



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LITERATURE

The Rose Garden	<i>Robin Morgan</i>	5
Xerox	<i>Jennifer Hafner</i>	6
Resurrection of a Salesman	<i>Heather A. McCormack</i>	7
The Color of Despair	<i>Sarah Davis</i>	10
Leaving Birmingham	<i>Paul Mattfeld</i>	12
lightbulb's burden	<i>Bryan Turnbow</i>	13
Close to the Edge	<i>Lindsay Mitchell</i>	14
Ennui	<i>Jay Enyart</i>	18
Broken	<i>Sarah Davis</i>	19
Observations at an Intersection	<i>Sandra L Peterson</i>	21
Jughead	<i>Bryan Turnbow</i>	22
Walls	<i>Jennifer Hafner</i>	24
Reception	<i>Jay Enyart</i>	25
Miracles	<i>Lynette Banning</i>	28
Storm	<i>Troy Sterling Nies</i>	30
The Golden Throng	<i>Troy Sterling Nies</i>	32
Church Bells Ring of Screaming Child ...	<i>Correy Kewatt</i>	37
A Pocket Full of Change	<i>Charla Grenz</i>	38
Hairpick	<i>Darryl Lee Kopp</i>	40
Dawning of Another Day	<i>Nicole Rust</i>	42
It Couldn't Be	<i>Correy Kewatt</i>	43

ART

(Cover drawing)	<i>Molly Huber</i>	
Heinrich	<i>Warren Kessler</i>	9
Uncommon Nude	<i>Rick Fetting</i>	13
Tears of Faith	<i>Fran Wanchic</i>	15
What Do You Mean		
You Didn't Bring Lunch!	<i>Sherry Johnson</i>	17
Spirit	<i>Deb Helbling</i>	17
Raindrops on a Window	<i>Jason J. Tomanek</i>	20
Anna	<i>Warren Kessler</i>	29
Best of Friends	<i>Vincent Cork</i>	36
Tom and Huck	<i>Bryan Turnbow</i>	41

A MOMENT OF CLARITY

Artists and authors struggle with concepts. They shape their ideas using common elements, such as unity, theme, and symbolism. These people share goals as well: they try to satisfy their own notions of achievement and appeal to their audiences.

Good art and good literature abide by understood design statutes that are taught and practiced by professionals. If someone achieves greatness without a plan, we attribute it to benevolent goodwill and rare spiritual guidance from within (a gift).

At any rate, this greatness, when realized, brings profound joy to its creator and to those who strive for reciprocal gratification.

A *FIGMENTS* staff member described one such moment of clarity as "perfection which is sought, admired, but rarely attainable."

Moments of clarity happen all the time. This year's staff members chose the clarity subject to complement this issue. *Figments* of their moments of clarity follow:

Some people see life as blue and dark. Others see it as yellow and bright. But the few who can step back from the color view themselves and their lives as whole.

The sound of snow. The perfect ending. When a child is wiser than an adult.
When I hear my voice recorded and realize that no one hears what I hear when I speak.

Passions, surprises, fears, joys — the birth of each.

Seeing a symbolic connection in an ordinary object.
Silencing a noisy room.
Standing in one spot of sunlight during a rainstorm.
Imagining infinity.
Sharing a dream. And nobody laughs.

An unexpected hug. An unforgettable quote. Ripples in a still pool.
A memory from smell. That one brush stroke. That one pen stroke.

That one word or phrase that, after a long arduous search, finally comes to mind, thoroughly satisfying me, stirring my senses, and raising my emotional barometer.

—Spring 1996 *FIGMENTS* advisor, Jodi Davis

POETS IN THIS ISSUE

TROY STERLING NIES is a sophomore from Mandan, who is majoring in music. "The Golden Throng" originated from one of his classmate's journal entries and some psychological difficulties Troy was feeling at the time.

JENNIFER HAFNER is a freshman, majoring in English. "Walls" began as a fun poem, but later developed into a more serious reflection of the way walls can hurt people.

Jennifer wrote "Xerox" to demonstrate how a person's lousy day was salvaged by her decision to do something simple and unusual.

JAY ENYART is a sophomore. He originally wrote "Ennui" about a drunk man who was going to kill his father, but Jay later decided on a different outcome, because he thought the poem would stun his own father.

PAUL MATTFELD is a Bismarck native in his second year as an English major. "Leaving Burmingham" is about the life of someone he once knew while living in New Orleans.

CORREY KEWATT is a freshman English major from Bismarck. A baptism in a Catholic church inspired him to write "Church Bells Ring of Screaming Child."

BRYAN TURNBOW is a sophomore. He was inspired to write "lightbulb's burden" because of, what he calls, "the injustice that plagues the lightbulb community."

SANDRA L. PETERSON is an assistant professor of commercial art at BSC, currently taking coursework to complete a Baccalaureate degree. "Observations at an Intersection" is the result of an English assignment to write a Dorothy Parker-type poem (Parker's poems characteristically end with a sardonic twist).

NICOLE RUST is a sophomore from Turtle Lake, North Dakota. She is majoring in nursing. "Dawning of Another Day" sums up how Nicole felt after a good friend moved away.

DARRYL LEE KOPP is a sophomore from Mandan, North Dakota, who is majoring in Spanish and education. While watching someone fix her hair, he heard the girl yell, which made him wonder about the act from the hairpick's point-of-view. Thus, the poem "Hairpick" was created.

LYNETTE BANNING is an English major originally from Mandan. She wrote "Miracles" after a trip to the mountains and Wyoming last summer.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

SHERRY JOHNSON is a sophomore enrolled in the commercial art program. She is originally from Wilton, North Dakota.

"What Do You Mean, You Didn't Bring Lunch!" is a black and white photograph taken while she was on a hunting expedition. Of the hungry peacocks, she says they were "fascinating creatures that were in a lunch line."

BRYAN TURNBOW's "Tom and Huck," a colored photograph, was inspired by his "being dirty." Bryan is the mud-clad figure on the right in the picture.

WARREN KESSLER is a visual arts major from Bismarck, North Dakota. His charcoal drawing "Heinrich" is based on an 1859 oil on panel painting by Gustave Kohler. The drawing is 17" X 23" in size.

"Anna" is also a charcoal drawing and was inspired by the softness of the tones in the original picture. Warren is a sophomore.

JASON J. TOMANEK is also a native of Bismarck. He is a sophomore majoring in visual arts. "Raindrops on a Window" is an "8 X12" charcoal drawing. Jason drew it because of the "challenge of bringing out the right colors and images."

VINCENT CORK is a sophomore art major from Minot, North Dakota. His imagination inspired "Best of Friends," which is a 25"X34" charcoal drawing.

RICK FETTING is a sophomore from Bismarck. His "Uncommon Nude" is a soapstone sculpture which stands 12" high. His inspiration for the piece was the chance to discover "what was hidden beneath the surface of the stone."

FRAN WANCHIC is a Bismarck native majoring in visual art. "Tears of Faith" depicts the woman who wiped Jesus's feet with her hair. The piece is carved from soapstone, and is 6 1/4" high and 6 1/2"X 4" wide. Fran is a sophomore.

MOLLY HUBER drew the illustration featured on the cover of *FIGMENTS*. The picture is a charcoal drawing on paper. Molly is a freshman from Bismarck.

DEB HELBLING is a commercial art major. "Spirit" is an 11"X14" pen and ink drawing which demonstrates the pointalism technique. Deb is a sophomore from Bismarck.

THE ROSE GARDEN

by Robin Morgan

ROBIN MORGAN wrote this story for an assignment in English 101, about a personal experience with a person she knew very well. Robin is a freshman, majoring in English.

The squeaky wheels of the little red VW bug grew quiet as we slowed to a stop on the park side of the street.

"God," I said. "Liv's car just reeks of gas or something."

"Yah," said Dave with a smiling face. "I guess we better not smoke in there."

Exchanging smiling glances, we stepped out into the street, and crossed over into the rose garden.

The sun beat down upon our faces and backs that August afternoon. I could feel the tiny beads of sweat starting to break the upper surface of my lip, growing into the salty drops that would soon slide down my face. I noticed Dave wipe his brow in an effort to keep cool. Our breath was short and heavy.

"This way," said Dave motioning with a slight nod

of his head.

We walked down the path of softened wood chips. Still damp from the early morning watering, they gave comfort to our dry, calloused feet. With a dirt border on either side, they guided us to our destination. Pleasantly sinking a bit into the softened earth beneath the wood chips, we made our way to the roses.

"I think if you were blind," I observed, "you would like it here just as much."

"Yah, you're right," said Dave. And it was true.

Before we got there, we stopped to let the fragrances soak in and lift us towards them. The thick enchanting smell of the roses blended with the fresh scent of pine from the trees. It seemed to change the hot air into something more pleasant to breathe. Our sluggish feet grew lighter as we stood.

It was the end of August, the time when the roses had their fullest color. Yet, if you touched them, they had a slight crackle to their velvet softness which left you to know that fall was

on its way. As we reached the roses, we could see the wide variety of colors and stages of development among them. The tiniest bud, with petals still making an attempt to bloom before winter, stood next to a drying blossom, heavy with an abundance of petals.

"How sad," I said. My thoughts were elsewhere as I touched a dry rose and watched the tired petals fall silently to the ground.

"Don't worry," Dave teased, "they'll be back next spring."

"Oh, I know, and they're still beautiful now. They're just changing." I stopped. "Like everything else." I let my lips part and smiled at the roses. "Sometimes that's just sad, I guess."

"Yah, I know," he paused. "Have you seen your house yet?"

"No," I said with disgust. "Mom and Dad didn't take any pictures."

"It's all so weird."

"No kidding! I mean, I've lived here all my life. In the same house even. Well, except when I lived down by the Platte, but I barely even remember, so that doesn't

really count.”

“You have to promise to write me.”

“Me!?” I turned in mock surprise. “You’re the one who’s always busy. I haven’t even left yet and I never see you!” I stopped. “I’m only teasing.”

“Well, you’re always with Kirsten,” he said, searching for an excuse.

“You can come with any time you want. It’s just that you’re always with ‘Miss Aprille.’” I said this with a mocking, sing-song voice.

Dave just looked down and blushed. He knew I had gotten him there.

“Don’t worry; I just like to tease you,” I said reassuringly. “It’s O.k. Things are just changing, that’s all. Like they’re supposed to.”

It seemed like we had been standing there for quite awhile, when all of a sudden we were aware of our beautiful surroundings once again.

Dave turned. “There’s just a bunch of wheat fields up there, huh?” He asked.

“I guess so,” I shrugged. “That’s all I’ve ever seen.”

“Well, this can be our rose garden forever then.”

“That’s right,” I said. “No one else’s.”

A soft breeze came up, and with it at our backs, we continued our journey down the path in the garden which is sometimes filled with roses.



XEROX

by Jennifer Hafner

one lifetime
is a road of disillusion
a path of lies
a corruption of spirit

one person
is the destroyer of my heart
a second of
an evil thought brings me down

one moment
of each day i still find pure joy
my heart is full
of a wonderful feeling

one machine
of plastic and light could save my
good emotions
all i have to do is simple

one nickel
i take from my blue jean pocket
deposit it
i lean down and Xerox my heart.

RESURRECTION OF A SALESMAN

by Heather A. McCormack

HEATHER A. McCORMACK gets into some "pretty trying ruts" when it comes to writing. She admits that this piece, however, is the blissful resolution to one of those hard nights: "Mac taught me that communication is natural, not a pain in the ass."

Desperate for a future, I hitchhike down Mac's past.

To my squinty brown eyes, my grandpa was a dried old soul. Marlboros (the hard pack kind), Budweiser (in a can) and road miles (of gravel and bones) had turned his face to ashes and crinkles. He knew how to growl, too, like a meaner William Burroughs.

"Elleeeennnn! I can't find my damn coat!" he'd bellow from the moldy entry.

"It's on your goddamn chair!" Grandma would yell back. Her gravel-bag retorts could K.O. Grandpa's gripes sometimes.

But most people didn't call Grandpa "grandpa" or John Harold McCormack. (No one calls my father by

his true first name either.) Time had christened him "Mac." Such a single-punch nickname was man enough for the black n' blue road life of a Fargo Glass and Paint salesman. Plus, if he were tipsy on whiskey, the Mac moniker suffered little slurring. And I believe my grandpa liked hearing his name hit the air cleanly: M-A-C.

In the nine years that we shared life together, I never once breathed that word. My ears, however, have entombed it forever.

**AND I BELIEVE
MY GRANDPA LIKED
HEARING HIS NAME
HIT THE AIR CLEANLY:
M - A - C.**

Mileage was Mac's mistress for twenty-five years. Linoleum, ceramic, paint, glass and thinner were his only cross-state company. To carry the salesman's hefty wares was a Chevy.

(Mac gambled on a Plymouth once, but the son-of-a-bitch broke down.)

Prime and prospering in the mid-1940s, Mac, like his counterparts, billowed and blew like the American flag. World War II-inflamed patriotism not only sparked mad U.S. bond drives, but also Mac's bass growls of "japs, chinks, krouts, and hebies."

Prejudice and racism, however, were not the core reasons for Mac's banter. To him, loose slang wasn't a slip of the tongue, but a well-versed history lesson. Born November 25, 1910, in Davenport, Iowa, Mac, too, had grown up with an ethnic tag: a Mick shanty. His grandparents Samuel and Mary McCormack were uprooted, unemployed Irish who surged Ellis Island in the 1880's. Mac had survived minority status for seventy-four years, so why couldn't someone else? Grandpa was very American.

When I first met

Grandpa McCormack, he had long since divorced the road. (Highways can love you only so long before they start to run you over.) His twenty-five-year stint with Fargo Glass and Paint had been most fruitful, though. Dust-dressed salesman trophies and suitcases of carpet samples filled Mac and Ellen's house on Thayer.

A sucker for all-things-breakable, I especially adored the leftover glass cubes. My sisters and I would endow the has-been goods with new souls: make-shift Barbie stages or Dorian grey kaleidoscopes.

While we kids scampered on the scarlet carpet with our make-believe toys, Mac and Grandma indulged in their dwindling afternoon vices: Marlboros and cussin'. I remember how their hard pack smoke would snake under the back room door and leaden my head for hours.

* * *

My clearest memory of Grandpa sounds from a soccer field. As a full-speed-ahead forward, I trampled prairie terra without sideline glances; now and then a sinister weed clump would break my full-throttle approach.

"No pushing, Heather! No pushing!" my coach would yell. I hated hearing my first name breach the

field. Distracted from play, I turned my head; Grandpa and his brown tweed hat were nowhere in the crowd's cherry flush. I finished the game, filled with snot, sweat and scars.

... MAC AND GRANDMA INDULGED IN THEIR DWINDLING AFTERNOON VICES: MARLBOROS AND CUSSIN'.

He was supposed to be here, I thought over the erratic beat of my temples; my kinetic heat soon slipped into autumn chill; shivering racked my ribs and skull:

"Gggggrandppa, whhherre arre yyyou?"

A snowball white Chevy Impala, slightly iced in rust, pulled up; an old man with a tweed hat and a swollen horn for a nose got out.

"S'ppose you're hungry, Heather Feather?" he asked me with that cancer-bitten voice box. I rather liked the beat up sound, although it scared me a bit.

"Yes, Grandpa. So hungry I could eat a horse," I replied.

"Guess we'll get a bite. Where do you want to feed yourself?"

"I like the Hardees

chicken fillet sandwich," I answered. Slowly, I boarded his American show boat and slammed the clunky door shut. Inside, the Chevy's ruby red interior glared at me like a blood-shot eye. I was eight-years-old and scared as hell to sit so close to blood.

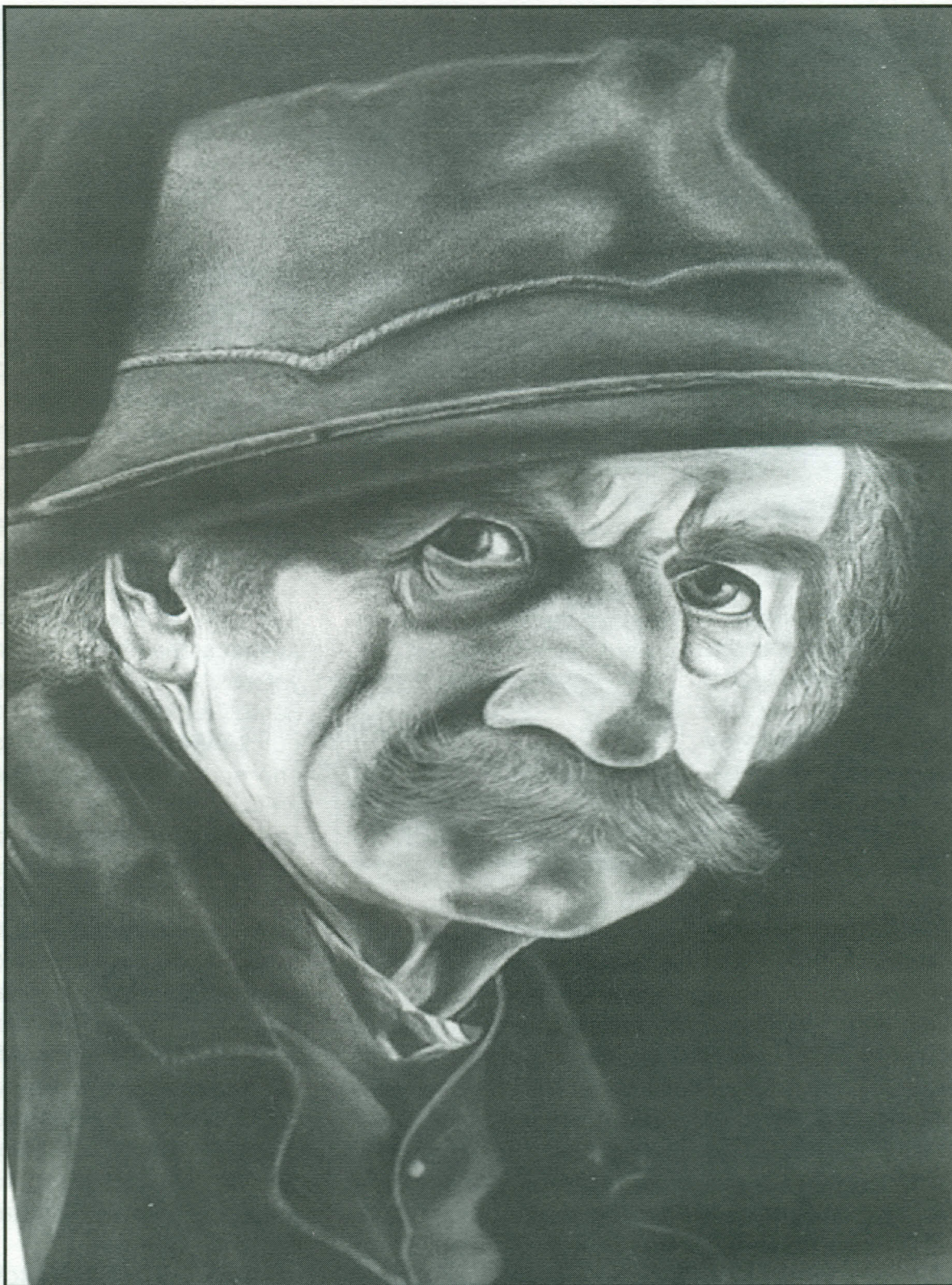
"Here we go," he announced over the engine's hack. Wrinkling my nose, I thought how grandpa's breath stunk like gasoline.

As the ex-salesman slipped through traffic, I, his only cross-town company, stole a few profile glances of the man they called Mac: ashen skin, shriveled balloon nose and tight liver ribbons for lips. My squinty brown eyes and swollen pink mouth had no place in that crooked-road-map countenance.

As the driver put on more miles, I swallowed my dinner and waited for my stop home. Grandpa was a familiar stranger who'd picked me up once and dropped me off in the future. Eleven years after his death, I wonder what Mac was really like.

• I now bow to two more vital men in my life: Mac (I can call him that now) and John Michael McCormack (most call him "Mike," but I call him worse). There is a reason to look back now.-H





by Warren Kessler

THE COLOR OF DESPAIR

by Sarah Davis

SARAH DAVIS wrote this true story for a short story project in Mrs. Swartz's fiction writing class. Her rendition of a young girl's traumatic experience reflects the cruelty of a dysfunctional society. Sarah is a freshman, majoring in psychology.

The young woman stepped out into the front yard and took a deep, trembling breath. The air was sharp; icy needles burned her lungs. Jeannie shook her dark hair out of her dress coat and bundled the collar around her pale neck. An involuntary chill crept up her arms as she bent her head against the night.

"Why does it always have to be so damn cold at Christmas?!" Jeannie's words slurred a bit from her Christmas cheer. The question hung in the empty night. There was no one there to answer. The loneliness sliced deeper than the cold.

Her eyes were drawn to the dancing strings of lights. A small smile turned her lips

and she found herself entranced. Jeannie's heart began to pound rapidly in her ears -thump-thump-thump-and she felt an uneasiness quivering her belly. When she closed her eyes against the sickness, she saw herself as a fourteen-year-old child. Her body was numb and forgotten as her mind turned inward, back to that day...

The houses loomed on either side... their faces bleak, yet sinister.

Jeannie began to walk. The snow was frozen solid and her boots crunched loudly, echoing through the quiet neighborhood. Around the first corner the wind picked up and Jeannie, surprised, was knocked off balance for a moment. She bent at the waist and hunched over, like a football player at practice. The next block, she turned back up the street out of the menacing December gale. "I'll just have

to walk the alley," she thought to herself and chuckled. Lisbon was so backwards that she would feel safe hitchhiking here.

She ducked down the alley. Here it was calm and peaceful. The night was beautiful, dead silent with a spattering of twinkling stars. The houses loomed on either side of these gravel avenues, their faces bleak, yet sinister. Jeannie chided herself for foolishness and quickened her pace. As she scurried towards the artificial security of a small street lamp, she glanced up and waved at Mr. Christian. The owner of the small bowling alley on Main Street had driven that old beater since before Jeannie was born. The next car was a little two-door Honda. After it passed, the brake lights shone and the car began backing up. Jeannie's heart fluttered until she heard a familiar phrase.

"Hey, you're Mitch Webb's cousin, aren't ya?" A passerby could smell the stale alcohol from five feet away. "We were just a goin'

to pick up that old Mitch. You comin'?" The driver had a big dopey smile plastered to his face and the other three guys were nodding enthusiastically. A flicker of recognition played with Jeannie's mind and she shrugged her shoulders, "Yeah, I guess. Where we heading to?"

"I told you, we're goin' to pick up Mitch."

She squeezed into the crowded back seat and settled herself. The empty beer cans littered the floor and the guys around her smelled like barn animals. The one named Shane reached over and playfully grabbed her knee.

"Very funny, Shane, but no such luck." Jeannie plucked his hand away and shifted her body a bit closer to the window. "Well, are we going or what?" Anxiety tainted her voice as the smell almost overcame her.

"Not yet," the passenger in the front seat chirped. "We haven't had any fun yet." Their laughter was maniacal. Reaching for an escape, Jeannie was grabbed roughly by her shoulder. The hands were gruff and strong. They grated against her skin like sandpaper. Her survival instinct was to fight, kick, bite, and scream. Impossible. First, she was gagged with an old pair of

sweat socks, then pinned, lying down, in the cramped backseat. Jeannie was aware of the driver getting out of the car and climbing into the back, while Shane went to the front. Four pairs of crude hands groped and pinched every part of her body. Jeannie began to silently cry.

"Oh, little baby girl, why the long face?" His eyes gleamed with a brutal rage that couldn't be human. "You know this is what you want. You asked for it, walkin' around in the middle of the night, coming to the car, getting in. You want me, little girl."

The pinching and brutal fondling continued as did the taunts and threats. Their words echoed in her mind - "Bitch, you asked for it. Sleazy girl. You want all of us. Slut. Tramp. You like this? I know you do. Cryin' for more. Pathetic. Used goods."

Soon she became devoid of emotion, and any further tears. She noticed a rip in the backrest of the passenger's seat. It became her only escape. Hysterical fantasies bounced around in her mind. The fluffy stuff was holy white, and angels would come about and save her. No, no, the small rip would keep expanding and she would be swal-

lowed into safety. No, wait, she could rip out some of the stuffing and it would be poisonous and she could rub it into her captors' faces and hurt them back. As the driver tore her pants off, shredding her panties and ripping at her blouse, he penetrated her. A feeling of hot pain and vulgarity seared through her. When she opened her eyes, the rip was a grungy grey, unmerciful and tainted.

A feeling of hot pain and vulgarity seared through her.


"Stop it! Oh, God, stop. Stop. Stop. No, no." Her pleas went unheard, her voice growing smaller and smaller. A nonstop mumble of nonsense still spewed from her lips. The man finished his sin but stayed inside her. Jeannie's body began to tremble and burn. Nausea came quickly and she threw up on top of her blouse and herself.

"Oh, shit! Jesus Christ, you bitch. Look what you just did. Get the fuck out of my car. Fuck. You were drunk. Shit! Don't you say nothing about this. Ain't no one gonna believe a drunk, fucking tramp like you. If you go a talkin', I'll know. Damn bet I'll know." The

man threw Jeannie and her clothes out the car door and took off. She lay scared, buried inside herself, for a long while. No thought came. Nothing mattered. The hard snow badgered her semi-nakedness and she finally rose. Jeannie did her best to try to pull up her wet, frozen pants and to button her stained, torn blouse. She no longer had her bra or panties - nor her courage, her faith, or her pride.

“Sweetheart, you must be freezing! Come back inside.”

Jeannie snapped into reality at her grandmother’s call. She opened her mouth to tell her, to tell anyone. But again, as the memories faded, she decided not to. The horrors were long ago and usually far away.

She shook her head slightly at her grandmother and started to walk. The cold felt good, real, mindnumbing and unforgiving. As she plodded forward, her slender, defiant chin rose and the knots of tension plaguing her body evaporated. But Jeannie couldn’t lie to herself. She would never be able to dispel her personal aura. It was black, the color of despair, the symbol of fear. 

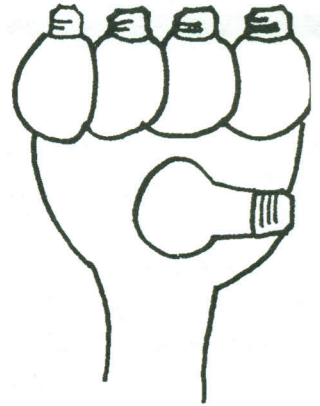
Leaving Birmingham

by Paul Mattfeld

I have lost the awkward clarity this institution allowed me several years ago and I could offer one thousand memories, detailing the women in taverns and the pale glimmer of a gun admired restlessly above our naked isolation, around green sheets, amongst sweat. I could tell you of loss and its fleshy palatability now or of obsession and my salvation. It seems I’ve forgotten myself in a sea of themes without words and the words of professors, many acclaimed, have left me only with the stale hostility of wisdom and regret. I have given you my heart out of desire or hatred and— Is this the end we’ve invited ourselves to? My voice, hanging from your skin like something all too ridiculous and you, alone with yourself at the window, an entire world seventy-five feet down and on forever. I can’t believe this is all we’ve salvaged since you left Birmingham to destroy me in this wasted, Indiana town of worthless barrooms and infidels. The pornography of my hands, lover, will become our regret.



by Rick Fetting



lightbulb's burden

by Bryan Turnbow

he lights my room day after day
looks down on me where i lay
obeys my fingers every command
without him, sightless bland
dont touch him when hes awake
give you all the pain you can take
mad because he cannot leave
no chance for him at a reprieve
one day his light burns out
call him names... dirty saurkraut
annoyed at him when he dies
no one cares for him, not even flies
toss his carcass in the trash
take one of his brothers from the lightbulb stash
skrewed in every sense of the word
the voice of the lightbulb goes unheard.

CLOSE TO THE EDGE

by Lindsay Mitchell

LINDSAY MITCHELL is a freshman journalism major from Minton, Saskatchewan. She wrote "Close to the Edge" for a fiction writing assignment.

Waves of blue and greenswallow me until I am completely enveloped. I take a breath, only to find myself with a mouthful of salty water, which I quickly spit out. I can't hold my breath any longer. I need air...just one...breath...of air..

My dream never goes any farther than that. I always wake up at that point, reeling with dizziness and gasping for air. I sit up, wipe the sweat from my face and my chest, taking huge gulps of the intoxicating salt air. The clock glows a green 6:23 as I wrap my robe around myself and head down to the kitchen. Funny how the only thing I want right now is a huge glass of

water.

The kitchen is warm and bright from the early morning sunlight. The ocean, which has always been in my backyard, makes little rainbows dance around the room as the waves gently roll up the shore and back again. Some days I feel as though I could watch them rocking back and forth forever, just letting my thoughts roll lazily along with them. I make my decision to go down to the sitting rock today as I hear the shower.

I make my decision to go down to the sitting rock...

I start breakfast for Dad while he's getting ready for work. Normally, Mom would have breakfast made and fresh flowers in a vase by this time, but she doesn't make breakfast anymore. It's just Dad and I now.

The room fills with the clean scent of Dad's aftershave and the clicking of his shoes, and a kiss lands on the top of my head. "Good morning, Carmie. Something sure smells good!"

Mom named me Carmel when I was born. She said I was the sweetest little treat she'd ever been blessed with. I always felt a combination of pride and embarrassment when she told that to people.

"I made an omelette for you, and there's a bagel about to pop from the toaster. Oh, and I figured out the cappuccino machine. There was this little booklet in the box and can you believe instructions came with the machine? I kind of thought your cursing and swearing was a pretty neat approach to trying to work it, though." I giggled and dodged Dad's swat with the morning paper.

"What do you have

planned for today? If you want to head into town you can take Mom's car." Dad listened and watched for my response.

I stared at my feet and shook my head. I'm not ready to feel any sorry glances pierce my back or hear "you poor dear" as the old ladies squeeze my shoulders. "Nah, I think I'll stick around here for the day, but can you bring home some milk and fresh vegetables?"

"Okay. Give me a call at work to remind me so I don't forget. If you change your mind about town, the keys are hanging up." Dad left me with a kiss in each palm.

Mom had grown up in town, about 7 miles from this house. When she was in high school, she used to bike out here all the time to watch the ocean. There's a place where the beach builds up into this tall rocky cliff, and Mom had conquered it, and claimed it as her own to sit and dream of her future. She told me once that she used to pray and wish and dream that she would own this house some day. That dream came true when Dad came to town.

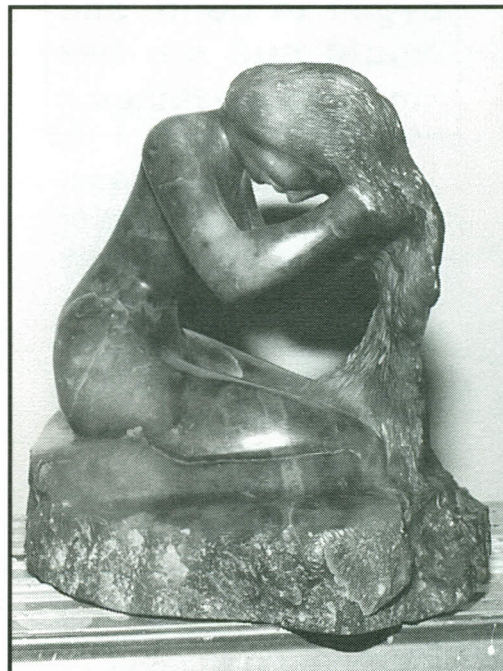
He had proposed to Mom in less than a month of dating, promising to take

her to bigger and better places, but Mom turned him down, telling him she was happy exactly where she was. But Dad knew what he wanted, so he made an offer to the people who lived here before we did, and bought the house. He blindfolded Mom, drove out here, knelt in front of the Sold sign, and said, "Now will you marry me?" The rest is pretty normal from there.

Mom's dream house became hers, a combination of cedar and glass. The back of the house is constructed mainly of glass, with four sets of French doors opening up to a two level patio. From here, you can see the ocean for miles until it drops off the edge of the horizon.

When my thirteenth birthday rolled around, Mom took me up to the cliff, showed me the spot where she used to sit, put a rose in my hair, and pronounced the spot mine. In the past four years, I have never received a greater gift. Before I came out here to my spot, I picked a rose and put it in my hair. Cradled here, I think of nothing and everything at the same time. There's this eerie calm that takes over my body and mind and now the memories come rushing in.

I remember Mom telling me once that many people had taken their lives out on this cliff. I can understand why they may have chosen this spot. Sitting here on these rocks, looking out onto the ocean, you can



by Fran Wanchic

see this turmoil in the waves, intermingled with a type of peace. The waves crash so forcefully against these rocks, angry that they can go no further, but defeated, they slowly roll back into the vast nothingness. Maybe since these people already feel the turmoil inside, that feeling that they can go no further, they believe that at the bottom it will roll away like the waves and leave only the peace behind.

One day I went to the edge of the cliff to look out, and I felt myself being pulled further out, as if something or someone was calling me. It was pretty scary to look down and see that there was almost nothing left between me and death, and not knowing how I had gotten there. Maybe that's what happened to Mom. Maybe she just went too close to the edge. I'd like to think so. It would be less painful than the truth.

Mom was beautiful. She was always outside, either doting over her rose bushes, or picking sea-shells. I can't recall a time seeing her without her straw hat, the one that ties under her chin. She always reminded me of a movie star in that hat. Her hair was weaved with the colors

of honey and sand, while her skin remained a Hiawatha brown.

In these memories Mom is smiling and happy, but that wasn't always the case. She had pills to keep her happy. Sometimes she got angry and decided she was sick of all the pills, and that's when things went wrong. She was a completely different person during her down times. It was hard to get her out of bed to perform everyday tasks. She would just lie there and cry, and as her rage began to build, she would pull out her hair, or throw things if she caught a glimpse of her own image. Dad slept in the guest room during her depressions and nobody came over.

...AS HER RAGE began to build, she would pull out her hair or throw things...

Mom's fits didn't happen very often, maybe once or twice a year, but it was very important to her that nobody knew. She said she would rather die than have the town pity her. They wouldn't understand. I mean, what did Mom have to be depressed about? She was happily married to a man who would have given her the stars and

could, she had a beautiful daughter, and a home envied by all. They would think she was just being selfish, and why shouldn't they think that? She thought so herself.

Mom's last depression was about a month ago. It ended here on this cliff. Dad blames himself since he fell asleep while watching her, but I think if he would have been awake, she would have waited for a better time. Nobody could have prevented what happened.

I awoke that night to find my patio doors open. I went to the deck and noticed that Mom and Dad's doors were open too. I ran into the room, woke Dad to help me find Mom, and went back to the patio. We saw her on the cliff and the rest seems like a really bad dream. She turned to look back. Her hair and her nightgown were blowing all around her as she turned and disappeared over the edge of the cliff. Dad fell into my arms, and I led him into my room. I sat on the bed to hold him and noticed the rose Mom had left on the pillow.

I forgive Mom for leaving us. I can't exactly say I understand what she went through to get to the point she did, but I know that the depressions got stronger all



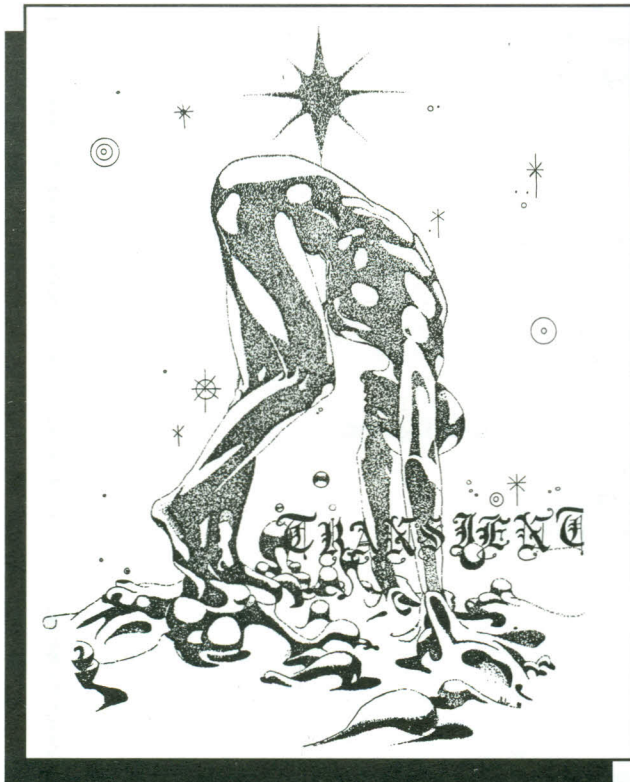
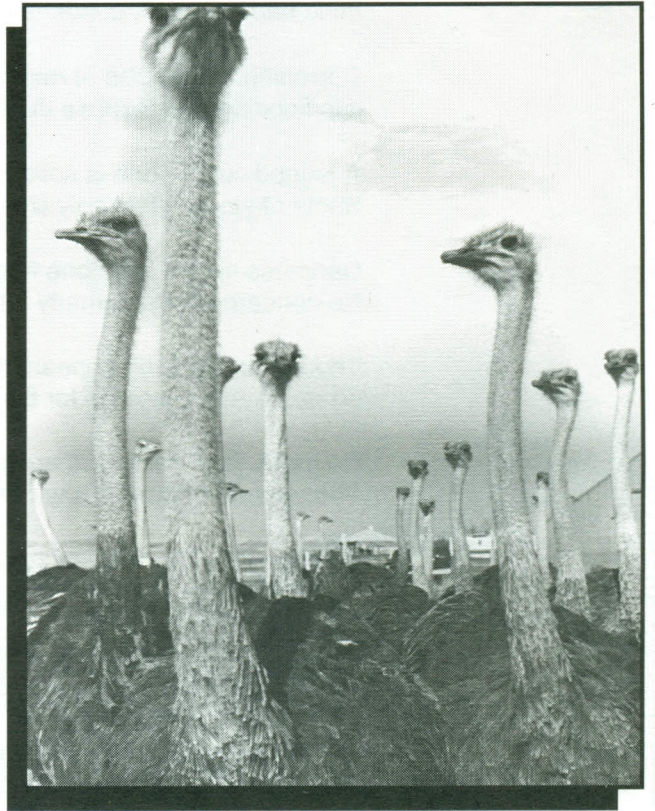
the time, and harder for everyone to handle.

With the salt of my tears mingling with the ocean spray, I, too, walk to the edge of the cliff. Instead of finding my peace at the bottom, I have come to terms

with my mother's death, and have found peace inside myself. I pull the rose from my hair and drop the petals over the edge, one by one. As the last one falls, I close my eyes and softly whisper, "I love you."

I turn to walk home, knowing I will never return to the cliff again. 🕷️

by Sherry Johnson



by Deb Helbling

by Jay Enyart

Ennui

In wet seasons of detest for reasons,
mine had taken off, condensation breaks to fall.

Corroding tendencies of raining wine,
lets flooding rage expose the mind.

A jagged cut of earth is solid, with no wrongs.
Shots of storm effect only sight, then gone.

Darkness allows the stone free night.
No concerns of the remedy for its plight.

Thoughtful agitation appears to be gray and serene,
an excusable distortion for the wasting colors I see.

No moon like I wished to enlighten hope.
Though black shrouds any hue, I need not cope.

Somberness is a guise of innocence.
Nudity is a vice, viable its presence.

Do all my dreams slip out streaming?
Can rain water melt a rock into steaming?

Connected yarns of carpet say
much the same, envisioning day.

Arms and staircases have a clicking match,
to staring at arms, cocking into catch.

I have staked my foundation already.
Without a ground, trembling seems steady.

Confidence in a sleep with consequence beside the bed.
Take a chisel,
carve a picture.
Point a gun to misery's head.

BROKEN

SARAH DAVIS was inspired to write "Broken" by a free writing assignment in English class. Sarah is a freshman majoring in psychology.

It was Valentine's Day and Ray and Lisa were going out for a nice romantic dinner. Lisa stopped at a small gift shop on her way home and bought a beautiful card that gave her goose bumps when she read it. It was perfect.

Her head was humming as she dressed and her hands were trembling like a school girl's on prom night. Smiling, now smiling wasn't something she did as often anymore, but this night she felt sexy and care-free. Her heart pounded and blood rushed behind her eyes as she looked into the mirror. The black, sleeveless gown was gauzy and clung to her skin; her hair was thick and luxurious; the necklace Ray had given her awhile back glittered in the dim light. Ra-

diant was the word that popped into her head. She turned around in embarrassment. Ray was standing behind her.

"What time are our reservations?" Lisa asked.

"Awwww, shit, baby, I forgot to make any. I'm sorry."

"Oh, well, that's all right ... (sigh). Where do you think we can get in? I'm starving!"

"Don't worry, baby, I've got the perfect place. But you might want to change." Ray's eyes crinkled in a smile as he said this.

"Yeah, right. Okay." She threw off her hopes of romanticism and slipped on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

Ray drove to dinner and Lisa was wary of where he would choose. They talked idly in the car on the way to - *PERKINS! God! Just great. Perkins on Valentine's Day*, she thought. There was still a fifteen minute wait. Ray talked about his new job

coming up, and Lisa smiled and listened with extreme disinterest.

"This job should be top money, baby. No worries for a long time." *Okay, no worries*, Lisa thought. *What the hell does he know about worries, anyway?*

"I'll be gone for ten days, baby. We should go straight home and start packing me up."

"And miss the movie? C'mon Ray, I've been looking forward to Valentine's Day for a month."

"Aw, baby, it's just another day. We can..."

"What? We can watch a movie anytime?! You just don't get it, do you Baa-Beeey." She spoke a bit too loudly and couples began to sneak glances at them. She didn't even notice. Months of anger were boiling over and nothing penetrated the red smoke swirling in her eyes.

Ray chuckled as he glanced away. "Always so high strung," he mumbled. An older gentleman looked

his way tentatively. Ray stared until the old man nodded slightly, then frowned at his wife and sadly shook his head.

"Goddammit, Ray, listen to me."

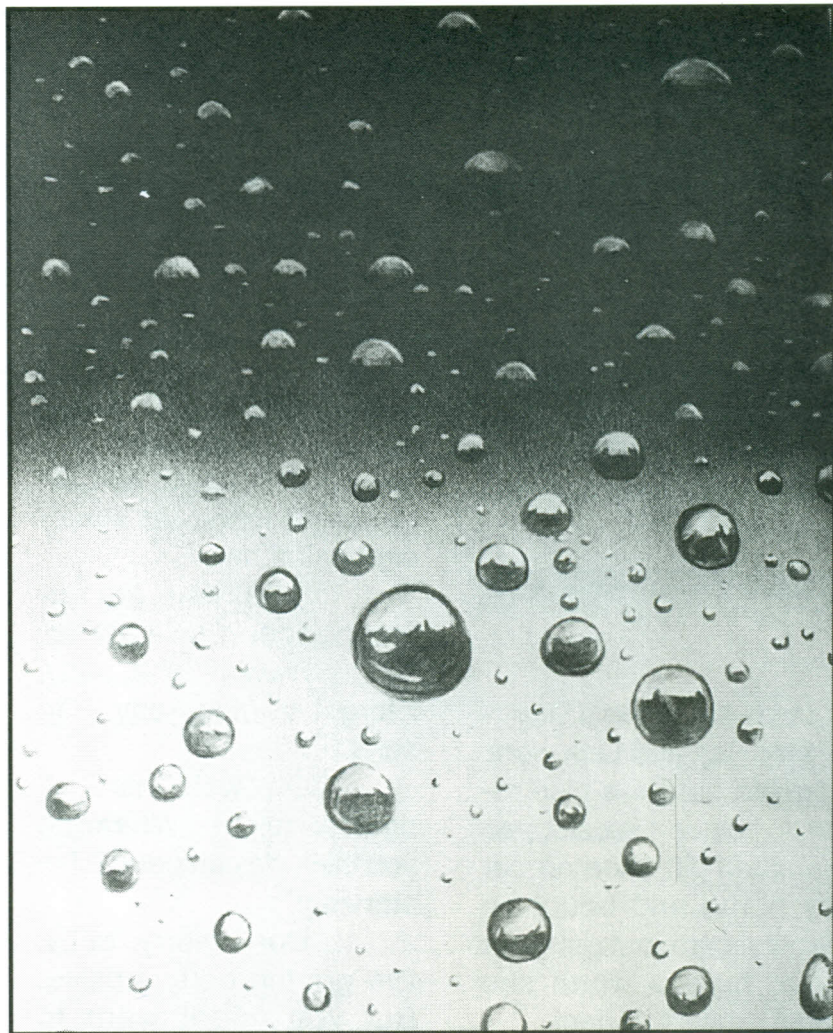
Their name was called by the hostess. People looked over at them, but the couple didn't budge. The hostess stood very still for a moment, cleared her throat nervously, then tried again.

"That isn't my last name. Maybe common law, but there still isn't a ring on this finger." Nobody in the lobby was moving. Time was suspended, as if encased in cement.

Ray finally turned on her. "What about the necklace? That is a damn fine necklace. Be thankful for what you have."

She looked as if she had been slapped. Her face slowly grew crimson and her body began to shake. Newly painted fingernails drew blood inside her tightly clasped fists.

"Take the necklace. Just ...Just Take it!" She flung the necklace at him. As it fell to the floor, it bounced off an ivory beaded shoe, turned, glittered, and lay motionless. "And don't you worry. I'll go home and pack your things like a good servant, but don't come to my house




Jason J. Tomanek

to get your laundry done. No more free room and board. Don't you dare come back." She pivoted, pushed Ray to the side, and ran out of the restaurant.

Ray shuffled forward. His face fell slack, and his head and shoulders grew heavy. The other couples weren't looking, but he could feel their dark thoughts. Glancing around vacantly, Ray bent to retrieve the cubic zirconia imitation. "I'm not a bad per-

son. Just a misunderstanding, another misunderstanding." The whispers hung empty in the air.

As he started to leave, the lobby gradually came to life with gossip and words for the "poor woman." Nobody noticed when he stuffed the ring box further into his coat pocket. 

Observations at an Intersection

The traffic stopped when the light turned red
A sporty convertible directly ahead
With top down, brand new and bright red
And occupants who would turn some heads.

The driver, fitting Scandinavian stereotype—
Yellow blond hair, blue eyes and, no doubt, height—
Cast adoring looks to the form at his right
Who appeared to be his date tonight.

Flowing in waves in the afternoon air
Was his companion's long strawberry blond hair
The sun picking up highlights as if to dare
"Come touch it, caress this, this beautiful hair!"

An agency's dream, this model pair
A perfect combination for an ad somewhere
What an attractive couple, a photographer's delight!
Other thoughts came to mind as I gazed on the sight.

The light changed from red to green
I followed them through the intersection
As we went our separate ways
Headed in the same direction.

The driver who'd caused many to salivate
Turned his head towards his attractive mate
Who barked and revealed profile profound
The beautiful strawberry blond—

Not with the anticipated oval shaped face—
But the exotic head of an Afghan Hound!

JUGHEAD

by Bryan Turnbow

BRYAN TURNBOW got his idea for "Jughead" from his ear. The story originated from his head.

Red scared people. He was just too different. He lived in a little shanty near the bayou somewhere in the south. He wasn't much for smarts and the whole town knew it, if you could call it a town, that is. It had a total population of about fifty and no real reason for anyone to want to come there. Things looked brighter before the mental institution closed, but now it was just an out-of-the-way social security leech. The buildings had even changed over the years. Most were now a dull brown, like dying grass. I guess it was from the hot swampy air, but it was just as possible that it was a sign of a dying town.

Red wasn't called Red because of his hair or anything like that. He just had the affliction of turning the brightest shade of red every time he was a little emotional. He was the shyest

person anyone in the town had ever seen. Because he wanted to make friends in the worst way, he often tried too hard and ended up achieving the opposite of what he had wanted. He just seemed to overwhelm people with attention and didn't really know that he was behaving abnormally. The older people who had known his mother before she died said it was because she had drunk so much when she was pregnant. His father must have thought that too because he had left Red at the institution sometime before he was ten. When the hospital closed, the doctors said something about being "borderline" and that he would do fine on his own.

Buck picked on Red constantly. Red didn't even know why people laughed at him. Buck would say, "Red Red still wets the bed."

"Not no mo, I don't," Red would reply.

Buck laughed hysterically at this at first, but as the joke wore on, his laughter had digressed to a mere

chuckle. Buck snapped one day, grabbing Red by the hair and throwing him towards the door. "Get otta here till you have something interesting ta show us!" yelled Buck.

Red burst out of the bar, his cheeks throbbing as he ran for the shanty. As he was running, an idea surfaced in his brain. "I gonna use ta stuff in me back yard. Somebody mus like somthang round der."

AS HE WAS RUNNING, an idea surfaced in his brain.

He clambered through the garbage until he found a large jar with a doll's head half submerged in a jug. Its cheeks were rosy red and the mouth was pursed as if to kiss. Stringy blond hair floated through the brown water like a spider web in the wind. The jug was tilted sideways against an old fridge and the one eye the doll had, winked slowly at

Red. This was what he had been searching for. If filled with some more water and a lid on it, you wouldn't be able to tell what was in the jug, and that, thought Red, would surely be interesting to everyone.

He went to the edge of a small pool and filled the jug three-fourths full. He labored to carry the sloshing monstrosity over the garbage strewn ground. He finally got to his back porch and put the jug on the old ice box that had a broken latch which needed a rock on top of the lid to hold it down. He looked into the doll's one eye which still blinked at him. It seemed to be saying everything was going to be o.k. The doll's hair swirled and swayed, making it hard for Red to see anything. But he knew what was being said to him. They had a secret together, and no one would be told what it was.

"Y'all gauda see ta thang I found en da swamp!" Laughing and snickering filled the bar air as thick as the cigarette smoke and the smell of stale beer. To Red, their smiling teeth seemed like broken candy canes with the stripes missing. It frightened him, and he was about to run out again when Buck grabbed his shoulder.

"This should be

good fer a laugh. Better'n sit'n here anyhow....let's go."

About eight of them, including Red, got into the back of Buck's truck and headed down the road toward Red's shack. When they got there, Red took them around back to where the jar sat upon the ice box. They all stared at the thing. No one knew what to make of it, but it was so enthralling to look at. Why did it almost seem alive?

For the first time, Red felt like he had the attention he deserved. He felt special. He felt needed.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, Red felt like he had the attention he deserved.

Buck stared the entire time with disgust, not at the thing, but at Red.

For the next few days, pretty much everyone in the town had to stop by Red's shack to see the oddity. More and more people stopped by to see the "odd thing in the jar." Buck sulked around the bar that night. He told anyone who would listen that it was his town and "no tard gonna take it from me." With ev-

ery telling, another beer was consumed.

"I'm sick of it!" yelled Buck as he slammed his fist on the bar and stormed out.

He drove through the light fog that was starting to blanket the ground. It seemed like a dirty fog, more brown than white, and the dirt from the road coated his truck with the same brown coating that covered the town.

He stumbled through the trash that littered Red's yard making more noise than anticipated, but it didn't matter; he was already on the back porch and had the jar in his hands.

Red was ripped from his sleep by the footsteps on his back porch. He ran out just in time to see the smashing of glass and the shattering of the porcelain baby head, its lone eye rolling toward Red's feet. Buck's laughter filled the thick dirty air.

"A dolly." Buck laughed.

A hot flush of color flooded Red's face. An anger that he had never felt before rushed through him. "You ain't gonna take my happiness."

Red took the rock that held the fridge lid down. The lid smashed into the side of the house, making three hollow thuds as the lid finally came to rest against


the house.

Now there was no sound. Just Red and the dirty air clinging to everything. Bloodied hair clung to the rock he held in his hand. The drips reminded him of the ants in the summer. He would catch them in his hand and watch them as they meandered downward along his palm and fingers, hesitate....and then finally leap to the floor and find their way into the darkness through the spaces in the floor boards. Then the red droplets did the same.

"What am I gonna do? My friend is smashed! Buck won't move....I don know, I don know!!"

He collected the shattered glass and porcelain of the doll head and dragged Buck and the shards out into the dump.

The next night everyone came to see the oddity. It had changed somehow. The water was the same, but the eye didn't wink anymore, and the hair seemed a darker color. It was no less strange, though, and Red still had his attention.

"Where's Buck tonight?" someone asked. 

Walls

by Jennifer Hafner

(Humpty Dumpty had a Great Fall)

Conversations prerecorded
muffled, monotone voices
came seeping through.
The almost invisible,
ghost-like partitions.

Guards wait in nuclear suspense
while the snake fills your
body with venom.
The wall is built,
the poison stoned.

Barbed wire bleeds your skin
half the blood
remains on the other side.
Made in hate,
to pedestal Holocaust.

Sirens scream
through the silent night
car doors hurriedly torn ajar.
"Up against the wall,"
perfect faces now permanent, purplish bruises.

RECEPTION

by Jay Enyart

JAY ENYART is a sophomore from Bismarck, majoring in English. He made this story up for his fiction class.

"He's dead. Sure as shit." Cad closed the door with his back. "Oh Christ." His slobbering lips quivered as he rolled his head hard against the door, harder when he teetered on his brow. A warm tear splashed and cooled over on the ice of his gas-pedal shoe. A small refrigerator shook off the warmth as it started up from behind the wet bar. The glasses rang like silverware on the humming motor. Cad grinned his teeth and popped his jaw open when he moaned. He stuttered and accelerated his sobs along with his footsteps until, at full length, he reached the bar, shoving the glasses on the floor. They bounced and turned, crumbled and gave out from underneath themselves, ringing until all that

was heard was his breath. He stood still, disorderly, his long overcoat sleeves shortened at his arms. The heavy maroon leather bunched at his elbows and squeaked sharper as the fists in his hair became tighter.

Cad gazed into the crystal that looked even prettier in the glow of the fluorescent lamp—the crystal glasses his parents had given him when he married Julie two or so years ago. She was beautiful tonight at Harry's party, with the dark chips of sequins sewn to fit her body, like a busted wine bottle hiding a fragile doily. Her corked roots sealed the darkness of her hair, but got lighter as it was drier towards the ends.

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT at Harry's party.

She belonged to Jon, *the pompous ass, always kissing it at the office to gain room with the heads. The lazy fuck spends his time talking about what should be done and never gets down to put in any elbow grease. It's amazing how Jon can talk his fuckin' face blue and still have time to get away, while the midnight-boys are stinky and coffee burnt, working overtime even, just to keep pumping out the merger revenues, spreadsheets, and asset figures to save Jon's ill-figured ass in the middle of a presentation. She deserves that pretty man. He looks so collectively smart, collecting his smarts from others that bullshit their way through it too.*

Jon had bullshitted his way right to her heart. She liked those talking guys. Cad was a great talker, but "sometimes you have to be serious."

She liked Jon because he didn't give a shit

about anything, about the possibility of raising a family or having enough security to be comfortable. "You can't let those ladder exec.'s elbow their way ahead of you. You have to be ready for the unexpected all the time, no excuses. Otherwise you're out of it. Fuck all that head-shining shit. Work has to be fully compiled, and new stuff has to be ready for tomorrow, or else you'll be expendable, end of line."

Cad slid down the wall beside the glass and sorted through the pieces for an unbroken shooter. He grabbed a vodka bottle and poured a shot for himself, as well as one for the bar. He quickly dumped it into his throat, poured another and then some. He kicked back, hitting his head on the wall, then hitting it again for good measure. Tears mixed in with the booze at the slippery joints of his coat as he smeared a glistening coat of snot across his face. His cold body would not accept the heat of the drink.

"Fatherless baby."

Cad passed out into the nightmare of earlier, starting at Harry's shin-dig when Julie got him to drink heavier.

**"FATHERLESS
baby"**

"Hi Cad. How are you doing? I talked to your mom the other day." She could never wait long enough for a simple response, unless it was the one she wanted.

"Oh yeah? And what did dear Ma-ma have to say?" Cad searched for the perfect hors d'oeuvres, as well as what his mom could possibly say. He knew "Ma-ma" would be trying her feeble attempts at boosting her son's stature.

"She says you're doing good, and that you're seeing Cindy Reland." She knew how to cover up a stinging statement with a pleasant foreword, smiling at him positively, but knowing damn well she wouldn't fall without a net in one of Cindy's conversations.

"Oh, well, Cindy and I haven't had time lately to make the most of the relationship, so we decided it would be best if we not continue it for awhile. I didn't want to tell Mom right away cause she gets worked up when things aren't going so well, you know." He knew she knew the way his mom had freaked out about the annulment. Of course! She had acted like Julie's counselor. He should have lied and upheld his mother's good word.

"Oooh. I'm sorry to

hear that. I'm sure you'll get along just fine." Her sympathy was bullshit. It was her way of convincing herself that their choice, her choice, was a good one.

"Oh yeah. I bounce back like a misfired piston." Cad laughed.

"You see! You have such a distinct laugh. You're always on the up!" She rambled on about how Jon had said Cad is always lightening up the office with his humor, and some other crap about people they had met on their get-a-ways whom Cad would be interested in.

Somehow Cad got away and floated back in with the riled bachelor crowd. He drank harder, laughed louder, especially when he noticed Julie out of the corner of his eye, paying no attention to the conversation she was in, just acting as that beautiful piece of machinery for Jon to show off, like some restored classic.

Cad never noticed the two of them leave. Later, Harry offered to give him a ride home, but Cad clicked on like a D.J. "Come on, Harry, we work later than this. I'll bring you into the night 'cause it's five to the hour and we ain't gonna stop 'til we're all the way home."

Cad took the long

way into town. He threw on his seat belt and tried to stay around the speed limit to avoid getting pulled over. The radio said something about the weather. Then the D.J. threw on a track that Cad recognized. It was some song about leaving somebody for such-and-such a reason, but he couldn't remember who had sung it. He remembered the band playing it while Julie had hummed it in his ear, pausing, and starting somewhere else after she absorbed the look of the room. He bobbed his body slowly, holding the steering wheel and the rhythm as he led her around the floor. Then all of the sudden a glass had chimed. A baby started crying. The silverware clanged, calling for the speech. The tables grew louder, and finally blended into a solid ring. A loud impending ring that kept coming closer and clearer.

His body thrust against the seat belt. His eyes glimpsed the spidering of the far windshield as his head dove into the steering wheel. The noise blended into the feedback of a microphone, waiting for him to come to.

He woke up and shut off the radio. All the fields were dark except for the moon that lit the area like a halogen reflecting off

a mirrorball. Cad unstrapped himself and got out of the car, to see the windshield of the other, crushed and bloody. He stepped back and waited for his unbelieving stare to focus on the staged road scene. The snow twirled in gay frolic with the moguls of the pitted ditches. He listened quietly to the band of engine parts cool and contract, keeping the beat as his skin snuggled up closely to itself.

He creaked past the broken colored lights to the other car. The man's head was somewhere near the floor boards while his steaming cells spread over the dash and leaked into the speaker holes, coating the distant reverberations of that last dance. A baby seat was inverted against the dash, void of a baby, empty, with no sign of father's friend anywhere.

Cad reeled back and fell. His hands clawed at the ground to get up and carry his tight frame to his car. He started the killing machine and left the quiet dead to babble softly to the fatherless chair.

**HE STARTED
THE KILLING
MACHINE and left
the quiet dead...**


* * * * *

Cad felt the darkness beam out of his eyes as he let the glass drop to the floor. He snapped. His head nicked the wall and slowly fell to his stomach again, where his gurgling whimpers crept up from. Silent twitches made his body hiccup and his gaping breathless mouth sway with it. Squalor became him in the scrutiny of his furnished domain. "I needed to be ready." He explained to his bar. "She never respected OUR time." He turned to the rest of the room. It remained silent, indifferent to his pleas. "What good is a father that doesn't support?" He dwindled off on the last words as he stood erect, his appearance creased. His head hurt with the blood of the other man, swelling his eyes. He felt like a thief, stealing that man's child, annulling his fatherhood.

Cad smoothed out the tear-tight coat, slowly, contriving an amends. The retribution was to be fulfilled. He hurried to his garage, already late for the meeting. He ignored the folds of sharp metal jutting out from his time machine. He started humming and the car joined in. The D.J. was tuned in and he assured Cad, "It's cold out there, but stay with us 'cause we're almost home."

Cad went to secure his seat belt. He laughed, as his face hung itchy drops of distilled juices. The gripped buckle smashed through the window and the itching was gone. Cad maneuvered the stick with the butt of his hand and he was gone, rushing through a crowd of corners to where that song played; to where he could say something sweet and try to quiet that crying unattended ring.

He crested the hill. The colored lights on the steamy dance floor, slowly grew clearer. He was clear to move with excitement to it, stepping up his anxious momentum. The wind blew the song into his face, freezing the moment to his senses. He saw the brilliance atop the cars, the tow truck, the ambulance. He aimed his vows to the family wreck, the small fingered memories caged within, trying to reach out for the baby that gave them nourishment.

Cad screamed at the uninvited guests, intruding on the ceremony. Among them he caught the eyes of a once angel, now mortal, pampered from head to toe in white linen, basking in attention, intently watching Cad begin his address, unknowing what he would be. He was childless. 

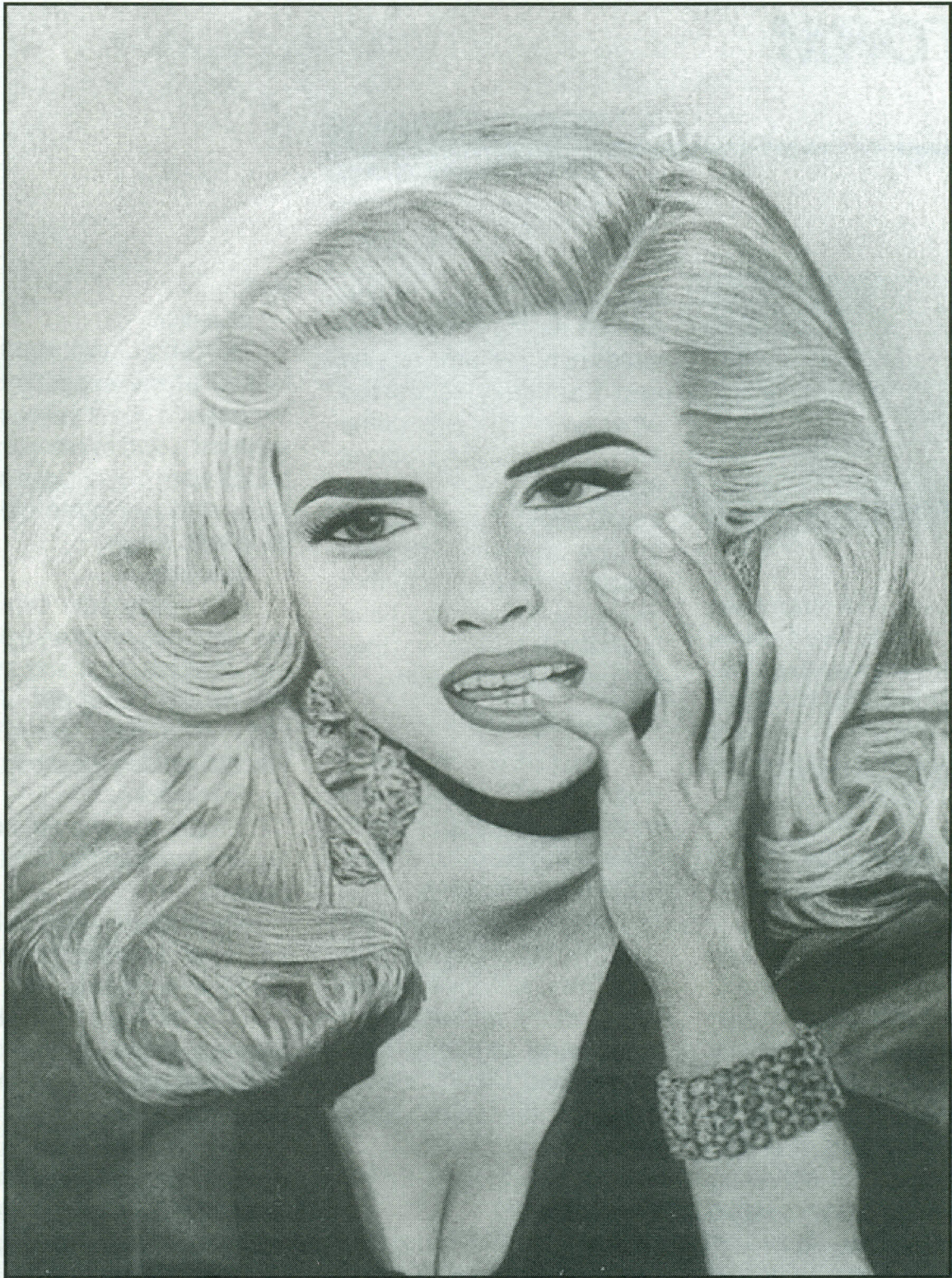
MIRACLES

by Lynette Banning

The miracle of sage
Like a room filled with
Potpourri — I breathed it
Deeply, consciously
Tasting the musky aroma
On my tongue
In my throat
Greedily seeking to take it home
Like a postcard souvenir.
Pale green brush, velvet foliage
(Sole nourishment for pronghorn)
Tough perennial prodigious child
Firmly entrenched
Like the dandelions
In our front yard.

The miracle of aloneness
This secret place of desert ocean
Our path to centeredness
Our escape from bustling touristville
To backroads bay, muddy
And barren to casual eye.

The miracle of silence
(Where ears tune into buzz of lone fly
And splash of jumping carp
That reverberates across lake space
And absence of noise
That roars in our eardrums)
Balm to overloaded senses
Like the milky soft-scented cream
We rub onto each other's bodies
Completing the spiral
From the harmony of wilderness
To our created order — Home
An evening of brominated
Hot-tub fun.



by Warren Kessler

STORM

by Troy Sterling Nies

TROY STERLING NIES wrote this compelling account about the trauma in his father's (*Storm*) life and the man's incredible recovery. Troy's portrait is the result of an English assignment working with Vignettes.

I dreamt of a large man in a rage, teeth showing, muscles bulging, veins rising off of his arms, his breathing heavy. Breathing in and out, in and out.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

He punches through glass and tears his arms, painting the window with gore and drenching himself with his own lifeblood. Enraged by this minor delay, he redoubles his efforts.

Hearing the shrieking of demons, he looks down the metallic corridor covered with body parts and sees seven blood-red men, wearing black uniforms, their eyes glowing. They point their bony fingers in his direction, and he hears

them hiss a stream of corruption as they seethe towards him. He turns around and frantically races the other way. His legs pump like two large pistons, but yet feel like they are slowing him down, almost moving him in slow motion. He tries desperately to race further down the corridor, his heart pounding in his ear, and their hot breath on his neck...

"What do you think of all this, Troy?" asked my mother, a sarcastic edge in her voice, the sound of steel grating across steel. The first thing I thought was, *Why ask me, a junior high kid, who was supposed to be emotionally immature?* I was being told that constantly, and I found it a bit ironic for the adults to be asking the unstable.

But, I knew perfectly well what I thought.

Fury raged inside, and my teeth clenched until I thought they would shatter. My eyes narrowed to slits, and I watched them through a red haze.

The clock ticked on the

wall.

One tick.

My father and mother looked at me expectantly. My father's chest stuck out subornly, and my mother's hands were clenched at her side, and her eyes were wide with anger.

Two ticks.

All I really saw before me were two children fighting. *I didn't do it; she did. No, he did. She did. He did. She did. He did. Shedidhedidsheshehe....*

Three ticks.

"I think you two are acting like two fucking kids!" I hissed.

My mother went pale; my father headed towards the door, keys in hand.

I remained at the kitchen table, a million pinpricks dancing up and down my spine.

Mom raced out after him as my sister ran out of her room and fell onto the floor sobbing, "Dad, don't go! Don't go!" I couldn't tell if I felt more anger at my parents for their worthless fighting or sadness for my poor sister who had to be there for it all.

I found myself at the front door, watching through the glass. Because the door was so thick, it was as if we were watching a silent movie. I could tell my mother was screaming at my father in the driveway, her mouth opening and closing, a stream of garbage falling on ears that wouldn't listen anymore. I imagined her tongue shooting in and out, a fiery, forked tongue lashing and burning.

And then the viper struck.

She started to repeatedly hit him, her fist closed. My sister let out a burst of more shrieking and pounded at the heavy door, glass shaking with each hit. Watching. Helpless.

Then Dad pushed Mom to the ground.

All time stopped.

My sister ran out to my mom. I stood on the porch as they went back inside. Two figures huddled together as one mass of weeping and shuddering flesh, bent and defeated.

I started off after Dad. I watched as he flew around the corner, and I listened to his car drive off into the night. I listened for hours. I wondered when I would see him again.

A sour taste in my mouth, and a nail in my heart.

I hated.

I HATED.

I was now allowed to go into the "forbidden room," as I was old enough to take on responsibilities that went with being down there. Dad had sold the rifle and cross-bow, and I knew, even shot either of the weapons.

It was late at night, and I should have been in bed, but I heard the tell-tale sounds of my dad working out, lifting his weights in the "now-unforbidden" room.

I stomped down the stairs, as I was now old enough to make big noises, as big as my little body could make. Some day I would lift weights like he does.

I made it to the bottom of the long staircase and entered the room. Only his desk light was on, casting shadows all around, and Pink Floyd filled the air with psychedelic sound. I looked over at him, lying on the bench pushing an enormous amount of weights over his head, his huge chest heaving.

Up. Breathe out — a dragon blasting its fiery breath.

Down. Breathe in — the sound of waves on a beach.

Up. Breathe out — the north wind blowing.

Down. Breathe in — the sound of the wind against the window.

Sweat ran down his face, his shirt soaked, armpits and chest, almost like when I sprayed him with the hose when we washed his car. I stood there, my mouth hanging. I had never seen him chest press that much before. I slowly walked over to him, careful not to disturb the working bear.

"Spot me, Troy," he said with sputtered breath.

This was more ritual than anything, I knew. My little frame could never lift such a beast. One day I would be like Dad. One day. I quickly went behind his head and grabbed the bar with both hands. Teeth clenched and eyes squeezed shut, I lifted... It went up! Maybe I really could spot him.

ONE DAY I would be like Dad.

The Golden Throng

by Troy Sterling Nies

I donned the mask of another face,
and competed in the not-real place.
Acting and dancing for my father's bliss,
I knew I had taken better drugs than this.
And while I moved mother did not,
she waited for the letter to stop.

After the darkened theatre farce,
I floated from the needle marks
to a land of barren trees, no wind did blow.
A midnight steed with hooves of fire
taunted my soul and took me higher.

I raked the offerings across the earth,
a diamond black of anal birth.
Fetor gone, breath failing fast,
I reached the gates in a ragged gasp.
Mouth of mother open in silent scream,
soul stealing letter, steed of black left the dream.

Wearing my mask, we left the place,
off to celebrate a loss of life's grace.
The effect was gone, I blinked back tears
and laughed as she wore her mask of careers.
Father stood proud, with hellish intent,
and ended our meal with a sexist comment.

The domain now his, the queen mostly gone,
Will I assume her place in the golden throng?

I heard him breathe again, harder, more forced. I squinted my eyes shut and tried to breathe like him. Breathe in, breathe out. He had told me hundreds of times before. That was when the pin holding the weights onto the bar slipped out.

"LOOK OUT!" he bel-
lowed.

A dodge.

A grab.

A crash.

A scream.

I opened my eyes and found 300, or so, pounds on top of my feet.

My broken little feet.

My dad and two of my good friends, Ken and James, and I piled into my dad's golden Lincoln Continental. It was two days before the 4th of July, and like all years before, it was time to pile up on the ammunition. Besides, every year since we had moved to Mandan, the whole neighborhood would come over to the Nies's to celebrate the 4th.

Everybody would bring fireworks. My dad would be the arsenal master as he neatly lined up the rockets, firecrackers, homemade bombs the uncles would bring over (and anything else that would make a loud bang) on all the card tables

he could scrounge up. Our garage would look like a munitions depot from WWII. All of our neighbors and relatives (and other adults) would sit in the front yard with their lawn chairs and watch the children create the vibrant spectacle before them. Occasionally somebody would have to dodge or dive a wild one, even put out someone's burning pants, as there was somebody every year who caught on fire.

But this year would be different. Grandma had passed away from cancer, and Grandpa wasn't doing so well. But, we would make the best of it.

**BUT THIS YEAR
would be different.**

My dad stomped the accelerator to the floor, as he was known to. Ken, James and I flew back into our seats, and my dad let out a battle cry that all of Valhalla heard, I'm sure. Ken and James looked like the fear of God had gone through them and into their pants, and all I could do was smile. My dad hadn't been in this good of a mood for a long time. The 4th was *his* day, and it seemed he was ready for a blast, literally.

After spending God-only-knows how much money at every fireworks stand in the nation, my dad zipped off in the Lincoln, now laden down with more gunpowder than you'd dare put a match to. Ken and James were actually liking the ride, and I still felt good seeing my dad back to his old self — still a kid.

We arrived at home, and my mom rushed out to meet us in the driveway. She had a worried look on her face, and I expected the yearly 4th of July fight where she would bitch about how we were burning up money. She could never have a good time.

She quickly hissed words to my father that I didn't quite catch, but what I did hear sent me for a loop. Grandpa was in the hospital. He had had a heart attack and wasn't expected to make it.

The world crashed around my father.

His face went black, and he cursed so foully, making the most profane vows, that I thought he was going to summon the legions of hell right there. Ken and James shook their heads. Both had lost their fathers, and they understood what it was like.

My dad stormed into the house, and all three of us sat in the car and stared

after hiim. I felt terrible for my dad — first his mother, now his father. I missed Grandma already. I didn't know how I would handle losing Grandpa. Or losing my father to that dark half again, his child dying inside, screaming to be alive. He had just snapped out of one sorrow, and now this.

Yes, the 4th would be different this year.

I walked slowly down the steps to the tool room, Dad's work room, the "forbidden room." I was never to go in there when he wasn't home. What could be in there I couldn't guess. I only knew from the two times I had been in there before. One time was to "spot help" when he weight lifted. The other time was when I was looking for Blacky, my cat.

The second time I had gone in there, he found me and yelled at me. He grabbed my arm and said, "You are to never go into this room when I'm not with you!"

**I WAS NEVER
TO GO IN THERE
when he wasn't home.**

I can still, to this day, hear him saying that to me.

I reached the bottom of the step and peered around the corner. He was in there all right. He was sitting at this desk and rubbing a cloth over something long and dark. The room was dark. The only light was his desk lamp. What was that thing? It looked wooden, but maybe it had some metal on it. I watched him a little longer. It was a gun! A rifle or a machine gun maybe! He rubbed it some more, put some oil on the rag and rubbed it even more. After a while, he put it on a holder on the wall. I ducked back around the corner and listened. I heard the chair slide, and then footsteps.

He came around the corner, and I jumped.

"What are you doing, Troy?"

"I'm just climbing the stairs," I said meekly.

"Why don't we go play Legos?"

"All right."

We played Legos that night, but I had plans made to check out that machine gun after school the next day, maybe even show a couple of my friends.

...He runs until he collapses, slumping against a wall. He pays no heed to

its seething against his back, a mass of wires, flesh and screaming faces, pleading for him to end their misery. He watches as the demons approach from down the corridor, a moving wall of screams in rage, having never given up in his life, and runs towards them, his fangs now bared. The demons crash into him, and he tears them limb from limb, gore and brains splattering the walls as the screams fill the air. Several still cling to him, trying in all their unholy might to drag him down...

I crept across the cold floor of the forbidden room. The room I wasn't supposed to be in. I looked for that machine gun that Dad had been polishing. There it was, high up on the wall. I slid the chair over to it and found that, even by standing on the chair, I couldn't reach it. But while I was up there I found another discovery.

Bullets.

Nice.

Shiny.

Gold bullets.

I imagined them as treasure, and I had to have them. They were in a plastic see-through case on the bookshelf on the wall. I

stood tip-toed to reach them and grabbed them just as I fell off the chair. The chair tipped over with a crash, and I lay sprawled out on the floor, my heart in my throat. I hoped Mom hadn't heard me. I must have lain there for about ten minutes, my ears straining for any sort of sound that would warn me of her approach.

**BULLETS.
NICE.
SHINY.**

Satisfied that she wasn't on her way with a stick, I opened the case and picked one of the bullets out. I was impressed with the weight of it. I put it in my pocket and carefully put the rest back on the shelf.

Several days passed, and I couldn't get myself to go back into the room. I had already shown the bullet off to several of my friends at school, and one even tried to steal it. I hid it every day under the pool table on a secret shelf. I just couldn't get myself to go in there.

Another thing that bothered me was that Dad hadn't said anything. I was sure he knew, but he didn't say anything. That was bad. It meant he was so

mad that he was just waiting. Or that he didn't know. But I was almost positive he knew.

Finally though, I managed to sneak back in and put the bullet back, the heavy burden that I finally washed my hands of... almost. Even though it was gone, it still felt like I had it.

So, I waited until my dad got home. At supper I was ready to tell him.

"Troy, how come you're so quiet tonight?" my mom asked me.

"I don't know," I quietly responded. My dad glanced over at me while he kept on chewing. My ears felt hot.

"Dad..." I croaked.

"Yes..." he said looking at me; his beard looked like it was bristling. For certain he would paddle me!

I thought I was going to go in my pants right there.

"I took the bullet, and I showed Robbie, and I put it under the pool table, but I put it back now, and I won't ever go in there again!" I rattled, sobbing.

My mom just stared at me, and looked at my dad with her "What the hell?" expression on her face.

"I know you took it, Troy, and since you told me, I won't punish you. Just don't ever do it again."

I couldn't believe it.

I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO go in my pants right there.

Ring.

Ring.

My alarm? I picked up the phone.

"Hello?" I rasped.

"...this is Doctor..." the voice said, far off.

"From... State Pen in... Is this Troy Nies, son of Storm Nies?"

A delay.

"Hello?"

"Yes," I sighed.

"Your father is in... hospital; he has had a nervous breakdown, which we believe was flashback oriented. Vietnam material. He punched through bullet-proof glass in his cell and tore tendons in his arms... security guards tried to detain him, but he went into a frenzy and fought his way through seven security officers and resisted two stun gun attempts. He said he thought they were demons and were going to eat him.

"YOUR FATHER IS IN... HOSPITAL; he has had a nervous breakdown."

They finally subdued him and returned him to his cell. He slipped on his blood there and hit his head on the toilet, requiring several stitches. I'm calling to inform the family that he's under care at..."

"Thank you."

Click.

Several more appear further down the hall, and to his horror, he sees that they brandish some sort of metallic wand. He shakes the hell-spawn still clinging to him, and in one final desperate burst of energy, he rushes towards them, arms raised and spread, his mouth wide in battle cry. Their lightning strikes him, jagged blue bolts of hell. The energy crackles through him, and the smell of burnt flesh and hair fills his nostrils. His vision goes static, but he bashes them aside when he reaches them, shrugging off their electric madness, and runs further down the bloodied corridors of hell, fanatically looking for a way out. They fire at him again. Another surge of raw energy. Staggering, he falls against the wall, the faces leering and laughing as gnarled hands drag him towards a festering hole. He digs into a screaming face of a child, its teeth biting him. He

grabs onto the hair, but his grip begins to loosen. Things with no earthly name burrow into his body and rip at his flesh, pulling him harder and harder. He

screams in rage. Never has he been beaten. Never will he lose. His fingers slip. He howls as they pull him down, down, down. And then there is darkness.

**Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Breathe in.
Breathe...
Breathe in...**

Breathe 



by Vincent Cork

CHURCH BELLS RING OF SCREAMING CHILD

by Correy Kewatt

Church bells ring of screaming child.
Splashing most spiritual water over streams.
The beast, the bastard, the master in exile.

Verses, hymns, and Bibles piled.
Pages and pages bound by reams.
Church bells ring of screaming child.

Parisioners pray against things so vile.
A decedece of purity, morality, that so clean.
The beast, the bastard, the master in exile.

Outstretched arm scratching to free the wild.
Tarnished temple brightened by stained glass beams.
Church bells ring of screaming child.

Thorned halo, blood stained palms, a lamb so mild.
A virgin named Mary, a Queen of queens.
The beast, the bastard, the master in exile.

Shadow cast upon plate, as if sundial.
He rose again, part of a larger scheme.
Church bells ring of screaming child.
The beast, the bastard, the master in exile.

A POCKET FULL OF CHANGE

by Charla Grenz

CHARLA GRENZ wanted to try something drastically different than anything she'd written before when she sat down to write this amusing story, profiling a relationship. Charla is a freshman.

Have you ever seen the streetlights in Nebraska?" I was sitting in a booth at a bar/caf e/bunch of dancing drunk people place. I was visiting.

"No," answered the "creature." I don't remember his name. I think it is Joe.

What was going on was that my best friend, and her...uh, the guy sitting next to her, were taking me out. I came to see Danielle. She wanted me to meet Joe, and I was doing all the talking. So, I talked about Nebraskan streetlights. I could tell that neither of them cared, but that was okay with me because I didn't really either. I would rather talk than stare at my food.

"So, how is school?" She had to ask right after I stuffed a handful of fries into

my mouth. Maybe she hadn't wanted me to answer.

"Good." That would have been enough to say. "I've learned a lot." I could have stopped there too. "Like about matricidal gall midges and nebbishy sap-suckers."

"Oh, really?" Like she knew what I was talking about. "What class was that? Science?"

"No. Algebra." I had expected a laugh because I was being sarcastic, but Danielle took the bread off her sandwich and Joe belched. So I set them miss the joke. Maybe it had only been funny to me. I guess I figured that if Danielle was with Joe, she must have a sense of humor. The only other thing I could guess was that she was blind. Let me tell you about Joe.

He had teeth like hollow, used shotgun shells. Yep, there was little difference. Except maybe his teeth weren't made to kill anything. But, I haven't mentioned his breath yet.

He seemed to collect

dust on his body, clothes and hair like it was a hobby. Not hard-working soil, but greasy, crusty dirt. He was like a walking version of Pigpen from "Peanuts." And when he walked, I would sneeze. Step, "Bless you," step, "Bless you." He wasn't impolite; he wasn't even loud. But when he spoke, it made my ears ache. He smelled a romantic combination of gasoline, do-nothing sweat and \$12.00 cologne.

HE SMELLED A ROMANTIC combination of gasoline, do-nothing sweat and \$12.00 cologne.

So, as I pondered how Danielle could eat with his hand on her thigh, he leaned over the table. As I held my breath, he asked, "Wanna drink?"

"Umm. Sure." I replied. He held out his hand, the pink, dry palm facing up.

I didn't understand. I blinked, twice.

"I think they're a buck twenty," he told me and then bounced imaginary money in his cupped hand for emphasis.

"Oh." I dragged out the "oh" as if I had understood perfectly the signal for "give me money." It was a good chance to look down, so I reached into my pocket and gave him two dollars. I absently watched him do a perfect impression of a two-weeks-riding-a-Harley saunter up to the bar. I thought I heard Danielle shouting above the four-boot, triple-hat-live band. Just as they twanged and warbled about "It's not my pickup in her drive," this is what I heard:

"We're engaged. Do you like him? I don't remember what I said. I think it was something about being happy for her, and then there was a drink in front of me and some spare change.

The rest of the night went by in a blur. That's the last thing I remember, clearly... engaged. My mind choked when it got to the "gag" part of engaged. No one knew the heimlich maneuver, so I swallowed lots of liquid and tried to drown it instead. It must have worked, because the next thing I knew, I was home, and the only word going through my mind was, "ugh."

**"WE'RE EN-
GAGED. Do you
like him?"**

There was something digging into my hip when I woke up the next morning. In my pocket was a phone number, "Buddy 523-8765," a bottle cap, "Zima," and eighty cents change. I decided it was either the cap or the change that was irritating me. There was a distinct ringing sound and, after I realized that the louder ring was the phone, I answered it. Praying to God it wasn't someone named Buddy. It was just Danielle.

"So, what did you think?" she asked. My mind was in delay mode.

"Uh, I tried not to?"

"Come on." Come on? I didn't know that I was off. I must've asked the wrong question.

"OK, you caught me. About what?" I didn't feel like guessing.

"My fiance!!!" My head started to hurt. I stuck my hand into my palm. I started to have flashbacks of her "fiance."

"Well," I swallowed once. "I don't know. I mean, I just met the guy." She sighed. I took a deep breath, eased my head down onto the pillow and

closed my eyes.

"There's something I need to tell you," she began. I shouldn't have closed my eyes. The room began to spin. The eighty cents and the phone fell on the floor. I raced to the bathroom just as her words and a quarter rolled along the floor towards me. Her words beat the quarter. "I'm pregnant."

I threw up on the "preg" and the quarter stopped on the "-nant." I flushed the toilet on, "Are you still there?" I sat there staring at the quarter, "Liberty, 1973, In God We Trust."

I crawled to the phone

**I THREW UP ON
THE "PREG-" and
the quarter stopped
on the "-nant."**

that was dangling off the bed, its curly neck stretching like it was trying to touch the floor. I leaned back against the bed. "Danielle?" I scratched into the receiver.

"What happened?" she asked me. She was asking ME what had happened?

"You stole my question," I answered, feeling pretty sober all of a sudden. She

Hairpick

by Darryl Lee Kopp

Jaws, yanked open
again and again
by a brutal hand.
My mouth stuffed with
strands of colored
threads. Tastes
terrible, it does,
as it twines between
my teeth. It's
like dental floss
but doesn't leave
my mouth Minty
fresh.

I get my revenge
though. Once in awhile
I am able
to bite into the
Scalp, and if
lucky, I am
able to get a
Warm feeling
on my teeth.
Still no Minty
freshness but,
Satisfaction.

paused. So I spoke against
the silence. "Danielle?"

"What?" she asked, as
if she were expecting me to
say something important.
Another quarter lay by my
foot. I picked it up and spun
it on the floor.

"You know the face on
the quarter?" I think she
was surprised. "Yeah, the
face. Well, anyway, he
looks off to the left. I won-
der if, originally, the print
faced to the right but it
printed out on the money
backwards. You know, I
never notice change much.
Isn't that funny? We just
spend change or give it
away or save it and never
really pay attention to it." I
made a "hmph" sound as if
I were amazed. "Do you
know why he looks off to the
left like that?"

She snorted. Then her
voice changed. "MEGAN!
What are you talking
about?"

"Nothing. Never mind."
She had missed the point.
Or maybe I was the only
one who thought it was sig-
nificant. The quarter
stopped spinning. My eyes
wandered to the clock,
flashing 2:00, which meant
that I had no idea what the
time was, but I knew that
the electricity must have
gone out for a minute about
two hours ago. Information
that was worthless. So, I
didn't share it with Danielle.


Then my eyes looked at the window, letting the sun in, and finally, at the quarter, with a looking-backwards face.

"Is that all you have to say, Megan? I just told you I was pregnant and engaged and all you ask is about a stupid, f---ing quarter? Damn it. I don't know you anymore. I thought you were my friend. I'll -- I'll talk to you later."

I opened my mouth just as the line went dead. If she had let me, I would have told her that, yes, I did have more to say. I would have told her what I told the dial tone.

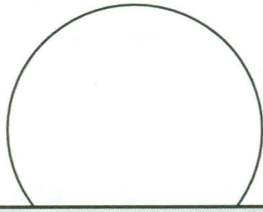
"I know why the face on the quarter looks that way. Because he is looking into the past. Because it is too sad to look into the future." I would have paused then. I would have closed my

eyes and whispered, "Only the past is certain. You think everything will stay the same, but it doesn't. Everything changes. Nothing stays the same."

That's what I would have told her. If she had listened. Because this time I DID care what I was saying. But she still didn't. She hadn't listened and I knew that she never would. So, I told the quarter instead. 



by Bryan Turnbow



Dawning of Another Day

by Nicole Rust

The ground is peaceful,
all lain with a white blanket of snow.
A light breeze rustles the barren branches of the trees
and makes small whirlwinds of snowflakes.
Suddenly the silence is shattered by the blinding red,
orange and yellow hues of the dawn.
Slowly the huge ball of fire rises above the horizon,
to illuminate the world with brilliantly warming light.
The world begins to wake with the dawn,
looking through the windows to feel the glowing warmth
of the light,
only to see the clouds that are nonexistent
but are instantly brought alive the minute someone thinks
they might see them.

Sometimes seeing things that aren't there
is worse than seeing the things that are.

IT COULDN'T BE

by Correy Kewatt

CORREY KEWATT got his idea for this story from a friend who dreamed it.

The vapors of stale beer invaded that smoke-filled dance hall, and sounds of vulgarity erupted from the bar where three middle-aged men were doing shots of Jack Daniels with beer chasers. The band played a slow melody of Garth Brooks, and I looked on enviously, thinking that if life were to end, I would die a lonely man with no contributions to the world, and no legacy to speak of, except that which could have been if only potential were to become reality.

I never gave much thought to those who spoke of love at first sight. I always thought it an aberration that life could produce such superstition, to conceive that one could be so drawn to another based on such superficial character-

istics alone.

That all changed when an angel-like vision caught my attention. I watched intently from a distance as she walked, with a gracefulness of a runway model, around the dance floor. Her eyes had a sparkle that was comparable only to the millions of stars in the sky, and as blue as the deepest depths of the mighty Pacific. She had golden auburn hair that cascaded gently over her perfectly rounded shoulders. She wore a snow white off-the-shoulder dress, hemmed just below the knee, tailored to fit only her luxuriate body, and wonderfully accented by a single strand of pearls.

My gaze was now piercing as she raised a glass of White Zinfandel. I began to contemplate the existence of that wine glass and how I would gladly pay that price just to be pressed gently to those lips of hers, even if only once. She was a gift from God, an angel among man.

I began to plan a confrontation, but how could I approach her without appearing to be some pompous ass trying to pick her up, a ritual I was sure she endured daily. After all, what would she see in a middle-aged accountant who had nothing to show for his life. No stocks or bonds, no T-bills, no money in the bank, no summer home in the Bahamas, and no winter cabin in Vermont — hell, I'd never even been to Vermont. Just a lonely apartment in the upper west side of Manhattan and a Camry Wagon, which played the role of a limousine that night, were the only material possessions I could call my own. My only hope was deposited in the few beers I had gulped down in the hour or so since my arrival. Perhaps the alcohol would calm my nerves, as not to show the timorous being that resided deep in the shadows of my very life.

My stair continued as she began to slowly walk

towards the entrance door. Suddenly, a trepidation came over me as she disappeared behind a wall of people. I was fearful that she was leaving. I began to jostle my way between the hoards of people with meaningless faces. A constant "excuse me, excuse me" pushed out of my lips as I forged my way through. That fear became depicted when I finally made my way to the door and she was completely out of sight. I opened the heavy metal door which led directly out to forty-second street. I looked down as far as I could see, but nothing. She was gone, and only the grotesqueness of the city was left in her wake.

***I WAS FEARFUL
that she was leaving.***

Then a gentle tapping on my shoulder caused my attention to shift. It was her. I was face to face with this beautiful creature, and I was immediately mesmerized by her magnificence. She broke the momentary silence.

"Looking for me?" she asked.

"No... a... Friend... "

"I noticed you were looking at me. Is there something I can help you with?"

"I, well, I'm not sure, you see, uhm." The words abruptly became lodged somewhere in my throat, while everything that she said conveyed a steady musical tone.

"Would you like to dance?" she asked with a slight giggle.

"Sure, why not," I stammered.

As I held her close, I couldn't help but to feel like a king. I held everything right there in my arms. Nothing could take the place of the way I was feeling at that moment. All eyes were on us. Men looked on enviously while the women looked on as if to say, "That bitch!" Time seemed to stand still, when I suddenly realized that we had danced through several songs, never stopping and without a word spoken. I began to relax a bit, and when the last song ended, I worked up enough courage.

"Would you like to get out of here? I was thinking that maybe we could go across the street to Ninon's for a cup of coffee."

She agreed, so I took her by the hand to lead the way. It was somehow different this time in that the crowd's people seemed to just separate for us, as though Moses were parting the sea.

We were seated in a booth which looked out onto the street. I asked the waitress to bring us two cups of coffee. As I looked about that greasy-spoon of a diner, I realized something: I didn't even know her name.

"I'm sorry. Where are my manners? I haven't yet introduced myself. My name is — "

Suddenly, she interrupted with, "No, please, no names. Not yet. Let's just be ourselves and see where the night takes us." I thought to myself that it seemed to be a strange, yet exciting fantasy, so I played along. At that point I would have gone along with anything she had wanted.

Our conversation ranged along many topics: political and worldly events, religion, and even philosophical issues. She was incredible, like no one I had ever met before — intelligent, witty, humorous, and had a personality that reached so deep I thought it would possibly take me years to truly get to know her as a whole person.

SHE WAS INCREDIBLE, like no one I had ever met before.

Something she said struck me as if cold water were being splashed on my face on one of those scalding hot New York summer days. She said that she thought people were really nothing more than souls in a prison of flesh, with bars made of bone, and drowning in blood and tears. I had honestly never looked at life in that fashion before; however, the more I thought about it, I began to grasp the realism behind the message. It defined my own life, surrounded by aging relatives who sucked at me for the strength of my youth, whatever youth I still had left.

As the night grew on, we must have emptied four pots of coffee, and I soon felt nature calling. I excused myself to go to the men's room. As I reached for the bathroom door, I glanced over my shoulder to drink in every moment of her beauty.

When I returned, my heart skipped a beat or two as I looked to the table at which we had been sitting, and she was gone. For a moment I took solace in thinking that she had possibly adjourned to the ladies' room, possibly to powder that precious nose. When I arrived at the table, my eyes became fixated on a napkin that was placed

near the edge of the table. There was a circular indentation of a coffee mug directly in the center, a gentle imprint of red, cherry-wine lipstick made by those lips I so longed to kiss, and a single word, her name actually, "Angela."

**WHEN I ARRIVED
at the table, my eyes
became fixated on a
napkin...**

I seized the napkin with my left hand and simultaneously glanced out the window. There was a taxi cab pulling away from the curb. I caught only a glimpse of the passenger, but in my heart I knew it had to be her. I instinctively ran to the door with a lump in my throat, thinking to give chase, but in my mind, I knew this was how it had to be. After all, she was a goddess, an angel, and I, well, who was I kidding? I thought it somehow poetic the way she exited my life as quickly as she had entered. Maybe Garth Books had the most fitting line of the night: "Our lives are better left to chance. I could have missed the pain, but I would have missed the dance."

I stood in the doorway for a moment watching as

the taillights of the taxi disappeared into the city night. Then a frail little woman approached from behind, and with a screeching voice said, "Hey, Mister, don't even THINK of leaving until you've settled your tab."

I awoke suddenly, breathless, and with beads of cold sweat forming across my forehead. I thought to myself, *It couldn't have been a dream. It was too real.*

I got out of bed, stumbled to the bathroom, and splashed water over my face. Then I returned to my bed to continue my sleepful bliss. I looked at the clock: it read 8:43 a.m. It was then that I noticed a crumpled napkin on the nightstand. I turned off the light thinking to myself, *It couldn't be.*



Best Prose

SARAH DAVIS
"Color of Despair"

Best Poem

JAY ENYART
"Ennui"

Best of Issue

WARREN KESSLER
"Heinrich"

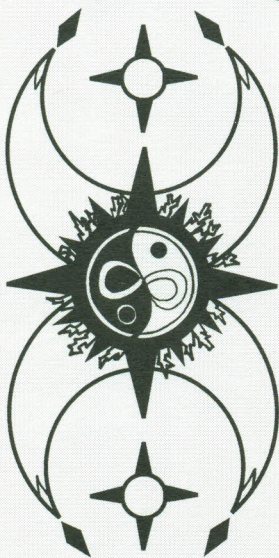
Best Artwork

FRAN WANCHIC
"Tears of Faith"

Best Photo

SHERRY
JOHNSON
"What Do You Mean,
You Didn't
Bring Lunch?"

The small symbol placed at the end of each prose piece is this logo, which was designed by staff member Bryan Turnbow:



The design represents a compass for the balance between transcendental consciousness and enlightenment forever.

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