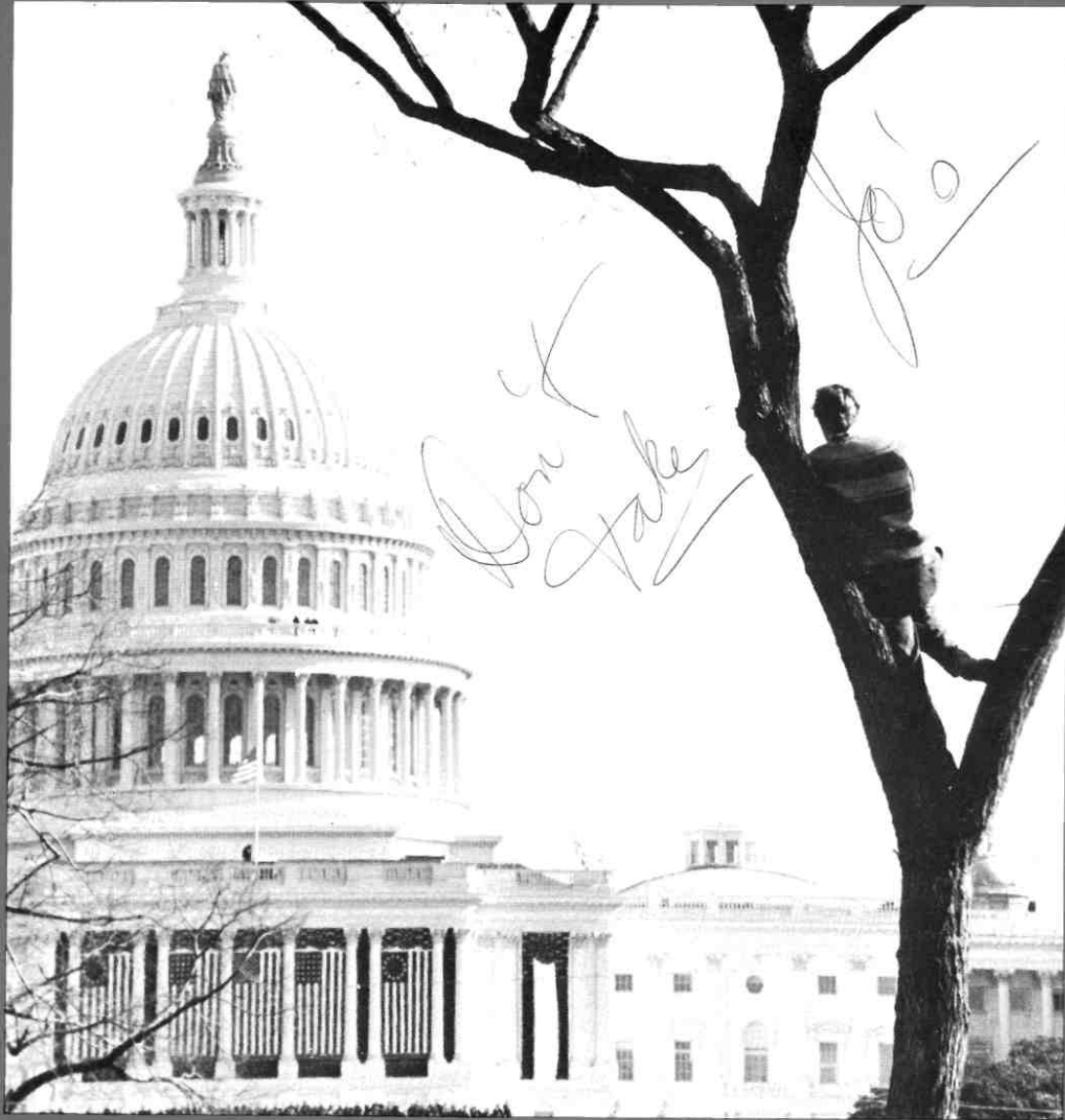


GARLAND



Spring 1993

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Garland

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Megaptera

By Steven Fabijanski

After a photograph by Bob Talbot

Rising from the dark water's surface
a scarred, barnacled fluke appears.
This tail, big as a boat, hangs
against the cloudy, white backdrop of the sky
while tiny rivers of water fall from its shovel-like edges.
These rivers fall, drop by drop, and reassimilate
themselves with the body.
Slowly, as the tail slips from sight,
the descent begins,
until, at some point, the surroundings are void
and there is only the body,
bare and unshaken. The cool sea
slips past, everywhere, all the time,
out of reach, racing and ungraspable.
It is total immersion,
diving into unknown waters, to be
guided by the body, to feel the skin
tingle, yet nothing firm to hold on to.
You could dive deeper, but the water is always
darker. You could level out, as a sub might, and wait;
or, like a whale, you could surface after diving,

and fill your lungs with new air.



Stilled Voices

(The greatest revelation is stillness.)

By Celeste M. Hoyt

I imagine the philosopher at the base of a tree
 in an overgrown forest in the ripeness of spring,
Dissecting everything and nothing from each other with his
 blades of contemplation.
The world is an invisible atmosphere of reconciled motion.

That philosopher transcends time, emerging as a poet
 sitting at a river's edge,
The roaring rush of water over the rocks clocking time.
 The sun blinds his eyes with a flash of
His childhood, a world of immortal enchantment.
 He hears no band, no whimpers, just the
Effervescent murmuring of innocent laughter trickling
 with liquid movement at the hush of the early
Dawn of a simpler existence — the harmonized unity between
 the world and his body.

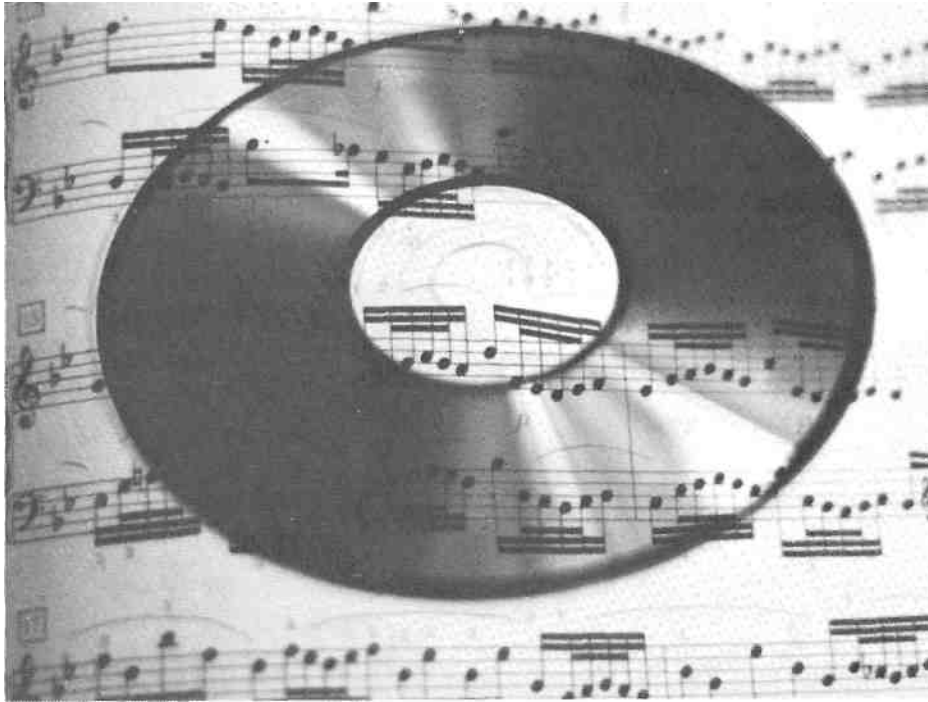
And once again, this man escapes the chimneys of time, escaping
 into my body that stands at my Grandfather's place of
Interment — his golden shroud at the edge of the cold earth.
 Others stand with me, but they are only vapors of figures
Fading and evaporating from vision. I fall, like tears,
 into a space of utter stillness. I fall but am caught.
A chilled autumn breeze, driven by a glare of the eye of
 heaven off the Atlantic, carries me.
The unexpressed sensations grow heavy and dark, and like the
 philosopher, I am in a forest — a forest of emotion,
Where one star reveals itself, like no other, through the
 woven awning of foliage — an infinite survivor
Kindled by the echoing, unheard silence of paradise.

Diametrically Opposed

By Andrea Jayne

She hates geometry, but her father is the principal and must get in early for work, so she is the first one in class. She sits in the very middle of the room. That way there are empty desks on all sides of her, free for anyone to sit in later. She hates geometry. Nothing is as perfect as this pseudo-world of lines, planes, and arcs. Kevin comes in—strange, he's never been early for the first day of school before — and takes his seat in the far left corner of the room. She opens her book to the first page that falls open and half-heartedly analyzes the circle. "A circle is a figure in which all points are equidistant from the focus." As if this is true beyond a doubt. She looks at the clock. Eight fifteen. *The clock's a circle — but if I measured all its radii, I'd be something a little different each time. Nothing is that symmetrical. Who did Euclid think he was?* Cristen and Brad take their seats in the very back. She waves shyly, but they don't notice. Next year she will be able to take Studio Art as an elective. Art is the only thing worth knowing; it is the only way to learn about the soul, the human being herself, the truly important knowledge in life. And she likes to paint and draw anyway. She traces the circumference of the circle with her pencil absent-mindedly. It's getting stuffy in this little room, beneath this uniform sweater. Rose walks right by her without a second glance, but she doesn't care. Rose is the one who started calling her "the art geek" anyway, so why should she care if Rose doesn't sit next to her? More students enter

the room, dragging their feet as if trying to take a piece of the elusive summer with them somehow. She smiles. Maybe they can see the hope in her eyes past the thick frames of her glasses. *Art geek.* The cheerleading bunch enters as one and sits at the right, the soccer-jocks crowd in towards the front. *Bet she won't even pass gym this year.* She glances over the theorems morosely and realizes that her class rank has no chance of rising. She feels hemmed in by maths and sciences; the corollaries and hypotheses are closing in on her. Perhaps this year she will win another award for her pen-and-ink works, and her parents will overlook the numbers. Eight thirty. The bell screams, lamenting along with the students. She fidgets nervously, flushes, leans down to pull up her socks, gives herself a chance to feign nonchalance. *Thanks, but no thanks.* Businesslike, she passes up the pity offered in Sister Marie's sad eyes, even though she knows that, out of the goodness of a Christian heart, the nun will make sure that SOMEONE sits next to her. There is only geometry, memorize geometry not. "A circle is a figure in which all points are equidistant from the focus." Her eyes are glued to the book, carefully ignoring the ring of empty desks around her. *Why do they call it a focus?* she wonders. *Maybe it's not like that at all. Maybe, instead of drawing all points to it, the focus is like one of those backwards magnets, and it repels all the points like little iron shavings into a near-perfect circle around itself*



Untitled

By Josh Mooney

in the shadows of a dream
i lurk.
in the mists of the wake
i linger.
in the freeze of the heart
i am.
the sum of every fear.
the source of every tear.
the desire for every moment
to fade.
in the bottom of the bottle
i swim.
in the still of the silence
i speak.
in the cower of the soul
i am.
the sum of every fear.
the source of every tear.
the passion for every man's quest
of god.

Actors Anonymous

By Joseph Tobin

Rebecca Kelly was alone. She was sifting through her mail, listening to her answering machine, and re-evaluating her life, as she did every day after a shoot.

"Hello! This is Bob from First Colonial Federal Mutual Bank of Pennsylvania. I'm calling to tell you that you," and here the voice rises a full register, "Rebecca A. Kelly," and back down again, "qualify for a special offer..."

That's not the one, she thought, and turned instead to her seventh-story view. She saw her future projected on the gray evening sky. Rebeca Kelly (the single "c" being her show-biz alias) landing her first major role, Rebeca Kelly winning her second Best Actress Award ("I'd like to thank my Mom..."), Rebeca Kelly asking \$7 million a picture ("And I want to direct..."), the married Mrs. Kelly retired on a plantation in South Carolina, mulling listlessly over piles of scripts ("They all lack feeling...").

"Becky, baby, it's me." Mom. "I wanted to know how the commercial went today. I was watching my soaps today, and you are just so much better than they are. I was talking to Phyllis from my Church group and they're going to do "Our Town" in the spring. I gave them your number; I hope you don't mind..."

That's not it either, she sighed. Bloated cirrus clouds lumbered across the autumn's sky like the closing of a grand white curtain. Rebecca took a piece of tape from her desk and began crackling at the dog hair on her sleeves. She tried to accept the fact that someone with her looks and talent had spent the whole day feeding slabby hunks of Dog-Gone dog food to a husky that had eaten its fill on take-one and had spent the rest of the time trying to smell everybody's crotches. A stepping

stone, she reminded herself, commercials are just a stepping stone.

"Uh, hi, Rebecca? This is me. Andy. I'm real sorry about sticking you with the Dog-Gone commercial. I know it's not what you want to do but I figured a job's a job, you know? This one is for Fine Pine household cleaner. You probably won't like it..."

A rude beep interrupted the voice of Rebecca's agent. He was the only agent she had ever heard of who actually apologized for getting his clients work. She loved getting calls from him because it took him forever to get to the point. Each bit of news became a mini-series of answering machine messages.

"Oh, geez, I'm sorry, I always take up so much space on your tape. I don't know how you put up with me. Anyway, they, the Fine Pine people, that is, needed a new mascot, and you're the only one they chose. Like I said, I know it won't be great, but they promised me —"

Andy took his clients' careers seriously, she thought, and that was part of the reason for his attitude. Rebecca also suspected that he had the kind of parents who overlooked the seven A's and made him feel guilty for the one B-plus.

"They promised me some prime-time exposure, so I guess that's not too bad, now, is it? Well, at any rate, come in tomorrow if you get a chance and we'll talk about it. Bye-bye."

Prime-time, she thought, this is great! She decided to celebrate and open that pint of Ben and Jerry's Rainforest Crunch that she had been saving. Maybe if this one brought her some extra money she'd be able to get the air conditioning in her car fixed. She didn't mind now that it

was winter, but it would be one sweaty pain in the ass come May.

"Ms. Kelly, this is Jean-Baptiste Reservoir of Warner Brothers Hollywood." Despite its affected French accent, the voice commanded Rebecca's attention like the smack of a clapstick on the slate. "We've just seen some of your work and we would very much like for you to come out here and...just kidding, Reebie, it's me! Ben!"

Ben was the guy who ran the community theater discussion group; "Actors Anonymous" it was called. Every week the local thespians got together to discuss techniques, their careers and strategies to get their big break. Or at least that was what it said in Ben's poorly typed "mission statement." She had also hated the name "Reebie" ever since grade school when the other kids used to make fun of her for it: "Don't touch her; you'll get the 'Reebie-Jeebies.'" Tonight, as Ben's message finally reminded her, was her third meeting with the group.

"So how did the commercial go, Becky?"

They were sitting in a circle. The only room they could get for the meetings was a kindergarten classroom, so everybody sat Indian style on a plush orange carpet in the "story corner" of the classroom. Cubby holes stuffed with blankets lined the wall; it looked like a pink, white, and yellow beehive. An illustrated alphabet framed the blackboard behind them, from A, Apple to Z, Zebra. In the far corner was an old cardboard dishwasher box held together with bands of masking tape, and the words "dress-up" were scrawled in large capital letters with black magic marker on the side. Dress-up, Rebecca mused, acting for kindergartners.

"Oh, fine, I guess." Yvonne, the woman who had asked the question, was wearing jeans, sandals and red socks, and an over-

sized green sweater with a sheep on the front of it. In the first two weeks, Rebecca noticed that the others grew silent when Yvonne began to talk. They acceded to her opinions, and directed their most fervent and personal questions to her. Yvonne had once gotten a speaking part in a sitcom pilot.

Charlie, for instance, a quiet red-haired man working in the suburban dinner theater circuit, had grown a beard when Yvonne told him directors considered beards a sign of maturity. "I'd grow one if I could," she had joked, and everybody laughed.

Murray, the drama coach for the local high school, began casting himself in cameos because Yvonne said the kids would enjoy a man of his expertise on the stage with him.

And Wendy, a grad student and teaching assistant at the university, began to teach each of her freshman film classes in a different character because Yvonne said that doing everyday things was an excellent way to "tailor the suit that is your character."

"I mean, it's not what I want to do," Rebecca continued, "but I still gave it my best, you know?" She picked at the loose shag of the O, Orange carpet and shifted her weight to get the blood flowing back into her legs.

"Yes, I know exactly how you feel," Yvonne said, twirling her ebony hair on the tip of her pencil, "like when I was doing 'Our Crazy Roommate' I thought to myself, 'Yvonne, you know you don't want to do comedy, but you have to make them all count.'" At the mere mention of Yvonne's day in the sun, the rest of the group leaned forward expectantly, like kindergartners in a story corner.

"Geez, Yvonne, you're so lucky." This voice belonged to Edgar, a quiet but muscular young man whose theater group offered him two or three lines per play in exchange for helping them build the set. "I'm never going to be that good."

"Now, now, don't talk like that." Yvonne was sitting next to Edgar, and she patted his knee several times as she spoke. "You are a very talented actor who works hard at his craft, and someday your time will come."

To Rebecca's amazement, the rest of the group immediately replied in a droning chant. "I'm a very talented actor, I work hard at my craft..."

Rebecca could not believe she was sitting in this classroom listening to a handful of people who seemed in need of therapy when she could be home watching old movies and eating microwaved popcorn. "...And someday my time will come."

This mantra of self-affirmation brought a Pentecostal hush to the room. "Networking," she thought, that's what Andy called it when he told Rebecca about the group. But now, as she sat in a musty basement, counting along with the numbers on the chalkboard, it occurred to her that she was about as far from networking as public access cable was from NBC.

"That's right, Edgar, and let's hope none of us forgets it." Ben spoke from behind large, thick, brown glasses and a heavily stickered clipboard. Rebecca thought that he directed his statement to her. She felt for a second like an inductee into a coven, someone who had yet to be acquainted with the rules of the brethren. So she stared at Ben's clipboard instead of him; at the stickers for Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and someplace called the Crystal Cave.

"You always have to give a hundred and twenty percent, or at least act like you are." He snickered and rubbed his eyes, forcing his glasses further down the bridge of his nose. Ben had spent the better part of his adult life making "short economic features." From eating soggy cereal alongside a cartoon character to showering with two kinds of foamy hemispheres on his head, he had sold it. "But seriously, though, I think it's important that we all learn from what Becky and Yvonne are saying. No matter how tiny your part might be, it will work only if you care about it. Excellent point, Becky."

Edgar and Murray lifted their hands from the floor and Rebecca thought that they were going to applaud her, but, since no else seemed inclined to join them, they dropped their hands. "I have one bit of good news for the ladies." Yvonne, Wendy, and the other women whose names Rebecca had yet to commit to memory, all "ooh"-ed. Ben held the clipboard at arm's length and read from it like a sergeant at roll call.

"I've just received a tip on a new film that is in need of a female lead. My source is a very respectable one and he tells me that it is a big name foreign director — bigger than Bertolucci, he assured me. But it won't be in the trades for another week so now's your chance to get in on the ground floor."

Rebecca chided herself for being so hard on the group. Therapeutic as it may be, it might turn out to be productive. Finishing the Dog-Gone shoot, getting a prime time spot, and now this, she thought; it's turning out to be quite a day.

"The name is Darkhorse and Ryder Agencies." All the women scribbled fiercely as Ben read out the address and phone number.

The woman beside Rebecca was writing on her hand for lack of paper. She wore a navy skirt and a white blouse, and Rebecca figured she had just come back from work. She imagined a life for this woman: entry-level in an accounting firm, always loved acting but was forced into the corporate world by her parents. She acts very rarely and is praying that the "Actors Anonymous" pan would sift her some gold. No ring on the left hand, bags under the eyes, and runs in the stockings — the signs were classic.

Rebecca pulled out a piece of paper and handed it to the woman. "This, I guess, would be our homework assignment before dismissal," Rebecca said, but the woman didn't seem to catch the irony.

Later that night she was having drinks

with some friends at a bistro. Deirdre, a secretary, and someone she had known since high school, and Carol Anne, working on her master's in psychology, were slushing through the sugary reds of their margaritas. They disemboweled a basketful of onion rings, while Rebecca hunched silently over a white wine spritzer.

"No way," Deirdre was saying, "long nails are definitely sexier. Especially painted ones, a nice bright red." She held out her own hand, its nails gnawed and stubby, and pursed her lips in disdain.

"So," Carol Anne began, "are we really going to see you on TV at a decent hour?" She waved her hand in the direction of a waiter, and pointed to her glass.

"Yep, that's what Andy told me." Rebecca remembered with a slight twinge of regret that she had forgotten to tell the Anonymous gang about it. She figured they would have appreciated that, especially Edgar.

"So I guess the next step is Hollywood, huh?" Carol Anne had been saying that ever since Rebecca had landed her first role as a disgruntled customer in a local low-budget commercial for Jerry's Auto Body. "My car goes like this," she'd had to say, then make a brrr-ing noise by blowing through her compressed lips.

Now, she watched Carol Anne's lips through the creamy translucence of the bottom of her glass, watched the straw siphon the last drops of the margarita like blood from an intravenous bag. She listened to the scratchy slurp of the air as it scraped up the straw, and Rebecca wondered how much she had left. She wondered how many more times she could give her all to something which wasn't nearly as meaningful as she'd like it to be. How many more times could she be the world's best housewife, or the world's best dog feeder, before the world finally noticed?

"A little bit." Andy was sitting with his feet propped on his desk. Rebecca

noticed the bright pink wad of gum wedged in the sole of his left shoe. It was eight o'clock in the morning, and Andy had just gotten the scripts for the Fine Pine commercial. "A little piece sounds too much like they're sticking pieces of tree bark in their pine cleaner."

He dropped his script to the desk, and the breeze fanned Rebecca as she made "emotion marks" — be happy here, inflection here, lower tone here, and so on — on her script. Rebecca often thought of scripts as dating partners; she liked to know everything about them before she agreed to be seen anywhere with them. And as she sat there trying to get into the mind of a pine tree, it occurred to her that she may have nailed down the reason why she hadn't had a date in a long time.

"Actually, Andy, does this smell like pine cleaner to you?" she asked, sniffing the script.

"Yeah. They sprinkle them with it before they send them out. Supposed to be very subliminal; make you a better pine tree. I can open a window if it bothers you."

"No, I'm fine."

"Great. I'm going to make some coffee." He got up. He was wearing blue jeans with a hole in the back pocket that his wallet kept falling out of. Twice already, Rebecca thought, he had apologized and picked it up after it had hit the floor with a leathery slap. He also had on a light blue denim button down shirt, and a black baseball cap with a white "G" decal on it— the Generals, he'd told Rebecca, his son's little league baseball team.

In minutes the room smelled of chocolate cake because of the special gourmet beans Andy bought. Rebecca looked at Andy's poster collection — framed promos from B movies he had gotten clients roles in. There was the frozen scream of a large-breasted woman running from something in "It Came from the Sewage Disposal Plant"; the death rays streaming out of space ships in "What if Jupiter Kicked Earth's Ass?"; and the



visages of horrified little children in "Mommy Isn't Mommy Anymore." She wondered what her poster would look like — running from the monster, hanging on to the bulging biceps of the hero — anything was possible.

"All right, Becky, I hate to do this to you, but let's go through it again." Andy handed Rebecca a cup of coffee in her white mug with a rainbow on it, while he blew steam from the brim of his "World's #1 Dad" mug. Rebecca sipped carefully from the side that wasn't cracked and returned her attention to the script.

"Hi! Do you know me? I'm a South Carolina Pine Tr—"

"Hang on ." Andy sat down on the corner of his desk, while Rebecca paced in a circle in front of him.

"What?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's just Carolina."

"What's just Carolina?"

"You are."

"I am?"

"Well, not you the person, but you the

pine tree."

Rebecca felt the conversation drifting into an Abbott and Costello routine, but continued to go with it just the same. "Me the pine tree?"

"Yes. It shouldn't be South Carolina; it should be just Carolina."

"But it says South Carolina."

"I know it does, Becky, but trust me. Look, I'm sorry, I know this isn't much of a script, but..."

"You worry too much, Andy. You're doing your job, and now I have to do mine. Carolina it is." She paused, made another mark on the script, and stared at Andy's face. She wondered where that scar above his left eye came from, maybe a fight, or maybe he was dropped as a child. "By the by, have you ever heard of Darkhorse and Ryder?"

Andy moved his chair, placing his mug on a square white mug warmer, the weight of the mug lighting up the tiny orange "heating" indicator. "Darkhorse and who?"

"Darkhorse and Ryder." She placed her coffee on the desk and removed from her pocketbook the piece of paper she had scrawled on at the meeting. "They're supposed to be casting for something big, but it hasn't been publicized yet. Ben says it's one of those ground-floor type of things."

Andy stared at the piece of paper and raced his fingers through his blond Prince Valiant hair. He began fumbling through his rolodex mumbling, "Darkhorse and Ryder, Darkhorse and Ryder..." Rebecca watched his lips move as he quietly read the name on each card he flipped. He cranked the rolodex one last time, as if he was picking a lottery winner.

"I'm sorry, but I have never heard of these people." He paused, coughed into his fist, and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt until they were snug against his forearms. Rebecca thought maybe Ben had made the

whole thing up, that maybe he just fed the group wild goose chases every now and again to keep their hopes up. "But that of course doesn't mean that they aren't a perfectly respectable agency."

Rebecca looked at the man who had been her agent for some three years now. Every once in a while when she was feeling lonely she would imagine that he happily married her instead. She envisioned Andy apologizing to the kids for not getting them better parts in the school play, and herself, a famous actress, coming to the school to give lectures on why kids shouldn't get in cars with strangers.

Andy moved closer to the window, picked up a crystal snow globe from his desk, and shook it, watching bits of white powder and glitter sprinkling over King Kong and the Empire State Building. "I'll make some calls and look into it. Just beware if he asks you to give him a read-through at his place." He paused. "That's when you know you're in trouble."

She nodded, and bent down to take another sip of her lukewarm coffee. She had dated an actor for a time in college. The magnetism and power of his performance had drawn her to him; she saw in him what she some day hoped to be. They were together for a while, and he arranged for her to get a lead in the school's spring production. She played Blanche opposite his Stanley and was absolutely terrible. Plus, the rest of the acting clique started calling her Yoko Ono.

"What time," she asked, "do I have to meet Fine Pine people?"

The next morning, the bitter after-taste of the instant coffee still swimming in her mouth, Rebecca Kelly arrived at the midtown suite that was to double as Fine Pine's studio. This was probably her favorite part of any job. She imagined herself unknowingly on the verge of greatness, the way Bergman and Bogart were on the first day of shooting "Casablanca," or the way

Stewart was on the first day of "It's A Wonderful Life." "Yes, it started like any other day," she would tell the interviewer years from now.

She went inside and was introduced to the director, a middle-aged man wearing jeans, work boots, and a khaki field jacket like the one Rebecca had seen on some guy doing a PBS documentary on Australia. He shook her hand and she noticed he smelled of cigarettes and moth balls.

"I understand you've done this before, so we should be able to get through this without much of a problem," he said with a half-hearted smile, then turned and walked away. She suspected that he didn't share her enthusiasm.

Rebecca looked around the studio. To the left the makeup table was bright and waiting; the mirror was outlined with round bulbs like a marquee. To the left sat a table with silver pots of coffee and plates of cheese and apple danish. In the middle of it all was the black behemoth of the camera, the boom mike hanging like a traffic light, and a backdrop of a painted forest. And of course, there in the corner, was a green turtleneck, a pair of black gloves, and a six-foot-five pine tree; the costume that was to be home for the next ten hours.

A young girl with teased black hair led her to the mirror, and Rebecca hoped that the costume zipped in the front, so she could get out of the damn thing without anybody's help. She wondered how heavy it would be, and if it had any ventilation—armpit holes, an open bottom, something — or would it just smell like the sweat of the last person who had been a Carolina pine tree. In minutes her face was green with non-toxic face paint.

She suited up, going over the script in her head, and considered that she actually enjoyed doing this. True, it wasn't taking up arms against a sea of troubles, but at least she could call it her own. And she was going to be the best goddamned pine tree

this side of Yellowstone.

"All right, quiet on the set, people! Ready...and...action!"

"Hi! Do you know me? I'm a Carolina Pine Tree..."

That was horrible, she thought, why couldn't she get a handle on that line? Do you know me? Do you know me? Try to make it friendly, she thought; remember me, your old pal the pine tree? Behind the camera, three techs wearing headsets clamored around the set. She singled out one and watched him. He adjusted some knobs on the sound board, waved some directions to the guys up in the lighting booth, spent five minutes untangling a king cobra of a knot, and managed to pass by the danish tray no less than three times in the process.

""From line five now! Take 3...and...action!"

"And you'll find a little bit of me inside each bottle..."

The green paint on her face was beginning to harden, and she could hear the crisp crackling of it falling off in tiny flakes as she moved her mouth. Worse, the costume was top-heavy, and she felt like she was going to fall over every time she moved. In between takes, one of the headset guys fed her a glass of water through a straw, since her arms couldn't reach her face.

"You're doing great, Rebecca. One thing, though—at the line, 'make your whole house blah blah...' remember to point to me on 'your.' Okay? Great. And more smiles, okay? Think Yogi Bear or something."

She glanced at the black and white monitor offstage and saw herself for the first time. She wasn't sure whether to laugh, cry, or buy a box of garland. Maybe they would lend her the costume this Christmas so she could decorate it.

"...and nothing has the cleaning power of Fine Pine..."

Yeah, the gang's going to get a kick out of this one, all right. She wondered if

any of the other ladies had called the Darkhorse people. Wendy probably did. She was young and would try anything. Of course, Rebecca reminded herself, she wasn't that old herself. That lady in the business suit probably did too. And if Yvonne did, then forget about it, the phones would be ringing off the hook.

"... so if you want to make your whole house foresty clean..."

It reminded Rebecca of an old joke about a woman in a flood. The rain was coming down like crazy, and a rescue van came by, asking her to come with them. "No," she said, "the Lord will provide for me." The water reached the second floor, and a rescue boat floated by. "No, go on without me," she said, "the Lord will provide."

"Once more...this one's the one, people. Take 19...and...action!"

Finally the house was submerged, she was sitting on the roof, and a helicopter came by. "No," she said again, "you go ahead." So she drowned, and when she saw God, she was furious. "I put my faith in you and you let me down." "I gave you a van, a boat, and a helicopter," God said, "what more do you want?" Rebecca wondered if the group was her van, her boat, her helicopter, or maybe the flood.

"...I have what the other cleaners don't..."

Then for a moment Rebecca Kelly imagined herself ten feet away, maybe with a headset on, eating the last apple danish. She looked at the woman in front of the camera with the ridiculous costume on, and something dawned on her. She was acting. Not day-dreaming in grade school about being an actress, not being overly critiqued by a high school drama coach because she spoke too quickly, not waiting for a self-appointed quasi-therapist to bestow opportunity upon her, she was acting, right here and now.

For Rebecca, the fan off stage right had stopped being a fan and had become a forest



breeze. Her arms had become branches, her feet roots; in fact the whole set was gone, and for a split second Rebecca Kelly was a pine tree in a Carolina forest. Maybe the group could help her, she thought, and maybe it couldn't, but the one thing it could not do was stop her.

"Hi! Do you know me?"

Rebecca arrived at her apartment eleven hours and forty-three takes later. She sorted through the mail — bills, as usual — and clicked the "play" button on her answering machine. Voices and beeps filled the tiny darkness of the apartment. She liked listening to her messages with the volume cranked and the lights off; it made her feel she was in a theater.

Tonight there was only one feature on the bill. "Reebie, hi, it's me, Ben. I was calling to give you a follow-up on the Darkhorse lead from last week. The director faxed me a copy of the script yesterday..."

She dropped herself into the cushions of her sofa. She thought about boiling some broccoli for dinner, then decided that she didn't feel like waiting that long, and that a frozen dinner would be much quicker. But she had only one dinner left, and if she ate it, she would have to go shopping tomorrow and she really didn't have the money to go shopping. She was expecting a check from the dog food people any day now, and once

she cashed it she would go to the food store. Maybe she ought to get a part-time job, one of those work-from-your-home things, selling magazines or something. She made a mental note to buy a newspaper tomorrow. The Fine Pine director said he might call her back onto the set for some finishing touches, so she'd have to get up early anyway.

"...So I was thinking we could read through some scenes here at my place. Give me a call when you get in. 'Bye."

She sighed, and couldn't decide if she was upset, offended, disappointed, or relieved. She wanted the heavy weight of missed opportunity to crash into her like the splatter of cold rain on a windshield. But instead, all she felt was the avuncular cares of hindsight, the embrace that silences sorrow and replaces it with rationalization; It wasn't that important, or, nothing was going to come of this anyway.

She rose and moved to the window, noticing flaky pieces of green in her dark reflection. As a child she used to know the

night sky by heart: Orion, Polaris, Cassiopeia, she could name them all.

"I want to be a star," she would tell her parents.

And now, so many years later, Rebecca Kelly turned to the stars one more time, to the pinpricks of light in the velvet blackness, and wished for a day when she wouldn't have to wish anymore.

She slid open the bay door and stepped onto the porch. Cold wind threaded through her hair like the lonely fingers of a lover in search of reconciliation. She imagined herself stepping into the dramatic final scene of a movie, could feel the burning eyes of the audience, when she realized that this was silly: she was alone. It was just Rebecca and a dark dome of nameless stars. She looked up at the patterns of them, tiny rips in the fabric of the night sky. One by one they all seemed to fade away, like members of a celestial audience, until all the seats were empty, and there was nothing but silence and darkness.

Wounded Pride

By Bill Schu

I waited patiently that day before
I saw the deer. I heard the shots, quite clear
they seemed, and saw the bullets as they tore
Through fur and skin, through life and pride, through deer.
He tried to run, tried to deny the pain;
He struggled to take step or shaking breath;
He staggered valiantly, though nearing death,
Through snow-choked trees and hazy, wooded plain.
A strong wave of pity swept over me
As the deer stumbled on so helplessly.
I should end it, I thought; I still have time
To diminish the extent of my crime.
 But no—I watched 'til he finally died
 In a pool of blood and a sea of pride.

For the Unborn

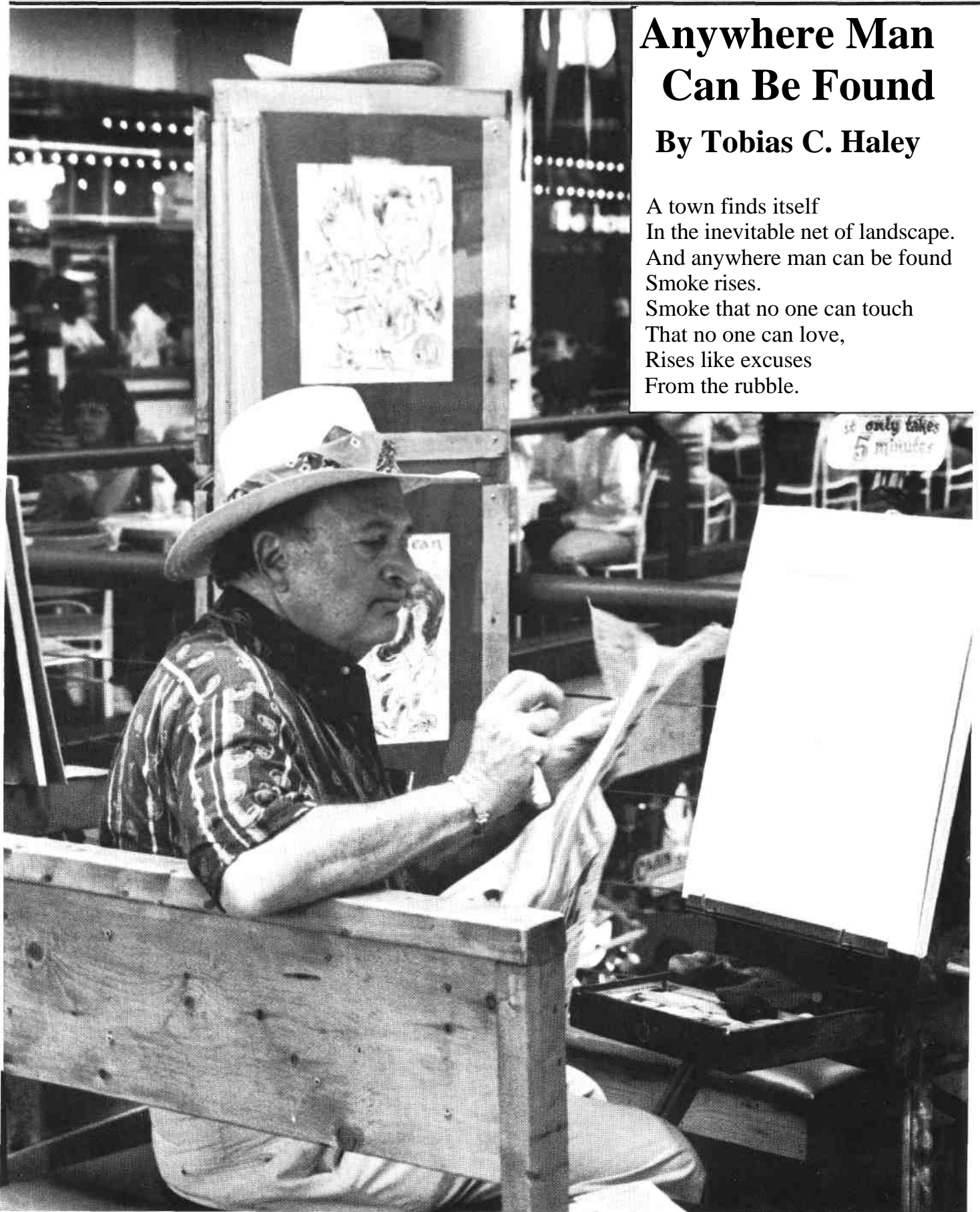
By Steven Fabijanski

At the park it is Fall. There is
the signalling of the end — decay.
A young girl,
perhaps a senior in high school,
stops among a stand of oaks.
Kneeling,
she picks up a fallen acorn
and holds it in her palm.
She stares at it curiously.
Brown and smooth, it captures
her attention. She remembers
his touch, her first time, the
pain and pleasure.
After carrying the acorn through
the park, she will reach the sidewalk
and let it fall, damp with sweat
from her hot hand.
Where a well-dressed man,
returning from lunch
will trample it beneath his black,
polished, wing-tipped
shoe.

Anywhere Man Can Be Found

By Tobias C. Haley

A town finds itself
In the inevitable net of landscape.
And anywhere man can be found
Smoke rises.
Smoke that no one can touch
That no one can love,
Rises like excuses
From the rubble.



Of Moons, Kings, and Couches

Wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets

-T.S. Eliot

By Lisa Prusinski

I walk away from this place
And the dull surface of failings
Thinking of velvet couches,
Victorian, maroon and sturdy,
Not knowing recline,
Yet smelling like flowery
Mothballs
On an attic shelf —
The dust swimming in swirling sun,
The sun of ancient gods,
The sun of fallen kings and empires
Like 1485, white rose and wine.
Where spiders dance and
Scatter, dust caresses.

I walk in autumn darkness
Like the moon lonely in her height.
Slowly she falls
And sinks on black trees
Slipping.
And I hear leaves
Stiff like taffeta dresses
In a ballroom —
Where the latent couch guards the corner;
Victorian, maroon and forgotten.
The dresses glide and touch
Wheeling color near
The velvet flower.

My shoulders stretch straight.
I stand tall
Walking under white Moon's light,
Listening to taffeta
Leaves
Waiting to smell them
Decompose to dust
Then, I too fall
Onto my Victorian couch
of velvet moss.

Plaguing Thoughts

By Josh Mooney

what becomes of the soul
as the final breath expires?
does it wrench and tear
from the warm flesh,
as a young wife beats her widowed breast?
or float away,
unheard,
as a small child disappears to weep alone?
he was young, too young they say.
killed instantly (whatever that means).
the life of a young widow,
the life of a small child,
survived by.
or does the soul linger,
brushing the cheek
as the cool faint breeze
of that summer night?

Passing for Emily

By Lisa Prusinski

Waltz me to the sky
of tinted darkening blue
and play for me a tune
which shall lull me where I lie.
I have ceased to see the pain
of a blackened withered branch
and instead await a dance
by the statue in the rain.
Spin me in the shadows
of the headlights as they pass
and carry me off at last
with only a pale, pink rose.
I see no more the sun
of August's passing youth
and colors all are few
as now my heart is done.

Statue of a Nymph in a Studio

By Celeste M. Hoyt

A woman, so life-like, holds the hands up, cupping
The air, and the knee curved — preparations for the
Presentation of self to an unseen observer.
The landscape of her slender body is suspended
In clay — *small breasts, generous buttocks, the column of a
thigh* — all carefully molded as if her porcelain
Skin swells with life. The bust of a forgotten soul hides
Beneath the canopy of foliage, its only company is
An empty watering can.

Her world is hidden by an ivy-patched roof brushing
The matted down courtyard of the studio with shadows.
But today, the door is half-open, as Maillol invites
His morning audience, exposing a flourishing world
Filled with large and small terra-cotta figurines.
The mini-relics of the woman clutter a windowsill as
Sunlight — the spotlight to a catwalk — pushes through
The clay-silted window, lingering in the curves
And tucks of their bodies.

*I am told that when he has a model in to pose
the studio door is kept locked.*

I wonder how he touches her during his sessions.
Perhaps it is a playful love-tap on the buttocks,
Maybe it's a stroke over the breasts, palming
like a damp cloth, their fullness. Or perhaps
He touches with unhindered violence: A finger
Probing her for infections, or maybe he uses his fist
Punching her imperfections flat into a perfectly
Round suppleness.

I wonder how it feels to be taken possession of,
chosen by the one with a kind of fury.

The Golden Years

By Maureen Marron

Her nonsensical babbling pulls him from a rattling dream, one he cannot remember nor describe, the kind of uncomfortably realistic nightmare that leaves a disagreeable residue somewhere deep in what we would call the soul. Coming into consciousness, Lou squints his aqua-blue eyes, which are now yellowing with age and unacknowledged illness, and focuses on the dust-covered travel alarm clock resting on an end table which stands beside the craggy patchwork plaid couch he uses for a bed. 6:45 AM. "Like clockwork...like clockwork she is, I tell you," he sputters, swinging legs which are slow to uncurl over the side of the couch.

With deliberation, he straightens himself and shuffles through the angles of fresh sunshine spilling in-between the metal planks of Venetian blinds to the cramped, blue bedroom where she rests fitfully. "Good morning, Pearly girl. How's the light of my life doing today? Did you sleep good? I hope so, sweetheart. You had me up a lot, though. When you gonna learn to sleep through the night again?" His hands grasp the metal bars of the rented hospital bed that consumes the tiny room as he looks down at Pearl. She is curled to the left, toward him, naked beneath the brown and orange wool blanket that is torn and stained. Her crusty eyes find his face but remain unfocused, then dart to a place far off behind him as she shrieks, "Lou, where the hell are you? I said to c'm here, you stupid!"

"I'm right beside you; I'm right here, baby." She ignores the words. Pearl's head turns to look out the window, that gaze of hers locked to a new interest, uninterrupted by her hands, gnarled into fists and peppered with liver spots, as they grab and reach and convulse without control and cross her line of sight. Lou's hands smooth down tufts of her coarse white hair, then reach down and feel the padded sheets underneath her backside. "Always wet. No matter how many times I try and change her, she's always wet." Disgusted, he

snaps back the blue paper sheets. "I gotta wait till the girl gets here, Mama. I can't go around changing you all the time 'cause I'd break my back. I'm sorry, baby, you know I don't like leaving you in this state. Now, Pearly, I'm gonna go get you some juice you gotta drink because Dr. Shapiro says you gotta drink more. Okay, baby?" Pearl's gaze remains fixed on the sight outside. "Okay, baby. I'll get the juice. Cranberry's okay, right? Your favorite?"

Lou turns, slightly losing balance, and leaves the stuffy room. After ten months, he is no longer offended by the odor of urine, sickness, stagnant air and scoffs at his daughter when she absolves herself after failing to come in and visit her mother. "It's the stench, Daddy, the stench. It makes my stomach turn and after a long day at work I wanna relax a little and not just come in and start gagging because its making me sick. Can't you understand that?" Yeah, Lou could understand that — the smell was foul, but he couldn't understand a daughter who wouldn't give five minutes, just five minutes, for the woman who gave birth to her and raised her and loved her more than life itself. No, that he couldn't, wouldn't, understand. And Barbara, she only lives through a connecting door that links her laundry room with the extension she and her husband, Michael, added on to their house when Pearl first started with her wandering spells. Barbara and Michael didn't think it was safe for Pearl to continue to live in that congested area of Brooklyn, where she and Lou had lived on Senator Street since the day they were married in 1937. Barbara was convinced her mother would get hit by a car and nobody would know who she was since Pearl wasn't so sure herself anymore. Lou conceded, but he despised his new quarters.

The bathroom is too dark and tiny; he has a permanent scar from bumping into the toilet every time he emerges from the shower. The bedroom, which at one time housed twin beds, can't accommodate the hospital bed, commode,

and other equipment rented from Lutzin's Hospital Supply Store his buddy Earl owns. Besides those two rooms, there is an additional one that serves as kitchen, living room, and dining area — and bedroom for Lou and his patchwork plaid couch.

Lou hates that his beautiful oak furniture, his red velvet couch and chair set, his stand up turntable that cranked out Benny Goodman tunes were all cleared out from the brownstone on Senator and sold at ridiculous prices, probably at prices even lower than the ones Barbara and Michael paid at the garage sale where they picked up the mismatched, poorly crafted dinette set and that lumpy plaid couch. No, Lou does not understand his children — Barbara, Lucy, their brother Barry who just split from his second wife — and has given up trying. They're all grown up now, and he doesn't like to meddle in their lives. And obviously they don't want to meddle in his.

Lou opens the refrigerator door, adorned with scribbled drawings suspended by brightly colored magnets shaped as fruits, works created by Barry's twins who were starting kindergarten in a few weeks and sent by his first wife, Sherri. He

pours the Ocean Spray, but the economy-size jar is heavy, and his hands are more shaky than usual, so some drops spill on the small area of countertop.

Back in the bedroom, Lou holds the straw up to his wife's lips, forcing it between clenched teeth. "Come on, baby, take some juice; it's your favorite." He tries to push the straw in farther, his hands fiercely shaking and her lips staining faintly with blood. "I don't understand you no more, Mama. You don't eat, you don't drink. What am I supposed to do with you? Huh, Pearly? What am I supposed to do with you?" He looks up at the octagonal shaped clock on the wall—its Roman numerals announcing the time: 7:40. "I gotta go wash up before the girl gets her, Mama. I'll leave the juice here if you wanna take some."

In the dark, small bathroom, Lou lathers soap over his unshaven face and washes it away with frigid water, letting the cold sensation energize him slightly. From the medicine cabinet's mirror, a stranger gazes at him. The grey and white conservative pompadour combed back and glazed with V05 formula, the bloodshot eyes hiding behind furrowed white eyebrows and thick black hornrims and underscored with puffy bags





and purple circles, the sunken, wrinkled cheeks, the curved shoulders...Who is this old man? It scares Lou that he has begun to feel as this man looks.

A knock at the door jostles him from self-absorption. Lou staggers to the door and a petite brunette hustles in, singing her greeting, her zeal concealing the fact that she was studying for her abnormal-psych exam until dawn. Mary is quite different from the stereotypical Personal Care Aide the health agency sends over. A sophomore at a prestigious college in New England, she spends her summer and Christmas vacations working for Health Force, a home health agency, because she "wants to help people instead of slapping burgers at Mickey D's."

Lou doesn't know all this about her; he only knows that she's educated and polite and follows his directions, doesn't complain and whine about the work she's paid to do, and treats Pearl with dignity, as an adult, not some "slow to learn" two-year-old. Most of the girls they send to him he doesn't find satisfactory, but he keeps his mouth shut because it's better — for Pearl — to have

somebody help him out.

None have ever stayed for very long — Maggy, two weeks; Louise, five days; Monica, a mere four hours—each complaining Mrs. Golden's case was unmanageable and far too strenuous, each unable to endure Lou's incessant criticism and demands. But Mary, she's been there since the twenty-third of May, the day Lou was caught off guard by her cautious, serving manner and luminous smile, the day Mary pulled out of his driveway in her Chevy Cavalier, her vision blurred with tears that mourned for a lonely old man pitifully devoted to his invalid wife.

"Okay, Mary, we got our work cut out for us as usual. She's soaked, absolutely drenched, and of course, she won't take no juice from me." Lou mutters this as he walks through the short hallway to the blue bedroom.

"Hi, Mrs. Golden. How are you today? It's going to be a gorgeous day out there later so maybe you and I can work on our tans. If you become a bronzed goddess, Mr. Golden won't be able to keep his hands off you!" Pearl's eyes are small fires, glowing with recognition and friendship. She's sure she knows this petite, pretty brown eyed girl with the sing-song voice and starched white uniform, but she can't bring a name to her lips.

"Who says I want his hands on me?" Pearl giggles, winking at the brown eyed girl.

"You're a bad one, Mrs. Golden. How Lou puts up with you, I don't know!" The smile, the luminous smile, is wide and honest.

"Yeah, my Pearl's some fireball alright. Oh, the wisecracks you used to zing everybody with! Right, Mama?" The old man in the mirror is smiling too, his face softer, open.

The metal sides of the bed go down with an echoing bang. Together, Mary and Lou, her arms giving support under Pearl's knees, his hand locked under her arms, lift the elderly woman's rigid body up and onto the commode that sits beside the bed. "Good God, Mama. How can a woman who eats so little weigh so much?" His face is crimson and sweaty.

Mary gives Pearl a sponge bath with the

water Lou had heating on the stove, chatting with her "client" about the weather and events in the news, but by this time Pearl has retreated into herself—back into her thoughts, her memories; a foreign spot that no one can reach but her — and only occasionally returns to complain that the water is too cold. When Mary finishes bathing Pearl, she and Lou struggle with unyielding, locked arms that resist shirts and sweaters and legs that kick off diapers, before transferring Pearl to the maroon padded seats of the wheelchair and wheeling her to the "all purpose" room, where Mary will spend almost an hour spoon feeding Pearl a jar of Beechnut's Apple and Banana Oatmeal babyfood and Lou will crush five pills to be hidden among the lumps and juices of a bowl of applesauce.

"So this is your last day with us, right, Mary?"

"Yeah, school starts on Thursday, and I need some time to get my act together — if I'm even going back! I'll have to see how I do on this final in my summer course!" With a spoon, Mary scrapes a glob of oatmeal, which Pearl has spit out, away from the old woman's chin.

The pills are powder, and Lou, his white eyebrows in a V, whispers, "We sure are gonna miss you, Mary. There'll never be another one like you — she really likes you and you don't cause no trouble; they don't come like that." With shaking hands he rubs the aqua and yellow eyes. "Okay, I gotta go to the drugstore and pick up a couple of things. Okay, Mama, that I go to the store and pick up some stuff for you? Okay, baby? You'll remember to give her the applesauce at nine thirty, right Mary?"

"Of course, Mr. Golden. I've got this routine down cold after three months. Aren't you ever going to trust me?" she teases. Lou is getting his threadbare beige coat and keys together, lost in his fixed state of worry and despair, and doesn't hear her.

"Bye, Pearly girl. I'll be right back, so don't you go starting to cry and asking for me. If you need something, you ask Mary, okay? You hear?" He clutches her cold hands and caresses them, hoping for a gesture in reply. With blank eyes,

Pearl chews her cereal, the creamy oatmeal and her unruly tongue showing with each bite. "The pills at nine-thirty, Mary."

Lou leaves the choky air of his apartment and marches into the thick, humid, August morning, down the wheelchair access ramp and onto the stone pathway Michael laid last spring. The brown Ford waiting for him is cumbersome and boxy, and dried paint drippings are visible where he attempted to do some touch-ups against Michael's advice. Climbing into the decaying car, pain pierces his lower back, pain even Lou can't ignore. "Dammit, body, I gotta keep moving!" When the Ford turns over after Lou's impatient fifth try, it hems and haws until reaching the Super X parking lot, where he swears at a teenage boy, hair pulled back in a long ponytail and wearing some heavy metal T-shirt, a skull and bloody rat pictured on its front, who cuts him off and flashes him his middle finger. In the Super X, he is propelled to aisle five where medical supplies line the shelves. Reaching down to grab a six pack of Ensure, pain in his back, reminding him of his circumstances, contracts his face and makes his expression stone.

"Good morning, Ernie. How are you today? Did Dr. Shapiro call in the prescription for the liquid medicine? Pearl can't take the pills no more and you lose so much of the medicine when it has to be crushed."

The blonde haired man, round and about fifty, replies, "Not yet, Lou. You know I'll call when it gets here. Just those?"

"Yeah, Pearly needs to get some nutrition in her. Thanks, Ernie, and you call me about the medicine, alright?"

"Yeah, Louie. Take care of yourself, buddy. You look beat."

As Lou pulls up to Barbara and Michael's house, he spots the red Cadillac in the driveway, the one that belongs to Gertrude Potts, the lady from the Department of Social Services who comes poking around once a month to coo at Pearl and order more useless bedpans and shower seats and who at one time wanted to know how she could have been of help in finding Lou a suitable girl.

Coming through the door, he finds Gertrude Potts sitting on the plaid couch, slurping coffee and chatting in her screeching voice with Barbara.

"Well, hello, Mr. Golden. And how are you this muggy morning?" A sugar smile greets him.

"Good, I guess." He doesn't look her way.

He doesn't want to see her pressed, white linen suit and spectacles, her salt and pepper hair tied up in that austere bun, the perfected look of concern and interest. "You gave her the pill at nine thirty, right Mary?" The young aide is close to Pearl, whom she has covered with a pink and lavender afghan, as she sits and watches a blurry Ben Gay commercial on the nine inch set, laughing at some private joke. Mary is holding one of the older woman's hands and rubbing her thumb across icy knuckles.

"Daddy, Gertrude is here to talk about what to do with Mama." Barbara says "tawk" like most Long Islanders do, her chapped lips tight, emphasizing the wrinkles around her mouth she tries to conceal. Locks of auburn hair push in opposing directions and deep circles, mirrors of Lou's, are masked by round tortoise shell glasses. Snug purple sweatpants emphasize her rounding, approaching-forty belly. "We really have to think about what we're going to do with Ma."

"What 'we're' gonna do? Mama is my responsibility, Barbie."

"Daddy, don't go getting all pig headed. Mary's leaving today, and we have to figure out what's best for Mommy. You don't like none of the girls they send, and even if you did find one, it's doubtful that she'd stay since Mama's getting so bad and it's too difficult to lift her."

"Mary and I lift her fine, Barbara. You don't know, you don't know nothing —you're never here." Lou's words are severe, but his voice weak.

"I know that when you call me in here at four a.m. because she's wet and calling for you, and we try to change her we nearly break our backs. I know it's killing you, Daddy, whether you see it or not, and I know you want to go on acting like you can take care of Mama yourself. But you can't Daddy. It's too much."

"Mr. Golden," the sugar coated bureaucrat interjects. "If you want to keep Mrs. Golden with you here at home, we'll have to discuss some options. Now, like Barbara said, it's getting to be too much transferring Pearl from the bed to the

wheelchair. Now, I suggest we bring in a Hoyer lift to make the transports easier. This is a piece of equipment whose canvas sheet remains under the patient at all times, then connects with chains to a metal bar that is cranked up and lowered over the chair. It..."

"No, godammit, I will not have my wife swinging around like a chicken, like some piece of meat. No, we'll get a girl who will do her work like Mary." The girl has her eyes downcast and shifts in her chair.

"Mr. Golden," Gertrude replies, "Health Force can't risk injuring their girls. A lift will be in here or aides of ours will not."

Sighing emphatically, Lou rubs his watery eyes, trying to chase the sting away, the pain in his back, a warm throb.

Barbara, too, sighs as some sort of answer before saying, "The only other alternative, Daddy, is to put Mommy in a home. Barry knows the guy who runs the Golden Age Nursing home in Port Jeff; he can get us a room for Ma tonight if we wanted it. Huh, Daddy? Huh?"

"She can't survive there. She needs me; she calls for me in the middle of the night. She'll know she's there and think I left her." Lou's voice is a worn out yelp.

"Oh, Daddy, no. She doesn't know what's going on. She calls out for her mother who's been dead nearly twenty years. She doesn't know." Barbara leans over her mother and bellows, "Mommy, where are you now, honey? The brown-stone on Senator? Are you in Brooklyn, Mommy?"

Still clutching Mary's hand, Pearl's eyes land on her daughter's matching green ones. "Yeah, Brooklyn, Brooklyn. Grandpa is here visiting."

"Okay, Ma. You say hello to him for me, okay baby?", she says, but her mother's eyes have already gone blank. "You see, Daddy, she doesn't even realize that she's been living here for four years. Yes, sometimes she's good and lucid and talks alright, but for eighty percent of the time she's so out of it. We have got to..."

Lou straightens more quickly than he has in months. "I don't wanna talk about it no more," he says and charges into the back bedroom where the hospital bed looks grim and oppressive minus Pearl. He paces within the restricted area of the blue room, clenching and unclenching fists that

have begun to feel the bite of arthritis, running hands through the slick white pompadour, hiking up the dingy brown polyester pants around his shrinking middle.

Resting his arms on a salvaged oak dresser from his old bedroom, Lou buries his head, forehead feeling the vibrations of his shaky hands. He takes a deep breath and raises his head with concentrated effort. "Oh Pearly girl, what am I gonna do with you?", he asks the beautiful young lady. Scarlet curls stark contrast against the white lace wedding gown; green eyes poke fun at the world as she smiles from behind the glass of the ornate silver picture frame. She was a gorgeous bride that September day fifty-three years earlier, and as Pearl sauntered — yes, sauntered is the only way to describe her walk down the aisle — Lou's heart pounded with excitement and pride.

They had met eight months before in Milarky's Bar when she came up to him and bought double scotches for the two of them to warm themselves on the blustery and frigid January night. He returned the favor and soon they were singing Sinatra songs with tipsy, off-key voices and talking about childhoods and old flames, being Jewish, and living in the Big Apple. When the night ended for them, just as the sun was beginning to peak over Brooklyn buildings, she wouldn't let him walk her home or give out her phone number. "I'll run into you soon I'm sure, Golden Boy. That's if you're real good with your prayers."

He did run into her, like she said. It was three days later and he was at the store, The Golden Slipper, a shoe store he and his brother Alan went in on together that prospered even in wartime and kept the two bachelor brothers living comfortably. The bell above the door rang as his recent red headed obsession with the Lucille Ball cackle meandered back into his life. To his shocked look, she remarked, "What, you thought I didn't know you owned this joint and that you're a regular at Milarky's Thursday nights? Now, Louie, I want a nice pair of black patent leathers, and I want you to assist me, please."

After four months of being inseparable, he proposed with a marquis diamond, and after another four months, she came down the aisle in the white lace wedding gown.

"Uhm...Mr. Golden? Oh, I'm sorry for star-

ting you. You holding up okay?" Mary was quiet, unthreatening, her eyes big and questioning.

The "v" of Lou's eyebrows were deep, and tears had begun to dampen his eyes. "She's my best friend, Mary, my best friend. And they wanna take her away from me and put her in a place where she don't know no one. She'll be so lonesome without me, probably start crying and carrying on."

"I know, Mr. Golden, I know, but your wife needs to get the best help she can and if that place in Port Jeff can give it, why not take it, even if it is hard on everyone? She's so sick, Mr. Golden, and you're getting sick too, and you won't be any good to her if you kill yourself doing the work of five people, trying to care for her. Take your time to think it through, though. You'll figure out what's best."

The aide tentatively places her hand on his arm. Lou is still turned away from her, eyes hard on the wedding photo of his Pearl. "Barbara and the lady from Social Services have left, and I've got to go now. My shift's over." Hesitating, something closes around her throat, and when she speaks again, her voice sounds forced and falters.

"It was really great working for you, Mr. Golden. I know you'll make the right decision about Mrs. Golden, whatever it is...I just want you to know that I'll keep you in my prayers. You guys deserve a lot of them." He could feel her smile, though strained, on his back. But he couldn't pull his face to hers, cherubic and young, full of life and vibrance.

"We're gonna miss you, Mary. Miss you more than you'll know. I'd do anything to keep you here. But you gotta do what you gotta do, move forward, or you'll get stuck behind, bet on the hand that's dealt to you. I hope everything treats you good." His fists are clenched.

"Thank you. I better get going." She removes her hand from his arm and soundlessly leaves the stuffy blue room. Lou hears her saying her goodbyes to an unresponsive Pearl; he hears the white Cavalier start up and begin the trek home, knowing that Mary has on her dark sunglasses, and her long brown hair and graduation tassel hanging from the rear-view mirror are blowing in the air which rushes through an open sun roof.

Cape Cod Bungalow

By Tobias C. Haley

I lay in bed listening to the gulls in the harbor
And the waves smacking against the concrete legs of the bridge
At rhythmic intervals.
Rubber tires sizzle
Against the dirt road and through the darkened window
A shadow of a great candle, with a short fuse,
Extends across the ceiling.
No matter what the circumstance,
The silence does not answer my legitimate question
And I am at a loss once again.

But Jesus Probably Wasn't a Virgin Either

By Bob LaPointe

As your cold fingertips caress the
plastic covering
on the end of the
shoelaces of my black Converse high-tops
and my steering wheel cradles
your dyed red hair,

is there a point in seeing
what's under the snow out there
or is it enough to have known
that we would have found out together,
if either of us had cared enough
to get beyond a deep conversation to
the things that really matter.

I can see you from our bedroom window,
late at night,
when you thought I was asleep,
crouched over a hair-dryer with a really
long extension cord so

you could tell me
all about it in the morning,
over coffee and forced kisses
through bad breath
from my lack of sleep

that I should go and see
what was under the snow sometime.
because you had tried it and
liked it a lot



Only to Eden

By Bill Schu

Can you not still detect the faint hint of perfume
That once drifted along behind her?
She walks these long halls still.
Although sound has long since died
For me, I can still hear her elegant
Footfalls on the stone stairway, feel the slight breeze,
Nearly undetectable, when she walks by.
No one ever hears her except for me,
But then, nobody else listens.

Do you not wonder how her sparkling garden,
Secondary in its glory only to Eden,
Lives still, unravaged by weeds and vines,
Undeterred by lack of rain or overabundance of it?
Do you not find it odd that the garden grows still,
Assuredly yet with restraint, just as she would have it,
When none has touched it for decades?
None, of course, except for she.

Yes, I see your thoughts, your sympathy, your discomfort.
You see a foolish old man, senile, deaf, and stupid, deluding himself
That his long lost love is still with him.
I suffer from no illusions of faith, or the supernatural, or astrology.
Old, deaf, and foolish I am, but no more foolish
Than those who refuse to believe truth, no more deaf
Than those who refuse to hear, no older
Than one whose love is truly gone.

The day approaches when she and I will be as one again,
Separated by no earthly boundaries,
Untainted by disbelievers, age, and sound.
That day I will at last, again, gently touch her hand.
We will rest lightly together, she and I,
And the glory of her garden will be second to none.



Frog's Green

by Josh Mooney

I didn't blow hard like everyone always expects you to. Actually, it was more of a sigh that blew out the thin white candles — all twenty-one of them. There was a quick laugh and the slap of clapping hands as the spiraled streams of smoke climbed up in the air.

"So, where do we go?", Andy asked.

"Let's go to Kelly's," Lauren suggested in a pulse of excitement.

"Now, now, it's Jake's birthday," Barry lectured politely. "Tonight is Jake's night."

"Oh, I wouldn't think it anybody else's night, would I?", Lauren stated. "It's just that Kelly's is so traditional. It always is. Well, it's Jake's night, where do we go, Jake?"

"Kelly's wasn't a bad choice," stated Brent.

"I never said it was," Barry answered. "But it's Jake's night. We always go to Kelly's. But since he's twenty-one now, I thought it would be nice to go somewhere else. A change wouldn't be a bad idea, would it, Jake?"

"So, where to, Jake?", Andy asked again.

"Yes Jake, do decide. We're all a bit thirsty." I looked up, she smiled. I loved it when she smiled, I did.

"Kelly's is fine," I said. Kelly's was a small pub not far from the campus. It was located on the "Strip," a row of bars and taverns along the city's main drag. It was a popular hang out, and each night it was filled with college students and homeless men who always hassled you for money. Kelly's was in the center of the Strip, we had been going to it since we were freshmen, before it became popular with the rest of the school. At first we didn't like that Kelly's became so popular, it was our place. But the bartender knew us by name, so after a while we didn't mind so much. We kept coming back, we fit in. Kelly's was perfect for us, and though it was crowded, for us it never changed.

"Drink another!", Andy yelled. I heard the distinctive CRACK!, and another bottle was slammed down in front of me. I wasn't done with

the bottle in my hand, it was still cold, but that didn't matter, the point was made. Andy's point, week after week.

"Well come on and drink up," said Brent. His head snapped back, and his fist slammed an empty shot glass on the wood table. "Jake?" I shook my head.

"Another round?", Barry asked.

"Mine," replied Andy, reaching into his pocket.

"Happy Birthday, Jake," Lauren said. She smiled, and kissed me on the cheek as she sat down on Barry's lap. She looked nice, we all did. I felt good, though I knew I shouldn't for some reason, and I was trying to find out what that reason was. A song came on the jukebox. "I want to dance!", Lauren announced. "Jake, do you want to dance — oh, that's right." She knew I couldn't dance. I never could dance, and that amused her, and she had the most fun on the dance floor when she laughed and made fun of me dancing.

"I'll dance," Barry quickly volunteered. Barry was a good dancer, though he couldn't dance better than me our freshman year. He had taken lessons over the summer we all thought, but he would never admit it.

"Lovely," she said, taking Barry by the hand and walking out onto the empty dance floor. Business was slow at Kelly's tonight.

"Something wrong?", asked Andy. He glanced down at my beer, beads of water, like sweat, ran down the side of the damp label. "'It's going flat. You're not gonna ralph?"

"I'm fine." Andy was a good guy. I had lived with him for two years. For his final year, he had moved off campus, where rules were just laws, and the school couldn't force its philosophies and restrictions on you. I picked up the new bottle and began to drink. It was warm, and the beer wash harsh against my throat.

"How are you and Lauren?", he asked.

"Fine." We were just fine, always fine.

People always asked, but we were fine.

"Fine is such a poor word, Jake," Brent said. "Not still sore about all that?" I glared at him, and he shrugged it off. Brent enjoyed making people squirm.

"You never told me about Princeton," Andy stated, trying to change the subject.

"Princeton was peachy."

"Do ease up, Jake," said Brent, coolly. "Poor Andy boy is just trying to change the matter at hand. You know how he hates confrontations." Andy didn't respond, he drank his beer.

"I'm sorry, Andy," I said. Brent continued.

"You never told me. I found out through Barry — Barry can be such a weasel. Still, you should have told us. He was our friend too." Brent wouldn't let it go. I played with my bottle. Andy finished his beer.

"Another?", he asked Brent.

"Three more," Brent replied, handing Andy three singles. Andy walked to the bar, and I pushed my beer to the side. "Don't let good 'ole Andy see you do that."

"Why must you be such an asshole?"

"That's not fair, you don't mean it, Jake."

"I do."

"Jake, tell me you don't mean it. You know me too well to mean it. That really hurts, you know...coming from you, I mean."

"I'm sorry, Brent. I take it back."

"You don't think I understand, Jake, but I do. Andy's gone, tell me what's wrong. Is it you and Lauren?"

"Damn it! Why does everyone have to bring up her name like that? If something's wrong, it's about Lauren; if I'm happy, it's because of Lauren, if I need to talk or blow off steam, it concerns Lauren. Just let it go, Brent."

"Relax Jake. I told you I understand. You're not upset about Barry?" He glanced over at the dance floor. Barry and Lauren were laughing and giggling with each other. The tone of Brent's voice was of disbelief.

"Jesus Christ...they're just friends. We all are." Go to hell, Brent. Andy returned with three drafts in medium plastic cups.



"They're serving these now? ", Brent asked.

"Yeah, and no more pitchers," Andy muttered with disappointment. "We won't be staying here much longer." I took my cup and quickly finished it.

"Three more?" I stood up, Brent tried to stop me.

"I'll get them, Jake."

"No. I want to." I did. I needed to walk, to get away from the table. I glanced out on the dance floor, Barry and Lauren were out there with four other couples. They clung to each other for support, both were drunk. Lauren's blond hair bounced above her shoulders, and she smiled, and she laughed. I walked to the bar and ordered four drafts. I gave the bartender five dollars to include a tip. He thanked me, and I began to drink one of the drafts.

The five of us had been friends since our freshman year. We had met at Kelly's, and hit it off right away. I had been dating Lauren since our sophomore year. We were always together, the five of us. We loved the same music, the same clothes, the same food, the same jokes...it was as if we had always known one another. We were perfect together. But tonight they didn't seem to understand, or was it me? Maybe Brent did? Or I was beginning to? Maybe I had too much to drink, or not enough, or just enough to fit in, but not really feel a part of it all. I finished my beer, and picked up another. Lauren and Barry were back at the table when I returned.

"This place is a bore, let's go to Tunes," suggested Lauren.

"I'm for that," stated Andy, as he took a beer from my hand.

"Jake?", Barry asked.

"Yes Jake," Brent said conceitedly. "Maybe Barry will buy you a drink there. Maybe he'll buy us all one — Barry, you haven't paid for anything tonight, have you?" Barry's face became red, and he looked at Brent, but remained silent.

"Now let's not argue," Lauren said coolly.

"Quite right," Brent agreed. "It's Jake's night, right Barry?"

"Would you like me to buy a round here?", Barry asked. He was becoming flustered and I

think I was enjoying it. I liked to see Barry squirm.

"No, we can wait until Tunes," he answered. "Just remember that it's Jake's night, Barry....If Tunes is all right with you, Jake."

"I've been saying it's Jake's night all evening!", Barry exclaimed. "Is Tunes okay, Jake?"

"Tunes is all right," I smiled.

"Splendid," Lauren said relieved. She turned to Brent. "And thank you so much for your help, dear. Honestly, Brent, what would we do without you?" She glared and Brent grinned.

Tunes was more crowded than Kelly's, but just as boring. We stayed long enough for Barry to buy us a round, and then we left for Frogs Pub. Frogs was the bar we ended every night with, it was the bar where everyone ended the night. We sat down at a table and a waitress came to take our order. Andy ordered two pitchers of Frogs' Green, a lager Frogs brewed in its basement. It was strong like malt liquor, and had a bitter after taste. The waitress brought back two pitchers of Green and a bowl of lemon wedges to take away the bitter taste.

"Are you tight, Barry?", Brent asked after his third cup. Barry had enough. He stood up in his seat and warned Brent to take it back, or he'd knock him one. Brent laughed.

"Please sit down, Barry," Lauren pleaded. "Let's not ruin the evening, and you're playing the clod."

"But he..."

"Are-you-drunk, Barry," she said. "He's asking you if you're drunk."

"Yes, Barry," Brent muttered. "You really should read some Hemingway. Tight means drunk, and I'm awfully tight."

"You're blind," Andy laughed.

"Some would just say awful." I heard Barry mumble.

"Yes," Lauren agreed, glancing at Barry. "And I think we've heard just enough out of you for one evening," she told Brent.

"Have you ever read *The Sun Also Rises*?", he asked her. "It's a fascinating book."

"Really? Do tell us," said Lauren, relieved

that Brent was dropping his assault on Barry. We all were, or at least, I was. Brent was asking for it.

"Well, it's about this WWI vet who got his balls shot off during the war. He goes around France and Spain, eating and getting drunk with his friends."

"I should like that," Andy smiled.

"You're really deep, Andy," Barry snapped, trying to regain his dignity. Andy did not respond. Brent continued.

"The best part of it is about this girl named Brett, who sleeps with everyone except the vet Jake —hey!— 'cause he ain't got no..."

"That's very lovely," said Lauren, cutting Brent off.

"It's the type of story I'll be writing!", Brent exclaimed.

"What about?", Andy asked. No one heard him.

"Really Brent?", Barry asked smugly. He was trying to get some licks in. Brent caught on.

"Yes Barry...all best sellers."

"What about?", Andy asked again.

"A moron, a jew, a whore, and a fool." Andy chuckled, the others grimaced, and I laughed or did something.

"That's very sweet of you dear," Lauren smiled, gritting her teeth. "Would you like to know what I will do?"

"Marry into wealth," Barry shot out.

"How charming, Barry. Are you rich, Jake?" She knew I wasn't, and Barry sniggered.

"Barry's rich," Brent blurted out. "He acts rich, though you'd never know he was rich. You'd think he was a wanna-be, but he's rich. Barry can buy anything he wants...and he does. Isn't that right, Barry? You're rich." Barry became silent, he was fed up with Brent.

"Brent can be brutal," Andy snickered.

"And sincere," I replied. No one heard me, and I was happy for that. I drained my glass and stood up to get a beer. Lauren followed me. When I reached the bar, Lauren grabbed my hand and dragged me to the back of the pub. She cornered me against the wall.

"Oh, Jake, I just can't stand it sometimes...them," she cried. Her eyes darted

everywhere, and she swayed back and forth.

"Do you love me?"

"Lauren?"

"Do you? Oh Jake, I need to hear it. Tell me that you still love me. Tell me that I matter to you." She leaned forward and hid her face in my shirt. "Do you, Jake? Do you love me?"

"Yes Lauren, I love you." I felt guilty, my stomach tightened into knots, and a lump formed in my throat. I wanted to leave.

"And I matter?"

"Of course." Lauren sighed and looked up at me. "And you Lauren? Do you love me?"

"Jake, don't be a clod. You know my answer."

"Please, Lauren."

"Jake, I've always loved you, and I've never let you down. I've been good to you."

"And Michael?"

"That's not funny," she snapped. "Oh Jake, we were friends, all friends once. Why can't it be like that again?" But I wanted to tell her it wouldn't matter how drunk I was, that I would never kiss another girl. Lauren went on. "He was one of us, but we don't invite him out anymore. I don't speak to him anymore. Really Jake, what more do you want?"

"I want to hear it from you."

"Impossible! You can be just impossible at times! Let's go back to the table and be happy, Jake. Don't become upset, let's not ruin our evening. Think of later tonight. Brent is staying with Andy. Think of tonight." She leaned forward and kissed me. "Let's go back to the others. Look how happy we were, we can be happy again. Yes, let's be happy again, Jake. Everything will be good, we will all be happy."

We returned to the table, Andy and Barry were arguing over the Orioles' chances of winning the Pennant. "Brent, hon," said Lauren, "Since you're so bent on making a profit at our expense, be a dear and buy another pitcher of Green."

"I'll buy it," Andy volunteered. He was intent on being away from the table should another round of exchanges erupt. "Losing my Religion" began to play, and Lauren and Barry

shot up from the table and trotted to the dance floor.

"Have you ever wondered if history repeats itself?", Brent asked me. "I mean, you would know."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. You're the history major heading off to grad school, that's all."

"I don't know..."

"I didn't ask you if you knew, I asked you if you thought. Do you know what your problem is, Jake? You don't speak your mind. Oh, you listen, but you never say a word. You're too scared. Why are you always so damn scared?"

"Where the Hell..."

"Just answer my question, Jake. Tell me what YOU THINK."

"Does history repeat itself? Like in cycles, does it go in cycles?"

"You're stalling."

"I suppose so...if you allow it to."

"Good answer!" Brent poured himself the remaining Green from the lonely pitcher. There were no more lemons, so he drank the dark beer straight and bore the bitterness. "I'm so tight!"

"Don't let Andy hear you admit that too often."

"Screw Andy! Do you think I give a shit what he thinks?" He held up his glass. "This is all that matters in his little world! All that matters! It's so sad, everything is so sad these days." He lay his head on the table.

"And you, Brent?" He looked up at me, his eyes were glassy.

"I don't know, Jake. I just don't know anymore. But you know what, Jake? I don't give a damn. At least I'm living."

"And the fool? What about the fool?" Brent smiled and sipped his beer.

"If you allow it, Jake." He winked at me and smirked.

"Good answer."



Orogeny

(for Loni, Stratton Mountain, Vermont)

by James Schultz

Death's winter grandeur rises like a bruise
or emotion felt from the throat up.

At nearly four thousand-feet above the sopping Atlantic,
February, the trail is frosted glass

speckled with flakes of snow
which look like Angels. They melt in the hand

easily. A mountain takes a thousand-million years
to rise from antediluvian seas,
one cataclysm at a time...

And this icicle peak is just another passing
punctuation in the sentenced landscape —
Owls Head, Mount Aeolus, Dorsey Mountain...

In slow orchestration oceans rise to acclivity
mountains erode to footpaths
friction

Darwin understood this

the descent of man
is just a grace note,
a grace note in time.

To See the Stars

by Chris Weiss

To see the stars spread far across the sky;
And set my fondest dreams for her to see.
To sing and laugh; yet never fear to cry.
And make them part of what I want to be.

To feel, and hurt, yet still to hope; to pray
The time will come at last when I am found;
And she will hear what I have longed to say
Through notes and bars that form the spirit of
sound.

Upon my soul are songs that yearn to sing
Like birds which soar with grace so high above.
With voice that sings so sweetly in the Spring
To warm the heart that thinks it cannot love.

To show the best I have inside my heart;



Torment's Tempest

by Bill Schu

Sleep — gentle, forgiving sleep
Refuses to drown me in its cool, placid water.

Pain — overshadowing, cleansing pain
Denies me the strength of its raw, steely blade.

Death — welcoming, eternal death
Forbids me the relief of its dark, silent coffin.

Oblivious to the gathering storm
Until the fierce undertow
Dragged me in,
I now know the power of passion's price.

The same hunger that swayed a swan
To descend upon Leda
Struck me with its sudden, urgent ferocity.
It reduced reason to withering foam
And crashed it, helpless, upon the barren shore.

Unable to shake my own shadow,
I bear the full brunt of torment's tempest.
I stand unwillingly against it, a thin birch
Tossing violently in the relentless gale but still
Rooted to the spot.



Home

by Rachel Miesler

It is the kind of neighborhood
where you can hear the phone ringing
through the open windows
two houses down, across the street,
and the woman, answering,
who lets her children play with other good kids,
apologizing loudly, and saying "sweetheart"
twice before she hangs it up.

Sometimes when all the kids have just been freed
from school, and are walking hardly home,
you can drive your car beneath the arc
of green and light confetti, and watching
leotards and shorts jog by, laughing,
letting sun touch their noses and their gossip,
you can make a left, instinctively,
on Maple where the tall trees break
and you can let high clouds reflect upon your windshield.
Then there is the safety of the early summer.

Yes, here no one seems to stay out late, but
on every corner street lamps drone year round...
through January, February, into March.
And sometimes you might notice the sky turn orange
above the rows of roofs when you're sleepless,
thinking songs instead of dreaming, and the snow
will send a light through your window
that pulls the blanket off your head
and makes your skin ache, oddly,
like a bird's might feel
when its feathers have decided to molt.

