

Orpheus

A Literary Journal

California State University, Bakersfield

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Orpheus

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Orpheus

A L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

v o l u m e • x i x

Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Advisor

David Moton, Reader

Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to the understanding of the work.

What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. The idea of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life.

Octavio Paz
(1967)

The most fruitful action of a university professor upon the young student is produced not by brining down the university to his level, but by beckoning him up to its level. Only in this way can that love for the things of the mind which is the soul of true culture be generated — by showing the things of the mind in their reality and power. Where there is fire, people will come to be warmed by it.

Matthew Arnold

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P o e m s

Orpheus •

A Ticket to the Theater

Four spots on his old age hand
A shocking...! A frightening...! Put them away!
Mauve, The Sea...Dream..., a divan, a blind, a fountain.
All this in eyes—just blink, just blank
My life is not in there, in them. Who am I, to you that is?
Have you called? No room service you say. Lights out!
I have my eyes, the inside, the face I cannot speak or see
I whisper to you, you are so beautiful, so far
I cannot see my face points north and south
My nose, the bridge around it, a furry muff
I touch my cheek, I feel the slope
But behind my chestnut eyes, unhinged, unplugged, lashes
I imagine my face in pockets, doughty pockets
Swirling, burning out in the chamber, beyond my grasp
Like slippery bills and my hands webbing, yellow...

Jewel-box ballerina you move in an assault
Your jump jumps itself higher, over, up
Before me turning your head, your smile, still life
Red glue on your lipstick, your hair, slicker-glass-spray
Erase that tucked on smile, those murky sapphire eyes
So dark those eyes, lashless...I jump in through, breaking them
I am empty and fill with vomit, through my nose
My eyes are sealed, my ears are bleeding donors
They stream nails steadily, such hardware in you
The air eats itself and my skin is hot and scaling
I raise my fists in unison, crashing them out
Jagged cymbals against your splintering torso
I push my hands through your face
Shredding those eyes, those peeling lips
Your nose scraping itself to the ground, knocking
I bend far and cup your triangle nose
I blush the sawdust off and pocket it
In green velvet swirls of pocket brush
You're inside me now...don't breathe...hush...I won't hear it!

Across the scene a light smothers his sad grimace
He strikes his chest, a blow, his eyes, knocking, to find a clue

He falls, his body a marionnette melting in folds of levity
He tears his hair back and is one with the floor
His head pounds a melic beat of cries utterly imprisoned
He rolls his eyes back till two mothballs glisten
He jerks a hand to his eyes, pulling them outside
And bounces them against the pavement, thundering
The tennis balls fly from his head, a lid has been taken
His heart is in his tennis, in his tennis balls storming
The herd rushes, too soon to let, your add-it
On my ledger, pour the score in my life.

Give me the spots, the sawdust, the eyes to taste
Rub them in my heart, across my sighs
Let me burn and scream like midnight sirens
Inside, I am inside, the Sundial
I have no division, no multiplications
Just one way additions
Just a handful of tinder, just a crowd
Just a heart murmuring and skipping a beat
The one the doctors say I don't need
Just a hand, a jellyfish, a hand, sometimes stinging
Let's pile the frames in hundreds
Where those who did not smell or touch the smudge
Under your nail, the tongue of islands, beyond the head
Turning...

Lighthouse

I saw an "A" without a face
I brush out the candle flame
And huddle the darkness of these walls.
For you, something in the heart listens
Awaiting your steps grazing the green dust
Walking the walls of my arched house.
My eyes sail through my head
So soon on a voyage of black sobs.
Inside, a crack on the wall sizzles
Buzzing and bloating me with breath.
I glow air until my heart bursts.
I am the lighthouse
Holding tightly to this rock
Hoping to radiate diamonds
in your path.

Laundromat

In a laundromat, a man is cutting his nails.
On a table I sit staring down my two machines.
To my right is a frail, lemon-faced woman.
She spreads a book thinly before her nose.
Her ears move in tune with the laundry turning.
Click, click, click...the man's nails scatter about.
Each click is exacted with full-nailed resonances.
An old woman stoutly stuffed in housedress
Enters sporting a head full of tight, white curls.
She sways diagonally toward a familiar machine
With a cartful of faded housedresses squeaking forward.
Our eyes click in and out of tune with the wash.
I refix my eyes on my two machines
Sudsing, desudsing, stopping, then turning
Humming, screeching, swirling...
I open my book to begin a chapter
Hoping the page will end with my wash.

Catching Turtles

Gliding through the lake waters
Mother at the helm
of our little rowboat
— oars in just minutes ago.
Sh...sh...sh...
Mother motions to us
to sit as still as a picture.
Smoothly sailing
through these waters
—no sail—
just Mother's graceful
scooping motion.
Pail in hand
turtles perched on rocks
soon diving in the water
as we approached
from behind.
Mother scooping up the turtles
in her wastepaper basket-pail
so that we —
her three adventure-loving children
could have summer pets
at Hotel Rifton.
Mother's three tender treasures
—her prizes—
learned the art of loving pets
to be enjoyed, to be cherished
and always returned
to the lake's waters
by summer's end.

Violence

Night stalks the day.
Restless children ready themselves to fight.
Screams of terror echo
through graffitied tenements.

Blood runs freely over young
bodies not yet matured.

Sirens scream.
Mothers lament.

Bagged bodies lay in line.

Politicians pocket dirty money.

Society groans.

No-one has an answer!

No-one cares!

Paint Box

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

Crisis

Ebon ooze
Sleeps beneath soil denuded by the searing heat,
Seeps between particles of dust
Roiling them to viscous muck
Which, pressured, boils toward the sun
Turns poisonous at the touch of greed
Sullies those that toil for its release
Becomes the coiling serpent in man's Eden
Dooms him to fall forever in the void
Sucked out by the avaricious pulse
Whose throb and hum may echo
Unattended
Until the millennium.

Pipe Dreams

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

My Grandmother

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afterwards,
Glad to escape,
I surface to the earth
And my green youth.

But I am marked forever
By that journey underground.

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

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

June

I look at you
and see me.
I look at me
and see you.
You are black
I am white.
I see no color,
only the beauty from within,
and the person you are.

You are my best friend!

You are a kindred spirit!

African Girl

The gentle breezes
that color the sights of love
come rushing at me from the heart
the soft spoken heart
the succulence of
an ever warming african girl

I stand astute
unshaken and unyielding
testing the temperaments of limits
the steadfastness of an always loving
understanding and affectionate
an ever warming african girl

Ignore the facade
stretch out your arms
indulge in the infinite bliss
the always satisfying
ever present ever feminine
an ever warming african girl

The gentility of innocence
and womanhood
nurturing my aspirations
and letting me get away
with an ever present childlike exuberance
an ever warming african girl

Absorbing in faith and with love
the pains emotion inflicts
being strong and resolute
countering the fragile disposition
nature bestows
you are one and always will be
an ever warming african girl.

Song In My Heart

The day I found a song in my heart
The sky was gray and bitter
And the clouds were dark and heavy
And the Heavens were weeping and wailing
And the winds were screaming and crying
And the elements were angry and in disarray
And the sun was hiding in protest
And the moon was nowhere to be found
And the stars refused to shine
And my heart was heavy and sunken
And it was easier to die than breathe

And the melody began to flow
And my spirit refused to wane
And my soul began to rise
And the rhythm began to well
And the colors of my heart began to shine
And the strength of my being grew in bounds
And the demons of the world were powerless
And my feet began to move
And my body began to gyrate
The music became real
The day I found a song in my heart

Rejuvenation

Rejuvenation
begets the need for change
aspiring to heights unattained
challenges the spirit of being
to project my vision of life
as blank a state of mind

Replicate the moment of creation
the will as given to man
imagination as expended by soul
the body a sojourner of character
beholds the foundation of strife

The depth of seas we transcend
the peaks of mountains we aspire
and all there in between
are nothing, but yet as real
the tune we play while here
apparitions our stations here in

To each his own to make
reality is us and more
and still it's virtual in truth
we see and yet we don't
the elements are ours to mold

The powers that roam in us
respects our state of mind
rejuvenation
the one we can't avoid.

Shadows

Shadows float
over whispering ocean waves
splashing beautiful beach sands
on my lover and I
our bodies in a tango
lips searches mouth
my tongue sips the sweetness
I feel the rush down my spine
hearts merge in ecstasy
through time and space
a constant struggle
pulling you into my pelvis
emotion experience cannot express

Learning to Fly

The future awaits me.

Now is my time to learn to fly.

Now is the time to hold my children and
take responsibility for my own actions.

I can no longer be afraid of the what ifs and maybes.

Now is my time to learn to fly.

I must address long lost loves and
soul mates who slipped through my fingers.

I can no longer look back with regret
only look forward with joyful anticipation.

Now is the time of my life.

Now is the time to put fears and fantasies behind me and
step into my own world of freedom.

Now is my time to learn to fly.

The future awaits me.

I must step through the threshold of life and take my
own life into my hands.

Now is my time to learn to fly.

Broken

I've fallen in love with you,
And there's nothing I can do,
To ask me to stop loving you,
Is like asking me to stop the wind,
It's the best time in my life,
Despite a broken heart,
I've encountered the best,
And feel nothing for the rest,
My broken heart will mend,
But loving you will never end,

A Friend

This message is loud and clear
To someone who is far, but near
Remember the name. It stays the same.

When you look back over the years
And your thoughts bring sorrowful tears
Within moments things get better
And you're no longer under weather
Remember the name. It stays the same.

Children grow taller... they age... they stray
Photos fade, but the name remains the same
As the years go by, some will die
No need to worry; No need to cry;

You may begin to think no one cares
That you're alone in this old world
In your darkest hour you will find light
For God will give you strength and might.

The prison walls will seem real small
You'll have no money, no one accepts your call
Society will move on—
As if, you did not exist at all
But you remember the name. It stays the same.

When you get out, you may not have a home
No one to meet you at the phone
The store that once stood, is no longer in the hood
You looked around and there it laid
The yellow pages, you thumbed your way
Remember the name. It stays the same.

You dialed the number, listed below
A familiar voice, says Hello.
As the car pulled up and you got in
The memories, the thoughts, the love that never ends

You found a friend.

It is No Journey

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

The Light That Failed,
Kipling

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

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

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

Oda a Roman Garcia

Román,
niño de fácil sonrisa,
nimbado por luminosa auréola,
de rancia alcurnia castellana,
tierno de corazón
y voluntad de acero,
por entereza escalarecido.
Minucioso escudriñador de corazones,
catador de castellanos tipos y tesoros
que en lienzo eternizas,
mago barajador de tintes y matices,
caudillo de vespertinas luces,
tejedor de imposibles sueños
buceador en mar de estrellas
en búsqueda de asequibles ilusiones,
mentor de corazones ávidos de belleza,
capataz de artística maestranza,
fiel dibujador de torres y figuras,
soberbio arquitecto de castillos y proezas,
fazedor de vetustas catedrales
que tiernas ovejas engalanan.

Y también
triturador de cítricas cortezas
que la amorosa Jarrilla—
hija del chateo—
convierte el blanco vino
en néctar para adeptos de la Peña.

Excelso artista,
eres
paladín,
ícono,
emblema
símbolo de Burgos.
En ti reside el alma de Castilla,
y tu pincel
encierra el encanto
de esas tierras catellanas.

The Path Taken

A teenage boy looked down a different pathway.
Friends walking with him urged him. "Come along,
We'll walk the asphalt main,
The paved, well-traveled lane."
But this new path sang him a different song.

What was there down this unkept, leaf-strewn byway
That made him want to gamble with his fate?
A power undefined
With strength so unrefined
Was calling him to walk on through its gate.

With youth's substantial nerve he passed the gateway.
And on the instant knew he'd stepped aright.
He'd never count as strife
The problems in his life
That came from seeing this path's different light.

So dusty and unfrequented, this roadway.
So few there were he met along its stone.
No "rest stops" by the side
Where a traveler could bide,
But here and there a house would stand alone.

How odd it was to see that this strange walkway
Went right beside the public thoroughfare.
But those who chose the street
Seemed some way incomplete,
Almost as if they didn't truly care.

As he explored the trails along this dustway
He found its tricks a sheer delight to know.
When your chance comes, you'll see.
I know. That lad was me,
Six decades and a wondrous path ago.

Untitled

I need my space, to think, to write;
To allow my Father time,
To give me all these wondrous words
In a sequence so sublime.

I can paint a picture like an artist,
So all the world can see
What a soul looks like on the inside,
That's how God uses me.

With words I can show you colors,
So brilliant or very subdued,
I can play a scene of life or love,
Emotions, shown without a cover, nude.

Tell a story, real or imagined.
This is what I do.
Take you to places you may not have gone,
Until I give myself to you.

Dancing in the Twilight (A rebuttal to Shakespeare's Sonnet #73)

Why do you self-compare with winter's day?
Its course is set, it cannot deviate
From cycle placed upon it by the way
Of sun and wind, nor even contemplate
Another action. Yet these things are yours.
The fact that you can think of it at all
Gives lie to arguments of closing doors
And causes all those postulates to fall.
If "sweet birds" sing not now in "ruined choirs,"
Do echoes of their songs still stir the loft?
"Yellow leaves" fuel their own funeral pyres.
No function theirs to make your bedding soft.
Yet if these things be not what they would seem,
What is this day that speaks out from your dream?

You dare to talk of death as if you know?
You living, breathing, walking, talking man:
What do you know above, abreast, below,
About, around or other of the ban
Which Deity Himself has hid for after?
"Death's second self," as if you knew its first
By lifting up the curtain of the Crafter.
If so come out and say so. Tell your worst!
Tell all the message you would get across.
Or is this your best? If so, how shocking.
Is this refiner's gold, not smelter's dross?
Is this your version of a Christmas stocking?
"This thou perceivest," suggests of leanings.
No harvest is done without the gleanings.

"Consumed with that which it was nourished by?"
My friend, most silverpenned, you are a liar.
This slipping of a pretext on the sly—
That youth is unto age as log to fire—
Is carefully thought. That doesn't make it true.
The heat is found within the coals. The flame,
All dancing, hypnotising, yellow-blue,
Is only there to bring the heat its fame.
Perceive then: it's not death, but age that shines
From embers sitting on a bed of ash.
By choosing the poetic rules of lines,
You tell the world of one more check to cash.
The dividend paid, life's final reward,
For its work done—or not—won't be ignored.

Schizophrenia

Inside the wayside institution, destitution reigned.
The schizoid traced a rhomboid where the pinnacle was
stained.

But clinical and cynical, the introvert was functional
To emulate and actuate the paranormal feigned.

Around the walls and through the halls, with frequent smile
and scowl,

The extroverted one inverted statutes with a howl.
To separate—eliminate—reality from fictional
Required of both "E" and "I" to watch their "S" friend
prowl.

And prowl she did, from id to id, within her own confines,
As superegos one and two approached each others' lines.
Perchance to meet from head to feet, and probe the other's
actual,

These unbridged fractures, split to shards, would try to
show their signs.

But id to id was only part, and never could they hope
To match up clear from ear to ear, or even try to cope
With all assailants, in and out, both parapsychological
And paraphrased non-factual: well past her grasp to grope.

The "E" force pushed the "I" like voltage pushes through a
wire

That current which, if unrestrained, can spark things into
fire.

Resistance here was logical, the same as in electrical,
But only served to push her further from her true desire.

The "I" id wanted comfort: the "E" id sought for fame.
The "S" assured that neither heard the other call its name.
So on and on, from dawn to dawn, amid the fool and factual.
The more things seemed so different, the more they stayed
the same.

Echo

An echo reverberates
Through the picture
In my mind
Torn....unsatisfied
This sorrow knows no bounds
Once....I heard
The heart wrenching beauty
Of the caged Eagles' cry
Whistling....softly
On the moist
Winter air
Their song
Enchanted the morning
And made the universe
reverberate....with
The echo of their loss
Their freedom....gone
Like the land of Navajo fathers
Gone....like the blossoms
In September
Gone....like the rainfall
In the summer
And the ocean
In the desert
Alone
Remembering....a precious dream
Now, turned into dust

Ritual

It's the smell you notice first
Upon entering
And you know you're past
Your mother's medicine cabinet.

Glass admits you automatically
As the flowers and balloons
Bow to your entrance

You approach the shrine
Where the priestess sits
And you begin the ritual
When aspirin fails.

Vitamins, diets, and exercise
Sulk in shame with the squeak
Of the failed medicine cabinet.

You scrawl your number
And tell who pays for your number
O, and by the way—
What's the matter?

Sterile women pass
With more important tasks,
Than to look at you.

Teddy-bear smocked girl
Takes you away
Measures and prepares—
Prepares the lamb.

Wait in the chamber
On paper,
Because you're diseased.

The Shaman enters
He touches you and chants
Interrogates and scribbles
On his official stationary.

With their dry touch,
The stethoscope and Doctor
Chill your skin.

Anxiety builds.
And in the rooms
Sweet medicos coo softly over their victims
Like Aztec priests in a beauty parlor.

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Time Management

Did you know?
Were you aware,
that time is not there?

Time is not a thing.
Time cannot be found.
Time has no substance.
Time cannot be held.

Time was created.
Time was devised.
Time is a figment
of the imagination
of mankind.

As the chimps
who've learned to sign.
How old are you?
What is the time?

It is now,
they would answer.
What is old?,
they would ask.

Imagine life
without time.
Imagine working
by the sun.
The sun is up.
I am up.
The sun is down.
I am down.

Would it be so bad?
Work longer days
in summer time.
Work shorter days
in winter time.
Work til the day is done.
Follow the sun

Ah, but what of the laggard,
the lazy ones,
the slothful king.
How unfair it would be
for those who work
to do the share
of those who sleep.

So we need time
to measure work.
To tell the lazy
how long to work.
To be sure
all share the load.

Time again
to check the clock.
For I must go
to sleep on time.

So I can get up on time.
So I can get to work on time.
So I can go home on time.
So I can go to sleep on time.

Did you know?
Were you aware?
That time
is not there?.

What Is It?

A tow truck
is a tow truck
that tows cars;
unless it is
a tow truck
that tows trucks.

If it is a tow truck
when it tows a car,
What is it when
a tow truck
tows a truck?

Perhaps it is
a truck tow truck.

Then it becomes
a truck tow truck towing a truck.

What tows a truck tow truck towing a truck?
I saw them, one day, on the road.
Did you?

Is it
a truck tow truck towing a truck tow truck towing a truck?

Much too long to say
before it goes away.

Is it
a truck tow truck truck tow truck truck?

Perhaps it is
a tow truck truck towing a tow truck truck to truck.

Too late.
It's gone.

A Day in the Life

Buzzzzzz!!! Coffee!
moist, tingly fingers
massage my skin to
Consciousness (*Monday? Tuesday?*
I think this must be Wednesday)
Dry! (*towel from the*
Sheraton) "Puppy! Let Go
Of My Socks!:
Black Boots.... closet — No!
front door.... No! (*I know I*
left them here!) "Wake-Up Kids
Time For School" (*bleary-eyed pink*
faces eagerly await the dawn)
"mommy — I don't want to get up!"
... "Get Up ... and Have a
Pop Tart!" (*the answer to a*
mother's prayers) "chocolate fudge
or brown sugar?"
"No! You Can't Wear Sweatpants!"
"Get Your Homework!"
"Where's Your Jacket?"
"Brush Your Teeth!"
"It's Time To Go!" (*did I turn*
off the coffee pot?)
"Gabriel.....Don't Forget Your Horn!"

Laughter, Chatter, Criticize
Interpretation, Analyze,
T.V., Movies, films, & Books,
draw A Parallel
reel it in and wrap it up!
write a paper (*very well!*)
"Doctor! Doctor!"
bring to me
the head *Heart*
Of Darkness" (*please*)
Metaphors and Similes
the layout on the page

pattern, rhythm, assonance,
Contemporary, (*Rage!*)

Ginsberg, Snyder, Ferlinghetti
the *Advocado* Dharma
Waiting for America
(*like waiting for a lover*)
mid-term (*oh! no!*) 1:00
(*haven't studied, yet!*)
10 terms identify
details and significance
words - are - floating
in - my - mind (*Pangu,*
Fu Xi, Nu Wa) Mahayana -
all are saved (*Amitabha Amitabha*)
by chanting
Amitabha's name (*Gabriel.....*
don't forget your horn!)

Meet the bus at 3:00
feed the kids
(*they eat a lot!*)
Baseball practice
(*not today!*)
fractions, tears,
the children fight!
I hit the gym
and run a mile
I sing this song
(*it makes me smile*)

(*sung to the tune of "The Macarena"*)

*We get a quart of water
and we put it in a pot
and then we booiilll the macaroni*

*We add a little butter
and we add a little cheese
and then we stiirr the macaroni*

My noodles are so fine! (hee! hee!)
"Gabriel.....dont'
forget your horn!"

Golden Years

Two days before Easter, a young lady quietly moved her elderly Aunt and Uncle into our trailer park and quickly abandoned them. Their trailer had no water, electricity or heat. It was cold and dark.

The old couple never changed clothes. His dirty bib-overalls and stained flannel shirt covered his old, smelly one armed trunk. A sweat-stained baseball cap covered his head while black motorcycle boots protected his feet.

She wore fatigue-green stretch pants and an over-blouse popular in the 1960s. Her dirty, unkempt hair blew in the breeze. Black house slippers protected her feet.

They took walks but not together. He moved from bin to bin sifting through the trash. He shuffled slowly using a cane. She moved briskly and with authority, yet she had no direction. They rarely spoke.

One day she disappeared into the nearby orange grove. Concerned citizens and police conducted a five hour search. Late in the night, police brought her home. Her slippers were covered with dust. Her head was battered and bruised. The policeman asked her what happened. She slowly felt her face, then quickly said, "he didn't hit me."

The next day she disappeared again. This time officers found her bleeding. She needed twenty-seven stitches to close her wound. Authorities confirmed that she felt the wrath of the old man's cane when he tried to make her stay near him.

Elder Abuse Intervention authorities placed her in a 24 hour care facility in another state. He lives alone in another trailer park. They are not living the Golden Years.

They Say I Am Insane

The say I am insane
Because I do my things my way
I have no qualms about pissing on the street
Or walk around butt naked, if I feel like it
I have no bills and don't care for motorized vehicles
I walk a lot and I am as strong as a bull

They say I am insane
Because I eat from trash cans
And never get sick
I envy no one and know not jealousy
I don't start wars and don't intend to be in one
I exercise my freedom with no strings attached

They say I am insane
Because I am not like them
I am not covered in layers of clothes
Nor do I hide myself in makeup
I don't have a public nor a private face
I bare my soul for the world to see
I talk to the gods whenever I feel like it

They say I am insane
Because I have no shame
I wouldn't kill for money
Nor would I screw my neighbor's spouse for power
I am free of spiritual shackles
And would care less if the streets were paved in gold

They say I am instance
Because they have eyes and are visionless
They have ears but lack understanding
They have information and know not wisdom
They have life, but roam around in coma
They have hearts and have not an atom of love

Yet they say I am.. I am insane!

Grandmother's Village

Under the full moon lit sky
Of my Grandmother's Village
Stands an ageless iroko Tree
With amazing stories to tell
She towers majestically
Listening to the young and old
The lame and the blind
Come through the Village square
For centuries long gone
And many more in the cusp of the horizon

She whispers every so often
when caressed by the gentle touches
Of the ever romantic breezes
Sometimes grudgingly bending back and forth
And happily dances at other times
Mostly she likes to be left alone
A luxury she's never had

The young and the old
Strangers and Villagers alike
Stroke her body and cuddle her branches
Even When she's sick and tired
And just does not want to play
It does not matter
She's the Grandmother of all
The ageless Iroko Tree

Consequences

Our days of climbing rainbows have past.
Nature has been met and she is no longer
virginal. Her fall will be on the six
o'clock news along with the random
projections on the longevity of our
external environment. The gift of fire
has irreversibly outdistanced the human
landscape. Tools of our tools, subdued
and cybernated, we are victims of
changing definitions and fluid boundaries.
As individuals we have merged with our
institutions and symbols and we are now
but fragments of reality. We have finally
outran our understanding. Sisyphus still
has his rock but we have destroyed his
mountain with nuclear fission.

In Memory of Ezra Fourteen Lines Or Expow Canto II Endra

or

On reading canto two pound
As a student who hears
A football game on tv
By the sea where poetry is pig
Latin.

Hang dog man, Ezra you Pound,
There can bees cannot heart "Italian."
But eye-talian, whey just eye-talian?
I didn't even knowa that Montavani played there (trans.).
Soft shoe buttered the land.
Bear coasts swirl the cliff-snow seeds of proved-rock.
Onyx, brother of Lear,
 spies on Clark Gable
under white air-fuzz, washed pagan of Zion;
But she cries against the oak hamlet:
"Elsinore, and were you or were you not in the forest (trans)
 and is it better to dream the last train to Selma (trans)!"
 And poor old Ezra blind, blind, as a bat
Word, lyre against stale flate fear, makes all old men see hel
he. beat. the. hell. out. of

Requiem for a Final Exam

here I am
stuck in a little corner of the 4th dimension

knowing that nothing is so important in
proportion to the time I spend worrying about it

ickky, ickky society made me a worrier

a carefree little worm inside me is wriggling
to get free
and be nothing more significant —
nothing more earth-shaking —
than the inhabitant of my little corner

Easter Communion

Peter, in prison before his martyrdom

I

I remember he died —
every year I remember
he died
every year

as the earth groaned
and the sky darkened
and the priests cried
"Save yourself o man of God!"
and he died
I remember

he said "this is my body;
broken, eat it"
and I ate
he screamed for me
when they nailed him
he said "this is my blood,
poured forth, drink it"
and I drank so deeply my breath was
taken away
he bled for me
when I nailed him

and he said "remember me
when you eat and drink"

I received his body
his blood
when I nailed him
year after year,
in the spring of the year,

o son of God
you take my breath,
my sins far from me!

Mary said, "He lives"
and something stirred inside me
something he said
I saw him die with my own eyes
and they wept when I saw him,
felt his hand upon my breast
as he embraced me

"feed my lambs"
I love you, am so very fond of you
"feed my sheep"
and I nailed him, nailed him
"feed my lambs, receive
the spirit I breathe upon you"

he screamed for me
he bled for me
moved upon me

I remember he died
every year I remember,
in the spring of the year,
as the earth groaned
and the sky darkened
and he died
I remember
o Jesus, I remember!

II

I'm ready to go with you I
told him

"But you'll three times deny me today"
No. I'm ready to die with you
"No" he kissed my cheek
I thought I saw a tear

We had eaten lightly but
my belly was full when we went with
him to Gethsemane
he said "watch with me, pray with me"
I was so sorry, so tired when
he woke us "Peter, James, John. Behold
my accusers" and they were upon us.

"Whom seek ye"
and I swear I saw them fall
he repeated himself and they could not move
"Jesus of Nazareth," the captain replied

"I am he, let these go"

I pulled my sword and hit at the high priest's
man and my voice filled the garden. Blood filled
my hand
"I will drink of my father's cup! I will have my
portion from his hand!"

he said "let these go" and then we all ran away
Ran away
I saw the others a I ran.

Along time I ran and stopped and
breathed hard to catch my breath slowly
slowly catch my breath
but I saw the soldiers led him to
Caiaphas's house and I followed. Through
the bushes I followed.

O God what they did to him
they laughed they hit him they said, "prophecy to us"
"walk this pool of water," "pull down the temple"
"Galillean Christ, what a fool!"
"A prophet from Galilee, behold a prophet from Galilee!"

A woman by the fire said, "You're one of his, aren't you?"
Whose I said

"Yes, I saw you when we took him," a soldier said,
"you had a sword then."
When? I replied, you can see I have no sword
"Why, you're a Galilleean too"

Damn! I don't know what you mean! And Lord I saw his face
his bloody sorrowful face and I ran. I ran
I ran.

I saw him hanging there that morning
bleeding, bleeding from his hands his feet
his face. his tired face. his face was not sorry.
I remember. We all saw him hanging there.

How can one man bleed so much?

We cried when we looked to him
my eyes were so blurred
I don't remember when he died
but the clouds filled the sky and the people
ran to get out of the storm

I can't remember when he died
I remember he died.

III

It was some time after I had walked
on the water with him
after he had fed five thousand
with so few loaves and a pair of fish
that I saw him as the Christ,
the hope of my fathers, the one
who would come

I remember he asked us
"Who do you say I am?"
The Christ I said the son of the living
God.

"You are a blessed man" he said "Simon, God
has entered into your heart and this is the
solid rock on which I shall build"

Then he told us how He
would die

I was horrified I would not see you die I said
"But surely you'd not deny me to drink
from my father's cup. Find my father's interests
and not yours. What do you know of my death?
My resurrection?"

I was silent but grieved

Mary said she'd seen Him
I stood in the tomb where we laid
Him — empty, just the linens —
John too was speechless

Finally I said I'm going fishing
and we went to work
fished — threw nets, hauled nets,
empty nets — all night all night
through the night long

We neared the shore with dawn
and could smell frying fish from
a dim-lit fire

The closer we drew the stronger
came the aroma — and a voice
"Cast nets to starboard"

Some crazy man on the beach I said
"What can be lost by it," John said
we cast to starboard
and dragged the net within
a few fathoms of shore and then
hauled in heavy, the net near breaking

"It's the Lord!" cried John as I
threw myself into the sea and swam,
swam and swam to Him

He served me a piece of fish
and bade me warm myself
the crew landed and breakfasted
beside me

we all listened

"Peter, do you love me?"
Yes I do Lord
"Feed my sheep"

"Do you love me?"
O God yes
"Feed my lambs"

"Do you love Me?"
you know I do
"Receive the Spirit I breathe upon you"

Revelie

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

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

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

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

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

North California Coast

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

The Comet: Kapuut!

(formerly entitled The Comet Kohoutek (without the semicolon))

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

(oh happy day! — i think)

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

moral

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

Stories

Orpheus •

Is Agnosticism Possible

An Analogy of the Swing and the Swingers

If I had a swing, and I had a swing, and I had never swung; and never having swung I had never had the sensation of swinging; and never having had the sensation of swinging I never knew how to use my swing. So I did what any would be swinger would do I went out and talked with two experts in swinging; — a rather peculiar thing about swinging — neither of my experts had ever swung nor had they first hand knowledge that any living man had ever swung or-as pointed out-some one rope swingers tried but there are no recorded swinging experiences just severe bounces at the end. However I used two ropes with a small board to sit on which separated the ropes by about 2 1/2 feet.

The first expert was very keen on swinging, which I took as a good sign, and his information was a rather forced nature, as he believed in swinging to such a *degree* that it was not merely a sensation but a momentous, forceful, living experience which the only exact criterion I had to follow to gain the sensation was *faith*, morals, love, truth, thought, and the action to swing upward and forward. I tried this and I went upward and forward but then I started backward and downward at which time he stood behind me and said it was not correct to go backward and downward and if I continued to do so I would never get swung in my swing but rather I would have my swing burned because all that is backward and downward, is hell.

I tried again, the expert pushed me forward and upward and held me there saying that faith would sustain us. Perhaps we didn't believe enough because in about three minutes he got tired and he let the swing down gently to the starting point, making sure we didn't go backward past the point of beginning. In a way it was too bad I couldn't go backward any farther because that part of the swing would have been in the shade and it would have been easier to hold me up in the shade rather than as we tried in the not sunshine with me straining upward and forward and he holding me about 6 feet off the ground pushing to the limit of his strength. He sat in the shade and rested and thought about the experience and explained that if we believed hard enough we could do it and that it would be our reward after we were dead. Here I asked him about the one rope swing that went down and bounced and while it didn't seem to last too long it must be one hell of a sensation of swinging; but as he had noted too, no one seemed to live through it. By this he empirically translated that the one thing we didn't have to achieve the sensation of swinging was that neither of us was dead. And besides this he noted while a one rope set swing was more comfortable it was not the proper method to use to swing as the one rope swingers had all swung and were dead. I thanked him and respected his inverse opinion that if one rope swinging makes you dead then all the dead are one rope swingers. I left him sitting under the tree sleeping from his exertion and returned to my swing.

There was a man sitting in my swing with both feet firm on the ground and he clutched the ropes firmly with his hands until they were white to the knuckles. His face was red from the strain and the sweat poured off his face. His feet were 2 inches into the sod from pressure and his rear end was 1/2 inch off the seat at all times. — "Here," I said to myself, "is an expert swinger!"

"Quick," he said, "Push me I think I've got the swing of it!" I pushed him as hard as I could hoping to at least see someone swing. His hands however must have been slippery from the seat; because they slipped and he went forward alright; but he left the swing behind. Fortunately he was uninjured, just bruised and a little dusty, from his experience; which since he didn't use the swing could not have been swinging. I brushed him off as best I could and asked him if we were going to try again. "No," he said, "While being an expert in swinging; he had never been able to find anyone who had ever been able to produce a fact that anyone had ever swung"; and he didn't have the time to spend gathering facts in every area of this large playground. And if I'd excuse him he would return to his special interest; which he allowed no one to touch. Of why it was thought to be so pleasurable to run around the outside of a merry-go-round; he confessed he could get the same satisfaction by running around a tree and trees were cheaper and more abundant than merry-go-rounds.

I thanked this kind expert who used reason and practicality to such just extremes. But I realized that someone must take a practical attitude and verify things so the rest of us could get all the advantages. Even if wrong I was certain that upon dying surely this man would swing even if he didn't have the facts.

Meanwhile another expert named Mr. Yavey stopped and he too professed to be an expert in swinging, but I was disappointed; as all he wanted to do was go backwards and we met with the same fate as did I and my first expert only we lasted a little longer as we were in the shade.

So, here are four of us sitting around the swing arguing about swinging, and facts, and Heaven, and Hell; when along comes another expert and he calmly points out that we should face the obvious; all our attempts have failed and so logically swinging was impossible and more than that a waste of good rope. Any fool could see that we couldn't stay up, back, bottom; which as he did point out wasn't very comfortable because it wiggled and was hard to keep still.

Another man, who had been standing and watching the whole time, came over to us and asked us what we were doing. Well, we were all a little dubious of him; he was dressed in flash plaids, had white shoes with little nails in the bottom of them and carried a sack of wicked looking clubs over his shoulder. Obviously he was not an expert in swinging, and upon questioning we were distressed to find he as a golfer—(whatever they are)—and while he had heard of swinging he had only used it on little balls and never with a rope. However being an economist, and it being his job, he felt that if we put all our ideas, except the one that it couldn't be done, together, perhaps we could all swing. We, of course, being of a greater number, not to mention more expert, advised him to go chase his little balls, upon which he left.

I, of course, was saddened that I would not be able to swing today, or any day that I could be alive to enjoy. So being undaunted I at once struck off in new directions and behold, I came across a teeter-totter!!!

The Furnace

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

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She

We are finally within sight of the grasslands and the forest beyond. We need to find water today; we had no choice but to cross the desert. The only other way out of the Nestor Canyons was blocked by the very unhappy remnants of the Nestor military. We had destroyed all of the bridges on our way into the Canyons. As always, She and I make an effective team; graduates of the best raining camps, experts in several fighting skills, familiar with all the weapons of the known worlds and genetically tuned to tolerate a wide range of climates. We excel in the skills that gain us these high risk, high paying assignments, the art of concealment. We have been in and out of more "impenetrable" strongholds than most Commanders have even heard of. We have successfully completed our assignment again, isolating the Nestor forces and disabling their weapons production.

I tell her: "I am sure Commander Kline is already launching his attack and planning his glowing press release about how he subdued this formidable foe."

She replies "All that remains now is for us to collect our pay."

She excels in understatement. To collect our pay we have to get off this planet alive, that's all. Not much, until you consider that every ecosystem on this planet is inhabited by at least one nation of warriors, except perhaps the desert.

We are now close enough to the grasslands to see an oasis, probably leftover water from the last storm; it may be so stagnant that Skeets are living in it. I intend to wallow in it anyway, but not until after we drink so much that we slosh every time we move, of course. I pat the water filter pack on my belt and smile. We stop at the last outcropping of rocks to survey the scene.

"Bilge rats! There they are; do you see them?"

"I make out at least 15, looks like they have staked out the watering hole for game."

"Not according to what I heard on the troop transporter. More likely its one of their coming of age tests, or a training exercise. I heard stories of how the Drogers kill for sport, some sort of competition between them to see who can make their prey suffer the most."

"Strange how such a vicious race can have a reputation as jovial fighters. The Colonial Military information describes them as laughing in every encounter, win or lose."

"Should we wait for darkness?"

"I'm sure we won't last even that long without water, besides, there's no advantage since we've lost our camo and night-sights."

We secure our meager packs, loose our blades and start walking directly toward the water. There is no cover in foot tall sparse red grass, we are in full view of the Drogers. We get within two meters of the water, close enough to smell it, when they attack. We

fight well, she is more vicious than I recall seeing before. But, we are heavily outnumbered and even we can't beat those odds.

I wake up, unable to move. I am tied to a tree branch hanging out over the water. Every inch of my skin feels like a descaled fish. I call out for her; she doesn't answer. I turn my head, looking for her; she doesn't answer. I turn my head, looking for her, ignoring the scraping on my back as I try to twist around.

Suddenly a calm voice says: "She is not here."

Just as suddenly, the owner of the voice cuts me loose and I fall into the water. The next time I wake up I'm on a pallet; still near enough to smell the water. A figure glides toward me, wearing some type of camo that I have never seen. It is constantly shifting colors, always in shades that blend with the background, like an overgrown chameleon. The "Wanderer"! I hadn't heard that he was in this sector of the galaxy. Rumors say that his successes exceed even ours.

"Where is she? I must find her!"

"Drogers don't keep prisoners. She is dead or soon will be."

"She is different, She can survive. I must find her."

"Not just now. First we must eat, drink and take a nap. I know where they camp; we will go after the third moon rises."

After we eat and drink enough water to turn us into mobile swamps, he gives me the same camo he is wearing. I have never seen or felt anything like it. It stands out from my skin by barely a millimeter. It has no discernible weight, yet the night chill does not penetrate it. I want to ask where he got it, what it is called, but I fall asleep instead.

We travel during the late night hours, weaving through the forest till we come to a small canyon just before dawn. The day is spent watching and listening with our untranslators. One thing is very evident; they are quite a jovial lot, and celebrate even their small victories gleefully. At nightfall we make our move. Killing one at a time, we work our way into the camp from both sides of the shallow canyon. There is no sign of her. No sign that she was ever here. I get to their leader and with one had at his throat, that is, the equivalent of a throat, and the other hand pressing my blade against his eye I demand to know where SHE is, what happened to her.

He just laughs like a jackal and replies: "You will never know, I win!"

I silence the howling jackal, but get no satisfaction in the kill.

The Wanderer gives me a ride back to civilization in his skiff. I spend the trip in silence, I don't even ask about the camo. All I can do is think of her, of how I need her, of how I will avenge her. He drops me off at the Venusian resort (not really on Venus) and makes sure that I make contact with the Colonial Government agent to collect my pay and hers. I spend the next three lunar cycles in Dreamscape Therapy. Finally, my psyche heals enough to face the world again. Even so, I don't really want to face the world. The Colonial agent offers me a retirement bonus, instead, I head off to the Delta quadrant. I hear there are some good battles raging there; I think I will fight for the Highlanders; I always was partial to them.

Four full-fledged wars, countless skirmishes and dozens of stealth missions later I am taking a break on the only inhabitable planet in the Persius system. This war is over, the three sides have come to an agreement after just one major battle. Wars aren't what they

used to be. No matter how many evil grotesque fighting machines I conquer and kill, I still have no satisfaction, no peace. The burning hole inside of me remains, forever.

An anonymous message is waiting for me at the rest station. I read it over and over while eating.

"Meet me on the ascension peak of Tannapala at moon rise tomorrow. I have news of HER."

My emotions rage, the burning in my gut roars to a full flame as I mull over a strategy. There is no more exposed place on this planet. There is no way to plan a defense or scout the possibilities in case this is a trap. There is no battle cover on the peak and no quick route down. I arrive early and wait, my eyes adjusting to the changing light; moon rise on Tannapala is as bright as a foggy day in the valley. I am determined that the messenger will not get away without answering all of my questions.

Someone is coming, walking erect and steadily but not threateningly, definitely human. He, or she, is well trained, approaching with the moon behind him, or her, so I can only see the armored shape. Finally the messenger stops a meter in front of me and removes the hood. It's HER!

"I am not SHE. I am your daughter."

Vision Fugitiva

(Desconozco su origen. Es sueño mío o piratería?)

¿Quién eres? ¿Eres de carne y hueso? No serás una visión fugitiva, ¿verdad? No habrás venido a ilusionar a los pobres mortales para luego esfumarte, desaparecer sin dejar tu imagen fija para siempre en su retina, ¿verdad? ¿Por qué te ríes con tanta facilidad, si no quieres que participemos en tu júbilo? ¿Qué secreto esconden tus ojos? ¿Qué mundos nos brindas, si no los hemos de conocer? ¿En qué lenguaje trazas tus secretos en el aire? No quedan escritas tus palabras el tiempo suficiente para descifrarlas y, cuando les das voz, su sonoridad es tal que nuestros oídos no son lo necesariamente sutiles para percibirlos y entranarlos en nuestras conciencias. ¿Por qué no permites que concuerden nuestra onda y la tuya? ¿Temes que tu tonalidad nos reviente los oídos y que todos quedemos sordos para siempre? ¿Es que tu imagen de igual manera podría ser nociva a nuestra retina y dejarnos en la ardiente obscuridad? ¿O es que no somos dignos de la belleza de tu voz, de la luz de tus ojos, del encanto de tu sonrisa? ¿Es por eso que vas y vienes por instantes, dejándonos perplejos y hechizados?

¿Qué ropajes son esos que llevas de tan sutil finura que parecen de niebla, de diafanidad maravillosa? Al igual que tu faz, tu cuerpo nos es desconocido porque, a pesar de lo fino de la niebla que te encubre, no logramos penetrar su sutileza. Eres pues un misterio impenetrable, una adivinanza indescifrable, un abismo insondable, un cielo sin confines, una belleza que punza deleitando. En una palabra, eres un ser sin contornos, una ilusión cuyo resplandor nos encandila.

No te alejes, te ruego. Deja que vea todo tu esplendor; que goce de tu belleza; que participe en tus mágicos ires y venires. Quiero reír y cantar contigo; beber en la profundidad de tus ojos; entrar en tus arcanos mundos; explorar parajes misteriosos; penetrar las diafanidades que te envuelcran, para bañarme en la luminosidad que irradas—hasta perdernos en tu totalidad de misterioso encanto.

Field Trip

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 10, 2490

TO: All Unified Tertiary Schools

FROM: Carl Kaapu, Dean of Archeology
University of the Pacific Rim

RE: Annual field trip to the Los Angeles site, Pacific Plate sector

It is my pleasure to once again invite you to send your best students to the 24th Annual UOPR Los Angeles Field Study. This trip will, as always, be timed with the lowest seasonal tides to allow for viewing of sites that are not open to the public. The dates are: March 19 through April 19, 2490.

The students will be led and instructed by graduate level Docents in the following specialties: Art History, Bioethics, Cultural Anthropology, Field Archeology, Geology, Historical Medicine, Politics, Sociology, and Transportation Engineering. Eligibility requirements are detailed on the application form; contact the appropriate specialty leader to obtain the prerequisite requirements. As coordinator, I urge you to screen your students' emotional and maturity levels. Remember that these students will be expected to be responsible for their own behavior. This is an excellent learning opportunity offered to a small percentage of applicants. Be sure your student has the self-discipline to make the most of this opportunity. I would not want to have to send any student home early with a security escort.

"Dinner time. Be sure you washed." "Yea Mom, I'm coming." A typical conversation on a typical day on a typical rural farm. But his was no typical day for Karen and Don, the Medlin twins. They waited until after prayer to announce their news, barely. Karen blurted out: "We're going!" Don followed: "We got accepted!" Mom calmly said: "You still have to eat your potatoes.", but she was grinning. She had seen the summaries while they were out feeding the horses; she knew mail had come from UOPR. In disjointed, excited fragments they announce that both of them have been accepted for the Los Angeles Field Trip. The UOPR Portland transport will pick them up on 3/18/2490 at 1515 hours. They are allowed only one bag and their handheld computers. They will have to keep notes and write a paper when they get back.

Field Trip Orientation, Los Angeles Site Dorm, Auditorium 2, 3/18/2490 1800 hours.

Karen, Don and a host of other students, about 100 total, filed into the auditorium. The Docents introduced themselves and gave an overview of the schedule for each specialty. They would all meet together for some portions of the month long study to compare notes and be exposed to the other specialties. The first lecture was background information and a historical review. Most of it they already knew, but there were some surprising updates.

Los Angeles has been uninhabited for about three hundred years. The major shifting of the Pacific Plate began two hundred years before that. It is now estimated that the Pacific Plate section of the former City of Los Angeles will be at 37°45' latitude, the site of the former City of San Francisco, in the year 3875, give or take a hundred years. The Continental Plate section of the old city is in the Los Angeles Historical Theme Park. Los Angeles was the largest city in the United States, which was the most technologically advanced nation of its era. In spite of the technology, society still lagged far behind. All workers endured hours of automobile or bus travel to and from their place of work, even those whose jobs could have been done at home or at local workstations.

The Information Systems department recently completed translation of several large early model data storage units. They were able to confirm previously circumstantial evidence that the standard work schedule was five consecutive days of 8-9 hours each. When you add the travel time to and from work this calculates to the average worker being away from home for 12-16 hours per day for five days each week. Furthermore, they appear to have been limited to only one 2-week vacation per year (everyone groaned at this idea). This information provides support for several new theories as to the reason for the art work on the outside of the buildings and along the walls of the vehicle routes labeled "Freeway" or "Highway." The latest and most widely believed theory is that they engaged in this art form as their only way to express their creativity within the bounds of their stifling industrial society. We have proof in the recent translations that products and work output were of much more importance than human satisfaction. There even were large groups of people who tried to prevent the creation of this art work, and it was punishable by fines or incarceration. Other groups of people expended a great deal of time eradicating or covering the art. Strangely contradictory, there is new information that there as some government sanctioned art work that covered entire sides of a building or wall. So far we have not been able to identify any remnants of this "approved" art work.

Each of you will receive an observation assignment in your departmental orientation. But, all of you will share the following assignment. Wherever you go, whatever your assignment, you are to record a detailed description of all exterior art work. We want multiple reports on every site since you will be including your own interpretation of the art in your report. Specifically, was it spontaneous, was it done surreptitiously, or was it government sanctioned? Since we don't know what characterizes the government art or if we have nay, we are hoping that a hundred new sets of eyes will help us find some common factor that we may have missed. Class dismissed.

Karen is assigned to the Transportation Department's excavation of the "Harbor Freeway" southern section. This site is having its seawall moved out about 10 feet; therefore, the Harbor Site crew will be working virgin territory this year. Don goes to the Art history department. They will be reviewing and cataloging all of the known art sites in the established dig areas.

Karen and Don spend the next four weeks in HAZMAT suits for four hours each day, then two hours for reports and updating journals. They barely have time to say Hi, let alone compare notes. The fifth week is spent writing reports. Karen and Don finally have time to share their experiences.

Don starts by describing some of the art he saw on "Main Street" particularly between "First" and "Interstate 5." "Most of the art was faded, almost indiscernible. The exception was some lovely painted tile work that up close looked like a random placement. But when you stood back several meters, you could see the picture of some women and men in bright colored costumes. They appeared to be doing a dance of some sort. It was colorful and gay, very uplifting. This was in contrast to some other tile work just a short distance away that was in muted tones and had no discernible pattern. It just looked like swirls and waves, more like the renderings of the Persius Nebula Cluster's gas trail. The two sites were so different that I labeled the swirls as being government sanctioned and the dancers as spontaneously created."

Karen responded: "That doesn't fit with the information about the suppression of spontaneous art work. There was a lot of spontaneous art work in the new section of the "Harbor Freeway." Most of it was in places that would not be in full public view, look at this structural model of the new sites. The horizontal section that lays directly on top of the automobiles is covered with paint. There were about four different colors overlapping each other, as if it were done in layers over many years. If I project the horizontal section upwards it fits across the span connecting two smaller roads. If the artwork was done with the roadway in that position, it would explain the overlapping and the unstructured design, since the artist would have to hang over the side, by a rope or something, about 10 meters above the lower roadway without hover packs."

"Is this an accurate copy of the artwork?" Don asked.

"Yes, of this one section. There was artwork on nearly every vertical surface."

Don continued: "It looks like names and symbols, not at all like the colored tiles that I saw. Perhaps it is some sort of message, something that only the working classes understood."

Karen interrupted: "Is it similar to the symbols used in the 2150 revolt?"

"Not really. Maybe you can do a language comparison. Be sure to include the variability routine, to allow for the writing style and the awkward position of the artist."

April 15, 2490, 0800:

A Docent opens the closing conferences "If you were selected to give an oral presentation, please come to the stage area."

Karen starts: "I have selected this section of the "Harbor Freeway" dig to illustrate

some spontaneous and I believe surreptitiously done artwork. Don has helped me with the sociology research. I have been unable to decipher the writings. A few letters are recognizable, such as this red "B" and this blue "C." Most of it eludes me, but then my specialty is structural not social.

Don continues the presentation: "I compared these new styles to what I observed in the older digs, particularly the colored tile art. There does not seem to be any similarity. For this and other reasons, which are listed in our written report, I theorize that all of the art work around the roadways was spontaneous, but due to the locations, not all of it could have been done in secret. Of the two styles of tile art, the one with the dancers does not fit with the oppressive lifestyle, but the one that is just swirls of color with no meaning could well be a sample of government sanctioned art. Karen had asked me if the writings on the roadways would have some connection with the revolt of 2150. At first I said no, but the more I study the designs, the more I believe that it does seem to be some type of protest."

Karen concludes: "We invite all of you to try to decipher the writings; perhaps someone has seen other similar work."

April 19, 2490, 0800:

The Docent opens the panel discussion. The docents have reviewed all of your reports and we would like to compliment you on your insight and thoroughness. There are enough ideas and theories here to keep us busy until next spring. The panel will discuss the oral presentations and offer our opinions of your theories. Karen and Don presented some new ideas which were compared to the information from the data translations. Congratulations, your report has been selected for the interdepartmental joint thesis. The complete report will be published next spring; however, we do have a few options ready now. We believe the artwork in the "Harbor Freeway" dig area belongs in a newly discovered category. The name for this work was in the old information storage units; it is "Graffiti." In researching the antique dialects library we found the root work, "Graffito" which means "A crude inscription or drawing on a wall or other public surface. Three theories have been selected for further research:

1. Communication relating to work travel and generally guiding the traveler along the safest route.
2. The results of interclass contact, commemorating important celebrations or spiritual events.
3. Spiritual symbols used to invoke supernatural powers for protection, productivity or procreation.

We thank all of our spring field trip students for their valuable observations. The 24th Annual UOPR Los Angeles Field Study is officially dismissed.

Bad Company

I was lining up the six ball in the corner pocket when she caught my eye. Perversely, I notice that she was both old enough to be an adult and young enough to be my daughter. But it wasn't that, or even her stunning good looks, that got my attention. Rather it was the way she played with that earring. She was ordering me out of retirement and I was required to obey.

I missed the corner pocket.

Ward followed my eye and laughed. "Can't say I blame you," came his Yorkshire accent. I never got over how he could pronounce every letter of every word. "If you can't miss for something like that, why bother living?" He then ran the table.

That gave me time to get the adrenaline under control. Urgent danger about which nothing could be done at this instant, that signal was drilled into us in training. Strange, I thought during the twenty years I was active with the company I never saw anybody use it. But let me go inactive and I'm told to sit tight and wait to do as I'm told. Here in the bar, shooting pool, that meant I should keep on drinking beer and shooting pool. So I bought another round while Ward racked the balls. I shot pool. But my mind wasn't on it.

Officially the company doesn't exist. Neither does it worry about little things like the lives of its agents. At least, not the way that most people do. It has other concerns. Just ask the three agents who died in Nevermindwhere, USA, dismantling a terrorist bomb. They succeeded, so it didn't make the news. But they didn't survive the radiation poisoning from the waste uranium-235 it was supposed to scatter to the wind. So when she showed up, it was all I could do to see the pool table. I was too busy visualizing synthetic viruses in our local water supply.

She got a drink and meandered over to the pool table.

It never took any attractive young woman any time to get Ward's attention. After about fifteen minutes I took her hint and quit the game. She'd already told me everything I needed to know.

Before I left the bar I called the special number we all had to memorize, let it ring six times before I hung up. To anybody watching it would appear that I'd gotten no answer. But the instruments on the other end would show the calling number, then some clever person would decide it had been me and would call my home within minutes.

"You got a call from Shell Island," my wife greeted me when I got home. "First we've heard from the in...ever, I think." She was smiling. This meant money. My courier service has four accounts which I service personally. Two of them are legit, while Shell Island and the fourth one are names for the company. Fortunately the only thing she cared about business was the income.

This time I let the phone ring until it answered. There was no operator. Mr. Poge always answered that line personally.

"Wendell. Have you heard from Roland?" This use of my real name followed by my company name required a specific response.

"Last word I hear," (that was the specific) "working for channel 23 news." That told him why I'd called. The girl at the bar had mentioned her age, which told me to use that number to tell him that she'd made contact.

"Excellent," he replied. "I have work in your area and need a guide. Can do?"

"Meet my price," I said with a laugh. "500 a day plus expenses, three day minimum." There was no code in this, and I didn't need to know what kind of work. I'd do and he'd pay. I was just telling him the local rate for mercenaries going into a combat zone.

"Fair enough," he accepted. "Can you meet the first bus in the morning and provide transport?"

"I'll be there."

All of this had been for my wife's benefit. When she realized that we were looking at a \$1,500 windfall, she started calculating how to spend it, which was what I intended.

"Well," I said, "looks like I'll be busy for a day or three. Want to take the children over to your brother's and let 'em enjoy the pool?"

"You bet I do!" I bet she did. That would get her into the city with its shopping malls. More important, it would get all of them off the mountain, and the further the better. \$1,500 shopping spree? I called that "cheap."

The next morning she left with the children, taking my anxiety with her. Because I'd have to be going who knew where when I picked up the girl, I called Ward and asked him to come to the office to give my four-wheel-drive a going over. This would also give the girl a chance to get away from him, just in case she needed one. He sounded self-satisfied, and was waiting when I got to the office. I gave him the key and he went right to work.

"Good morning, sir," my secretary smiled. "You have a message. He insisted I take it verbatim." That made it a briefing. Worded to tell her nothing important and to keep her from getting curious, it would tell me something very different.

It was on my desk, under the morning paper. I grabbed a cup of coffee and sat down to read. Spreading the newspaper, I gave it a quick look: and almost dropped my coffee. My new boss was the lead story, found face-down in the canal.

Years of experience kept me from reacting. Or if I did no one mentioned it. Also habit came to my rescue. I normally spread the paper, then lay any messages on top of it. When I realized I wasn't looking at the picture any longer, it was because the message was in the way.

To: Mr. Stockhurst

From: Mr. Poge

I have a package in Danville that has to go out today. You may have to explain yourself because I might not be able to get in touched with the right people. The address is 24365 Saint James Terrace, and is to be delivered to the Snowflower Lodge near your place. If the consignee is

there, deliver even if you have to wake him up. If not, return the package unopened. I sent a courier two days ago but haven't hear from her since. Probably in a local bar pickup up truckers, didn't even call back to quit. I've been trying to get in touch with this guy for five days, but never know just what he's doing or when. There's a bonus if you can get me his work schedule.

Typical Poge message. Disguise dynamite as Christmas candy, wrap it up in tinsel, and set it off in some schluck's face. He'd been doing it to me for years.

"Danville" is the company's code-name for the old USSR, so picked because there are so many Danvilles in the USA that it's inconspicuous; my target was a Russian, probably former KGB.

I might have to explain myself; be prepared for the Russian to be hostile.

The pickup address was on "Saint James Terrace;" this Russian was posing as an Englishman.

"Might not be able to get in touch with the right people;" the Russian had no known ties to the current regime.

Return unopened if I can't deliver; call immediately if he's skipped.

I may have to wake my consignee up; a sleeper, or in this context, a deep cover agent.

"Never know what he's doing, or when;" the Russian may be free-lancing.

"Bonus (for) his work schedule." If possible, find out what jobs he's done.

There were three important things about the agent he'd sent: a woman, she was supposed to pick up her assignment in a bar, and she'd failed to make a scheduled call-in. Mr. Poge also included a timetable when he was referring to her. "Probably in the local bar picking up trucker, didn't even call back to quit," is not a complete sentence. Those who know, know to add a stretch factor to the next time reference. That next time reference as "five days." How much of a stretch factor is elsewhere in the briefing, in this case the number of the pickup address: 24365.

24 and 365 are common numbers in counting time. 247 (24/7) is days to weeks. 24/365 is days to years. This was vital. They'd been looking for this Russian for five years. That was one year less than I had been living here, retired. In this line of work there is no coincidence. That Russian had been sent after me.

But between the time he got his orders and the time he arrived, the USSR collapsed. Stuck without support, he put his orders on hold and settled in. He made a place for himself at the Snowflower Lodge and boosted his income by plying his trade. A professional killer can always find work. Sometimes it even comes to him. After five years he'd become nuisance enough that he had to be removed. That had been the girl's job, a job that was now mine.

The job was defined in the key phrase "has to go." I was free to do whatever I must, including kill him on sight.

Now, did I know an Englishman who came to this area five years before? Somebody who worked at the Snowflower Lodge and who like to pick up girls in bars?

Put another way, who took ten dollars off me at pool the evening before? What mechanic kept my four-wheel drive running? Did I really know the man who, at this moment and at my expense, was doing Heaven knew what to that boltpile I was planning on driving?

No wonder she used the urgent danger signal. I was in boondong deep.

Six years, and I'd grown fat and lazy. Five of these years he'd been scouting me. He was neither fat nor lazy. His free-agent field work kept him current. He was a turbo-charged V-8, and I was a rust-bucket in the salvage yard. If I took him on, it would be a freak of the universe if I won. Not good odds.

But on the other hand I'd spent 50 years scouting me. I knew me better than Ward did, and I wasn't about to overrate myself. Didn't that give me some kind of advantage? So, what were my scouting reports on him?

He enjoyed fast cars and faster women. He was an expert at Trivial Pursuit, and he loved little twists that upset other people's logic. At bridge he would sooner claw his way to four hearts than breeze his way to six diamonds. Points earned in the lower suits were to him sins. Then there was that cocktail party game he invented. A line from a song is coupled to the name of the singer in order to suggest another song. "What is and isn't mine," by Dawn, comes out Sunrise, Sunset. Adding it up, I tried to get inside his head.

Where would I be, and what would I do? I looked out the window at the four-wheel-drive. Ward was still under its hood. He had me under surveillance.

Well there was no way I was going to touch that truck. It could rot. Unfortunately, unless I was willing to borrow a car and make people ask questions, that trapped me in town.

No taxis. No buses served here except the twice-daily Greyhound, and ours isn't the kind of town from which you walk. A mountain valley with one road going through it and forests around, there's no place to run to and no place to hide. Not from Ward. He got his job at the Snowflower because he was a mountain climber. He had me in a box.

Yet I could sniff airholes.

A memory pushed forward from my training days, a statement from an old-timer.

"The cat's best chance against the dog is to take the offensive. But it must strike before the dog bites." What were my fangs and claws?

Of course. The four-by. If Ward was going to use it against me, why not use it against him? And if he wasn't, why not use it anyway?

Ward knew that I was with the company, and he was there when the girl made contact with me. But if he'd interrogated her, he might believe that I'd not yet been briefed. He killed her carefully. He as not the man to do anything hasty in front of witnesses. How to persuade him to keep thinking like that? IT was time to talk.

"Ward, want some more of my money?"

"Always. What's on your poor excuse for a mind?"

"I have to go over to Madison," I lied. "Can you run it up to the lodge and back and make sure its not acting up? You know how cranky it can get.

"Which i won't do if you'll let me pull that computer carburetor and put in a proper

throttle body injection." He was good. If I hadn't had excellent information to the contrary I'd have believed that he had nothing but a heart of pure gold. But the sequence was there. The girl warned me, she picked him up, she went into the canal. One plus one plus one.

"You'll be wanting it done right away, of course," he speculated.

"By ten thirty. I have work piled up to last me that long, but then I'll want to get going fast. I want to be past the canyon before noon." That was easy to believe. Afternoon lighting on that canyon road is a known cause of many accidents. Also that canyon makes a marvelous ambush sight, and I wanted him to think on that. Why should he do something in a hurry that could attract attention, when he could take care of it neatly and watch it get blamed on my carelessness?

"Well," he said, "if I'm to do it proper, I'll need dollars. 50. Cash. Up front."

"Pirate!" I parted with the money and went back inside. It was 16 miles to the lodge. That should take him about 12 minutes. I waited for five minutes after he was gone, and picked up the phone.

"State Police? I want to report a stolen vehicle."

There was no point in waiting to hear back from the police. Ward would think they were pulling him over for speeding until it was too late for him to fight. They'd do the job. I called the special number.

"Check the county jail. Grand theft auto. Hurry if you don't want him to make bail. If you can't take it from here, resign."

Within an hour Wad was arrested. He was never arraigned.

I saw Ward (his real name was Yakov Strelnikov) a few more times, when I was called in to help with his interrogation. How to put it? he was learning to cooperate? Eventually he provided information that closed the cases on nine contract killings. But that first night, he had a question for me.

"Why the cops? You never let anyone else do your work before."

"After I saw what you did to a freshly trained young woman? I'm retired. What kind of fool would I have to be not to take a warning like that?"

"There's more," he shook his head. There was.

"Think. You were my partner, and I bid seven clubs. You upped it to seven hearts, and we went down two." He nodded; I continued.

"I learned something that night. You like it head to head. Maybe if you'd let me have my seven clubs, you would've learned something about me.

"I'll take the wind and not worry about how I get it."

I left an hour later. He hadn't sabotaged the four-by-four. Paying careful attention to the traffic laws, I went back to my retirement as agent-in-place for the company.

The Seedling

Monday

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

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

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

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

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

Opening the onion skin stationery I found these lines:

Dear Sandy:

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

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

Love, Mother

P.S. Fluffy misses you!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tuesday

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

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

"Sandy? Sand-eee! Here—over here!"

I braked my bike abruptly and planted one foot on the curb. Across the street I saw a slim girl in jeans and tailored jacket running toward me, her shoulder-length brown hair

shining and bouncing. I merely looked at her as I did not recognize her. She was out of breath when she ran up to me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Then."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wednesday

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I began to gasp for air, as if all the dust in my rag suddenly had caught in my throat. My ears were ringing, I felt hot, burning. I stumbled, still gasping, toward the door,

mumbling something to Louise. I burst open the door and ran outside into the sunshine stopping only for a moment before running into the park across the street.

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

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

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

"And never looked at my state of mind."

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

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

Thursday

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

I thought of Illinois, of Mother. And of Dad and the last time I had seen him: in the jail, where he stood looking so frightened, after bailing me out. We had marched by chanting, our fists defiantly high. God, why hadn't I stopped? I lowered my head and reluctantly walked up the flagstones to the house.

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

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

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

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

I nodded as I looked at Fritzie sideways, knowing she was sincere. I knew what she meant. I'd had those same feelings both during my longing teenage years in Illinois and when I finally moved to California for college. I spent days just walking up and down the

beach, drinking in the sunlight, feeling the smooth grittiness under my feet and between my toes. It was spiritual even now, though much of the magic had worn off. I pictured myself in the old days: long tan legs in cutoffs with a bikini top, jumping wildly to spike the volleyball, and later pensively staring at the pounding surf.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Friday

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saturday

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With my suitcase under my arm, I looked around my tiny abode one last time. I

sighed. I was happy to be rid of it, but remembered the good times, too.

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

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

The Glass Eye

"I got it, I got it!" we all yelled. It was just a game we used to play, whenever grandpa fell asleep and his glass eye popped out. Every time he fell asleep in his chair, his head would drop until his chin hit his chest, then it would happen. He glass eye would pop out and hit the floor. It was a big challenge to see who could get it first as it rolled across the room. It usually went under a chair or table which made it harder to get.

On rainy days, we would just sit around acting like we were doing something else, so grandpa wouldn't know we were waiting for him to fall asleep. As soon as his head would start for his chest, we all turned around and got ready to jump for the eye.

We had a lot of fun playing this game, until grandpa died. It just wasn't the same on rainy days without grandpa's glass eye. We tried playing games like hid-and-seek or tag, but there just wasn't the challenge that we had chasing that eye. Things were getting pretty dull around the house without grandpa, but then one day, things changed.

Dad was out in the garage working on his car with a grinder trying to get rid of some rust spots so he could repaint it. We were in the house playing tag at the time, when we heard a loud scream. Mom got out there first and she wouldn't let us see what had happened. All she said was that dad had hurt himself and she was going to take him to the hospital. Well, she did and we didn't see dad for a few weeks. He finally came home though, and he had a brand new, shiny, glass eye!

After that, things got back to normal around the house, almost that is. Dad didn't fall asleep like grandpa, but for the first few months we used to follow him around the house, waiting for him to bump into something. It was more fun that waiting for grandpa to fall asleep, cause you never knew when dad would bump into something and his eye would pop out. It was more of a challenge too. You never knew which way it was going to go.

After a while we got tired of chasing his eye, and found other games to lay, like chasing cats with our bikes or throwing rocks at birds. This kept us busy until we got into high school. We found new things to do then, but none of them ever compared to our childish game with the eye.

When we grew up and got out of college, we all went our separate ways. My brothers and sisters got married and had kids of their own. Ya know, sometimes I wish I had gotten married and had kids too. Especially when I have to crawl around every time this damn glass eye falls out.

Covered By His Wings

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

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

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

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

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

"She has lupus."

"She has what?"

"Lupus. Systemic lupus erythematosus."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hello?"

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

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

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

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

Almost a year has passed since that terrible night, and yet every details stands out in my mind as though it were yesterday. Will I ever forget the paralyzed feeling of unbelief that gripped me as I saw her take her last breath? Or the desperate moments when her older sister, Roxanne, and I tried giving her mouth to mouth resuscitation and cardia massage until I could see we needed professional help, and left Roxi to continue while I phoned the nearest fire department and ambulance? Or how the firemen had lost their way trying to locate our house in the unmapped desert? But, more than all that, will I ever forget how God seemed to soften each shattering blow with His tender assurance "... low, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Throughout the months of Nannette's illness, on

the night of her death, and during the months since then I have sensed a gentle peace that comes from knowing beyond a doubt that God is still in control "He will cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge . . ." (Psalm 91:4).

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

When did this all begin anyway? It's hard to put my finger on the exact beginning, for this disease is a sly enemy that sneaks up on its prey from behind, unnoticed. Only five months before her death Nan had realized that her ankles were swollen every evening; a rather minor problem, or so we thought. We decided that it was probably the result of so much strenuous marching in the band at school; surely it would go away in due time, as she grew more accustomed to marching. And so we ignored it. Nan was a healthy, happy girl; a sophomore in high school, with long copper colored hair that hung to her waist, a few rusty freckles marching across her nose, warm blue eyes, and a thin silver-colored retain wire across her front teeth, punctuating her gentle, easy smile. Nan was a good student and she enjoyed the closeness of several special friends at church and at school alike. Unlike many teenagers of fifteen, boys had not yet fully come into the picture, and Nannette's idea of a perfect day was one spent at home sewing or putting in the kitchen, baking homemade bread or trying out a new recipe she had clipped from a magazine. So why worry about swollen ankles?

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

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

We were surprised to learn that lupus (SLE or LE) is not really a new disease, even though few people have ever heard of it. It has been known since 1828 when it was first described as a skin disorder (discoïd lupus); in its mildest form it affects primarily the skin of the face, causing a crusty rash. In more recent years, however, physicians have

discovered that it can also affect other systems of the body (systemic lupus), with its most serious form damaging vital internal organs. For some reason it seems to affect young females more often than any other group.

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

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

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

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

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

Then came the age old question: Why US? Why Nannette? As Roxi pointed out one day, we were not a family that took God lightly; we took time out every day to thank Him, to praise Him for his blessings. Had we not acknowledged His presence in our lives adequately? What had we done to deserve this? From the beginning I could sense that this was not a punishment that God was meting out on us, but rather an opportunity to shower His blessings on us, and on others through us. There were lessons to be learned through this experience, and we determined to learn them one day at a time. Through those

bleak months that lay ahead, two phrases seemed to form in my mind and then stay there: "Think about WHAT IS, not WHAT IF," and "Don't spoil TODAY by worrying about TOMORROW." As a result, we were able to concentrate on each day as an end in itself; to enjoy Nannette for as long as we had left, and to revel in the blessings of each single day. One day as we were waiting in the outer office of the kidney specialist, we noticed a young couple sitting across the room, holding on their lap a young boy suffering from a grotesquely enlarged head. No doubt he had been born that way, or at least it had probably been present most of his life. We went away with hearts full of compassion for that young couple, and praise to God for allowing us at least fifteen normal years with Nannette.

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

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

Now and then, however, a problem would arise that would stop us short. One that seemed to repeat itself often was the growing embarrassment Nannette began to feel about her physical appearance. The medication was unavoidably causing fluid retention and her face took on a full, rounded look; her weight increased considerably, and she became more

and more limited to the number of clothes she could fit into. Fellow students and even some of her closest friends would make jokes and cutting remarks about her weight gain. Often she would arrive home in tears. On one such occasion, she reported that a boy called out to her as she passed, "Hey, whatcha doin', storin' up for winter?"

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

Nothing could be done to lessen the swelling of her face, but I decided the time had come to do something about the rest of this problem. One afternoon I took her shopping to buy a few new clothes that would fit her properly for the time until her condition would be under control and she would resume her normal slender shape. The shopping trip in itself proved to be a great boost to her morale, and the clothes helped her to once more feel acceptable and attractive. She wrote a letter to her cousins that afternoon that warms my heart every time I read it:

Dear Karen, Harold, Beck, Jon, and Sharon,

Wow! What a way to start a letter!

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

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

Love,
Nan

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

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

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

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

Dear teacher:

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for your help

Sincerely,
Mr. & Mrs. Ted Bergman

At the semester break we decided that Nannette was under too much pressure at school, and we finally talked her into dropping biology. She was reluctant to do this, afraid that it would set her back so far that she would be unable to graduate with her friends when that time came. But it was a great relief to her to be free of the complex and time-consuming homework that had plagued her evenings. Next on the firing line was geometry; it, too, posed a great problem to all of us — to her because she found it increasingly difficult to comprehend, and to us, because we were forced more and more to help her night after night to solve essentially the same problems. There seemed to be no carry-over of learning from one day to the next, and our patience began to wear thin. It was difficult to know for sure just what the problem was; whether she was growing more and more dependent and lazy, taking advantage of her illness, or if truly there was a learning handicap as a result of either the medication or the disease itself. We talked seriously of having her drop out altogether and of getting a home tutor instead. (Had we known then

of the ultimate outcome we would have simply ignored school altogether, but we felt her condition was temporary; surely a remission was just around the corner.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She repeated it again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why pray for me? I wondered but said nothing.

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

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

"Oh, is this for me?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, I can't remember."

"Are they balls of yarn?"

"No, I don't think so."

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

"I don't know."

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

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

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

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

Nan was reluctant to come back to bed, but finally did so, grumbling as she came.

"They told us we could do anything we wanted to here," she complained. I realized she was referring to the rules at the hospital; she was obviously confused even as to her whereabouts.

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

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

Later, when Nan was awake, I tried to talk to her to see if she was any more rational after a few hours' rest. Her responses during that day varied. Sometimes she seemed quite

rational, while at others she was not. She seemed fragmented into basically three separate personalities: a little girl of about five or six bursting with joy and enthusiasm; Nannette herself, at fifteen, rational, responsive and coherent; and a stern, angry child I had never met before.

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

As the day wore on, I became more and more oppressed by the magnitude of the situation. For months we had been praying that God would bless the efforts of the doctors and give us wisdom in knowing how best to treat her illness. We had trusted Him implicitly to help us with the problems as they arose, one day at a time. And we continued to walk in the knowledge that nothing happens to His children with His permission. So we knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was still in control. This was happening for His purpose.

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

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

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

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

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

Suddenly she began to breathe heavily.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

