven in recognition of us and the tension lessens as she begins to speak.

"Well, I'll be damned! Where the hell've you all been?...I told 'em you'd come...where've you been?" She turns away suddenly, not caring for an answer to her question, and begins walking back down the hall, with her head bent over her bag, "Well, come on and I'll show ya the rest of the people around here...and me lookin' like this...can't I get some teeth?...that ol' bar soap — they wash my hair with it so now it don't have no shine..." She's found her reflection in a glass window embedded with chicken wire. David swallows hard as she traces the image of her frazzled hair with trembling fingers. "What d'ya suppose happened to me?" she asks.

We coax her from the window saying that we'd like her to try the new robe we've bought her.

"Hope! Hope!" she shouts to the head nurse who's been watching us from down the hall. "Come 'ere an' meet the kids. I told you they'd come." Kate introduces us to the nurse as if for the first time. Hope gently reminds her that we've all met before. But Kate does not respond. As she sits down



on a folding chair in the hall, David and I notice the familiar change in expression that signifies his mother's drift to some distant memory.

"People don't have t' know I'm from Kentucky. They never do guess it," she insists. Kate had been obsessed with correcting her accent and concealing her impoverished youth. She had accomplished both. People had considered her a refined and beautiful woman. David was always so proud that she was his mother. He tells me this often. Perhaps it is a way to remind himself of the fact. But now she seems ironically imprisoned in the memory and manner of that past.

"They said Alma Carter was a slut, you know...But I was the slut..." she stops, choking back tears, "...And everyone always said Benny had such pretty legs...Didn't your dad have pretty legs..." she declares rather than asks this question, tears winding down her craggy face. They drop against the side of the plastic bag and mix with her saliva. "Did I kill him, too?" she sobs, "I musta...or else why don't he come see me in this place?"

David is gentle now. His anger replaced by guilt as he sees her torment. "No, no, you didn't kill anyone, Mother —"

"THERE'S THAT OL' MAN THAT KEEPS GETTIN' IN MY BED!" She jumps from the chair with a vengence that coagulates her tears, and starts toward the man who has an eerie resemblance to her; the face and bearing common to the demented. "They took away my trash can. Said I can't go throwin' it at people, but how else can I get him outa there?...Benny had such pretty legs. Everybody said so...Nobody'll help me. So now I don't have no trash can...Then they don't change the sheets after he gets in it! They just say, 'Go on, Kate, just go on an' get back in bed. It's nice 'n cool in there...'"

She starts down the hall to do just that. David and I stand there a moment watching her, considering what to do. Then she turns back and calls to her son, "Well...you comin'?"

## THE BALLAD OF HENRY JAMES AND THOMAS WOLFE

or Gunfight at the Verily In a Not Unsatisfactory State of Affairs

Corral

by R. Saalfrank

Weee-ee-ell, twasn't but in May —  
The start o' spring in these parts —  
When old Henry James caught young Tom Wolfe  
Raidin' the local literary arts.

Now Tom dared Henry to a literary duel —  
"I'm the natal genius here," he started to bawl —  
Then Henry called Tom a big-collared ass  
An' Main Street was cleared fer the brawl.

The two took their places at the crack o' dawn,  
Though it weren't till dusk they met face to face,  
'Cuz Henry James, true to form, took a long, convoluted, roundabout  
way  
that took in half the town,  
An' young Tom couldn't find the place.  
(he was *lost*)

"Give me your Aristotelian best," whined Tom —  
He had his classic allusions drawn.

Henry replied, "Might I, declare, emphatically, thus I having had little  
recourse in a matter so incident, to a future of matters, more  
resplendent in their respective spheres as that which would soothe  
the most monstrous, of barren, beastly souls but still no longer a  
pitiful crier of truths yet soon evident, and I shall, will!"  
An' the fight was on.

Tom's neck swelled like a mule with the draughts:

"Return, o angel, to the black Parnassan heights from which you fell, a  
leaf

bound by the hills — as quick to strike in pleasure as in rage, an  
ember flaming cinder your secret soul to the Theban glories — o  
fire, o soul enough!"

"And you," said Henry, "in eminence, of too hasty yet never unanticipated fame, give chase, hopelessly the churning depths for that, having long hidden with disdainful pleasure, the unattainable pride of innocence, whilom you so feverishly and, with pain of fearful heart, dwell of your soul (the mythic, stalking beast,)"  
Then the name-callin' started gettin' rough.

"Your brother wears army boots!" Tom shouted,  
But Henry, bein' Freudian, knew what he really meant —  
"You keep your penile deprivation fantasies to yourself!" he screamed;  
"Tea and crumpets, tea and crumpets!" jumpin' up an' down, Tom went.

Symbolism flew hard an' fast;  
Tom called Henry a Tory truffle-head,  
While Henry struck back with some o' his stunnin' dialogue —  
"You don't believe that, if you did you wouldn't wonder," he said.

Well, out come Tom's sister,  
An' we all drew our breath:  
Tom, bein' the autobiographical sort, was bringin' out his family  
To talk old Henry to death.  
(or at least make him neurotic)

Tom's pa brought a marble angel,  
Which Tom's ma started swingin' around;  
Tom's brothers started throwin' stones,  
But ol' Henry stood his ground.  
(I reckon he was used to heavy  
metaphor flyin' around)

Tom brought out his girlfriend an' Aunt Jane —  
'Thout end they came a-runnin':  
Granma, Barber Joe, a lady on the porch,  
The milkman, the mailman, Great-uncle Sunnin,

God showed up with Teddy Roosevelt —  
Through it all Henry stood stock-still —  
Attila, Bovary, twenty local barkeeps,  
The piano teacher, Moses an' Buffalo Bill,



Aristotle, Euripides, Tom's chiropractor, Gandhi,  
Ester Sloane, Thomas Sneale, Oona Strong —  
Tom was pagin' through the phone book  
When we realized somethin' was wrong.

Tom was out o' characters!  
Pleased with genuine creativity, he started to shake.  
"Vicum tu," he screamed an' froze —  
Tom had made a grammatical mistake!  
(it's supposed to be "Vicum te")

As Tom fell, fatally embarrassed,  
A literary oak struck at the roots,  
Henry strolled on over with his final blow:  
"Aristotle wears army boots."

We knew that Tom was gone —  
He lay there perfectly silent;  
But then ol' Henry started too t' shake —  
He wasn't used to much excitement.

He blanched an' staggered an' clawed his chest  
An' with a wheezy "Nay" fell in the road;  
His blood was oozin' out in fancy rivulets, formin' curlicues an' commas  
an' such,  
While Tom's just flowed and' flowed an' flowed.  
(an' flowed an' flowed an' flowed)

The town was so quiet  
With both our literati dead,  
Someone called Doc Hemingway for his opinion:  
"They're dead," was all he said.

*epilogue:*

Well, Tom an' Henry are lyin' in the graveyard that,  
With the sagebrush comin' to leaf  
An' the crabgrass startin' to cover the epitaphs —  
Which are (thank God) mercifully brief.

## Golden Beauty

by Todd Michael Wilms

The poet never sleeps,  
he dreams  
of days and nights gone past  
Summertime —  
full of love and wonder  
Autumn —  
the flame ignites  
Winter —  
the fire is burning  
never to go out  
He dreams of friends and affection  
as his heart beats faster,  
faster as he thinks of one  
full of mystery  
like the colors of the spectrum,  
his emotions show through

She is there, waiting  
the friend and lover  
in a world they have created  
The sun shines through her hair  
Pure Beauty with arms outstretched,  
I run to her  
and though I may fall along the way,  
I reach her in the end

The poet never sleeps,  
he dreams...  
of the Beauty he sees in her

## The "Eve" Syndrome

by Kristin Koessler

It would seem that woman should not have been made in the first production of things. For the Philosopher (Aristotle) says that "the female is a misbegotten male." But nothing misbegotten or defective should have been made in the first production of things. Therefore woman should not have been made at that first production.

— St. Thomas Aquinas

In lying, men are commoners, women are aristocrats.

— Abel Hermant

Among all the wild beasts, there is none more harmful than the woman.

— St. John Chrysostom

There is a good principle which created, light and man, and an evil principle which created chaos, darkness and woman.

— Pythagoras

Throughout history, inequality between the sexes, has progressively developed because of the sexist tradition that began with Adam and Eve during creation. From the moment Eve persuaded Adam to eat the forbidden fruit with her, men have used this as a trigger and just cause for their unjust treatment of woman. Even today with new evolution theories and changing religious beliefs, men still have a sinful, evil image of woman embedded in their subconscious. Not only is this evident in mere man/woman interaction and competition such as at the work place, home and school, but in the media. Television, radio, books, magazines, and newspapers are actually helping to promote this evil, distrustful, inferior, lying, image of women. According to the media of today, woman is seductive and uses her sexuality to try to gain power and corrupt men.



The advertisements in today's magazines are a prime example. It is difficult to find an ad that is straightforward, honest, and centered on the actual product they are trying to sell. Each advertisement is different but they all have the same message: the product they are selling will make you more desirable and sensuous, etc. and that in turn will make you more beautiful and sexy. Their product will give you the sexual power to dominate, persuade, captivate and manipulate the male sex. The idea that women are intelligent individuals capable of achieving power and success through intelligence, education, and work is completely ruled out. According to these advertisements, sex is power. With it they can dominate, manipulate and weaken the male sex.

Women are also being downplayed in writing. Women want to be taken seriously and treated equally. They want to be respected for their intelligence not their bodies. However, breezing through many current women's magazines, you find some shocking titles:

"The New Seductress" <sup>1</sup>

"The Joy-No-Kidding-of Sex" <sup>2</sup>

"Daring Little Dating Looks" <sup>3</sup>

"Boss Lady-pretty power principles to bank on" <sup>4</sup>

"Clothes Minded: Clever Cleavage Tricks-Three Show-and-Don't Tell Looks; Evening Add-Ons You Can't Do Without; Have a Fling With a Wild Thing" <sup>5</sup>

"Twelve Types of Sexual Wives" <sup>6</sup>

"The Lady They Call Madame Sex" <sup>7</sup>

This does not have anything to do with women's abilities or intellect. It gives the message to woman that they can be as intelligent and as hard working as they like but they must never forget that this is a man's world. Man is the superior beast and the only way to overcome him is with the power of sex. With sex the woman is in control.

Is this really true or is it just deeply imbedded subliminals? Do people really believe sexuality is the key? Do people really believe that women are evil and use their sensual powers to manipulate and corrupt men? Look at some of the most publicized women of the year: Fawn Hall, Jessica Hahn, Donna Rice. They all have one thing in common. They are generally viewed as corrupters or destroyers and are all accused of using their good looks and sexuality to gain publicity or promotion and to protect, control, or manipulate their men in some way. Vanna White, one of the biggest household words today, gained her publicity by parading across our T.V. screen every evening charming "Wheel of Fortune" viewers with her coy smile, attractive figure and revealing clothes. In the past women such as Marilyn Monroe, Fanne Fox, Mata Hari, Cleopatra, Delilah, Scarlett O'Hara, Madonna, and Viki Morgan all used sexuality to gain success, fame, power, and/or fortune.

Ever since Eve first offered Adam a snack, women have been capable of destroying men through temptation. Delilah, Cleopatra, and Mata Hari-powerful, smart, gals all-knew that the way to a man's heart is not only through his stomach."<sup>8</sup>

Women today must make a decision. They want to be treated as equals and respected, yet society and the media tells them they can only do it through sex manipulation. What does a woman do when success today is almost always linked with a woman's sexuality instead of her intellect and true natural abilities? Society should make an effort to undo the underlying "Eve" syndrome by following Elaine Morgan's suggestion in her essay "The Man-Made Myth:"

"It is time to approach the whole thing again right from the beginning: this time from the distaff side, and along a totally different route."

It is time for men to stop downgrading women and for women to stop encouraging inequality through giving in to the sex power trap. Inequality has formed partly because of the male prejudice but is also the fault of women's insecurity.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Scovell, Nell; Mademoiselle Nov. 1987
2. Bernikow, Louise; Mademoiselle Nov. 1987
3. Mademoiselle Nov. 1987
4. Mademoiselle Nov. 1987
5. Mademoiselle Nov. 1987
6. Fox, James, Cosmopolitan, Nov. 1987
7. Cosmopolitan, Nov. 1987
8. Scovell, Nell; Mademoiselle, Nov. 1987



## The River

by Dawn Hutchison

Those were the best days of summer. Those when the thermometer outside our kitchen window reached 95 degrees, even in the shade of the walnut tree. After breakfast Dad would go back upstairs and change into his long, striped swimming trunks. This was an unspoken signal to the rest of us. We would spend the day on the river.

Mississippi was one of the first words I learned to spell. Well, at least, one of the first words with more than two syllables. M-I-crooked letter-crooked letter-I-crooked letter-crooked-I-P-P-I. That was when I was about 5 years old. It wasn't until second grade that I actually realized what "crooked letter" meant. By then we had developed a much more sophisticated spelling method. M-I-Double S-I-Double S-I-P-P-I. It was a lot faster to say, too.

Anyway, my brother and I would leave the table while Mom cleared it, and we would go to our room to put on our swimsuits. Mom had a new sewing machine so she made everyone matching suits. They were red and blue with patches of white stars on the blue stripes. Mine was a two piecer. I really hated wearing a two piece suit because my belly hung out and I was embarrassed of what my mother insisted was "baby fat". I wore the suit anyway since Mom made it and I didn't want to hurt her feelings.

While my brother and I got ready, Mom packed lunchmeat sandwiches and fruit into her big green bag. My dad's job was to pack grape pop and Huber beer into the cooler. In the summertime there were always cases of cheap beer stacked along our garage wall. Dad couldn't pasup a good deal. He also said that cheap beer tastes good when it's hot and you're on the river. I didn't really like the taste of beer, but sometimes Dad would let me take a sip of his. I would wince at the bitter liquid as it slid down my throat, and then smack my lips, pretending that it tasted good.

We loaded the colorful bags and buckets into our blue station wagon, and piled in, sunglasses and towels in hand. The ride to the river took 10 minutes, but it seemed forever to me and my brother.

To entertain ourselves, we would lean so close to the window that our sunglass lenses clicked against the glass. We watched, eyes darting with the passing scenes. The cattle were sweaty and swatted the flies with their brushlike tails. The farmhouses grew closer and closer together until the street widened and we passed by small, square houses with tiny windows and tiny front yards. They were grey houses with grey yards except for yellow plastic pinwheels or pink flamingos stuck in the grey soil. The neon signs for pubs, taverns, bars flashed even in the bright morning light. And my brother and I watched as the "river rats" moved mechanically through the grey houses, yards, and doorways under neon signs.

Finally we bounced over the old railroad tracks and turned into BOB'S MARINA. I was always proud that my father's name was the same as the man's who owned the marina. Bob from the marina even wore a captain's hat just like my dad's. I gave it to him for his birthday. It was dark blue with shiny gold braid. The hat made Dad's blue eyes even bluer; and he said that he liked his hat because it made him feel like a real captain.

We tumbled from the station wagon and quickly loaded the boat. I had to be careful on the dock. If I didn't step on the rungs just right then my thongs would catch between the boards and pull right off my feet. I walked slowly, watching the water through the slats as I passed.

My brother and I had to wear big orange lifejackets on the river. They gave me a rash under my neck where the sand and friction scratched my skin. Sometimes we tried to untie the strangling bow, but Mom and Dad invariably caught us and made us tie them again.

There were plenty of other rules, too. The list included no food in the boat, no muddy or sandy feet or limbs in the boat, and no pop without a tupperware sipper-lid. Dad enforced these rules, and they were simply followed. I guess I never really knew what would happen if I ate potato chips in the boat, but I didn't want to ask, either. It wasn't that Dad was an especially clean person; his desk and dresser top were always scattered with papers, key chains, spare change, match books, rubber bands, paper clips, and seafood recipes clipped from the newspaper. The fact was that our boat was only cleaned once a year. It was an annual event.

In May at the beginning of the boating season, the whole family would spend a Sunday afternoon cleaning the boat. Dad parked it in the driveway just out from under the walnut tree. We scrubbed the waterline with SOS pads, took brushes to the blue vinyl seats, and windexed the windows. I had eczema on my hands so I couldn't clean with any soap. Mom let me hose down the seats and hull when they were finished washing. I held the cool hose in my hands and felt the water pulsing inside of the tube. I sprayed until the foamy lather washed away into the gravel of the driveway.

The boat looked great when we were done. The sun reflected off the shiny



chrome surfaces and warmed the smooth vinyl seats. But after a week in the muddy water, the bottom was already thick with river scum.

That's probably why we had so many rules about the inside of the boat. Dad also said that food crumbs in the boat would attract mice, who would then attract snakes. My brother and I would nod with innocent awe, but we didn't really believe him. We thought it was just another one of those scare tactics that parents think so effective on their children. Anyway, we didn't believe him until one day. Mom saw a snake coiled up on some lifejackets stored under the seat. She thought it was one of my brother's rubber snakes so she reached down to pick it up. When it moved, she screamed and I'll never forget her face. Her face was as pale as the belly of a clam and she had this look like she'd just swallowed raw fish. My father lifted my brother and me to the dock in one swift motion. Then he and Mom scampered out of the boat. We just stood on the dock, looking at that grey and brown snake lying right there on top of our lifejackets.

We didn't take the boat out again for about two weeks. Dad said it was because of his work schedule, but I knew that he was worried about that snake. When we did go out again, my brother sat on the seat over the spot where the snake had been. He declared that he wasn't afraid of snakes and he would protect us. No one argued.

My brother and I liked to go to a sandbar to play on the pebbly shore. The sand was warm and smooth under our feet and in our hands. We would build whole empires and dig a deep canal around the sand buildings, letting the muddy water rush through the city.

Sometimes we would wade through the cloudy water, searching the bottom with our toes. Searching for large river clams with thick shells. We put them in our cooler, next to the leftover pop, to be taken home and ground into chowder. The wet insides of the shells were smooth and magical. They shimmered shades of green and blue and pink and lavender. But as they dried in the sun, the surface turned a chalky white, and we threw them back into the river.

Sometimes we just sat at the water's edge to look at the river and to feel the waves of passing barges. With each surge of water, the sand would wash up, becoming trapped in our swimming suits. It was gritty and scratchy against our skin, but we didn't mind much.

My Dad loved to waterski. He would do tricks for us behind the boat. At first we would just watch, but he held the rope in his teeth or between his knees until we screamed and applauded. He looked so funny when he did those tricks. Like a flightless bird, with his arms spread wide for balance. He hardly ever fell. But when he did, we acted concerned and then laughed at how silly he looked with his skis and limbs tossing into the water. My mom smiled as she watched my father ski or us playing the sand. She just sat on her towel at the water's edge, toes dangling into the cool water, smiling as she watched.



September was the best time to be on the river. The palisades were orange and gold with the Autumn leaves along the cliffs, and the sun was big and low in the sky. The water was stiller in September, so the sun and trees reflected on the smooth surface.

Dad didn't mind that the air was colder: he kept right on skiing until his lips were transparent purple, and he shook with the cold. We would watch him from the boat as Mom drove and my brother and I snuggled under a damp, sandy towel. There was something unspoken in us.

We listened to the slow slurping of the water against the shore. Listened to the stillness of the warm, yellow air. The hum of a motorboat drifted by and the wind held the voice until the boat was long past, and then reluctantly released the tone into the cool breeze. The birds, black against the sky, flew in large flocks, their wings pulsing silently.

But no one ever said anything. My Dad would just ski a little harder, and the rest of us build in the sand, splash in the water, or laugh just a little harder.

The river smelled in September. It always smelled, but we never noticed it until September. My mom said it was because the water gets so warm that it makes the green algae grow. It covers the surface with a filmy layer of green. The smell is like fish and moist peat moss.

It was in September that I liked to just close my eyes and feel the air press against my face as we raced across the water. I would just close my eyes, and breathe the river.

And let it lift me, up over the burning palisades.

## Trivial Matters

by Kristin C. Koessler

I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which make a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

— Martin Luther King Jr.

In the essay "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr. suggests that the Catholic Church is ignoring racial and segregation issues because they have "no real concern" and instead have become committed to legislating morality on trivial matters. One matter that the church is pouncing upon is artificial reproduction. The Vatican's "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its origin and on the dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day," deems it "un-Christian" to use "artificial" means of reproduction such as artificial insemination, frozen embryos, in vitro, test tube babies or surrogate motherhood. According to the Vatican "sterility is certainly a difficult trial," but stands firm: "Marriage does not confer upon the spouses the right to perform those natural acts which are per se ordered to creation."<sup>1</sup> This new doctrine is causing many Catholics to make tough religious and personal decisions and as a result are developing enormous guilt and outrage.

One reason people are outraged is because the church is sending mixed signals. On one hand the church is saying that the purpose of sex is procreation. However, on the other hand "if a doctor can help two people who can't of their own vocation conceive, why not?...Now infertile married couples who are willing to conceive without enjoying these pleasures are being denied."<sup>2</sup> This is very difficult especially since the Catholic Church puts such a strong emphasis on having children and creating "families."

Another reason this doctrine upsets many young couples is the fact that if they do use artificial means of reproduction they are sinners. "This announcement makes me a mortal sinner; it means I can't take the sacraments."<sup>3</sup> This puts a lot of guilt and social pressures upon those who are considering or who have already undergone artificial means of reproduction. Catholics are afraid not only of carrying the sin themselves but possibly forcing their children to carry them as well. One young Catholic mother states, "I won't like it, years down the road, if I want to send my children to Catholic school and they're taught that their parents committed a sin in having them."<sup>4</sup>

Many Catholics are just plain confused. They do not understand the sin involved with creating life; "The Church can condemn abortion but how can it condemn giving life?"<sup>5</sup> Even if artificial means are used, is it so morally wrong if the purpose is to bring happiness? to bring life? to allow infertile couples to become parents? "It's God who gave us this medical technology," the Catholics argue.

Catholics everywhere are being torn apart by this new doctrine. Many young, devout and otherwise perfect Catholics are painfully considering leaving the Church because they are in bitter disagreement. Disagreement over what...the way a human life is brought into this world? After examining this issue and seeing the intensity of the passions it is easy to understand Martin Luther King Jr.'s frustration. The Catholic Church is concerned with the social issues of today, however, they tend to concentrate their efforts on trivial matters such as artificial reproduction. The Catholic Church would rather bicker about how to better it and promote harmony between the beings that are already alive and living here.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Orth, Maureen
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.



## Black As Coal

by Dawn Hutchison

My great-grandfather was a coal miner. He lived in Roanoke, Illinois where he raised 11 children in a house close to mine. The slag from the mine was mounded into huge piles, extending several hundred feet up into the sky. These mountains were as black as the coal from which they came and they were called jumbos. A track was built up the side of the jumbo in order to transport more material to the top of the mound. My great-grandfather was a supervisor and was the first to enter the mine. He made sure it was safe and that there was air for the men to breathe. The mules used to transport the coal and slag lived underground and were blind from living in darkness. In the summertime children played on the jumbo, as if it was a pile of sand. The mules were brought up from the mines in the summer, and lived in the care of local farmers. The children rode on the strong backs of the mules, but the animals had to be led since they could not see.

Climb the jumbo, children.  
run and slide  
down  
into the dark, dark grains  
until it stains your thin, young limbs,  
painting your cheeks a chalky black.

Climb the jumbo, children.  
play in the slag your father drew,  
—cart by blind muled cart.  
And play in the soil of your father's sweat,  
of your father's blood,  
of your father's life.

Play in the mountain  
your mother wet with tears,  
and mold your castles  
with the darkened grains.  
And watch  
as she alone calls you home, children,  
wringing her hands  
in an apron black.

## Grace

by Leslie Sack

The warm air dried the tears off my face. At that moment I began to realize how long a year is. The neighborhood cat scampered out from underneath the wooden steps. I finished smoking my last cigarette before I went back inside. The smell of the smoke lingered on my cotton scarf and mixed with my Paris perfume. I was ready to travel — to move on. I thought back on my year and was proud to not have the possibility of suicide on my mind any longer. The people I stayed with had given me more love than my own parents had in a long time. Finally it felt okay to be with other people and to share myself. Why don't I remember those long winter nights of playing solitaire and lying on my bed listening over and over to the song that my friends made for me before I left home?

I would knit while she would weave at her loom. She would make coffee and we would eat cookies and talk some more. The couch was red wool and itchy on my back when the sun came streaming in. The smell of coffee stayed in the air whenever she reopened the thermos lid. I drank so much that my cheeks would quiver. I shared my anxieties about the future with her and accepted the warmth that she felt for me.

Jan Frode's glasses kept sliding down his nose and he kept pushing them back up with his wrist. Camel cigarettes were kept in his front shirt pocket. Engineering school wasn't fun for him because he knew that teaching children would be more fulfilling to him. He and Torkel studied together but it was always Torkel that stayed up past midnight to finish his three page long physics questions. Torkel's face was age sixteen and his seriousness equalled that of a fifty-year-old professor, but his body and devotion were alluring to me.

I laughed at the jokes I didn't understand. I couldn't figure out why they always had to make fun of the Swedes. Torkel and Jan Frode hadn't arrived so I helped tear off the half frozen shrimp tails and heads. I gulped down the extra saliva that came into my mouth and swallowed more wine. The three of us took off our shoes, turned up the stereo, and danced the jazz routine we had learned the day before.

Torkel's brown eyes were staring across the room but I kept speaking to him. My mohair sweater was making me sweat and I had to restrain myself from putting my arm around him. Merete smiled and then laughed as she filled his glass for the fifth time. My cheeks hurt from smiling too much.



I glanced at his tan wrist, at the loose fist he made, and felt the orange glow of the dawn. He hadn't touched me once. My prayer to disappear wasn't answered so I decided to hide away in the bathroom. As my feet touched the cold wooden floor my arm hairs stood on end and I sucked in my stomach. My blood pumped and pushed until fast breaths came. The flash of white light forced me to see my reflection of confusion in the mirror.

We ate the bon voyage cake with our hands. I knew that I would miss sitting on the couch. I stared at Torkel who was staring out of the window. Jan Frode pulled out a cigarette and walked out of the compartment. I turned on my walkman and listened to Christopher Cross sing love songs.

She sat next to me with her feet on the seat and hugged her knees. I nodded, "yes". I mumbled, "yes" and I nodded, "yes". She wasn't sure she could stand traveling with her lover for a month. I crawled up and slept on the baggage rack next to the ceiling.

I couldn't tell which direction I was facing or how I could get out of the train compartment. The darkness pressed in on me. I felt Jan Frode's hand on the vinyl armrest next to me and Torkel breathed in time to the music in his dream. There were no rocking motions or clicking sounds to calm me. I didn't want to put my head on Jan Frode's shoulder. The heat became increasingly stifling; my lower back ached and the train seat pressed hard against my butt. I lay down on the floor — the air felt cooler but the floor was harder and dirtier than my seat. I dreamt that a man was chasing me through the train.

We had taken turns carrying the three foot long french bread so by now about a foot of it was already eaten. The warm Camembert cheese and bottle of cheap French red wine were in my shoulder bag. It felt good to sit down in the grass, drink the wine from the bottle and eat mouthfuls of bread with chunks of broken off cheese. It was the best part of the day. As we walked out of the park, we watched a man doing tai chi next to a statue of the three graces.

They watched the soccer game on the television in the hotel lobby. The cafe I walked into served only espresso. The machines made a whirring sound, like the rhythm of ceiling fans. I sat down outside and peered in at the white counter. The dark haired mens' bodies floating above it. The dark haired servers were making a dance of rotating progression; they started at one end of the counter and turned twice before they handed the foaming, steaming, untouchable cups to the inattentive customers. My white pantsuit blended into the fence-like white painted chair. As I turned to look at the people sitting next to me, my legs touched the steel of the curved table leg. The lady next to me had no arms.



Four Italians were looking into our compartment, wanting to have seats. None of us had taken Italian, but I knew some Spanish. The curves of the mother's long black hair with streaks of gray, her voluptuous figure. It was obvious that her six-year-old daughter would look the same way in about twenty years. While the mother slept, the girl made us laugh when she imitated her mother's grunting. Julio, the ten-year-old son, was trying his best to keep the family pride alive by attempting English words. His father smiled from beneath his mustache and bald head. I pulled out my sketch pad so that we could communicate with the children. The devious girl drew scribbles of sailboats and happy blue ball-point faces, the boy drew a car and the rest of us drew dancers, peace doves and people falling down.

The sun was setting as we walked on board. It felt like we were defecting; we had our passports checked and had to sign two official looking papers. White stark lights. No carpeted floors. No scenic lookout from inside. Bare soft brown plastic floor all around. Rotating brown chairs that are only comfortable for fat ladies with no butt bones. We drank beer and ate the crushed apple streudel. The back deck had a view of the water but there was barely space left; bodies were strewn everywhere, like living corpses. I marked out my territory by crawling in a square on the black steel deck. My sleeping bag became wet from the gathered mist. I imagined myself sinking into the depths of the indigo sky as I listened to Christopher Cross whine about love in a beautiful setting. I felt a body next to me move.

The cab driver couldn't speak English. We didn't let him know that we didn't have enough cash to get us to our destination. He yelled profanities at us and demanded money. We were rescued by a handsome middle-aged Greek man smoking a cigar — he wanted to rent us a room.

A "strenuous" schedule: get up, go to the grocery store, eat jam, bread, cheese, and warm seven-up, walk two miles downhill to the green clear water, drink carbonation and stare at tanned nude bodies, float in saltwater, fall in the waves, make sandcastles, walk up the hill, shower, slab on lotion, nap for an hour, dress in clothes that wouldn't put our sunburns in pain, walk to the main restaurant drag, eat Greek salad and pasta, drink huge beers, go out dancing, pass out in the hotel room. Repeat.

The brown dirt road had Swedish tourists driving past rented mopeds. Some days we sang Norwegian folk songs but today it was just the slaps of our thongs and the taste of dirt from the clouds of dust. I continued to sweat.

Jan Frode and Torkel didn't take off their swimming suits so I felt strange about taking off mine. I would roll the top down while they had their eyes closed and then slip it back on when we would go up to get a drink. Only Jan Frode would look at me in the eye when I was caught with my top down.

They didn't know that I had taken their picture; their tanned bodies glistened with oil and their faces were placed in frozen smiles. They lay side by side with their straw mats underneath them and their pseudo-polo tee shirts were tucked under their heads. The white sand caressed the shape of their arms and legs. Their breathing was as peaceful as the sound of the waves.

My sunburn didn't turn brown; it just made me feel like a living heat wave. First, lotion on the legs; next the chest and arms; followed by the face and, finally, the impossible back. I didn't ask either of them to help me; they rubbed each others' backs.

Two sixteen-ounce bottles of dark beer went well with the rich pasta in cheese and tomato sauce. The Greek salad was too small but looking down on the ocean and the rooftops filled me up. My coherence declined with the last rays of day. It was annoying to have to keep going to the bathroom; I was wearing my white pantsuit. The three shoulder buttons got smaller as my hands seemed twice their normal size. I kept twirling a copper coin between my thumb and forefinger and I had a cigarette for the first time since we had started out on the trip.

I listened to the sound of my heels clicking on the pavement. We sat in the middle of the street holding hands and looking at the stars. My forehead wrinkled as I squinted to block out the excess light. My neck muscles ached from bobbing my head while I was dancing. The words "let's have a good time tonight, let's party all night tonight" wouldn't leave my mind. I could still taste the vodka and feel the heat that had surrounded me on the dance floor. Jan Frode told me about his family and his frustrations with love. He told me that he had noticed my love for Torkel. I nodded. He mumbled some words that I couldn't understand and then kissed my lips.

I tried to concentrate on the ticking of the clock. My head was spinning. The wall to my left had never seemed so friendly. I said, "I wonder where he is." Jan Frode didn't answer; he had asked me the same question two minutes earlier. I couldn't force myself to breathe deeply and pretend that I was falling asleep.

Torkel said he couldn't remember how many bottles of oozo a Swede had bought him. Jan Frode was silent. The eggs slid down my throat and I kept putting honey into my tea so that I wouldn't have to look up. A chunky American girl said "Hi Torkel" as she walked by.

I had to wait half an hour before my train left so we went into the cafeteria for some coffee. I stared at my palms and kept feeling the warmth of the cup. Torkel barely hugged me and Jan Frode put his arm around me as he reassured me that I would have a good trip. I bought a postcard with a picture of a man holding a dove in his hands.



I concentrated on looking up words I didn't know. My red pocket dictionary was beginning to fall apart; the white cardboard was showing through and pages from the middle were falling out. The batteries in my walkman were dead. A man in a pin-striped blue suit looked into my compartment.

His lover stood on the platform and he leaned out of the window. He brushed his hand lightly across her right cheek. She bit her lower lip and lowered her eyes. Her flowing blonde hair encircled her stiff body. His shoulders pulled at the seams of his coat as he reached out to try to kiss her. They locked fingers. The train started to move and they had to let go. He sat down across from me and read the newspaper.

Christine wasn't there to meet me. I called her up and found out that the name of the town was the same as hers, but her town was forty kilometers away. I had to spend the night; my eyes drooped and my body sagged underneath the weight of my backpack. The manager of the youth hostel wouldn't give me any other help than throwing a list of hotels in the area at me. I had enough coins to make two phone calls. Both places I called were full, so I decided to knock on a door across the street. I rang the bell and a man with a beard answered the door. I put on my "I am scared and alone" look. I said, "I am in a desperate situation" and he replied with "Come in, I couldn't refuse you a warm bed and food because I spent months of my life hitchhiking in America and everyone there treated me well." I bought him and his wife flowers.

The mist kissed my face and I stayed standing in the same place long enough to know how I felt. My eyes were as wide open as they go and the water on my eyelashes made me notice every blink. I looked out at the waves, felt the wind on my body and heard the hood of my jacket flapping behind me. I could feel my heart beat in my throat — beating in time to the waves beating against the sides of the boat. It was the one time in my life that it felt like it would be all right to die.



