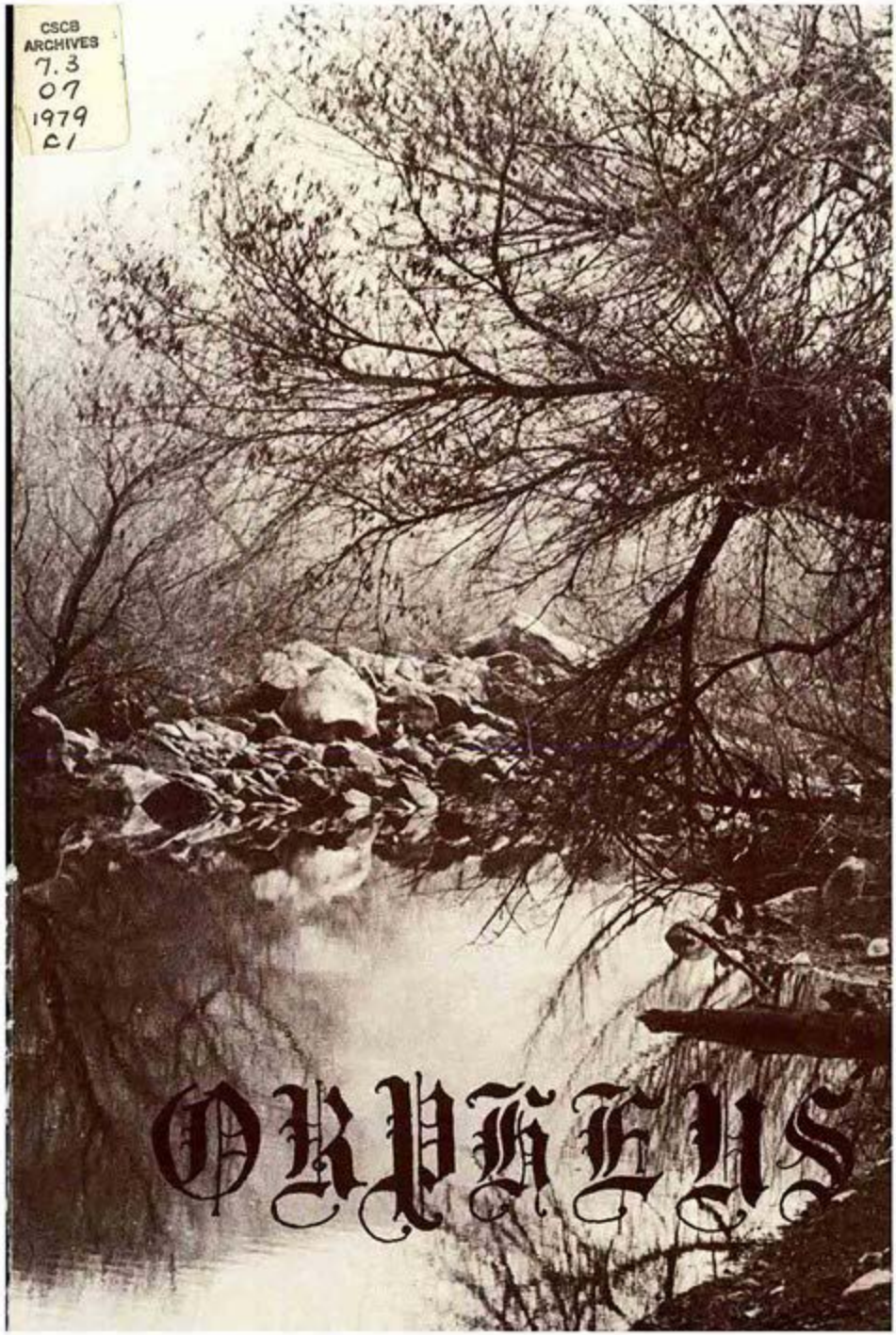
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ORPHEUS

Volume vii 1979

Cover Photo - *Afternoon* by M. Jerome Evans

Editors' Notes –

Literary contributions from students, faculty, and staff have made possible the publication of *Orpheus* over the past eight years. These writers have creatively rendered many diverse perceptions of and feelings about human experience. To commemorate this creative spirit we have decided to include selections from past issues along with those for the current year.

We have not separated the works according to the years in which they appeared in *Orpheus*. Rather, the stories and poems are interspersed to emphasize the timeless quality possessed by literature.

This issue of *Orpheus* is dedicated to our special friend, Solomon Iyasere. We thank him for his guidance and interest in our effort to edit this issue of *Orpheus*.

Barbara Fraley
Joanne White

We are grateful for the services and consideration of the following whose assistance has made possible this issue of *Orpheus*.

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LSB

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SUMMER GALA

Backstage
In a greenroom
Dressed in imitation
Dressing rooms
White curtain walls
Flap
Because the door is open
Because it's 110 outside
Onstage
Masked and plastered faces
Shine
Smile
And stick to one another
Like memorized lines
Old
Before the lights
New beyond the lights
Applaud this make-believe
Reality

Sara Tucker 1979

FLIGHT

my mind, released, takes flight
etching the blue piercing the air
a winged tracery defiant unafraid
    flitting dipping soaring
that peers down at the me it left below;
seemingly a helpless sunlit heap

but I too ascend
    abstracted from my earthly self
to buzz fledgling spirits
touch the gossamer of angels' wings
gather asteroids and stars
even defy father sun

then comes the yearning
to reach up all the way
and touch the heavenly vault
escape the prison of my earthly self
    caressed by an errant cherubim's plume
be set aglow by a seraph's flame

Carlos Lozano 1975

MATTHEW 24:40

Listen, Brother.....

"Come," you said,
"and I will show you the way of life."
Thank you.

I was yearning to be free,
And you crept off to the chapel
to pray for
my release.

I was homeless,
and you preached to me the splendors
of an aristocratic mansion.

I was poor,
and you dazzled before my eyes the riches
of another world.

You seem so charming,
so thoughtful,
so kind.

I see the way plainly
that I must go,
But I am still hungry...
and lonely...
and cold...

And too tired to follow.

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Bertha Crow 1979

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 1978

THE MURDER OF ADESUA

Please, open your ears and listen,
Stay awake wide-eyed to the end.
I have a tale to tell,
A tale I know full well;
Not a plain tale as those
That have reached your ears,
But a tangy tale of double sorrow:
Full of fits and fever
Of fate that fell;
Of how a noble creature was plucked unripe
By force and fraud.

If, at the end, you find without warmth
The story this tale unfolds
As it drifts here and there
With events twisting and stepping out
To move into one another:
I am not to blame -- It is not my own creation:

Mine is not the heart that caused this woe;
Mine is not the hand that shaped these deeds --
I am a mere teller of tales,
Spinning and weaving from old yarns,
Playing old songs on a broken flute.
It is a burden I place upon myself
To tell this old tale of double woe
That has for ages bled many hearts:
So that greedy hearts may take heed
Never again to ravish Beauty
And break the bond between mother and child,
And I never again
Have such a sad tale to tell.
If in your heart my tale strikes a tearful chord

And I never again
Have such a sad tale to tell.
If in your heart my tale strikes a tearful chord
Forgive me, for
There is a rift in the flute.

Owega, O You Father of Tales,
Wordless I stand before you, naked,
Give me the words to recreate these woeful lines
Which themselves lament as they chart these dark events.
Ewawa, You Mother of Design,
Stay with me till the end.
Edion Ason, You Guardian of Sleep,
Give us some room,
Stay away for awhile, till the end.

(A soft melody played on a harp provides the background music for the rest. The Storyteller pauses before continuing.)

Alone she lighted the village and beyond,
A living flame, bright and clear,
And set fire in every heart that saw her.
Tall, slender, untouched by man -
Her enchanting beauty pierced every heart,
Gnawed the hearts of Chiefs, Kings and all:
Adesua they called this noble creature,
The only jewel of Idia,
The pride of Ezomo of Izebu,
A gentle maiden in whom Wit and Beauty came to full harvest.

From far and near many suitors crawled to her feet,
With dark, secret desires,
Night and day to feed their hunting eyes on her virgin flesh
That stirred their dreams
Even at midday.
None could escape her radiant beauty
None would pass without a longish stare,
With mouth fallen open and wide.

She captured the eyes of all,
The hearts of old and young, women and men.
To hide her beauty is to cover the sun
With a broken sieve,
For Nature's hands shaped nothing so fair:
She was soft and new like fresh palm wine,
Gentle and succulent like a young yam tenderling -

But within, her own heart, like a palm kernel,
Remained uncracked,
Unyielding and resolute.

Near her door treasures were piled
By named and nameless suitors to win her heart and hand.
Her calm, defiant heart eluded all -
Silver and gold could not ravish her.
Egrets always swarm around a cow,
But they never drink her milk.

Adesua's fame spread far and wide like the harmattan fire,
Scorching every heart that came too close.
Still, she was the secret desire of all:
Where there is honeysuckle,
Ants fall free on their faces.
Without faults to find, she was admired by all.
Her devoton to duty caught every eye:
She daily celebrated her household rites
Without a sigh, without a fallen face;
On every market day,
She was first to appear,
Sweeping and cleaning her mother's stall,
Goal selling was her trade.
Her presence made the market full:
From far and wide nobles came to buy her goats,
To steal her heart
Drawn to her like moths to a burning flame.

Yet her beauty she never used:
It was triumph she never sought.
Her priceless heart was never bought
Only goats she offered for sale.
As her fifteenth year came round
She became the highest treasure of all,
Sought by the King of all Kings,
Oba Ozolua, fountainhead of all,
The giver of the *bronze anklet.*
His name strikes fear in every heart,
Bends every thought to his will,
As the forest leaves and twigs
Sway to the drumming of the wind.

As news of Oba Ozolua's anklet
Reached every ear,
The other struggling suitors
Bowed out in haste,
For no one rises above the King:
A stream never rises above its source.
"This was an honor she dare not refuse,
The dream of every maiden of the land –
To be the queen of the King of ALL,
Embedded in coral and gold,
Dolled in worldy fame" –
Was the thought hanging on the mouths of all.

But Adesua remained firm and fair
While tears welled in every eye that heard her reply:
"No woman ever refused to dance with the King."
Though the rhythm of the King was *even* and *clear*,
Adesua danced to a different drum.
She gave every man her ear - none her heart.
Her choice ached every soul,
Raked every heart that cared.
Tears fell after tears in her mother's eyes
Yet her love she never denied,
And only time came to sooth the sore of her father's grief.
Still, she roamed amid the twigs and thorns,
Tangled with cropping sheep and ropes,
Buried in shrubs and dung without regret:
To be the Queen was not her wish,
She had no *palace candles* in her eyes –
Unbridled nature was her only love and care.

Adesua's name sounded loud and clear
On every talking drum in the land;
Her fame spread wide and far –
Even Oba Ozolua with his wounded pride
Could not but praise her defying will,
Bore well his anger proudly and unbent.
Thus Adesua's noble deeds fanned her living flame.
It was a fame she never pawned.
A glory she never sought:
Still she labored night and day, without a sigh
Bore well her lowly life,
Goat selling was still her trade.

Strange it seems to tell
The pain Adesua caused to all
The tears she brought throughout the land;
None could understand her heart's desire
Unfettered to remain
Untrammeled and free.
But time will make us calm
If not wise,
And show the way to live
With what must be.

Enzomo learned to live with grief
And accept the loss of the royal Hand;
Never to be father of a noble line,
Content again to rule his private realm.
Long days he spent in painful thought
Anguished that his daughter's will
Was not his own.
But none could sway the heart
of one so fair,
So pure,
So dear.
Thus, alone the father learned to live with pain,
And alone Adesua renewed her daily joys:
to the young lambs and kids
She offered the care
Her royal suitor longed to claim,
With Nature only to share her heart and bed.

With passing days, Idia, too,
Left her mournful tears behind
To share Adesua's joyful delights;
With Imaguero, she
Took solace in the child she had
And withdrew her lament
For the child that never would be.

Thus, with every fading day,
The fame of Adesua cried with clarion voice;
Her name filled every heart, every thought,
Proclaimed anew on every drum from shore to shore.
Alone she flowed along
Amid the twigs and shrubs,
Found shelter and safety with the goats:

Unerring Nature her only love and care.
Whatever she held so close to her heart
Eluded the Oracles and all.

Well, every flow has its edge
Every flowing stream has it low,
And with every ebb
Come the crawling crabs
Awash on silent shores:
Grabbing all that falls on their crooked paths,
Stirring up the silent shores with borrowed homes.

And so a huge crab scuttled across Adesua's silent shore
With its forked and crooked claws
Clutching life from what it did not own.
Eze is his name, Chief of Oboro
A man who lives by palace greed,
Wearing his pride on his sleeves:
Famed for turning commonwealth into private estate,
Converting public roads to private pathways.
Like the cormorant, he feeds upon the young,
Like the shadow, he doggedly haunts the path of the rising sun,
With the nightfall, he with Death reigns supreme.
It is a proverb old and plain:
A crab never walks straight.

And to Adesua trusted Eze's crooked words,
Words that are soon lost in the thin air
For it was only through words older than herself
That her guarded flesh was ravished
And with it the living flame
That lights the whole village and beyond –

Here is where our story ends –
Well, forgive me for what defects there may be
In this tale of woe:
Not for the old knots here and there
Brought by old tangles in the broken yarn,
But for those rifts brought by my own runs.

O, Adesua, fair child of our troubled land –
How can I sing of thee
Without a tear
For you

For us
For all that might have been –

The fire darkens, the wood turns to ashes,
The living flame extinguished –
Misfortune falls upon the land.

Solomon Ogbede Iyasere



A DOLL FOR SHARON
(A Short Story for Children 4th to 5th grade reading level)

A cold breeze whipped hard against Sharon's apple-red cheeks as she turned into the tiny unnoticed shop on her right. Cradling something in her warm arms, she gently opened the handsomely carved wooden door. A silver bell sang out a welcome as the warmth of the crackling fire from the old black belly stove reached out to warm her cold body.

A smile formed on her delicate pink lips as Sharon eagerly looked around the crowded room. The late afternoon sunlight played on her redish brown hair and her curls seemed to bounce in delight. On the heavily laden walls were dolls. Nothing else. Just dolls. There were big dolls, little dolls, dolls that talked; dolls that walked, beautiful dolls and plain dolls. All of their carefully dusted brightly colored outfits blended together into a brilliant rainbow.

"Hello, Sharon," said a big grey-haired man as he stepped out of a back room. His broad shoulders seemed to fill the room but his thin body did not seem to match his big frame. His face was growing old fast and his body knew it. The wrinkled face was kind but serious. His arms seemed too long for the faded plaid long-sleeved shirt.

"Hello, Dr. Peppermint," answered Sharon putting her precious bundle on the high counter.

"What have we here? Not again!" exclaimed Dr. Peppermint.

"Melissa did it! Not me! I told her not to play with it, Dr. Peppermint. Honest I did," Sharon replied.

Tenderly grasping the limp doll, Dr. Peppermint bent over for a closer look.

"Umph ... umm ... ah ah!" exclaimed Dr. Peppermint. "Here's the problem! Her right arm needs to be put back into her shoulder socket. This missing right finger will have to be replaced. Hmmm . . ."

"Dr. Peppermint? She'll be alright, won't she?" Sharon asked worriedly.

"Of course she will, dear," Dr. Peppermint said gently as he patted her chubby hand. "Come back the day after tomorrow, Thursday, O.K.?"

"Thank you," Sharon replied as she turned to leave. Turning back to look once more at her cherished doll she noticed how thin Dr. Peppermint was getting.

"He should eat more," Sharon thought to herself as she stepped out in the chilly air. Dusk was falling fast.

"I'd better get home or Mom will worry," Sharon thought as she quickened her tiny steps.

The afternoon traffic rushed by and people bumped into her as they hurried home to their warm house and dinner. Nobody seemed to notice the old man either as he hung a Closed sign in his window cluttered with dolls.

Dr. Peppermint watched the rushed people for a little while then quietly went over to the counter and picked up the broken pieces of the doll.

"Now don't you fret," Dr. Peppermint said smiling, looking down at the doll. "I'll have you fixed in a jiffy."

As he turned the light on in the back room, clutter seemed to jump out at him from everywhere. Glue, pieces of clothing and paper were scattered all over his small bed and dresser. His work counter was groaning under the weight of his small refrigerator and work tools. A lifelike image of him in his younger days decorated the peeling beige wall along with some other assorted dusty pictures. Sitting down in an old ragged chair, he started to examine the sick doll.

"Just a few more blocks," Sharon thought as she hurried along. "Doesn't some nice warm hot chocolate sound good now?"

The downtown rush hour noise was dimming as Sharon turned down the last block. The houses were of a square shape trimmed with brown lawns frozen by the cold.

"What would we ever do without Dr. Peppermint?" mused Sharon. "He's the only one who can fix our dolls just right. I can't ever remember him not being here."

Her house was yellow with a white trim. The leafless trees in front of her house seemed to shake with cold as the chilling breeze blew through them. A light was on and beckoned Sharon on as she jumped up the front porch steps two at a time.

"Mom, I'm back," yelled Sharon, as she peeled off a coat and two sweaters.

"Hi, honey! Dinner's almost ready. Steak tonight!" her mom answered as she stuck her head out of the kitchen door, her face flushed with the heat from the stove.

"Oh, boy!" thought Sharon as she scrambled for the bathroom to wash up.

Dr. Peppermint washed his long fingers carefully and dried them on his thin dish towel. Upon opening the refrigerator, he did not have to look very long for something to eat for dinner. Only a carrot and some stale bread.

Dr. Peppermint sighed as he settled back down in his chair. An unopened envelope laid on the top of his clock by his elbow. It was addressed to a Mr. Arthur Peppermint, 299 So. 3rd St., Totlo, Maine. It was from the State.

"I know what they want. Can't they understand I'll pay them when I can?" Dr. Peppermint said outloud to himself as he chewed on the rubbery carrot.

Frowning, he put the letter in a long grey box on top of several other unopened white long envelopes. Finishing the bread off with his usual glass of water, he gathered up all his things from his bed and piled it on the already sagging counter. Squeezing his tall frame into the cramped bed, he managed to fall asleep quickly.

"Did Mr. Peppermint look at your . . ."

"Dr. Peppermint, Mom. I've told you before it's Dr. and not Mr. Don't let him hear you say that, please," Sharon interrupted anxiously.

"Oh, I seem to forget. Never mind . . . did he look at the doll?" her mom answered as they cleared the table off. Her father had retired to the study to look over some more papers. Melissa went over to turn on the T.V.

"Yes! And he said he could fix it again! Isn't that great, Mom!" exclaimed Sharon.

"I don't know how else he would make it unless you kids didn't keep bringing him dolls to fix. Whenever I pass by his shop, I never see anybody in there. I wonder where he lives? Have you ever met his wife, Sharon?" asked her mom.

"No," answered Sharon slowly. "No, I've never seen anyone else in there besides Betty, Martha and the other kids. But he sure can fix anything."

Finishing the dishes did not take long so Sharon had time to finish some math problems before bed time. Solving math problems did not come easy for Sharon as she sat over the long division problems biting her thumb nail nervously. With her eyes growing more and more weary over each problem Sharon decided she'd better go to bed.

"Maybe I can think better in the morning and will be able to work the rest of the math problems out then," she reasoned as she crawled under her warm blankets.

She soon fell asleep thinking about the wonderful room full of nothing but dolls. A smile formed on her still face as she slept.

The week passed quickly as Sharon went to school and played with her friends afterwards. Everyday they always ran by Dr. Peppermint's shop waving as they went. Dr. Peppermint always had a big smile and a wave for the children as he stood by the large glass window.

Then one day after school Sharon stopped at the tiny doll shop and went in.

"It's Thursday, Dr. Peppermint!" exclaimed Sharon.

"Yes it is Sharon, I have your doll in the back. One moment," said Dr. Peppermint as he went into the back. Bringing the precious doll out, he laid it carefully in Sharon's arms. It looked good as new.

"She looks happy now, Dr. Peppermint," Sharon said smiling. "How much did it cost to fix her?"

"A dollar," Dr. Peppermint answered.

Counting out her change carefully, Sharon laid one dollar on the high counter clutching the doll tightly in her left arm.

"Thank you, Dr. Peppermint. Thank you so much!"

After she had left, Dr. Peppermint opened the old cash register and put the change in the empty stalls.

Sharon was so happy, she skipped all the way home hugging her doll all the way.

"Melissa isn't going to play with you again," she said as she comforted the doll.

As Sharon ran by the doll shop the next day, like she did every day, her hand stopped in the middle of a wave as she saw the Closed sign in the window.

"What!" exclaimed Sharon as she stopped running. The other children stopped also.

"Is he sick?" someone else asked.

"He didn't look sick yesterday, Dr. Peppermint's never sick," answered Sharon.

Peering into the window, they strained to see something. All they could see were empty shelves. Instead of cheerful dolls only an opened long white envelope stared back at them.

Nancy Sabovich 1977



A DRINK OF WINE

The wine toasted the beginning of joy
developing from a rare and wonderful vintage.
The essence was full but discoloration came as
a tinge of impurity darkened the glass.
The taste brought her bitterness
and she took it from her lips.

Time renewed the wine to crystal clearness
she could not drink for memories were strong.
Looking into the fine clear fruit
I longed for the thirst to return.
The need was to wet her parched, tender lips
and to restore the pleasure.

Carl Knutsen 1979

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 1978

IT IS NO JOURNEY

"East - out of the mouth of the
river...then west, then south,
and then east again...God knows
how far."

The Light That Failed

Kipling

Brown bird, blue bird,
Steel tied near;
I know a cable
Strong as fear.

Hill tops hide us
Though tires touch -
Our ways so close I
Don't care much.

Old friends age
Quick as thunder.
(let's keep growling
till one goes under).

Andrew Grzeskowiak 1974

APPOINTMENT

There's a place of swift returning,
Down a dusty road slightly hilled
And flanked with gullies,
Where wild roses drift and pale like stars in the morning,
Loving only when breezes woo their pollen,
And trembling like vapor at the fall of monarchs
Keeping their tryst with the Reaper.
Just before the creek,
Over the ridge, is a cabin,
Bright and warm in the sunlight,
Shaded by a huge oak tree
From which a rope, still swinging,
Dangles over a silent wagon wheel
Axled in the earth.
Every heart has its time of turning,
When trial flights lead to nothing,
And honor palls with acquiring,
Before the monarch falls,
And April sits in the rocking chair.

Bertha Crow 1979

A day gone by
A love felt forever
Different places and skies
Different person, same eyes

Expiration seven years
Renewal guaranteed
If all is renewed
What of memories?

Maureen E. Beck 1979

RAINDROPS

Rain upon a windowpane
Obscuring vision
Hidden by a veil of water
Here and there the glass is clear
Be quick
See reality, now is the chance
For soon the chosen tear of rain
Will fall
And the world will be concealed once more.

Raindrops falling long and hard
Out of the black
Into the lamplight
Onto the glass
Hear the strength of many
Pounding with all their force
You see, you hear
An infinity of drops
Tapping, rapping
Hear them
Heed them and the barrier is no more.

Rebecca Perry 1974

DRIFTGLASS

Patina of distance
Pounded into sleek smoothness
By the crash of uncounted waves
Flinging you deep
Thrusting you skyward . . .

Caught up by a bronze lover
You paused in your journey,
To wander on tomorrow or never;
Close held in a warm clasp,
You see only a starry night.

You sparkled in his hand
Scattered sun-shards to the breeze,
Sparkled as he pressed you
Warm and glowing into my palm,
Handclasp around you.

There are no warm hands
To cherish your fire now.
Alone in my cool fingers,
You who knew the sun can find
Little fire in a dim lamp.

Back, then, to sea and sky.
The surf calls you; turning,
Flung high against the sun,
I watch your bright star-point
Set free to drift once more.

Cynthia Combs 1974

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 1978



COVERED BY HIS WINGS

The driver jumped in beside me and slammed the door shut. He shifted into first gear and the ambulance moved forward, slowly at first, and then rapidly picked up speed. He flipped a switch and the low drone of the siren echoed inside the cab, gradually increasing it's volume to a deafening scream. I could see the flashing red light reflecting on the hood in front of us, its pulsating rhythm almost keeping time with the urgent voice of the white clad attendant in the rear of the ambulance as he counted, "One, two, three, four, five, one, two, three, four, five, one, two..." Endlessly he counted the strokes of his hands as he pressed the chest wall of his patient in sharp rhythmic thrusts, simulating her heartbeats. On the count of five I could hear the sudden burst of oxygen through the mask held to her face by the other attendant.

I glanced back to see if there was any sign of life, but could see only the attendants kneeling over her.

The static of the CB radio crackled above the roar of the engine. The driver picked up the speaker. "We're bringing in a fifteen year old female. The name is Nannette Bergman."

"Do you have her vitals?" the voice on the radio asked.

"Negative. Code blue," he replied. Then he turned to me. What did you say is wrong with your daughter?"

"She has lupus."

"She has what?"

"Lupus. Systemic lupus erythematosus."

He repeated the information into the speaker, and then added, "Estimated arrival time, ten minutes."

"It's a twenty minute drive to town," I reminded him.

"Yes, I know, but we'll go fast," he explained.

I sat nervously as I watched the needle of the speedometer creep toward the 100 mark and then hover there as we streaked past scattered stores and houses along the desert highway. Cars pulled hurriedly to the side of the road and stopped to let us pass, a blur of red and white light glowing in the early evening darkness.

My chest felt tight, like there was a big chunk of lead inside where my heart had been, and every muscle trembled with apprehension. I could not speak, and now and then a violent sob escaped my throat.

"She'll be all right," the driver assured me, touching me lightly on the arm. But deep down inside I knew he was wrong. For I had seen her stop breathing; had seen her eyes grow lifeless and her body limp. Still, there must be hope; he could be right. And so I prayed, half aloud, "Oh God, please help her! Don't let her die! Please God."

Minutes seemed to stretch into hours; time was suspended in slow motion, as we hurtled down the highway at top speed, screaming our way through the traffic.

Finally we slowed and turned into the emergency entrance at the hospital. The ambulance came to a halt beside the building and I jumped from the cab ahead of the rest. I ran through the doorway and down the hall to the nearest telephone where I found a woman standing there chattering casually into the mouthpiece.

"May I please use the phone? This is an emergency!" I asked as politely as I could.

She turned and glared at me. "Of course you may, after I'm finished," she snapped, and then continued talking.

"Please! Let me use the phone! My daughter's dying. I have to call my husband," I pleaded.

She turned toward me again, and her arrogance faded into astonishment. "Well...why, all right...yes...of course. "Goodbye, I'll call you later." and she hung up and stepped aside.

My hands were trembling too badly to find the number in the telephone book and dial it, but by now the hospital receptionist had come to where I stood, and I asked her to help me find the number. She dialed it for me, and then stood close beside me as I waited for an answer. My husband, Ted, was away on a business trip to Washington, D.C., and I did not know exactly how to reach him. But miraculously, only minutes before Nan had suddenly stopped breathing, Don, Ted's friend and co-worker, had called me to say that he had just spoken to Ted on the phone. He had told me the number of Ted's motel in Washington "in case you need to reach him," he had said. How could he have known that in less than an hour we would be caught on the very doorstep of death, irrationally desperate to tell Ted what was happening

and to come home – NOW. And so it was Don's number that we had dialed, realizing that in my haste I had left the scrap of paper bearing the number of Ted's motel on the desk at home.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Don? This is Gwen. Listen, will you please call Ted and tell him to get home right now! We just brought Nannette in to the hospital. I don't know if she's alive or not."

"Well...ah, sure...okay!" he stammered with surprise.

"Thanks, Don. I have to go! Bye!" I quickly hung up the receiver and hurried back to the emergency room where I found the doctor and ambulance attendants standing idly beside the still form on the examining table. I heard the quiet voice of one of the attendants as he spoke.

"Well, her pupils were already dilated when we got there," he said, and I knew immediately that we had lost the race. Our daughter, Nannette, was dead.

Almost a year has passed since that terrible night, and yet every detail stands out in my mind as though it were yesterday. Will I ever forget the paralyzed feeling of unbelief that gripped me as I saw her take her last breath? Or the desperate moments when her older sister, Roxanne, and I tried giving her mouth to mouth resuscitation and cardiac massage until I could see we needed professional help, and left Roxi to continue while I phoned the nearest fire department and ambulance? Or how the firemen had lost their way trying to locate our house in the unmapped desert? But, more than all that, will I ever forget how God seemed to soften each shattering blow with His tender assurance ". . . low, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Throughout the months of Nannette's illness, on the night of her death, and during the months since then I have sensed a gentle peace that comes from knowing beyond a doubt that God is still in control. "He will cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge . . ." (Psalm 91:4).

Probably the most devastating experience a mother could ever endure is the loss of a child. Nannette was a part of my very flesh, and for fifteen years I had nurtured her, held her, counseled her in becoming the gracious, loving young woman that she was growing into. Could this really be happening to me? Surely not! We are merely an average family, living in an average house with a very ordinary life style. And death and disease are so foreign – surely they've got the wrong house! Surely this could not happen to ME. Oh, death came awfully close last year, when the teenage son of a friend died of leukemia, but could the same thing be happening to me? Yes, I'm afraid it could . . . and it did.

When did this all begin anyway? It's hard to put my finger on the exact beginning, for this disease is a sly enemy that sneaks up on its prey from behind, unnoticed. Only five months before her death Nan had realized that her ankles were swollen every evening; a rather minor problem, or so we

thought. We decided that it was probably the result of so much strenuous marching in the band at school; surely it would go away in due time, as she grew more accustomed to marching. And so we ignored it. Nan was a healthy, happy girl; a sophomore in high school, with long copper colored hair that hung to her waist, a few rusty freckles marching across her nose, warm blue eyes, and a thin silver-colored retainer wire across her front teeth, punctuating her gentle, easy smile. Nan was a good student and she enjoyed the closeness of several special friends at church and at school alike. Unlike many teenagers of fifteen, boys had not yet fully come into the picture, and Nanette's idea of a perfect day was one spent at home sewing or puttering in the kitchen, baking homemade bread or trying out a new recipe she had clipped from a magazine. So why worry about swollen ankles?

Nevertheless, when we noticed that the swelling was not going away, and in fact she was also waking up in the mornings with puffy eyelids, we finally grew concerned enough to take her to see a doctor. After a thorough examination and extensive blood and urine tests, the doctor put her in the hospital for a week's observation. He told us that she was suffering from severe kidney damage caused by systemic lupus erythematosus - a rather mysterious name for an even more mysterious disease.

We were baffled by all the foreign words we were hearing; what did it all mean? One of the first things we did was to borrow all the medical books and journals we could get our hands on, to try to gain a better understanding of what it was we were up against. (Our local doctor was somewhat reluctant to loan us the books we requested, but when we took her to a specialist a week later at a large university medical center, he and his staff were extremely helpful in spending time discussing the disease with us, in loaning their medical textbooks to us, and in seeing that pertinent pages were copied for us to take home.)

We were surprised to learn that lupus (SLE or LE) is not really a new disease, even though few people have ever heard of it. It has been known since 1828 when it was first described as a skin disorder (discoid lupus); in its mildest form it affects primarily the skin of the face, causing a crusty rash. In more recent years, however, physicians have discovered that it can also affect other systems of the body (systemic lupus), with its most serious form damaging vital internal organs. For some reason it seems to affect young females more often than any other group.

It is believed that lupus is a condition in which the body develops immunities or an allergic reaction to its own cells. In Nannette's case, her natural antibodies that would normally fight foreign cells, bacteria, and viruses, were destroying her own kidney tissue, or, as I explained to her, they had forgotten who the enemy was, and were fighting her own good body cells.

The cause of lupus is unknown, although it seems to be somehow related to excessive sun exposure or to certain drugs. It also seems to be more common in some families with a predisposition to collegen (connective tissue) disease, such as arthritis. Since many of the symptoms of lupus resemble other diseases it is often misdiagnosed; mild cases may go entirely unnoticed.

In looking over the long list of possible symptoms of lupus, we could readily identify many that Nannette had had for years, but they seemed so common, who could have guessed that they were warning signals? She had never really regained her strength and normal body weight after a bout with mononucleosis in sixth grade. She tended to have canker sores in her mouth much of the time, and hangnails, as well as a low grade, unexplained fever on occasion. All of this seemed rather unimportant at the time - certainly nothing to be alarmed about. I had read that many teenagers go through periods of rapid growth when their energy level is low; I had decided that would explain Nannette's lack of energy. Even though she dearly loved to cook, it seemed strange to me that she ate so little herself, hardly enough to keep a bird alive. How long had she had lupus? That's impossible to say. In retrospect, I'm convinced that it was lurking in the shadows for many years before it finally reared its ugly head to launch an all-out battle.

From the beginning the doctors were guarded in their prognosis, although they did seem optomistic that with intensive therapy her condition should be brought into remission within about six months. With the aggressive use of steroid drugs, lupus is no longer the life threatening disease that it once was. One author estimated that 95% of lupus patients were still alive after three years, so we felt optimistic too. We explained to Nannette that some patients die from lupus, but that we didn't expect her to die from it.

Yet, deep down inside, from the beginning, I had gnawing doubts about the outcome. For some reason I could not muster much enthusiasm, and when people asked me how she was doing, my answer was often pessimistic. How our hearts ached at the thought of our daughter caught in the clutches of this unseen enemy that was eating away at the very fibers of her life.

Then came the age old question: Why US? Why Nannette? As Roxi pointed out one day, we were not a family that took God lightly; we took time out every day to thank Him, to praise Him for his blessings. Had we not acknowledged His presence in our lives adequately? What had we done to deserve this? From the beginning I could sense that this was not a punishment that God was meteing out on us, but rather an opportunity to shower His blessings on us, and on others through us. There were lessons to be learned through this experience, and we determined to learn them one day at a time. Through those bleak months that lay ahead, two phrases seemed to form in my mind and then stay there: "Think about WHAT IS, not WHAT IF," and "Don't spoil TODAY by worrying about TOMORROW." As a result, we were able to concentrate on each day as an end in itself; to enjoy Nannette for as long as we had left, and to revel in the blessings of each single day. One day as we were waiting in the outer office of the kidney specialist, we noticed a young couple sitting across the room, holding on their lap a young boy suffering from a grotesquely enlarged head. No doubt he had been born that way, or at least it had probably been present most of his life. We went away with hearts full of compassion for that young couple, and praise to God for allowing us at least fifteen normal years with Nannette.

Nan's treatment included large doses of prednisone and a low sodium diet to minimize fluid retention. She was also instructed to limit her calories, since

prednisone would tend to increase both her appetite and the build-up of body fat. From the beginning Nannette took an active interest in her treatment, and assumed full responsibility for remembering to take the medication regularly. This in itself was a relief to the rest of us, since we knew we could trust her to follow through with the treatment without supervision at school and at other times when we were not there to remind her. Her fascination with cooking proved to be an asset also, and she began devoting her spare time to the creation of interesting low sodium foods. We also made it a practice to eliminate salt from all foods served to the entire family so that nothing was served that she could not eat along with the rest of us. We were surprised to find how tasty many foods can be without salt, especially frozen vegetables served with a squeeze of lemon.

From the beginning of her illness we were tempted to overprotect Nannette; the doctors and medical books alike warned us that in her condition even a mild cold or infection could be very serious. We thought about keeping her home from school and church, away from the germs that lurked around every corner among her friends and classmates. After considerable thought, however, we decided that it would be unrealistic and demoralizing to her to do that. If she were to remain the well-adjusted, happy individual that she was, then she would have to be allowed to live as normally as possible within the real world. So it was a conscious choice that we made, to allow her to continue to attend school, church, ball games, slumber parties, youth retreats, and the full gamut of teenage activities. And as a result, Nannette's life was really not unlike that of her friends, except that she took a handful of little white pills every few hours, and there were certain foods she had to steer clear of. Basically her life was full and vibrant and she remained a cheerful, normal teenager plagued by the usual concerns of getting her homework done on time, deciding what to wear, and trying to convince her mother that it wouldn't make her too tired to stay up and watch the ending of "Gone With The Wind" on television. Her cheerful determination was an inspiration to all of us, and we grew to appreciate each other more and more as time wore on.

Now and then, however, a problem would arise that would stop us short. One that seemed to repeat itself often was the growing embarrassment Nanette began to feel about her physical appearance. The medication was unavoidably causing fluid retention and her face took on a full, rounded look; her weight increased considerably, and she became more and more limited in the number of clothes she could fit into. Fellow students and even some of her closest friends would make jokes and cutting remarks about her weight gain. Often she would arrive home in tears. On one such occasion, she reported that a boy called out to her as she passed, "Hey, whatcha doin', storin' up for winter?"

How my heart ached for her, and there was nothing to do but hold her close and cry with her. Deep down inside I hated that boy, whoever he was, but then my hatred melted, and I said, "Oh, Nan, try to forgive him; he doesn't know how sick you are."

Nothing could be done to lessen the swelling of her face, but I decided the time had come to do something about the rest of this problem. One

afternoon I took her shopping to buy a few new clothes that would fit her properly for the time until her condition would be under control and she would resume her normal slender shape. The shopping trip in itself proved to be a great boost to her morale, and the clothes helped her to once more feel acceptable and attractive. She wrote a letter to her cousins that afternoon that warms my heart every time I read it:

Dear Karen, Harold, Becky, Jon, and Sharon,

Wow! What a way to start a letter!

You must excuse my writing as my hand is shaking tonight. I want to thank you for your prayers. I am often depressed and it's a comfort to know so many are praying for me...

I had a really neat day today...At noon, mom picked me up. She took off work and we went shopping. I bought two pairs of pants and two new tops. Then we went home...I baked a pumpkin and an apple pie. That's my kind of day!

Love,

Nan

As her letter describes, she also began having difficulty with muscle coordination; writing was often very tedious and the results were almost illegible. One day the telephone rang; it was Nannette telling me she had missed the school bus home.

"I was having so much trouble writing, but the teacher made me stay anyway 'til I had finished writing my essay, and by then the bus had gone." I could tell she was crying, and my muscles tensed at the unfairness of it all.

As weeks wore on, Nan also began complaining that she was finding it more and more difficult to concentrate in class. "It's like they're talking a whole new langauge; the words are ones I know I've heard before, but I don't understand them. They don't mean anything to me," she explained. We recalled reading in the textbooks that it is often difficult to differentiate in lupus patients between drug-induced mental disorders (that is, resulting from the medication) and actual central nervous system involvement of the disease itself. In either case, we were beginning to see personality changes in our daughter that we had never seen before: moodiness, depression and discouragement (not all that uncommon in any illness), but also a diminishing capacity for understanding abstract ideas, such as those presented in geometry class, and inability to remember details, such as those she had no trouble memorizing previously in biology class.

Something had to be done to inform the teachers of her condition. Until now, all they knew was that she had missed two weeks of school during the

time she was in the hospital. The rest, I'm sure, had been passed around as hearsay in the faculty room. The fact that she rarely missed a day of school and seemingly was maintaining a normal routine was actually working against her in situations where she was physically and mentally unable to keep up. With this in mind, we composed the following letter and mailed a copy to each of her teachers:

Dear teacher:

A few months ago we learned that Nannette has a disease called Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, more commonly called SLE or just Lupus. At this point it has damaged her kidneys and is causing swelling of her face and ankles, as well as a number of other problems. This illness is non-communicable and is one she will probably always have. Its cause is unknown. Hopefully, it will be under control in several months.

Since some of its symptoms may interfere with her school work, we felt it might be helpful to mention them to you so that you will be aware of the problems she is having.

Occasionally the medication she must take causes her hands to shake and she is unable to concentrate. Her handwriting then becomes quite tedious and sometimes illegible. As a result she feels somewhat frustrated in trying to keep up in class.

Nannette also has occasional severe joint pains (knees, ankles and shoulders) and abdominal pains, so she is somewhat limited in physical activities. Also, since Lupus seems to be aggravated by excessive exposure to the sun, the doctor has recommended that she avoid it whenever possible.

We hope this will not change your expectations of her in the classroom, since we feel she will be able to manage quite well most of the time. However, when these symptoms do interfere, we hope you will understand, and give her an extra word of encouragement.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mr. & Mrs. Ted Bergman

At the semester break we decided that Nannette was under too much pressure at school, and we finally talked her into dropping biology. She was reluctant to do this, afraid that it would set her back so far that she would be unable to graduate with her friends when that time came. But it was a great relief to her to be free of the complex and time-consuming homework that had plagued her evenings. Next on the firing line was geometry; it, too, posed a great problem to all of us – to her because she found it increasingly difficult to comprehend, and to us, because we were forced more and more

to help her night after night to solve essentially the same problems. There seemed to be no carry-over of learning from one day to the next, and our patience began to wear thin. It was difficult to know for sure just what the problem was; whether she was growing more and more dependent and lazy, taking advantage of her illness, or if truly there was a learning handicap as a result of either the medication or the disease itself. We talked seriously of having her drop out altogether and of getting a home tutor instead. (Had we known then of the ultimate outcome we would have simply ignored school altogether, but we felt her condition was temporary; surely a remission was just around the corner.)

An unexpected complication arose when we suddenly realized that, as a result of Nan's illness, we were devoting most of our time and attention to her at the expense of our older daughter, Roxanne. Roxi was a senior in high school, and was quite capable of managing her own affairs. Often she was left alone when we had to take Nan to see the specialist in the town 130 miles away. Roxi always managed on her own very well, and did an outstanding job of seeing that the household chores were taken care of and the horses fed in addition to her own very busy schedule. So it came as a total surprise to us when we realized that she was developing a deep resentment toward her sister. Our growing awareness of this was enough to begin to effect a cure, and we tried after that to give her special, individual attention whenever we could.

Nannette did not respond sufficiently to the initial steroid treatment in combination with the low sodium diet, so later on another drug (azathioprine) was administered along with it. She was also retaining a great amount of fluid, so a diuretic was prescribed. Much to our dismay, she lost so much fluid in the next few weeks that she changed from a plump, rounded young lady to virtually skin and bones. If she had seemed thin before, she was even thinner now; I had never seen anyone with hip bones that showed all the way around. She seemed to be shrinking up to nothing before our very eyes, and we had serious doubts about her treatment. The diuretic caused other complications that seemed almost insurmountable: her mouth was so dry that she began carrying a tiny bottle of water or iced tea in her purse to sip on every few minutes; she had to leave classes early in order to have time for a stop in the bathroom; many precious minutes of her sleepless nights were spent in the bathroom. The long ride home on the school bus became an impossibility and I began picking her up after school and letting her spend the last hour of my work day with me in my office, doing homework or reading where she could be close to a bathroom.

Four months after the diagnosis Nannette developed a slight cough. X-rays did not reveal anything serious, but the cough persisted for several weeks. Nan seemed to feel increasingly weaker, and at her next visit the doctor admitted her to the hospital for a complete re-evaluation. He was concerned about the cough and discovered she was suffering from a mild case of pneumonia. She was given antibiotics and, after only a five day stay, was released from the hospital. The doctor seemed relieved that her condition was not as serious as he had suspected at first.

As we were driving her the 130 miles home from the hospital Nan rested in the back seat of the car. We were startled when we passed through a well known intersection of two highways known as "Four Corners"; Nan sat up, leaning on one elbow and said, "Last time we were at Three Corners, Daddy tried to hide us between four posts." (Ted was not with us, since he had left in the middle of the week for a business trip to Washington, D.C.)

"Do you mean Four Corners?" I asked, puzzling over what she had said.

"Yeah, I guess. But Daddy tried to hide us between four posts."

"What do you mean, Nan?" I could make no sense out of what she had said.

She repeated it again.

"Nan, you're not making sense," Roxi complained. "What are you trying to say?"

"Oh, never mind. I don't know what I'm trying to say. Just forget it," she replied, and lay back down on the seat, remaining silent for the remainder of the trip home.

I pondered her words at great length, wondering what she was thinking, assuming that she was still half asleep and a bit incoherent.

But after we got home, she poured herself a small glass of pop and was eating a prune. Suddenly she seemed to choke and gag, and spit the prune into the sink.

"What's wrong, Nan, did you choke on the prune?" I asked.

"Well, you told me to eat more protein, so I made it into that," she said defensively, pointing to the glass of pop.

"But did you choke on the prune?" I asked again.

"Well, you told me to eat more protein," she persisted angrily.

Many of her statements that evening made little sense, and at one point Roxi quietly called me aside, out of earshot of her sister. "Mom, what's going on? Something is wrong with Nan; she's not making any sense."

"I'm not sure. I think it's just that she's a bit disoriented from being in bed for a week."

"I don't think so! I think there's something seriously wrong with her."

"Maybe you're right, I don't know. Let's keep track of how often it happens; maybe I'll call the doctor in the morning if she's still irrational by then."

We then wrote down all that we could recall that she had said - most of it made no sense - and continued to keep notes for the rest of the evening. I felt baffled by the sudden change we were seeing, but felt that it surely would pass as time wore on. I sensed that she was definitely not herself, though, and decided she should not be left unattended during the night. Since Ted was gone anyway, I invited her to share my queen size bed with me for the night; her response was childlike and enthusiastic.

As we were lying there in the darkness, she suddenly said, "Mama, I love you!" My heart churned inside my breast, and I put my arm around her.

"I love you too, Nan. I'll pray for you," I added, choking back the tears.

"I'll pray for you too," she promised.

Why pray for me? I wondered but said nothing.

Moments of silence passed, and then suddenly again she said, "Mama, I love you. No matter how many crazy things I say, I really do love you. I think I'm going crazy!" and she began to sob quietly into her pillow. After a time she fell asleep. I felt relieved to rest too; this had been a very long day, checking her out of the hospital and then the long drive home.

Our rest was short lived, however. Nannette awoke a short time later and got up to use the bathroom. When she was finished, though, she failed to come back to bed. I called to her, and told her to come on back. She complied, acting as if the thought had not occurred to her. As she passed by the dresser she spotted a colorfully wrapped gift that Roxi had brought home for her earlier from a friend at church. Nan's eyes lit up like a little child's.

"Oh, is this for me?"

"Yes, Mary sent it home with Roxi for you. Would you like to open it?" I knew it was past midnight by now, but we were both awake anyway, so why not?

"Oh, neat!" she exclaimed excitedly, and picked up the gift.

I closed my eyes momentarily, and must have dozed off. Suddenly Nan's stern voice startled me awake.

"Well, I'm waiting!" she scolded in a harsh, hateful tone that I had never heard her use before. Was this really Nannette speaking to me like that? She stood in the doorway holding the package.

"What are you waiting for, Nan?" I asked, shocked by the threatening tone of her voice.

"Oh, all right," she said cheerfully, using the light-hearted, little-girl voice that had also emerged during the evening.

All night she was up and down, using the bathroom, getting a drink, and searching for something. "What are you looking for, Nan?" I asked as I saw her fervently looking under the blankets, under the bed, on the dresser, everywhere, searching.

"I'm looking for those white balls I made. I made one for you and one for me; I tried to make one for Roxi but I just couldn't," she explained.

"Do you know what kind of white balls they are?" I asked.

"No, I can't remember."

"Are they balls of yarn?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Are they to eat? How do you use them?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'll help you look for them in the morning. Let's go to sleep now."

Moments later Nan was up again, this time walking out the door when I woke up and saw her. "Where are you going, Nan?" I asked.

"I'm going to get dressed. It's time to get up," she explained. (It was probably 3 a.m. by now.)

"No, Nan, it's still night. It's still dark outside. Let's come on back to bed, and sleep a little longer. We'll get up after a while," I suggested.

Nan was reluctant to come back to bed, but finally did so, grumbling as she came. "They told us we could do anything we wanted to here," she complained. I realized she was referring to the rules at the hospital; she was obviously confused even as to her whereabouts.

By morning she was totally exhausted and slept soundly for several hours; I was wide awake, though, and deeply disturbed by the puzzling night we had spent. I decided to call the doctor; maybe he would be able to explain what was happening to her, or if something should be done, could make a recommendation.

When I finally reached him, he was as surprised as I was, and could only suggest that she was suffering from central nervous system damage. "Just try to be as patient as you can, and talk it through with her. Try to understand her as best you can."

Later, when Nan was awake, I tried to talk to her to see if she was any more rational after a few hours' rest. Her responses during that day varied. Sometimes she seemed quite rational, while at others she was not. She seemed

fragmented into basically three separate personalities: a little girl of about five or six bursting with joy and enthusiasm; Nannette herself, at fifteen, rational, responsive and coherent; and a stern, angry child I had never met before.

Deep inside my heart was aching at what I saw and heard that day. The ravages of lupus had eaten away first at her kidneys, then at her very flesh and bones, and now at the mind that had been so alert, so full of love and tenderness and life. My precious child was a mere shell, a walking skeleton, and now there was not even a healthy mind left.

As the day wore on, I became more and more oppressed by the magnitude of the situation. For months we had been praying that God would bless the efforts of the doctors and give us wisdom in knowing how best to treat her illness. We had trusted Him implicitly to help us with the problems as they arose, one day at a time. And we continued to walk in the knowledge that nothing happens to His children without His permission. S o we knew beyond a shadow of doubt that God was still in control. This was happening for His purpose.

And so it was within this knowledge later that evening, while Roxi helped Nannette with her bath, that an overwhelming realization came over me: it was bad enough that she had to suffer from the physical pain and deformity, but now it seemed that her personality and mental capacity were also irreparably damaged. She would never be the same again, and I knew it.

With tearful eyes, I turned my face toward heaven and prayed, "Oh, God, if Nan has to live the rest of her life like this, then please, just take her home." Little did I know how soon He would.

I finished clearing the table, and then went back to the bathroom where Roxi was helping her dress for bed. Nan's skin had become uncomfortably dry and flakey during the months of her illness, so I said, "Here, let me lotion your back."

"It would be easier to wait til I'm lying down," Nan suggested.

"Oh, it will only take a minute," I said, and smoothed the lotion over the dry skin that stretched across her boney frame.

Suddenly she began to breathe heavily.

"Oh, let me lie down! Please, I'm so sick, let me lie down."

We hurried to put her pajama top on her and helped her walk down the hall to her room. There we laid her gently on the bed. By now she was breathing in short gasps.

"Oh, we've got to get her to a doctor, fast!" I said. The nearest one was fifteen miles away; I knew we'd never make it in time.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" she warned, panting heavily.

"Why Nan, do you hurt?" I asked.

She did not answer at first, as if thinking about my question; then she said "Yes" in a rather tentative tone of voice.

Suddenly her heavy breathing stopped. I saw her eyes turn upward and then come forward in a lifeless stare.

No amount of oxygen or mouth to mouth resuscitation could have revived her, but we tried frantically anyway using the technique we had read about and seen on television.

Only ten minutes after I had breathed a prayer of relinquishment, God had taken me at my word, and had taken my beloved daughter home. In the months since then we have gone through many hours of grief and loneliness at the sight of the empty room where her Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls still smile up at us from her pillow; the empty place at the dinner table where she had sat to serve us her latest gourmet delight; and at the piano, where she had often sat to pound out a favorite hymn that she had memorized. Now, instead, her portrait smiles down from the piano, her smile still marked by a dimpled cheek and a wire retainer. For fifteen years she graced our home, adding a touch of warmth and love to every room. Now that glow still remains a part of us, within each breath we take and in each memory of Nannette.

Gwen Smith Bergman - 1979

THE OLD PIANO

The chords are silent now;
a coat of dust on ivory.

Faint strands of silver stretch across
from score, and key to key.

Brimhall, Schaum, Tchaikovsky too
all sound the same to me

When silence reigns with no one there
to break their reverie.

An inner song of peace and joy,
of love and memory

Bursts forth in strains of happiness
and makes a melody.

Gwen Smith Bergman 1978

EVENING

With grace and elegance evening unfurles her lacy shawl
And slowly moves among the trees.
Her crinoline petticoat scatters twilight
As silently she rustles by.
Her long veil flows delicately behind
And stirs a gentle breeze.
Her fine scent, like jasmine on the cool night air,
Awakes a sleeping heart.

Georgia Knutsen 1979

AN UNENCHANTED STROLL

Conversing uncontents
Methodically reviewing
Mistakes of those they bore
Establishment traditions
Take precedence
Over love and life and lust
The knowing eyes
Are filled with tears
Of dreams and years and lives
Gone by

J. C. Breez 1979



THE CHOOSER OF THE SLAIN

It's the phone. Again. Damn that phone. "Akers' Cropdusters." Crappers, Rod thinks. Won't I ever get home today?

"Hey Rod. This is Lance Sloan. Can you dust a field this evening?"

"You bet. Whatcha got?"

"It's the cotton on the East Ranch. Field thirteen, a hundred thirty-three acres. You remember the field?"

"Sure do. The one with the high-lines, an' the peach orchard in the corner. Whatcha gonna use?"

"Forty-five pounds of sulfur, and it's loading at Filmar's Ag-Chemicals right now. They need to know which airstrip you'll use."

"Good deal, Lance. I'll call 'em if you like. Are the sprinklers off?"

"The water will be turned off at six, and I'll appreciate it if you'll call Filmar's."

"Sure. Right away. We'll be there in an hour."

"Thanks, Rod. Sorry about the short notice."

"Thanks for the order, Lance. Don't worry, we'll make it on time."

Rod stabs the disconnect button, and dials Jay's number. He'd flown in the morning, but it's his turn for evening work. The phone rings and rings. Dammit to hell. Is he out? Finally –

"Yeah. This is Jay."

"Rod here, Jay. There's work right away."

"O.K. I'll see you in ten."

"Great," and Rod hangs up. Then he's dialing again, for Filmar's.

"Filmar's Agricultural Chemicals. May I help you?"

It's a familiar voice. Josie, Rod's thinking.

"Josie, it's Rod. Send that stuff for Sloan to Strip Number Three. You know. The one in the mouth of Coliseum Canyon. How much you sendin'?"

"Six thousand pounds; a hundred and twenty fifties."

"Gotcha. We'll be there about six-fifteen."

"You got it. Bye now."

Now for the ground crew, Rod says to himself, and goes out to the shop, where Pedro is teaching some kid how to buck rivets. "Pedro, I need two swampers and a flagman. Who'll it be?"

"I'll swamp myself, an' take Gene. J. R. here can flag. That gonna be it?"

"Yeah, send the rest home, Pedro."

"O.K."

"We'll use Number Three, an' as soon as we can get there. It's a hundred an' twenty sacks of sulfur, so take your respirators an' goggles, an' sharpen your knives. J.R., come to my office when Jay gets here."

There, Rod thinks. It's that simple. I'll be home in thirty minutes. Dammit! That's the phone again.

"Akers' Cropdusters."

"Got anything going tonight?" It's the boss' voice.

"Yeah, sulfur on cotton for Sloan. A hundred an' thirty-three at forty-five on the East Ranch. Jay's on his way out, an' after I brief him, I'm for home."

"O.K. I'll drift by there after awhile. See you in the A.M." There's a click, and that's it.

And here's Jay.

"Hi, Rod. What we got?"

"It's that cotton on Sloan's East Ranch. The one with the California Edison derrick lines. You know it. You've done it lotsa times. A hundred an'

thirty-three acres at forty-five pounds of sulfur. You'll work off Number Three Strip, cause the field's right off the mouth of that canyon."

"That's the field with the orchard in the corner?"

"That's it. You can brief J.R. here. He'll give you a crank, an' then go flag." Good O. It's home for me; Rod gets up and grabs his hat. Just a minute. Now what? What's wrong with Jay? He's looking awful funny.

"Sulfur? Geez, it's calm for sulfur. J.R., get outa here a minute. I wanta talk to Rod."

The flagman looks at Jay, and then at Rod, who nods, so out he goes. Jay looks sort of embarrassed, and his jaw muscles seem kind of tight.

"Look, Rod. It's awful calm to be workin' those wires tonight. An' hot. It's so damn hot. That plane'll fly like a streamline' brick, an' without a breeze, that sulfur'll hang fifty feet high. I won't be able to see nothin', with that sulfur waterin' my eyes. Even with new goggle straps I'll be half blind. I don't like it."

"Hell, Jay, I know all that. We all know that. Who does like it? Look Jay. This outfit has been dustin' that field for twenty years. You've done it a dozen times or more in the seven you been here."

"I don't like it. I'm tellin' you, Rod. I don't like it."

"Jay, nobody likes it. I don't like it, dammit, an' I don't even fly."

"Well –"

"Now just a minute, Jay. It's your turn to work. I can't call another pilot in just because you don't like it. How d'you think they'd like it? Darn it. Take lighter loads. You got three hours to do an hour an' a half job. Take your time."

"OH, O.K. I s'pose, but I still don't like it."

"Jay, I hear you."

"Well, I won't be able to see shit."

"Look Jay. I'll go out an' flag it myself, so at least you won't have to worry about the flagman screwin' up. If things look that bad, I'll wave you off, an' get on the horn to Pedro at the strip. How's that?"

"Well, that'd help. Oh, O.K. I guess I'll go an' suit up." But he doesn't make a move for the door. He's stalling, thinks Rod. God damn glory boys who make all the money, and then I got to babysit them for eighteen hours a day.

"Well, let's get goin', Jay, or we'll be here all night."

"I think I'll try that new goggle-strap."

"O.K. Jay, but let's go. Tell J.R. to punch out an' go home, an' when you're ready, I'll give you a twist."

Jay goes out, and Rod slaps his hat on the desk. Then he picks it up and slaps it down again, harder. Overtime, again. I'll be lucky to get home by ten, he thinks. Four-thirty in the morning until ten at night. Isn't that sweet. Get here first, and leave last. Too tired to eat at night, an no time in the morning. He thinks of Theresa, and how she never bitches like she's got the right to do.

"Honey, can't you make it home a little earlier some nights? We hardly ever see you, and I never get to cook a decent meal for you." A little more of this, and she'll tell me to get some other hermit for a wife, and then – then – Lord, don't ever think like that.

Rod picks up the phone, and his face says he's mad, but he thinks, cool it, and dials the answering service which answers night phone and radio calls.

"We'll take it over 'til you call in the morning," another familiar voice replies, and Rod rescues his hat, kicks the door shut with his heel, and gets his pickup.

Jay, waiting by the duster on the taxi strip, climbs into the open cockpit as Rod drives up the parks out of the way. Nobody knows these guys like I do, Rod thinks. Them and their butterfly stomachs. Well, chickens can fly, too, and he walks up to the nine foot prop.

"Off," he shouts, the thumb on his outstretched arm pointing to the ground.

"It says off," says Jay, visually checking the magneto switch again.

Rod rapidly but carefully pulls the big blade through again and again, while Jay pumps the throttle, to prime the big engine. Then he hollers, "When you're ready."

Rod pauses, then "Make it hot!" his left thumb pointing up. Jay also gives the thumb up signal as he switches on the mags.

"It's hot," he shouts, and Rod makes a mighty pull on the prop, jerks his hands loose and falls away, as the four-hundred and fifty horses turn that prop into a blur. He gives the thumb and forefinger A.O.K. circle as the engine gobbles up all other sound, and retreats to his pickup.

On the way to the field he thumbs the mike. "KJX 434, Seven to One."

"Go ahead, Seven." That's the boss.

"I'm gonna flag this one myself, so you needn't come by unless you want to."

"Any problems?"

"Not really. I'll talk to you later."

"O.K. then. I'll go home. See you in the morning."

"Roger. Seven out. KJX 434 clear."

Rod hears One, back on the air, telling the answering service he'll be at home, and for them to call Theresa and tell her Seven will be late. Yeah. Late again. All in big letters, and it really burns my ass, steams Rod. But –

On the field, the breeze is perfect. It's a good, consistent, eastward drift that will push the dust away from those wires. Rod looks up, hating those three columns of derricks, side by side, with their heavy transmission lines and steel sky-lines, looping from tower to tower. But the light is good; Jay will have no trouble seeing, and with this drift, we'll be out of trouble in a load and a quarter.

Pacing, he marks off a dozen passes by raking his flag's staff across the soft dirt, and then remembers that he'll have to watch it when the plane comes through and out under those wires. He remembers training flagmen on that very field. "It's a tough titty for you," he'd tell them, "if you don't get out of the way when that plane is comin' from under there."

He looks again at the maze of derricks and lines, crossing the field on an angle. They must be a bitch to fly through – and around – and over – and under.

He hears the distant sound of the P&W engine, and he looks over toward the canyon, with its column-like rocks, and identifies the old Stearman, sporting modified wings, and the ugly, short engine mount which holds the big radial engine. Gosh, he thinks, could anyone mistake it? But the rig's almost here, and Rod stops daydreaming, clutches his flag, and runs back for the first pass.

Jay comes in perfect, and the dust drifts away from his work and his eyes – couldn't be better, thinks Rod, and lines him up on the second pass.

Through and under he goes, just as he's always done, no problem at all, Rod figures, but all the same he knows that he wouldn't be threading his way through those derricks at a hundred knots with maybe twenty feet to spare. But Jay, he's making it look easy. He runs out on the twelfth pass, just like he should, and turns back to reload.

Rod marks off about twenty more passes because there's lots of time, then walks back for the first pass of the second load. Looking up the canyon again, he sees the old Stearman coming, slow but straight. What would Lloyd Stearman think if he could see his baby now, now that it's only an old farm tractor that just happens to be able to fly. Or a pack mule, maybe; a flying pack mule.

Jay lines up high, way over the towers, and now he starts to side slip onto the pass. That's a dumb trick with a full load, thinks Rod. He'll crack every spar he's got if he doesn't catch – the engine is screaming! Christ, what's he doing? He's turning! No, he's rolling! He can't, Rod's mind peals. That whole mess of wires is suddenly a bunch of shooting, blue flashes. He's on his back! Oh God, he's falling on his back! Oh my God!

Rod is running up the cotton row, watching the loaded duster fall from the tower tops. When the rig hits, his ears tell him that the scream has stopped like a siren smashed in mid-wail. Things seem to happen in slow motion, now, and Rod, running, watches as the plane rises several feet as if bouncing on a big trampoline. A big puff of dust lazily drifts away as the wreck slowly settles.

Rod is running up the field. He's running in a box that smells like sulfur and dust, a box without a front, but with tight sides, and a back that's pushing so hard that he's almost falling on his head.

Then he's finally there, looking at Jay hanging upside down in his belts, but not touching the ground, because the fin and rudder aren't hurt much, and they're holding the fuselage up. Jay's hard-hat is hanging from it's chin-strap. and his nose is bleeding, and then the blood starts to run over the brow of the helmet, and there couldn't be that much. How can there be so much blood? And something else – his goggles. Where are his goggles? Could he see at a hundred knots?

Rod lies on his back, beneath Jay. "Easy now, Jay. Easy now. Let me do it." He tries to hold him up and reach for the belt lever that will let everything go, and Rod can smell gas cooking; he smells the blood, because it's all over him. It smells like killed blood always does.

Jay drops loose, and falls onto Rod, still flat on his back, sliding and pulling him out, and saying, "'Easy, Jay. Easy, Jay." and the gas is stinking as it boils off that hot engine, and if it blows – "God, don't let it blow," Rod thinks out loud, and then he realizes that they're all over sulfur, too. "One more minute, God, an' we'll make it."

Then he lays Jay down, and sees that his head is flopping like it's on an elastic thread, and the blood oozes wet from his nose and ears. Rod tries to get a pulse.

"Jay, Jay. C'mon Jay, it's Rod. C'mon, Jay." But he knows there's no Jay. There's no pulse. He stops for a minute, realizing now that this isn't Jay. Jay, you're gone. You're not here.

What next? He wonders for a second, but he knows his job. Get back to that pickup, first. His legs are so heavy, they're hard to move, and the cotton's so blurry, he can barely see – and there's puke in his throat because he can still smell dead blood.

At the pickup, gasping and choking, he leans on the door and thinks, don't panic now. He steadies himself on the seat for a moment, then squeezes the mike.

"KJX 434. Unit Seven to Base Two."

"Base Two." It's the girl at the answering service.

"I have trouble, repeat, trouble. Take this description. Ready?"

"Ten-four. Ready."

"I'm at the corner of Iron Lane an' No Name Road. One-half mile to the northeast is a wrecked plane in a cotton field. The pilot is dead, repeat dead. Call the sheriffs, they'll have to come, an' tell them to send an ambulance, yeah, an' I guess the coroner. They'll probably do it all anyway, but you better tell them. I'll be up at the wreck, but my pickup will stay here. Tell them it's got Akers' Cropdusters decals on the doors. Now, feed it back."

She does, and then she says, "Who was it, Rod?"

He says, "Jay," and he feels tears, and the taste of puke is back with the stinking blood.

"I'm sorry." Her voice is real low. "We're all sorry up here, Rod. You take it easy."

"Call the boss an' clue him in, too. I'll be at the wreck. Seven clear," and the tears are there, and he hates himself some more, and for no reason he suddenly thinks that that's the first time ever that she hasn't called him Seven.

Rod looks up the canyon, through those rocks, and remembers Pedro and Gene. Back to the mike.

"Seven to Fourteen."

"Gotcha, Seven. We heard you to Base. It's bad, bad. Awful bad. Whatcha want, Rod?"

"You guys pack it up an' go home. I'll see you both in the mornin', before five." This is tough; talkin's tough, he thinks.

"Can't we help down there, Rod?"

"No use, Pedro, but thanks. There's nothin' I can do now but wait. Seven clear."

And then Rod is walking up the cotton row, and he thinks about seven years of knowing Jay, and he feels heavy, old, icy cold, liquid lead coming up in him from somewhere, and then it's in his guts, and still coming, and he remembers. Tomorrow. I'll see you before five in the morning, and I'll see four pilots, too – no, Goddamit, three, and I'll send one of them to finish this field. He says it aloud, "Before five. In the mornin'. Who you gonna send?"

So he's back at the wreck, and there's Jay that's not Jay, the drying blood thickening around his nose and ears, and all around his flight-suit collar, and then there's this white moth, with little black specks, trying to land on Jay's nose – no, there's more than one, there's three or four, or more – yes more, all fluttering and circling around the blood – a bunch of dumb moths.

Rod tears off his shirt, and covers Jay's face, but the moths, they aren't leaving, there's a whole bunch, so he takes off his tee shirt and swats and swings it at them.

"God Almighty," he raves. "Goddam moths!" and he wildly swings the shirt 'til he's out of breath once more. He still curses, and folds his arms over his eyes, but he still sees them.

Sobbing, he looks up the canyon, under the wires, past the rocks. He hates those wires; he hates his job; he hates the pilots, and, worst of all, he hates himself.

"Who are you gonna send? Who'll be thumbs up for the morning?" For the last time he looks at the moths, which by now completely cover his shirt. He turns his back on Jay, and waits for the sheriff.

Charles Morrison - 1979

HOME

It seems my heart will always go
Around the childhood scenes
I know
Across the meadows dressed in
robes
Where non but God and Nature
probes,
The buzzing of velvet bumble bees
And birds that twitter in the
trees,
Over the hill to the babbling
brooks to rest
The rough hewn pebbles reveal
their breast
Where God and Nature never
cease
that was home...

Lillian 1978

THE GENTLE LOOK

Wet and green shimmering in the sun
with soft foot steps leaving their mark.
The laughter of a smile filling my heart
with a tender touch always there.
The gentle look, filling her eyes
bringing out the brightness of the warm day.
But now - dry and brown the hard ground breaks
as they walk slow, weighted and distant.
A smile has turned and the heart empty
as the touch gone with all its tenderness.
The gaze no longer soft or full
as sharp pain fills the place,
once bright and green.

Carl Knutsen 1979

REVELIE

I let you dawn gently on me
like morning light on asters;
like crescendos swelling
from silence of stars

I took you bright and tender into me
like emeralds gleaming in a silver string;
like music of harps
taut with the passion of care.

I let you love me in the going of your way
like sunshine at the Zenith
of some hot day;
like butterflies on flowers
nodding in the breeze.

I took you -- always - flowing --
like waters to the seas;
like clouds which scud the sky.

And you gave me back -- a bounty --
everything and I.

Howard C. Zimmerman 1979

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 1978

NORTH CALIFORNIA COAST

NORTH CALIFORNIA COAST

Let some other man
Hitch his wagon to a star
I'll press myself
Into the rusty red bark
Of a giant redwood
And find the slow soaring
Ambition of a tree
My feet are happily earthbound

John Pair 1976

APPEL DÉSESPUÉRÉ

Tous les hommes sont frères, Confucius
affirmait il y a plus de deux mille ans
Le monde est vraiment grand
mais dans ses secrets replis
besoins et aspirations humaines
traversent le même ténébreux chemin
et notre monde n'est somme toute
qu'un vaisseau spatial léger
trois billions d'habitants
devraient sagrement diriger

Mais il n'y a rien de comparable
au monde verveilleux de l'enfance
car c'est un monde qui puise sa source
dans le lait maternel et la chaleur du sein
dans les premiers mots marmottés par le bambin

Mais dans cette vie éphémère
Rien ne brise le coeur d'une mère
comme la séparation brusque de parents, d'amis
ou l'exil involontaire sur une terre étrangère
ô choc cultural ô destin implacable ô éternel ennui!

Rien que Rachmanioff faisait fortune en Amérique
jamais il ne pourrait de son esprit chasser la vieille Russie
Quoique Solzhenitsyn soit banni par les Kremlin tsars
il s'inspire encor des salles psychiatriques et de Gulag

Depuis que j'ai quitté mon pays
la nostalgie du Vietnam ne m'a jamais quitté
de petites choses sont devenues symboles vénérés
un simple dessin de feuilles de bambou tremblantes

une calligraphie autographée sur un rouleau de papier
des manuscrits illustrés sur le vieux Tonkin
ou des lithographies d'un monde perdu de la Cochinchine
des lotus roses dans un lac au doux parfum prenant
des faibles lames léchant une plage de sable blonde
des vagues battant un amas de rochers
devant l'océan dressant leurs masses sombres

Les objets inanimés semblent doués d'une âme vivante
mais l'appel des compatriotes désempares
est encor plus désespéré, plus pressant
maintenant que de millions vivent
courbés et tremblants sous la main de fer
des cadres inperturbables
qui toujours et partout
voient Rouge, implacable
car d'autres tons, d'autres couleurs
les jettent dans une aveugle colère;
ainsi, moulé dans cette moule fantastique
mouve et bouge, o peuple extraordinaire!

Chau Kim Dinh 1979



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 boss 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 someting?" 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 ony 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. S ome 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, big 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 into 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 thei. 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 a 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 in 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 supersititious. 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 heart 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 underside 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 talks 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 someting 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 souls 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. "Haven'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 lifts 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 voice 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 control 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 catapulated 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 brown 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 1978

RUMORS

Like blackbirds in the reeds
grackles in dry grasses
caw and protest
mimicking bawky hinges
squawking objections

doub.e flutter
air-bird and pond-image
burst like pinata
over lead water
liquid mist of sky

demanding notice
flexed start, fixed stare
suddenly there
clamor and black flakes in air
settling, quick arc resettling
flash and clack
persisting.

Later
gone. Quite gone
lone pond.
Quiet
no memory fleck
no check of dark on gray
only
stiff dry rushes
doubled in water-image
and no sound.

Anne Passell 1974

PAINT BOX

Tubes of illusion
Passive, inert agents of imagination
Capped tight against fantasy's escape,
Metallic cocoons of dreams unattained;
Clash and blend in chance confusion
Constantly changing, spledid disarray.

J. H. Bilas 1974

A COMMEMORATION: THE KERN RIVER

High in the snowcapped Sierras she was born,
In spring, when snows begin to melt.
She is born gently, singing along in rivulets
As she skips over rocks.
As she looks up she sees sequoias, ponderosas,
And sugar pines waving their branches in adoration
From her rock strewn shores.
There, she is a happy traveler, meandering down inclines,
Joining other streams, becoming one with them.
She sometimes gathers herself into small pools,
Pools that reflect her gray granite walls,
Of, if we dare to look, our faces.
When the pools fill, spilling over,
She moves on.
As she moves, she grows, changes her mood,
Becoming a river of rushing water
As she keeps her headstrong bent
Toward the bed man prepared for her
On the upper valley floor.
She is the life of our part of the valley.
She has a past, present, and future all her own.
Those granite walls that enclose her,
If they could talk, would tell us tales,
Stories of Shoshonean Indians who ground their live oak acorns
In rocks along her banks, then dipped the cold, clear water,
To purify the bitter meal.
Those trees that line her sides
Would whisper and gossip about the happenings in gold camps,
Now ghosted towns, and about the men who panned for gold
Along her shores.

And those stones would echo the joys and sorrows
Of migrant peoples who camped next to her.
Before the dam was built she used to become over zealous,
Wandering where she pleased, here in the valley,
Not far from the town.
Where she wandered there sprang up groves of cottonwood,
Mesquite and other chapparal.
Chapparal that hid life, cottontails, jackrabbits and roadrunners.
Hid them from the wiley coyote who hunted them,
Then after the hunt, worshipped the moon
By singing songs along the river at night.
But now, men have harnessed the Kern's power,
Hold her back.
While the only thing left of those trees
Are the limbed skeletons you see, to the west,
Raising their arms, in supplication to the sky.
So, today, most of the waters are held for us,
Banked, you might say, for future use.
She uses this man made bed as a diversion for awhile.
Who knows if she enjoys her interaction with man
As we intrude her waters to swim and play,
Or whether she welcomes the caresses of our ski laden boats.
Yes, she even quietly gives up her bounty,
Of silver streaked trout and bass,
To those of us who angle, patiently, from drifting boat
Or sandy beach.
Ah! But when she is loosed once more, her mood swiftly changes.
Now she is more like the waters of Ladore
As she rushes and tumbles, slices and cuts
Her way through that resisting gray granite.
When she is in this mood,
She demands our respect, and we give it.
We give it because we know that the rest of her unleashed power
Is held in abeyance.
We know that she has her treacherous moods,
Just as we have ours.
But we take from her too,
As she pushes her way through power plants
Turning turbines that create the light for our dark times.
Then, she goes on.
As she goes she gathers rocks along the way
And in her momentum she spits them out again.
Spits them out in patterns against her sides.
Soon, with a mightly rush, she bursts forth again
From the confines of the canyon,
Only to settle down to a more even eddy.

After this she passes through parks
Where the children throw breadcrumbs to the ducks who live there,
And where swimmers float tubes past her sandy cliffs.
On through our bustling city she travels.
Then, she is diverted, once more, into man made systems,
Where at the end, she gives herself up to the thirsty ground
That is waiting to seduce her.
The earth, in turn, gives the waters up to the plants
That spring from its bosom.
Her future? She is resurrected again
In the blood red wine that is squeezed from fall grapes,
And once more, in the white winter snows that sift down
Blanketing the high Sierras.
But, when those cold sleeping snows begin to warm next spring,
Kern River will awaken, be reborn to a new life,
Then, for another growing season, we will have her back.

Wava Owens 1979

IN THE BEGINNING WAS

The Forest -
There am I among the mountains, where
The ancient and contorted oak have
Shot their ricocheting limbs
Toward a nearer heaven.
Armed with whining steel,
I on them design new monuments in stump,
So eloquently mute among their forebears so mutely eloquent.
They have left roots,
As I.

The Wood, Piled -
There am I among sledged wedges,
Chips, and fallen bark.
Loading my other arms
I carry carcasses of toppled forest foes
Out of this limbo
To new life.

The Hearth -
Here we are, both warmed;
Here we part, both burning;
Ash bound. We shall
Meet in the
Beginning.

Charles Morrison 1979

WRITER'S RHYME

I want a word that revs up and screams off like a rocket
A black and white streak from the pen in my pocket
And some words that wheel even and fast on the mouth
That curve people north who are heading south
And four-wheel drive words when the road bellies out
Words that hang onto hitchhikers through detour and doubt
When monotonous lines roll sleep-smooth and ahead
Are the lights, words that shriek! words that mad up the dead!
Give me stark flashing words that ten thousand can ride
Without cross-signal delay down the highway inside
And miles before the gas runs out, at the perfect time,
Quick give me a word that'll stop on a dime!

Rumery Charles-Jackson 1976

TECHNIQUE

BREAK NOT YET THE DAY
WHEN HE SHOULD COME BRINGING
THE NAME: LOVE

FOR EVEN SO
DESCENDS
HIS PEACE
AS HEAVENS WINGED DOVE

SHALL ALL ARISE TAKE UP THE FLIGHT,
SWORD, AND BLIGHTED STORM
TO CONQUER DARK
AND HATED MEN AND ALL SHALL BE
NOT WARM

THEN
PEER
DOWN
LIFE, TO KNOW US NOT,
AND CATCH US UNALARMED!

THEN CREEP AWAY
TO RUSTED COVES
TO REACHING ARMS
UNHARMED

YET SEARCH THE DARK FOR THE LIGHT
AS A HOLE IN THE UNGREAT SKY

AND COME AGAIN, BRING NOT THE MEN
AND THE CHILDREN STILL ASK: WHY?

SEND FOR THE MESSAGE TO BE QUESTIONED
READ TO ALL
THE LIE
WHY ONE WINGED DOVE, GAVE BIRTH TO LOVE
AND MEN GAVE
BIRTH TO DIE.

edlynn nau 1976

LA FEUILLE TOMBE . . .

La feuille tombe en automne jaune rabougrie
La flore hiberne en hiver blanc d'albâtre
Mais se rajeunit au printemps verdâtre
Quand, de la terre généreuse d'une tendresse inouie
La nature endormie se réveille
Animée par la sève montante la plante s'éveille

Mon âme ce matin sombre
Vole vers ma lointaine patrie
La haine de l'homme incroyant
Glace le sang et dechire le coeur;
La brume éparse, la rosee vaporeuse
Tissent un châle macabre
de deuil blafard d'Orient
sur la terre humectée de sang et de sueur amère
souillee de rouge de ses enfants et de mes frères

Eperdue, terrible, implacable
les vainqueurs de la Révolution
mènent la danse de la Haine
trente ans après
c'est la danse macabre
une dans frénétique, accablante
foudroyante, vire-voltante
Sur la terre ancestrale des Viet
c'est la ronde infernale interminable
des innocents et des coupables....

Des larmes amères
troublent mon sommeil
plein de cauchemars
et je suis hanté
je ne sais pourquoi
de visions funèbres

Des images lugubres
tournoient dans mon esprit
une valse dantesque, sombre
des fous qui tourbillonnent
dans une fantasmagorie
surréaliste et sauvage

Je ne sais pourquoi
Je souffre jour et nuit
d'un mal indéfinissable
Et je me baigne chaque jour
dans une atmosphère étrange
pleine d'émoi et d'effluves contraints

Mais ô mon coeur
Entends la mélodie céleste
d'un oiseau exotique
qui joint le conciliabule
de ses frères ailés
dans un cantique effréné.

Chau Kim Dinh 1979

AUTUMN SONG

An autumn wind whistles a changing breath
over the face of a passing year,
and upwards through sleeping branches
waving wildly
slaps at freckled leaves.

Terrance M. Matthews 1977

THE COMET: KAPUUT!
(formerly entitled The Comet Kohoutek (without the semicolon)

we were told last november
and deep into frozen december
to view the skies with wonder
for they would soon be split asunder
by a ball of streaking ice
that would illuminate all our nights
and in its view Love-Making would commence
(a rumor that made the preachers tense)
for to them the comet was to fear
signifying the end was near
TO BRING IN A NEW AGE
AND THE RULE OF *THE SAGE*

(oh happy day! - i think)

to others it was a christmas star
but that it wasn't - by far
for this enigma came forth in january
right after booze, football and resolutions most salutary
it came forth out of the night
and as I said, it was expected to be quite a sight
even for those with hangovers - eyes still closed tight
but it fizzled, yeah it fizzled
what a disappointment
like a fly's frustration in ointment
like a cosmic sperm in the night
missing the aim in its sight

moral

but it's for these sideshows that we live
for there's nothing quite like humanity;
and that truly is show b'z

Clark Long 1974

CLOWN BALLOONS

Silken

Banners rise

High, higher still

Gentle streamers

Waving

An invitation

Of drifting

Childish dreams

Buy

Buy a balloon

A child waits

To fly.

Sara Tucker 1979

OTHELLO
FROM DESDEMONA'S POINT OF VIEW

The charisma he possessed on the battlefield
Was gone when he entered the bedroom and took
off his shield.

Great strength that made his body vibrate
Was a weakness that soon encompassed his mind
with hate.

Jealousy arose in his fiery eyes –
This devil gave Othello uncertain thoughts
And all my reassurances of faith were lost.

Sid 1976

WAR TIDE

The Achaeans rode the purple waves at sunset
In black-bodied hollow ships
Advancing on Troy
Desire shone in their eyes
The mingled ray of the thousand-eyed war tide

Above the many shoulders stood four
Wrapped in soft double thick mantles
Of the royal hue
Brash Agamemnon and wronged Menelaus his brother
Shining Achilles of immortal blood
And golden-voiced Odysseus

Fierce hearted Greek tide
Rose against the purple splendor
Of the halls of Hector and
Helen-stealing Paris
A surging sea to overcome
The sacred citadel

John Pair 1976

nursery rhyme words
create fairy-tale worlds
pixies and elfins at home there
what is real never sifts
through moonflower glaze
glamoured Hollywood magic
all the prettiest of life
retained
so forget
what isn't ugly enough
to be grotesque
to be fantastically horrible

truth is relative
all my relatives
are pixies and elfins
witches and goblins
cats with high-priest eyes
not people
no clothes
but plume feathers and costumes
image-makers

circles
the egg is the perfect shape
fools on a hill
watch it turn
so I call myself Humpt-Dumpty's alter ego

J. A. Allen 1979

COCKTAIL PARTY

Lost
In a swirling void
Of faces
Voices
Movement laughter
Faces voices faceless bodies
Swirlingwhirlingmovementfaces
Lost....

Virginia Wirtz 1978

NARCISSUS

Under the beat of this
special drummer

I walked wide

spraddled into innocence
of my name

called once more
in each roll

Those stepping with me
in the plasma
of our bonds
on this beach

followed heavy broad prints

in sands

before the tide.

Howard C. Zimmerman 1979

UPON A WISH ONCE FULFILLED

A dream night of
Neverending pleasure
Fostering hopes of more to come
A cloudy, figgy feeling
Of warmth and tenderness,
Of joy and hope
Of desolation and gloom
A gala celebration
A man reborn
A woman reloved
A hell revisited

J. C. Breez - 1979

THE MAGICIAN

Magical incantations of medieval derivations
Infiltrate the air with illusions of grandeur
Leaping rabbits, flying doves, vanishing helpers
Methodically appear and disappear

Alchemistic transmutations glitter and glow
Physical aberrations deceive the senses
The magician conceives the artifice
The people know

Vincent Zaragoza 1974

INNOCENCE

Awakening from a winter sleep,
I greet politely
a glorious morn,
    cuddling my dented heart,
    guarding secretly my dreams

Measuring my steps,
I tromp
along a lonesome path,
    shrouded with doubt
    rutted by season's storms

Alone, staggering
I tightly coil
against a leafless ash,
    swollen and bruised,
    feeding my battered heart

Then gazing at moody clouds
peeking at this youthful day,
my heart touches
a gay shadow
    skipping lightly,
    chasing one small boy

With eyes sparkling
and feet prancing,
he smiles disarmingly,
    hiding his words,
    yet speaking
        to my hopeless heart

Tina Frisbee 1979

66th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SINKING OF THE *TITANIC*

Seeds fly on
the wind's wings like
Thoughts scattered by
the breeze
Gold light filters
through green loveliness
And white sheets
play gracefully in the
Spring air

Jerome Evans 1979

AT 2:30

it was seafoam
that curled above
a powder yellow earth
slowly whirling
barely perceptible
on the azure wind
they came in
like ivory zulus
tier behind tier
engulfing
the paper cut moon
emerald eyed poseidon
probably sent them
to this single land
of dried dreary brown
as a pearl omen
for the dusty kit fox
who shivers
with the wind
as the sea turned waves
roll silently overhead

T'sin 1979


LSB