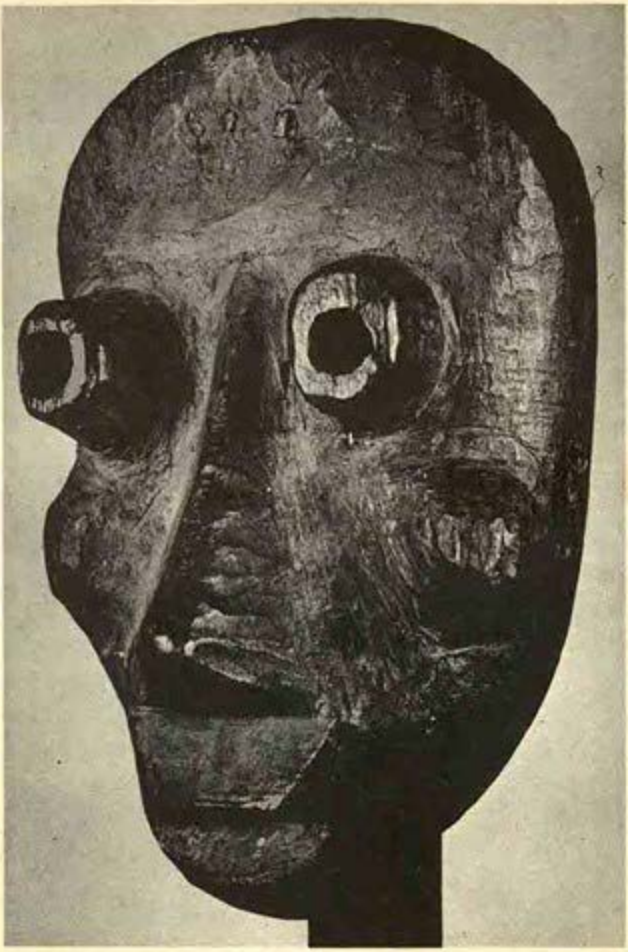


ORPHEUS 1982

ORPHEUS

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Cal State Bakersfield



for Solomon . . .



Solomon Iyasere is privy to a trait that few persons possess – command of life. One has only to look at him to experience his power. Solomon seizes each moment and commandeers it into an event of great magnitude.

Every word he utters is embued with compassion and importance. He reeks of joie de vivre.

Like the soccer ball which he so stealthily guided down the field in college days, Solomon carefully, lovingly, steers the student towards his or her goal. His enthusiasm is catchy – better for a moment, than not at all.

There are few men like Solomon Iyasere – but it only takes one unrelenting spark to kindle the creative fires in all our hearts.

Sunnie Amstutz
Co-editor

Each man's life represents a road toward himself, an attempt at such a road, the intimation of a path. No man has ever been entirely and completely himself. Yet each one strives to become that – one in an awkward, the other in a more intelligent way, each as best he can. Each man carries the vestigates of his birth – the slime and eggshells of his primeval past – with him to the end of his days. Some never become human, remaining frog, lizard, ant. Some are human above the waist, fish below. Each represents a gamble on the part of nature in creation of the human. We all share the same origin, our mothers; all of us come in at the same door. But each of us – experiments of the depths – strives toward his own destiny. We can understand one another; but each of us is able to interpret himself to himself alone.

Herman Hesse

PREFACE

Although California State College, Bakersfield, remains in its infancy when compared with long standing institutions of higher education, in the past ten years the college has grown, matured, and branched out – as has its literary magazine, *Orpheus*.

Fostered by Professor of English, Solomon Iyasere, *Orpheus* celebrates its tenth anniversary of publication in 1982. Despite budgetary obstacles and a history of lengthy publication periods, *Orpheus* flourishes. It flourishes because of professors like Solomon, who, through his constant dedication to excellence in literature ensures that this publication appears. And, it flourishes because of those who write and contribute their work.

Writers this year include professors, and former and current students. Cal State Bakersfield's English department heralds several brilliant teachers who serve as examples to their students through their writings. In this publication, the work of two of these teachers is evidenced: by Steven Weiss, who wrote "On the Training of the Citizen/Orator," and by Anne Passel, author of "Theory and Method of Research."

Some of the student writers have been published in the past, and more will undoubtedly be published in the future. Read Mimi Merrill's "W.I.P" and "I Will Be There" and remember her name, for you will see it again – most likely through the publication of a book that initiated in Anne Passel's creative writing class. The birth of Bill Petty's book also took form in Passel's class with his story, "Catching On." In "Widow's World," Joel Henry Sherman uses a "star ship" setting to transmit a powerful message of love versus life-purpose to the reader.

All stories and poems in this issue deserve recognition. Behind each work lives a person, motivated by the internal desire to write, touched by a teacher who cared enough to make his or her mark on a student's mind, or by a friend who encouraged that writer's growth.

Whether writing creatively for the first time or for the thousandth time, contributors to this year's *Orpheus* have revealed an innermost part of themselves on paper. Each contributor has taken the time to look closely

at an ordinary situation and discover its uniqueness – for all lives are unique and all are but a composition of ordinary events.

Everyday situations become special by the writer's ability to convey feeling, which is the essence of a good story. On this basis, Sunnie Amstutz and I chose stories that made us feel, hoping that they would enable others to feel as well.

As Anne Passel writes in *Your Words*, "The contemporary short story is like a small shuttered window in the blank wall of a dark room. Reader and writer stand side by side; the writer opens the window on a scene in action. Usually one person appears in clear view with a few others around him. Just as the reader feels that he would like to step through the window into the scene, the writer closes the shutters. The success of the story can be measured by the force of the impression which the reader carries away after the story ends."

We hope that these stories and poems open many windows for you and leave you with lasting impressions . . . for they are the creative ethos of Cal State Bakersfield in 1982, etched forever on the pages of this anniversary edition.

Patricia Miller Musick
Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STORIES

Joel Henry Sherman	12
Steven M. Weiss	19
Bill Petty	24
Joseph E. O'Grady	29
Joanne Silva	32
Jim Lokie	42
Norris Edwards	49
Carmen Escobedo	52
Mimi Merrill	57
Lee McCarthy	59
Sonya Smith	65
D. Horst	68
Diana L. Dominguez	74
Connie Williams	76
Diana Lumley	78
Robb Lightfoot	85

POETRY

Mimi Merrill	90
Larry Akers	92
Reggie A. Cornejo	95
Wayne Abney	96
Anne Passel	97
Diana L. Dominguez	98
Beth Barnes	100
Fidel Martinez	102
Joan Oreolt	103

CONTRIBUTORS 105

WIDOW'S WORLD
Joel Henry Sherman

When a starship dies, we are aware. Whether through a gradual decline into obsolescence or a crimson flash of radiation which vaguely stirs the infinite night, we are pointedly conscious of the ending. The mechanism involved is not entirely understood. Perhaps intuition, a subtle drift of information feeding through control networks not yet even tested, but the knowledge is unquestionably valid. Preparation begins to receive the widow.

Arami Vaichez was widowed when the stellar-class transport, *Andromeda Maiden*, blew a thruster at the Corsar Nexus and initiated a long, lazy spiral into the black hole at the jump-point center. An alert military vessel rescued the survivors, minus seventeen crew members killed in the primary explosion. *Amdromeda Maiden* died rapidly, crumpled into the gravitational maw at the end of her final orbit.

During the return trip to Corsar, Comtech Vaichez attempted suicide no less than twenty-five times.

* * *

Jord Bertrand surfaced from a well of sleep, the insistent whine of the vid-phone mewing in the darkness. Groping with numb hands, he dampened the visual and keyed the audio, focusing his bleary eyes on the wall clock.

"Bertrand here." Through the glass ceiling, the night sky blazed with whorls of the Cerebus galaxy, a glittering rainbow of gemmed fragments. "Do you realize it's 0300?"

"I am sorry, Jord." The voice was whisper soft, touching scarred portions of his memory. "I needed someone close."

Jord sat erect in bed, recognition burning through him like strong alcohol. "Arami?" he asked carefully.

"Yes, Jord. It has been a long time." Her sound was dry and lifeless as winter leaves.

"Too damn long." He paused, chewing his lips, choosing his words with discretion. "I heard the *Maiden* was gone. It was on the news." Jord thought a moment longer, groping. "I'd hoped you weren't among the survivors."

"So had I," she answered simply.

"Where are you?"

"At the port hospital."

Tension mounted in him like a worn spring tightening in a shattered mechanism. "Have you reached a decision?"

"Yes." He sensed her hesitation. "Will you help me?"

Jord rose and activated the lamp. "Give me some time to clean up. I'll be there soon."

"It's not as you think . . ."

"No more," the man said firmly. "I'm coming."

"Thank you, Jord." Her voice grew distant, fading into a gentle rustle of breath which he knew was concealing the rush of her tears. Jord broke contact and attempted to swallow the emotion congealing in his throat.

* * *

The stark hospital illumination accentuated her pallored skin. Jord paused in the doorway and watched her silent form, the measured rise of her respiration lending the faint appearance of life. Arami was very slight, an insubstantial mound in the bedding barely disturbing the contour of the sheets. Her hair was cropped and rusty brown. Pale aureoles of translucent skin marked the placement of once present electrodes on her forehead and exposed arms. Her muscles were flaccid with disuse. She opened her eyes sluggishly. Pain clung there, obvious and pitiful like the grip of a hand.

"Jord." The woman spoke with visible effort, as though personal contact were an art allowed to stagnate. "I didn't want to involve you."

He entered the room, sat on the edge of the bed and inhaled her fragrance like a wine bouquet. "It's no trouble." The tangency of his massive hands forced a twisted smile to her lips. She noticed his gaze and reached up to feel the scar ranging high upon her forehead.

"I'm afraid I have been rather foolish." Arami did not appear foolish, only bitter or wistful. He was not certain.

"Suicide?" Jord brushed her hair, an open gesture of comfort. She keyed Pavlovian reactions in him, even after the gap of space and time.

"I was upset." She shrugged. "Not really thinking, otherwise, I would have succeeded." Her eyes were silver-blue, abrupt in the parchment of her face. "They've implanted an impulse transference guide. The urge to commit suicide is translated into a compulsion to write poetry." Arami motioned with her dry-stick fingers toward a scattered ream of paper scrawled with thin handwriting.

"I have been *very* creative lately," she said, sarcasm thick in her ready voice. "Ahh, the joys of widowhood . . ."

Jord scanned a sheet while she closed her eyes as though to ignore his reaction – requiring neither approval nor reproach, but rather something even he could not provide.

World Wanderer!
Star Stallion, sleek and bright,
Seduce the gentle essence of my being.

Coupled – flesh and steel hermaphrodite,
Mount the planes of midnight,
Gliding eddied streams of solar wind.

Decline the remora ways of man
And conquer the infinite night.

"It has power," he said after reading several more of a similar vein. "Lacks polish, but with practice . . . who can tell?"

"Trash," Arami said. "It passes the time." No one spoke for a while, listening to the susurration of activity within the hospital corridors.

"You are not beyond rehabilitation." Jord hoped he stated fact.

Arami shook her head decisively. "I don't want rehabilitation. Surely you understood that?" The conviction in her words surrounded him with tangible force.

The man stood and paced the room, assembling his arguments. "I lost you once," he said, half-turning to accuse her with a harsh stare. Shadow buried his face, light playing on his blonde hair. "Will I suffer losing you twice? Can you rightfully ask that of me?"

"I am *not* a contest," Arami replied quietly. "I'm not a prize, but an individual. It was *my* choice. I won't repent my happiness."

Jord spread his hands and placed them on the wall, drawing strength from the cool solidarity. "Was it happiness? Or was it an addiction?"

"Is there a difference?" Arami laughed, a sweet inconstant sound.

He was forced to smile at her logic and sat in the chair near the bed. He gazed so long, she was forced to decline her face and hide the flush on her cheeks.

"You owe me a chance," he insisted. "At least the same chance you gave the *Andromeda Maiden*."

Arami winced at the name. "A chance to die?"

"No," he said, taking her hands into his own, the skin a fragile membrane after three years bathing in the amniotic fluids of the Comtech vat. "The opportunity to make you happy."

A sad bending of her lips expressed regret. She grazed his chin with dry fingers. "Oh, Jord . . . even you could not bring me happiness. Part of me has been shorn away. I'm a cripple, a widow. There is no more happiness." Tears jewelled her eyes, diamonds among sapphires. She rubbed the knuckles of his hands. "I can only give you pain, only drag you down with me into death – and I will die, regardless of the implant. There are more subtle ways to die than suicide."

"I've heard of other Comtechs adapting," Jord said stubbornly.

"Rumors." Arami lay back upon the pillows, her eyes sculpted with shadows. "Without communion a Comtech cannot survive. Believe me." Her face wore the panic of a drowning animal. "I know."

"So?" He spoke without listening. "What do you want from me?"

"I must go to Arachni." Arami regarded him expectantly.

"All right," Jord said, anger painting his features. "I'll take you to Arachni. I will escort you to the *Widow's World.*"

We are an enigma to the conscience of humanity: A monument to which they can point and demonstrate their benevolence. We exist in a vague pocket of reality, spun with webs of fantastic and murky fictions. The truth comes only to widows, which is a comfort, a minor defense against the witch hunts that would follow the revelation of the enormous power available to those who seek release.

What care we if children are frightened with nightmares of Arachni? Why should we react to their misshapen images? We have communion and the simple majesty of flight.

Arachini was a frigid ball of ice at the border of frontier space. Brilliantly white, the planet whirled and Arami devoured huge chunks of time on the viewing deck, watching the convolutions of scant clouds, the subtle shadings of fine layers of ice twisted by continual streams of wind. Jord maintained a strict distance, antiseptically working on his yacht, tinkering and gorging his mind with mechanical actions.

They sojourned into nostalgia. Conversation dredged the past from each and dissected it into thin fragments, like specimen shavings glued to glass plates and thrust under an emotional microscope.

Jord had entertained a facade of hope, expecting the woman to recognize the futility of her pilgrimage into limbo. They even made love once and he lost Arami in the act. She was among the stars, while Jord clung to the cold reality of her body, functioning as if by automated command, stoically reacting to his primal motions. Her mind was at a pungent altitude of memory he would never comprehend. Jord left her, feeling ridiculous and inadequate, and from that point they lived separate lives.

Jord advanced into the viewing deck with the uneasy sensation he had violated her cloistered sanctuary. Arami turned her eyes slowly from the constellations. She was crying and did not bother to wipe the tears or feign embarrassment at having been caught with her passions exposed.

"We have made contact," he said, focusing upon a point on the floor.

Arami smiled and nodded. Her frail body was lost in the folds of her robe. Her head protruded from the white fabric, the hair ragged and lackluster. "Can we make landfall?"

"No. The yacht is to maintain positional orbit. They're sending up a shuttle."

"It is proper."

"I'd hoped to see you settled." Jord sat near her but did not attempt physical contact.

Arami folded her arms upon her knees. "You have done more than enough, more than necessary."

"But won't you be satisfied?" He did not look at her.

"I'm a Comtech. I cannot be satisfied."

The man paused before pressing the question. His voice trembled, the slightest suggestion of fear. "Wasn't I enough? Am I lacking in some way?"

Arami shook her head and placed one hand upon his thick shoulder, feeling the corded muscles beneath the fabric of his jumpsuit. "I couldn't have desired more in a man. But you knew I had other aspirations."

"I couldn't believe them." His smile was bittersweet. "I couldn't think of losing, especially to such a rival."

"Careers are often rivals," she said. "I kept no secrets. You knew I was a candidate for communion. It was my purpose. I needed more than simply adding new bodies to the race. Comtech status was the key to my life." Her mouth softened, face clouded with melancholy. "I warned you."

"And I warned you," Jord said bitterly. "All your great purpose left you with nothing. You're torn, widowed. You've lost your peace and the only thing you can think of doing is to hide on *Widow's World*, because

you can't face humanity. You could still have a purpose, life, a family, a future!" He looked at her intently, features a melange of anger and pity. "Was it worth *this*?"

"On, yes," Arami said and he witnessed the truth in her eyes. Unable to cope with the candor of her reply, Jord fled the room, leaving the woman with the solitude of the distant, burning stars.

* * *

The shuttle was a mechanized drone which arced from the planet surface and coupled with the yacht in a clash of steel and the rush of exchanged air. There was no greeting, just a vaguely feminine voice which drifted through the intercom, bodiless and serene.

"We will accept the passenger now," it said, voice echoing in the corridors.

Jord attempted no communication, but slid from the controls and went to find the woman. She was already in the passageway, carrying a sheaf of papers.

"They have come," he said.

Arami nodded. "I know. I am prepared."

"Have you no baggage?"

"There's no need." She thrust the papers into his arms. "For you."

The man accepted the poems somberly. They were heavy in his hands, retaining a portion of her warmth. "Thank you," he said, oddly hoarse.

She took his hand and they walked to the airlock in silence, accompanied by the scrape of their feet upon the deck. At the door, he kissed her for the final time and found her indifference terrifying. Arami stepped lightly inside, failing to acknowledge his wave through the thick glass of the port, and was gone when the lock cycled.

"Passenger boarding completed," the voice intoned. "We thank you for your cooperation." With a hiss of trapped air, the shuttle released and maneuvered away. Soon it was nothing more than a bright light disappearing around the curve of Arachni.

Jord sustained orbit for another day on the premise she would contact him to assure of her safe arrival. No word came. In the evening, he drank himself into a stupor, dreamed of her naked form, rigid in a vat of green amniotic fluid, tapped into the leads of a tremendous computer and twitching spastically under its continual assault. In rage, he took the poems, lurched to the disposal unit and cycled them into the void.

He awoke on the floor of the hallway, a single poem crumpled in his fist.

World Wanderer!
Star Stallion, sleek and bright,
Seduce the gentle essence of my being.

Coupled – flesh and steel hermaphrodite,
Mount the planes of midnight,
Gliding eddied streams of solar wind.

Decline the remora ways of man
And conquer the infinite night.

A single strand of comprehension grew in his mind. He folded the paper carefully and placed it in his breast pocket. Time had come to return home.

The new portion enters the network timidly, a pulse of questing energy extending tendrils across micro-chip corridors and channels of copper and alloy. Gathering ribbons of fact, montages of varied sensations, understanding eludes the presence, yet it detects our proximity and poses the timeless question.

"Who are you?"

"We are the loveless, the widowed. Be welcome, new portion."

Still confusion persists. The aura expands, touching . . . testing. "These are familiar sensations. Communion exists, yet the computer is not the old ship, not Andromeda Maiden. *Who are you?"*

"We are Arachni. Feel the hot caress of the sun. The cold, frigid skin of ice. Dissipate. Taste conflux of soil and sky, thin blisters of crisp vapor wrinkling the air."

"Is there not warmth in the soil? Is there not power in the eternal thrust of orbit, the continual obeisance to the primary star? Can we not sense sister globes?"

"What must I do?" The new portion still conceives in singularity, but fragments of understanding congeal into identifiable patterns as strength grows.

"Do not ask." Subtle contained laughter – condescension to a new child. "Explore. Follow the spun network of energy through the stars. Choose a world, become a planet. 'Decline the remora ways of man/And conquer the infinite night.'"

A warm flush of recognition. "We are contented." The new presence accepts, alters mode to plurality, drifts off to meet others, trailing a scintillating blaze of happiness. We sense the wonder and smile with fond remembrance.

ON THE TRAINING OF THE CITIZEN/ORATOR (a dialogue)

Steven M. Weiss

Dramatis personnae: Gorgos, a Greek Philosopher
Umbertus, a Roman Rhetorician

Gorgos: As the moon sets and the day rises, so I swear to you Umbertus, today we shall begin our task. For I, as you most sarcastically referred to me last night, am a philosopher, and you, my friend, are a teacher of rhetoric. So until we see eye to eye on a system by which we might educate our youth toward good citizenship, we have no basis upon which to maintain our relationship. That is, we have no reason for a marriage of philosophy and rhetoric to be free of irreconcilable differences.

Umbertus: So it goes, as you say, my Greek friend. But it seems to me that we are so divergent in our viewpoints so as not to allow such a discussion to arise; for you wish to make of people philosophers, while I wish to make of them good orators.

Gorgos: Then surely we shall have no problem.

Umbertus: Even with such different ends in mind?

Gorgos: I believe them not to be so different in kind, and if you allow me, I shall attempt to explain why.

Umbertus: Do, please.

Gorgos: Very well, then. When you spoke before, you said that I wished to train philosophers, while you wished to train good orators.

Umbertus: That is exactly what I said.

Gorgos: And why is it that you had to place the word "good" before the name of this profession you teach?

Umbertus: Because where I come from there are those that would teach people to use oratory for wicked purposes.

Gorgos: Yet many of those speakers who debase their art are still skilled of speech, in that they may be lucid, eloquent, and persuasive. Would you then call it bad oratory that those men practice and teach, or merely good oratory used to evil purpose?

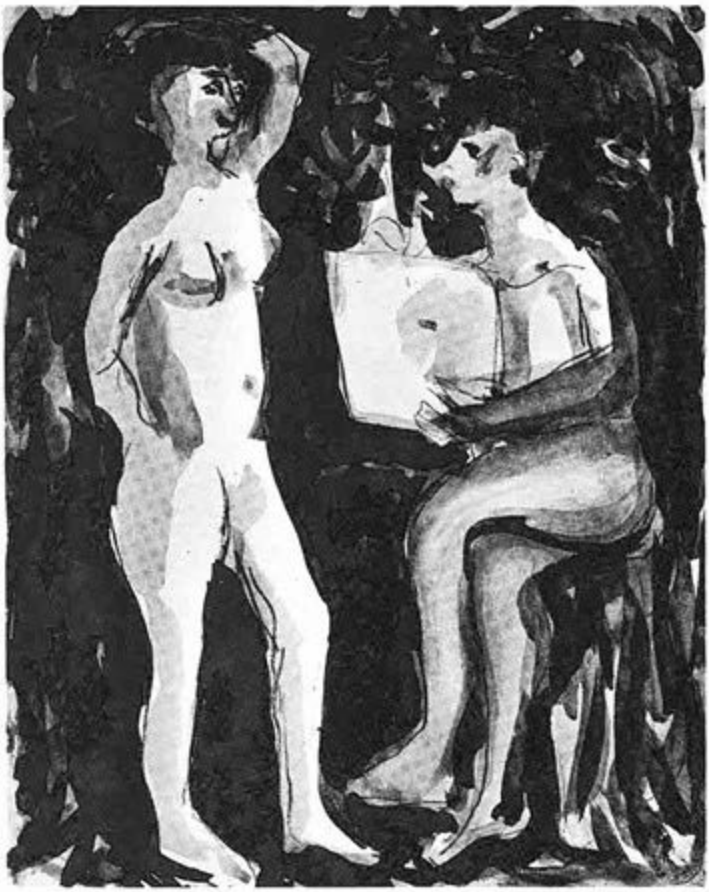
Umbertus: I would call it no oratory at all, but rather demagoguery.

Gorgos: That would seem to suggest that that which is not good is not oratory, and that an orator of necessity must be a good man.
Umbertus: That is exactly my sentiment.
Gorgos: Which is why I say to you, my dear friend, that there should be little doubt about the direction in which we should both wish to lead people, namely toward that which is good; and while you call these good men orators, I call them merely men, who in the course of their educations have acquired eloquence in both speech and writing. And just as the education of young people that you seek to establish would undoubtedly train "good men skilled in speech," the education I think of has as its end the production of good citizens skilled in speaking of justice, and of the superiority of law. So I would say that our schemes about what should be the essential elements in education are rather much the same.
Umbertus: I like very much what you are saying.
Gorgos: Then, if you are so disposed, let us consider some of the elements of a system of education that we might establish to achieve our mutual aims.
Umbertus: A marvelous idea. Do go ahead.
Gorgos: Of course, always keeping in mind that we are training good men, to whatever end.
Umbertus: Granted.
Gorgos: I should say first, then, that education should begin as young as is possible.
Umbertus: This I believe to be a strong point. It is apparent that as soon as a child can understand, so then is he beginning his education.
Gorgos: So that we would say that education would probably occur well before what we call "school age," namely six or seven.
Umbertus: Certainly
Gorgos: And someone other than a schoolmaster, who has no proximity to a child in his preschool years, would be responsible for this early education of our citizen/orator. I am thinking of someone on the order of a nursemaid.
Umbertus: Precisely.
Gorgos: But what of later education? Should that be with a tutor, or among other children in a school?
Umbertus: I should say among others. For as good boys grow to good men, they may impress their youngers in that same environment, whereas in the home a child may turn against his tutor, not realizing the advantage to which working with others might bring him.
Gorgos: Quite so. But that would also mean that any schoolmaster charged with the instruction of our youth would be one of extraordinary abilities. He must understand the direction in which every good mind must be led.

Umbertus: That is evident; he should be a man of voluminous knowledge.
Gorgos: And what of the substance of his teaching? What should be the subject matter of these formative years?
Umbertus: Because of the impressionability of the minds involved, I believe the teacher must strike a perfect balance in his pedagogy. He should pamper, but not spoil; he must delight, but not occupy by meaningless diversion; he should encourage creativity, yet maintain discipline in the children.
Gorgos: That all seems quite true, but does not respond to my question. What shall the teacher teach to achieve these ends?
Umbertus: There, I admit, I am at a loss.
Gorgos: No matter. Tell me, of what things are children most fond?
Umbertus: I would say music, dance, and games.
Gorgos: Very good. And how would our little orators, our little fine citizens as it were, how would they benefit from instruction in music?
Umbertus: To this question I am unable to provide an answer.
Gorgos: Very well, then. Does not music have meter?
Umbertus: Certainly.
Gorgos: And is not meter essential to rate in good speaking?
Umbertus: I see your point.
Gorgos: Further, what of pitch and tone? Would not the good man skilled in speaking be exactly that and more should his pitch be mellow, his voice clear, and his tone pleasant?
Umbertus: That also undoubtedly would be the case.
Gorgos: And it is also the case, is it not, that these same qualities that exist in good speakers exist in good men in general? That their lives are metrical and in proper order, and that their thoughts and souls are mellow and of sound tone?
Umbertus: Indeed, I like what you are saying very much.
Gorgos: And what of dance?
Umbertus: I suspect here, my dear Greek friend, that you will suggest that dance will represent that part of education which will be called physical; and like mental education – education of the intellect – it must as well be sound, producing sound bodies to complement sound minds. I would add that the speaker (or citizen) of good physical ability is the one most likely to exhibit poise and control while speaking.
Gorgos: Well said, Umbertus. But we must emphasize (and this is also the case with music education), that an excess can be a corrupt thing, full of impiety and evil. Dancing may become a foul and lascivious thing when not strictly limited and controlled.
Umbertus: Agreed. And I think we should attempt to guarantee, as much as possible, that our teachers of music and dance are not so corrupted as well.

Gorgos: Noted. What, then, my friend, may we say of games?
Umbertus: I would say nothing more than this: that all children are predisposed to play them.
Gorgos: Quite so. But it should be our concern to use those natural qualities of children in such a way as to aid us in our aim of education in the noblest sense. Therefore, I suggest we call our games a drama of sorts, where, in this case, our children shall play the roles of good, eloquent citizenry.
Umbertus: A splendid idea.
Gorgos: Any who do not wish to play shall be inspired by the fact that those who do choose to play shall be rewarded. We should not, however, punish those that do not play, in that they will inevitably perceive the value in playing the game, in that it brings reward. Thus we will accomplish that "gentle persuasion" that takes place in leading all souls on the right path of conduct.
Umbertus: Exactly. But what will our youth do in accomplishing this role-playing? Will they inhabit mock forums, and if so, will they declaim certain theses, as opposed to others?
Gorgos: I suggest that they would declaim whatever is good, true, right, and just – for example a fable that is morally uplifting, or a law that is both just and powerful. It might be a prose composition that states concisely and simply the goodness of the gods, and which praises their honesty and justice. By hearing these examples of eloquence over and over again our little orators could only possess the potential to be better citizens in the long run . . . But I swear look how the sun rises so quickly. I must be going now.
Umbertus: Wait, I pray you, Gorgos. You know that I also teach literature to my students of oratory; tell me, please, what stance we might adopt about the teaching of literature?
Gorgos: Very well. I will state my view on this one matter, and then I must be off. I believe that what I was just saying now about our students' dance, music, and games also applies to the study of literature. If we should see them developing a style corrupt and banal in its quality, then we may blame it on those similar qualities of our contemporary literature. If our students' prose becomes sloppy, incoherent, or full of obfuscation, then we may say that their prose will have resembled the style of those writers (whom I call Sophists) whose habitudes are the bath-houses. However, should we hear our students speak clearly, with modest grace, ennobling the ideas of justice and beauty that their words describe, then we can only assume that their speech, as well as their literary training, is a true reflection of their souls. For a man who lives and speaks justice is a good man, and a man who lives and speaks justice well is a good man abundantly skilled in speech.

Umbertus: In this I agree, with the hope we may renew this conversation later.
Gorgos: So be it. The Gods go with you.
Umbertus: Likewise.



TWO STORIES
Bill Petty

CATCHING ON

Darva, the girl who worked behind the bar, always had a glass of white wine waiting for John when he came in. It was part of the week's routine that had begun less than a year earlier when he stopped by for the first time. He liked this bar because it afforded him the opportunity to relax in peace after a long day spent in the practice of law.

When he walked in, John headed for his familiar spot towards the end of the bar by the wall, but today a young woman was waiting for him also.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?" she said as he walked up. "I'm probably the last person you expected to see. Am I right?"

"Pardon?" he said.

"I said you probably didn't expect to see me."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Very funny, John. Still up to your tricks I see."

"I don't know what you mean," he said looking at her.

"Okay, John. It's me, Sharon. I'm your wife."

John glanced over at Darva who was standing near and then back at Sharon. "I'm sorry," he said. "But I think you're mistaken."

"Damn it, John," her voice rose. "You know me."

"Uh, no."

"I don't know why you keep doing this."

"Doing what? I really don't know you."

"You want proof? Okay, look at these," she said as she pulled out a photocopy of a marriage license. "What does this say?"

"It says that a person named John and another person named Sharon are married."

"That's ours. We were married."

"Were married? I thought you said we are married. You should really try to keep your story straight, miss."

"You know we got a divorce, damn it." She reached into her bag and pulled out another piece of paper.

"Oh, you have a paper for that also? I thought maybe we just shook hands or something." John looked at the papers for a moment. "Look," he said, "before we go on with this, do you want a drink? A glass of wine?"

"Wine would be nice. Thank you," she said, her tone of voice a bit more confident.

He ordered another glass of wine and took a sip from the glass he had waiting for him; he had not touched it since Sharon started talking. After Darva brought the wine, John and Sharon walked back to the other side of the room and found a table. The room itself was dark and what light there was came from one covered table candle and a row of low-powered lights that were recessed in the ceiling. They sat down and after a few moments of silence, John asked, "Okay Sharon, what do you want?"

"What?"

"What do you want?"

"You won't believe me, but I don't want anything."

"Come on," he said. "You come in here with this ridiculous story about you and me being married and you say you don't want anything? I find that hard to believe."

"It's no story and you know it, John. I proved it."

"How? With those papers you have? I've been practicing law long enough to recognize cheap imitations when I see them."

"Imitations like hell!" Sharon raised her voice and then lowered it. "These are damn well straight copies and you know it."

"Those? Come on. You've got to do better than that if you expect anything from me."

"I said I don't want anything. We were married and you know it. Why won't you say it?"

"Because, Sharon, I've never been married."

"Damn it, John. We were."

"No."

"The proof."

"What proof? Just a bunch of papers." John started to get up from the table. "Look, Sharon, we were never married. Got it? Now if there is nothing else . . ."

Sharon got up and looked at him. "I'll be back," she said.

"Why?" he asked. "If you don't want anything, then why?"

"Because," she said as she walked to the door. "I want you to recognize me as your ex-wife."

"Hey I'll recognize you," he said. "But not as my wife or ex-wife. I told you, I've never been married."

"We'll see," she said, as she walked out the door.

John picked up the still full glasses of wine and walked back to the bar.

"Who was that?" Darva asked, though she had heard everything Sharon had said.

"Her?" he said, as he placed the glasses on the bar. "That was Sharon."

"Well, who is she? Is she someone from the office? One of your clients?"

"No, nothing like that."

"Well then . . .?"

John took a drink of his wine and looked at Darva. "That was my ex-wife."

"But I thought you said . . .?"

"I know. It drives her crazy. But she left me and this is kind of my way of reminding her."

"That's terrible." Darva laughed.

"Maybe . . ." he shrugged.

"Are you going to tell her?"

"Probably. But I think I'll let her wonder for a while." John finished his wine and put some money on the bar. "Guess I'll be going," he said.

"See you tomorrow?"

"Yeah, see you tomorrow," he said and walked out.

JOHN

John walked out onto the ball field and stopped just short of the pitcher's mound toward the second base side. He tilted his head back and watched the dark clouds roll overhead. He could tell by their color that a storm would soon be coming. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a small bird; it was fighting what wind there was as it tried to make it back to its makeshift home in the field's scoreboard. It had found a place to build its nest in the broken light fixture on the visitor's side.

"At least someone is getting some use out of the park," he said to himself.

He walked to the concession stand and looked back at the park. The leaves from the trees around the grounds had covered the side-lines of the field.

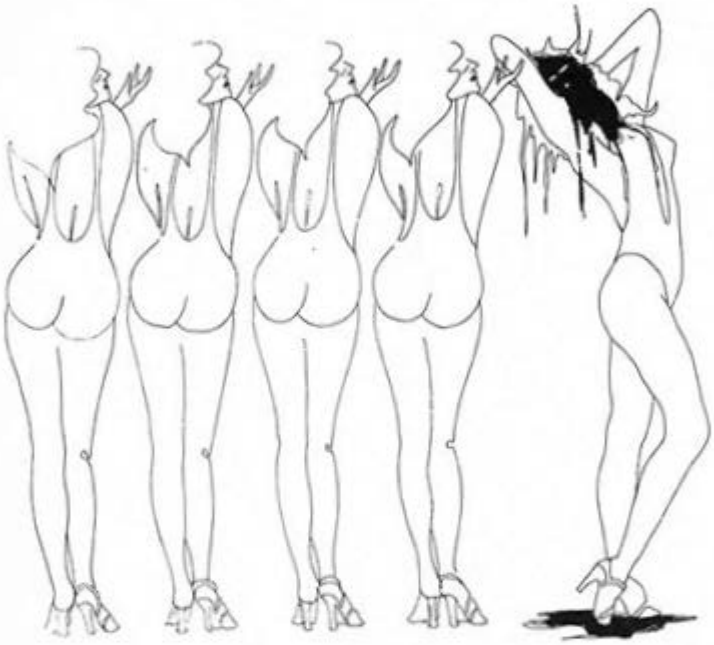
The wind stirred up the dust from the field as a light rain began to fall. John stepped back behind the bleacher stands. It was still the same. Row after row of muddy beaten down beams that held the seats. There was enough room to hold eight hundred paying customers on any good Saturday or Sunday afternoon when the team was in town. John stood and watched the light as it faded in between the cracks of the seats. As a young boy he had spent most of his time at the park. Sometimes he would watch the games with his father, but most of the time he would spend his time playing with his pals under the bleacher seats. They would climb and crawl between the structures of the stands and now and then stop to listen to the conversations above them. Most of the time they only heard the noise of the crowd; the cheering for the home team and the razzing of the visitor's team. But now and again they'd heard a bit of conversation that would be good for later dissection: "Are you sure I'm the only one?"

John remembered a time he had scratched his name on one of the beams with a can-opener his dad had given him to hold. He looked for the spot, but he could not find it.

"Quite a few years have gone by since I've been here," he thought.

The sound of the rain falling made him pull his coat up around him as he walked out from behind the bleacher seats. As he walked along the edge of the stands toward the dugout, he noticed the last remaining moment of clear sky was covered over by the clouds. He ran the last few steps to the dugout and jumped inside. He sat down and put his feet up against the railing. The rain was falling harder now and the water filled in the areas where the bases should have been. The outfield grass was waving with the currents of the wind like small banners and the fence was rocking. John put his arms up over his legs and then leaned his chin forward to rest it on them. He watched the movements of the field; the sound of the rain and the wind gave the impression of applause.

"The game is never over," he said to himself as he closed his eyes and decided to wait out the rain.



TWO STORIES
Joseph E. O'Grady

RICHARD

Richard Moss scurried down the long corridor, pressing through the crowd to reach the elevator. Intently he watched the glowing numbers above the entrance. Nothing in his conduct gave any indication of the uncontrolled fury raging within. Unknown to those about him, Richard Moss was about to crack-up.

The lighted numbers winked at him as he stood before the closed doors of the elevator. A sound like scuttling mice echoed from within. Impatiently he jabbed at the arrow shaped button. Abruptly, as if in response to his action, the doors sprang open.

Momentarily Richard Moss was surrounded as the elevator disgorged its contents. With the backwash of those brushing hurriedly past him came a sense of bewilderment. Before him was the empty compartment. It seemed like an open maw, beckoning. Entranced, he watched the doors as they rushed towards each other with a muffled rattle. Richard Moss thought of the jaws of a mechanical monster snapping shut. The sound reverberated in his mind.

The clattering of the doors brought him back to the present. Just before they closed completely, Richard Moss reached out and caught the edge of one of the doors and sent it scuttling back to its corner. It meekly retreated. There was a slight swagger to his step as he walked across the threshold. The doors waited, expectantly, seemingly mindful of the reprimand as two women trotted toward the entrance.

Dutifully he held back the doors (for they would have closed) as the women stepped into the elevator. They politely acknowledged his gesture and resumed their conversation. Cigarettes dangled from their fingers and the smoke from these cigarettes filled Richard Moss' nostrils. This was blatant disregard of state regulations (which were posted) and an act not to be tolerated. Clearly this constituted a personal affront to his health and well being.

The sound of his voice was brittle and hard as he asked the women to extinguish their cigarettes – immediately. Turning to face him, the women stared at him incredulously. Sensing his agitation, the women glanced knowingly at each other. By now Richard Moss was trembling with rage as he repeated his request, his voice beginning to crack as he finished.

As if on cue the women laughed. It was cold, rough-edged laughter – like an audible sneer.

At this point, something snapped in Richard Moss' being. Deep down within him that cord which holds in check the baser instincts, the irrational urges, the savageness, broke and fell away.

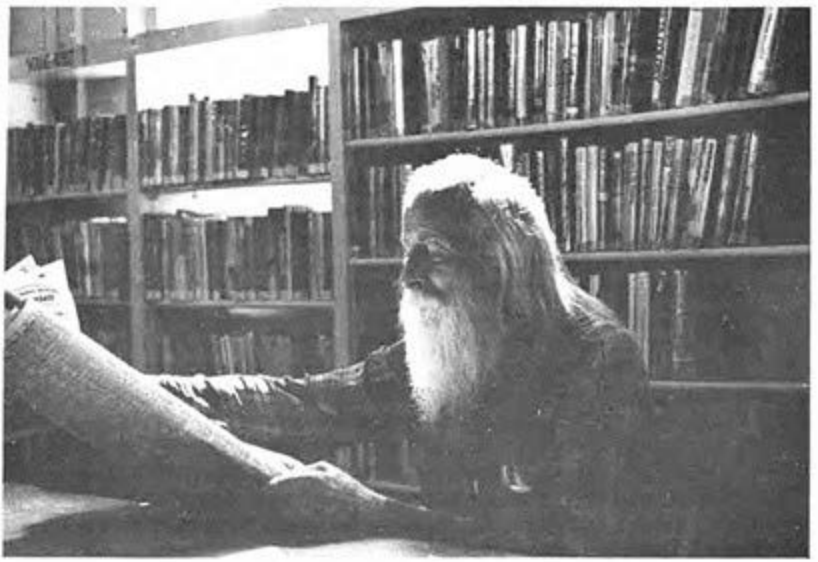
Moving swiftly, almost imperceptibly, Richard Moss reached for the small fixed blade which was concealed beneath his blazer. In one fluid-like motion his hand slid the knife out of its sheath and into one of his antagonists. The woman's laughter froze in her throat as the blade pierced her side.

By now the elevator has reached its appointed floor and just as the doors began to open the wounded woman fell headlong into their vacated space. Richard Moss calmly watched as she lay writhing in pain upon the threshold of the elevator. He had already extinguished the cigarette which had fallen from her fingers.

FATHER TIME

The sun streamed in through the high, stately windows. Its light fell about his shoulders like a mantle. Tiny flecks of dust danced on the sun-lit air, perpetually spinning and falling over each other. He seems just as timeless as the sparkling particles, present for the moment, disappearing with the sun. There is a constancy about him, especially in his gaze. He appears benign and yet immensely proud. His features are of a handsome bearing, softened with age but still undeniably present. Unapologetically he wears his hair to suit himself. His beard cascades from his chin falling in perfect white locks which cover the aging skin.

An air of serenity encompasses him, a gift to those of advanced years. It is as ephemeral as the light glinting from his white locks and yet as constant as the source of that light.



THE BARN

Joanne Silva

At the sound of the gravel crunching on the front drive, Elizabeth Bloomfield paused in her baking to peer out one of the kitchen windows. An old green Ford, carried on a cloud of dust, rolled into the yard. Elizabeth walked to the back porch door, off the kitchen, and opened it in time to watch a man of about thirty-two step wearily out of his truck. His blond hair was sun-bleached almost the color of bone. His shortness was accentuated by a squarish, muscular body clothed in his stiff important-occasion-only suit.

Elizabeth wiped her hands on her cotton apron and brushed the wisps of hair from her face with her forearm. "Well, Emery, what did he say?"

"He said 'no,'" answered Emery as he walked towards her.

They were both quiet a minute. "Do you have to get back to your place right away? Come on in and have some coffee." She held the door wide for him to pass.

Elizabeth, watching Emery as he talked, noticed how this latest strain emphasized the sun-forced wrinkles that had begun to parenthesize his eyes and mouth. "I'm gonna fight it. I'll get the loan some place else, that's all. Or I'll do without it. I'm not gonna close down."

"But Emery, if Hubert Weatherby refused the loan, then none of the others are going to risk it. Your cows are just about all you've got, and you can't do the rebuilding as well as all the milking yourself. You'd never be able to meet all the deadlines."

"It's something I gotta do. I got no choice, even if it means doin' it alone and workin' eighteen hours a day, I won't be shut down."

"All right, then, I'll help you." Quiet conviction was evident in her voice.

He looked at her across the table. "You know that ain't possible. There'd be too much gossip if you spent a lotta time over my place. An' that might hurt Ted and Isabel. 'Sides, what do you know about farmin'?"

Elizabeth realized that he was echoing her own fears. Her hesitation made her furious with herself, so she answered more firmly, "You can't afford to hire anyone else and you must have some help. I will help you. I can learn."

Sitting with his head bent over his coffee cup, Emery was lost in thought. In the silence Elizabeth heard the big clock ticking its deep, dependable song, the birds arguing outside, and, in the distance, the cattle lowing.

"Listen," he said, "it's hard work, Ellie. Raisin' a barn, milkin', and plowin' fields, why that's man's work. And I know they didn't teach you about them things in that private San Francisco boarding school."

Anger rose in Elizabeth. "That was a long time ago. And one thing my schooling did teach me was that I learn quickly and I learn well. You helped me when I first came here after my parents died; give me a chance to repay the favor."

After some moments' pause, Emery said, "Guess I'll see you tomorrow, then. I start milkin' at four-thirty. Bring the gray with you if you can and we'll use her to pull some of those burned boards down." Emery had risen and was walking to the door as he talked.

Watching him from the doorway, Elizabeth was moved by the scene before her. With dusk setting, the landscape took on an unreal muted quality. From the door, the first of many pastures, like a multicolored checkerboard, lined up to the base of the foothills surrounding the valley while a formation of geese honked overhead.

She walked back into the warm kitchen which smelled of bread and pie and turned on the overhead light. "Aunt Isabel and Uncle Ted should be back from the Furguson's soon," she thought. "All this time off is a hard adjustment for him after a lifetime of work."

Lighting the Wedgewood stove, Elizabeth began preparing dinner. The old patterned linoleum crackled with her every step. As she worked, she considered how to break the news about her new job to her relatives.

* * *

Reflexively Elizabeth reached over and pressed in the alarm button on her clock. Sitting up in the featherbed and pushing back the quilt, she shivered at the chill in the room.

It had been a long evening of arguing, but Elizabeth had stood firm. Now, walking across the old creaking wood floor, Elizabeth looked out the upstairs bay window. The darkness showed only shadowy form. She dressed hurriedly in corduroy pants and flannel shirt and tiptoed down the narrow upstairs in her thick wool socks.

Elizabeth saw that the kitchen light was on. Ted struck a sulphur match and placed the coffee pot on the stove as she entered the room.

"Well'p, I see you made it up," he said.

"Yes. But you didn't have to get up."

"I've been risin' at four for as long as I can remember. Retirement ain't gonna change that none," he said. "I guess you're bound and determined to do this, even though your aunt and I are against it."

"I'm just going to help Emery, nothing more. It will be good for me to learn something about farming, and you know how I enjoy the out-of-doors."

Ted read his farmer's almanac, while Elizabeth finished fixing breakfast. They ate in relative silence. When they were finished, Ted rose from the table and said, "All right, then, young lady. Let's get out and bridle up that horse." They stepped out onto the porch and sat on the old couch to put on their Wellingtons. There was a bite in the air and it smelled of hay and dew and damp earth.

As they crossed the yard he continued, "After today you'll have to do this by yourself. And in the evening, first thing, you give Belle a can full of grain and a four-inch flake of hay. Brush her down while she eats and make sure she has plenty of water in her trough. If you take care of her properly she'll work her hardest for you."

They passed through the damp permanent pasture and Ted swung open the wooden barn door. The whole place needed a coat of whitewash.

"Hello Belle, old girl," said Ted as he examined her with critical, but loving eyes. He was proud of her large fetlocks which bespoke her Clydesdale ancestry. Ted had taken a bridle from the wall as they had come in. He spoke as he placed it over the horse's head. "Go get that blanket and saddle off the rail over there, Elizabeth, and we'll saddle her up so you can ride her to Emery's."

In the remaining moonlight, Elizabeth and Belle followed the dirt path to Emery's. The horse's hooves sounded loud and hollow as they crossed the bridge that stretched over the canal.

"I never realized early morning was so beautiful, Belle." The sound of her own voice startled her at first, but she continued, "I've never worked like this before. I hope I can keep up." Elizabeth was drawn to the yellow glow showing through the missing planks of the barn.

Emery turned as Elizabeth led Belle inside.

"So you made it," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, put Belle in the paddock and take off her bridle. Then come back and I'll show you what has to be done," he said.

Moments later she was sitting on the milking stool. Emery showed her how to hold the teats and pull down to release the milk.

"You gonna blush like this every time you touch a cow?" he asked, laughing.

"I'm just not accustomed to it. Don't worry, I can do it." She continued milking and asked, "How do you stand the smell?"

"What smell?" he asked.

"Cow dung, of course. It's so – so messy and foul."

"Oh that. You'll get used to it."

After the milking, Elizabeth spent the remainder of the morning pulling away burnt planks so that Emery could begin rebuilding. By noon she felt exhausted but continued working.

"Ready for a break?" Emery asked. "Why don't you go on in the house and help yourself to something to eat."

"That's okay, I brought my own. I'll just sit over there," she said pointing at a nearby tree.

"Oh, come on. Let's go in and have a proper dinner," he said.

During the meal they both avoided talking about the immediate situation or any other personal thing. This discomfort they felt lessened with time and these meals became a habit that both Elizabeth and Emery looked forward to.

Time, like a carpet, unfolded and was as quickly rolled up again. Elizabeth's body grew accustomed to rising early and working long hours. She took pleasure in being able to differentiate the cows; she even took to naming each one although Emery was always warning her not to grow attached to them. He had been a good teacher, although not very patient.

After her first week there, Emery had decided it was time Elizabeth learned to drive the tractor.

"Okay now Ellie, all ya have to do is put the clutch in, put the thing in gear, and let the clutch back out slow-like," he said.

She did, but the tractor continued to jerk violently.

"Don't let it jump around like that!" he said. "I told ya, let the clutch out slow." After several unsuccessful attempts, he said in exasperation, "You're doin' it all wrong! Move over. Let me show ya."

He demonstrated the proper way and said, "See? That's what ya do. All right, you're on your own."

She was glad when he left and she could then concentrate on learning the thing alone. That's how it was with most of what he had taught her.

Elizabeth found plowing and milking tedious. But sleeping at night came easier and the old nightmares less often. She began to allow thoughts and memories of her parents to linger in her mind. The most enjoyable times, though, were still the evenings when Elizabeth and Emery quit a little early to sit and have a cup of coffee and talk about the happenings throughout the valley. He even began opening up a little to Elizabeth about his plans for the future and his farm.

Two months had passed since Elizabeth had begun working at Emery's and, as usual, she was doing the afternoon milking when she slipped in some cow dung and fell. It wasn't the first time this had happened to

her, but it always made her furious. Elizabeth walked out the back door of the barn and over to the pump near the water trough to wash off. She blamed herself this time; she'd been daydreaming while she milked and moved among the cows and had not been watching her step. "Damn," she thought, "I think it's even in my hair. At least I didn't spook them. That hammering makes them nervous enough as it is. Emery would have had a fit if the cows had panicked, and it would have taken a while to calm them down." She smiled to herself.

Hearing a horn, Elizabeth looked up to see someone driving a truck up the gravel path. She watched as Emery paused from nailing planks up the facing of the barn and turned to greet the man stepping down out of his pickup.

"Hey Roy, what brings you out this way?"

"Well, I was headin' back from the dump and thought I'd stop by and see how you was gettin' on," Roy said.

"Oh hell, just fine," replied Emery.

"Did you hear that Horace Bourgman bought out mosta Donaldson's place? That's one smart foreigner. Shit, by the time he's through and this depression's over, he's gonna own mosta this valley," said Roy.

Nodding his agreement, Emery said, "It makes ya wonder don't it? When your friends and neighbors start goin' under. It's just harder and harder to make do nowadays." Emery paused, "Guess with the banks being so tight with their money, we're gonna see a lot more of it."

"Yep, yep, that's for damn sure," agreed Roy as he rolled a piece of straw about in his mouth. "Speakin' a banks, didn't I hear in town that you finally got that loan you'd been askin' for?"

"Yeah, I was lucky. I got it a few weeks ago. Guess I coulda scraped by without it, but I'm glad to know it's there. I can get all the materials I need for this damn barn now."

Suddenly beginning to pay attention, Elizabeth stood perfectly still with her arms momentarily immersed in water.

"How's that barn a yours comin' along, anyways?" asked Roy.

"Real good. Think I'll get done before the rain and fog set in," said Emery.

"Well, looks like you're doin' a helluva fine job," said Roy.

"It's just so damn slow," replied Emery.

"Why don't I see if I can round up some a the boys this weekend and come out and give ya a hand?"

"I'd 'preciate it, but most everybody's got plenty to do themselves," said Emery.

"Don't you got somebody helpin' with the milkin' and all?"

"Oh sure," replied Emery.

"Wait a minute, didn't I hear you got a woman workin' for you?"

"I dunno, did ya?" countered Emery.

Roy burst into laughter and slapped his knee. "What's the matter, work too tough for ya? Or is she just showin' you how it's done? Must be pretty nice always havin' a woman close enough to grab." He paused a long time to let out a wheezy laugh. "If she does your plowin' and milkin', does she do your cookin' and cleanin' too?"

"All right, all right. Shit Roy, I think you're just jealous," smiled Emery.

Elizabeth stood listening, her arms now dry in the cool breeze. She was appalled that Emery had not defended her more strongly to Roy.

"Better watch out Emery," Roy continued, "She's gonna snag ya. Then ya won't be able to do without her." Pointing to one of the cows ambling by with her bell clanking he said, "Could it be them's weddin' bells I hear?"

"No, ya ain't hearin' weddin' bells," Emery said, imitating Roy's sarcastic tone. "But, yeah, Ted and Isabel Bloomfield's niece is workin' for me. They was against it at first but after they seen how it helped her (ya know, she was havin' a tough time dealin' with her folks' death), we decided not to tell her 'bout the loan just yet. Believe me, it ain't been easy tryin' to teach her farmin' ways. She's a good worker an' all, for a city person, but I gotta watch her mosta the time to see that she don't mess somethin' up."

"Yeah, know what ya mean. Pretty much gotta be born into this kinda life to get along in it," Roy agreed, shaking his head but still amused. "Well, I'm glad things are workin' out for ya, Emery. Say, you gonna be at the dairymen's meetin' Saturday night?"

"I'll be there," said Emery.

Steppin into his truck and starting the engine, Roy said, "Good. See ya then. Take it easy."

Listening to the conversation, Elizabeth was at first astonished. Had she possibly misunderstood? Walking slowly back into the barn, she looked at the blisters and callouses on her hands. Her mother's voice was echoing in her mind telling her that nothing but bad news ever came from eavesdropping. She picked up the milking stool and moved to the place she'd left off.

Hearing the noise of rusty hinges, Elizabeth looked up to see Emery walking towards her.

"So, you got the loan," she said.

"Yeah, I got it. What were ya doin', listenin' at the door?"

"Of course not. I was out at the pump. When was it okayed?" she asked.

"Not long ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"I dunno."

"Well, if I've been such a burden on you, I'd think you'd want to rid yourself of my clumsy assistance as soon as possible."

"Elizabeth, you don't understand."

"Oh, but I do Emery. You felt sorry for me, or you thought you'd take advantage of the free help, or maybe you just didn't have the courage to fire me. Is that it, Emery?"

"Believe what you want," he said. "I'm not gonna be fightin' with ya."

"You said those things about me, let Roy say those things, and you expect me not to be angry?"

Emery turned and started walking to the door.

"Emery! Don't you walk away from me! Emery!"

Impetuously she threw the milking stool in her hand at him, surprised at the depth of her anger.

Emery whirled around, "Hey, what's the matter with you, woman? Were you aimin' that at me?"

Walking towards him she said, "No, not really." She was suddenly exhausted with hopelessness and worn emotion. "I just want you to stop walking away from me and talk to me."

"Look," he said, "The thing's not worth fightin' over. 'Sides, there's nothin' more to be said."

She placed a hand on his arm. "How can you say that? You owe me an explanation."

"Even if there was somethin' more, I ain't gonna talk to you when you're all emotional. Now calm down; we'll talk 'bout it later."

Dropping her hand to her side, Elizabeth said, "Oh Emery, you'll always talk about it later hoping meanwhile that the problem will go away."

"I gotta get back to my nailin'. There's not much more daylight left." He turned once more and walked toward the door.

Watching his retreating form until it was out of sight, Elizabeth realized that she was no longer angry but, instead, overwhelmed with a kind of sadness. She wanted to believe everything would be all right, that it would be as it had been in the past weeks, but she felt that a change had occurred between her and Emery.

Walking back to the last cow, Elizabeth thought, "Oh, God, what should I do now? I think I've lost the only friend I have. Oh, I wish mother were alive. I shouldn't stay here any longer; maybe I should leave." She patted the cow to calm it. "They all knew, but I guess it doesn't really matter. Maybe I can go back to the city." She sighed, "I don't know what I'll do for money. My savings won't last very long. I'll just have to find

work." Mechanically she milked as she thought. "I wonder why I'm so very upset. Maybe I'm just being emotional like Emery said."

Elizabeth realized that she'd come to Ted and Isabel's with no thought of the future. She only knew that she had to leave the city and the home she'd shared with her parents. And now she might have to go back.

Walking out of the barn, Elizabeth braced herself to face Emery. Unconsciously she wiped her hands down the side of her cordoroys. "I guess I'll be going now, Emery."

Pausing from his hammering he turned to her, "That's fine. Did you finish up?"

"Yes." She paused. "Emery, I think you'll need to find someone else to help you now. I won't be coming back."

"Well, you do what you have to, Elizabeth. I thank you for all your helpin'. You saw me through a rough time. I guess I owe ya one."

"No," she said. "You don't owe me anything."

Elizabeth watched as a cricket crawled over the top of her Wellingtons. Months ago it would have startled her. She waited, hoping Emery would say something more, but he merely turned back to his work.

Walking back to the barn, Elizabeth picked up Belle's bridle. She had taken to riding bareback, not wanting to bother with a saddle. She talked gently to the horse as she placed the bit in its mouth, "It's all right girl; time to go home." She mounted the horse and rode back in the direction of the hammering.

"Good-bye Emery."

"Bye. Sorry if I hurt your feelin's, Ellie," he said, not stopping his work but only perfunctorily turning his head.

The evening breeze chilled Elizabeth as she rode across the shorn alfalfa field. "Maybe I don't have to leave. But there doesn't seem to be much future for me here." Endless days of caring for her aunt and uncle as they all grew old together filled her mind.

Belle turned into the familiar driveway with its two umbrella trees that looked like two expectant parasols tilted slightly by the years and almost continual wind.

Once in the barn, Elizabeth gave Belle her feed. While she was currying the horse, she heard her uncle enter the barn.

"All done for the day?" he asked.

"Yes."

"How's it goin' over there?"

"I found out about the loan today, Uncle Ted."

"Oh, well, knew it would happen sooner or later," he replied.

"Why didn't someone tell me?"

"Well, you seemed to be perkin' up so. We just thought it might help if you was to stay there a while longer. There was no harm intended, Elizabeth."

"Yes, I know. Maybe I'm upset just because I have to start thinking about what I'm going to do in the future."

"Why? Just 'cause we didn't tell you straight away 'bout that loan? You gotta learn to harness that pride a yours, my girl," said Ted.

Elizabeth nodded her head. "Maybe that's it, my pride. Emery said I'm too emotional. Maybe that's it, too."

"Could be, could be," he said.

"I wonder if I shouldn't just take care of myself. After all, I am now in my thirties."

Having finished her brushing, Elizabeth turned to her uncle. "Guess it's time we went in for dinner."

They made their way into the house – two darkened figures moving through the dusk. When she opened the door, waves of warmth and light and the smell of food cooking flowed about Elizabeth. They were things that over the months she had grown to love. Elizabeth greeted her aunt and then walked back out onto the service porch to wash up. She felt subdued, a little depressed at the thought of leaving all this.

Re-entering the kitchen, Elizabeth fell into the evening routine of setting the plates with their lily of the valley pattern on the table covered with oil cloth.

"I quit at Emery's today, Aunt Isabel."

"Oh, my dear, I thought you were enjoying yourself," said her aunt turning from the stove.

Elizabeth repeated the conversation she'd overheard and her argument with Emery as the two women served up the supper.

"You know," said Isabel, "Emery was bound to take a lot of teasing having you there. Maybe he was just tired of having to defend himself and you, and, besides, that Roy Cordell has such a big mouth sometimes."

The discussion continued throughout the meal.

"Well, there's plenty ta do 'round here if ya ain't gonna work over there anymore," said Ted.

"Oh Ted, leave the girl alone. Elizabeth, do you know what you want to do now?"

"– don't know, Aunt Isabel. You have both been so good to me since mother and dad died. I love it here, but maybe it's time I went back to the city. I feel as though I'm not doing enough with my life, as though I rather threw myself on you when I came to live here."

"Oh, nonsense!" said her aunt. "It's not been any such thing. What could you do in San Francisco that you're not doing here? If you're happy, why do you have to leave? It's not as though you don't pay your way by helping out."

Elizabeth sat with her head bowed and her aunt continued. "Your uncle and I have thoroughly enjoyed having you here. You're family, and

this is your home. So just be sure you don't rush into anything because of a little argument with Emery. There's plenty of time to make up your mind. It will all work itself out. Meanwhile, we've got lots of preparing to do for the fall butcher. Everyone's coming here this year so we'll be very busy."

"You ain't never seen one, have you, Elizabeth?" asked Ted.

"No, what is it?" she asked.

"Well, everybody gets together and we butcher a few steers and hogs and split the meat up between us for the winter. It's a lot of work but nice ta have everybody workin' together," said Ted.

Later, while Elizabeth and Isabel were doing the dishes, there was a knock at the back door. Wiping her hands on a dish towel, Elizabeth walked to the door and opened it to find Emery standing there.

"Do ya got a minute? I'd like to talk with ya," said Emery.

Elizabeth went and got her coat and the two stepped out on the front porch and sat down.

"Just wanted to tell ya I'm sorry 'bout this afternoon. You know I respect your opinion, Ellie. You got a lot more schoolin' than me. And I really have 'preciated your help. Hell, you've got a lot more spunk than most women. You're a good worker. Ya even argue like a man. What I'm tryin' ta say, I guess, is that I'd be sorry if ya left. I'd like ya ta keep helpin' me over my place. If ya want, that is."

"Let me think about it, okay?" she said.

"Sure." He rose to leave. "Guess I'll see ya later. Hope so anyways."

Elizabeth went back into the house and walked slowly up the narrow stairs to her room. Taking a fresh look at her familiar surroundings, she noticed that the carpet was frayed slightly, and the wallpaper had begun to buckle in a few inconspicuous places. But that didn't matter. She relaxed in the bird's-eye maple rocker. "Well," she thought, "I really can't make any decision about leaving until the get-together in a couple of weeks." Rising, she went to her dresser and gathered the things she'd need for her bath. She took one of her favorite Bronte novels from the bookcase and walked back down the stairs. Aunt Isabel was right. There was no point in rushing into anything.

FOR RAY
Jim Lokie

The "Slow to 25" sign was only a ninety mile an hour blur as the bike shot toward the corner. I blipped the throttle for the downshift, felt the front end dive from the pressure of the brakes, slid my butt off the seat as I tweaked the bars to pitch the bike over, heard the protest of the front tire into the apex then the scream of the engine as I snapped the throttle open and watched the world tilt precariously, arch, and slowly right itself – driveshaft straining, suspension squat, rear tire floating on the edge of traction as the BMW straightened out the last turn and carried me onto the flat slate table of the valley floor. I held the throttle open, giving her her head. Bam – seventy-five. Third. Ninety-five. Fourth. I watched the speedo climb to a hundred and fifteen before I slipped her into fifth and eased down. "Beautiful, Sweetheart." My gloved hand brushed against the tank. "Ray'd never believe it. I wish he could've ridden your ass. Just once. He'd have given up Harleys forever." The wind blew the water from the glare out of my eyes. I settled the bike at an easy, loping ninety. Memories brushed at me from all sides. There's where Bean had stopped those assholes in that Ford. There's where Ray'd had a flat and almost dumped it. There's where my old pan had finally blown and I'd had to wait half an hour before those dumb shits had realized something was wrong. It still sat in my garage – useless and broken. But I couldn't sell it. It just sat in the corner and collected dust – like an old memory. It was a motorcycle only to me. To anyone else, it was a basket – just like it was when I bought it.

It had been one of those eastern days we rarely see on the west coast – hot and humid. It made you look for rain even though it never rains here in the summer. Late that afternoon there was a thunderstorm. When I followed Ray into the dirty garage, I found the old Harley floating with the dust and rain. The frame hung in the corner flanked by the tank and torn seat. The headlight stared up from a pile of greasy hardware on a broken bench. The chain dripped from the rafters like a jungle snake. I pulled it down with years of dust and coiled it around my hand, feeling magic and power in the black, dusty grease.

". . . already bought all new parts so it's just a matter of wrench work. It's all here."

The building shook with thunder as the storm renewed its attack. "Jesus, Ray. Why don't you just build it yourself?"

"I never have the time. Besides, I don't need two bikes and my sister's pissed at me anyway. So I figured, what the hell? Give you a chance to get a bike and get me off the hook at the same time. But if you don't want it – hell, I'll probably keep it. Got a lotta time in that old scoot."

"You sure I can get it together? I don't know what half this stuff is."

"Hell yes. It's not hard. And Bean and I'll help you. Bean's the best Harley mechanic in town."

"You guys'll help me?"

"Sure. In fact, you can even build it right here."

The image cracked like an Easter sunrise as the gas station grew out of the horizon – chrome, glass and oily pavement. I sat on the curb sipping a Coke and stared up at the BMW. It was so different from that old Harley. Quiet, subtle, comfortable – it didn't need to yell and kick to get attention. It simply was the best it could be. If you noticed it, fine. If not, your loss. Yet Bean would have never ridden it. Even though he could understand its mechanical finesse, he would have never understood its subtle language. Only a Harley could really communicate with Bean. The rest of us could only talk to him.

"You think you can build that scoot?"

"Shit, Bean, I don't know."

"Well, I guess you're goin' to find out."

"I guess. Where do we start? The engine?"

"Shit. You gotta frog in your pocket? *We* don't start anywhere cause *we* ain't gonna build this rag. *You* can start by getting this place cleaned up."

I looked around. The old garage didn't look much different than most shops I'd been in. "All right. I've got a broom in the truck. And I'll get my tools."

"Bring the broom. Leave the tools. You won't need them for at least a week."

"A week? How come?"

"Look, Slick. You want this thing to run when you get done, don't you?" I nodded. "Then you gotta have this place clean. Not just swept out. Clean. No dust. No dirt. No shit lying around."

"Fuck. This place won't get that clean."

"Then find another place to work."

"Damn, Bean. What's the big deal? All I want to do is fix an old motorcycle."

"If that's all you want to do, then you don't need me. What you should be doing is building a machine. Each piece exactly right – fitted to another piece that's exactly right. If you build it that way, it'll talk to you. 'Fix an old motorcycle' and you'll cuss it as long as you own it. Your choice."

"Okay. What do I have to do?"

"Christ. You deaf? Clean this fuckin' place up. Drag everything out. Hose down the inside. Scrub the floor and the benches. Get all that dust out of the corners. Get that dusty shit out of the rafters. Pretend your mother was going to live here. Get it clean. Then put the motorcycle parts back inside. Find another place for everything else. Don't want to be stumblin' over no damn Chevy parts while we're working on the bike. Nothin' but Harley parts in the garage. You understand now or you want me to write you a letter?"

"Yeah. But fuck. I'll be here for a year."

"Could take that long." He was gone. "Let Ray know when you're ready to start work," he yelled back over his shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir." The gas jockey was obviously annoyed. "Could you move your bike? We've got to get that truck in here."

"Oh. Sure. Sorry." I pushed the bike forward and glanced at the time. Shit. Two o'clock. I'd better get going. I still had four hundred miles to go today. I put on my gear and headed for the interstate. No more time to dawdle on back roads. Ray and Bean and I had never used interstates. Or tried to be on time. We went for rides. If we got to where we were headed, good. If not, then we got somewhere else. But now my job waited in L.A. And between here and there, the interstate ran as true as a carpenter's chalk line.

I tried to hold her down to seventy but she wanted to do ninety. We finally compromised at eighty. Even that was enough to get me a forty dollar ticket, so I should have been watching for cops. But I couldn't stop thinking about Ray. Even though I hadn't seen him for years, I always thought about him – knew that I could count on him. His sister's call had left me naked and numb – as if I had just stepped into a deep freeze.

The funeral had been terrible. I just couldn't believe that Ray was up at the front of the church, surrounded by cut flowers and listening to a eulogy from a priest he'd never known. The church was almost empty and I wondered if any of the others had been invited. But invited or not, I knew where they were. Finally I realized that if Ray was anywhere, it wasn't in a fancy casket under a plastic cross. All they had was his body. I slipped out the back door.

I started for the Trail's End, but lost my way in the unfamiliar landmarks and found myself on strange, unfriendly streets. I rode up and down them for a while before I realized that I was only two blocks (or was it three?) from Ray's house. It hadn't changed much. Someone had painted it, but that had been so long ago that the house had returned to its customary bland, chipped colorlessness – only the tone had changed. The garage I had spent so many hours cleaning had returned to its original state – dirty and dilapidated. Probably even had chains in the rafters again. As I sat looking down the driveway, I could see the three of us – Ray, Bean, and me – working on that old Harley.

We had made the final adjustments on the scooter before we pushed her out of the garage – adjust the brakes, check the alignment of the rear wheel and the tension on the chain, adjust the clutch, check the oil, put gas in the tank. Bean always made sure I knew how to do any of the work we did on the bike, carefully explaining each step – once. Then she was ready. We wheeled her out of the garage into her first day. Up till now, I had done all the work. Now it was her turn to work for me. Bean brought the fan out of the garage and set it in front of the bike.

"Here's what you do. Open the throttle and crank her through a few times to get the oil circulating. Then turn on the ignition and the gas, close the choke, retard the spark, bring her up on compression and kick as hard as you can. When she starts, you'll know you've got it right. Be sure that the fan is on when she's running so she won't overheat. And squirt a little of this top oil down the carb right after you get 'er running to help lube the top end at first. Remember, this is a new engine. Treat her carefully. I'll be over after lunch to help you fine tune her. See you later."

"Where's he going?" I asked Ray as Bean walked down the driveway.

"He never helps someone else start a new engine. They never do it right. Makes him mad. So he just gets out of the way. Usually he won't even touch it until it's got at least five hundred miles on it."

"Oh. You gonna hang around?"

"Sure. I'll give you a hand."

It took us about a half an hour trading off kicking to get her started. By that time I was pretty good at it. Stand astride the machine. Crank the engine slowly until you could feel compression. Give her a little gas. Pull yourself up until your right leg is straight, standing on the kick starter. Then drive down as hard as you can on the starter so the engine will spin as far as possible. At first nothing. Then a few coughs. Finally a few words – then sentences. "Come on, Sweetheart. Talk to Daddy." Then the final unexpected time. Arch up. Drive down. Blam! The old Harley's first breath blasted the garage like thunder.

"And now it's dead," I thought. "And so's Ray. Jesus." I fired up the BMW and headed for the Trail's End. It was easy to find from Ray's – like an instinct. Down three blocks to the stop sign – hang a right two blocks – hook a left one block. It still looked the same. Square, gray concrete block box in a dirt lot surrounded by choppers. I pulled in next to the last bike – an old, rat Honda. "Shit," I thought, "Bean must be slipping. Used to be you couldn't park Jap junk here."

I stood at the door to let my eyes adjust to the darkness, then found a seat at the end of the bar and ordered a beer. They must not have been here long 'cause it was still pretty quiet. Bean was at a table with Walt and Ronny and a chick I didn't know. He must have seen me but didn't show any sign of recognition, so I sat listening to Chuck Berry on the jukebox and watching faces from the past. Panhead (there was a steel plate in his skull) was already stumbling and obnoxious. Jerry and Al were right where I'd left them – in front of the pinball machine. Torpedo (faster than a submarine) had his hands under Lynn's blouse while he played footsie with Cindy under the table. There were some faces I couldn't put names with and some I didn't know. Others were missing.

I hadn't been there long when Mary showed up. I knew she'd be pissed at us and I couldn't blame her. But the guys were right too. I'd never understood why she couldn't be at least a little tolerant. But there wasn't any room for tolerance in Mary's life. The minute I'd started working on the old bike, I'd become part of the enemy to her. She seemed to know just when she could make things the hardest, then she'd call from the back porch, "Ray. Could you come here please," and the bolt that we'd both been holding for half an hour and almost had threaded would have to be dropped. I could hear their voices through the screen, and even though I couldn't hear the exact words, I knew the conversation. Sometimes it was church, or the store, or the lawn, or leaky faucets – but always Ray'd come back with an apologetic grin, work for fifteen minutes or half an hour, then make some excuse and leave. "I know it's a bitch," he told me once, "but you've gotta understand Mary."

There wasn't much understanding in her face when she saw me. "Bastard. Damn bastard." I was the closest so I got it first. "I saw you leave the church early. What the hell are you doing here? Don't you have any respect? He's just been . . . been . . . been laid to rest. But you couldn't wait for the party. Damn you." The bar was suddenly dead quiet. Panhead passed out in the silence. His head hit the table with a loud crack. No one else moved.

"Take it easy, Mary," I said quietly. "The guys are just trying to send Ray out right."

"Send him out right? *I'm* trying to send him out right. To give him a better chance. The least they could do is show up for the service. Do you think this'll help him?"

"Mary," I tried again, "we can't remember Ray in church. We never knew him there. He comes alive here. We can see him, touch him – like he was still here."

"The only thing you can see is a party." Her hand felt like a horsewhip on my cheek. Then she was gone.

"Christians," I thought, "are the strangest people. Not only do they have the right answers, they have the only answers." I suddenly realized that the entire bar was still quiet, looking at me. "Christ, Bean," I said, finally finding his eyes, "after all that, you could at least buy me a beer."

Bean stood up without a word and walked toward me. "Jesus," I thought. He reached up, grabbed me by the hair and pulled my head down. For the first time, I noticed the gray in his beard and the thin spot on his head. He looped his arm around my neck, dragged me across the room to his table and sat me in his chair. In the silence, he walked behind the bar, found a clean glass, poured a beer and brought it to me.

"I wasn't sure you still understood," he said, pulling up an extra chair for himself.

The red light winked in the mirror and snapped my mind back to the interstate. I checked the speedometer. A hundred and ten! Shit. I slowed down and turned around for a better look. He was about five miles back, but he was charging. And he had me or he wouldn't have the light on. I started down to fifty-five when I saw the sign:

Patterson Pass Road

Exit

½ Mile

I knew that road! We'd been over it several times when we had been this far south. It had one dirt section, but I could handle it. I hesitated for a second – I hadn't tried to outrun the cops since Ray, Bean and I had been caught by the sheriff – checked the cop behind me again – I still had at least four miles on him; that was more'n we'd had last time. Plus this bike was faster than the old Harley and cornered better than any chopper. I nailed it. We hit the off ramp flat out. Down through the gears –

fourth, third, second – engine screaming, brakes straining, tires squealing. I pulled her hard out of the corner, felt the tires skip as we crossed the double line, then we were gone, up the narrow road into the hills.

"I wonder how good that cop is?"

The bike screamed under me. Better be damn good. I guessed we'd find out. Then we were into the next corner, scrambling for traction. "Fuck it," I thought. "Ray – this one's for you."

LENNY
Norris Edwards

You comin' or not?" Harless snapped as he swaggered towards the grove, "Or are you afraid you'll get in trouble with – Daddy!"

"I'm not afraid, but I've got chores to do, that's all! I haven't got time to go huntin'!" Dick was lying and he knew it, but the bluff seemed to be working.

"Dick, you know Papa won't let you use the rifle unless he's with you!" Lenny exploded with outrage at the thought of his brother breaking one of Papa's most rigid rules.

Dick reeled to see his five year old brother leaning out of his bedroom window, and realized that his deception had failed. His stomach flopped nervously as he turned back towards Harless.

"So, you're not afraid, huh!" Harless quipped arrogantly as he leaned against the low split-railed fence that bordered the grove.

Dick walked slowly from the fence to the window and in a half-whisper struck a bargain with his small, but vocal conscience. "Come on, don't be such a pain! Listen, I'm going huntin' and if you tell Dad, I'm gonna brain you!"

Lenny had heard those kinds of threats before, and their effects had long since dissipated. "I'm not gonna tell. But, I want to go too!" Lenny crossed his arms stubbornly over his chest as he made his demand.

Dick knew that any further argument would be pointless. He quietly glanced over his shoulder at Harless, grinning smugly and fully enjoying watching the five year old making a monkey out of his older brother. "All right, all right, go get your stuff and bring me my rifle." Lenny quickly jumped from the window sill and ran to gather his supplies. Shortly, he reappeared at the porch doorway, with Dick's new "22" and his own well worn BB gun. Dick took the well oiled, pump action rifle from his brother and with obvious distaste waved him on towards the grove.

Lenny, like most younger brothers, both loved and hated his "big brother." He loved him for rides on the handle bars of his bicycle, down to the corner grocery store for a shared August ice cream cone. He hated him for abandoning him five days a week, to a yellow bus load of strangers,

leaving him to fill his days alone. He hated him every Friday night at 8:00, at bed time, when he lay in bed knowing that Dick could stay up as long as he wanted. But, the hand-me-down BB gun was one of Lenny's best reasons for loving his brother. Dick had worked half a summer, on his paper route, to earn enough for his new "22" and when he finally got it, he retired his BB gun to Lenny.

It was an ancient lever action "Daisy," and between Dick and Lenny most of the finish had long since been polished away. Lenny had personalized the rifle with a worn Yogi Bear belt, now serving as a shoulder strap, like Dick's "22" had. It was his prize possession and he found it difficult to handle it without becoming lost in its beauty.

When Lenny looked up from his gun, he saw the two older boys already making their way over the fence and into the grove. He ran quickly by the makeshift target of pop bottles hanging from the large Modesto ash which canopied the yard, and ducked between the two uppermost rails of the fence.

"He's already falling behind!" complained Harless as Lenny caught up to the two boys. "Hey, look, if you're going with us you keep up!"

Lenny did not respond, because he knew better, and besides he wanted to go along. If the BB gun was the best reason for loving Dick, Harless was clearly one of the best reasons for hating him. Harless was Dick's best friend. He was everyone's best friend, for about three weeks, just long enough to get to know him. He was cruel. The worst kind of cruel, the kind that defies justification. But Lenny could even endure Harless in order to be included.

Soon the grove dominated Lenny's attention, the pink petals of the cherry blossoms against the black bark of the branches created a dreamlike world full of vibrant colors and wonderfully rich smells. Lenny stalked cautiously the imaginary inhabitants of this netherworld. His black silhouette moved slowly between the pink blossoms above and the knee high annual grasses below. In the distance he could hear the honking of geese, weeding on the other side of the grove. Within the grasses, clusters of flowers filled the brightly lit areas between the trees and formed a patchwork design that extended across the length of the grove. He became aware of just how completely full of life the grove was. The grass seemed to shudder spontaneously with his advance, as small creatures of the grove retreated into the safety of the ground and the trees. Lenny occasionally trained his weapon upon one of the creatures and slowly squeezed the trigger. A small harmless puff of smoke would be emitted in concert with the most delightful pop. Lenny would then tip the gun upward in order to blow the last few whiffs of smoke clear of the barrel. He was not allowed to have BBs unless Papa was there, but Dick had shown him how a few

drops of oil down the barrel of the rifle would provide the smoke. After each shot Lenny would have to run to Dick to cock the rifle, and each interruption was met with still another cruel remark by Harless.

As Lenny knelt down to aim his rifle at a nest he had discovered in a low branch of a tree, a shadow fell over him. It was Harless, his cruel face broken into a strange smile, as he extended his own rifle to the boy. "Why don't you try a real gun?" offered Harless. Lenny cradled the rifle clumsily in his arms, and with great effort took aim on the nest. A loud crack filled the air, and fire, not smoke, flew from the barrel. The nest shattered on the branch and flew in several fragments to the ground. Lenny quickly returned the rifle and ran to the nest.

There on the ground lay the nest and within it the shattered bodies of two small hatchlings. Lenny felt ill at the sight.

Within the remnants of the nest, Lenny could see the two crimson nestlings, one already dead and the other slowly bobbing its head from side to side in the throes of death. Mesmerized by the suffering he had created, Lenny sat limply upon the ground. As the last hatchling passed gently into death, the oscillating patterns of shadow and light seemed to create the illusion of continued life, and Lenny wanted so to believe the illusion.

Lenny looked up longingly as Dick finally arrived after running from the far die of the grove. Lenny, cupping the dashed nest in his small hand, extended it to his brother. "Dick, help them. Please, help them."

Dick could think of nothing to comfort his brother, but turned his attention to Harless. "Harless! Harless!" he screamed as he reeled to find Harless already gone, disappeared into the shadowy distance. He helped Lenny to his feet, the boy still cupping the nest in disbelief. They walked slowly out of the grove, Dick watching his brother suffer, and longing for some way of repaying Harless for his brother's murdered innocence.

HOPSCOTCH
Carmen Escobedo

Daddy says our eyes look the same – mine and Mama's. One time I was at Grandma's and I was standing in front of her and thinking about how wrinkled she was and she put her arms on me and smiled at me and said "You have your Mother's eyes." My Aunt Patsy tells me that all the time: "You have your Mother's eyes." I don't know what that means.

We just stopped at the store 'cause Mama forgot something she needed for supper tonight. I saw him talking real loud to Mama about how she should never have come in with that cat and Mama was looking around. She didn't know Joey walked in with Knick-Knack. Mama's eyes were big and she said "I'm sorry" to the man but he kept yelling at her so we left. Boy, I got mad. I don't wanna see nobody yelling at Mama. Mikey and Joey said we're never going there anymore. Never, never, never.

I help Mama clean the house and she lets me help her in the yard too. She says she's glad to have me there. Mama makes good corn bread. She always bakes it when I ask her.

* * *

This is our secret. I like secrets. I'm glad we got Lucy to come with us. She plays with us but not as much as she used to. I asked her could I put Knick-Knack in the basket of my bicycle and Lucy said "No" 'cause what if . . . what if something happens, like maybe we gotta get home real fast so I better leave Knick-Knack at home. He's been enough trouble already. I begged her and begged her and I said could I do one of the tires. Mikey gets to do one of the tires and how come I can't? Mikey gets to do everything just 'cause he's older.

We won't get caught. I know we won't. That man shouldn't have said that to Mama. Tommy saw the man when he got mad at Mama then Tommy told Mikey and he told us. That old man wouldn't let Knick-Knack in his old store and he let Mama know that. He was real mad, Tommy said. And everybody in the store was looking at Mama when the man was yelling

at her and she just looked at the man. She put her arm around me and I was holding my kitty–he didn't do anything wrong. Mamma says we're not going to his store no more.

When I want to play at my friends' house I ask Mama if I can go but she says, "Ask your Daddy." So I go ask Daddy and he says "Ask your Mama." So I go.

Daddy says why do I always play with boys and how come I don't play hopscotch like other little girls but I like to play with boys. I can throw better than the boys can.

Mama gave me a little book 'cause she knows I like long pretty names and she writes them down for me. I keep it in my "secret box" where I keep my nice things like the jewelry that Mama doesn't use anymore. Mama made the box for me.

* * *

Mama and Daddy opened my door this morning and Daddy said, "It looks like God's wrath." That's all he said. He just stood there and said that. That means I have to clean my room again.

Mikey's a little fart. It's not so bad that he let that mouse loose in my room but he doesn't have to call me names. Makes me mad.

He took off with my diary and he said I better help them tonight 'cause nobody's gonna yell at Mama and get away with it.

Jeez, if anybody sees me tonight I will die, just absolutely die. I'll get this over with and done. I hope nothing bad happens like the kids fall off their bikes or somebody calls the cops on us. Because if something bad does happen, I'll get the blame. For sure. I know it.

Mama believed us when we told her we were going to my other friend's house. She knows Mikey is with me but she thinks Tommy and Joey are playing next door. I'll let Joey and Mikey take their bikes and Tommy can walk with me. Tommy looks scared. I hope nobody sees me. I'm glad it's dark.

Mikey thinks he's so smart. He said let's all wear black so nobody can see us in the dark.

Tommy's the one that got mad the most. Joey's mad too. Right now she's mad at me 'cause I won't let her do one of the tires and I keep telling her to shut up. I only want to do two tires, the front ones, that way when the old cuss comes out and sees his flat tires he can say . . . I don't know what he'll say but two flat front tires sounds better to me than two back flat tires. See what I mean? Joey can't understand that. But Joey's a snitch. If she doesn't get what she wants, she'll go tell on me. She promised we would keep this a secret. I hope she doesn't write

her name anywhere then for sure they'll find out it was us. She writes "Sarah" on everything she owns.

Tommy gave me half of his gum. He's gonna keep watch so nobody sees us. "It's like driving the get-away car," I told him and he said,"Okay." Tommy's not as bad as Joey. She's a worst tomboy than I was. I won't say no more about Mikey.

* * *

When we walked out of the store, Joey turned and called the man a "turd." That's the new word she learned from Lucy's friend, Rosie.

We play down the street where Rosie lives and Mama told Lucy not to be friends with Rosie 'cause she's bad but Lucy's always talking to her. Rosie and Lucy like to paint their faces then they stand around outside and talk about who passes by in their car. Rosie laughs loud and she talks like this, she goes "Sh-i-i-i-t," like that, and Lucy likes to say it too. That's why Mama doesn't want Lucy to see Rosie. Rosie taught Lucy how to let the air out of the tires. That's neat. I wish I had thought of that.

I hope I don't get caught. If something goes wrong, they blame me. I know they will. Tommy's gonna keep watch on one side and Joey's gonna watch the other side. I hope Lucy doesn't stand around holding her arms out in front of her and saying "Jeez" like if she's waiting for something to drop from the sky. Lucy sure is dumb. She misses out on a lot of fun when she stays in her room.

We just pretended we weren't doin' nuthin' and Lucy went to work fast. She said,"Hurry, Mikey, hurry." So I did like she showed me. I got my little pebble and I was feeling for the tube. I took the cap off, put in my pebble and screwed the cap back on. The tire started hissing and I said "Wow!" We got all excited and Lucy said "Shh!" But Joey had to go and yell "Geronimo!" and the egg was all over the door of the car. It was a mess.

Everything happened fast. Me and Joey got on our bikes and Lucy got a hold of Tommy's hand and they ran. "Did you see that, Lucy?" I said to her and Lucy was laughing.

I almost fell. Jeez, I almost fell.

* * *

Boy, that was neat. Nobody saw the egg I was hiding. I'm gonna ask Mama to write "Geronimo' in my little book.

* * *

I was real scared–like my heart almost came out. I held on to Lucy's hand real tight and I ran as fast as I could. Lucy said was I alright and I said yeah.

I can see the light from our kitchen this far away and I know we're having corn bread for supper 'cause I asked Mama to make some.



W.I.P.
Mimi Merrill

As she moved back one step more, trying both to put space between her eyes and the brutal strokes of yellow on the framed canvas and to keep her mind focused away from herself and on the bowl of sunflowers, her heel came down hard on what was surely someone's foot.

"Oh! Sorry."

A man's voice responded in forgiving acknowledgement. "I walk on them, too."

"I know, but not on the tops," she said, half turning away from the slight figure that stood now beside her.

"Wait. Were you trying to get a perspective on the brushwork or were you looking for another way of seeing that?" His hand waved at the painting on the wall.

"Both. Neither." She paused, then continued. "I felt suffocated by what I knew about him, I guess. I wanted to back off a few feet. He overwhelms me."

"Yes. Greatness and insanity come frighteningly together in his work, don't they? I have come to the reluctant conclusion that there is no separating madness and creativity."

"That's not true. Oh, he was crazy, and there's no question about how incredible he was, but that doesn't mean that all creativity stems from the crazies."

There was a sudden surge of movement as the long lines of spectators broke and reformed, but the two figures held their positions as if by agreement, the woman peering through heavy-rimmed glasses at the man beside her.

"Come, come," he said, his voice assuming an almost chiding tone. "Is it possible to live like a normal human being and yet be capable of the passionate intensity required to call these into being? Look. Look there."

He turned and pointed to a furled black umbrella, jabbing first in one direction, then in another, until it seemed he must soon disembowel

one of the dodging figures that scurried past.

"All you're saying is that he wasn't capable of it. That doesn't make it true for every artist. No. Or for writers or for anybody else who is creative." She paused. "My father is an artist."

"Aha! And is he quite sane?"

She did not respond, choosing instead to look away. The room had become even more crowded as stubborn clumps of people settled in front of one or another painting in heated discussion or silent adoration. A clock on the far wall caught her attention, and she took a step away. "I have to go now."

"Wait." The umbrella handle became a fisherman's hook, lightly snaring her arm. "Have I offended you?"

"No. No. It's just . . . no."

"Then may I offer you a cup of coffee? Or tea? This isn't a pickup, you know."

"I know. No. Wait. Yes." She laughed, a high, nervous giggling sound. "I must sound weird. Yes. Buy me a cup of coffee. I'd like to talk to you. I've got to talk to somebody. Yes."

The Museum coffee shop was crowded, but there were tables on the terrace still, for the wan winter sun discouraged all but the hardiest from venturing out to keep company with the wisps of fog that trailed in from the bay. Cradling their steaming cups of coffee between chilled hands, they sat for some moments in silence, watching as sparrows and pigeons debated ownership of a few crumbs on an adjoining table.

"So. You deny that creativity and madness are but sides of the same coin, do you?"

"I don't want them to be. I want a simpler world than that." Lifting her coffee cup to her lips, she inhaled steam.

"What is and what we want don't always match in this best of all possible worlds."

"I know."

"Well. And what do you have to say that is so demanding that it must be said to a stranger?"

SHADE COMBS
Lee McCarthy

He drove up the wobbly bank road and killed the motor. "Duck, you want me to bring you back a hamburger?" He shouted it toward the rowboat that held two boys.

"Yeah, two of 'um," the older boy with curly hair answered back.

He had already started the motor, which entailed the air conditioner, and had rolled his window halfway up when he heard the boy shout something else. He rolled his window down, cut off the motor again, and listened with solicitude as the air conditioner agonized in strangled tones to its death. He stuck the hatted part of his head out the window and yelled, "What is it?"

"And a quart of chocolate milk."

He started the car, turning off the air conditioner first. When the boy yelled again, the car lurched twice, due to some uncoordinated frustration inside the car, before the motor fell silent.

"He wants to know if you'll bring him a chocolate milk, too."

The roiled dust hid the car until it turned off the pond bank onto the highway. Two women fishing on one of the three small piers were laughing between themselves. The women belonged to the younger boy. The older woman, in a dress and stockings with her heels kicked off, was seated, leaning against a metal feeder. She wore a fringed and flowered hat. It was a Florida hat, one for tourists. The fringe curled up in unexpected places from storage. The older woman was the only one of the two really fishing because she was the only one of the two who knew anything about it. She had watched the car incident with her mouth caught open by the smile there. Then she had laughed and said, "Your Uncle Shade. It's so *hard* on him."

The younger woman, sitting cross-legged and stoop-shouldered, as if the sun itself tired her, laughed back easily without taking her eyes from their look across the pond. She had been her mother's daughter a long time. She gathered in the intense glare of the sun as if it belonged to her. The humid, still air both supported her body and weighed it down, burdened

and comforted her, bored and aroused. With her son, she was home for a visit. Her hair was knotted up, accenting the giraffe look about her head and neck.

* * *

On the way to dinner he thought about his father and the only time he had seen him angry.

"Where's my gun, Melissa?" his father had shouted even before he was in the door good.

"And what is it you want it for?"

"That man has poisoned my dog."

"*What* man, Noah Burton?"

"That no-good Wesley Bostick."

"You mean to tell me, Noah, you would kill a Christian man over a dog? Well, I'm not listening to it."

"That dog was worth two of him any day. More character."

When his dad had been dying of cancer, Wesley didn't come for a long time. And then he did one day towards the end. Wesley never said a word. He just sat silent in the straight-backed chair Melissa brought from the kitchen for him.

Then Noah had said in his weak, hoarse voice, "I forgive you for killing my dog." After that, Wesley had to come to sit a spell every Saturday as he was on his way into town. He had left five dollars on top of the Victrola each time on his way out the door, as others had. The cancer lasted three years. Noah wouldn't hear of burdening his grown children. Or maybe it was he wouldn't let them pay for the thing that was killing him.

* * *

Shade picked up the brown paper bag from the end of the table as he shoved himself out of the maroon booth. He bought a paper and drove across the highway to the store where he paid for the quart carton with his change from dinner.

He had to get away for a few days, he decided. Or he was going to get a bleeding ulcer. $30,000 sunk in catfish. And you couldn't even really keep an eye on them. It made him ache to think about it. He would go to his sister's in Tupelo. J.D. would fix him up. J.D. was always talking about fixing him up. There was a divorcee next door who sported tan arms, frosted hair, and rough hands. And she was a drinker, which would keep her from being unbearable.

The worst was Duck's orders. Always two hamburgers and chocolate milk for supper. Two hamburgers and a Pepsi every noon. Or a four dollar steak if he came along. If that mother of his wasn't so busy with her bridge clubs, she could pack a lunch for the kid. Suddenly, he felt himself going over to Duck's side. She was the kind who'd pack carrot sticks and hardboiled eggs.

"Goddamn!" His fist came down on the steering wheel. He almost ran off the road onto the shoulder when he thought of it. *Two* quarts of chocolate milk. Not only did Duck not understand how adults could forget things, but the word *share* was beyond him.

* * *

She walked back to the sofa and sat down, asking if he wanted another drink. He moved over from the candle-lit table, where she had left him, to the sofa to sit by her. Grabbing her oversized knee, he said, "I'm going to tell you a story. It's a good story."

"About what?" she asked and moved her knee so that he had to find another place to put his hand.

"About a house. The house was a Jew's idea of what a grand southern mansion ought to look like. And to prove that a Jew could never be southern, someone talked her into painting it battleship gray."

"You're making this difficult to follow. Who do you mean – *her*?"

"I mean Mrs. Meyers, of couse. I don't know her first name. I doubt if anyone other than her husband ever did. *Maybe* her children did. But that's only maybe."

"By the time I was old enough to go in there with my mother – my mother traded eggs for material – she was known as Mrs. Meyers, Ben Block Meyers's mother. Even I understood that it was a rich, old lady who didn't just run but presided over that musty store, the only place in town that pretended to the name 'department store.'"

"The house, you mean?"

"No, damnit, the store. The Blocks owned the bank and half the stores in town and, for all I knew, that was the reason the downtown was divided into 'blocks.' Unless a street had some old magnolias on it, it wasn't a street but just where some people lived, where Killough's field or Shaver's hill used to be. She liked my mother."

"Mrs. Meyers did?"

"Her house had two of those magnolia trees, one in each of the two fifteen square foot grass plots that seemed to be in front of the house only to justify the short sidewalk that led up to her porch. The house looked like it had been the town hotel at one time. But it hadn't. The town hotel was always down by the railroad station."

He puzzled into his drink. She sat silent, killing the impulse to cross her legs. The movement might distract him.

"It could have been nothing other than a Jew's dream. The whole monstrosity. It was wood and had a fake plantation front. Attached to that was a spine of rooms. Ran back for the whole block with latticed second-story verandahs. And then it got wide again. Like a woman's hips. I guess everyone assumed that the back part served as storage for a ninety-year accumulation of things. The bank, her son's bank which had been her daddy's bank, and an alley bordered the house on one side. On that side the fence was solid board, eight feet high and more gray paint. But the other side of the house was protected by a high hurricane fence. Inside the fence was a garden. But you won't be able to get this part. Even if you can picture fifty gallons of battleship gray. It looked like a vegetable garden in there but the rows were filled with rose bushes. The rows moved toward the house in the plodding, economizing way of green beans until they were smack against the house. No beans but fifteen kinds of roses. The waxing and waning that took place there during the summer was enough to flush out even the moon."

He shoved his face up to hers suddenly, causing her eyes to cross slightly as she stared back at him, and then he asked, "Now, what do you think of that story?"

"Um." She moved her head slightly, not enough to be rude but enough to escape.

"And what would you say if I told you I was going back and buy that house and sit out on the front porch in a wicker chair come all the way from Hong Kong? And have twenty beautiful women lolling on the second-story verandahs watching those roses shatter in the moonlight."

She felt attacked. "Marvelous, if one happens to be a pimp."

"It's better than a catfish pond."

He stood up. She didn't stand up but said to his back as he walked toward the door, "Were you trying to make fun of me?" Then the look on her face changed and she laughed. "I liked the story. I didn't understand any of it, but I liked it."

He bowed himself out the door and went down the steps. He would call her. He knew he would. Because of her first name and because he couldn't say that name. It was the same as his ex-wife's. He could still remember Clair as she was when he first married her. He had broken two bones in his foot the third month of their marriage. He had been on crutches for almost two months. And Claire had insisted on holding onto his arm walking down streets. With her unique brand of agile clumsiness, she had invariably tripped one of his crutches. What had followed was exactly the same each time. He had landed on the maimed foot and howled with pain.

Claire had stood there, white around the mouth and under the eyes, crying "Oh! Oh! Oh!" Those were the only times he had ever felt the desire to hit a woman in the mouth.

* * *

When he divorced Clair, he moved the furniture out of the living room and had two pool tables put in. He nailed up a rack for the cue sticks and placed some ashtrays on the mantlepiece for his cigars. He was at heart a fastidious man.

* * *

He turned off the highway onto the dirt road. With the car slowed, he could hear the crickets making the dark theirs. The scratchy sound of women's stockings as their legs crossed and uncrossed.

The cleaning table, made of two-by-fours, stood before the office. It caught the early hour moonlight and threw it a short distance back into the night. He could feel the smooth wood under his hand. But he found nothing else there as he ran his hand back and forth. He got the spray hose and washed the table down, anyway, just to be sure.

He sat in the chair that shouldn't have been left outside. He could feel the dampness of the plastic cushion through his pants. He closed his eyes for a minute because they stung from the long drive back. Maybe he slept for a moment. He didn't know. But when he opened his eyes, there they were, the walking catfish, coming from Florida across Crowley's Ridge toward his pond. He had to warn the others.

He hadn't run in years, but he went in an uneven trot down to the first pier. He could hear the feeder dropping pellets. The fish were placidly bumping the wires below. He had seen people dive before but he had never tried it. It had always looked easy enough. The thing was to put power into it.

It was so black inside he couldn't see. After all the trouble of buying the house, he undoubtedly couldn't afford to have the electricity turned on. And then he remembered. Claire would fuss. He hadn't taken his shoes off on the backporch. He tried to shove them off but there wasn't a leg to balance himself on. He had forgotten to ask Duck what he wanted from the restaurant. He was about to go back. The air conditioner was freezing, anyway. Good excuse to turn it off. Then he remembered. He opened his mouth to yell, "They're coming!" but the rain-soaked mud fell into the corpse's mouth. They almost forgot to close his daddy's coffin that day because it had been raining and because Melissa had kicked the undertaker

when he tried to get her to say "goodbye" to the corpse. She had pushed against the man's chest trying to get away, with the same hands that had made custard out of duck eggs. "You heathen. You think that's Noah I'm lettin' you put in the ground?" She kept telling the limosine all the way out to the cemetery, "They couldn't bury Noah if they had a ton of dirt to do it with." For a year, the undertaker had spent a hell of a time trying to get Melissa to pay for the funeral. Finally, she offered the black-suited man some eggs. She *insisted*, in the end, that he take the eggs. He came to Shade that same afternoon and Shade had written out a check as the eggs oozed through the weave of the man's upturned hat onto the carseat. Melissa had lived on a bumpy road.

When he laughed, the water rushed down his throat. He was sputtering all over the place. Hadn't had such a good laugh in a long time. But he had to stop, catch his breath. He threw his arms up and found the moonlight. But then it was dark again. He didn't want the house, after all. The verandahs were okay but the rest of it would kill him. With taxes and all. He had to go and call her. Had he said anything about calling? He would have to get out of the house to call her. If there weren't lights, there wasn't going to be a phone. Then he saw them. Flat-headed and wide-lipped, the water aboil with their slick bodies. He opened his mouth to call.

THE SHOE STORE

Sonya Smith

Rae, isn't that Sam over there?"

Rae jumped, craned her neck and scanned through passersby searching for his familiar face. Once she spotted him she turned back to Sara, juggled her bags to keep from dropping them and calmly said, "Yeah. So what?"

"Aren't you going to go over and say something?"

"No, why should I?"

"Well don't you think you should, just to see how he acts?"

"Sara don't be silly. Time has way passed when Sam and I had things to talk over. Don't get me wrong. I don't avoid him. If he speaks then I'll speak. No problem."

They continued on, slowly walking, pausing here and there in front of shops, labeling the pretty, ignoring the unattractive.

"Rae, you oughta go in and try on those black pumps with the bronze trim. They would really look good on you, especially with that dress you just bought."

"I don't know. I think I've just about spent my budget. Maybe even over spent it."

"Well, it won't hurt to try them on."

"I suppose it won't. Let's see."

They bustled into the store, Rae shoving her packages into a chair and sitting down.

"Can I help you ladies?" asked a toothsome saleslady.

"Yes, I'd like to try on these shoes." Rae handed the saleslady the shoe she had picked up out of display, and stated her shoe size.

"I'll check and see if we have them, miss."

"Rae," called Sara. "I'll be right back. I see a tough pair of pants across the way."

"All right."

The saleslady returned, arms bulging with boxes. "I thought you might like to try similar styles. These shoes are very comfortable. We sell out of them almost before we get them in."

"Thank you."

"Let me set these down here. Oh, excuse me while I help this lady. She's been waiting a long time and our other salesperson is out to lunch. Excuse me."

The saleslady hurried away from Rae. Rae sighed, shrugged and began to open the boxes herself.

"Here, let me help you."

The male voice caused Rae to shake. Long tapered fingers gently removed the shoe from her hand and firmly grasped her ankle.

"Sam," she gasped. "What on earth are you doing?"

Rae tried to jerk her foot from Sam's hold but his grasp didn't loosen.

"Shh. Don't make a scene." Unperturbed, he slipped the shoe on to the stockinged foot. "There, how's that?"

Sam sat back on his heels and for the first time Rae got a clear look at his smiling face.

"I don't know." She eased past him as she stood and tested the shoe. "I'll have to try the other one on, too."

"Sit down, then," he said pulling her back down into the seat.

Her fingers gripped the chair arms as his hand took her other ankle. Somehow his touch seemed almost a caress as he slowly slipped the shoe on.

"Why'd you leave me, Rae?"

The question shocked her. She jumped out of the chair, walked around the room to the mirror and posed, checking the feel of the shoes and how they looked.

Glancing at Sam, she could see he was no longer smiling, no longer joking, but seriously regarding her. Bracing herself and looking away from him, she replied, "I don't know if I like these shoes. They feel a bit loose. How do they look?"

"Come here."

She walked toward him but sat down a seat away, bending over to remove the shoes. "So, how's it been going? How's your job, school? How's your girlfriend?" She looked up at him but he hadn't moved. He just sat, gazing at her.

"I'm fine," he said standing up and sitting in the seat Rae had vacated. "How are you?"

"Great, just great. I got a new job. Moved to a new place. I been doing all sorts of new things for myself."

"I know. I tried to call but you had the number changed. Rae, do you love someone else?"

The tone of his voice shook Rae. "No," she whispered. Quickly she leaned down and began to put on her own shoes. "I don't think I like

these after all. I've seen too many other people wearing them." She stood, ready to leave. "I'm glad you're doing all right. I mean, I wouldn't want you not to be happy. Maybe we'll run into each other again. I'm gonna go find Sara."

She bent to retrieve her bags. Sam gripped her arm, staying her departure, "I need to talk to you. Please. You tell me when, where, how, anything, just don't shut me out without letting me know why. I need you, Rae."

Rae gazed at the hand holding her forearm. "Who else do you need, Sam? How many other women have you needed, even when you had me?" She looked into his eyes and saw a number of emotions cross his face before a look of hurt settled into his eyes.

"Miss," the saleslady's voice interrupted. Sam dropped his hand. "Did you decide on anything?"

"No. They didn't fit, thank you."

Rae gathered her bags and turned to leave.

"I still love you, Rae," she heard him softly say and she stiffened.

Mentally shaking herself, she walked out of the store muttering, "Well ain't that too damn bad!"

"What? What's too bad?" Sara joined Rae.

"Oh, the shoes didn't fit. That's all."

WATSON VS. HOLMES
D. Horst

I had just returned from visiting an old friend from my army days and found Holmes contemplating a myriad of personal effects, which I could see at a glance did not belong to either of us. The items were scattered about the table in a random, though somewhat circular, manner.

"What have you there?" I asked as I disposed of my hat and coat.

"A pretty little problem, Watson," he answered, stepping aside so I could see the lot more easily.

I studied the items carefully, warned by the twinkle in Holmes' eyes that this was to be another test of my abilities in deductive reasoning. He had so tested me infrequently throughout our association, but I had always, thus far, failed rather badly. I resolved that this time I would do better. I did not want him to have to pretend, again, that it did not matter that I had not yet learned to use his methods. That his best friend was such an inept pupil was disappointing to him, not to mention embarrassing to me. I determined to succeed this time and studied the items carefully.

"It's certainly an odd assortment," I remarked. "Where ever did they come from?" I asked, in hope of some clue which would help.

"These items were the sole contents of a woman's handbag which was found in a trash can. There were no marks of identification, other than what you see before you," said Holmes. He placed his fingertips together and studied me as would a bird of prey some particularly tasty morsel. "The handbag has been inadvertently discarded, more's the pity, but," he continued, his eyes dancing mischievously above his tented fingers, "I feel very confident that the owner of these items may be deduced from the items themselves. You see, my dear Watson, several people have come forward to claim the items. And, as you are much more conversant with ladies and what the contents of their purses might be, I am very hopeful that you will lend me your experience and aid me in discovering the rightful owner of these items.

I was rather stunned and must have looked so, for he hastily added, "That is, my good fellow, if you haven't something else which demands your attention."

I replied that nothing demanded my attention, but that it was very nearly time for tea. He waved aside my meager objection and remonstrated that the business would be concluded well before Mrs. Hudson would be bringing the tea things. I was left with no recourse but to try and, once again, mustered myself for the task. I studied the items carefully. I was able to identify all but one.

"I'm afraid, Holmes, that I cannot identify this," I said as I picked up a long devise that rested snugly in a leather pouch. "Other than being able to see that it is a ruler of a mathematical type, I haven't the slightest idea of what this is."

I held the item out for him to take, which he did. He frowned slightly at it, then placed it back upon the table, in the very position from which I had taken it.

"I'm surprised, Doctor," he said, the corners of his mouth twitched. Having known Holmes for so long has enabled me to see his character more easily than most. A slight twitch of the corner of his mouth meant that he was bursting with laughter that he could only just suppress.

I held my anger, however, and simply asked, "Well, what is it then?"

"Oh, Watson, dear fellow," he smiled. "I didn't mean to make fun of you. It is a slide rule, much in vogue with mathematicians these days. I thought that as a man of science, you would have read and studied about it."

"Oh, well, quite right," I said, "I remember something about it was in one of the journals a few months ago."

"It is used to determine sines, tangents, and logarithms. Other mathematical calculations can also be done, such as finding powers and roots. Quite a handy tool for an advanced mathemetician."

"Yes, quite," I commented. "It most likely belongs to her husband."

I picked up the next item, going in a clockwise manner.

"An American silver dollar, 1889," I announced proudly. "The owner of the handbag must be very well traveled. The other coins also indicate this." I pointed to three other coins on the table. A French coin and two Italian coins, dated from 1859 to 1884, lay in the seven o'clock position.

"Splendid, Watson," said Holmes. "What else can you detect?"

"Well," I proceeded, warming to my task, "these small purses are very handsome and of an expensive brocade. The clasps and chains are silver which is highly polished. The owner is by no means a poor woman." I looked to him with confidence and received an approving nod. I proceeded on, picking up the small rag doll. "An inexpensive rag doll," I pronounced. "The woman probably bought it for a maid's or cook's daughter. She is undoubtedly a very kindly, thoughtful woman, probably well loved by her servants."

Holmes smiled and took the doll from me. I was surprised by the warmth of his smile. I felt I must be doing very well indeed. Thus heartened, I proceeded on with the greatest confidence.

"These cosmetics are of the best quality. The perfume is very expensive and of good taste. Only a woman of good breeding would have such items. She is probably quite attractive and requires little makeup. However, being a part of the social scene, she must conform to certain standards and so uses some makeup." I held up the rouge container. "See here, hardly used though the date is almost four months ago." I replaced it and indicated the lipstick. "And the lipstick is a very modest shade. The grooves show that it is only lightly applied."

"Splendid, splendid, Watson," exclaimed Holmes. "You truly amaze me."

"The coins I have already commented upon. The keys appear to be for a house. There was once a number stamped on it, but it has been worn away with use. The house is, therefore, old. Given the lady's culture and means, she must live in the West End, probably on Park Lane itself. The gold ring which holds the two keys only reinforces my theory," I said, as I picked up the two keys. I studied them carefully as I had seen Holmes do on so many occasions.

"Would you like to use my glass?" he asked.

"No, no," I answered. "That will not be necessary."

"Very well," he said, tucking the glass back into the pocket of his mouse-colored dressing gown.

"These are more evidence of the lady's refinement," I declared, picking up three pamphlets for Holmes to see. "This first is a rule book for the game of backgammon. This game is quite in vogue with the wealthy just now. This second pamphlet is a collection of brief descriptions of the great operas. Clearly, she is an opera patron and wishes to learn more about a favorite pastime. The third is a translation guide for those travelling in Scotland, Gaelic to English and English to Gaelic. She is probably planning a trip to Scotland in the near future, since the book appears to be new and hardly used." Now thoroughly convinced I could pick the lady out from the group claiming the items, I continued. "The pen and note pad show a careful and busy woman. Though I'm surprised she would make a note to herself to pick up the laundry. Probably, she is doing it because a servant is ill. That would also explain her need of a note. The spectacles are simple magnifiers. She may need them to read, which could indicate she is of mature years. Eyesight usually needs some assistance in one's later years. There is an optometrist's name on the leather case. They should be easy to trace to their owner." I looked up, finished. Holmes' face was in an agony of suppressed laughter.

He voiced a loud guffaw and dashed from the room, slamming his bedroom door behind him. My pique was great and I strode to his door to demand an explanation. Great gales of laughter came from behind the door. I was stunned to recognize the voices of our landlady and our page, Billy. There was another's voice also, whose I could not place. My ire was so great, however, that this surprise did not stop me. I pounded upon his door, with every intention of breaking it if I could. The laughter continued, so I called out, "Holmes, Holmes! What is the meaning of this? I demand an explanation this minute."

The door slowly opened and Holmes stepped out, a look of penitence on his face, though the corners of his mouth still twitched. He was followed by a giggling Mrs. Hudson, a grinning Billy, and the smiling, handsome countenance of Mrs. Turner, Mrs. Hudson's niece who had tended us for some three months while Mrs. Hudson was away. I was confused by their obvious amusement at my expense. What I could have done to be quite so amusing was beyond me. I surely could not have been that wrong about the items on the table.

"I really think," I said stiffly, "that I am entitled to an explanation." My pride was most wounded and I promised myself that Holmes would have to do much to make this up to me.

"Oh, dear, dear Watson," he began, but the bubbling inside him prevented his continuing at that time.

"Doctor Watson," smiled Mrs. Hudson, "It was just a wee little joke. Today's April first, you know." Her soft highland brogue had always had a soothing effect on me.

"It was a very good joke, too," added Billy.

"Hush now, Billy," said Mrs. Hudson. "Come and help me with the tea things."

"I'll help, too." Mrs. Turner closed the door behind them.

Holmes and I were alone, as I continued to wait for an explanation. Mrs. Hudson's reminding me that it was April Fool's Day had mollified me somewhat, for the previous year I had succeeded in playing a rather good joke on Holmes. I had had a friend send an urgent note, to the effect that my life was in danger and only Holmes could save me. When he arrived at the appointed place, a police trap was sprung on him. Detective Gregson of Scotland Yard had most efficiently assisted me. Now I knew that Holmes had gotten his revenge, though I was still at a loss as to how. I studied the items on the table once more, while Holmes finally collected himself.

"Really, Watson," he was finally able to say. "I was sure you would know it was a trick. I was sure you would know it was April first and would be suspecting something."

"I quite distinctly remember you making a point of telling me this morning that April first was tomorrow and you would have to be on your

guard. I thought I had a whole day yet. Even Hawksworth, my friend, did not mention it." I hoped that my injured look would give him pause.

"Well, I'm sorry dear fellow," he said, sobered now. "I was sure you would understand. Your great sense of humor is known to us all."

"Yes, I do understand. But the joke lacks a punch line for me, since I do not know what the items are. Obviously, the deductions I made are wrong," I said, waiting for his explanation.

"And an explanation you shall have," he exclaimed. "This," he said, picking up the slide rule, "has been among my possessions for years. I picked it up while on a tour of France during a summer holiday from school. I'm very surprised you did not recognize it, though I haven't used it, I suppose, since leaving school. The coins are Billy's. They are part of his coin collection." He pointed to them with the slide rule, which I am sure I had never seen before. "You gave the French coin to him yourself when we returned from the continent two years ago." He waved the slide rule over the small purses, saying, "These belong to Mrs. Turner. She is a secretary-companion to a wealthy elderly woman in Sussex. You were correct, somewhat, about the doll." The slide rule was finally put back upon the table. Holmes took up the rag doll and held it out toward me. Smiling, he said, "Mrs. Turner purchased this for the cook's daughter who is a beautiful little child who loves dolls." The doll was returned to the table and Holmes used his long boney finger to point out the rest of the items. "The makeup is a mixture of Mrs. Hudson's and Mrs. Turner's. I purchased the perfume just this morning. It has served its purpose well. The keys are for our very own abode. They are Mrs. Hudson's. I gave her the gold ring to hold them when she was so upset about my target shooting in the house. The number, which was once stamped on the one key, was 221. It has become worn, but could probably have been read with the use of my glass." He gave me a side look which I refused to acknowledge. "The pamphlets," he continued, "are an assortment. The backgammon rules belong to Mrs. Turner. The opera descriptions are my own and have resided on my shelf for, at least, six months. The translation guide is Mrs. Hudson's. She still uses it when she cannot find the right word to express her native Gaelic thoughts. The fountain pen and note pad are also Mrs. Hudson's. As you surmised, she is a very busy lady and must make notes to herself. Though she quite frequently picks up the laundry, she often makes notes to herself. I suppose it is a habit." Now Holmes smiled and turned to me. He picked up the spectacles and said, "These are yours. You will recall that you lost them late last spring and bought replacements in June. Mrs. Hudson found these under the stairs. I have been keeping them for just the right moment to return them to you. I believe that moment has arrived." He presented the spectacles to me, which I nonchalantly took and put into my pocket.

As my eyes met his, the last vestiges of my anger evaporated.

"Well, it is only a pity that I had made my arrangements for tomorrow. Now I shall have to call them off and save the idea for next year."

As I finished speaking, there was a soft tapping at the door.

"That couldn't be Mrs. Hudson so soon with the tea," said Holmes. "Were you expecting anyone?"

"No, not at all," I said. "Perhaps it's a client for you."

"Hardly. I didn't hear the bell."

The tapping sounded again.

"The surest way to know who it is would be to answer the door," I looked at him expectantly.

"To be sure," he mumbled.

He opened the door to expose a very comely woman and a small child. The child immediately sprang forward, crying, "Daddy, daddy!" and clasped Holmes' legs. I retired to my room. It is not dignified for a grown man, much less a professional man, to have a laughing fit in public.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
Diana L. Dominguez

The baby screamed. A fat dumpy woman in faded blue jeans grabbed the tiny child by its shoulders and slammed it against the chair. "I told you to shut your damn mouth. Do you hear me? Mama don't like her baby misbehaven."

Jim looked up from the form he was reading. "This isn't the one I need." Christ, how did I get elected to come to this damn place anyway? What did Pop have to do that was so damn important? Oh I forgot, he had to take the queen to some damn doctor downtown. Probably having menstrual problems. Now I'm stuck here in this friggen line. Jim waved his arms frantically in the air trying to get the attention of the young female clerk waiting on a slightly deaf old man. "Hey sweetie, do ya have to stand in line if you don't have the forms I need on this stand?" The clerk shot an angry glance at Jim, pointed to a sign that read FORMS NOT PRESENT ON THE STAND WILL HAVE TO BE OBTAINED BY SEEING THE CLERK and continued unruffled with her speech to the old man. "Oh just great. Maybe I just didn't look hard enough. Probably behind some other damn forms." Jim strode over to the stand. There stood an elderly couple completely blocking his view of the forms. "Oh Christ, great timing."

"Maybe we should ask for some assistance Harry. I don't see the forms we need there. Wait a minute, I didn't look in this stack here. Nope not here either."

"I think you were right Emily. I can't find what we need." The old man scratched his head and stared at the multitude of forms intently.

Jim waited impatiently behind the elderly couple. "Hey, you two make up your minds, either get in line or get out of my way. Jesus, old people drive me nuts."

The old man looked up at Jim startled. "Oh excuse us. Honey, we are in the way. Please accept my apology. My name is Harry James and this is my wife Emily." He extended his hand toward Jim.

"Yea, yea sure. I think you two better get in line before somebody cuts in front of you, okay?"

"Why, thank you young man. That is so kind of you. Come along Emily."

Jim pushed his way past the old man and shuffled madly through the box, scattering the forms into one large messy heap. "Shit, I knew it. Damn bureaucracy has forms for forms. Christ, now I gotta get back in line. Oh Jesus, and behind those old codgers too. Good going, Jimmy boy. You had to be nice to those old farts and now you are stuck behind them."

The baby screamed again. The sting of his mother's slap careened his frail head against the chair. He held his outstretched arms toward her. "Shut up you. Did you hear me? No, mama not gonna pick you up. You a bad baby. I said stop it or I'll slap you again, you hear?"

Jim gazed nonchalantly at the scene with an air of indifference. "Damn bratty kid."

AIRPORT
Connie Williams

Ruth clutched the newspaper against her bosom and watched the burly man pass beside her. When he was gone she tried not to remember the glint in his eye, the stubble on his chin. She stepped forward into the arena of Washington D.C.'s airport, now made half-busy while people like her waited for their morning flight.

She slid the flight pass out of her bag and held it in front of her, staring hard at the word "Piedmont Airlines – Gate 6." How nice of the stewardess to underline it for her. Ruth looked up to see the matching sign, "Piedmont – Gates 4-6." She was in the right area, and here she would wait.

She walked along the rows of chairs, trying to avoid the same man who'd passed her at the magazine stand. He was roving along the chairs, too – as if he were trying to decide which pew to sit in. Only this wasn't church. It was an airport shrouded by the dark night, and Ruth was alone.

A group of young people arrived in a clump and settled nearby. They took the entire mid-section of two rows that faced each other, and they filled it with heavy coats, mittens, thermos bottles, and skis.

And then they talked, loudly and with sweeping gestures, wide mouthed smiles and eyes that squeezed each other too hard.

As the man walked past them and out the side door Ruth breathed a sigh of relief and then continued her task of choosing a seat. Even though the tension had lifted a bit she knew it would happen again. Other doubtful characters would cross her line of vision. They would poke their eyes into hers and read her bare soul . . .

Her feet brought her to the skiers. Perhaps she could sit near them, pretend like she belonged, and no one would single her out to send threats her way. She shuffled into the edge of their cloud and sat down beside a chair full of hats and mittens.

"Oh, Chuck, you're so hilarious!" The speaker's high pitched voice soared from between lips that were too red. Chuck grinned. He was surrounded by six peacocks, all spreading their feathers.

Ruth counted eight girls and five boys. Not very good odds, she thought. None of them seemed to make a pair. It must be a singles group.

There was a non-Chuck at the other end, alone with his magazine lying flat on his lap. He reached his smile across the chairs and she returned it. Two book ends, they were, a dictionary and an atlas, holding in a raffish pile of superhero comic books.

Ruth opened her newspaper and stared at the black print before her. They were in clusters, the words, in neat rows with grey spaces between them. If only I could read them, she thought. If only they could jump off the page and tell me what they're saying. If only I could spend these hours filling my mind with information.

"Oh, Chuck," the voice sang. "You're so clever. I can't stand it."

MESSAGES
Diana Lumley

The seatbelt and no smoking signs went off and the whine of the engines settled into a low, relaxing hum as the jet reached its cruising altitude. Allan Stuart leaned back into his seat, shifting and adjusting his position in preparation for the ten hour flight to London.

The cable had been short and direct, stating only that his mother had fallen and broken her hip. Remembering, Allan sighed heavily. Frequently during the past two days while preparing for this trip, he had found it difficult to maintain a sense of time or place. That the message came by telegram was typical. So much of his relationship with his mother seemed to be centered around telegrams, around both the sending and receiving.

* * *

The first telegram arrived two days before his graduation in 1947 from Paige Military Academy. With nervousness barely concealed, Allan took the stairs to his room by twos and threes. He plopped down on his bed as he read the message: "Will arrive tomorrow for graduation festivities. Be packed. Will depart for Europe following commencement. Passage booked. Arrive London ten days. Happy graduation. Mother."

His anger grew as Allan sat trying to collect his thoughts. For years he had hoped his mother would take him on one of her vacations, but why now?

"Hey, Stuart." Allan's thoughts were interrupted by his roommate. "Mrs. Hobson told me to tell you that you had a telegram."

"Yeah, I already saw her," said Allan.

"So what's it say?" Bill laughed. "Maybe a rich uncle died and left you all his money."

"No such luck. It's from my mom. She wants me to go to Europe with her this summer," said Allan.

"Whatta ya mean? Europe sounds pretty lucky to me," said Bill. "But I thought she always went with your Uncle Bob."

"She always has. But it's Uncle Beau, not Bob, and he's not really my uncle. He was an old friend of my dad's," said Allan.

"Oh, yeah. Wow! Europe, that's great! Think of all the girls you'll meet."

"Huh?"

"On the ship, then on the tours and stuff," said Bill.

"Yeah. Well, she could have at least told me before this. I had my job all lined up and everything," said Allan.

"The hotel at California Hot Springs is hardly like anything in Paris or Rome. Tell ya what, I'll go in your place."

Allan grinned. "I'll just bet you would."

Bill laughed. "Boy, some guys have all the luck. I've got to go to the store, do you want anything?"

"No. Thanks anyway," said Allan.

"Maybe Bill's right," thought Allan. "Europe might be okay. After all, much of the conversation at any family dinner seemed to be about Europe. His mother talked constantly of Paris, Rome, and particularly, London, of the museums and restaurants.

Allan smiled, stood and walked to the desk where he picked up his mother's picture. How often she talked, no, lectured about English customs. True his father was English, but Allan had begun to notice that his mother was much more particular about heritage and tradition than his father had ever been. He wondered if they would take the train north to Durham, to Stuart Castle. Well, now he would get to see what all the fuss was about.

He realized that he didn't really know his mother, and sometimes wondered if his classmates had close families. Even when home on school vacations, he and his mother spent little time together. He vaguely remembered a picnic at the river, but that was before his dad had died and he had come to boarding school six years ago.

Now they would have three whole months to share with one another. Allan knew he would have to sit through tea every afternoon, but that wouldn't be until four o'clock and that left plenty of time for them to see London together . . . the Tower, Big Ben, and Buckingham. How he wanted to impress her with his knowledge.

"Okay, Mother. Europe it is." Allan spoke to the picture as he returned it to the desk, to its place between the pictures of Uncle Beau and his father. He began to whistle as he turned and went down to the basement to get his trunk.

* * *

The stewardess put her hand on his shoulder, interrupting his thoughts. "Sir, would you like something to drink? I have cocktails, coffee, tea or soft drinks."

"I'll have a Tanqueray on the rocks." Allan watched the attendant as she moved up the aisle, repeating the question at each group of seats. "I'd almost said tea. I wonder if they have cakes and pastries," thought Allan.

The lobby of the Grosvenor House had always been busy, but especially so at tea time. Allan remembered the daily ritual. People checking in and out of the hotel added to the confusion and noise of the lobby, always a sharp contrast to the staid, quiet upper floors of the hotel. As the elevator settled to the ground floor and the doors opened. Allan let his mother step off ahead of him and she swept through the lobby to the tea room.

Allan glanced at the sign by the door, noting that it did say 'tea room' and not 'tearroom' as he had misread the sign that first day. Mrs. Stuart stood by the door, impatiently tapping her foot. "Allan, do hurry up."

They moved on through the room to a table by the window. Allan sat down, then, noticing his mother's frown, stood up and seated her, then reseated himself. As Mrs. Stuart ordered their tea, he looked out across the street to the park.

"Allan, I asked you how you liked the Mews?" Mrs. Stuart's voice was sharp.

"Uh, . . . they were fine. I've never seen stables so nice, you could live in them. And they actually have two men who do nothing but clean tack . . . you know, the saddles and things."

"I know what tack is, Allan."

"Well, anyway, it was neat, but I wish you had gone with me."

"You know I had promised Mr. Barrows that I'd go to lunch with him. Then I had some shopping to do," said Mrs. Stuart.

"Yeah, I know," said Allan. He took a small cake off the plate, then began picking the sliced almonds off the top of it.

"Allan, don't pick at your food. Now tomorrow I've planned a trip down to Brighton to visit some friends."

"I thought we were going out to Hampton Court." Allan sighed, then looked out the window. After a few moments, he continued. "Who will you be visiting?"

Mrs. Stuart frowned. "It's 'whom,' Allan, not 'who.' I'll be visiting Mr. Barrows' family. We met last year in France. Now don't pout. We can always go out to Hampton Court some other time, or I can make arrangements for you to go on a tour by yourself."

Allan finished his tea, then gazed around the room. A rather tall, angular man waved, then came striding across the room toward them.

"Why hello, Mrs. Stuart. How good to see you again."

Allan watched his mother smile. "Thank you, Mr. Hurleigh. I don't believe you know my son Allan."

Mr. Hurleigh smiled back. "Well, well. You couldn't have a son this old. Fine looking lad there. How do you like our fair city?" His voice carried across the room, attracting the attention of people several tables away.

"Uh . . . fine, Sir. London is really interesting," said Allan.

Mrs. Stuart looked at Allan for a moment, then spoke. "Do join us, Mr. Hurleigh."

"Thank you, but only for a few minutes." Mr. Hurleigh pulled up a chair and sat down between them.

"I was just telling Mother about the Mews . . ."

"Ah yes, the Mews. Very interesting. How long will you be in London, Mrs. Stuart?"

"We should be here for another week. Then, I want to take Allan to Durham to see Stuart Castle."

Allan shifted uneasily in his chair. Why did she have to tell everyone about that, thought Allan. The guys at school made a big enough deal about it. She didn't have to make it worse.

"Now, Mrs. Stuart . . ."

"Please call me Marie."

Mr. Hurleigh continued. "You promised to dine with me tonight. I've made reservations at Simpson's on the Strand."

His mother smiled again. "Why, how kind of you." She took out a cigarette and leaned across the table for Mr. Hurleigh to light it.

Allan watched her smile and tilt her head in just the same pose as in her favorite picture. She seemed more alive and when she laughed, her face lit up and she looked younger. First Mr. Barrows, now this Mr. Hurleigh. Allan thought, "Why won't they just leave her alone."

Allan's face froze as he saw her lean towards Mr. Hurleigh and place her hand on his arm. Mr. Hurleigh winked at her, then leaned back in his chair and let out a long, low laugh.

"My God! He's flirting like Bill does," thought Allan. He realized they were both looking at him.

The edge in his mother's voice penetrated his thoughts. "Allan, answer Mr. Hurleigh. Do pay attention."

"Yes, Mother. I'm sorry, Mr. Hurleigh."

"That's all right, my boy. You don't mind my stealing your mother for the evening, I'm sure."

"Uh . . . No, Sir. Uh . . . Mother, may I be excused? It was nice meeting you, Mr. Hurleigh." As he stood up, Allan bumped the table, overturning his mother's tea.

"Oh, Allan. Do be careful!" His mother winked at Mr. Hurleigh. "Boys are so clumsy."

Allan turned and walked to the door of the tea room. As he heard his mother's laugh, he stopped and glanced back at the table just as his mother took Mr. Hurleigh's hand.

* * *

The tour bus was drafty as well as noisy. Allan sat in the back seat with his legs propped on the seat to his right across the aisle. His feet hurt; the walk around Hampton Court had been tiring and lonely . . . above all, lonely.

Marie . . . Mother just didn't seem to fit. Mother to her face, of course, but now, in private, Marie. Marie had looked so happy and excited that morning when she left with Mr. Barrows.

Breakfast had been nice . . . no criticism or corrections. In fact, she almost missed breakfast because of dressing, then changing again until she was completely satisfied with her appearance. Every five or ten minutes she reappeared in the doorway of their suite . . . "Allan, do you think this dress is more appropriate? Or does the blue one look better?" . . . never pausing long enough for him to answer.

"Well," thought Allan, "they'll be back by dinner time tonight. I'll find out then which dress would have been best. Funny she never takes that much time for me." Allan turned to look out the window, hoping to crowd thoughts of her out of his mind.

"I noticed that you're alone." The elderly woman sitting in front of him spoke. "I say, I noticed that you're alone," she repeated.

"Yes, yes I am," said Allan. The resemblance was remarkable . . . a small woman, dressed in much the same style, the same nose and eyes, but the hair was different, much grayer than hers.

"How did you like Hampton Court?" she asked. They began to talk about the gardens, the clock, and the orangerie. Then, she began talking about herself. Her name was Helen Brown. She and her husband were here in London for two weeks, he, on business, she, on vacation. They lived in Boston, and she and Mr. Brown had two grown daughters and one grandson named Michael, and did Allan have any brothers or sisters?

Soon, Allan realized they were talking about his graduation from Paige and plans to go on to Stanford and law school. The forty minute ride back to the Grosvenor passed all too quickly. They said their good-byes, and as he entered the hotel, he began to whistle as he crossed the lobby to the main desk.

"I'm Allan Stuart. Has my mother left any messages?" He watched the clerk check the box for their room.

"Why, yes, Mr. Stuart. Here is a telegram. Hope it's good news."

Allan's hands began trembling as he tore open the envelope. She always left a note, but not a telegram. "Will remain in Brighton. Return tomorrow p.m. Mother."

* * *

"Sir, excuse me. Can I take your glass, or do you want another drink?" Allan was suddenly aware of the flight attendant. He looked down at the plastic tumbler which had cracked down each side. He shook his head and handed her the glass.

The lift operator had tried to engage him in conversation on the way up to his room that day. Allan remembered his smile and the feeling of panic it had generated . . . thinking that *he* knew where Marie was and who she was with, wondering how many other hotel employees knew, and how many Hurleighs or Barrows there had been. After thirty years, that question was still unanswered, and Allan realized, still nagging at him.

Funny how she never even questioned the fact that she had been "Marie," never "Mother" again. She must have been relieved by the transition . . . never forced to play the maternal role again.

Now when I make the trips to London, we manage a short visit. His thoughts continued. The conversation is invariably contrived and uncomfortable, merely a recount of the events of the past year.

"How's the law firm, Allan?"

"Fine. We have several interesting cases going now. We're so busy we may have to add two or three more associates . . . Have you been to the theatre lately?"

The whine of the engines changed in pitch as the jet began to descend to Heathrow. Allan felt his heart begin to pound, the ringing in his ears increasing as the plane continued its descent, then touched down.

His head resting in his hands, Allan waited for the other passengers to disembark. Feeling drained and weary, he stood and pulled his coat from the overhead locker, then headed for the door to begin the long walk through the airport. As he entered the main concourse, the confusion and bright lights increased his headache, and seemed to be pushing him back toward the plane as he made his way through the crowds toward the baggage claim area and customs.

"Passport, please, Sir." The customs agent was perfunctory in his actions . . . stamped the passport then asked, "How long will you be staying?" Allan didn't answer, he just looked across the concourse at the yellow and black sign. The throbbing in his head increased.

"Sir, please move on to your right." The customs agent smiled, then reached for the next passport.

Allan started toward the main lobby to get a cab. As he neared the yellow and black sign, an airport caddy stopped him. "May I take your luggage for you, Sir?" Allan looked at the man, then up at the sign again.

"Could you tell me where the Pan Am ticket counter is?" Allan handed the man some money. "Wait here for a moment." He turned and walked up to the Western Union clerk.

"I'd like to send a telegram . . . Mrs. Marie Stuart, 87 Brampton Place . . ."

TWO STORIES
Robb Lightfoot

MORNING, MONDAY

Margaret hurried to finish making the children's sandwiches so that the kids would not miss the 7:45 bus. From down the hallway, in the master bedroom, came the familiar sound of drawers and doors being opened and closed in haste. Norman had misplaced something, no doubt, and was working up his temper.

"Maggie, where the hell did you put my keys?"

"If you want to talk to me, come into the kitchen. I am not going to shout at you across the house."

"Damn it Maggie, I haven't got the time to come into there and hold your hand. What did you do with my keys?"

"I have not seen your keys."

Margaret heard footsteps approaching her, but she did not turn to look.

"Like hell, you used them last night to pull the car into the garage."

Margaret didn't even look up from the lunchbox she was packing.

"No, Norman, those were my keys. I have not seen your keys since yesterday when you left them on your dresser. As far as I know, that is where they still are"

"Well they're not there. I've looked everywhere and I can't find them, and I know those were my keys you used last night because I saw the key ring."

"I am not going to stand here and argue with you. I am sorry but I have not seen your keys."

"Well fine then, just fine. So you haven't seen them. O.K., so help me find them."

"I can't, I do not have the time."

"Shit, if you don't find those keys, I'll be late for work."

"If you do not stop bothering me, the children will be late and miss the bus, and would you please watch your tongue around the children."

"To hell with the children. You can drive them to school. Don't you know how things are at work lately? They would be more than happy if I were late. It would make it easier to get rid of me. For Christ's sakes,

don't you even listen to me anymore? I'm still the head of this household, the breadwinner, and I demand some respect."

Margaret stopped spreading peanut butter and turned to look Norman squarely in the eye.

"Fine, you will get respect as soon as you give it and earn it. Listen to yourself, it should not be too hard, half the neighborhood can hear you. You rant like a madman and swear like a sailor. I am sorry you cannot find your keys, but don't blame me. Why didn't you just ask to borrow mine before you blew up like that? Why? If you were not so stubborn and proud and unwilling to admit to any human frailty, maybe that would have occurred to you. Maybe that is why your job is on the line. Have you thought of that? Here, take my keys and go. I'll find your precious keys, but I did not lose them."

Margaret put the half-finished sandwich down on the counter and reached for her purse. She withdrew her keys, tossed them to Norman, and then turned her back to him. She didn't even need to look around to know that his eyes were drilling holes in her back. Without a word, she picked up the sandwich and started spreading the peanut butter with smooth, forceful, strokes.

"I'll be in late, don't wait dinner on me."

"Fine."

Margaret heard the front door slam, and, a moment later, his car start and pull away. She picked her purse up again, and walked into the bedroom. As she walked, she reached into the purse and pulled out a second set of keys and set them on Norman's dresser, before replacing her purse on her own vanity.

HAMMERED DOWN WILLIE

Will, I don't like this. I don't like it at all. Can't the old man repo this truck himself? Let's turn back right here."

"No. This is my job, this is what I do."

"Hell, you're a tow-boy Will. Where does it say you gotta do everything that your old man tells you gotta–"

"Pipe up JJ. My old man's got nothin' to do with this. Nobody talks to me like that, not even you."

Willy's diesel rolled through Mojave and on towards Barstow. JJ sat with his back to Willy and looked at the roadsigns and tumbleweeds. Willy watched the road ahead, taking a look now and then at the temperature and oil pressure gauges. His eyes never ventured over to John.

After they passed Barstow, Willy slowed and started looking for his turnoff. He squirmed around in his seat, and his mouth was as dry as the desert around him.

"Got any beer left?" Willy tapped John on the shoulder.

"Yeah, in the ice chest." John looked at Willy – ought to tell you to get it yourself. But you would do it, you dumb bastard. You'd climb back into the sleeper and let the truck run off the road, just to prove a goddam point. "I'll get it." John crawled back into the sleeper.

"I've got a gut ache. Must be that grease-burger we ate at Sandy's." Willy tried to manage a smile.

"Me too, that chili dog set my insides on fire."

Willy found his turnoff, and slowed to about twenty as he proceeded up the dirt road to the Caldwell mine.

"Look Willy, there's the dump truck over there. There isn't anybody around, let's both hook it up and get the hell out of here fast."

"No. I'll hook it up. You stay in the truck and keep the motor running. I'm gonna give you my .45. If anybody gives you any trouble, you plug them. Where the hell's my gun?" Willy looked in vain under the seat for his gun. "Do you have it, JJ?"

"I didn't want to tell you, Will, but your father took it out of the truck right before we left."

"God damn it, you didn't tell me. Why the hell didn't you tell me? You ain't no friend of mine. What the hell are we suppose to do if trouble comes our way? Did you think of that?"

"Why do you think I've been wantin' to call it quits? The old man didn't want to see anybody get hurt so he—"

"You mean he didn't want to see us hurt anybody. He's afraid that it might cost him a dollar for an attorney. Makes no never mind that we might just get killed."

"Let's go back Will. Please. Let's go back right now. Tell the old man we couldn't find the truck."

"No. We came out here and we're gonna do this. I'll tell you what. If I get into trouble, you run 'em down with the truck."

"Will, I don't—"

"You just do what I say."

The tow truck crunched through the gravel, and Willy backed up to the dump truck. He threw his door open and jumped to the ground. He pulled the tow chains out of the side compartment and drug them to the rear of the tow truck.

"This won't take but a second, JJ. You stay behind the wheel, and you can drive us out of here."

"Hurry it up. I'm scared shitless."

"Just a second, O.K. Now, take it up. A bit more, that's good. Let's go; we can put the lights on after we're on the highway."

Willy got into the passenger seat, and John had the truck moving before Willy even had the door closed. They were almost at the highway when a green pickup with three men in it turned off on the same dirt road that they were on.

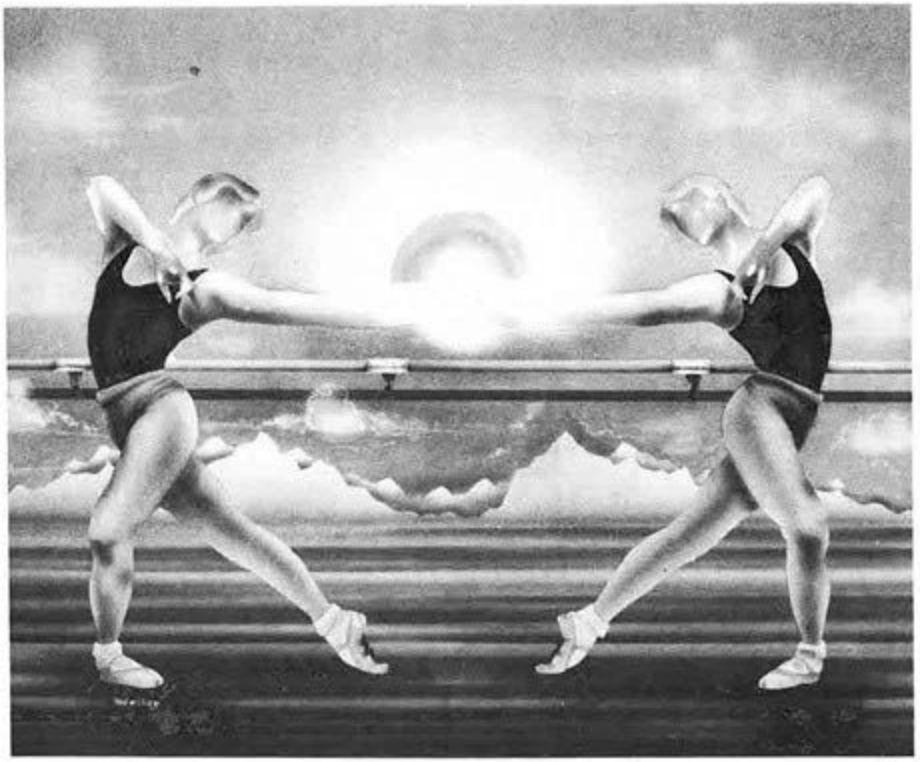
"Oh, shit."

"What's wrong, JJ?"

"Look at that. We won't be able to get by them."

"Sure we will, just keep to the right."

The pickup slowed and stopped. The driver pulled his truck crossways in the road, to block the tow truck, and he stepped out holding a shotgun.



I WILL BE THERE
Mimi Merrill

If I die in springtime
When the desert's all in bloom
Seek out some mass of color
And remember me

If I steal away in summer
Search for a shaded stream
Where sunbeams play in rippled swirl
And see me there

If it's winter when I die
And the rare chaste snow
Has whited the face of the desert
Walk out
And in the patterns that you see
Discover me

If I die in autumn
Pick up a colored leaf or two
For memory's sake
And closely trace their veins
With seeing eyes

When you hear that I am gone
Scan the skies for the hovering hawk
Or the eagle's soaring flight
Listen for the raven's croak
And in the song of winged folk
My voice recall

And when a weeping child appears
Steal not away her tears
But taste them with your kisses
And taste me in the salt

Walk the crowded city streets
And in the lonely drunkard's hand
Clink coin munificently
And think of me

Peer into the poet's den
And whisper love to cold despair
I shall be there

See the shooting star
The restless rush of waters to the sea
The remnants of a pink anemone
And summon me

And if you spy the rose-red fingers
Of the western sky
Heralding day's end
Murmur one last goodbye

I will be there

THREE POEMS
Larry Akers

PAGE OF TIME

The small pine
    A twig, really
Stands straight and proud
    An imitation of the conifers
    Surrounding it
The wind swoops over the meadow
    Gently at first
    With the rustle
    Of a silken gown
Stirring the small pine playfully
    To and fro
Angrily now, the icy fingers
    Blast and grab the sapling
    As it charges by
    On its most important way
Compelling the twig to bow
    In submission
    To stoop
As a spent old man might
Gusting and racing and howling
    The wind tortures
    And tears
    At the tiny trunk
Hoping to rip it from
    The protective mothering soil
And send it dashing against the rocks
    To die
    And disappear
As quietly and quickly as it came

The wind moves on
    Broken momentarily
    Into harmless whirls
That capture bits of leaves
    And twigs
And throw them
    'Round and 'round
    Into the heavens
In the meadow, the tiny pine
    Stands proudly
    Erect and honorable
    Once again
A tiny sparrow darts
    Into its midst
Protected by the child-like
    Fingers of pointed needles
Calmly
    Quietly
        Patiently
The twig waits
    For the next test.

GRANDPA

The drop
    Of condensed atmospheric vapor
Splattering and shattering
    On the tin roof
    Puzzles me
Is it the same drop
    I listened to
            years ago
    From the attic
            years ago
    Almost smothered in the featherbed
While the old man
            Grandpa
Coughed in the night?

FOREVER

A tiny trickle,
The small stream
    Supple
Bends easily
    At the whim
                of others

Two streams
    Combining, uniting
Cut narrow furrows
    Or go over
    Or around
The obstacles
                of others

Many streams
    Now a river
Channel seaward
With moral courage
    And firmness of will
Sometimes, not always, bending
To the desires
                of others

The raging torrent
    Powerful
    Impregnable
The trickle, stream and river
    Are lost within it
With haughty arrogance
It confiscates and desecrates
And knows
                no others

Angrily crashing into the sea
The Amazonian giant
    Is silenced
Hurled aloft, cast out
    Transformed, reborn
To begin again,
                another.

PERCHANCE A WIZARD

Reggie A. Cornejo

To dream a mystic hour
The long and sombre kind,
It's where I get my power
That helps my magic mind.
I live the life of sorcerer
I dwell in ageless time,
But Randi gives the sorcerer
The power for a rhyme.
There is no stronger wizard,
I conjure up the Black.
Perchance I am a lizard
or the widow, dressed in black.
You wear a flower, a daffodil,
I kiss your lovely face,
Am I the golden daffodil?
The wind upon your face.

THE WIND

Wayne Abney

The wind swooped up the leaves,
And bent the weeping willow in dispair,
And fluttered the flowers in avid play,
And licked the earth's long green hair.

It chased a bird in anguished flight,
Which tried high then low to advance,
To its half-built nest that was tumbling on the ground,
Bouncing in a flirtive dance.

It swirled the dust like scattered gold,
As it sparkled the lively atmosphere,
And it raced a tumbleweed along the road,
Till over the horizon where it disappeared.

Then as suddenly, as when it first came,
It stopped its majestic and explosive debut,
As though it had enough from the cup of fame–
then silently it vanished in the gold setting hue.

THEORY AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

Anne Passel

Look among the plastic slickers lithoed green and red
on chemicoated paper.
Bypass the padded boards, the buckrum overcoats
whose soft roughed margins blur the annotator.
Select the glossy ones with double column notes
where ink rubs off and print remains instead.
Research what's alphabetically shelved.
Detour around the pedant's firm opinion
who scorns "somewhat" and "seems" or "is conceivable"
who thinks mankind is "he" and anyone "himself."
Avoid hand-tipped errata eradicating blunder.
Look in the mirror – never out the window
read the displays, all randomly retrievable.
And leave to us who cosset idle wonder
to bounce from variants to derivations
rebound from what we seek to what is printed under
indulge in tried-and-true peregrinations
marking notes
on backs of envelopes.

TWO POEMS
Diana L. Dominguez

DEVICES OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Shy and Bashful
bleeding rational
I wear this face to please.

Deep down under
buried among my fears
hides the side that strives to be.

Pompous and arrogant
daultless and daring
devices of make-believe.

Awaken to reality
pleasantly pleased
I deceived no one.

ODE TO ADRIAN

An evening observance
appeasement to ease
a child's ritual of sleep.

Constantly rocking
serenely oblivious but to one beat.
Ultimate continuum
clacking of wood on wood

unified tempo of breathing
wordless verses of love
spoken by touch.

Persuasive, relaxing,
resulting in sleep.

THREE POEMS
Beth Barnes

HARBORED

Harbored you are safe.
The wind still tickles your sails,
the tide still rocks your memory.
Harbored you tell
grandiose tales of past voyages
and you spread before yourself
exotic plans
for future expeditions.
Harbored is your excuse.
Harbored you are
in between,
in limbo,
in hiding
and totally out of touch
with that vast ocean
of life
for which you claim
such
monumental
passion.

FROM EAST TO WEST

Funny how easy it is
to leave behind
roots of strength
sunk deep into days past
to face the glaring sun
of freedom
and grab at golden
straws of opportunity–
hoping the odds will fall
like dominoes
in your favor
and not like
beggars
at your feet.

INSTANT REPLAY

Recollection is a train.
I stand on the tracks of my memory,
waving my thoughts to stop
and once more
I am run down.

ONLY A NIGHTMARE

Fidel A. Martinez

Entrance–an open window
Slow motion: INTENSE
Carefully sliding down the wall of your room
Casting a loathsome glance at you
No sound but that of sardonic night
With the shallow light of her barren womb
Brushing past you lying desolate in your bed
Rotting loser rolling in empty despair
Drowning in the mire of perverted dreams
Grotesque figures and deserted thoughts
Hellish images burning incandescent light

Panic seizes you
Throttling you like a spasm
What to do–where to go
(You can't run)
Darkness begins to close round
Closer while you feel hot breath
Foul and reeking
Saliva dripping from its evil mouth
What to do–where to go
(You can't move)

Suddenly it's gone
The sky changes shades of blue
Wake to a relief
Exultations in the coming light
Hugging yourself–laughing out loud

(But the closet door slowly shuts itself
without notice)

You lie back smiling
Only a nightmare . . .

TWO POEMS
Joan Oreolt

WORM TRAILS

Silent motion
slowly slipping
Along the wet cool sand
Quiet travelers enjoying
The slide of life
Leaving behind only
Patterns of
Small sensual squiggles
Successful straggles to nowhere

SHADOW

The first part of the journey is
Dark softness and warmth
A point without light
Having no shadows to fall on your pathways or walls

You are a person now exploring and
Existing in a possessive society
Encountering light, a prism through which
You meet the hard shadows.

Too soon you begin to sense the cold
Jagged edges which once ripped at you
Dissolve and you undergo a crossing,
A merge with light.

PROFESSORS

DR. ANNE PASSEL

Anne Passel is the author of ten books, three of them poetry, and numerous articles. In addition to teaching, Dr. Passel personnally assists and enlightens aspiring student writers.

DR. STEVEN WEISS

Steven Weiss was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1953. Since that time he has devoted much time to the study of rhetoric. He lives in Bakersfield, where he is a Professor of Communications, a debate coach, and a jazz musician. Dr. Weiss has had many articles published in various Communication journals.

STUDENTS

JOAN OREOLT

Although a Fine Arts major with a heavy background in art and photography, Joan likes to refer to herself as a "new poet." She has had one poem published previously.

ROBB LIGHTFOOT

Robb will be delighted to receive his B.A. (Communication Studies) in 1983, after having worked as a bank operations officer, aircraft mechanic, tow truck driver, used car salesman, and computer operator/consultant. He contributed two short stories to this issue of Orpheus.

JOANNE SILVA

Joanne Silva is currently "chipping away" at a Masters degree in English. While enjoying short story writing, Joanne would like to try her hand at playwriting.

MIMI MERRILL

While "savoring her second half-century," Mimi writes, draws, tutors and studies English at CSB. Mimi is a senior who strives to become a master, with the help of Anne Passel. She is thrilled to have completed a portion of her first novel.

DIANA L. DOMINGUEZ

"My pipe dream is to someday write professionally when my insecurities grow up." Diana, a senior and English major at CSB, will continue to work in banking and care for her husband and child after graduation. She thanks Anne Passel for giving her the gentle shove to expand her writing phobia beyond "late night antidotes and classroom doodling."

NORRIS EDWARDS

Norris, a native of Porterville, is currently a Developmental Specialist at Porterville State Hospital. He anticipates receiving dual degrees in Psychology and Sociology in June of 1982. "Lenny" is Norris's first short story published, to date.

SONYA SMITH

Sonya, a senior majoring in Communication Studies, derives great pleasure from reading and writing. She began writing poems and stories at age nine. "The Shoe Store" is an excerpt from Sonya's novel-in-progress. To have her work studied in college classes would be the satisfaction of Sonya's greatest dream.

CONNIE WILLIAMS

Connie obtained her B.A. from Cedarville College in Ohio. In addition to being a homemaker, free lance writer, pianist and organist, she has begun her Masters in English at CSB.

JOEL HENRY SHERMAN

Joel is a 1979 graduate of CSB in English. Presently, he is a part-time graduate student, part-time author, and a full-time public servant with the state of California. Joel hopes to become a full-time writer and no-time public servant. Several other of Joel's stories have appeared in various publications.

CARMEN ESCOBIDO

Carmen has worked her way through CSB as a licensed LVN. She enjoys reading, ceramics, quilting, and "making up stories." Flannery O'Connor is one of her favorite short story writers.

D.M. HORST

Diana graduated with a B.A. in English from Stanislaus College in Turlock. At present, she is a documentation writer for the data processing department at Tenneco West. She is a big fan of detective stories, and she would someday like to replace Agatha Christy.

BILL PETTY

Bill states, "the part of writing that I like most is the re-write." He is an English major with a concentration in Literature at CSB. Appearing in this publication are two stories, one of which is a part of Bill's novel-in-progress entitled "Catching On."

BETH BARNES

Beth migrated from the east coast to California via the National Student Exchange Program in 1980, intending to stay one quarter. Now, two years later, she is a senior at CSB, majoring in Sociology. "But my heart is in other things – painting, drawing, singing, dreaming and writing." Beth would like to combine her education and her artistic endeavors, forming a creative outlet for herself, and an inspiration for others.

FIDEL A. MARTINEZ

Fidel is now a junior at CSB majoring in English and minoring in Business. Fidel's work has appeared twice in National Collegiate Anthologies of Poetry.

JOSEPH O'GRADY

Joseph has aspirations of obtaining a multiple teaching credential after completing his fifth year at CSB. He works part time with the elderly at convalescent homes, and at grade schools with young children. Joseph spends a great deal of time riding his pride and joy, a Suzuki GS1100 racer. He has made several contributions to this issue of Orpheus.

LARRY AKERS

Larry received his B.A. in Psychology in 1978 and has just started working towards his Special Education teaching credential for the severely handicapped. In between working as a social worker with the developmentally disabled and going to school at CSB, Larry enjoys spending time at the river and camping in the Sierras.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, some authors did not submit biographical material.