ORPHEUS

A Literary Magazine

ORPHEUS

Volume VI, 1978

Cal State Bakersfield

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

William Wordsworth

* * *

THIS ISSUE OF ***ORPHEUS*** IS HUMBLY DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO PURSUE CREATIVE ENDEAVORS RATHER THAN YEILD TO PASSIVITY.

* * *

"Let's keep on dreaming, it doesn't cost a thing."

Jehan Rictus

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The staff of ***Orpheus*** would like to express our deepest gratitude to the following:

CSB SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES for sponsoring ***Orpheus***.
CSB FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT.
Joan Lewis, Penny Vorhees, Vivian Cochneuer and Jacki Kenneth of the CSB REPROGRAPHICS CENTER.
Judy Clausen of the CSB NEWS BUREAU/PUBLICATIONS for office space and equipment for graphics.
Ron Macomber, printing.

Copyright 1978 by ***Orpheus***

EDITORS

Gary Powell Joanne White

GRAPHICS

Jerome Evans

COVER DESIGN

Michael Antonell
Richard Kolar

STAFF

Susan Bain
Tina Berona
Tim Gottfried
Charles Morrison
Joel Sherman
Candace McBeath

ADVISOR

Solomon O. Iyasere

PREFACE

Almost anything one says about poetry is as true and important as ***anything*** else that ***anyone*** else has said. Some people react ***physically*** to the magic of poetry, to the moments, that is, of authentic revelation, of communication, the ***sharing***, at its highest level, of personal experience; they say they feel a twanging at their tear ducts, or a prickling of the scalp, or a tickling of the spine, or tremors in what they hope is their heart. Others say that they have a kind of a sort of a vague feeling somewhere that "this is the real stuff." Others claim that their "purely aesthetic emotion" was induced by certain assonances and alliterations. And some are content merely to say, as they said of their first cinematographic picture, "By God it moves." And so, of course, by God, it does, for that is another name for the magic beyond definition. . .

Dylan Thomas

Look up through the trees
The sun is spinning a web
to catch your mind's eye.

Kay Barry

MEETING

At the edge of day,
As each star-threaded cobweb
Brightened into a rainbow gem,
Our spirits met and
Clung in wordless space
For an eternal instant.

Margaret Beilby

THE ALBUM

Alone in the quiet room
He turned back the covering,
Turned it back slowly, gently,
Fearful yet careful,
Turning the spiral bound
One square at a time,
From the top cover to the bottom sheet.
Then, just as carefully
He closed the cover,
Set his life upon a shelf
Eyes glistening, cheeks wet,
He went out silently
And softly closed the door.

Wava Owens

Damp night
Fog mist silvers the air
And cold settles into the marrow.
Allow me your refuge
Surround me in sweet welcome warmth.
We'll shed our burdens of life-worries
and melt into the moment.
Time won't reach us here.

P. A. Valentine

FISHERMAN'S DREAM

As you greet the sun at dawn
The prancing hooves of a fawn
And summer sighing in the trees
And snowy breath on every breeze,
Dance wild and merry mountain streams
Where hopeful anglers spin their dreams
The lingering speckled trout will hide
Beneath the singing snow capped tide.

Lillian

ONDINE

I saw a woman, a mermaid rather,
standing at a party swallowing the room
where other guests held faces unfinished.
But,
I saw, I *did* see grass swaying,
sighing green in her eyes
and a seaswim around thighs,
an Ondine beauty caught midstream.
Oh, the swinging mind,
my mind walking,
yes — through water
swaggering wide, yet
endangered, staggering
on somnolent dreamfeet.

Russell Huddleston

THE SHARPSHOOTER

Six men dead so far today. The boy breathed a sigh of satisfaction as he stroked his rifle lovingly. His bright eyes darked around the small camp of sleeping men; he swelled with pride at the importance of his post. He snapped erect when Captain Jackson, leader of the scouting band, sauntered up. "I trust you're keeping a close eye on the camp, boy. The men are depending on you."

"Yes sir."

"You did a good job today, boy. We've gotten rid of a lot more Yankees since you joined our outfit. You shoot real fine."

"Thank you, sir."

The captain strode off and the boy relaxed in the warm glow of the captain's praise. He thought back to his life before the war and cringed inwardly. He hadn't had a life before the war, unless you could call working a rocky-soiled, dead-end farm, living. His father had been angry when he joined the Confederate army, claiming that his son was needed at home to help. But the boy was adamant. He saw no future on the farm and he refused to stay.

So at an early age, the boy vowed to gain recognition and a place for himself, no matter what the cost. The recognition he sought came much sooner than he expected. Years of squirrel shooting on his father's farm had given him a sharp eye and a steady arm. He rarely missed his target.

The boy's first few months as a soldier were as exciting as he had dreamed. He was involved in several skirmishes with Yankee patrols and one major battle. He won a medal for bravery and was well-liked by his companions.

The Confederate army was quick to see how valuable the boy was to them. He was soon removed from the mass of common men fighting and dying for the Confederacy. The boy was reassigned to a scouting unit, a small marauding band that picked off Yankee scouts before they could infiltrate Rebel lines. The men gained a reputation for expert shooting and brazen guerilla tactics. The Yankees feared them – the boy was proud to be part of them.

When the boy's watch ended, the men packed up their camp. They headed for Colonel George Patterson's plantation to escort the aged man and his wife to a safer place in the city and then to convert the plantation house into a headquarters unit for the advancing gray lines.

The boy yawned as the men moved forward. He resented such mundane assignments. He was anxious to fight again.

They reached the hills surrounding the estate shortly before noon. The men eased their positions in their saddles and sat quietly, watching Captain Jackson, and waiting for orders.

The big house lay below, white with waves of sunlight shimmering off its sides. The fields and outbuildings around the house appeared deserted; the Colonel's slaves had long since gone. No sign of life stirred in the house – there was an uneasy silence in the air.

The Captain spoke to break the silence. "I don't like what I see; something's not right. I'll send two of you on foot to investigate. Boy, you and Sgt. Wilkes go."

The sergeant and the boy took off eagerly. Within twenty minutes, they were in shooting distance of the house. They hid silently behind a large clump of bushes and waited. "You figure there's Yanks in there, Sarge?"

"I dunno, boy. Keep quiet now – we don't want 'em to know we're here. We might see some action yet – I hope so."

The boy eased his cramped legs and steadied his rifle, his finger poised over the trigger. "Any Yank comes out of there, I'll get 'em, Sarge."

"I know you will, boy. Just be patient."

Soon, the door of the house creaked open and a lone blue figure stepped out, a rifle slung against his shoulder. The boy raised his rifle and took careful aim – the figure dropped.

"Good shooting, boy. You got him. Come on, let's go over toward the side of the house and see if there's any more. There can't be too many Yanks in there – it's too quiet."

They crept like cats toward the house – cautious and silent. To their surprise, the house was deserted. "I can't imagine why there'd only be one Yank holing up here, boy. Wonder what happened to the Colonel and his wife. Yanks probably got 'em. They always did like to kill women and old people."

The men edged near the barn and the fallen body. Suddenly, the boy stopped and cried out in horror.

The dead woman lay sprawled in the dirt, a crimson stain spreading over the front of her blue dress, a shovel clutched in her lifeless hand. The sergeant sank slowly to his knees. "My God. You've killed the Colonel's wife."

* * *

"Captain Jackson, I'm really worried about the boy. He's not himself."

"What can you expect, Sergeant? He's very upset about killing Mrs. Patterson. He'll get over it . . ."

"Maybe you should talk to him, Captain . . ."

"Sergeant, I already have. I told him to forget about it. It's just one of those things. Wartime you know. At least we don't have to worry about an investigation . . ."

"Yeah, sure was lucky the Colonel was already dead. Beats me how that tiny woman managed to drag his body outside . . ."

"Yes, well, she must have been planning on burying him . . . that's probably why she had that shovel . . ."

"Well, we'll be moving out tomorrow, Captain. Maybe some action will get the boy out of his slump . . ."

"Sure, I think so. We'll get back to fighting. He'll be fine. He's a real trooper . . ."

* * *

By sunset the next day, the Confederate band stumbled into a small Yankee camp. The Rebels charged forward, the boy in their midst. He sat straight in his saddle, his eyes glazed, his rifle hanging slack at his side. A Yankee soldier galloped headlong at the boy and ripped open his stomach with a sharp-pointed blade. The boy smiled, blood oozed thickly from the corner of his mouth, and he slid lifelessly to the ground.

Barbara Fraley

TUTANKHAMUN

O Great Tutankhamun, glimmering mosaic of pompous indignity, you are but a reminder of man's inability to transcend the barriers of time. Am I to believe that contained within thy magnificent tomb, lie the petrified remains of a god?

O Great Pharaonic figurehead, is it truly within thy power to conquer the legions of the dead with but the remnants of an equestrian horde of zealots? Within thy superficial divinity, humanity bestowed upon thee the power to create and destroy the armies of the living, yet imbued with powers by the cosmic entity, you sought to immolate the power of the universe. Is it for my people to believe that death elludes thee, O tyrant of the river Nile, or that the scarab remains the sole tutelary guardian of thy immortal carcass?

O Fearless warrior of the Valley of the Kings, region of the dead, arrayed in the motley of war, draped in the flayed flesh of thy victims, the Lord of the House of the Rising Sun beackons thee with pillars of metamorphic luminosity. Those who have died in battle for thy name, have arisen from their smouldering pyres to greet them, Tutankhamun, for those who perished by the flames of pharaonic ineptitude now seek retribution.

O Great Prince, caught within the Gorgon's eternal trance, glimmering majesty, god-King of the world, embellished in the riches of the universe, thou art but putrid flesh in mine eyes. For yours was a degenerate dynasty of malignantly deformed creatures clutching at receding filaments of life.

Now, O great divinity, as I peer into the lapiz lazuli eyes of thy gilded gold image, I see but a faint glimmering of eternity, a god-King imprisoned within the ephemeral boundaries of past glory, within the sepulchers of the dead.

Ruben Mendoza

THE FURNACE

We didn't have a big hearth glowing with fire to warm us when we came out of the cold. Nor did we have a modern heater with a thermostat that could keep us warm through the night. The big, sooty furnace in the basement kept our home warm. The furnace burned coal, so my Father and I would go down the steep stair-case into the basement to shovel coal.

The furnace was black cast-iron, dusted with soot. It was exciting to go into the basement with my father. I read travel books and adventure stories – the basement was a foreign country to be explored and the furnace fascinated me. As a child, I watched through the thick glass window in the door as the flames leapt around the coal, and they reminded me of my Sunday School lessons on Hell. I was frightened of the red and yellow flames, yet I thought of how beautiful Hell must be, all aglow with warm, soft colors.

When I was a little older, my Father taught me how to shovel coal into the furnace. There was a special room, with a door facing the furnace door, where the coal was stored. I dreaded opening the door to that room. The door was connected to the cold outdoors by a coal chute, and when I opened the door the cold air would rush in and battle with the warm air from the furnace. I was between them, always hurrying to shovel coal, so that I could shut the door to the cold and be left in the comfort of the warm air that hovered around the furnace.

The cold, however, could not altogether be avoided. Mornings always came too soon. After a long winter night the coal would be almost burned out and it took a while before the new coal my Father put in could re-heat the house. I hovered below my blankets and stayed in bed for a long time, to avoid walking over the icy floor. Over the years, I learned to keep my clothes next to the bed. That way, I was able to dress under the warm blankets and prolong my protective comfort awhile longer.

Only in the afternoon, when school was out, did I really enjoy being in the cold. My friends and I would snowball the girls as we came home from school. It was fun because they could never run fast enough to return the cold snow. While running through the cold, I couldn't wait to get home so I could help my Father shovel coal into the furnace. The glowing flames still fascinated me and being near the furnace gave me a chance to warm my chilled body and numb fingers.

* * * * *

I left the cold Midwest the winter after I finished highschool. A war needed soldiers and so, I joined the Marines. I looked forward to a relief from snow and icy winds and my job as a box-boy. Boot camp in California was hard, but I appreciated the warmer winter climate. It gave relief to the long hours of training.

At last my buddies and I were ready for battle. We were being sent to a country I had read about when I was younger. Then, it had been a tropical paradise, a place people from all over the world travelled to for vacation. I anticipated seeing the sandy beaches, tropical jungles, and Buddhist Temples I had only seen pictures of before. I knew I was going to war but looked forward to adventure. Growing up in the long cold winters seemed so dull compared to what I was going to do.

I passed out, with several others in my troop, when I first saw enemy bodies decomposing in the jungle. Some of the more seasoned soldiers laughed at us. With shaking legs we made our way through the jungle that day and many of the days that followed. The days and weeks were spent searching for pockets of enemy soldiers who were hidden throughout the territory. We passed through desolated villages which had been crushed by tanks. It was hard to imagine that once people ate and slept and laughed there. The rank odor of death pervaded every step we walked.

In the villages that were still standing, children would hurl stones and foul words at us. Once, a seven-year-old boy attacked the sergeant with a knife. The sergeant turned the knife on the child, and the boy fell in a pool of blood; his mother was crying hysterically and cursing the sergeant as we trudged on into the jungle. The sergeant laughed and said to a private, "Helluva place to be isn't it?"

The moist heat of the jungle was sometimes unbearable. Even after it rained, there was no relief from the heat because the whole jungle steamed. The only deliverance from the sweltering jungle were rare trips to the ocean. The ocean offered both safety and refreshment. Laying in the warm sun I would think of the cold winter back home and the furnace my Father had to fill with coal. I would recall those cold mornings as a child when I was able to prolong my comfort and protect myself from the cold by huddling beneath my blankets.

When I had been to war about five months I lost my left leg. We were on a routine search of villages, walking on a trail we had been down two days before, when I got a pungee stick in my thigh. The pain was unbearable – so much so that I fainted. I woke up several days later, still heavily sedated, and the doctor told me I had lost my leg from gangrene. All I can remember is that I cried, and went back to sleep.

I left that death-ridden land and war without a leg and my naivete. Occasionally, I go back home in the winter. I cannot go down the steep staircase anymore, but often, when walking in the cold, fresh air, I pass the coal chute and recall my childhood impressions of the warm soft flames in the furnace.

Joanne White

THE WANDERING BOAT

O it was so dark a night
No star no moon shone bright
The sky was pitch dark
Only crest foam wave curled white
Sinister furrows mark of ocean fight

The compass of misfortune didn't function
(why is it that bad luck never came alone?)
Where was the North Pole star
Where the Cross of the South laid?
Where were all the familiar constellations
Beacon of mariners of all nations?
Now, even the wrinkled map of China Sea,
by a gust of wind, whisked away
in the hands of pernicious Neptune.

Thus the boat was sailing but wandering
a toy in sea god's implacable strand
an easy prey of sweet yet treacherous mermaid
forever ready to lure humans
into her deep, somber breast!

Very often in many, many
a sleepless night I worry
about the fate of the unknown boat
Where could this aimless boat go
without fuel, without food, without water . . .
How can anyone day and night paddle and row?

Poor boat of the Wandering Vietnamese
Who renounced to his native country
Repulsed at every shore he touched
Isolated between the high, high sky dome
And the ever moving, frustrating seabed;
Sea sick, home sick, hungry, thirsty
Seeking freedom but finding only hostility
Poor boat without port of call
For ever wandering on the four oceans
For ever prowl . . .

Oh God! have mercy on those poor souls
I beg thee, guide them safely
to thy promised land
where the refugee can start a new life free
under thy protective wings
and bless them, O Almighty!

Chau Kim Dinh

THE CASTAWAY

She practiced a winning smile
And donned the clothes set out.
She wore a ribbon in her braided hair
And squeaky tight shoes upon her feet.

She walked slowly
Down the polished hall
Savoring the anticipation
Of love and family.

The other children
Smiled shyly
And wished her luck
And watched her
Grow smaller
As she headed for
The inlaid door
With the big gold knob.

The supervisor took her hand
And whispered tenderly,
"You look lovely, dear,
Perhaps this will be the day."

She crossed her fingers
And smiled shyly
At the couple waiting.
They fussed and fawned
And called her dear
And spoke in words above her.

"She is cute, don't you think?"
"Yes, but perhaps we should wait.
I think she isn't exactly what we . . ."

Thin shoulders hunched,
Life died in her eyes.
She walked showly away,
She wasn't chosen today.

Barbara Fraley

T.V. MOVIE

Flutes and violins

Tenderly kiss the air

With sound so sweet

And love so pure

The last night I saw you
I thought of the first time
I saw you standing alone in the wind
I said only "hello"
As your lips formed the sound that
Touched my ear
You saw me the next day
And rode in my car to the city
We hid from the rain
And laughed at the cats by the door.

In the night
I watched you pour milk in a bowl
"Kitty, here kitty," sounded so smooth
As you dressed and stepped out for awhile

Morning arrived.

I'm skipping stones down the street

My feet in the gutter, water so cold

There's simply no tenderness anymore

Merry Rogan

THE PASSING OF AN ERA

I've got eight dollar shoes
That used to cost five,
And now they're out of style.

Jerome Evans

SPIDER LADY

Across the traffic in the room, the boy hears SPACE SHOT pay off and watches in the neon machine the slow merging of a Soviet and American satellite: pop, pop. Two Games.

From its psychedelic middle, the juke box arms reach out and beep on a new groove sound by DiDi Dean and Band and play it: "Who don't ya be muh rock 'n' roll king," DiDi moans, "and I will be your sweet young thing."

Cuh-rap! John thinks, two games, two lousy games that dude won and I'm playing Pinball Wizard because it's new and the Syndicate hasn't fixed it yet and I haven't won one damn game.

"Why the hell do you go spending the hard-earned money you made mowing lawns?" his mother would ask.

"Yeah," his father would shout, "going down there to that greasy spoon and throwing your bread away on those goddamn machines that the Syndicate fixes and supporting those goddamn criminals!"

And every time his mother would say, "hey, leave him alone." And his father would lament that he was just trying to help the little bastard and save him from the "goddamn Syndicate." And she would yell, "Yeah, well there ain't no such thing and you stop using that foul language around me all the time, you sonufabitch."

And John'd slip away, them still arguing their vacation away. He'd move on down to the Yellow Sub for a malted and then to the Wiz to play the machines. And though his parents warned him not to, he'd take the beach route home along the oily Isla Vista cliffcoast.

John puts his last quarter in the silver coinhold of Spider Lady. It falls cleanly into the slot, crisply clicks off two games just like the sound of tiny bullets and plunks the coins down into the full tin stomach of the machine. There is a "Tilt" on Spider Lady, a winking neon woman with webbs of snaky hair and clothing of rainbow lights. John presses the little red navel button on the black and gold front of the machine. Spider Lady comes alive – the red and white and yellow and blue lights clack and bells ring, the 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 buttons beneath the glass playsurface light up, and a special red light flashes and its sound splinters the air. The humming game is settled down and ready to play.

He draws back the spring to spin out the first ball. About that same time, a kid his age with pimples, a tall skinny kid with a smart-ass look, saunters up and starts jiving him: "Hey, Flip! Yeah, shake it mother, yeah, shake it, flip it, oops, too bad, man, wow, you really screwed it, huh, you really lost it."

"Listen," John thinks to himself, "just lay off, OK?" He finds himself getting red and angry just about when his second ball drops straight through the sidepocket 1000-when-lit but the 1000 isn't lit.

"Hey, you missed that flip too," the kid said.

Still John does not answer him. The shiny steel ball almost drops, the special lights up, he makes two good flips, a save, gives a dramatic twist flip and in missing the flip moves the machine just enough to tilt it.

"Hey," the kid whistles, "you tilted Spider Lady, man. You tilted the game you shoulda won."

John stares down at the INSTRUCTIONS beneath the dirty glass of the machine. He looks up with hatred, past the cigarette burns on the painted wood borders of the machine and up to the peeling neon glass where the score is shown. Suddenly he pounds his fist against the glass and turns to the kid who'd come up on him.

"Look," said John, forcing the words through thin tight lips, "just move on, ok? I'd hate to have to knock the shit right outa you."

"Hey, man," said the kid, "you got a burr up your ass."

"Off my case, ok?"

Just then the manager paddles over, a panda of a man with dark coiled beard and stoned eyes. "What's happenin' here?" he asks.

"The machine tilted and it shoulda paid off," John replies.

"Yeah, well, minors ain't supposed to play these machines anyway, right, mister?" the pimply-faced kid asks and John almost hauls off and slugs him.

"You can have another game, man, don't sweat it," the manager says and reaches in his pocket for his chain of keys.

"Shee-ut," says the kid walking off. John watches the key turn in the keyhold and open the dark gut of the machine. The manager squats over and touches a hairthin wire connected to the coin slot. Click-click-click. The neon Spider Lady has three games on her.

"Thanks," John smiles.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," the manager comments to himself, moving on down to 2*0*0*1 to check how many games are being won off it. John imagines the Syndicate arriving in workmen's clothes early in the Santa Barbara morning fog, trucking in their secret magnets and screwdrivers and "fixing" the machine not to pay off.

Across the room, Space Shot pays off: pop, pop again. Two men dance back and forth before an enclosed hockey game as each flips a button which activates hockey flippers which shoot little discs back and forth toward the opponent's field goal. When the machine clicks off, the men walk away grumbling and Elton John is telling them that "butterflies are free to fly."

Another busy night at the Pinball Wizard. John's finished his games. He won two but felt cheated still, cheated by little magnets that prevented him from hitting the special targets and cheated by weak flippers that could not spin the bonus buttons. He sure wished he had another quarter. "Hell," he thinks, "one more quarter's all I'd need."

He looks around the room at all the machines flashing and the huddled men giving studied flips to gain control of tiny balls that rush down at them. All the wonderful machines in that place: Dream Mobile, Twist This Summer, Rancheroo, City Life, Lady Luck, Scorpio Rising. And the target games and the old-fashioned juke and the one-armed bandit machine that for a quarter prints up the Lord's Prayer on a tiny plastic disc.

John catches the faint smell of the oily sea beyond the strong rhythmic staleness of beer and hamburger and sweat and cigarette and cigar smoke. Nearby, the Magic Lantern lets out its audience, spilling them home in the dark summer night to argue about the axe-murder film playing there. The Loom Shop would be closed, its shells and beads catching the street light as they float on macrame hangers. He catches a breath of fresh air as a clock outside begins to strike 11 and the gameroom behind him still reverbs with machines.

John stands in the doorway as if balanced between the dark world outside that will return him to the cottage his parents have rented near the cliffs and the neon-lit atmosphere of his pinball palace. He decides to stay awhile, despite what his parents would say.

At first, he drifts through the noisy currents of the room, unable to decide which game to watch. Then, as if he were himself a steel ball drawn by magnetic force, he moves to a corner machine called ROCKET SOCKER. It was singing and dancing to the man's flips, bells and clicks and pops. John watched the shiny disc fall against a flipper and be sent out with a precise motion against a target and then fall neatly and deliberately (it seemed) into a special. Pop. And then the final number matched the machine number and another Pop!

"Wow, man, you beat it on score. You beat it on Special. And you matched!" John said.

"Would you like to play awhile?" a voice asked him.

"Sure," John said, already hearing the machine recycling for a new game.

Usually when he'd ask to play a game, John would be told no. This time, he hadn't even asked and he was playing first one game and then another on Rocket Socker. He could feel the man staring down at him. Perhaps it was excitement about winning and playing again and again and still the man letting him play and not wanting the machine back or perhaps it was fear that stopped him from looking back at the man. John was dimly aware that the Wiz was emptying out and that "last call" for grill orders had long since been sounded.

He played on, the flippers moist and cool with nicotine as, again and again, he plunged them in, squeezed them, and won. The machine seemed whirling with color as if suddenly he were lost in the game, had forgotten the early angry quarters and the unfair tilts and the syndicate magnets.

It was the last game.

Ball Two was finished.

Three to go and he was way, way ahead on score. More than before, he felt the stranger's eyes bearing down on him. Still, he did not look up. Behind him he heard another machine Pop! just as he flipped his ball into the Special-When-Lit pocket and the special didn't pay off.

"God Damn It," he said, pounding the glass surface.

He started at his own words. He looked up. The stranger was there, smiling a strange thin smile. Then the stranger was laughing a laugh that seemed to gurgle up slowly from deep in his throat and

then shake his whole body. John was even more startled when he looked into the man's eyes that seemed like long glowing tunnels.

John was frightened and didn't know why. He concentrated then on nothing but winning. He played the fourth ball. Flip! He missed the target. Flip, and the side-activators threw the ball against the rim of the target, the ball hurled down and John was sure he'd lost it but flipped anyway, and as in slow motion the ball moved against the Special Pocket and fell into it with an ecstatic Pahhhp!

He had won. Won again and then again on his last ball. Then matched, the machine giving a reluctant pop. He turned around to see where the man had gone only to discover that the lights outside the Wiz were turned out.

"About through, kid?" asked the owner, who had begun to sweep up.

"I got five games on," John said.

"yeah?"

"Five games left, me and this man was playing them."

"What man?"

"Ah, he left. And I got five games."

"That's far out. Wanna leave them on the machine and come back and play them off first thing tomorrow morning?"

"Wow, man, thanks," John said. He walked once more out into the night air and felt how much cooler and fresher it had become. He turned around and watched the owner humming and sweeping.

It was cool enough near the sea that John wished he'd brought his jacket. He looked at the long rim of sidewalk mapping into the darkness before him like a runway. The Magic Lantern was dark, with only a dim light spotted on "IG The Thing of Space" which would begin the next day.

How weird to walk by a dark and deserted theatre in the midnight hours. How angry his parents already would be. To them, winning games was no excuse not to be home by 10. They believed in curfews even on vacation. Well, let them.

He walked initially toward the cliffs, along a long line of eucalyptus trees, dark, with great shadows thrown against the sidewalk. They seemed to breathe and move.

He wheeled around, drawing and spinning a six-shooter he pretended to uncase from its holster. He was alone, and happy.

Slowly he walked along the row of shops, the bookstore with "BUY PASSAGES" displayed in its window, the headshop with "SELLING OUT" scrawled in flourescent paint and inside he could see the dim glowing posters of Jimi Hendrix and Mick Jagger and Janis Joplin and John Kennedy playing with his child. The Super Lil' Market windowed bargains hand-printed on shelf-paper. Ground Beef .69, head lettuce .39, Mayonnaise —

He heard something.

Before him stretched long rows of entranceways, each door catching into its own shadow. In the distance, he could hear the sea spilling oil at high tide against the shore and he imagined the sand crabs crawling into the sand and the flies hopping closer to mainland as the water foamed up.

He felt dread. He turned around. Nothing. But he heard breathing. He was sure he heard breathing.

He was walking faster now. He felt a kind of choking inside his throat, his face burned, his body felt the cool night stabbing at his sweat.

It was fear, that was all, it was fear. Get home, he kept telling himself. He wheeled around again. Nothing. He began to run. He panicked. Something was behind him, chasing him and hotly breathing. He stumbled, picked himself up, saw a shadow dart into a large clump of bushes.

He waited, listened, watched. Nothing moved.

He imagined his father shouting: where are the cops when you really need them?

He got the idea that he should circle back to the gameroom. The owner might still be there. Or maybe somebody would give him a lift from the Yellow Sub shop if it hadn't closed. Everything would be all right. He straightened his shirt, wiped his sweat from his face against his sleeve. It was all imagination, that was all.

He was walking now back along the same shops. The wind seemed hotter and stronger. The street lights froze the shadows into a nightmarish photograph. His teeth chattered and he could not stop them. The few parked cars seemed waiting coffins or potential ambush spots. He felt weak, strange, helpless, alone.

He was jogging now, along a side street he had never been along before. Go home, he whispered aloud, go home. But he was going in a different direction, away from home and away from the places he knew.

He ran through what seemed a tunnel walled with dark shops. He stopped. He felt fear, pulsating his vision like a heartbeat. He knew something was behind him or ahead of him, something very close, only feet away or even inches. He heard it breathing.

Slowly he began to turn around, and he heard his dry voice whimpering aloud, "no, no, leave me alone, leave me alone, for God's sake." He turned to see his own reflection in dark store glass with dark shapes inside and the street light freezing the outside world in the eerie glass reflection. He spun around, he could feel the hairs on his neck tingle, he could feel the veins working behind his eyes, his body shook uncontrollably.

Several feet away from him, a large black dog looked at him and panted. He didn't know whether to laugh or kick the thing. It simply remained there, panting as if it were laughing at him.

Damned beach dog, he breathed aloud.

Well, he thought, if someone were around besides himself, the dog would be barking, right? And if someone were following him then the dog would let him know it, right? And the dog was just sitting there, staring at him, watching him, just a normal dog, right?

He needed confidence and that is why he walked over to the dog where it sat there laughing and waiting for him. He bent over and began to pet its dark wet matted hair. He laughed as he cuddled the dog: "Bored, huh? you wanna go to the beach and play Frisbee, huh? you been fed, you sure seem fat. Wanna walk home with me? what's your name fella?"

And so forth.

His confidence did not last. He heard something else, so did the dog. It didn't move. He rose from it because now he knew, consciously knew, that he was being watched by the same eyes that earlier had watched him. He backed off from the dog with a step, seeking to find protection in an entranceway. He felt something cold and hard lean against his body.

He screamed and threw his hands up and backed off into the shadows away from something tall, clothed in a dark suit, something that stared into his face and seemed to cast off a gray light in the dark as it moved back and forth. He backed into the brick encasement of the entrance and stared at a store dummy wobbling in and out of the night shadows.

He started to laugh and to cry at the same time. He was gagging at his fear, his stupid, childish fear. There was nothing there but a dog and a dummy. He leaned over and could see forms inside the store, lined and dressed in price-tagged undershorts or business suits or casual pants, six or seven men and women mannequins, their outfits washed of color in the darkness. Several were missing wigs. They were inside the glass on which a sign was marked SUMMER SALE SWEEP. He was outside and could see his own dark silhouette thrown against the glass.

Inside, the lifeless eyes almost seemed to be moving.

So his mind was playing tricks. That arm was reaching out as if to worn him. Those eyes, those dead eyes, suddenly seemed to shine and glow and blink. A child mannequin seemed to whisper: get out of here, stop playin' games, be glad to be home, tomorrow play your games, don't be us.

A dark woman in a long dark gown back there, without any wig on, did her lips move: Papapapop!

The mannequins blinked, their eyes opened very wide and glazed, their mouths began to work back and forth as if they were chanting words formed by small teeth. The glass rippled like a dark surface of water and he heard in his mind the sound of pinball machines ringing and popping and he saw a world of neon glass spin before him and it was like he was in a circus.

He was on a dark and moving merry-go-round. The mannequins with shiny teeth and glowing eyes rode dark fierce horses that galloped to the rhythm of a calliope greatly speeded up.

He heard voices hissing to him as if he were under water in a long tunnel floating in a darkness waiting to be reborn.

John had become lost in fantasy. He had not even noticed how, slowly and deliberately, the tall man had moved up behind him. He had not seen how calmly the man had stood there and watched him. He had not at first felt the man's hand reaching out for him, touching him, moving him darkly into his own body.

Inside the dark silent mirror, the mannequins were still and watching. John felt a sharp, agonized pain in his neck like two knives pinching through his skin and slipping into his veins. He tried to scream and found himself vomiting, his mouth choking, himself fainting into a trance at once sensual and terrifying. He could feel the biting like a rhythm in himself, a rhythm matching the cold spreading over him. His eyes were fluttering deep inside his skull and when they slowly rolled back down, he was staring dully out into the world.

Without feeling and without motion and without reaction, he heard the spattering of his own blood, saw the stains against the glass. The man's form rose up from his neck, the mouth swollen with dark liquid. He saw the dark laughing dog watching.

Slowly John was lifted like a stuffed doll. He did not feel pain as his head was bumped against the thick window and the glass vibrated and echoed. In his mind, hundreds of machines exploded with specials, neon games played in laughter and faces and darkness.

When the window cracked and shattered open, its dark socket spit out pieces of light like neon bits of Spider Lady.

The newspapers reported him dead. He wasn't, really. When evening came, he would still move, as if in a trance, across the room, his pocket filled with quarters. He would play the winking neon woman with webs of snaky hair and clothing of rainbow lights. And then he would wander outside along the streets or past the soft thick low trees on to the sandy beach until he got hungry and met someone.

J. Cal Keet

MY GRANDMOTHER

I saw death today
In the labyrinthine walls
Of an old folks home.

My grandmother rests there,
Drooling, stained with urine,
Broken from life –
Yesterday's love locked
Within the sinews of her body.

Once she lived
On the second floor
Of this complex for the aged,
In a clean, well-lighted place,
Richly lined
With pictures of us all.

Later, she descended
to the first,
Keeper of invalids,
The chronically old.

When that level
Could not hold her,
She was taken to the basement
Where the inmates wait to die,
Their eyes set, their minds numb,
A tremor in the pulse.

Beneath the ground now,
Weighted with memories,
She dreams her way
To the grave.

Afterwards,
Glad to escape,
I surface to the earth
And my green youth.
But I am marked forever
By that journey underground.

Her touch will not wash away,
Stays with me,
Bonds me.

I saw death today
reflected in her eyes,
And her long arms hold me still.

Michael Flachmann

TANIZAKI: AN ALMOST SONNET

what time has come to find victory in defeat
his lacquered mask hiding a faceless face
and i in my silken shroud bound at the waist
they have decreed it and i will not repeat
though time brought victory too often too near
if they be right vainless is the life forfeit
glory gone awry or falsity taken to the limit
it is not i but they who have reason to fear
death pointed bowelward with firm prayful hands
splashing crimson pain upon the saffron dress
no they won't nor will he permit me to digress
to the overwhelming question poured out like sand
if reality could be summed in a single phrase
i'd say . . .

T'sin

MEDITERANIUM

Lukewarm air
in ultramarine,
dull blaze,
chirping grass;
air scenting
over burnt loam.

Pastels,
trigonoms,
squares,
cylinders.
Sienna mildness
on tile roofs,
crickets under hedges.
Faint drifting
evening shadows.

Mediterania:
Pans flute
in vibrating waves
flowing through yellow ripened fields.
Darkness lays
over the silent sea.
Schools of fish
glisten with the moon.
Cold vibrating lights
and sudden reflections.
Moonsilver rumors everywhere.

Christiane Michaela Vincent

Composed and translated from the German

THE INFINITY SQUARE

There was no wind that evening, which was unusual for the wind had roared non-stop for ninety days. Layman Bogs leaned against the crumbling wall, picked his nails in the lamplight, and considered the coal-black stillness an omen. On the horizon an electrical storm stalked over jagged mountains, faint light flickering over the saw-toothed ridge. He strained his ears to hear the distant thunder. But there was only silence and the scraping of Brother Kent's footsteps from the depths of the pit.

Bogs yawned, stretching his thin face and opening his oval mouth to crater size. A garbled exclamation barked from the excavation, feet scuffling briefly. He picked up the lantern, wiped at his eyes, and went to investigate.

"Brother Kent?" Bogs leaned out over the hole. "Are you all right?"

For a moment he heard nothing, then came a rushing sound like a quick intake of air — a sigh of pure pleasure.

"Glory be!" Brother Kent's bass tones rumbled from the abyss. Mortar trickled from the wall at the sound of his voice. Bogs hung the lamp out farther, slicing an arc of yellow light down the earthen stairs.

"Have you found something?" He took several steps into the interior. It was dark and thick like a womb. "Brother?"

Brother Kent's laughter echoed from inside the tunnel. "I'm all right," he hollered. "Of course I'm all right. Why you should see it! The most magnificent sight I've ever beheld. Praise the Holy Knowledge!"

Bogs clambered down the steps, tripping once on the edge of his robe. Four meters down, the pit leveled off into a tunnel. His sandals raised clouds of dust, swirling in the gilded light. At the end of the shaft Bogs could discern a vague outline, the rounded curvatures of Brother Kent.

Kent's lamp was suspended from a spike in the wall. His pick was just visible beyond the hold where he had penetrated an illuminated chamber. The fat, bald head was slick with perspiration. Heavy jowls danced as he spoke, making his face a sea of motion.

"Look at it, my dear Bogs! Just look at it!" He grabbed the edge of Bogs' robe and dragged him to the pierced casement. Through the broken masonry, beyond the shattered fragments, lay a smooth-bored tunnel. The walls were like marble, sleek as glass and reflecting the light of overhead lamps.

Bogs clutched the edge of the rupture and peered in. "It's the greatest find of the century." His jaw fell limp, exposing small white teeth. "Imagine . . . electrical lighting in a buried shaft."

"Imagine nothing, Layman Bogs. Who needs imagination when reality gives such displays so freely." He pushed the pick aside with a chubby hand and squeezed into the opening. "Come, Bogs. We must probe deeper into these mysteries."

Bogs hesitated for a moment, then slipped inside, sneezing at the motes which filled the air. Their footsteps vibrated in the closed space, even breathing echoed faintly. The corridor wound and twisted, spiralling down for fifteen meters. Glass-smooth walls gave way to chipped mosaics, gleaming in the artificial light. Oceans and volcanoes, mountains and cities, spread and flickered in the glow of a white star. Reptilian creatures with large skulls and scarlet eyes worked through the tedium of daily existence, frozen forever in chips of broken stone.

"Witness it," Kent panted, rubbery chest heaving. "Drawing, lettering, pictures of how life actually was for these beings. This shaft is the Rosetta Stone, Troy, and King Tut's tomb all balled into one. It means wealth and fame for me, you, and the order. Blessed be the Holy Knowledge!"

Bogs nodded briskly, his tiny eyes glittering. "Of course. Blessed be the Knowledge. You realize . . . there hasn't been a discovery of this size since Wyncz and the treasury of Beta-5!"

"That's quite correct. Nothing even near this magnitude." Kent brushed his thick palm over the wall. "What craftsmanship. We must bring photographers."

"Yes, yes. Photographers and simulators," said Bogs.

"And blessed simulators!" They wandered down the shaft, darting from scene to scene. Their soft voices bit at the stillness. Then as suddenly as they had begun, the mosaics ended. The corridor sides were slick and empty. The lights stopped a few meters further on, shearing the tunnel and leaving it in an eye of darkness. Far in the distance was a golden circle of illumination, a beckoning halo. They stood at the end of the light for a long time.

"Onward, dear Bogs," Kent said, inflating his chest.

Bogs shivered timidly and clutched at his robe. "Onward, Brother Kent!"

"In the name of the Divine Archaeology!" Brother Kent intoned. "We shall go with God and an open mind." He stepped into the darkness and Bogs hurried quickly in his wake.

The tunnel yawned into a vault which was cloaked in nightfall, except for a two-meter circle of light centered around a low cubicle and four stools. Like a block of lucite, the cube squatted before them, glowing with internal movement and luminescence. As they approached, it flickered, blossomed into a series of colors, a spectral rainbow floating before them.

"In the name of all that's holy . . ." Kent squinted at the cube between puffy eyelids.

Bogs wrinkled his nose and stopped a sneeze. "What is it?" His breath was hot at the back of his throat. He swallowed, his slender neck convulsing.

"I have no idea," Brother Kent said, drawing closer. He touched it, expecting the surface to ripple like a puddle of silver water. Colored tones slid away from his touch, reds and oranges radiating away into the depths of the cube. It was cool and hard against his palm. A tingle spread in his nerve endings, tickling against the base of his brain. He found that he could not avert his eyes.

"Touch it, Layman Bogs. The surface radiates a feeling, a holy sensation . . . very much like goodwill."

Bogs came forward and placed a finger against the surface. Azures and indigoes trickled from his finger point. A shiver etched his spine, blotches of gooseflesh across his thighs. He slid down to cover the stool.

Brother Kent sat down, burying the plastic support with his bulk. He stretched both palms flush against the cube. The colors were changing, a continuous stream that sometimes formed patterns sliding away into the void of the square.

"It's bottomless, Layman Bogs. Deep and infinite, like a soul would appear, my friend. A square of infinity." Various highlights played about the creases in his round face. His gaze probed deeper, straining to catch all the movements within the cube. Something was inside, near the center. A figure, perhaps. He was not sure, but he blinked and watched and shivered with delight.

"Yes, yes," Bogs said softly. "That's what it is . . . an infinity square." And he pressed his hands to the cube, while the colors bubbled, balls of phosphoresence burning into his mind.

The last letter was handed out with a small ceremony, and a groan rattled from the throats of the four-hundred miners crowding the auditorium. Ard returned to his seat, clutching the letter between his fingers.

"From your girl, hey Ard?" Duboir laughed, poking at Ard's ribs as he passed. A chuckle rippled through the men.

The mining boss, Vokavich, returned to the podium and motioned for silence. He had on his worried face, Ard noticed, and Vakovich paused a moment before addressing the crowd.

"Now I've got some bad news."

His voice echoed against the high-vaulted ceiling. The miners leaned forward on their chairs.

"As some of you may know, one of the beloved Brothers of Knowledge, and an idiotic Layman, have gotten themselves lost. So we've got to organize ground parties to relocate them."

A collective moan went up from the men. Ard slumped back into his seat.

Vokavich waved his hands for silence. "Bird crews went up but couldn't find anything. And it was an entire day before the bretheren even saw fit to report them missing, protection of the Sacred Books and all that . . ."

The miners laughed. Ard folded his letter and put it into his pocket.

"We piped the problem into the deep space computer and it separated all of you into two-man search teams with assigned areas to search."

The crowd muttered briefly and Vokavich inhaled. The room was stale with sweat and cigarette smoke.

"The mines will be shut down at least for today. Packs are available in the commissary. And your partners names will be posted in the theater."

He brushed his gray hair back and scratched at his chest. "They're probably dead anyway, so don't bust your asses trying to find them. Be careful. Rest every hour or so. Check in by radio. Everything understood?" Vokavich watched the crowd nod in unison.

"Okay then," he drawled, a strange mixture of Spanish and southern accents. "Get going."

The miners filed out of the room in a fluxing line of gray jumpsuits. Letters rattled crisply in dirty hands. The line flowed into the main theater and milled before the screen where the names were flashed in silver light. As a pair flickered, the two men called would move to the console, punch in, and head for the commissary.

"Lexington – Mauritani – Sector 5"

Lexington and Mauritani went to the console, punched in their identifications, and then left. The process continued, deleting the miners by twos until it stumbled on Ard Stockwell's name.

"Stockwell – Kleinschmidt – Sector 42" the names flashed.

Ard moved toward the console and stabbed his card into the slot. But no Kleinschmidt followed. Ard glanced around the room, but no one moved.

"He's probably beating off in his room," Duboir murmured.

"Are you kidding," someone said. "He isn't even interested in himself."

"Probably doesn't have anything left down there anyway," Duboir said, "Just a stump."

Everyone laughed nervously. Ard tapped Kleinschmidt's name into the keyboard and queried "Where?" The small video plate above the keys informed him that Kleinschmidt was asleep in his quarters. Ard went to the door.

"Where is he," asked Duboir.

"Asleep."

"Well," Duboir said loudly. "Poke him in the butt when you wake him. See if he doesn't come up with a grin." He slapped Ard's back.

"Hell, he doesn't smile for anything," said Ard, disgust lingering in his words. Then he walked out the door.

"Duboir – Shuster – Sector 43," said the screen.

There was peace within the chamber, broken only by harsh breathing; whispered voices against the membrane of darkness. The men were encircled with light, robes drawn back from pinched faces, eyes shining behind red rims. Like statues, they held frozen postures, red and green tints lining their hollow features. Spectral light emmanated from the cube, glowing on drawn flesh and tight lips.

"How long's it been?" asked Layman Bogs. He sneezed quickly, a reflexive action. He thought of habits like granite statues standing beyond the body.

Across the cubicle, Brother Kent massaged the crystal surface beneath his right hand. Clear light was blood-red through his fingers and nails. A solar system of rainbow hues spun crazily within the cube. Fat solar flares stretched out from a golden sun to engulf a system of rotating blue spheres. Then in a blaze of russet pinwheels, the image vanished in a cosmic explosion – leaving only a fractional image burn in his brain.

"I don't know," Kent said. "Distortion in my time sense. Could be a day . . . maybe a week. But I suppose they've sent out the usual search parties."

Bogs nodded slowly. His mind felt like a sliced pie, triangular sections missing, sheared off clean leaving only crumbs drying in the bottom of his skull. Sweat formed droplets on his lips. A tingle moved along the cabled muscles in his neck – tickling. His heart surged, his body flexing to the throb of the cardiac pump. Dry sand, extruded to the back of his throat, scraped at his tonsils. And he sneezed.

"Ever had an addiction, Kent?"

"Not that I can remember. Except of course, the total devotion to the quest for the Blessed Knowledge. But I wouldn't count that. I consider such devotion a virtue!" Kent moved his face to within inches of the surface. His breath condensed in steamy circles. Beyond the gleaming colors, the molten lava of light, a figure moved for an instant. He almost recognized it, but the picture faded into a pyramic of fire. It left him trembling with excitement.

"Think the search party will find us?" Bogs was beginning to taste fear. Little clots of bile burped up from his stomach. During an eyeblink, he saw a scene from his youth; he was stealing credits from his mother's purse. His mouth twitched, cracking the dry skin, leaving red splits which dripped blood onto his dusty robe.

"Can't really say," mused Kent. "It's like wondering if the local star will nova. If it does, who'll be around to say I-told-you-so?"

As he approached the entrance to the pods, Ard decided that he always drew the unwanted details. It was outright persecution. He rubbed the faint hair on his chin.

"Who repairs the sanitation chamber? Me." The door snapped open. He walked inside.

"Who crawls down into the tunneler when it's swallowed a rock that can't be digested? Me." He waved at a passing search team. They shook their heads and laughed, packs rattling on their backs.

"And now I get to wake Kleinschmidt. Damn!" He stopped at his pod and slid into his desert skin. The silver material crackled against his neck. He clipped on the cooling unit and adjusted it to the comfort zone. With quick strides he crossed the chamber and grabbed a lift tube to the fourth level. Then he circled along the inside terrace and entered Kleinschmidt's pod.

The interior was stark, egg-shell walls as crisp as the day they had sprayed from the foam guns. Twilight emerged from the simulators and Ard could see his breath in frozen clouds streaming from his nostrils and mouth. A north wind licked at his ears, carrying light flakes of snow. A wolf howled in the distance.

Kleinschmidt was on his stomach, shadows gathered in the hollows of his arms, scallops of darkness around his buttocks and back. And reached out and touched him. The skin was cold and moist.

"Hey . . . Kleinschmidt. Roll out."

The sleeper's sides heaved twice and then resumed normal rhythm.

"Come on, we're on call." He prodded the wet back; the flesh slid along muscles and bone. "Ober, wake up . . . come on!"

Kleinschmidt lifted his head, a slow deliberate movement. He was like a reptile in cool shade, sluggish yet defined. His eyes were closed, depilitoried face twisted into a hairless scowl.

"What do you want?" Kleinschmidt's voice was flat, lacking bite or pitch. It sent chills through Ard.

"We're on call. S. and R."

"What?" Kleinschmidt rubbed one eye, opened it, and then the other. The whites were clear without red veins. The irises were flat-gray washers.

"You know," Ard said. "Search and rescue. Some of the Bretheren have strayed from the flock." He grinned and stretched. The material of his desert skin rustled.

"Which ones?" Kleinschmidt swung to the edge of his bed. His bare feet slapped against the floor.

"Brother Kent and Layman Bogs." Ard shrugged. "You've probably met them."

"Kent?" Kleinschmidt's gray eyes deepened, silver highlights intensifying his stare.

"Yeah, bit fat toad. Can't have gone too far. Bird crews went up as soon as we were notified, but that was a day after they were missing. Nobody's found anything." Ard scratched under his arm, then down at his groin. "So Vokavich broke up the mine crews. Everybody's on foot in teams of two. We're a team."

Kleinschmidt stuffed his legs into some briefs. The elastic snapped around his waist, the pouch pulling tight over his genitals. From a footlocker he withdrew his desert skin.

"I don't need a partner."

"Sure you do." Ard helped him pull the cloth across his shoulders. "Vokavich doesn't want to lose anyone else." He lifted the cooling unit and set it in place between Kleinschmidt's shoulder blades.

"I work better alone." Ober adjusted the fit beneath his bicep.

"Doesn't matter. Three days gone by, and they're dead. Hell, we each get a body bag with our packs." He thumped the thermostat. "What setting you want?"

"Maximum." Kleinschmidt hesitated long enough to feel the cooling liquid pulsing through the arteries in his desert skin. Then he walked to the door.

"Like things cold, don't you?" Ard followed out onto the terrace.

"It reminds me of home."

"But I thought you were from earth, near the equator?" But Kleinschmidt had already stepped into the lifts. Ard shook his head and dove after him.

They picked up their packs and commandeered a robot ore car into the desert. Kleinschmidt pretended to watch the broken landscape as it cracked on left and right, canyons and mesas etching the parched

surface. His jaws were set in ridges of drawn tendon and cartilage. He listened to Ard chatter, picking up phrases but not bothering to answer.

"We've been assigned to 42. That's the dead sea region, down by Jacob's gorge." The white sun glistened from Ard's lenses. "The last mining shot down there fell into a huge fossil belt. It's where the Holy Archeologists were last seen. So I figure we've got a good chance of finding them."

Kleinschmidt turned, grinding his teeth against each other, upper plate meshing with lower.

"Finding their bodies, I mean." Ard corrected himself. He thought that Kleinschmidt had tried to smile.

"You really hate the brethren," Ard said. "Don't you?"

And then he knew Kleinschmidt had smiled, showing his teeth behind thin lips.

They were on opposite sides of the cube, arms spread, hands gripping the polished glass. A cool draft floated in from somewhere, bringing the musty smell of time, centuries of dust and desolation with a hint of decay. Bogs' face was chalk white, circles deepening beneath his eyes. He shifted on his stool, his robe dropping to the floor.

"I've lost my calves," he said. His knees felt like stumps weighted down with sacks of cheese, limp and rotted.

Brother Kent's smile beamed across the cube, like a minor sun peeping over the horizon. "No feeling in your lower legs?"

"Correct."

"Well then," Kent cleared his throat, bags of limpid tissue wagging. "The machine is working faster on you. It's only reached my ankles." Kent drew a sharp breath as a river of red coursed between his hands, boats of yellow and orange whirled in the bloody eddies.

Layman Bogs was visibly trembling. His hands were cold and numb. He was afraid that any sudden motion would break them into slivers, a million fragments tinkling to the cold white floor.

Beyond his palms the purple hues were deepening into a chasm of black. White lights twinkled star-like in the void, brilliant diamonds of luminescence. Then they became gemstones, crystalline rocks the size of a man's fist. And Bogs was no longer a separate being, he had become part of the cube. . .

The natives on Dardellaus wore diamonds on their necks. Bogs had never seen such stones, with such promise for perfection. To the untrained eye they were mere lumps of glass, but Bogs could see the internal beauty and the fire that work could produce. He had tried to barter his knife for a necklace, but the natives were stubborn and superstitious. No one would part with his stone for fear of his life. And now that the ship was ready to depart, Bogs had the intention of parting life and gem if need be.

He met his victim in a clearing, broke his skull with a rock, and ripped the diamond from its leather thong. It was cold in his hand. But before he could return to the shuttle, the alarm had been given and the natives blocked his escape. He ran through the forest, past the lichened trees and the deepening shadows. His chest heaved, the blood racing in his veins. The natives were swift in pursuit, revenge gleaming in their glassine eyes.

And the monastery rose from the forest like the rock of God, opening its gates to welcome him. The brethren led him to a chapel. The Abbot watched him through meshed fingertips. Bogs went down on his knees and begged. The gravel floor dug into his flesh. The Brethren began smiling. They called him Layman Bogs.

. . . The cube returned to the colors once again, and Bogs could catch his breath in deep gulps. There was a bitter taste of disgust against his tongue. Waves of nausea swept through him.

"Did you see it?" he whispered.

Brother Kent rubbed the cube and smiled. "Yes. Beautiful wasn't it?"

"No!" Bogs shuddered. "It was horrible."

Kent gave him a strange grin. "You think my heroic efforts in the last war were horrible?"

Bogs cocked his thin face, throwing deep shadows down his cheeks. "Heroic efforts?"

"Yes . . . my care for the sick and wounded. The Brethren granted me Brotherhood on those grounds. Blessed be the Holy Knowledge."

Shaking his head violently, Bogs twisted his face in anger. "That's not what I saw. There was evil . . . deeds which I did before the Holy knowledge touched me." He began to weep. "Brother Kent, there's fear in my past."

"Don't weep, dear Bogs. You are of the Brethren. You have come to atonement." Kent saw the figure in the cube once more, moving swiftly at the edge of his perception. "Besides . . . there is goodness here," he said.

Kent's face radiated with eternal light.

The heat was a living thing, pouncing on its victims with a rush of furnace air. Ober moved swiftly against the beast with his hood and visor lowered against the crystal glare of the local star. It fractured and dispersed over granules of sand and lumps of eroded rock, melting on the surface of Ard's robe. He marched in Ober's shadow, following the man's liquid gait over the spine of a ridge.

"Hold up," Ard gasped. His lungs were screaming for air and burning with each breath. "I've got to rest."

He squatted in the shade of a rock ledge and reached into his pack for some food. "The way you've been moving reminds me of a holy quest. Seen any grails lately?"

"What?" Kleinschmidt stood in the light, surveying the land as it dropped away in a series of canyons and cliffs. Purple shadows clung to the undersides of overhanging ledges and shelves of stone.

"Nothing. Just a joke, that's all." Ard peeled the plastic wrapper away from a soy packet. "Think they passed this way?"

"Can't tell," said Ober, moving back into the shade. Pulling the visor away from his face, Ober let the wind caress. Heat fluxed on the fractured horizon, oozing up, away from saber-toothed spires and pinnacles of red stone.

Ard offered him a chunk of soy, but he was intent on the country, sifting the landscape for signs of human passage.

"Yeah," Ard mumbled around his food. "That's what bothers me about these ground searches. Hit or miss . . . you know what I mean?" He chewed the brown solid, working his jaws in and out. Crumbs fell from his lips.

Ober grunted. The sound was ambiguous. He pushed his back against the rock shelf. The layers of wind-burned minerals ribbed up his vertebra. Refrigeration liquid swirled through the crackling desert skin, brushing the heat away.

"It's hot," Ober said.

"Sure is," Ard swallowed a mouthful of soy. "Been out here, what . . . six hours now?"

"About that." Ober pulled his canteen from his belt and swallowed some liquid. It was warm, collecting the phlegm in his throat. Gobs slid into his stomach.

"I don't think we'll find 'em."

"We'll try." Ober talked with his eyes closed, relaxing for a moment. The desert air was bland, no scents except for the tang of their sweat. He wrinkled his face at the odor.

"Sure, but why? I really don't want to carry their bodies back anyway."

Kleinschmidt rubbed his chin. Stubble chaffed his skull. He wondered whether he heard the sound or just felt it. "So we don't carry them back."

"You mean, we find 'em and leave 'em?"

Kleinschmidt nodded; the sun flared from his naked scalp.

"Why?" Ard shook his head and a lock of blonde hair fell across the bridge of his nose. "After all that trouble, we're kind of obligated to haul 'em home."

"I just want proof, okay?"

"Sure . . . but I still don't understand." Ard shrugged, picked the cellophane from the sand, and slid it into his pack.

"I never asked you to understand," said Ober. His washer eyes sparkled madly for a second before the descending visor cut them from Ard's view.

They moved down into a rocky scar. Feldspar and mica glittered in welts of salmon quartz. Small streams of sand preceded them as they crossed the canyon wall and receded along the valley floor.

Layman Bogs was dying of fear; terror which dribbled out in colored rivulets from the face of the infinity square. Breathing in tight sobs, his whole frame shook convulsively.

Brother Kent smiled. And the calmness of a placid lake washed out to try and comfort his terrified assistant.

"Come, come, my friend. There is no need for such agitation. If this be the end, well you have been prepared. You have the Holy

Knowledge, and the Sacred Encyclopedia, and have strived to further the Brethren for more than five years now." He shook his face for emphasis. "You have been saved."

Bogs snorted, rolling the whites of his eyes. He sneezed four times in a row. "I don't want your comfort. I want an escape!"

"One cannot escape from destiny." Orange flames burst from the space between his palms, stabbing into a scarlet night. Kent lay his face against the cool surface, feeling the warmth as it spread out from his cheek.

"Kent, this box isn't destiny. But . . . what is it?" Bogs' words trembled in the chamber, echoing against tons of unseen rock and soil.

Kent thought for a moment, considering the data they had encountered in the tunnel. "It's something supreme. Some form of deity worship that was established by the former culture. This is probably hallowed ground, and the cube could be an altar."

"An altar? But everything I've seen inside, all those scenes of violence and deceit in which I've taken an active part."

Brother Kent nodded. "But everything I have witnessed has been good."

"Then why haven't I seen goodness? Why?

Kent gave him a small frown. "Perhaps you have not led the life you should have led."

"But I'm a layman."

Kent shrugged quickly. "No matter, temptation is present to all."

"Then what about yourself? Don't you have any reason to fear?"

A volcano of warmth was spreading over Kent's half of the cube, a profusion of cheerful colors radiating into his eyes. It held him silent for several seconds. "Huh?"

"Haven't you ever committed an error . . . a major sin?"

Kent froze, the heavy jowls sliding down his face. "No!"

The sound made a sharp bark in the chamber and a border of darkness flickered about the edges of the cube. Brother Kent shifted on the stool. The belt on his robe pulled tight across his fat and

snapped. It fell to the floor, clattering on the white stone, and the transceiver clipped to the leather strap switched on. A faint signal squeezed through tons of soil, worming out into the open air.

"Don't you ever get lonely?" The question was pure conversation, but it struck a chord that Ard had never meant to touch.

Ober turned away and lifted the field glasses to his face, but something in his eyes left moisture on the lenses. "No."

"You don't?" Ard shaded his face from the glare, then pulled his visor down. "I sure do. I mean, with all this empty space around, well, it makes me think of how empty I am without my family." He shifted position, feet scraping on the grains of sand. "Don't you miss your family?"

"No." There was a sound in Kleinschmidt's words, a blend of anguish and anger.

"Must've had a bad home life," Ard said.

"Not at all." Kleinschmidt turned towards him. The gray eyes were blank, like caves leading to the recesses of his brain. "I don't have a family life . . . anymore."

Ard could feel the bitterness against his face. Red flushed his cheeks. He thought of a time when he was a boy and had turned over a rock to watch the red ants boil in frustration. Prickles etched his legs with the memory of their stings. "I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. I guess everybody should have a family . . . that's all." He tightened a strap on his pack. The material bit into his shoulder. He wondered if it would rub raw.

"Everybody should have one," Ober said.

"A family?"

"Yeah," Ober said. "And anyone who destroys a man's family should be punished."

"That makes sense."

"Well . . . he wasn't."

"Who wasn't?"

"The man who destroyed my family," Ober said. The words were pronounced with that peculiar pitch that Kleinschmidt had incorporated into his speech. The sound was like a bell whose clapper was swaddled in cloth. It lacked tone.

Ard stood still, digesting the revelation which had unfolded. The red ants were at his legs again, but when he moved to brush them away, nothing was there.

Kleinschmidt returned to his surveillance. The tunnel vision of the binoculars sucked the landscape into him, bringing the distant boulders to the end of his nose. Below, on the valley floor where a wide plain spread between two thighs of rock, the fossil belt glittered in the daylight. A few towers, corroded by the wind, leaned and crumbled into cobbled streets. Ober scanned the area, digging into the shadows and shades with his eyes, until he spotted two day packs leaning against a crumbling wall.

"Ard! I've found something down in the city." He pointed his arm, thrusting the binoculars toward his partner.

"Dammit, yes!" Ard squinted against the hot glasses. "They've got the Brethren emblems on them."

"Good!" Kleinschmidt murmured. He clenched his fists, knotting them into chunks of bone and flesh. Leaping away from the hill, he sprinted toward the level plain.

"Come on!" The sound carried away on the wind, a howl of a creature excited by the scent of blood.

Bogs' whole body was numb, all the outer extremities, his head, hands, everything except for a spot in the center of his chest where he always thought his soul should be. The colors of the cube surrounded him. He was no longer a separate entity. The square attacked him and he was swallowed in a miasma of hues and shades that flaked the interior of his skull.

"Kent," he whispered. "Have't you seen it yet?"

Brother Kent had his forehead against the cube, peering into the swirling interior. "Seen what?"

"Inside. In the deepest part. Something moves."

Kent lifted his pale eyebrows. Wrinkled flesh moved between his deepset sockets. "What moves?"

"A figure." Panic lined the words with creaking sounds. "It's coming for me."

"In the cube?"

"Yes, yes. Can't you see it?" Layman Bogs was pulling his face back from the glowing cube, pushing himself away from the monster at its depths.

"It's got horns, and leathery wings, and a spiked tail."

"Horns and wings?" Kent shrugged. "I see nothing, my friend."

"Kent! It's reaching for me! Help me, Kent! Help me." His voiced whined away into silence. Features turning white as bone, he strained to escape.

"Wait!" Kent said, "I do see something."

But Bogs was no longer listening. He no longer cared. His heart seized, pump jamming. Blood refused to flow. Something burst in his head, red liquid flowing from his nostrils. And he fell in shattered stages against the surface of the cube.

"Yes," Kent said softly, his voice breathing reverence. "I do see a figure." His face spread like morning light. Deep within the infinity of the screen, inside the core of the machine, Brother Kent saw the face of God. And God was smiling.

The ruins were ancient – hollow memoirs of life that stood in spite of the attacks of wind and dust. They panted together, leaning against the chest of a stone column. The packs were hanging limply from Ober's hands. He shook them in the air.

"They're down here. I know it. I can feel them." Ober's throat ached for water. He swung his canteen up and drank.

"Do you think I should . . ." Ard paused for air. "should radio in? I mean about the packs?"

Ober did not answer. He stood back from the column and rotated slowly. His eyes dug into the soil, matching footprints, searching for directions and locations.

Ard pulled his tranceiver from his belt. He fiddled with the controls absently, more intent on Kleinschmidt's motions. He watched Ober's gaze, the way he clutched the packs so tightly that his knuckles whitened, the angry wrinkles about his naked scalp. Ober's hands were squeezing the packs, twitching in a grip that could wring out life in spattering droplets, and something clicked in Ard's mind. He knew.

"Which one of them?"

"Huh?" Kleinschmidt rotated on his heel, tightening the muscles in his neck and jaw.

"Which one was it? Bogs or Kent . . . and your family?" He swallowed, scratching at the prickles on his legs.

Kleinschmidt nodded slowly. The flat, washer eyes held Ard. He felt them boring into his face.

"Which one?"

Kleinschmidt inhaled deeply. The fabric of the pack twisted in his grip. There was a sound of tearing. "Kent."

Ard was still turning the controls on the radio, turning them reflexively. Static and conversation sizzled in the dry air. "You want to talk about it?"

"Why?" Kleinschmidt stood straight. His chin jutted like a point of stone. Wet blotches seeped out beneath his arms and the desert skin was plastered tightly over his corded chest.

"The story isn't much anyway. A minor archeologist, working on a project on one of the inhabited moons of Clytie in the Apollo system, finds a small, sealed vase and takes it back as a paper weight to his quarters on Clytie." Kleinschmidt was breathing hard, but fatigue had long passed.

"I'm sure you've heard of wheat germinating after centuries of storage. Well, the vase contained a virus. It killed a third of the people on Clytie before it was controlled. My wife and child lived there." He fell silent, the gray eyes blank. He rested his hands against the column. A whirlwind gathered strength and flung sand down the cobbled street.

"And Kent?"

Kleinschmidt dug his nails into the worn stone. He laughed, a brittle growl. "He joined the Brethren of Knowledge and gained sanctuary under the Lord. Since then his achievements in inter-galactic archeology have made him virtually untouchable. And that's why I have to find what's left of him." A faint smile crossed his lips. "It's only justice."

Ard felt balls of frozen mercury trickle down his spine. He shivered and returned to the radio. When he first caught the signal, Ard thought it was a mining band coming from deep within the planet, but then he remembered that the mines weren't operating because of the search. He checked the frequency, double checked, and then switched on the omni beam.

"Ober, I've got a live signal!"

Kleinschmidt was on his knees in the street, searching for signs in the blowing dust. "What's that?"

"From their radio, Bogs and Kent. I've got a live signal, coming from these ruins. They're alive!"

Ober reached him in three steps and snatched the radio.

"What the hell . . .?" Ard stood, reaching toward him.

"Can you get them on the omni directional?"

"I've got 'em. But we'd better radio in."

"No!" He barked the reply, fiddling with the radio, pointing it, listening to the emitted beep until it seemed loudest.

Ard tightened his arms, lifting them cautiously. He looked around for a handy weapon. "We've got to radio in. They're Brethren. They'll probably need first aid. Remember the sanctuary laws."

Ober's eyes were like nickles in a pool of milk. Ard reached for the radio and Ober hit him in the chest, spinning Ard to the ground.

"No!" Ober roared, running away down the street. The radio beeped louder.

"Ober, come back! I can't let this happen." Ard regained his feet and pounded down an intersecting walk. He reached the intersection before Kleinschmidt, gained the top of a wall, and jumped. He struck Ober's shoulder, scrambling for a hold. Ober twisted, bringing his fist up, striking with the knuckles. Ard passed but hung onto the rope, pulling them both to the street. Ober kicked him, lashing out with his heavy boots. Bones and ribs splintered, like dry wood popping in a fire.

"Kent's mine!" He screamed. "You don't understand . . . Kent's mine!"

Ard lay in the street, his mouth opening and closing like a giant fish spread out on a pier. "No, Ober. You can't." He pulled himself up, crawling up the folds of Kleinschmidt's desert skin.

Ober struck him again. His boot swung out, catching Ard in the throat. Ard catapulted backward into a stone basin. His skull thudded hollowly against the rock. Ober hefted a chunk of masonry, raising it high above his head. The sun flashed behind it, a dark shadow on

Ard's face. Ober felt the blow through the soles of his boots, the ground jumping for an instant. Ard's arms twitched convulsively, fingers scraping weakly, and then were still.

Ober stood with his hands pointed at the sky. A shout echoed in the dead town, ricocheting from tower and wall. "Kent is mine!" His laughter crackled savagely.

The signal led to the edge of a pit. Earthen stairs descended into darkness. It increased in strength, the beep ringing in his ears like a deadly siren wailing in broken spasms. He was running mechanically, body strained beyond normal limits. Adrenaline pumped through his system. Acid burned at the back of his throat.

He leapt over a pick, squeezing through a broken wall where the tunnel entered a polished shaft. Electrical lights burned over head. His footsteps clattered on the hard smooth floor. Dust whirled up to choke his lungs.

The passage twisted like a string of polished intestines. He passed the mosaics, unheeding. There was only room in his mind for one thought, death. Revenge burned in his mind, the sides of his skull heating to white intensity. Then he was in darkness, but there was light at the end of the passage, daring him onward. The tunnel spit him into a chamber, into the hollow womb where Kent's face beamed in a ten-foot circle of light.

Ober froze at the entrance and measured his quarry.

Kent did not see him, but he noted the sounds of approach. He turned to face the darkness.

"Welcome, pilgrim," said Brother Kent. "Come and worship with me in this . . . the holiest of places."

Ober laughed. He leaned against the wall, holding his stomach, and laughed. His sides ached, throbbing slowly.

"This is not a joke, my friend." Kent wrinkled his flabby cheeks sternly.

"Oh yes it is." Kleinschmidt spat on the floor, drawing the mucus from his throat and heaving it in a shallow arc. "It's the final joke. The last laugh."

"You must not scoff. God is present in this room." Kent's eyes shone dully.

A grin played on Ober's face. "Where?"

"Here in the cube." Kent motioned with his round palm. "Come and witness it." Kent saw the figure in the depths, beyond the colors, far within the nautilis of the square. It was God, seated on a throne, wrapped in glory and smiling at his true disciple.

"That improves the joke. God is here with two murderers." Kleinschmidt advanced into the light.

"Murderers?" said Kent. He blinked at Ober. "I'm a Brethren." He returned his gaze to the cube, but discordant hues writhed within, blue-black clouds swimming in a scarlet haze. Flashes of green lightning stabbed here and there.

"Only masks the fact. But it doesn't destroy the truth."

Kent swallowed loudly. "And what is the truth?" He looked but could no longer see the figure on the throne. It was swallowed by the spreading darkness.

"The truth?" Ober's voice was a breath of refrigeration. Ice tinkled in the words. "Surely you haven't forgotten the planet Clytie." He paused to breathe quietly. His hands trembled. "And a broken vase."

The cube boiled up in a lava of browns and blacks. Kent reared away as small bat-like creatures swam in the clotting scarlet mass.

"I'm sanctuaried!" His words sobbed, chest convulsing, wattles of fat throbbing. "I've atoned!"

"Can one atone for murder?" Ober raised one eyebrow.

"But what about yourself? You said two murderers?"

Ober advanced one step at a time. His eyes danced with madness. "That is correct, Brother Kent. And there's no God here for you or me."

He clutched Kent's fatty throat, hand sinking into the flesh.

The depths no longer smiled at Kent. The cube turned black as a shroud. Leathery hands reached for him from the darkness. Kent tried to pull away, but his heart seized. Blood refused to flow. Something burst in his head, red liquid flowing from his nostrils and ears. He fell in shattered stages against the cube, his own reflection looming up to plant the kiss of doom.

Kleinschmidt let go. He stood there for a moment, feeling the rage drain from him like urine. Then he pushed Kent's body from the stool and sat down.

Inside the eye of the cube, beyond the patterns and beneath the colors, Ober saw a figure. Under the darkened hood was a face of ashen bone – hollow eyes burning. It was the grinning countenance of the angel of death.

And Ober Kleinschmidt smiled.

Joel H. Sherman

NIGHT SONG OF A SOMNAMBULIST

i have known shadows
slumbering on the floor
lying desireable
behind midnight's facade
i have known a couple,
a couple maybe more

i have twisted, squirmed
among the quilted covers
attempted to leap
the pillowed wall
only to be held softly
against want
not against desire

i am summoned
i stall i flutter
like a homingbird
returning to its prison
i beg to enter and peck
hungrily upon the door
it will be different
a different price is paid

i have been exacted
and extracted
till there is no more
i have heard them
snicker behind the door

years wither smiles
smiles that guard
aimless miles that tumble
amidst crumbling hotels
i have felt them
rolling on the floor
living a little more
as they die in pieces
at the entering in of life

time has calculated
untold sums
was it worth it
worth it after all
i shudder
i hear him flutter?
behind the wall

days spread to years
years cumulate fears
i grow old: i grow tired
visits become more easy
partings more difficult

i understand
i don't understand at all

T'sin

PIPE DREAMS

stubby lonely fingers stroke
time worn briar dark and smooth
dreams ascending far reach
like love long forgotten
fragments and shreds of life
reality clothed bourbon amber
it has become the pipe
dreams of blue-gray smoke
dissipating into black and blue
fingers yellowed with stoking
filtered fantasies gone awry
in bygone glories only existing
discarded bundles of aged
angered fingers tamp
the stuff of dreams and dreams

T'sin

DALAT MON AMOUR

Sur la branche d'un pin
Un moineua pépie
Salut, retour d'un beau jour en Californie

Un brise, ô si caressante, si gentille
Apporte fraicheur et senteur du matin

Le jardin fleuri
Seme un note jaune et violette
Pleine d'espoir et de tendresse
Parmi la verte pelouse
et les cyprès géants

Le trémolo d'un oiseau
Dans ce calme matinal
Semble une cascade d'argent
qui miroite tentante
dans la forêt obscure
et sombre de Delat, mon amour

Mais où est donc
la belle insouciante?
Dalat mon amour
avec ses lacs, ses chutes
ses amoureux,
tout frileux
juchant bien haut
sur le Langbiang plateau

Où sont les amoureux
qui passent leur lune de miel
à Dalat qui rêve dans
ses châlets suisses,
qui se promène dans
ses jardins des délices
et qui soupire
dans ses forêts
de pin majestueux?

Chau Kim Dinh

ONE SATURDAY

My heart beats within a stone
my head sinks with a dark and cruel burden.

I have sent myself into confinement,
a monastary of high walls
pressing all of me
into one hard rock.
No noticeable seams,
once a deep tear here
that grew together again
and closed this dungeon.

Feelings like a spring breeze:
    Inside,
they turned into hurricanes,
                particle flurries
that only moistened my eyes.

I held you
like a graceful splendid venetian goblet,
so fragile:
    I, so afraid
to fracture it completely
with the over much of my speech,
upon the tiny crystal of your silence,
unable to mend,
to make it sing again
with the tip of a finger.

Your hands spoke of weakness,
Yet pertinacity in your knuckles.
In the small wrinkles
I read your pain
of days yet to blossom.
Then,
after I said
all I could say,
little comfort to your silence.

My dreams remain,
a small cloud
in your deadly blue sky.

Christiane Michaela Vincent

Composed and translated from the German

A MOTHER'S LAMENT

Two vacant rooms stand clothed
in shrouds of silence down the hall.

"Let's close the doors,
and save the cost of cooling," he suggested.

No, leave them open.
Please.
Don't close the doors.

Wrinkles deepen into creases in the dusty cap and gown.
Awards.
Diploma.
Old history assignments marked in red
Stored neatly for a later day.

Daydreams.
Plans.
The flurried rush of progress.

Next door, a lemon yellow robe that's almost new.
A hand embroidered caftan stained with jelly.

Unfinished homework on the closet shelf,
A lock of burnished hair tied in a yellow ribbon.

Courage.
Faith.
And now eternal life.

Let go.
Release.
The greatest love is that with arms held open.

New life.
New hope.
A search for greater purpose.

I'll let them go,
But
Please, don't close the doors.

Gwen Smith Bergman

THE SEEDLING

Monday

The postman's beat-up blue and white jeep swung around the corner right on schedule. He reached my tilting gray mailbox with the faded numbers just as I finished the end of last night's joint and was headed toward the radio to turn up the volume. I pushed open the flimsy screen door and it was snatched by a gust and clattered against the stucco wall. Stepping quickly, I wrapped my shawl around me tighter and jumped back inside to avoid the blustering March wind that carried the tingle of sea salt and the tang of fishermen.

Plenty of room
At the Hotel California
What a nice surprise . . .

With the music playing loudly I sifted through the day's junk mail. As I hummed, a letter slipped through my fingers to the floor. I got very few personal letters – so I quickly stooped down to pick it up. I felt the thick, crinkly white paper and looked at the ornate scrawl, and a click went off in my head. It was time, of course, for The Letter.

I walked to the window and brushed away a cobweb to get a better view of the morning sea – turbulent and energetic, dotted with white caps from the strong wind. I looked down at the handwriting of my name and address: "Sandy McKinley, 41 Beach St., Los Playas, Calif.," and tried to decipher the attitude of the writer. The letter was always from Mother; Dad never wrote. Men of his generation and sensibility seldom wrote anything but business letters. I'd only heard his voice in the last seven years.

Inside the envelope I found the usual check – for many years now, our only communication. This time was different though; a real letter was enclosed and the check was for a larger amount, too. At first when they started sending these checks I had felt guilty about taking the money, but I'd long since realized it kept me alive.

Opening the onion skin stationery I found these lines:

Dear Sandy:

How are you? Your father and I are fine. He sends his love. He is busy with the new plant, they're putting it up by Des Moines. It's going to be a pretty one. They will make gears there. I am busy on the hospital addition fund drive. We've got to raise $1 million. It takes a lot of my time.

The extra money is for your birthday. Spend it on something nice.

Love, Mother

P.S. Fluffy misses you!

I laughed and thought of Fluffy, my white, long-haired, self-centered cat. No, Fluffy didn't miss me.

"She sure writes poetic letters," I said aloud, smiling. "At least she writes." I wondered if they missed me. It had been hell living at home during high school and only mildly better during school breaks when I was going to college.

My birthday — God! I had forgotten all about it. I had gotten to the point where I couldn't remember my exact age without subtraction. I mean, who cares? I glanced at the calendar. My birthday was Saturday, I was going to be 29. Jesus.

I sank down on the sofa and thought of the previous birthdays: at 13, clean and fresh-faced, smiling and blowing out candles. I was a fuller figure in a tighter sweater at 16, glancing nervously around the table as I opened presents. By 19 I was a California woman who had discovered sandy beaches, marijuana, Vietnam, and bralessness. At 21 I ate magic mushrooms on my birthday, at the commune off campus, and made my own celebration fireworks on the inside of my eyelids.

Now, at 29, it seemed so far away and yet, as I looked around, much of it was still with me. My closet held the same guaze blouses, activist t-shirts, and madras skirts from those trippy college days, even though I had sworn off hallucinogens long ago. My hair was still in the same bushy style, though now the dark brown was highlighted by the sun from too many hours at the beach. My friends were still the same, a little older, mellower perhaps, but otherwise the same.

I stretched my arms and yawned at the morning outside. I looked around my small cottage, taking in everything.

"God, it's cramped in here. And musty and damp." I threw open a couple of windows and the wind blew everything around in the room. I had to close them again. I circled the room, looking at my habitat with a newly critical eye.

"Maybe it's time to move. I've lived here for almost six years – and certainly no improvements can be made to this rabbit hole.' I paused, cocked my head, and with my hands on my hips, kicked the worn carpet with my toe, and went for a walk on the beach.

Tuesday

Blinded by the morning sun, I pedalled my old bicycle that was stripped of its character by the elements and age up the hill behind my cottage. The cottage was sandwiched between many other small, gayly-painted houses with a minimum of lawn space and a maximum of ocean view. The cottages had originally been planned as summer vacation houses, their front yards planted in easy-care low-flowering plants and bushes. Today they bloomed in blue and purple.

At the top of the hill I turned left toward the bank where I planned to cash the check. Rounding the second corner I heard someone calling my name.

"Sandy? Sand-eee! Here--over here!"

I braked my bike abruptly and planted one foot on the curb. Across the street I saw a slim girl in jeans and tailored jacket running toward me, her shoulder-length brown hair shining and bouncing. I merely looked at her as I did not recognize her. She was out of breath when she ran up to me.

"Jessie?" I muttered very low, staring at her.

"Of course it's me. How have you been? You look great – just the same as always," Jessie grinned and her pretty, dark features lit up her face.

"God, Jessie, it's been – what – at least six years since I've seen you. I'd never have recognized you!" I was still sitting dumbfounded on my bike, my patched skirt dragging on the curb.

"I haven't been around here for a long time. Not since I graduated–"

"Wait a minute!" I grabbed her arm, then quickly withdrew. "We both got kicked out after the riot and the busts–"

"I know, but they let me back in the year after. I only had one semester to go —same as you, right? So I graduated and I've been working in a library up in Oregon. You'd love it up there. Have you ever been to Bend?"

"No," I said. I'd never even been to Oregon.

"Well, anyway, I'm back to come to an alumni honors week. Imagine them picking me? If they only knew how we almost burnt down the Ad. Building! I remember you — standing up to that state policeman, right before all hell broke loose!" Jessie talked excitedly, remembering those days. I examined my toes.

"Yeah," I smiled, remembering too. "Those were great times, huh? Then we all got shoved into the paddy wagon — didn't you get knocked on the head by a cop?"

"Oh, yeah," Jessie said, "I'll never forget that. But I don't hold it against the policemen — they were just doing what they had to, I guess."

"You're kidding!" My eyes widened. "You got smashed over the head by a pig and you can say that? After the way they treated us?"

"It was so long ago, Sandy. How can you still be angry about something that happened seven years ago?"

"Well," I paused, a little embarrassed by my outburst, "it seemed to important then."

"Then."

"Yeah, I guess so." I tried to change the subject. "Say, why don't you come over and see everybody tonight? We'll have a party like the old days! Chuck's still here, and Al, MaryAnn, Cindy, everybody!"

"I don't know, Sandy. It's great seeing you — but you're different from them. I don't think I'd have anything in common with those guys any more."

I was taken aback. How could she think I was different from my friends? The thought was — well — unthinkable! I just stared at Jessie.

"Actually," she said, "I'm a little surprised you're still hanging around with them. Why don't you come up and see me in Oregon?" She scribbled down her address and gave it to me.

"Oh, I doubt if I could ever afford it," I said, glancing at the strange address.

"Well, sometime, maybe. I hope you do. I've gotta go. Great to see you!" She ran off as she had come, leaving me sitting on my old bike.

I pushed off from the curb, almost losing my old sandal. I glanced back in Jessie's direction but she had gone.

Wednesday

"Morning!" I called to Chuck and Louise as I entered the shop, trying to sound cheerful. Usually coming into the dark, Eastern world of the head shop cheered me up, but today I felt like I was burried in wet cement and could only wiggle my toes.

Chuck waved from his leather-tooling bench where he was working on a belt. Louise came out from the back room with some chamomile tea.

"Here, you look like you need this to soothe you today. Something heavy?" Louise could see right through me. Sometimes I loved her for it.

We sat down among the plants by the front window on straw mats. I stared at my dirty Indian print skirt and cradled the cup of steaming tea.

"Oh, Louise, you know sometimes you feel like, like . . . like immobile inside? Like you're solid inside when you want to be liquid?" I tried to melt my insides with the tea.

"Yeah, I guess," she replied, puzzled, but trying to read me. "Like when you don't know exactly what's hassling you but you know something is?"

"Sort of." I tried to cheer up. Talking to Louise usually did that but now only the tea felt right.

Louise went back to work as a few customers came in. I sat for a few minutes longer. Not coming up with any mood-elevating thoughts, I set down my cup and started dusting candles on the side of the store.

Music was playing on the turntable. I dusted an orange-scented candle as Linda Ronstadt sang.

> Southern California, that's as blue as a girl could be,
> Blue as the deep blue sea . . .
> I need your golden-gated cities like a hole in my head,
> Like a hole in my head, I'm free . . .

I brushed off a whole row of candles with one swipe of my dust rag.

Let the springtime begin . . .
I have wasted too much time
Just to sing you this sad song . . .

The smell of the shop's incense began piercing my nose. I turned my back to the candles. Louise stood, her long blonde hair streaming to her waist, dusting water pipes behind the counter. Jerking my head I saw Chuck bending over a t-shirt where he had just printed "Do it in the Dirt."

I began to gasp for air, as if all the dust in my rag suddenly had caught in my throat. My ears were ringing, I felt hot, burning. I stumbled, still gasping, toward the door, mumbling something to Louise. I burst open the door and ran outside into the sunshine, stopping only for a moment before running into the park across the street.

"I've never been claustrophobic before," I gasped, heaving breaths on the park bench. "What's come over me lately?"

I looked down at my familiar clothes and got a whiff of body odor. I tilted my head back to get some fresh air. I relaxed and calmed down, and tried to examine my past.

For the past six years or so I had lived in the cottage, worked in Chuck and Louise's head shop, gone to the beach, gone to parties, and had about four different lovers, none of which I had at present.

"And never looked at my state of mind."

I thought of all the devices I'd used to cloud my thoughts: the tranquil beach that put me into a natural trance, the marijuana I used to help me sleep, the parties with more dope and more music to soothe, the mystical head shop with its rows of unreality.

I felt disgusted but uncertain. My friends enjoyed and seemed to thrive on their lifestyle. I had seemingly thrived too — for a good many years.

Thursday

I stopped in front of Chris' and Beth's house, looking at the pink and purple sunset before going in to the gathering. A lone sailboat glided on the day's last breezes. I thought of being on it, going to South America. I thought of Jessie's Oregon, and the many places I'd never been.

I thought of Illinois, of Mother. And of Dad and the last time I had seen him: in the jail, where he stood looking so frightened, after bailing me out. We had marched by chanting, our fists defiantly high.

God, why hadn't I stopped? I lowered my head and reluctantly walked up the flagstones to the house.

Actually, I had been looking forward to this party. I loved getting together with my friends – we did it often.

Chris was a chef at a local chowder house – his specialty was the creamy clam chowder the tourists adored. Beth made custom clothes and sold them at a local store. They had lived together since we all lived at the commune. They were old friends, as were Sheryl, Bob, Cindy, Louise, Chuck, MaryAnn, Freddie, Al, and Fritzie. A big bowl of chowder was waiting for all of us as we arrived and sat on the floor, slurping and sipping.

Fritzie sat down next to me and told me about her new puppy, a brown mutt. The dog loved the beach, she said, burying bones in the sand, snapping at the waves, jumping at gulls.

"You know, the beach – the ocean – are so spiritual. They're alive, yet they give you life. They're so eternal," Fritzie mused, her dark curly hair unruly around her neck. "I really couldn't live anywhere but by the ocean, and especially on California beaches. They're so charismatic, so dynamic. You know what I mean?

I nodded as I looked at Fritzie sideways, knowing she was sincere. I knew what she meant. I'd had those same feelings both during my longing teenage years in Illinois and when I finally moved to California for college. I spent days just walking up and down the beach, drinking in the sunlight, feeling the smooth grittiness under my feet and between my toes. It was spiritual even now, though much of the magic had worn off. I pictured myself in the old days: long tan legs in cutoffs with a bikini top, jumping wildly to spike the volleyball, and later pensively staring at the pounding surf.

Al sat down and began sipping his chowder. He was tanned even in March from working outside painting boats. His wavy, light brown hair was pulled into a ponytail and his warm blue eyes reminded me of the ocean – and what we shared last summer.

"How ya doin'?" Al asked me, glancing up from the spoon at his lips.

"Okay." I admired his clean blue workshirt and the muscles underneath. I still felt something for him, but strangely never thought of him when he was out of sight.

"Bonnie and I are having some folks over Saturday, Will you come?"

"Sure." While the thought of him and Bonnie still wasn't comfortable in my head, I knew none of us had ties to one another. I quashed the emotion and scraped my chowder bowl.

"Saturday's my birthday," I said suddenly and wished immediately I hadn't.

"No kidding?" Al looked at me brightly, making my lonely heart pound. "Well, we'll have a real celebration then! I've got some great coke I've been saving for the right occasion . . ."

I grimaced, but I'd known he'd make a big deal out of my birthday. Maybe I wanted it . . . No, I didn't, I thought, and kicked myself mentally. Now I'd be expected.

I leaned back and surveyed the group. I had good feelings about all of them; I felt comfortable here on the rug surrounded by my friends, my family. On most days I would let that feeling of fellowship flow through me, sweetening my spirit, but today it had a sour fringe to it. I sighed. I felt bored and useless here, too, like I had done it a thousand times before. My friends looked too familiar, too comfortable, like my old worn rug.

My mind felt so clear, so alert, I imagined pins poking into me, and I noticed no one had sent a joint around yet. I drank some wine and listened to and looked at my friends like they were strangers. I heard all the conversations in the room at once. I'd seen them all before and heard their words a thousand times. I gulped down the rest of my wine.

Friday

Birds hopped on the grass in front of me as I sat on the park bench in the sunshine. The warmth helped me think; it felt like years of cobwebs were being swept away. A block away I could see the small store front of Chuck and Louise's shop; it looked tidy and secure. Louise came out with a broom and swept the front step. She didn't see me — I was too far away.

I got up and walked past Chris' chowder house where tourists and locals mingled over their mutual pleasures. Their faces looked happy as they hunched over steaming bowls of soup.

Down the hill I passed Fritzie in the gallery and admired the pottery and copper sculptures for a moment. Fritzie didn't see me; she was busy with a customer and I moved away.

At the marina Al was indistinguishable from a group of about ten painters working on the bottom of a tugboat. A new coat of blue was going over the old dull gray of the "Missy B."

A cloud passed over the sun as I reached the beach. For a moment the sand looked cold and white like snow, the sea looked like churning ice, gray and forbidding, and the dunes seemed to go on forever with no shadows to mark them. I shivered. The sun came out again and touched everything with its golden fingers; I was strangely reassured.

I walked near the surf for a while then sat down to be hypnotized by the rumble of the waves. I pulled my skirt up and burried my legs in the warm sand. I patted the sand smooth until my legs disappeared. The ocean kept flowing. Sandpipers darted among the waves, searching and poking. My toes wiggled involuntarily and cracked the smooth surface, liberating my legs. I picked up a handful of sand and sprinkled a path all the way home.

Saturday

The birthday dawned early and I was up to see it. I stood at my window entranced by the new sun: its glory, its splendor, its brilliant, quiet colors. Its energy charged me like a direct circuit.

I turned and faced my small, drab cottage. A ratty sofa and chair furnished the square living room, while a tiny round table and chair graced the hallway — the kitchen. None of it was mine; it had come with the house.

In the bedroom a rickety single bed stood against one wall and a multitude of pictures hung everywhere. One by one I took them down and remembered which of my friends had drawn or painted them, and when.

Sheryl had given me her pencil drawing of a gull in flight. MaryAnn exchanged a charcoal of the grassy dunes for one of mine — I'd forgotten which one. Freddie gave me his pastel of the breakers for a Christmas present — I think he gave everybody one that year. A small oil by Bob, a real artist, was my masterpiece. He had painted a fisherman on his boat and captured the hard-working, free spirit of the man. I stacked them all carefully, reverently, in a pile.

I took out the one suitcase I owned — an old leather and straw-faced one that had long since lost its handle. I put the artworks of my friends inside and covered them with a pair of jeans and a sweater. A jacket was also put in, and an ancient pair of boots.

Changing into my denim skirt and Mexican embroidered blouse, I slipped on my old Indian sandals, shut the case, and carried it into the living room. I felt like a farmer who must abandon his field because the soil is worn out. He loves the land, it has fed and nurtured him, but he no longer wants or needs it.

I also felt a power within me, growing – like the farmer's seedlings. It filled me with anticipation and hope, like the feeling of renewal in the spring's rains. I felt a glow from the inside somehow. I knew the best was yet to come.

On an old drawing pad I scrawled a message in charcoal to Louise, saying "I have to go." I asked her to split my things with the group and give away the rest to the Salvation Army. I wrote down the address of my parents for her.

With my suitcase under my arm, I looked around my tiny abode one last time. I sighed. I was happy to be rid of it, but remembered the good times, too.

I opened the flimsy screen door and it slammed belligerently one last time. The March wind whipped my skirt around my knees as I stepped out the gate.

Catching my breath, I jumped, then ran down the street. It was my birthday and I was going home.

Lisa McC. Webb

The Altar

The child lay peering into the soft shadows of the tall grass. Above, the sun covered the land with an even warmth that caused little drops of sweat to run down his back. He shivered slightly as the droplets tickled their way across his soft skin. Deep within the shadows, tiny bits of life crept or flitted over the tender shoots that palely sprouted from the fertile soil. The child tasted the sweet smell of the crushed grass beneath his cheek and he sighed with the joy of the moment. He remembered nothing of the instant past and knew nothing of the moment to come. Trapped in the sensual joys of the present, he accepted each sensation as it came; the quick pain of the insect's sting, the moist warmth of the day, or the bursting happiness of the life within him were simply there, neither feared nor remembered. He was complete and fulfilled within his moment of time. He rolled onto his back, eyes clenched tightly, and watched the sun's dazzling rays interrupted by the shadows of the verdant plants dance on his reddened lids. Movement turned to form. He sighed softly and began to watch.

The flickering light from the council fire illuminated the circle of elders as they sat cross-legged, intently listening to the tall man standing near the fire. "The gods," he said, "have not heard us for a long time. I do not think that there are gods any more." Those in the council circle watched him in silence. "I shall go away," he continued, "and, alone, I will try to find the truth. I do not know how long my search will take, but I shall not return until I know the answer." He walked from the firelight into the darkness, the sound of his footsteps faded into silence. The elders slowly arose, some in silence, others softly discussing the event. All were deeply concerned at the departure of their man of wisdom.

The land was austere yet filled with subtle beauty. The men had forgotten how many seasons had passed since he had walked from the council fire. From the doorway of his stone dwelling he viewed a vast plain sprinkled with sparse desert growth. Dun colored monoliths thrust toward the sky like giant idols guarding the fields of granite boulders that gave feature to the plain. In the distance, rainbow colored mountains tore at the horizon. By day, the scene was saved from starkness only by the thousand delicate shades of brown or purple. But by night, the sky, with its blazing display of stars, was awesome. The night sky was the reason the man had stopped here to ponder the silence of the gods. Here in the serene beauty of the wasteland, he sought the truth.

After he had come to the plain, the man had spent countless days and nights in thought. "I shall seek the truth in the night sky," he thought. Gathering all the secret things of his arcane art to himself, he painstakingly made a sparrow. It was coarse and grey, but powerfully driven by a spark of some inner fire the man had given it. When the moon shone forth from its home beneath the earth, the man threw the sparrow directly into the circle of silver light. It flew straight into the cold face of the moon and was soon invisible in its pale aura. The man waited patiently until the answer came sadly drifting on the evening air. "You are alone," it said.

"The gods are farther away," he thought. Again he gathered those things his dreams told him were needed. Using more of his store of skill and knowledge, from the earth he made doves, small and neat, their pale feathers smooth, their motion fluid. Choosing the brightest of the sky lights after the moon, he hurled the doves into the dark sky, each one aimed at its own colored sphere. He waited, dreaming of their message, wanting to be able to return to his people with news of hope. The sky patterns changed with the seasons. At last, when the secret blooming of the tiny desert flowers had come and gone many times, the soft cooing of the doves came floating on the morning air. "You are alone," sighed the dove voices one by one.

The man, again, used more of his great skill and knowledge. He made countless marvelous eagles, each identical to the next, each sleek and polished. And each was driven by a thousand fires smaller than the grains of sand that covered the desert plain. He made so many of the eagles that they covered the plain, their golden shapes straining toward the sky. Then he flung them, one by one, into the darkness. The eagles sped true, each with his eyes unblinkingly focused on one of the pale fires that pierced the arch of the heavens. The man, now tired and thin, waited. He counted time by watching the jagged peaks of the distant mountains slowly grow rounder and softer with the wear of the sun and wind. Eons passed before the first faint cry of the eagles came back. Their cries, strained through the dark void, were fainter than the softest midnight breeze. One after another the eagles told him, "You are alone."

The rounded mountains sat on the horizon under the old sun. Their once gay rainbow colors were now faded and windblown over the plain. The man, old and feeble, thought "I must search in the last place I know of." He turned his thoughts inward. With the last of his knowledge and using the finest craftsmanship, he built one gnat and placed it in his eye.

The gnat grasped there the end of a thought, and gently began to wind it into a skein. It followed every gossamer thread of thought, every silken web of intellect, ever winding as it wandered the maze of imagination and experience. It wound the soft memories of childhood and the painful memories of youth. It traced the paths of companionship and love. It circled the spirals of knowledge, always returning to the point where it began, only to follow the delicate threads to another promise and another beginning. The gnat walked the calm, confident corridors of maturity, winding achievement and satisfaction. It crept through the doubts of old age, finding happiness and grief, acceptance and regrets. The man, his eyes closed in concentration, followed each twist and turning of the gnat. He examined each thought, every fact, all of the dreams that the gnat coiled into the skein. The man suddenly felt intense longing and anticipation. He knew the next thought would bring the answer, his long sought truth. But the gnat had reached the end of the thread. The last tangle was unraveled, the last spiral unwound, the last long corridor traversed. The gnat's answer rustled through the emptiness like the sound of a lizard creeping through dry grass.

There was no one to hear.

The child threw his arm across his eyes to stop the tears. He felt the intense sense of loss. He knew the sadness and the loneliness of the man. He sobbed for the lost truth and for the unfulfilled promise it held. The after images slowly faded as he turned his face back into the shadowed grass. As the images faded, so, too, did his memory. His sobbing ceased after a time and he again dreamed on in his timeless moment. His curly hair was warm and damp from the sun's warmth and his soft face still tear streaked. But he again lay watching the wood bees and the tiny leaf hoppers move about in the shadowy growth. He idly formed a mound of rich earth and placed, on the top, a dun colored stone that somehow seemed out of place on the black gravid earth. The stone, warm and porous, was like a wind carved remnant of some ancient desert monolith. The child murmured to the stone, "I don't want to be alone. You will be my friend, won't you?" And he placed at the base of the mount a tiny worm as a gift.

Jaye Manis

dancer

you danced into my life
whirling spinning until my mind collapsed from dizziness
watching you watching me
lost in your deep brown eyes
your intensity surrounds me
swirling with the air i breathe, the ground i walk upon,
the sunlight that filters through the clouds

i am comfortable with you
like no one before
let me explore your spirit
hear the moon speaking to us in the night sky

i know you
you speak the hidden feelings i have written
i feel you
your presence leads me through the hours
to places i would not go before
and brings me back from places i am now
a focus

it is because of you i am changing
you are catalyzing the transformation
you have the power and have let me see
the beauty inside
the flower beginning to bloom
tiny sparks of energy flow from you
giving me strength
stroking my very soul

i no longer move in time to the music
i am time
drifting through space
i am music
pulsating with the stars

it is because of you, dancer

Judi Halevy

AT 35,000 FEET

Blue
Thin high
Bright azure
Infinite stuff

Man
Rarely glimpses infinity
Over his spoiling
But learns in every round
Where there is no vision
He perishes

Spirit
Builds wings
Lifts man above his spoiling
Experiencing infinity
Eternity
In the same moment

Spirit
Energizes
Interior vision
Hope is
Bright azure
Blue

Hocker

Like awakening summer
You beckon me from shadowed sleep
To a wide-windowed hall.
Fragrant with sunlight.

For a moment
You and I as close
As blossoms touching

Then, the floor between us
Too vast to walk,
Our words fade
In the empty space

I long for a lake's
Dark stillness,
And the silence of the trees.

Mary Laird

THE ASSIGNMENT

I wish I had done it then,
when I felt I could.
With ideas popping into my head – that old cliche –
and artistic phrases.

But I was writing a letter
and since it had been started earlier in the week,
it seemed that I should be writing on the letter
instead of just writing for fun.

I looked out at the tiny crystals dancing in the sun,
rhymical yet not in perfect time.

I thought, I could write a whole poem about them.
I could liken them to little delights that are enjoyed for a moment and then are but wonderings.

I thought, I could start out with their smallness and enlarge the perspective –
all the way from the fun with it and visual beauty of it,
through its use as a commercial commodity and energy-god to the "grand plan."

These were the thoughts I had
as I paused while writing on the letter.
He (our instructor) said we should take a common object or occurrence and write about it in a different or unusual way.

And that is what I did, in my head.
And then I came back to the letter, and the day, and all the activities that demanded my time:
All the beautiful thoughts turned into wonderings.

I wish I had done the assignment then,
when I could have done it so well.
I am sitting here on this day
at the appointed hour for working on the assignment,
but the thoughts and words and artistic phrases seem to have stepped out.

I surely wish I had done it then,
when I felt I could.

Marianne Kistler

A CELESTIAL DOXOLOGY

Come, look, turn your eye
toward twilight when the downing ball dims
fire dividing into single flame dying,
and your global sight intuits
all amethyst on the land, when
some windhand sweeps that color
to night's stigmata-blue.

Now, you turn a darker eye in,
inward, into the inside vast of heartskeep
teetering, leering, looming on the edgy black,
you lean on the palette and escape
the prism of space, prison
caught through time
in a backsearch,
connecting, collecting
cerebral static, psychic riff-raff
emblazoned by a great, transient touch
of tin and transistor.

Go, wipe the diamonds and cinders from your eyes,
wash the emanation that once transmuted
earth and word, world and stone.

Russell Huddleston

WINTER STORM

Shiny-brittle jutting spears
Drip dark drops downward
To the snow.
Black-scowling clouds
In sleepy-sullen sky
Mutter rambled oaths.
Snarling wind scours bare
The sparsely-whitened hills.
Hailstones drive into the ground.

Virginia Wirtz

BLACK HOLE IN THE ASPHALT

Ring of black shadow in the stony tar;
    Home of a friend, who chattered in the sun;
I checked my noontime sack for shares, which he
Would scamper to retrieve, and turn and run
    Down thru' the ring, swallowed by his world.

His door, an accidental evidence
    Of man's incompetence,
Impervious to digging paws,
    Denied invasion too, to beaks and claws.

A truck of tar repaired the road one day.

    I had deceived my friend.

Charles Morrison

LIKE DRESDEN AMONG THE RUINS

A shock of sound
And we are bleeding
Color and guts
White froth sickness
The sea is churning
On the deck
Burning
On the landing
Pounding
Pounding
In the sky
On the shore
Like Dresden among the ruins

Jerome Evans

MORNING BRINGS THE DARKNESS

He sat immersed in an amber lazy-swirling aura of efflorescent infinitesimal dust. His slumped demeanor seemed to emit the smoky particles like a fog vaporizing through his pores. For an instant he shuddered and the dust skipped and churned away; but seeing his passiveness, they returned and settled as though a fixture of his countenance. He began rocking slowly to and fro; the dust clung to him in his dilatory rhythmical movement.

"It is good news?" he muttered, "Or at least . . . well, it must be good news . . ." While he susurrated, he idly toyed with a gum-rubber mouse, kneading it softly with his fingertips. "For thirty-two years I've been without it, and now they tell me it's possible." He shook his head slowly, set down the toy and rose to his feet. He smoothed the wrinkles from the bed, then touched his eyelids lightly with his thumb and forefinger. With a sudden jerk, he turned and strided to the door, unbolted the two deadbolt locks, grasped his cane, white-knuckled, and stepped into the hallway. Quickly, he rebolted the locks, then turned and groped his way down the stairs. He stumbled out onto the sidewalk and felt the heat of the sun. Stiffly, he made his way down the walkway and took his favorite turn to the seaside.

The Pacific breeze invigorated him as the sounds of sea-birds cheerly wafted to his ears. "Perhaps, it is good news," he lightly smiled. Then in childish exhilaration he laughed aloud, "Yes, it could be good news: good news indeed!" He stumbled over a gathering of discarded seaweed; instead of catching himself, he fell willingly to the sand. Below him, he felt the graininess of the upheaved sea bed and rubbed its granules between his fingers. The coolness of the salt-spray splashed refreshingly across his face and he tasted the salt with his lips. He felt renewed as the singing sea further calmed his simmering temperament. In the distance, he heard the chatter of seagulls as they kited for their food. "Seagulls," he murmured to the sand, "seagulls . . ."

He laid there for sometime and felt the sun hissing as it sank into the ocean. As the fire extinguished, the cold of the twilight began to creep through his clothing. As much as he dreaded leaving, the mounting cold forced him to his feet, and in his stiffened gait he headed down the well-tamped path. His shoulders shifted downward with each step bringing him nearer to the arteries of the town. He grasped his cane tightly and muttered, "still, it is only a possibility; isn't it."

He stumbled on the first step as he began the climb back up to his one-room apartment. He took the steps one at a time with computer accuracy. "A foot for each step, and a step for each foot," he mumbled miserably. Each movement became slower as he neared the top. He laboriously opened one lock, then the other with such complication a stranger observing would have wondered if he belonged there at all. Once inside, he closed the latches with angered dexterity.

He did not feel like going to bed. He slid a volume of ***Paradise Lost*** from a meticulously arranged shelf, and sat on the edge of the bed. The cubicle of his apartment seemed to concentrate his growing depression. He mechanically fingered the pages of the book, not noticing their contents. After several attempts at concentrating, he slammed it shut. Through his nose he hissed vehemently, "What the Hell does Milton know, anyway." He returned the book to its place on the shelf. Returning to his bed, he picked up the mouse from its place on the night table. Exploring the mouse with his fingers seemed to mesmerize him into a state of partial restfulness. Slowly, the rocking motion began; and as he rocked, he regarded the pacifier with amusement and concern. He felt the roughened stump of its missing tail, and knit his brows together. "Still . . . it is a good mouse, is it not," he forced a smile that seemed to relieve some of his tension, "still a good mouse," he buttressed his thought. With a look of vague satisfaction, he replaced the mouse to its night table.

Touching the toy reminded him of a birdling the neighbor boy had allowed him to hold during the day at the park. He had felt the beating of its faint little heart and its blood coursing through the tiny veins of its body. "Amazing," he had thought, "that such meticulous perfection was present even in a creature so small." But when it shivered fearfully in his hands, he quickly handed it back to the boy. He wanted nothing to die so wretchedly, especially when he was holding it. As far as he was concerned, "If it was going to die — it could die elsewhere."

Involuntarily, he leapt up, methodically testing the locks on the door and sat back down. The thought of death had spoiled his thinking.

He busied himself with preparation for bed. First, he removed his left shoe then his right and carefully arranged them at the foot of the bed. He then removed his saltwater stained clothes, bundled them up and placed them in the wicker basket inside the bathroom

door. "The landlord will have them cleaned in the morning." He thought of showering, but decided he wanted to smell the sea while he fell asleep. From the bottom drawer of the chest, he removed his pajamas and put them on: first the right leg, then the left, then the right arm, then the left. He turned back the sheets sixty degrees. For a moment, he had an urge to pray. He sat on the edge of the bed – forgot it – and rolled between the covers. Murmuring "It is good news, is it not . . ." he slid into a turbulent sleep without smelling the sea.

Somewhere in the distance, he heard his name. He attempted to respond. His mouth moved in a fishlike munching motion and his throat rattled like marbles, "Did it work?" Before he had time to hear an answer, he was pulled back into the sightlessness of sleep.

He sat on the edge of the bed absently toying with the scarred mouse. He took a deep ragged breath, then with deep-seated strength he flung the toy across the room. It disappeared behind the couch with a dull thud. He punched his thumbs deep into his eyes and shook forcefully. "Yes, it had been a success – a damned medical history." He recalled the morning after his release, he had risen early: before the sun. When the first rays of daybreak had swelled through the slot beneath the window shade, he had jumped to his feet and wrenched open the blinds. It had been glorious. The vivid brightness of the mounting sun, and its morning pait of color had overwhelmed him. He had drawn down the sash, and in the darkness of his compartment he contemplated the sun's unearthliness. For a moment, he had felt the relationship of the sunworshipper to his diety. He had laughed mirthfully, "like a fool."

With a show of effort, he removed his thumbs from his eyes and rose to his feet. "Perfection is an idle dream: a dream vanquished with the opening of the mind," he uttered gloomily. He started to pick up his cane; instead, he kicked it across the floor. He heard it clatter as he hurried out the door.

As he walked, the cracked and peeling paint of the stop sign post commanded his attention. He could see that the sun-blistered paint had yellowed into a pale and muddy color. It reminded him of dried urine on white porcelain. He tore his eyes from the sight and sped down the street. Soon his gait slowed to an agitated walk. He gazed hypnotically at the grizzled colorations of the salt and wind scoured buildings. He felt the bore-worms gnawing through his own flesh at the sight of geraniums befouled along the sidewalk. He shuddered at the sight of a mangled cat in the gutter. He heard the roar of an approaching bus. Dingy grey and blue, it passed him with the pleistocene faces of men reading newspapers, gnome-like children with faces pressed against glass, and medusa women with hair in curlers flashing before him as though on a nickelodeon. Again he shuddered.

His bowels seemed to pump up deep amber. His body shook violently; then like a deflated bladder, he collapsed into a park bench. Through hooded eyes, he peered benumbly through the park. Inside he boiled, "Filthy children bedecked in rags . . . trees hideously brown and decaying . . . mangy vermin dogs licking ulcerated wounds." He wanted to scream; instead, his body shook spasmodically.

Above him, he heard the call of a seagull. He drew his head slowly upward, a smile flickered in his eyes and the corners of his mouth climbed desperately for a smile

The seagull laughed cruelly and without passion.

He sat, glimmer-smile transfixed on his face. Deffecation filtered through his hair, onto his forehead, and into his eyes. Rage held him locked in its grip. Abruptly released, he dropped to his knees – livid – in search of any weapon by which he could retaliate. Groping blindly with heated eyes, his hand found a fist-sized stone. With a single wracking sob, he turned his eyes heavenward in search of the vile bird.

A teetering smile lifted up into a full strength laughter, eminating into the surrounding air with piteous humor. He couldn't see the bird – he couldn't see any bird at all.

T'Sin

alone with myself
is a world of
music and dancing in swirls
so fine and people with
eyes that cast out darkness
yet live in the dark
to make paintings with light
and somehow survive while I simply
die
and lie in confusion to
listen to flutes and see
circles glide concentric and
tangential red so often,
blue sometimes
always there in spoken silence,
broken silence
and night so rare

Jerome Evans

THE WIND. IT BLOWETH AS IT LISTETH

A Friend, cooling a wetted brow;
A Maestro charming chimes;
A willing Oarsman, plowing seas;
A Miller, milling grain;
A smiling Servant at the well;
Then, suddenly –
Field Marshal of the air,
Who orders leaves to turn;
And, if they dare to disobey –
Rips the umbilical, and hurls
Them back upon the Mother of us all.
Truly,
This is a Tyrant who defies
The earth, the seas, the sky;
A monstrous, moody madman who
May play a Cupid to
The ones he wills to die.
Yes,
This is a Power, with a voice
Commands of Kings can never still;
Godlike, dispensing Good, and Ill.

Charles Morrison

THE NUTMEG CUP

when I gaze
deep
at my face at
the bottom
of the red cup,
I am reflected–
distorted, I am.
my eyes become moons
of black pupils
and my nose/mouth
fuse so the shadows
are like a mountain
growing gray between my eyes.
the eyes squeeze shut.
nutmeg at the bottom
of the red cup
makes me sleepy.
So I drift off to my
imaginary dreams.
distorted, I am.
away to another
world.
drifting – soft
red cup melting.

Andrea MacDonald

RAINBOWS

The blue room held arching rainbows,
Though gray mantles, folded and neatly tucked,
Often, at a moment's notice, blanketed the atmosphere.
Before what-had-been-echoes whispered in the corridors
And fell, spilled from the flowing cup.
But that was before life, or knowledge,
When innocence, as the pre-conceived child in the
parent's mind,
Is neither dead nor alive,
Before the feast,
When rainbows were as complete as a life cycle
of a whole generation,
As complex and fragile as the silken strands of a spider's web,
And happiness spanned a bright brittle day.

Bertha Crow

COMMAND PERFORMANCE

Command Performance
put the soul on the spotlight
to be gazed at, and razed by
civilized eyes –
eyes seeking perfection
and wanting more than justified –
eyes looking at gestures –
eyes staring within
the confines of that spotlight
to command performance.

Joanne White

The cold sun surrenders to the smokey horizon
The evening for a moment is still
Then like a fire catching or a rumour spreading
The howling winds arise out of the hills in
the north
Sweeping down, to the valley's dread, from the
mountains like ancient hordes.

Like calvary with neither commander nor steed
They charge and clash, fight and twist,
tear and turn
They sack empty cabins and ruin tumbleweed
towns
Spilling the sages blood without care or fear
They turn once again, rolling their plunder
before them
They ride on whispering wings
Home to their mountains in the north,
their silent halls, and ghostly kings.

Fritz Baier

Ancient folded mountains,
Flood-furrowed faces held up to the sky.
In patient resignation to the wind and storm
Mute you stand
Yet speaking all things in your silence.

Virginia Wirtz

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

Old king – a bold king once.
Stabbed you must be
To writhe a prophecy
Of visages of future kings,
Cloaked in anonymity and tartan aegis.
Bloodred and tortured foretellings:
auguries from royal entrails
and regal rubious flux.

Knarled, knotted
Sire in title only;
Spewing only spittle, virile no more.
No heir betokens last breath –
brave deeds your only reckoning tally;
childless, you have no other.

Dull flash of priestly blace:
lightning to the final thunder of your heart.
Hand, blue tattoo, the last earthly image
looms large across your fogging vision
and all is blanketed void.
Death rattle drowned by shout of serried, circling clan
surrounding skull-witnessed holy abattoir.

Be comforted, once mighty-thewed Chieftain, by your chariot
and haunch of boar
(Pig's meat . . . and you know the manner of ***their*** death)

Continuity at all costs
and regicide a cheap price
Fool's bargain

The king is dead, Long live the king!
The king is dead, Long live
The king is dead
The king

Old king – a bold king once.

S. L. Stelzner

THE ANIMAL

The swift canine arises
with almond-eyes clear, always keen,
encased in a skull carried slim
high the look, old as the first tear.
Who chose the bark
heard by a line of pharaohs?
Listen in the dark
come close
near the voice, unmeasured by years.
Hasten, leaning on wind limbs,
feet trimmed for flight
the form lifts toward home,
this climbing deer, fleet-eyed wonder,
the prize of Egypt.

Russell Huddleston

NOWHERE

It is the desolation of the world
that yawns in front of me,
like an abyss,
I will hurl down.

The emptiness inside of me
the emptiness around me
words floating from my lips
    bubbles . . .
with no content.

My body
    mortal frame.
Inside
emptiness . . . emptiness,
nothing definable
    without evidence.

The creature
        I don't know
    is myself.

Christiane Michaela Vincent

Composed and translated from the German

CELEBRATING LIFE

as i pause here on this weathered rock
Creation sparkles
with Spring
and force

i am touched
i become . .

my enlivened spirit
now walks
in
the warmth
of
The Son

Tina Frisbee

THE VOYAGERS

My dreams were all of sailing
    On those surging mounts of blue;
I longed to go a-sailing
    Like my Grandpa used to do;
        Each Epic he would paint for me
Was Scrupulously True.
        I was a child. I knew.

* * * * *

At last I went a-sailing,
    I was nearly twenty-smart;
The Awesome Ocean proved, Grandpa,
    You'd paint only part;
        I swore that you I'd hurt, rebuke,
I'd bare your bogus art –
        But, I didn't have the heart.

* * * * *

Though anchored safe, I realize
    My hours in Port are few;
My ship 'The Rocker' has my
    Children's children for a crew;
        I've filled their canvas, light
                and bright,
With airy, derring-do,
        So they can sail a while with you.

Charles Morrison

Dusting leaves-sifting-
Red, gold, and autumn brown
Respond, yielding more readily to the wind's caresses,
Too tired to rest except upon the ground
To carpet, even in death,
The green winter rye.

It, cold-resisting-
The winter's fierce, determined blow,
In young innocence disdain the rusty whisper,
Refutes the school that lays all nature low,
In season,
Drifting away in the summer wind.

Bertha Crow

SLEEPING DUCKS

quiet in the
Time before dawn,
John Carpenter's cabin
Becomes alive with a perking sound

Hot black coffee chases
The morning fog
Squirrels are heard in the
Misted trees and blue jays
Sing the sun's arrival.

A shipwright by trade,
His memories float by
Like sleeping ducks
on the river

Jerome Evans

THE APARTMENT HOUSE

The apartment house itself was not all that old. It stood silent behind viridian trees and a fine lawn that seemed out of place so close to that cracking stucco. Winter was better suited to the place; winter, when the trees were bare and the beautiful grass sleeping. But now spring had come with its greens and blossoms; the pale beige cracking stucco of the apartment house was simply out of place with it.

But the white sign was an outrage to the building. In spite of its early decay, the bright red letters of the word QUARANTINE did not belong on the door. Even worse was a crude black cross painted on the door just beneath the QUARANTINE sign, with the words "Lord have mercy on us."

* * *

James pulled off his sandals and looked with anguish at his cracked feet. The calloused skin on his heel possessed many minute fissures through which soft fleshy skin was visible. Bits of dried blood coloured the cleavage. He rubbed his toes and flinched at the surprising coldness of his fingers.

Bass notes pounded the air outside James' room. The windows rattled at the sound. James jumped up from the floor and his aching feet and threw open the door.

"Turn it down you turkey!" The noise continued as James exhaled a stream of disgusted language. He slammed his door and moved toward the closet. James picked up the three inch shell casing he used for a door stop and dropped it purposely to the floor. The bass notes stopped. James sat down again and continued soothing his warm aching feet with the cool massage of his intricate fingers.

Finally he laid down flat and raised his legs straight out six inches above the floor. Many years of practice had taught him to raise his legs precisely six inches above the floor. It was as if a six inch prop were holding his legs up. His stomach muscles tightened as James counted out the first minute. When he had reached the third minute, his legs rested on the floor. His stomach muscles relaxed and rejoiced that the three-minute workout was over.

James now sat quietly in his time-worn chair. Had it been made of wood, he would have had an antique. But as it was, the cloth on the chair was green and the places where the stuffing came through seemed to fully indicate its age. He was reading Thomas Nashe:

> Strength stoops unto the grave,
> Worms feed on Hector brave,
> Swords may not fight with fate,
> Earth still holds ope her gate.
> "Come, come!" The bells do cry.
> I am sick, I must die.
> Lord, have mercy on us!

There was a knock at the door. "Who is it?"

"Henry and Marie DeVoy, we live across the hall."

"I don't know you."

"We thought that since we're all stuck here, we could get to know one another."

"Go away. I don't want anybody's disease. Go away!

The sun set as Henry and Marie closed their door on the empty hallway.

* * *

Henry was depressed by James' refusal to see him and his wife. He turned on the television and flopped onto the couch.

"Is something wrong with us?"

"I don't think so, dear," Marie consoled, "he just doesn't like people much I guess. The others see us and we see them. Everyone's been really nice these past few days."

The news was just ending . . . "And still no word on that quarantine case over in the east central section of our city. The Albuquerque Health Department continues its investigations into the

nature of this unknown disease. The Health Department also said today that they are certain the disease has been successfully contained. And for tonight, that's the news."

"When will they find something? Who are they running tests on anyway? Ain't no health department around here where we are," Henry bellowed.

"I don't know, dear. We'll be able to go out soon. Let's go to bed."

"It's only six-thirty."

"I know. But I was hoping we could go in and . . ." she kissed her husband lovingly on the ear and she loosened his tie and collar. "Play and make love and enjoy being with each other." Her cool fingers smoothed Henry's depression.

"Like honeymooners?"

"Yes, Henry, like honeymooners."

"OK." Henry smiled. Henry and Marie walked into their bedroom and closed the door behind them.

Henry drowned his granola with a beer. His head hurt terribly. It always hurt these days. He looked out the east window and watched the sun simply rise.

"Another day," he said. "Another day." He scowled at his granola and beer. Henry left his breakfast unfinished and began dressing. Blue trousers, white shirt, and that wretched tie. Henry's tie was always crooked and looked as if it had been tied a year ago by a twelve year old boy who had no intentions of ever having to go through the anguish of tying it again.

"Oh, Henry," Marie despaired. Her voice was smooth and refreshing, even more than it had been ten years ago. Somehow she remained the sole source of pleasure that kept Henry going. "You can't go to work, why did you get dressed for it?"

"I forgot. Well, I can take off this tie anyway."

But he didn't. Henry went to the door expecting to find his morning paper. It wasn't there. Henry slammed the door shut. "That stupid paperboy!"

"But Henry, he can't deliver until the quarantine is lifted."

"Yeah, well!" Henry fumed. His head still hurt so he sat down in the living room and began reading a two-week-old *Time* magazine while Marie went on with her daily tasks of ordering their household.

At one o'clock Marie turned on the television and sat down to watch her programs. Henry put down his magazine and watched with her. Marie held Henry's hand in her lap as she watched the show with great intensity. After the third program, Henry was bored. "They're all the same."

"No, no, Henry dear. You don't understand."

"No – they're all the same – they're all into each other's lives and she's having his baby and he's married to what's her face's girlfriend and her uncle is her baby's father and his sister is having an affair with the surgeon who's in love with that other guy's wife and then to top it all off the acting is lousy and that Irish grandmother has an Italian accent."

"But they're all different. You just have to watch them for awhile."

* * *

Bob belched loudly in his bed. He stared at the ceiling as he smoked his favorite drug. He looked at the empty side of his bed.

"When's this thing gonna be over? I ain't sick."

Bob was not used to sleeping alone. His good looks and charm had always enabled him to bring somebody home from "Jerry's Disco Barngrill." But not being able to go out put a stop to that and emptied his bed of would-be companions.

Bob looked in the mirror. His long brown hair had shifted wildly in his night's sleep and the splotchy beginnings of a beard seemed unfitting to his wide chin. He flexed his tanned and hairy chest. "You're good looking even in the morning. What a star!" He laughed in the mirror and combed his hair. Turning the stereo on loud, he stepped into the shower. The music woke him as he listened to it over the running water.

A loud thud jolted him as he stepped out of the shower. "Get screwed!" he yelled over the music, "that stupid freak," he muttered, "can't even listen to my own stereo." He turned it down and walked over to the window. He opened it, stuck his body out and yelled up to the floor above him. "Egg-suckin' freak! Knock it off! I'll listen to my music whenever I want to!" He turned the stereo up louder this time and set the bass control up to its maximum. Bob sat down on his couch and lost himself in the pounding bass notes.

* * *

Mrs. Taylor lived downstairs, nearest the door that opened onto the street. She never heard Bob's stereo

Most days after cleaning her small apartment, she would sit in her rocking chair with a cup of tea and just watch the traffic pass by in front of her picture window. She was enjoying the spring, watching buds form and blossom into flowers and the fruits of each kind of tree in the neighborhood.

Mostly she enjoyed the evenings when Mary came to visit and read to her from the Bible. Mrs. Taylor knew every story in that great book, but still thrilled at the words that were so alive.

Mary was a good companion to Mrs. Taylor. She loved her a great deal. "So young, yet she has time for me." She truly thanked the Lord for her young faithful friend, and now that Mary had not been feeling too well, Mrs. Taylor prayed for her recovery, fully trusting in the grace of God.

Without Mary to come over, Mrs. Taylor was a little lonely. But she would not give herself over to self-pity. When she felt like walking, she could go over and take care of Mary.

* * *

Mary sat in the warm water of her bathtub. Her thoughts were miles away from the tub and the quarantine and the dull throb in her head. She kept thinking of a sermon she had listened to on tape last night. Since she could not go out, the church sent her tapes of each service. It wasn't the same as being there, but at least she got to hear the Word.

"The Lord will humble you only so that he can exalt you later. God has no desire to show only how debased we are. He wants to show that we are nothing – and we are nothing – only to show that we can be something in Him! God wants to exalt each of his children to share the throne with our elder brother Jesus. He has no desire to show just our inadequacy, he wants to show us our sufficiency in Him! Praise God! We are to ascend with Christ. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that truly wonderful?"

Yes it is. Yes, it is. Mary turned these ideas over and over in her mind and heart. Suddenly, she heard a strange noise. A rather large piece of the ceiling fell with a loud splash into her bath. Mary screamed as she jumped up out of the tub, "YUK!" She just stood there for a few moments in total shock at the decay of her bathroom ceiling. She dried herself and put on her blue fuzzy bathrobe

Dialing the phone, her fingers were almost numb with nervousness. "Mr. Klein, the bathroom is falling apart!"

"Who is this?"

"Mary in apartment two over on G street."

"Oh, Mary," Mr. Klein became interested, "What happened?"

"I was in the bathtub and the ceiling just fell in on me. Scared me to death. What a mess!"

"Well now, just calm down a little. Were you hurt?"

"No, just scared."

"Well, I'm glad you weren't hurt."

"Can you fix it?"

"Well, with this quarantine business going on I can't come in there 'til it's over."

"What about this mess?"

"I'm sorry Mary. I'll get over as soon as the quarantine is lifted. Bye." The phone clicked. Mary laid the receiver on its cradle and began dressing. The pain in her head increased; she sat down in dizziness. There was a knock at her door. Mary rose slowly and opened it.

"Oh, hi, Mr. DeVoy. How good to see you. Come in." Mary's warm smile did not show the pain that was in her throbbing head.

"Mary, we need to borrow a few eggs. We've just run out and of course we can't go to the store."

"Oh, certainly."

"I hate to trouble you."

"No trouble at all. I'll be right back."

Henry stood still looking out Mary's window. The trees were all green. The grass was green. The traffic passed quickly by on the street. The sun shone fully bright in the late afternoon.

From the kitchen Henry heard Mary singing as she opened the refrigerator. Her voice was soothing, even though she was a bit off key. "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice . . ." Happy girl, Henry thought. ". . . praise the Lord, let the people rejoice. . ." The song stopped there as a loud crash took its place. Henry rushed into the kitchen. Mary was a heap on the floor surrounded by broken eggs.

"Mary, what's wrong? Are you okay?"

There was no response.

Henry got down on his knees and turned her face toward him. He put his finger in her mouth and was ready to give her mouth to mouth breathing. He stopped. "Mary?" No response.

"No! Oh God no!" Henry raved. He jumped up and ran out into the hall. Mrs. Taylor heard his screaming and came out to see what was going on.

"No!" Henry screamed.

Bob came out and looked down the stairs at Henry who was still screaming at the top of his lungs. "No! Oh God no!"

"What's going on?" Bob asked dumbly. By the time Marie had come out, so had James. Marie tried to calm Henry down, but to no avail. He still ranted and raved on. James was disquieted by this hysterical interruption of his solitude and privacy. Everyone looked at each other. Finally, Mrs. Taylor went into Mary's open door and found her body on the kitchen floor. With a tear falling down her cheek, she quietly called the police.

The ambulance arrived with its blaring lights, but no siren. The men in it took Mary's body away, all covered up so her face could not be seen. A doctor from the Health Department assured the other apartment house dwellers that they were doing all they could to find out what the disease was and how to combat it. "Are we all gonna die like she did?" Bob asked anxiously.

"I don't know. I don't think so. Try to be calm. We're doing all we can."

During all of this, Henry was absent. Even Marie wasn't thinking of him.

It was eleven o'clock. The street light lit up the apartment house door. The red letters of the QUARANTINE sign showed brightly. Had there been any passers by, they might have heard the loud knocking just inside the building. Henry stood strangely motionless, banging on Mary's door and pleading incessantly, "Tell me more. Tell me more. Tell me more." At last, Henry stopped. In a daze, Henry opened the apartment house door and walked outside into the coolness of the night and the bright light of the street lamp. He turned toward the door and looked long and hard at it. The QUARANTINE sign was oblivious to him. He stared at the crude black cross and the painted words beneath it:

Lord have mercy on us.

Jerome Evans

SHRIKE SONG

delicately winged harbinger of death
small shadowed deadly flitting
casts its mallet frocked in innocence
malevolent darkness hounding bludgeoning
clothed in multi-liquefracting light
smothering unsuspected
victims in her envelope of self-pity
poisoned billed she sweetly sings
her victory torn and bleeding
naked on the wire barbed techniquely
unfeeling clausewitzian song

T'sin

i did not know

but . . . how was i to know
or even . . . comprehend
i was not told
nor even shown
was it love . . .
or necessity
. . . she didn't say
nor could i . . .
i did not know
i thought . . . i felt a tear
she would not let me see
i . . . touched her shoulder
she looked up smiling slightly
her face melted to my shoulder
. . . did her's tremble
i do not know
she stopped so quickly
should i . . . expose my thought
would she want me to understand
. . . i think not
i hoped she would . . .
i think she does not
there's a twisting near my heart
. . . her lashes stroke my neck
i smooth her breast
a tear bleeds down my cheek
. . . i pray there is not
i must be strong
that is strength . . . isn't it
why . . . humanity ordained it
if she were to cry
. . . so would i

T'sin

Someone spoke my name so calm
as the evening moon-tide rose and fell.
I listened to the ocean flowing
on the broken rocks
and I heard a low voice say,
"Change the things you've loved."
And out below the dim horizon
one small sail exhaling motion.

Now come, say my name, my palm
spreading even and open to you;
then listen for the cry of the crow
and the babe that's lost
and then hear, alone, afraid,
your soul's deepest love.
And out below the red horizon
one tall sail exiled to ocean.

Now sing the ancient love-psalm
and wander to the dark sacred wood
to question the roses' unfolding.
Then, see and unlock
the door, long closed, bolted with fear;
latched against my love.

Bird Anderson

ANOTHER

Laughing hysterical
    center of things
Jokings vulgar
    nobly crude

She takes a man home
    making grand her exit
And says "Ya'll don't talk now,"
    leaving the party to wonder

At home in the sheets
    she clings to no one
But jokes and writhes
    and finally sleeps.

Mirror in the morning
    reflects the track of a tear
The lover awakens
    she jokes with him laughing
And starts the new year

Jerome Evans