"... To be a poet means essentially to see, but mark well, to see in such a way that whatever is seen is perceived by the audience just as the poet saw it. ... A student has essentially the same task as the poet: to make clear to himself, and thereby to others, the temporal and eternal questions which are astir in the age and in the community to which he belongs."

Henrik Ibsen, "Speech to the Norwegian Students, September 18, 1874."

On these pages you have some of the responses Butler University students offer to Ibsen’s challenge.
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This issue of Manuscripts is respectfully dedicated to Dr. Roy Marz.
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*Freshman Writing
Speak not of age-nor love-nor death
nor untimely red red rose.
Cross that stereotyped horizon and unravel eternity's circle
to form an infinite line—

Look beyond the raised horse's head and past the orbs of grandeur.
Darken the thunderbolt of Zeus-
let Dante rest in a created hell.

There must be more to this flowing art of indigo
besides recollections of the waters of life...
So, anyway, I'm sitting here in a little public library on 46th and Sunset, looking over a copy of *Fugal Analysis*, by some guy named Ebenezer Prout (if you don't believe me, look under 781.4 in your neighborhood bookmobile). Looked like maybe it was some kind of Freudian stuff about people with weird hangups, but it's not. It's all music. Boy, my general knowledge has sure improved since the world got killed off. That's because I spend a lot of my time in libraries.

Toward the end, everybody was running off to a hospital or driving off the side of a big hill or something. They were all going wild and yelling, clutching at their heads, so there was nobody in the libraries. I still don't like running into old corpses everywhere I go, so I spend a lot of time in places like this, but I stay away from churches and hospitals and bowling alleys. Lots of people went to churches to die, and the rest went crawling to hospitals... don't go to bowling alleys because I never did like to bowl.

In case this document or whatever-you-want-to-call-it ever gets to anybody, maybe I should say something diplomatic. Like, "Hello on behalf of mankind," or "We got tired of waiting so we went on without you," or "Where were you when we needed you?" The last one's the best.

There goes the one o'clock Friday air-raid siren. It sounds like a last lonely trumpet wailing at the fate of humanity.

Actually, it sounds like a cat that got his tail stepped on, but I just said that so you'd know that all poetry wasn't gone from the world. In fact, I'm the best poet in the whole world. I'm really the best everything in the whole world, you understand. Well, not the best lover.

Time for my one o'clock run around the block. Be back in a minute.

I'm back (skipped a line so you'd know I was back). I'll tell you, that's a long way, but I've got to keep myself in shape. I was Mr. Universe last year. Five-nine and hundred fifty-five pounds— I was the
smallest and lightest Mr. Universe in history. Guess I scared all the other entrants off.

But enough about me. Let's talk about you. How are you? How's the family? How are the job and the dog? Seen any good movies lately?

You've got to say all that in a letter, and it feels better if I pretend this is a letter and not a last will and testament for the whole planet (good metaphor, huh?).

"I, the human race, being of sound mind and body (according to the best doctor in the world), do hereby leave my entire estate to anybody, or anything, that happens to come along, but Disney World shall be forever preserved as a monument to my memory."

Anyway, guess if I'm going to write this, I might as well pretend somebody's going to find it. So you'll want to know how things got this way. Well, I don't know everything about it, so I'll just tell you what I remember.

It was in the middle of February, but it wasn't too cold, about sixty. It was warm enough to play golf for the first time of the year, and that's what I was doing when whatever it was started happening. I was out in 37 at good old Pleasant Run Municipal G.C., and that's only one shot off the best I've ever had for nine holes, and great considering there were at least three holes in every green, two of them gopher.

So, on number twelve, I tried to go up over the big hill to try to hit the green in two. The ball managed to pick out the only tree branch within ten miles of the line of the shot and whacked it. It came down right next to the base of the tree, which was halfway up the hill at about a forty-five degree angle. I had to stand with one foot on a big root and the other one on a rock, on this awful slope, so I choked up on an eight-iron and punched at it. Nicklaus, maybe, could have pulled off that shot.

So that's when I slipped and fell backwards, until I fell into this pretty deep dried-up creek bed and hit my head, hard. I woke up real suddenly a while later, decided not to play out the round, picked up my clubs, and started back across the first fairway to the car.

That's where the old man was. He must have been the only other one on the course at the time. It was almost dark.

He was lying there on the grass just off the first tee, sort of rolling around, holding onto his head, with his clubs all thrown around him. He was making an awful kind of gurgling noise, like a broken one of those things you blow at your fireplace, and there was blood and
foam coming out of his mouth.

There was grass torn out of the dirt in patches all around him, and he was just crawling in a circle and gurgling.

I picked him up to take him to the car, which is when he scratched four big cuts in my face. I didn't mean to drop him but he startled me and I did. Then he rolled over, bit off the end of his tongue, and died.

Never saw anybody die before that. I ran to my car, was sick a couple of times on the way, but made it and took off for the hospital to get an ambulance.

The hospital parking lot was already filled up, so I dumped the car on the side of the street and ran into the emergency ward. The room had about two hundred people in it, most of them screaming and gurgling. A doctor ran up with a hypodermic needle and started to poke me with it, but I grabbed his arm and yelled for him to tell me what was going on. He broke the needle against the side of his head, screamed at me, and collapsed into my lap.

I pushed him off onto the floor, a little panicky, then ran out of the building knocking over people with foamy bloody mouths.

I fell down in the grass by the parking lot, and listened to all kinds of noises that had never happened all at once before. People yelling, air-raid sirens, police sirens, fire truck sirens, and cars crashing. Mostly, you could hear cars crashing. I think I finally stumbled out to my car and just sat in it in a daze.

II

The radio in my car didn't work, so I went straight for home when things looked a little clearer, to find out what was going on. Had to go around a bunch of side roads to avoid car crashes. There were a few people milling around and few crawling or lying right in the road. I sure couldn't just run over them, so I had to get out and pull them over to the side. The hospital had gone crazy, and I didn't even know what was happening, so it seemed like the only thing to do was to leave them there, although I really wasn't even thinking then.

The car did hit one of them, though. It was dark and she was lying right on the side of the crest of this hill, so there was no way to stop in time. She had been dead anyway, though, I think. I hope.
Nobody but my three cats and me lived in my little apartment on Kenneth Avenue, so I wasn’t afraid to go in. The first thing to do was to get the news on TV. The regular eleven o’clock anchorman wasn’t there, and the guy they had was having trouble reading his copy. His face was all sweaty, dripping makeup, and his glasses kept falling off his nose.

He said that there was a national emergency, that a worldwide plague had hit between five and six p.m. EST, that nobody was immune, that an estimated half the world’s population was dead already, and to stay off the streets, there was no cause for panic.

He said the station was going off the air, but it would go on automated network feed, and to stay tuned to emergency radio stations.

I about died right then. I’d thought it was maybe something real wrong with the city. But it was the whole world!

Then it hit me that my cats may have gotten it, too, and checking them out showed that they did. Not quite as badly as most of the people, but bad enough. Maybe it was a little strange, but that made me feel worse than seeing all those hundreds of people die, because my cats were the only family I had. They looked bad.

It seemed like only I didn’t have the plague. Even the newsman had been rubbing a headache, and there hadn’t been anybody without it on my way home. They’d said that no one was immune.

The local TV station went off, there was some raucous music, and by the time I was paying any attention, Johnny Carson had come out to do his monologue. He made a joke about the President, then one about how cold it was in Buffalo, then a minute later he took his golf swing and led into a commercial. But I was going wild. Everything was okay in L.A.! Nobody in the audience was screaming in pain; there was no mention of any worldwide disaster. At least somebody else was still alive!

But Johnny never came back. The screen went straight to static, just as I remembered that the Tonight Show is taped earlier in the day. Used to be, anyway.

I tried calling my folks, friends, the operator, anybody, but all I could get was the weather. Cloudy. Don’t mind telling you, I cried myself into a lousy, rolling-over sleep that night.

The next morning I let the cats back out of the bedroom, fed them, and went out to meet what was left of the world.
There were dead people all around, most of them curled up like animals hit by cars, which a lot of them had been. Nothing was moving in the whole town but the lights at the Steak 'n Shake, which kept going back and forth between the “In Sight it Must be Right” sign on top to the front door, where a guy in an apron and a white hat was lying with red stuff all over him. Maybe it was chili.

There was nobody alive at the mayor’s office, at any of the TV stations, or in the Statehouse, and I was beginning to get the feeling that there was no need to hurry. None of the phones anywhere could get anything but a weird kind of busy signal that sounded sort of asthmatic.

It was scary the way I was getting used to seeing dead people all over, like after a war, only nobody was dressed right for a war. So then I got up the nerve to go check on my next-door neighbor Bill Bowman and his family, hoping they were just hiding or something, although I was prepared to see them dead at the dinner table. It had started a cold drizzle.

The door was locked, but it didn’t take too much to kick it open. Nobody came to see who was kicking in the door, but I thought maybe they were sick, so I went on in. It was all gloomy and cold inside. I don’t know how I’m going to write this down.

I edged into the kitchen and saw that the glass door to the patio had been broken out and what was left in the door was stained. I looked around the end of the hallway into the living room. There was a mattress in the room with a cover over it and a big bulge in it and God there was a hole in it where a shotgun had blasted into people all huddled up and I could just see bone and dry blood before I backed away and got sick again, and again and again.

It was Bill’s wife Joan and their two kids. They must all have been suffering something awful for him to do that to them. I could never have done a thing like that. Maybe Bill had been in so much pain himself that he couldn’t tell what he was doing. Yeah. Because the ceiling and even the refrigerator were shot up, so it looked like there had been a gunfight in their little apartment.

I just crawled into the bathroom to try to clean myself up. Hadn’t remembered about Bill. He was halfway down in the tub where he’d killed himself with the shotgun we used to go hunting with, and he never shot up an animal like what he did to himself. We’d been best friends since we were twelve.
I either screamed or just whimpered on my way out of there. I got my own gun, let my howling, still-alive cats go out the front door, which they'd wanted to do for five years, and decided to get the car and drive east. Didn't even say goodbye to the three of them.

Their names were Sam, Flanner, and Buchanan.

Nothing happened between Indianapolis and Washington. Nothing. It took three stops along the way at gas stations off the highway, and then it took some driving around to find the White House once I got to Washington. The funny thing was that there were no people around it. You'd think they would have been climbing the fences.

It's sort of a sad thought - the President all alone in the Oval Office while the whole country was dying. But then, he must have been dying, too.

Inside the building, there were only a few bodies around, which were easy to step over. After nosing around a little, I found the Oval Office. The big white doors were closed. I was scared to death he was going to be in there, dead on the floor covered up by the Secretary of State or something, but I turned the hard gold doorknob.

The room was empty. There was nobody on the floor behind the desk, but there were reams of official-looking paper on top of it. The flag wasn't at half-mast.

The papers were all classified, all full of sentences that ended with periods that should have been exclamation points. Basically, I found out what I had come to find out - all about the end of everything in the whole world, except for one dumb damn grade school teacher in bluejeans crying in the Oval Office.

III

The plague really was worldwide, and wasn't caused by any kind of warfare known or thought possible before now. It had happened at the same time in every country, at 5:37 EST on February 19th.

In the middle of the afternoon on that Thursday, the brainwaves (alpha, beta, etc.) of every living creature in the world were somehow jumped in intensity about ten times. This killed some almost immediately, but kept others in awful pain for a number of hours. There
were a lot of statistics in the report, but no explanation of how it could have been done. I haven’t explained it nearly completely, but that’s the gist of it— that’s how the world ended.

I must have been knocked out just as it happened, and it must have been what brought me around so fast. There must have been other people who were in comas or something when it happened, but they must have been killed in the hysteria in the hospitals. I saw a hospital in Philadelphia that looked like it had been bombed.

Used to think that some of them must have survived, though. But it’s been two years, and I haven’t found a single person or animal alive. I spend every day looking around the entire country, but I end up alone in some library.

One thing I remember about those papers on the President’s desk—the scientists at Arecibo had gotten “emanations” from something on one of the asteroids out past Mars’ orbit. Of course, nobody had time to do anything about it.

Now, you can say that I’m trying to make up a spectacular story about invaders from outer space, but I really think I’ve got an idea of what happened to us. I figure this: if we needed another planet to live on for some reason, a planet just like our own, we’d have to grab up the first one we could find. There can’t be too many within any reasonable distance, and, like they used to say, beggars can’t be choosers. So if we did find one, and there were some kind of primitive living things on it, what would we do? Not go to war if we could help it, and we might even try to be as merciful about clearing out the lower forms of life in the place.

Too far-fetched? Hell, we’ve done it already, on a smaller scale. Go ask an Indian about it, if you can find one.

I think that’s what happened. I figure they’ll wait for awhile for the smell to go away before they come to claim their prize. So I’m counting on a few more years before they get here, since they would’ve come by now if they were in a rush.

So there’s a few things I can do with the rest of my life. I can roll over and die, and take the whole human race with me, but I’m not ready for that. Maybe there’s still one person out there, still alive with me. I’ve put signs and signals nearly everywhere in the country by now, and maybe I’ll get a response, Sometime.

Being alone is no good. Not if it’s all the time. What I miss most of all is taking my first graders to the gym. I miss them.
Anyway, the other thing I can do is to get ready for when the people that did this come down to take over “their” planet.

I didn’t mention it before, but I’ve learned a lot about the worldwide nearly-automatic defense systems of the two most powerful nations on Earth. You see, I can just walk into the Pentagon or the Kremlin any time I want to, since I’ve made a point to find out all about the systems that protect them and their countries. I’ve set up bases of my own in the Pentagon, at the White House, and at a bunch of military and SAC bases, and in about three months I’ll be ready to start work on arming our whole weapons arsenal. It’s a terrifically slow and tough process, but it’s all I have left.

I can already operate a helicopter and a train, and I’m going to learn how to fly a small plane to get through Siberia west to Moscow, and to all the bases in between. I’ve got unlimited supplies, and I know the basic set-up over there from our intelligence reports. In five years, it will all be tied in together, if one man can do it.

And when the things that killed the whole human race get here, I’ll be sitting in the White House, and I’ll press a series of buttons that will blow up them and me and everything.

So I don’t know who’s going to find this. But writing it has made me feel better.

IV

A part of me says that revenge is not a noble motive, certainly not a good enough reason for blowing up our whole planet, and that bothers me.

But it’s not only revenge. There’s got to be justice, hasn’t there? You can’t just kill all the people there are and then just take over their home. I mean, even an Indian has to have a planet to live on, and it doesn’t matter how powerful you are, you can’t just make him crawl up in a ball and die and live on his land and get away with it, can you? Can you?

This planet is ours. And now it’s mine. And if there was ever anything worthwhile in man, we can’t just roll over and die like animals!

I’m sorry. I’m writing too excited and too fast. I’ll slow down and try to say what I mean right.
I ran across a poem in the library the other day. It said that a man has to: “Rage, rage against the dying of the light!”

I guess that’s why I have to fight these things that murdered everyone I ever loved or cared for, and everyone I never even got a chance to love or care for. Somebody has to rage against the dying of the light. Somebody does.

God, I’m crying again. I cry too damn much.

---

PRAYER

Ed Shacklee

the flower that
a
caterpillar loved was
crushed, left ravaged
by
mandibles.

spun in silence
my
new heart has no hunger.
let my wings do
no
injustice

let me touch you.
the
wind has no cradle if
your petals feel
the
angry frost.
The apple was not the culprit
nor was there an original citrus sin.
This fine fruit plainly
plunged us into peargatory.

Behold the dappled pear
ripening sagely, woman-like.
Cup it in your hand; let its aroma
peaceably pearmeate your senses.

See the speckled skin
stretched tautly over firm sweet meat.
Beckoning, the softly rounded haunches:
teasing the teeth.

Of all fruits, this the most fragile, female;
o pear girl.
A TRIBUTE TO ROY MARZ

Werner W. Beyer

(Editor's Note: The following is the text of a speech delivered by Dr. Werner Beyer at a retirement dinner honoring Dr. Roy Marz, longtime member of the English Faculty at Butler University.)

The retiree whom—unlike Mark Anthony—I "come to praise, not bury", has been a good and faithful servant at Butler for almost thirty years. And yet he is so retiring that few of his many students through those years and probably few of his colleagues knew him well or even know much about him. Though he and I (and the late Cary Graham) came to Butler in the same fall of 1948; and though Roy and I were office mates for years and worked closely together on sundry departmental and university assignments including the University Writing Contest, I can't honestly say that I know him very well.—For he was and remains a very private person.

Even if his health had permitted it, I doubt that he would have enjoyed being here on such an occasion, since he never liked publicity or baring his heart even to friends. Yet he never wanted for friends, being himself a warm and friendly person, so he has them in many parts of the world.

Roy Marz was born in 1911, a native of Kentucky. He received his Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate from the University of Cincinnati, in 1933, 34, and 37 respectively. He taught there between 1937 and 1941, when he joined the army and served in Counter Intelligence, among other places, in Italy. He promptly fell in love with the land, its language, its art and culture.

After the armistice he returned to teaching at Cincinnati between 1946 and 1948 before coming here.

At Butler like everyone in the Department he taught Freshman English, also English Authors, Modern Poetry, and Modern Drama, and latterly Shakespeare and Victorian literature. More than a few of his students confessed that they had been captivated by as well as converted to his easy cosmopolitan culture, his searching scholarship and careful explication de texte: his passion for understanding every allusion, every word in the text he was teaching.
Roy Marz is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Modern Language, The Poetry Society of America, the AAUP. He was a Ford Foundation Fellow in 1951-52 and typically spent his time studying and writing in his beloved Italy. In 1962-63 he was a Fulbright Fellow, teaching American Literature at the University of Catania in Sicily. On the side he delivered a series of lecture on Americanism and American Literature for the U. S. Information Service at Bari, Palermo, and Catania. He spent many summers in Italy and taught at least one summer at the University of Delaware, where, some of you will recall, Paul Cundiff had gone.

Roy was elected to membership in The Poetry Society of America and listed in the *International Who's Who in Poetry* (among other places) by virtue of his having contributed more than 130 poems to such prestigious publications as *Poetry Magazine*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *The Saturday Review*, *Epoch*, *The Quarterly Review*, *Accent*, *The (Canadian) Northern Review*, *New Mexico Quarterly*, and *The [Italian] Botteghe Oscuri*.

He won two national prizes for his sensitive poetry—that of the New York Poetry Center as outstanding young American poet in 1951 and the Oscar Blumenthal Prize awarded by *Poetry Magazine* in 1952. He also wrote some short stories and at least two very poetical, irresistibly charming plays—*After Closing* (published in 1962 in *First Stage*, a quarterly of new drama) and *O'Fallon's Cup* (published by the same magazine in 1966). *After Closing* was given nine performances between March 4 and 20, 1966, by the Judson Players of Washington Square, New York.

His plays—rich, warm, tender, poetical and whimsical like the music of his poetry—reveal the rare spirit which is Roy Marz. He loves animals, fantasy, and the fey as he loves art, music, poetry, the stage and beauty anywhere. He spent much time in Florence, Rome, Paris, London. Years ago we surmised he was studying the Italian artists of the Renaissance intensively and working on a book on Giorgione. Typically he said little about it. Quite recently I discovered that despite failing health he has continued working on it in his enforced retirement, that it is in its fourth draft and under contract to Simon & Schuster! May it soon be published!
Manuscripts

But let us hear Roy speak for himself in two of his poems. The first is titled "The Elephant Graveyard."

From their several hills the sick bulls came to the graveyard (Hunter at dream, it is nearer than any dream)
They came with the great ears apread, and each endeavored
A sick majesty worthy his station at home.

They lumbered the easy grassland and told how the trunks,
Never to spiral again, hurled tigers aside;
At drowse in the shallow river they mumbled of links
Outlasting moons and the marbeling of the herd,

Or stunned in a ponderous circle to be august,
Wise beyond thought, bull sufficient as bull;
And when they buckled gargantuan rumps to rest
They did not feel the tilt of the earth at all

Nor notice if there were stars. They told the season
By those who tottered; they lurched and were unafraid.
They balanced the morning-unable against the risen,
And when it was time to die they openly died.

It is only the dream of the hunter, long corrected,
That one awakened to say he decided to live
Or that the remnant bulls in council enacted
They had not heard him speak nor seen him leave.

The second poem is a description of a painting—The Donatello Annunciation: Santa Croce" (from the life of the unborn, prophetic Christ).

Naive flesh that will strain for my miracle,
Your eyes do not move, unshadowed the easy cheek;
Only the book held to your breast is loved,
But you will forget the book when you suckle me.
The angel foresees, is moved, but you aloof
Will not move to a music beyond your sphere
Nor pity your private star as inferior, silent;
You wait, strung, the full sounding of grief.

If only Who chose so well had chose other,
The womb prolific, the eyes public for tears,
Bearing children and loss as usual traffic;
I could not hurt you then. Forgive me, mother.

Thomas Carlyle, speaking of Bobbie Burns, once wrote that “a poet without love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.” Roy Marz’s work as teacher and writer reinforces the point. He is a rare spirit, our poet long in residence at Butler, for whom the esthetic experience was and is indeed a “form of contemplation, a loving attention to” the qualities of things, whether remote or under foot and overlooked. His poems are part of the memorable creations of the loving human spirit.

May 1976

TO KATHY

Richard Ringley

Better never tell her that
the funny man in the blue hat
smoking Winston cigarettes
is reading The Bible
looking for loopholes
trying to slip through
Heaven with a sack of rum.
Passport stamped by the church constabulary
only cost me four “Hail Mary’s.”
Better yet
There are no duties.
LIKE A SHOOTING STAR
LIKE A SHOOTING STAR

David Darrell

The planet was a beautiful one even from a thousand miles up. There were white, whispy clouds over mellow blue seas and lands of many shades and hues. It was very definitely beautiful.

To Throm Stormont it was downright thrilling. Not for its beauty but for what those patterned colors represented—life. Or at least vegetation of some kind. And there was water obviously enough and clouds which meant rainfall. A class M planet.

Throm set the controls for one more orbit and his one-man scout cruiser responded smoothly. His was a dangerous service. He and a mere dozen others were the vanguard of the advancing wave of civilization who probed into the blank and endless unknown. The survival rate for his occupation was only three trips, and this was his fourth. But he didn't really care. He had chosen the solitude of space to escape the solitude he suffered on the civilized worlds, so he had little to lose from the start. Even so he was careful, always careful. That is why he was making his tenth scanning orbit of the planet and getting more excited by the moment. The finding of a livable earth-type planet happened maybe once in a century. The odds were a million to one against any one man making such a discovery. And for the one who did, there was eternal fame, money, maybe even a Fleet Captaincy. Throm decided he could wait no longer to go down and have a look.

It was then that he first noticed anything was wrong. The controls indicated that the ship was already in a gentle descent. He reset the controls—nothing happened. He cut back the engines—no results. He punched manual override—still nothing happened. The ship began a steady sweep to starboard as if it knew where it was going. All Throm's efforts to correct the course were futile. Finally, in desperation he cut in the circuit breakers, again with no effect.

The ship purred on in all its magnificent power, and slowly Throm calmed down as he realized the ship was not out of control but was rather being controlled, by whom or what he did not know.

It wasn't long before he found out at least where he was going,
The ship settled down in a cool green meadow surrounded by foliage which Throm could swear was a mixture of oak and elm. Beyond the trees in the distance were rocky slopes which rose to majestic purple mountains. On the other side at the edge of the meadow, was the object that really caught his attention. It was a grey obelisk, pyramid-shaped but folding in at the bottom as if it were just the uppermost point of a much larger structure. As it was, it was hardly imposing. It could only have been about twenty feet high and about the same at the base.

Throm felt a wisp of breeze brush his cheek and darted out of the control room, into a corridor, and stopped in anguish and then resigned acceptance. Both doors of the airlock were open. That was supposed to be impossible but they were open. Whatever toxic bacteria were in this strange planet’s atmosphere were in him now, so what difference did it make?

But what air! His nostrils dilated as he drew in gentle draughts of the cool fragrance of dew-covered earth and rain dripping off autumnal leaves. Very old memories buried under the crushing burden of decades of loneliness and life lacking appreciation of beauty stirred, and he remembered wooded hills and trickling streams in the still-frontier wilderness of Wisconsin. And the memories were pleasant because shared, shared with someone who gave movement and life to her surroundings wherever she went. Darling Orsha. His Orsha. He shuddered but inevitably the memories marched on to when that golden life had been so pitilessly snuffed out. And his own helpless compliance in that end.

He moved mechanically out of the airlock pausing only to strap on a blaster. He headed straight toward the obelisk building. Whatever had brought him here would be there, and he’d best confront it directly.

Not unexpectedly he found an open portal and headed for it, be it invitation or trap. Upon first stepping through, however, Throm jumped back. In his brief glance at the gloomy interior, he hadn’t been able to see much but he did get an impression of size—stupendous size. He scanned the exterior again. It was the same positively small structure. Back inside he gazed searchingly but could find no limits to the edifice. In fact he had great difficulties judging size at all. Everywhere was a thick, murky darkness which gave the impression that the walls could be both a few feet away or miles. Only ahead was a vague sourceless glow and toward this he walked.
He was sure he must have walked the length of the building ten times when he felt he had reached his destination. Felt it because the glow seemed close although just as sourceless. He stood uneasily, not sure what he should do or whether he should do anything at all. When the stillness was broken, Throm was startled into shocked stiffness, for many reasons but mostly because the physical stillness itself had not been broken.

"What is your purpose here, Human," were the words that materialized directly within his head.

"I am..." he began falteringly.

"Throm Stormont of the scout cruiser, Orion," the disembodied voice completed.

"How...?"

"Along with our telepathic powers, we can, of course, read the thoughts that run along the surface of your mind."

"Well, if we're to get anywhere, I'm afraid you are going to have to let me verbalize my thoughts in my own slow way.\" This burst of angry frustration was perhaps a bit undiplomatic, but it served its purpose in giving Throm a much needed chance to get himself orientated.

"Very well."

Again that expectant silence prevailed, and this time Throm guessed he was expected to do something. He said: "I come to establish contact between your species and my own."

"Are you then representative of your species?"

"Yes."

"We have not before met one of your species. We must know if your kind are worthy of being allowed to settle among us. Since you are representative of your species, you will be the test."

For a while now Throm hadn't liked the direction the conversation was taking and for the first time he felt a thrill of fear. He fingered the handgrip of his blaster. "What kind of test?"

"A test of the one universal concept—truth."

"And when will this test begin?"

A scream. Throm whirled, blaster in hand. There was no mistake. The scream had been real and human! Forgetting the alien, he ran back the way he had come, guided into the shadows on his left by a final repetition of that fateful sound.

Running full tilt he crashed into an invisible barrier. Staggering, then regaining his balance, he fired the blaster point-blank and the disintegrating lines of force tore a great gash in the obstructing wall.
Beyond was a woman.

Both of them froze. She as she saw the aimed blaster, he just in sheer amazement. She had short well-groomed blond hair and was wearing a spacer uniform of sleek, tight-fitting plastic. Her eyes were a startling bright blue but in them he saw desperation.

"Hurry," she pleaded. "We must go."

He was convinced. "This way," he said. They turned and struck out for the one real light in that gloomy building, that framed by the portal. For a horrendous number of heart-stopping minutes they ran; every moment expecting the portal to slam shut and seal them in. But it didn't, and they had covered half the distance to the Orion before they paused to look back.

Throm raised and aimed his blaster at the portal, expecting at last to see his antagonists in the flesh. What he saw was quite different. A trim silver machine on movable tracks drew up before the portal, the left track stopped, it slued around, and entered the light of outdoors. As it became visible so did several tentacular arms ending in various claw-like devices. Throm had seen enough. He fired and, like the barrier before it, the front end of the machine disintegrated.

Within minutes they were in the ship and Throm had both doors of the airlock closed. He led the way to the control cabin and motioned his new companion to strap herself in as he did the same. He directed the ship's monitor toward the alien obelisk to give him advance notice of any further attacks and frantically went about readying the ship for lift-off.

"Sit tight," he said encouragingly. "We'll be out of here in a few seconds."

As he completed the final adjustments and hit the firing button, he failed to hear the woman's fatalistic reply: "They won't let us go. They never will."

The blast of the atomic engines was bone shattering and within seconds became positively frightening, especially for Throm as he waited for the increasing pressure of acceleration and instead felt only the continued vibration of the engines' thrust. The whole ship was vibrating now, and Throm knew it couldn't take much more of this. In defeat he pulled back the throttle and stared at the monitor with mouth agape. At full thrust for several seconds and they hadn't budged an inch. More unbelievable, they had blasted the meadow with enough energy to have completely burnt it off, yet there was no sign of any damage at all.
"They’ll never let us go," the woman said again and this time he heard her.

"Why? How can you say? How do you know?" The questions were fired in rapid succession out of a sense of growing futility which fed on the feeling that she was right. Could it have come to this so easily? The thought that this was his fourth trip and he might soon become another case proving the statistics flitted across his mind.

"They will keep us here as long as we are of use to them," she said in simple reply. He looked at her carefully. The statement might have been taken as one of a defeated will which had suffered too much, too long, without hope. But on perusing her bearing, the line of her mouth, the deep blue eyes, especially in those eyes, he saw an inbred defiance. That stubbornness of the human spirit that burns unquenchable through all adversity. Her statement was a recognition of stark truth, not out of despair but because she had no senseless illusions left. But the spirit he saw was the one he first experienced in her frantic flight to freedom. No, this was not yet a defeated human being.

Such a mixture of pitiful suffering and determined strength moved him, touched him more deeply than he could ever remember having been touched. For a minute he actually struggled with these emerging emotions before suppressing them and reasserting the dominance of his calm intelligence. Nonetheless, he was shaken.

"Why do they want us?" he asked.

She shrugged. "To learn. They’ve never seen us before. They want to find out more before they are confronted with the bulk of our race."

"Well, they won’t get us here," Throm said decisively as he switched on the ship’s defensive screens.

"They have a special fascination with the mind," she continued. "They like to test its limitations and—how much pressure it can take. Probably because of their own special mental powers."

"So I noticed. They are remarkable. They can’t reach us in here can they?"

She shrugged again but didn’t answer.

He nodded and then started. "How dumb of me! My name is Throm Stormont and this is the Orion..."

She smiled for the first time. "I’m Istria. Hello, Captain, and you, too, Orion," she said extending her hand. "I’m awfully glad to see you both though I’m not sure all you’ll be able to do is keep me company in my prison."
Throm passed that off and asked: “Come, tell me how you got here.”

“I was on a colony ship headed for Altair IV when we were attacked by Tregan pirates. They boarded and we fought them until it was hopeless, and the last few of us tried to escape in the lifeboats. I don’t know what happened to the rest but my ship’s computer must have malfunctioned. It brought me out here and the Testers pulled me down.”

“How long ago?” Throm asked quietly.

“A year,” she replied with a sigh.

Again a wave of irresponsible emotion washed over Throm and this time he wasn’t entirely successful in suppressing it. “It sounds to me like you could use some sleep. Come on. I have an extra cabin. It’s not very big but it has got a bed.”

She followed wordlessly and was soon stretched out under the sheets of a bed which did, indeed, fill the entire room.

“Are you sure there is nothing you need?” Throm inquired for the third time.

“No, Captain,” she said, smiling again. “It’s like you said. All I need is some sleep. Just...” And this time she aimed those depthless azure eyes at him and he thought he saw mirrored in them signs of his own feelings though without his emotional confusion. “Thank you, Throm, for being here.”

Back in the control cabin he busied himself with new flight computations, or at least he tried to. Mostly he paced back and forth before the monitor staring through the growing darkness at the silent stillness of the plain. What was he fighting? And why? Was all his careful endeavor to come to this? And just when he had it made.

To discover an M-class planet supporting intelligent life!

No Fleet Captaincy that. He could retire. But retire to what? So his thoughts came back to the old haunting that had driven him into space in the first place.

It was funny how long it had taken him to ask her name. What was even more funny was that there was a reason for his delay and that reason beckoned to him now. He had felt somehow that he already knew her name, that had he forgotten himself he might accidentally have named her... what?

The resilient tone of her voice, the natural charm in her personality, the wave of her hair struck a cord within him of a long dead strain he and another had once harmonized on. If he had to name her, he would have called her Orsha.
"Now that's enough," he shouted at himself and effectively blotted out the whole train of thought with long-practiced efficiency. He started off for his cabin, confident that the screens would defend against any external threat. He couldn't help, however, stopping outside Istria's door and taking a look inside.

Only her face was visible, the golden hair splayed about it with a soft sheen from the light through the door. He couldn't help staring and minutes began to move by. From the subliminal levels of his mind flowed a feeling which he dared not repress because it had become so rare. It was the sense of peace and happiness he had known so long ago and so briefly with Orsha. In a very real sense this feeling was Orsha, to him. For when she died she more or less took it with her. Afterwards, he would gaze at Tri-D images and then try to picture her in his mind flowing and alive, but if he didn't regain that special feeling, he knew he hadn't recaptured her. All he had was a plastic image.

Of course, there were times when, quite unconsciously, he would suddenly think of some little thing she had done and for a micro-second the feeling would be there, she would live again; and then as he strained to hold on to her she would slip away.

And so it happened now except that the feeling was steadily infiltrating his nervous system, satiating him, and growing stronger. Instead of the frustrating moment, it went on and on. It was too much to hope for. His imagination strained for release to leap wildly to all the glorious possibilities opening out before him.

Nevertheless, old ways die hard and he held back. As he looked down upon the sleeping form, a disbelief set in. It WAS too much to hope for. She couldn't be what she seemed. Somewhere there was a flaw. She must be just the imaginings of a despondent man trapped in a web he couldn't see or understand. Her image blurred and wavered and for one nerve-racking moment he thought she would disappear entirely, but when he looked again, she was still there same as before.

The moment brought him back to his senses. He became aware of the beat of his heart in his ears and a drop of sweat as it made its way past his temple and down his cheek. Very quietly Throm allowed her door to slide back into place, and he wearily headed for his bunk.

Throm was awakened in the morning by an alarm, not the usual alarm but the ship's warning alarm Istria was outside her door as he
headed forward and her face was a question.

"Something is approaching," he explained.

The monitor quickly disclosed three of the clawed machines churning toward them from the obelisk. Throm allowed a slight smile to touch his lips. This he was prepared for. "Just watch what happens when they hit our screens."

With the end of his words also came the end of his confidence as an orange light flashed toward them from the pinnacle of the obelisk. Throm glanced over various dials and swore in disbelief.

"They hit us!" he exclaimed. "The screens are at full power, and they shot right through them like they didn't exist."

The pinnacle flashed again and then again at regular intervals. Throm made a decision and reacted instantly. "Come on," he commanded as he took Istria by the hand and began leading her through the ship. Theirs was a nerve-straining rush, all the more so because the deadly attack they ran from was so silent. No explosions, no shells no rip and screech of metal. Just the lovely orange disintegration beam slicing off one chunk of the ship after another. Throm stopped before the door he wanted and as he lifted his hand to open it, it glowed orange and was gone. He stepped through the opening without hesitation into the ship's hold.

"Istria, pick up a couple of those survival packs while I open the outer hatch."

He maneuvered through the crowded casings to the loading hatch where he pulled the emergency handle. With a hiss the air seal broke and the storage doors blew out. By then Istria had caught up with him and together they leapt to the ground and struck out for the underbrush at the opposite end of the meadow.
A couple of times the orange beam flashed past them and Throm stopped, thinking they had been seen, but it was only the disintegrator firing straight through the ship, whose once beautiful outline now looked like a chunk of coral. He also saw something else. One of the claw things had come around the end of the ship and was bearing down on them. Their escape was not to be so simple after all. He pulled his blaster and sent its beam flicking across the level land to strike the enemy machine head on. Nothing happened.

"They've adjusted it for your weapon," Istria noted. "We must flee. You can't fight them, Throm."

In full agreement he turned and they ran together. Ran into the forest on and on interminably. Only after hours of stumbling, scratching, slogging flight did they fall in exhaustion of the bank of a small stream.

They lay panting on the ground, eyeing each other and soaking up the coolness of the moist earth. Throm, gazing at Istria's dirt-streaked face and caked hair, began to chuckle and then to laugh. It was such a welcome relief from the tension of the past few hours that it was minutes before he could control himself enough to answer the puzzlement on Istria's face.

"You," he said, pointing and still chuckling, "after a whole year here you come out looking the most lonely woman I've ever known and after twenty-four hours with me you look like a Methalusian wench."

"Is that so?" she replied in mock indignation. "Well you could use a bath yourself," and with that her leg shot out and sent him rolling down the bank, but not before he managed to grab her ankle, and they tumbled into the water together. Without thinking what he was doing, Throm was splashing Istria like a frolicsome two-year-old and she retaliated in kind. It was wild and exhilarating and absolutely insane. Finally, both climbed up the bank and lay on the grass wet and weary but happy, oblivious of the danger from which they had fled.

They dared not build a fire, but they did have some food packed in self-heating cans which served as well. Dusk was falling again and they went to sleep by the side of the brook, but this night was not to prove any more restful than the night before. Throm didn't know what caused it but whatever it was must have alerted Istria, too, for he snapped awake and rolled over just as she cried out. The great claw of the machine was poised above his head and, though he knew it was hopeless, reflexively he drew his blaster and fired. The claw vanished.
He searched the dim underbrush with his eyes, sighted on a great moving shadow, fired, and it lay still.

"Evidently, at close quarters the blaster still has some effect," he remarked.

"We can't stay here," she answered back.

He nodded and, picking up their packs, they moved as silently and swiftly as possible in the blackness. After awhile they stopped and leaned close in the hollow formed by the roots of a mighty tree.

"Something is wrong," he whispered.

"What do you mean?" Istria asked, puzzled.

"Well, just stop a minute and look at everything that has happened to us. These creatures are so powerful they could take control of my ship, force it down, and open the airlock by no visible means. Yet, somehow, we escape from these almighty creatures, and from their own building no less, when all they had to do was shut the portal to trap us inside. Then they leave the ship's airlock conveniently open for us even though we know they could have shut it. The machine they sent after you, I cut down easily with my blaster. But yesterday they were impervious, and just now the machine that was about to kill me is vulnerable again. And that attack yesterday. They again show their awesome power by holding the ship down and proceeding to cut it to pieces despite the shields, but they are so inept as to allow us to open the cargo hatch and escape. And why did they wait for daybreak to launch the attack when we would have been helpless at night? And why were the machines only on three sides of the ship, leaving one and only one convenient path of escape? It would seem that the stupidity of these supercreatures is as colossal as their intelligence."

"Or all the mistakes have had a purpose," finished Istria.

"Exactly," Throm affirmed with a nod. "And you said they want to test us."

"Especially mentally."

"Yes, mental endurance would be what they're after. Cut us off from most of our machines and technology on which we have come to depend, send us running on foot through an alien environment under the most primitive conditions, and pursued all the time by a nameless, featureless power which we can fight but not beat. Imagine what the long term effects could be."

"Please don't," Istria pleaded but for the moment Throm was unconscious of her interruption.
“Still...” he began and hesitated, his brow furled in a frown.
“What is it?”
“There’s still something missing,” he answered at length. “Surely they know we’d figure it out this far.”
“Maybe not,” she rejoined impatiently, “they’re still learning. Even if they did, what difference would it make?”
“Okay,” Throm sighed and, shaking the doubts out of his mind, turned his thoughts to the problem at hand. “We’ll head for the mountains. Since the Testers herded us this way, that’s probably where they want us to go anyway, but I don’t see how those tracked machines can follow us up those slopes.”

The purple mountains were actually quite a bit farther than they had looked, and it was four days before the pair hit the foothills. They took no more chances for neither of them had any more illusions about the enemy. They started each day’s journey before dawn and did not stop until well after dark. They took turns at keeping watch, never made a fire, always triple-checked campsites for any forgotten piece of tell-tale trash, backtracked and walked in loops, sometimes because of the ruggedness of the land but usually in a frail attempt at confusing the trackers. But they never did. Their precautions prevented any more near disastrous encounters with the monster machines, such as that of the first night, but several times they were heard shattering trees or seen topping some piece of high ground. It was, indeed, a mental torture of futility, but it also served to build a bond between this man and woman which was itself a new strength. With each day of shared peril, where each person’s survival depended on the other, a mutual trust and deep, private level of communication were forged and growing stronger.

Throm couldn’t pin down exactly when he recognized this attachment between himself and Istria, but it must have been somewhere between the fading of the gnawing doubt of something missed and the cultivation of a bundle of absurdly optimistic dreams. Suddenly he had a reason to survive and go back with his world-shaking news and to wealthy retirement because now he had someone to go back to, or with rather.

He became heedless of the danger that stalked them as he contemplated this potential new course of his life. He looked forward to each day’s climb so that he could help Istria, feel the slight pressure of her hand in his, every once and awhile receiving one of the quick blue-
eyed glances that said so much. But even then he did not realize what pressure he was under until, with dawning realization, he noted that the trackers had not been seen for two days. It was over a week since his forced landing and their supplies were running low, they were climbing around the most bleak and bare landscape he had ever seen, and no one knew he was here, but with the disappearance of their relentless foe, these problems became minor and easily soluble.

That afternoon they found a large cavern midway up a slope of loose gravel accessible only by a single cliff-edge path. There, perfection of the site seemed just one more omen of hope to Throm. They made a fire for the first time and cooked a small rabbit-like creature he had shot that morning. After the meal Istria lay close to the glowing coals and watched the sky as it, too, began to glow with the departing fires of the sun. Throm sat against the rock wall also watching, but watching Istria and not the sky. His mind was very calm. He marvelled at that. He concluded it could only mean that his mind was unified at last in what it felt and in what it had decided.

He moved toward Istria and lay down beside her. She didn't move, and he gently touched her shoulder and turned her toward him. For a moment he lost himself. She lay so quiet and expectant. He could see she knew what he wanted to say, wanted him to say it. But did she feel it, too?

"Istria, when I came here I was alone. I mean really alone. So much so that I didn't even know myself, that one companion that everyone should be entitled to, at least. But now... I mean we may never get off this planet, we may die here., but at least I'll know I had you. I... I..."

"I love you," she said.

So sweet and simple yet it said it all. Throm felt they had made a pact and he moved slowly, tenderly to seal it with a kiss. She moved to meet him, and the red coals reflected in the circles of blue.

A test of truth.

Throm stopped.

A test of truth.

The doubt that had been smoldering at the back of his mind all these days came burning to the forefront of his mind in the form of those words spoken to him by the Tester back in the obelisk.

"Throm...?" There was anguish in Istria's voice and Throm could not bear to look in her eyes.
He got up and moved to the mouth of the cave watching as the darkness began to absorb the red sky. That something that was missing. He had remarked how miraculous had been their escape from the Testers, but how had Istria escaped just when he happened to be there? She had never said. But the Tester had said something—that Throm must face a test of truth. At that moment the conversation had been interrupted by Istria’s scream. He had, of course, considered this to be some chance happening, but could it be that the test of truth had begun at that moment?

But what was the truth he was looking for? Was it the realization he had just made? Or the fact that Istria was a plant, an imposter?

Or was he a fool? What difference did it make as far as his feelings for Istria were concerned?

He heard gravel sliding on gravel. Looking down he froze and his energy dwindled to ashes. The machines were there. Three, four, he couldn’t be sure. And they were coming up. It wasn’t possible that they could make any headway on that steep, crumbling slope, but they were. Throm rushed back into the cavern.

It didn’t look good, but there was still a chance they might get away. Inside Istria hadn’t moved from her position by the fire and Throm felt a pang of remorse.

“Our friends are back, Istria,” he said. “We’ve got to leave.”

She didn’t move. Throm hesitated and started toward her when there was a flash of blue from the mouth of the cavern followed by a thudding explosion. They had switched from disintegrators to energy beams. Thus distracted, Throm hadn’t noticed Istria get steadily to her feet and walk toward him.

She said in a deadly calm: “Enough is enough.”

She grabbed his blaster from his belt. Throm was so shocked by her manner and strained, empty look on her face that she was several paces ahead of him before he instinctively darted after her. A blue beam flashed into the cavern and reflexively he threw himself to the earth. Through the dust of the resulting explosion he saw Istria’s shadowy figure at the lip of the cave firing madly at the approaching attackers.

Throm started up again and paused just for a moment. A wild volley of thoughts fired through his awareness. If she was a plant, they wouldn’t kill her. Perhaps the test was for him to stay. It was a trap to lure him out. Instantly, these thoughts were overwhelmed by a simultaneous frantic rush of emotions which screamed at him: What the hell are you waiting for do you realize what you’re doing what you’re
giving up go man go! He only paused a moment, but it was an eternity
too long.

Another blue beam, another blue flash, and Istria was dead on the
floor of the cave.

"Istria..." he croaked through dust-clogged lips.

Throm was immediately at her side but did not touch her. There
was nothing he could do but look at her. His mind and body were
numb, temporary defense against the sea of emotional destruction
building behind an inner dam. How could he have allowed this to
happen? Again! His deepest repressed feelings crashed to the surface.

He had stood helplessly by watching more than his own life being
destroyed once before. He had hidden as the Trogan pirates had slowly
wrung the life out of Orsha's body. But he had been a boy then. And it
hadn't been his fault the pirates had come. What was his excuse this
time? He had led his life to destruction. His life! Despicable worm, he
had destroyed a life more beloved than his own.

Throm reeled in the death-grip of despair and finally did the only
thing he could. He fell on Istria's body and screamed to the skies, the
machines, the rock walls about him in all the stubborn desperation only
a human being can show when cornered: "No-No-No-No-No. She's not
dead. She can't be. I can't have killed her. This cannot be."

Through his tear-blurred eyes her body seemed to shimmer and waver.

He had seen that happen once before.

Throm was instantly on his feet—calm, steady, solid. Perhaps his
emotional outburst had cleared his thinking processes for it was
suddenly all childishy clear to him. He had been so blinded by his own
troubles, that he had never been able to identify the critical evidence
and put it together. They key question had always been: What was the
truth? So he had wracked his brain to find this elusive truth in all that
was going on about him. All the time he kept trying to make some kind
of sense out of the coincidences and unexplainable events (such as those
machines now climbing a slope they can't possibly climb), but had been
doomed from the start by making one basic assumption: That what was
happening was real. It was a natural assumption, but one he had had
no right to make.

He looked again at Istria's body and said: "I do not believe in you.
Such a person as you could never had existed, and you do not exist
now. Let me see the truth."
The body wavered hesitantly, then faded completely. Throm looked down at the advancing machines and they vanished. After all, Istria had told him herself about the Testers' unique mental powers. He should have guessed from the beginning that they could easily spin a web of illusions for a receptive and vulnerable mind such as his own. In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if...

The monitor of the Orion displayed a many-hued planet a thousand miles below. Throm looked down at the controls. The ship was just completing its tenth orbit. Throm slumped over the controls and put his head in his arms. He had made it. Somehow, in the space of minutes he had fought his way through the most intricate labyrinth ever constructed to challenge a human mind. But he had won.

"Do you really believe that?" said a tender, feminine voice.

Throm started violently. He had half expected something but not this. He turned and faced Istria. "You do not exist," he said in trembling voice. "You are the whim of a destitute mind. You...

She shook her head slowly from side to side, her blue eyes teary-filled with pity, and something else. "Do you really believe that?" she asked again.

He dropped his head as he began to glimpse the massiveness of his defeat. But even now he could not give in. "Istria, you weren't real."

"But I was and I am, as real as your thoughts could make me."

"But it didn't happen," he insisted.

"Yet what you felt was real. It was a test of truth, Throm. What is the one universal truth that never changes?"

"You do know," she continued. "It is yourself. What you experience and most of all what you feel inside is all the truth you have a right to expect and all you need."

"Then why did I...?" he began but choked as his defences began to give way.

"Reject the truth?" she finished, her own voice cracking now. "You could not believe that you had found that for which you had searched so long. So you denied your senses and, worse, your own feelings, looked on your own love as betrayal; and finally sought for deception so hard that you lost yourself. I am sorry for both of us, but I pity you."

"Both of us?" he repeated in a daze. Oh, God, he saw something. He dared not know the answer but he had to ask. "What if I hadn't..." Istria bit her lip, barely able to speak, but she did. "Then all would have been as you imagined."
“Ahhhhhhhhhh...” In torment, the animal cry was wrested from his throat because he knew it was true. Even when he thought he had won, the victory had been a hollow one, bought at too great a price. Now that hollowness rang in his ears. His soul had been torn open raw. Only after long minutes did he mumble, “So what now?”

“That is up to you, Throm.”

He looked up hastily but she was already gone. And like Orsha before she took a part of him with her, one he could no longer afford to lose. He sat and listened to the soft hum of the atomic motors. He looked at the lush planet passing below. She was down there still. No! He shook his head. No more lies. No more dreams, false hopes, and deceptions. He had been given his chance and had proved inadequate. His was a flaw that had crippled him all his life. And now the purpose that had kept him alive all these years had been sacrificed. There was nothing left for him. He was dead.

On the monitor was a range of purple mountains. His hands moved confidently, without his having to look down, and were still again. The nose of the Orion fell gently and ever more steeply until it began to glow and burn from friction with the atmosphere.

In the sky above the obelisk, there was a flash like a shooting star and was gone.

“Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind.” - Rudyard Kipling
I can't find the light.
A smoky haze filters into the holes from outside
to within me.
My mind lies dormant-
    with the echoes of a door slamming
    and the vibrations afterwards, pulsing inside.
Stuffy, it is hard to breathe.
The flowers die. It's touching.
Stranded in a stream of everdayness.
    of the approaching time, make this, do that
Finished, start, stop and begin-
The who's stand alone like stick people in the fog.
I can't find the switch.
There are no paradises or heavens or stars—
    just dust.
And the smoke—it burns the senses,
    and dulls their response.
Wait! Wait.
Did you see it? Did it come?
    Missed.
Gone before I could even think
to feel it, to touch.
Hollow, bare—an endless echo
Knocking, Yet no one is there.
    Eyes, eyes. Your tears cannot bring
resurrection to the dead.
They can only etch patterns of broken dreams
on cheeks made of stone.
The who's are laughing, mocking my face
in the wetness,
the acidic vapor eating their souls away.
    Look, look. But I am blind.
I can only smell the light.
The fires smolder, hissing breathing heat
in the un-light.
Shattered hopes hang like jagged mobiles
suspended in midair
which tear at the flesh
and let the blood run smooth
and oh, so clean
of the brightest red, shining in the dark
until it dries to form a hard scab
and a gleaming white scar.
Where is it?
Groping in the nothingness, the particles
swirling in sequence,
One, two, three, four.
A shiny, palatable globed fruit—the gift!
the tongue drools in anticipation.
Sorry, eaten already.
The who’s are sinking into the vapor.
Nobody knows.
The vapor crystallizes upon us,
sealing in a vacuum filled with smoke
and no holes. Suffocate all ye ones.
The maze gets more complicated at each turn.
Adjust, you sticks.
Breathe in all the deadness-
The ways have all melted—
it doesn’t matter.

“Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, three-piled hyperboles,
spruce affectation, figures pedantical.” - Shakespeare

“A poem must intensely excite. Excitement is its province, its
essentiality…” - Edgar Allen Poe
WHO KILLED CAIN?

Natalie Ashanin

A Play in One Act—Two Scenes

Place: The wilderness, outside the Garden of Eden
Time: About twenty years after the expulsion
Cast: Adam - middle-aged, irritable, showing signs of strain
Eve—middle-aged, loving but careworn
Abel—16 years old, placid in nature, easy going, helpful, lovable
Cain—18 years old, rebellious, moody, introspective

They are dressed in skins, or roughly woven cloth. Adam and Eve should have a shawl or stole which can be pulled over the head when required. As the scene opens we see a rude hut, or perhaps the opening of a cave to the left, with primitive tools outside it—a basket, a hoe, a hollowed out stone for grinding grain etc. A little to the right of center back is a rude stone altar. In the background are mountains, with a large volcano guarding a pass between them. As the scene opens, Adam is sitting outside the hut, shaping flints.

SCENE I

ADAM: Cain! Where are you Cain? I need more flints. Why isn’t that child around when you need him—Cain!
EVE: (coming out of hut) He’s probably down by the brook. He spends a lot of time there.
ADAM: Doing what? Dreaming! Utterly useless, that’s what he is. He doesn’t do a thing unless I tell him—over and over. Downright lazy, that’s what he is.
EVE: Now Adam, calm down. He’s alright. He’s just trying to figure things out. It’s a hard life we lead and...
ADAM: And whose fault is that?
EVE: That's right, blame me . . . it was all my fault—and I did it all for you.
ADAM: For me? Now see here...
EVE: Yes, for you! Casting eyes at the tree and always wondering why we couldn't touch it, then complaining you were bored with the same old menu. What was I to think? I thought it would please you.
ADAM: Now see here, I may have wondered, but I never would have gone near it, so don't try to excuse yourself by blaming me!
EVE: But once I picked it, you ate it, didn't you? You didn't have any qualms then, did you? So don't put all the blame on me!

(Enter ABEL with a shepherd's crook in one hand, a pair of dead rabbits in the other)
ABEL: Imma, look what I have for you! I snared two rabbits for supper.
EVE: (taking the rabbits, at first with delight, then as she looks at them, with sorrow) Oh, thank you Abel. They will make a nice stew. Oh, the poor dears! I remember how sweet they were in the Garden. It doesn't seem fair somehow that He should punish them along with us. The poor innocents, they didn't do anything. And all the other animals, pushed out along with us. It doesn't seem right somehow.
ADAM: (takes the rabbits from her and puts them on a rock outside the hut. He puts his arm around EVE to comfort her) I don't know why He did it, Eve, but all creation was in our care, and when we failed, it failed with us. As we suffer, so do all created things, dying and bleeding to support our life.
ABEL: Then if we ever redeem ourselves we redeem them too—right Aba?
ADAM: (beams proudly at Abel) That's right son! (he sighs) But can we ever redeem ourselves? It will be a long, long process and I fear that left to ourselves, we never will be able to do it.
ABEL: Then is there no hope - for us, and for them?
ADAM: (looking toward the mountain) I don't know...I think... I feel...something tells me He means to help...but there is a long struggle ahead, Abel. For us - for you and me, the Garden is lost. Perhaps someday, for your sons' sons' sons . . . (shakes his head) I don't know, Abel, I just don't know!
(Cain saunters in, examining a rock)
ADAM: Oh, there you are Cain. Didn’t you hear me calling you? What’s that you have?
CAIN: A rock—look, see how pretty it is with all the colors in it. I found it down by the brook.
ADAM: (exasperated) A rock indeed! And can we eat it? You are the most useless thing! Your brother brought us some rabbits for supper and you, you bring a rock! You’re supposed to provide us with grain and vegetables. Where are they?
CAIN: (sullenly, throwing the rock on the ground) Nothing’s ripe yet.
ADAM: What about the grain in the plot on the other side of the brook?
CAIN: That’s for sacrifice. Do you want to eat that? I’ll get it.
ADAM: Don’t be insolent! Go and find something in the woods - there must be berries or nuts or something! (He picks up the rabbits) I’ll go and skin these for you, Eve. (Exit Adam)
CAIN: Why does he have to get so mad at me? I can’t do anything to suit him!
EVE: (soothingly) Don’t get upset, Cain. It’s just that your father has so many worries and he needs all the help he can get. You could help him more.
CAIN: Well, he always shouts at me - never at him (he indicates Abel) Perfect little Abel-boy can’t do anything wrong!
ABEL: Oh lay off, Cain. You know you provoke him on purpose.
CAIN: I do not - but he makes me mad! I wish he’d leave me alone.
EVE: Now boys, there’s no need to squabble. Cain, I think I saw some greens in your garden that looked about ready. Go on and get some of those and I’ll fix a nice salad to go with those rabbits.
CAIN: Oh, alright! (Exit Cain)
EVE: (sitting down and grinding some grain) I declare, I’m at my wits’ end. Everytime your father and Cain get together, they fly at each other. I don’t know what to do.
ABEL: It’s because they’re really so much alike. Cain really wants Aba to like him—he really does—that’s why he gets so upset when Aba gets mad at him.
EVE: You’re a smart boy, Abel - and a good one. I know it must seem sometimes, like I’m always taking Cain’s part, but I have to. Your father doesn’t understand Cain at all, so I must. Somebody has to love him and believe in him. Your father is closer to you, and that’s fine Abel, but don’t forget I love you too. It’s just that Cain needs me more.
ABEL: (gives her a hug) I know, Imma, I know. Cain’s alright, really he is, but Aba should lay off him a bit. But Cain does get him mad.

EVE: I know, I know!

ABEL: We have a nice lot of lambs this year. It won’t be hard to find a perfect one for the sacrifice.

EVE: That’s fine. You’re a good herdsman, Abel. Our flocks have grown. (She gets up and starts to make a fire)

ABEL: Shall I get you some wood for the fire?

EVE: Would you? That’s a dear! There’s lots of kindling lying around, but I could use a few larger logs.

ABEL: I’ll get you some - be back in a minute! (Exit Abel) (Eve starts to pick up kindling around the yard. When she reaches the back right of the stage she suddenly drops the kindling and screams)

EVE: Adam! Cain! Come quick, Abel - it’s back, the horrible thing is back, oh come quick! (Adam, Cain and Abel rush in)

ADAM, CAIN, ABEL: What’s the matter, what is it, where...

EVE: (pointing) There, by the bush, on the ground, see there it goes...

ADAM: The snake! Quick, kill it!

CAIN: (grabs the hoe and attacks the snake—Adam and Abel join in)

There, get it ... hurry ... watch out ...

ALL: No, it got away ... there it is ... get it ... quick there, no here, watch out, it’s striking ...

ADAM: Oh, it got away!

ABEL: (comforting EVE) It’s alright, Imma, it’s gone, it won’t bother you again. It was only a snake.

EVE: Only a snake! If only it were! It’s evil, Abel, it’s evil.

CAIN: It was just a small one, don’t be so frightened.

EVE: I wished you’d killed it. It’s a bad omen, I know. Evil is coming again!

CAIN: It was only a snake, Imma. We chased it away. Don’t carry on so!

EVE: (frightened) No, no it wasn’t “only” a snake. I know...it was the other one, the Dark One, the Troublemaker, oh it’s evil, I tell you, it’s evil! Oh Adam, I’m afraid!

(Adam puts his arms around her protectively. Cain and Abel stare at each other, incomprehending)

Curtain
Early morning, a few days later. A thin spume of smoke is issuing from the mountain. Cain is sitting on the ground, a sheaf of grain is next to him. He is staring moodily at the volcano.

(Eve comes out and starts to set out breakfast. She gets a skin of milk and pours it into rough bowls. She takes some dates out of a basket and arranges them on a mat which serves as their table.)

EVE: What are you looking at, Cain?
CAIN: There - where He is. He must know we're going to sacrifice. He's showing His sign on the mountain.
EVE: (straightens up and looks toward the mountain) Oh, He knows everything.
CAIN: Have you ever tried to go back there - to the Garden, I mean. Are you sure you can't go back?
EVE: (bitterly) Oh, we tried. We were lost at first, didn't know how to do anything, so we tried to go back, to beg for another chance, but it was no use. There's a fiery stream, like a sword, across the valley. It's impossible to get through.
CAIN: So what did you do then?
EVE: We learned.
CAIN: What did you learn?
EVE: Everything - how to do everthing, grow grain, make spears, weave cloth, hunt. We had to survive. (sighs) You can't imagine the despair we felt! You and Abel have it easy. We can teach you. You don't have to go through what we did.

(Adam and Abel enter, carrying skins of water)
ADAM: Cain! What are you doing mooning around? Why aren't you getting ready for the sacrifice?
CAIN: I was watching the hills - look, there's smoke on the mountain. That's His sign isn't it?
ADAM: (looks toward the mountain) Yes, He's there.
ABEL: Is it He who speaks when the mountain rumbles?
ADAM: Sometimes. He is there - and everywhere. His voice - His voice is like thunder...other times, it's like a whisper. You can hear it there, right inside you.
CAIN: But Aba, who is He? Why does He have such power?
ADAM: Do not question! He is what He is. Everything that is is His and is subject to Him.
CAIN: But why....
ADAM: (getting angry) You ask too many questions! Seek not to understand the unknowable. Accept.
CAIN: How can I just accept? I must know!
ADAM: You fool! Have you no fear?
EVE: Adam, be patient. Cain does not know Him as we do, as we did, back there. He can’t understand the awe, the terror...
ABEL: And love, Imma, you said there was love. .
EVE: That was before...before we had to leave. Afterwards, it was different.
ADAM: But He stayed with us Eve. He showed us how to survive. Whenever, desperate, I called to Him, He came. Without Him we should have perished here in the wilderness. He must love us in spite of everything.
CAIN: Then why did He punish us all? It’s unfair! Why should we suffer, Abel and I, and all because of what she did. And you didn’t stop her! But we weren’t even born! He’s a tyrant!
ADAM: You blasphemer! Be quiet!
CAIN: Why should I? I have a right to know. You two have lost paradise for me, and you want me to be quiet and accept!
EVE: You know how it happened Cain. I’ve told you often enough. As for what He is, He will in time reveal Himself to you - as much as you can bear, that is. Now go and get the rest of your offering. That sheaf is too small.
CAIN: I have another. I’ll get it. (Exit Cain)
ABEL: Shall I get the lamb now, Imma?
EVE: Yes, go on. We must start before it gets too late. (Exit Abel)
ADAM: (sits down and helps himself to some food) You’re too soft on Cain, Eve. You must make him do his share of the work. Abel and I had to bring all the water by ourselves.
EVE: Cain’s a thinker. He wonders all the time.
ADAM: A lot of good wondering will do him! I wish I could understand him, but somehow I can never get close to him.
EVE: Have you tried listening to him?
ADAM: Humph! Listen to him? Why doesn’t he ever listen? Everytime I start talking to him he gets that faraway look in his eyes, as if he’s saying “ho-hum, there he goes again!” Ask him to do something, and he’s got a hundred different excuses why he can’t. Abel now, is a different story. He’s always willing to help, always around
when you need him. Never complains. Why he's a joy to have around!

EVE: They're different.
ADAM: They certainly are! If I wasn't the only man around, I'd wonder... (Enter Abel, a lamb slung around his shoulders. He is running away from Cain who is pursuing him. Abel runs to Eve and cowers next to her.)

CAIN: (furious) You... you, it's all your fault! You did it on purpose!

You always spoil things for me... .

ABEL: Honest, Cain, I didn't. They just got out of the pen. I couldn't help it.

CAIN: You didn't lock them up - it's all your fault!

ADAM: Calm down Cain. What happened?

CAIN: (trying to hit Abel) His sheep! His damned sheep got into the grain and ate it. They ate my sheaf for the sacrifice! (He tries to hit Abel again, but Eve fends him off)

ADAM: Stop it! That's enough. You must have been careless and left the sheaf lying about.

CAIN: I did not! You always stick up for him!

EVE: Well, the harm's done. We can't delay any longer. Let's start the sacrifice. Cain, your one sheaf will have to do. It isn't your fault you have no more.

(They rise and stand before the altar. They prostrate themselves, then rise and raise their hands over their heads. Abel steps forward and places the lamb on the altar. Adam takes a branch from the fire and lights the wood on the altar. The smoke rises upward.)

ALL: All praise to Him who accepts our offer! Selah!

(They bow).

ADAM: Cain, your turn now.

(Cain places his sheaf on the altar. Adam lights the wood again. Instead of rising, the smoke billows down around the bottom of the altar. Everyone coughs and chokes)

ADAM: He does not accept it!

(Cain steps forward. He raises his face and a clenched fist to heaven and cries out:)

CAIN: Why not? Isn't it enough for you? I'm not to blame if Abel's sheep ate your grain. Why don't you take it out on him! What's wrong with my offering that you reject it? (There is a long pause. The mountain rumbles. Cain listens) No! I am not unjust to my
brother . . . Am I my brother's keeper, that I should be concerned with what he does? The fault is his! (He listens again, then suddenly, enraged, he pounces on Abel) You . . . it's always you! Aba loves you best and now He . . . He too favors you! You always spoil it for me! (They scuffle) I hate you! (Cain picks up a rock and hits Abel with it. Abel sinks to the ground and is still.)

EVE: What have you done!

ADAM: (runs to Abel) Abel...Abel, my son, speak to me! Abel! (He raises a grief-sticken face) He's dead! Abel's dead!

EVE: (runs to look, then covers her face with her veil and rocks back and forth, wailing) Oh Abel, Abel my son, the joy of my life!

ADAM: (advances on the horrified Cain) You good-for-nothing, you wretch! You've killed your brother! Murderer!

CAIN: No! No! I didn't mean to do it! I was angry, but I loved him! (sobs, hides his face in his arms)

(Eve pulls Adam away from Cain)

EVE: Oh Adam, what are we to do? (She goes to Cain and tries to comfort him, but he throws her off and prostrates himself before the altar)

CAIN: Oh, Thou who art All in All, what shall I do? What can I do? How shall I expiate my crime?

(The stage is darkened a little and from the volcano there comes a low rumble. Cain rises on his knees and raises his arms imploringly, then bows his head.)

CAIN: No! Let me die! Let me wash out my sin with my blood, but do not send me away - alone - where all will be against me. Slay me right here! (bows his head) (sobs) According to Thy will be it done, I will go. (He rises. Somehow, he seems older, his face riven with grief. There is a remote look in his eyes.)

Imma—Aba—I must go.

EVE: Where, Cain where?

CAIN: Away ... there, beyond the desert. He wills it. I must seek my expiation, there - away from you. I know not what awaits me, but I cannot stay here. I must forever be an exile and a wanderer on the face of the earth.

EVE: (anguished) But I have lost one child - must I lose the other as well? Stay Cain. Work out your salvation by being doubly our son!

CAIN: I cannot. See, look upon my face. His mark is upon me and I am condemned to be a vagabond. It is His judgment.

ADAM: (somberly) He must go Eve. There is no other way. His
brother's blood cries out from the ground. It is forever between us. He must go!

(Cain takes Abel's crook. Eve hurriedly packs up the remains of the breakfast in a cloth which she gives to him. He slings a water skin over his shoulder, then goes to center stage.)

CAIN: (speaks to heaven) I acknowledge my guilt and accept Thy will. Thou hast set thy mark upon me and from Thy face shall I be hid. I go to... whatever awaits me.

(He turns, looks longingly at his parents) Aba, Aba I... I love you!

(He turns and runs from the stage)

(A long pause)

EVE: (sobbing) You have killed them! You have killed my children!

ADAM: (trying to comfort her) Cain killed Abel, Eve, but he is alive.

EVE: (Throwing off Adam and confronting him) Alive? You call going off alone into the wilderness alive? He's just as dead to me as Abel is - and you killed him!

ADAM: I killed him?

EVE: Yes, you! You with your favoritism. You never even tried to understand him. He wanted your love so much, but all you ever saw was Abel. It was his jealousy of the love you had for Abel which drove him into his rage!

ADAM: Am I responsible for his being jealous? Abel was good and sweet. Cain was...is...difficult. He never did what he was supposed to. His killing Abel only proves it!

EVE: No, oh no, Adam! Oh, Adam, you don't understand. It was your love he wanted. You had so much for Abel, but so little for him!

ADAM: And you, you made it up by spoiling him, always taking his part. Cain could do no wrong. You were always defending him. You still are!

EVE: You never understood him. He was a seeker. He questioned. It was hard for him to accept what happened to us, our life here.

ADAM: And why? Because you filled his head with tales of how glorious it used to be.

EVE: Abel heard the same tales.

ADAM: But you should have seen the effect they were having on Cain. They made him discontented. It wasn't my love for Abel, but your blindness to Cain's faults which killed him.

EVE: No! I had to love Cain, for you had so little for him. I had to make it up. You left me the difficult one and took the loveable one for yourself. It was easy to love Abel.
ADAM: I loved them both!
EVE: And so did I . . . and now we've lost them both! (sobs)
ADAM: How did it happen? How did things come about to end this way?
EVE: Who really killed Abel? Who killed Cain?
(They look at one another. The stage gradually becomes darker while the volcano is lit up with a red glow. Wind blows. The volcano begins to erupt)
ADAM: No! Oh no, no! (He covers his head with his prayer shawl and sinks to the ground) Oh NO!
(Eve stares at him, then understanding comes to her and she gives a piercing shriek and drops to the ground, covering her head. They cower on the ground as the volcano rumbles and the winds blow.)
CURTAIN

SHY

John D. Wilson, Jr.

I sit alone in mute contemplation,
Thoughts of her, captive within consciousness,
While passion lingers on into oblivion,
Her love was captured by capriciousness.

I look upon remembrances of her caress,
Oblique as they are few and far-between,
As fading spirits; I am deserved of less,
Eros' fields, I am not content to glean.

I alone remain, without having seen,
Romance was not to occupy my time,
Distant, yet alluring; she is quite keen,
Not allowing me the pleasure most sublime.

Yet alone I sit, silent thought submerged,
Within the realm, my hope shall not be purged.
Hey, Fred. What'll you have? Oh. I dunno. The Blue Plate isn't bad today. Sound like a winner? Okay—HEY, RUDY! A BLUE PLATE WITH HASH BROWNS AND A COFFEE! Huh? Oh, that picture up there? That's a couple my ol' high school buddies, Ziggy and J.B. They were the best of friends, those two. You'd always see 'em clowning around in the halls, punching on each other or makin' faces, y'know? Sorta like Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy, except Ziggy was short and puny, an' J.B. was tall and muscular. Ol' J.B., he flexed more muscles gettin' a drink of water than I would in a tug o' war! What an ox!

Yeah, I guess when they say that opposites attract they musta had Ziggy and J.B. in mind. Ziggy talked fast, and was always usin' his hands to show what he was talkin' about. Just to look at him, you'd think he was one of them deaf-mutes.

It wasn't that way with J.B., though—he was a real low-key guy. J.B. did everything smooth, y'know? When he ran, it was like watchin' a thoroughbred run the quarter. You've heard of natural athletes, haven't ya? Well, this guy was the dictionary definition. Effortless coordination. That's why it was so funny to see those guys stroll down the halls together. Ziggy would flap up and down like a banty rooster, while J.B. would sorta ease his way through the crowd. Guys in a group would let J.B. pass like some foreign ambassador. Ziggy just bounced off everybody like a human pinball.

Yeah, they were a sight, them two. I can see 'em now. J.B. in his short blond hair and big red letter jacket, followed by Ziggy with his hair flying everywhere at once, dressed in a shabby ol' Navy pea jacket that the Salvation Army probably gave away.

Ziggy was a real wiseacre. He could crack anybody up. Anybody. Like when he stuck those rubber tubes down Mr. Bundy's pants pockets in chem lab and turned the water on. Right during a lecture. It gushed down his leg and Ziggy yelled, "Hey, look! Bundy's had an accident in his pants!" What a card, that Ziggy! Bundy was screamin', "MISSter Zickgraf, I believe MISSter Weeks"—that's our principal, Ducky Weeks—"would like to see you RIGHT NOW!"
So ol’ Ziggy, he up an’ says, “Well, I’m afraid Mr. Weeks will have to make an appointment like everyone else.” The whole class was really goin’ bananas by now, especially J.B. Ziggy could always get J.B. goin’.

Anyhow, Bundy is steamin’. “MR. ZICKGRAAAFL!” he yells, shakin’ his head like an epileptic. But Ziggy is ready. “All right, Mr. Bundy. Don’t get excited. I don’t want you to have another accident!” Everybody is just dyin’ laughin’, and Ziggy waltzes out like Groucho Marx to see the principal. Sure, it was kinda dumb to do, I guess, but without Ziggy, I’da never made it through chemistry.

Did he ever get in trouble? You mean for his wisin’ off? Well I hope to shout, he did. You don’t pull all the damn stuff he did an’ get off scot free everytime. Nosirree. I think Ducky—our principal—laid into him a few times, even though Ziggy would blink those innocent blue eyes O’ his an’ say, “Yes, Mr. Weeks. No, Mr. Weeks. It was all a misunderstanding, Mr. Weeks.”

Then there was the time that Ziggy an’ J.B. got everybody in drafting class to move their mouth without talkin’. Mr. Fry turned up his hearing aid full blast an’ then Ziggy went up an’ yelled in his ear, “MR FRY, CAN I SHARPEN MY PENCIL?” Well, Ziggy really got his hide tanned for that! He got away with most everything else, though, ’cause J.B. always backed him up. You’d think a guy like Ziggy would get punched out all the time, but not with J.B. around. J.B. had fists the size of small hams, and made it clear that he would use them on anybody that gave ol’ Zig a rough time. Boy, they were just an inseparable team.

Huh? No, you won’t see ’em around now. They both left town after they graduated. J.B. got a baseball scholarship to some small college out in California. They say he coulda gone pro if his arm hadn’t gone bad. Damn shame, y’know it? J.B. could really throw heat. I think he sells insurance out there now.

Ziggy? Well, Ziggy, he ran off with Sally Tate. Y’know Sally? Reverend Tate’s daughter. Nobody’s heard from ’em since. They say he probably went out to California to live with J.B., but—who knows? All I know is, we sure as hell miss him. Well, the fellas used to, anyhow. We’d be down to the Elks, drinkin’ a few beers, y’know, and somebody’d say, “Remember when ol’ Ziggy locked the janitor in
the broom closet?” or “That sounds like somethin’ Ziggy would do.” Nobody remembers him much now, though. Seems like the old gang’s thinnin’ out. Mostly younger fellas now, y’know? It’s kinda sad. They sure were a crazy pair.

Can I get you another cup of coffee?

**HOUSEWIFE’S MORNING SONG**

*Julie Heller*

There are thousands of cluttered breakfast tables every morning, But my heart rises like the steam from coffee cups at only one: Occupied by this man so un-rare it cools my coffee to think of it. But this man belongs to the corner of this kitchen And these jelly jars as only this man can belong. Including Death

Look at your hand. Your hand which is smooth and white— So young. What can be done?

One day, some day Look at your hand: Wrinkled and marked—so old Everything’s been done.
I've never told this to anyone before, but last year, just before school started, I was captured and taken aboard an alien spaceship.

Now I'm sure there are a lot of questions concerning my admittedly unbelievable claim. For one, I could be either lying, deranged, or the victim of wild hallucinations. For another, some might question whether the structure in which I was taken was indeed a spaceship, and even if it was, was it truly alien. Well, to answer all these questions, you just better believe me, because I got the proof and it just might make me the most powerful person on earth.

But let me go on with my story. It was just after midnight and I was driving down Five Points Road between County Line and Southport Road. Way out in the sticks. So there I was, driving along, when up in the sky, and no, I was neither drunk nor stoned, I saw a circle of red lights spinning around and around. In the middle of the red lights was a purple light that glowed on and off. You can imagine that I was pretty shocked by just that, but right after I first saw the thing, the purple light got brighter and began to flash more rapidly until it was a long, continuous stream of light like a big purple searchlight. And worst of all, this big purple searchlight was aiming right at my car! Pretty soon it swallowed my car and all I could see was purple. The car slowed down and stopped all by itself and I couldn't move a single muscle. Not even my eyelids.

I'm not sure exactly when, but I lost consciousness. It wasn't a bad sleep, and in fact it was pretty good, because I didn't have any dreams since all I could see was that glowing purple light. I don't know how long I was out, but when I did come to, again I was pretty shocked. You've seen movies and read stories how when people are taken aboard flying saucers they're just amazed at all the sophisticated equipment and these little green men and everything. Boy are they wrong! I found myself lying on a bare mattress in a room in a slum apartment. Can you believe it? The place was filthy. There were stains on the walls, the plaster was falling from the ceiling and there was mud and an unmentionably disgusting crud all over the floor. It stunk.
I laid there for a while, not moving so I wouldn't get any of that crud on me. I was scared out of my mind, too. Man, I wanted some high-powered equipment and computers and stuff so at least I'd know what was going on. You can imagine how confused I was. And it didn't help any when this guy came walking in. He was pretty normal looking, but short (about five-two, I'd guess) and he was dressed in sneakers, jeans, and a flannel shirt. Right then I thought he was a fellow prisoner who had escaped and came to rescue me, so I jumped up and greeted him. But then I saw it. He had a ridiculous long tail that had a tuft of dark hair on the end of it. He looked so stupid. I laughed at him.

“What's so funny?” he said defensively.

I kept on laughing and he was getting pretty mad.

“Laugh at this, funny body.” He pulled out what I guess was supposed to be a ray gun, but it didn't look like anything more than a flashlight. He aimed it at me and flicked it on. Once again, it was the purple light and it put me right to sleep.

When I woke up this time, I was sitting in a chair in another filthy room. Across from me, sitting behind a desk was a short, fat bum who hadn't shaved for a couple of days. He was wearing a dirty T-shirt with a hole torn just to the left of his navel, and his hair was greasy and all messed up. And there was that stupid tail.

“Sleep well?” he asked me.

“What is this?” I said. “If you guys are supposed to be spacemen, you're doing a pretty bad job of it.”

“What do you want?”

“Where's all your computers and far out technology?”

“We didn't bring any with us.”

“Why not?”

“We didn’t think it would be worth it on this crummy planet.”

“You're one to talk. You guys are just a bunch of derelicts, living in this goddamn dump.”

“Yeah, well we sure made a mistake picking you up. Low intelligence quotient, SAT scores total of 850, sub-average personality rating, kitsch culture taste, abnormally low sexual drives, poor physical upkeep, lacking in muscular development, a congenital though not deformed defect in the lumbar region, a poor credit risk, a pair of speeding tickets in 1973, Mary Jo McCollum just turned you down for a date...shall I go on?”
I lunged at him but the fat slob dodged me and I fell reeling to the floor. He stood over me and kicked me in the side and pulled out one of those flashlights, holding it in my face.

“You asshole,” he snarled. “You’re not going to get out of here until we’re done with you.”

I conjured up visions of dissections, frontal lobotomies, and mind probes.

“What are you going to do with me?” I asked.

“We just want you to do something for us.”

He grabbed my arm and helped me up from the floor, but I punched him in his tremendous beer-gut and tried to run out of the room. But as I should have expected, I soon found myself engulfed in purple light. Again, I passed out.

I woke up sitting in that chair again, but this time I was tied in the chair with a rope. That fat son of a bitch was sitting behind his desk, leering at me and waving his stupid tail. I hated him.

“Sleep well?” he asked.

“You guys are a joke,” I said. “If you wanted to restrain me, why don’t you put me in some kind of a ray?”

“We did.”

“That purple piece of junk is nothing new. Earth science could do that.”

“Shut up.”

I obeyed him. I didn’t care any more. I figured I might as well play his game.

“We just want you to help us out,” he said.

“But why me? Why didn’t you get somebody who knows some government secrets or something?”

“We don’t want government secrets. You just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

“Lucky me. You going to kill me? Take me apart?”

“God no. Why would we do that?”

“That’s what you aliens usually do, isn’t it?”

He waved his hand at me in a gesture of disgust and shook his head.

“Just do what we want you to, okay?”
“I will not betray my country.”
“You fool. We’re not asking you to.”
“Well what do you want?”
“Buy us some beer.”

I looked at him for a moment then strained forward and turned my ear to him.
“What?”
“Buy us some beer,” he repeated.
“What do you want beer for?”
“We’re out of it.”
“You mean you guys drink it?”
“Sure. Why not?”
“Doesn’t it mess up you aliens’ metabolism or something?”

He jumped up from his seat and almost threw his flashlight at me in rage.
“When are you going to cut out that spaceman crap?” he roared.
“Sorry.”
Pacing in front of me, he threw his hands in the air. He turned to me abruptly and put his hand on my shoulder.
“Will you buy us some beer?”
“Why can’t you buy it?”

He took a deep breath and cast a glance at the ceiling. Closing his eyes, he exhaled slowly. Then he laughed and swung his tail around and waved the little tuft of hair in my face.
“Stop!” I yelled. “I’ll buy your damn beer! Just stop it.”

He yelled for one of his alien friends, and held his flashlight on me while his friend untied me. The three of us walked out of the room. It was morning by now and I could see my car parked along the curb outside. Just before we went through the door, the head alien stopped me.

“Now listen”, he said, “we’ve not asking that much. Just walk into the liquor store and order ten cases of Blatz.”
“Boy, you guys really are aliens. Get some Bud, man.”
“Shut up.”

I obeyed him, seeing that they were both holding flashlights on me.

“Here’s the money,” he continued, handing me a wad of bills. “Once you load the stuff up and drive us back here, we’ll let you go.”

It seemed fair to me. The head alien opened the door and we all walked out to the car. Alien number two opened the door of my car and
we got in. I nearly slammed the door on the head alien’s tail, but he got it out of the way. He threatened me once more with his flashlight but since I was driving he didn’t zap me.

There was a liquor store just around the corner. I pulled up in front of it and went in to get the beer. The clerk helped me carry the ten cases, and he had the strangest look on his face when he saw those two sitting in the back seat, fanning themselves with their tails. I kind of grinned at him and thanked him for his help. Before I got in the car, the head alien told me to bring in a six-pack.

They each popped open a can and started chugging greedily. Hah, I knew that beer would mess up their metabolism. They started getting drunk right away, and as they did, their stupid tails got stiff. They both giggled and acted really dumb for a pair of grown-up aliens.

“Hey! Will you two settle down? I’m trying to drive,” I told them.

They just laughed at me. One of them rubbed his tail in my face, but I grabbed his tuft of hairs and pulled on it. He yelled groggily, but he was too drunk to remember to zap me with his flashlight. The other one just laughed at him.

I was really relieved when I got back to their slum apartment. I helped those two fools out of the car and led them up to the door. They stumbled in. I carried all their beer in for them, and didn’t even bother to steal any even though they wouldn’t have been able to stop me. But I did steal something. Just before I left I reached into the head alien’s pocket and stole his flashlight. I zapped both of them and they fell restfully asleep. I hope they both had terrible hangovers.

I ran to my car and sped off, and I never saw or heard of those two stupid-looking aliens ever since.

So now I’ve got this ray gun and it’s probably a power unmatched by anyone on earth. I’ve used it only a few times; once to shut my boss up and another time to zap a gas station attendant when I didn’t have any money. Still, I keep it with me at all times, even though I notice it glows purple at night.

I only wish I could find out what this little stub that’s grown at the base of my spine is.
And there I was
Raving absurdity after absurdity
Chastizing everything
And never had anything to call my own.
Engaged in the great desire
to be less than I am
And worst than I should be.
There I was
Absurber than the Absurb.
But I would like to say
Without being
silly
vain
pretentious
Or absurd
I Love You
maybe.
REQUIEM FOR YESTERDAY

Jon Brooks

It's over.
In the dimly-lit memory
all you can see is the
shimmering
of a lucid tear in his eye
that never escaped;
and the people never look back
or even wonder why...
at least, not very long.
His time was up
and he never knew it -
confused, he died
a thousand times in his mind
Only once by suicide
the dreams that never came true
don't matter any more:
yesterday gives them to tomorrow
as the candle of today
dies.
CRITIQUE SONG OF K. BRUCE COOK

Kevin Cook

“Spiritus est promptus; carno est infirma.”

Let us pause then, you and I,
When the morning has leaped up into the sky
Into tenth, eleventh places on the clock;
Let us stay, within some halfway-fathomed lines,
The twining, whining shrines
Of hopeless nights in helpless authors’ shells
And dusted dreams marooned in private Hells:
Lines we follow like bacterial lament
With a clinical intent
Which lead us to a weekly essay question.
So watch as thirty sages
Rush away to fill five pages.

In the room the children all succumb
To “Sailing to Byzantium.”

The too-cool air that filters in beneath the weathered doors,
The yellow sun that cools its feet upon this hardwood floors,
Mix essences in corners of the classroom,
Chill chalk definitions, day-old chores,

Let drift within themselves the words that float unspoken,
Slide out the window, make a three-floor leap,
And noting that it is an early April day,
Abandon Jordan Hall, when talk is cheap.
And indeed there will be days
For the yellow cool that gilds the parking lot,
Swirling in the quickly taken squares;
There will be days, to strip the haze,
To shed the masks that mask the feelings that you feel;
There will be days to truly comprehend,
And understand the words of Eliot,
That like a dividend will then descend;
Days to know, yet disagree,
And days for yet a hundred credit hours,
And for a hundred seen-from-window flowers,
Before I take a yellow-cool degree.

In the room the children all succumb
To “Sailing to Byzantium.”

And indeed must come the time
To wonder, “Prufrock’s puzzle — must it be?
Is it all his own fault? Is it me?
Am I naive, to shun his corpse-esprit?”
(They will say: “How ideals cling to him!”)

My unlined life, a double decade interim,
My unreceded hair, and search for a synonym —
(They will say: “What does he want? The seraphim?”)
Do I dare
Disturb the wasteland man?
At twenty years there’s time
For judgments that will later seem a crime.

For I have known it all already, known it all:—
Have known the objects, meanings and designs;
I have painted all the world in black/white lines;
I have known far more than others each new fall,
Have handed out beliefs like valentines.
Again should I presume?
But now I wonder (once I knew, knew it all)—
Wonder if perhaps there's more than black and white.
When this is contemplated, scrawling on a pad,
When I am penned and writing on the wall,
Maybe all things are mad;
Guardian angels quickly take to flight, and
The world's no anteroom.

And now I think, having known it all, known it all—
Is anything knowable? Do I know?
(For in the real light, is more than black and white!) 
Is it little bites of fear

That make me stall right here?
Insects that crawl into my ear, and somehow stop my scrawl
And can I faith exhume?
And how can I presume?

Shall I say, I have felt the dust of college halls
And read the chalk that stays upon the walls
Of empty rooms; and the fall of Gaul I can recall?

I should have stayed among my high school class
Acting older than we were, en masse.

But the poem, and the love song, are the issue,
Penned by wor (1)dy hand,
Bitter, grim, a hatred grand
Splashed upon the page, and printed for the few.
I shall, having read of his devices,
Have the courage to rebuke his sacrifices.
For though I've spoken rashly, spoken wrongly,
Though I've felt my words (grown fully wrong) forced back into
my throat,
I am a student—that keeps me afloat;
I have seen the certain truth of knowledge wane,
And have felt eternal Poets look at me, in pain,
But now, again, I'll think.

I have seen in his despair song, after all,
Prufrock's failing is the problem of Man,
He is afraid and unwilling to do what he can.
Asking always: "Would it be worthwhile?"
Completes the thought with just a futile smile.
He has not the heart to face what might befall,
Were he to break the mold, defy them all.
To say: "I am John Proctor, prepared to die,
Rather than to aid my own downfall!" —
Then one, recalling stronger days,
Might say: "That is a thing that I recall.
Martyrdom, I recall."

And it would have all been worth it, after all,
It would have been worth while,
After empty, hated parties and despairing,
After the bitter, after the fearful, after the dark that follows
all the weak—
All this, a life so bleak—
It's not impossible to die for what you feel.....
It would be as if a Samson, now, had brought the temple down on him:
It would have been worth while
If only one, wondering how it was you grew so tall,
And pondering your memory, should say:
"He had the wherewithal;
Perhaps it's Hope that's writing on the wall."

No, we are not all martyrs, nor were meant to be;
But we all need heroes, those daring to do
What we fear, to battle a windmill or two,
To reach a star, to reach, at least—again,
For better lives, here, now, to begin,
Though fearful and tearful and insecure:
Some men would follow, who had been hollow,
And some, in time, unable to endure,
Would fail.
But some would win.

Gloria (Glorious)...
In excelsis homo (man victorious).

Shall I retreat from such a vision? Too ambitious?
Their potential is what makes men more than fishes.
I find Prufrock's love song too malicious.

Any hope is nobler than no hope at all.

Prufrock feels he cannot change his ways,
But his paralysis is all our own.
We must strive for more, or die, alone.

We have lingered in the darkness, dying, small,
Grown stagnant in our wasteful failure-cry.

Man's only glory is the heart to try.