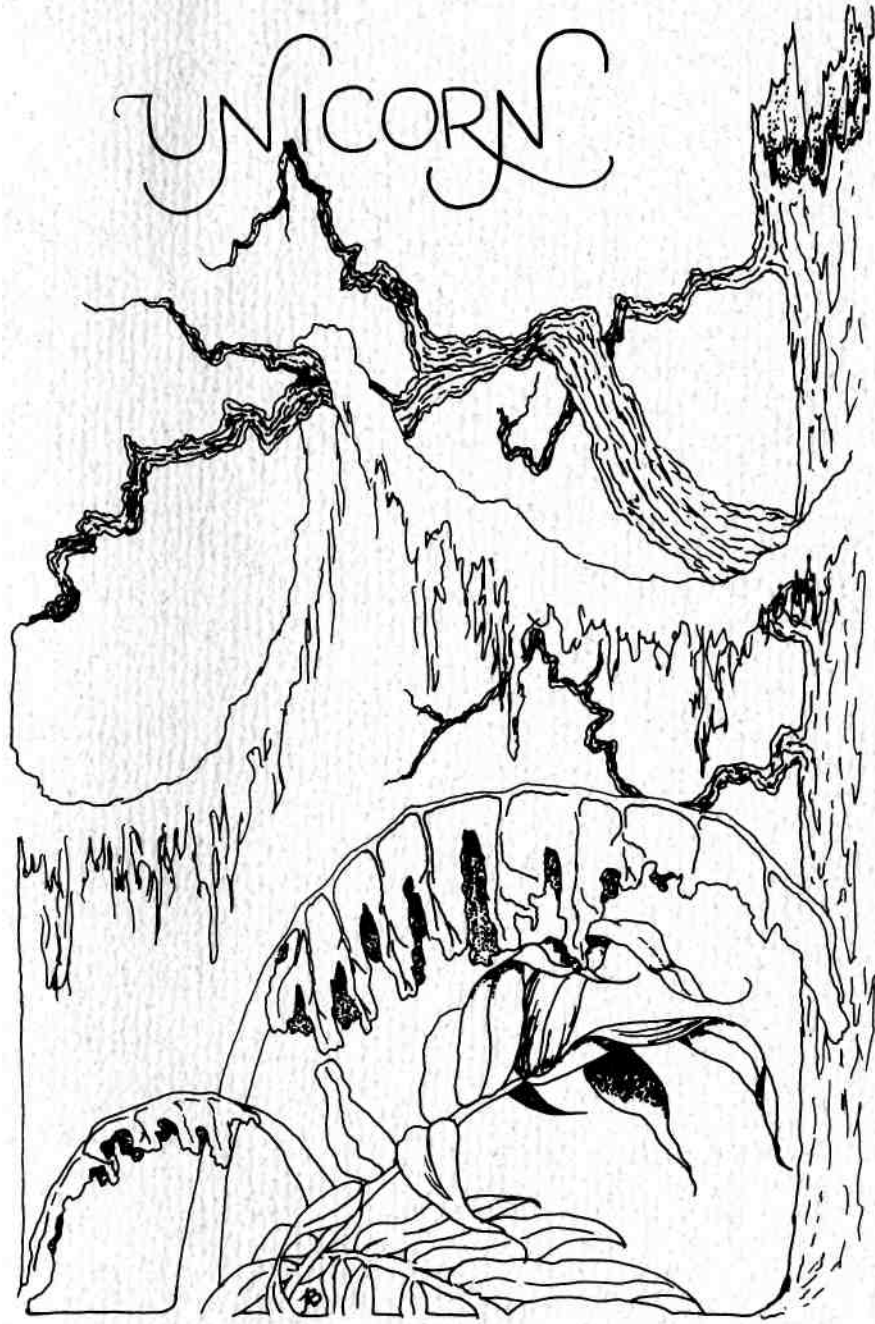


UNICORN



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Editor's Note:

Special thanks to Linda J. Hallmen
without whose help this issue
would not have been possible.

JUDGMENT DAY

"The Queen is dead! All is lost!" shouted Ehud as he ran through the debris that had been the village.

"Calm yourself Ehud! We can't let things get out of control!" Zadok screamed. He pursued his friend through the crowd, which was being whipped into an even greater panic by the news of their queen's death.

Before Zadok could catch Ehud, he heard the distant roar approaching again. He clung desperately to a huge chunk of rubble as the noise built to a deafening crescendo. Then the sun was blotted out, and the tremendous wind began destroying all in its path.

He watched helplessly as three nursemaids carrying oblong white bundles were whisked away to certain death. All around him, bodies were being carried away, or crushed by wind-blown debris.

Then, as suddenly as they had come, the wind was gone and the darkness lifted. The roar grew fainter and fainter.

Zadok ran frantically through the village surveying the damage. Broken bodies lay everywhere in the rubble. The air was filled with waving appendages and groans of pain.

"Oh Almighty Father!" Othniel moaned skyward, "I know well this is your judgment upon us. But what have we done to deserve such a fate? Surely we have sinned, but just as surely have we repented. Oh Almighty Father, have mercy!"

"Othniel! Don't waste time on foolishness! There is much to be done!" Zadok screamed.

"Where's Ehud!" Zadok shouted. "Othniel, where's Ehud!"

Othniel pointed, but did not look in the direction he indicated.

Zadok saw the broken body of Ehud, crushed by fallen debris, his leg still twitching crazily from beneath the rock.

Turning away from the gruesome sight, Zadok hurried over to an underground granary that had caved in. Workers were trapped in the honeycomb of storage bins, some dead, others screaming for help.

"We've got to start getting the survivors out!" Zadok shouted.

But it was too late. The distant roar began to grow louder and louder again. Then darkness engulfed the village and the tremendous wind began to scatter bodies, both mutilated dead ones and screaming live ones.

Zadok and Othniel ran furiously in an effort to escape. Othniel stumbled and fell. Zadok saw the wind take him, and he heard the faint sound of his friend's screams trailing off into the distance.

Zadok grabbed hold of a massive chunk of rubble, wrapping himself around it and clinging in a frantic embrace. In desperation and terror, he prayed to the Almighty Father for mercy.

For a time it looked as if he might escape again. Then a huge boulder crashed down upon him, crushing his abdomen against the rock to which he clung. He screamed in agony as he released his grasp. The roaring wind flung his lifeless body end over end through the rubble.

A bluejay screamed from his perch high in the bleached skeleton of a dead apple tree.

"Done just in time, Dad. Ballgame's on in five minutes."

The father smiled as he pushed a power mower across the freshly-cut lawn.

"What was all that dust by the peach tree?" the son asked.

"It was nothing," the father said. "Just ants."

Michael Scott

Undoing

Behold myself beholding
shards of crystal shattered meanly
in my hand. Helpless
with a fatalistic fascination,
I tighten my grip,
scarring myself with
what had been whole
until, with a soft tinkle
against my palm
it froze, began to unravel.
I am the pain I've caused you.

This hand which knew not itself
touched you, marvelled
at your neat fragility
and crushed you into a jagged
heap of writhing prisms,
touches you now, bleeds
among your precious ruins
and scraping itself hard
along your edges—it feels
a deadness in the texture
where you stopped being.

Marjorie Paoletti



King of the Bedouin

I don't like flying. I never have and I never will. My uncle Bernie—he's a pilot—once told me that nobody really knows what makes planes fly. There are two theories. Both work. But nobody is really sure which one is right. Somehow, that shook my faith. I don't like Cairo either. It's too hot. But that's where I'm supposed to meet my friends. To make matters worse, it's not a 747. I'm going in this little jet. If I had a choice I'd take the 747. I mean—I figure if something that big can get off the ground it won't come down until it's supposed to. Anyhow, I'm sitting in this jet, a 347 or something, waiting to scream across the Sahara when this stewardess comes up. "Would you care for a drink, sir?" she says and I say, "Yea. I'd like a drink. I'd like a vodka and tonic." She leaves. Comes back. She hands me a cup of ice with some tonic in it and a miniture fifth of Vodka. "She can't be serious," I think to myself. "This cute little bottle doesn't have enough liquor in it to catch a fifth grader a buzz." I get up and sneak into that little kitchen thing—the galley—and grab a fistful of mini's. Now I'm set. I figure by the time we take off I won't be able to tell which end is up anyway.

Enter my aisle-mate. She's not very pretty. Big nose. Oily skin. Pink shirt. Checkered pants. She's carrying some big, thick paperback. Terrific. A gaudy intellectual. I figure I'll have some fun looking at her pants when I finish my drink. We exchange the usual amenities. "Nice day." "Going to Cairo?" etc. "Have you ever read Kubler-Ross?" she asks, pointing to the paperback. "No." I say. "I thought I'd wait for the movie." She laughs. "I like you," she says. "You're funny." We take off. I'm buzzed.

It's supposed to take about four hours to get across the Sahara and land at Cairo. I busy myself looking out the window, raiding the galley, and looking at the gaudy's pants. "Have you ever thought about dying?"

asks the gaudy. "What?" I respond slowly and with difficulty. "Have you ever thought about dying?" she repeats. "Not lately," I tell her. "Why? Do you know something I should know?" "What do you mean?" she asks, apparently confused. "I mean we're up here in an airplane - God only knows how it flies- racing across the wild blue with no way to save ourselves if something goes wrong and you up and ask for no apparent reason if I've ever thought about dying. I mean what brought it up?" "This book I've been reading," she says apologetically. "It's all about the way people deal with dying. I've never thought about death until I started reading it. I was just wondering if you've ever thought about dying?" "No. I never have," I tell her. "Look. I don't want to seem rude, but there's a time and a place for everything and I just don't think this is the time to be thinking about death." "You're afraid of flying aren't you?" she says. "Who? Me? No," I tell her. "Christ, if I had it my way we'd all be born with wings." She laughs. "I like you." she says. "You're funny."

Sudden turbulence. General panic. Oxygen masks.
Ears pop. Plane crash.

I'm knocked unconscious for awhile. When I come to nobody is moving. I manage to pull myself from the wreckage through a hole where the galley used to be. After a couple of minutes I stick my head through the hole and yell "Hello!" It sounds dumb under the circumstances but I can't think of anything better to say. No answer. I crawl back into the plane. Most of the bodies are still strapped into their seats. The gaudy intellectual is still clutching that book in her hands. I check her wrist. No pulse. I check everybody. No pulses. The nose of the plane is buried deep in the sand. I figure I'd be happier not looking in on the pilots. I crawl back outside and lie on the sand. It's so hot it burns. The sun is incredibly bright.

I don't believe this. Air flight is the safest form of transportation known to man. You're safer in an

airplane than you are in your own car. All right, every now and then there's a mid-air collision. Once in a while somebody screws up and overshoots the runway, but statistically I should definitely be on my way to Cairo. There is no way that this has happened. If you were to take the number of people that traveled safely in airplanes in a year and divided by the number that died in transit-I mean I didn't want to go to Cairo anyway. "All right. There's no use bitching about it," I tell myself. "I'm in a lot of trouble and I'm going to have to make the best of it." I crawl back into the plane and search for supplies. I figure I'll be rescued by morning so all I really have to do is get through the night. I gather some blankets and pillows together. I figure it gets pretty cold at night, so I scout around the galley for some mini's. There aren't any though. It looks like I'll have to rough it alone.

Nightfall. Sandstorm. The wind is unreal. Little grains of sand slash at my arms and face. I retreat back into the plane for shelter. It's dark inside. Not dark like night or dark like and unlit closet- dark like death. I can feel the corpses around me. It feels anxious inside-like they're all waiting for me to fall asleep. I talk aloud to hear my own voice. I keep waiting for some-

one to answer. I feel unwanted inside the plane. I feel very alone and scared. "Well?!" I scream. "Go ahead and say it. It's not right that I'm alive and you're not. Go ahead! I know what you think. It's my fault that this happened. I drank too much. I made fun of the gaudy. So what!? I didn't know this was going to happen. I didn't plan it! I didn't even want to go to Cairo! You all think that I should be dead too! Don't you? Well? Answer me, damn it! Don't you?" Silence. I can't go to sleep. I feel sick inside and very alone. The storm is screaming outside.

Sunrise. The hole in the galley is half filled with sand from last night. I slip through the hole onto the desert. I don't want to spend another minute with the

corpses. They make me feel guilty for being alive. I see that the storm from last night has buried most of the plane. I figure my chances of being rescued have just dropped significantly.

This is really too much. I should be in Cairo with my friends. I should be parading around the pyramids or frolicking in the Nile. I should be doing something-anything else but roasting in the sun all alone. O.K. I'll get my act together. Here's the deal: I'm sitting in a thousand square miles of nothing next to a bunch of dead bodies. The plane is half buried in sand. Nobody is gonna find me for a few days. O.K. The way I see it my job is to keep alive. I crawl back into the plane and look for food and water. No luck. Why should there be food and water? It's a small plane making a short flight. They don't serve meals on these flights. Whatever was in the galley is either destroyed or buried in sand. O.K. Fine. I'm cool. All I have to do is hang out in the desert for a few days. Somebody must be looking by now. In a couple of days I'll be sitting in the Cairo Hilton laughing about this whole thing.

Day and night and day and night again.

I'm still waiting. Nobody has come to save me. I'm starting to think I may just die out here. Things could be better. It's not the dying that has me upset. It's dying at this point in my life. I mean- granted I haven't done very much to improve the quality of mankind in the past twenty years but I don't deserve to die because of it. Somebody else could be here in my place. Somebody old. Somebody nobody likes. Mr. Ferrara, my little league coach, could be here in my place. He's old. Nobody ever liked him. He could just sit here on a dune and blow on his whistle until he dropped dead. The vultures could have a field day. He's really fat. A body like that could support the desert food chain indefinitely. Look at me. I'm skinny. I mean I'm really skinny. A body like mine could make maybe a meal or two. Three tops. Mr. Ferrara is a much better choice. I mean it's not fair. I'm too young.

I could turn out to be another Albert Schweitzer. Why waste such potential? Why not rescue me and put me through some sort of catharsis? I could turn out to be a great leader of something. I could turn out to be the white knight of humanity.

Day and night and day.

The heat is unbearable. There's nothing to look at. No one to talk to. There's nothing to do. My head aches. My mouth and throat feel sticky and dry. I keep my eyes closed most of the time because it hurts to look at the sand. Maybe this is all a bad dream. Maybe I'll wake up in my room. If this could just be a dream. If I could wake up in my own home, I'd do anything. If I woke up in my own bed to the smell of bacon I'd do anything. I'd cut the grass. Trim the bushes. Clean the basement. Anything. I wouldn't drink or smoke or stay out late. I'd study and wear pink shirts and checkered pants. If I could open my eyes and just not see sand I'd become the posterchild of higher education. If I just wasn't here, I'd be O.K.

Day and night and day.

"You look terrible," says Kirsten. "I know," I say. "I haven't had a chance to clean up in a few days. I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting company." "I've been waiting in Cairo like a jerk. You don't show up. No call. No letter. No nothing. It's typically you to do something like this. If you weren't gonna show up you could have at least let me know so I could have made other plans and had some fun. But no. Devoted girlfriend hangs around for three days waiting like an idiot. I should have learned a long time ago not to rely on you for anything. I should have left you a long, long time ago." "All right. You're right," I say. "I haven't treated you the way you deserve to be treated. But-I mean, look around. This time I have a great excuse. There is no way I could have let you know." That's this time," she snaps. "What about all the other times?" "All right. I'm guilty," I say. "I've been rotten to you. I've been rotten all my life. I always make things go my way. But I'm

gonna change. Honest to God, I'm gonna change. If I get rescued I'm gonna become the model boyfriend. I'll call every night. I'll write lots of letters. I'll bring flowers. I'll take you to nice places. Look, if I get out of this, you and I will go upstate camping—just the two of us—just like I've always promised. We'll pack some food and some wine and spend the weekend by the lake—just like you've always wanted. I swear to God we will." "No we won't," she says. "Do you know how many times I've heard this 'I'm gonna change' routine in the past three years? Christ I've been stupid. You're not gonna change. You can't change. You were born and you'll die a selfish, self-centered bastard!" "You know, you could be a little more sympathetic under the circumstances. If you figure that I'm gonna be dead-dead!-in a day or two, you could go a little bit easy. Look. O.K. I love you. I don't show it well but I love you. You have every right to be angry. You have every right to leave. But I still love you. Maybe everything has come too easy to me so that I don't appreciate what I've got. You're very beautiful and very important to me. You mean more to me than anything in the world. I don't know what I'd do without you. I need you. Don't leave me. Please." Sometimes I surprise myself by how smooth I can be under pressure. It's different this time though. I really mean it. "No deal," says Kirsten. "I've heard all this before. You won't change. You can't. I'm leaving." Exit girlfriend. Enter depression.

Day and night and day.

O.K. So it seems pretty certain that I'm going to die soon. There are only so many days one can hang out in the desert until death sets in. It's not that I mind dying. I don't really. I'm not even that upset about my lack of longevity. I just keep thinking about that movie "Lawrence of Arabia." The bodies decayed so fast in the desert. I keep thinking how I'll walk around in my last few minutes. I'll be very casual. I'll just stroll along the desolation with my rotting white talons show-

ed loosely in my pants whistling a happy tune through bleeding, dried up lips. What upsets me most is my face. I don't like the idea of my skin flaking off and my eyes shriveling up in their sockets. I don't mind dying. I just want to go with some decorum. I'd die right now if I could be in a big, green park. I'd just jump in a hole and nestle into the moist earth and let nature do its stuff. None of the mess of decaying above ground. I'd like to die in a park where my body turns into nutrients to help out the natural process. Now that's class. I doubt I'll get my wish though. Maybe I'll reset my sights on a band of gregarious Bedioun warriors. They'll take my wandering to be a sign from Allah. They'll take me to their camp, revive me and make me king of the Bedioun. Maybe not. It really doesn't matter much now anyway.

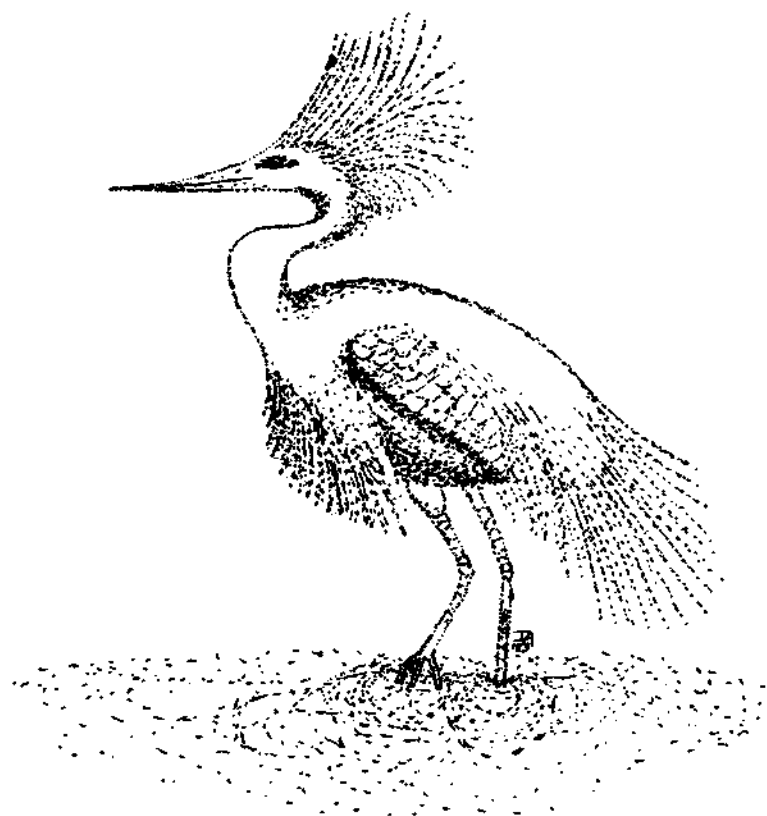
Day and night and day and night and day and night again.

Rob Hardesty

Randi

Randi speaks six romance languages:
I think I have a job with Arthur Andersen in Boston.
I believe Diana Ross and The Supremes
I trust you, but
I promise I
I wish we
I love

Drew Bowden



TO MY TWIN, WITH LOVE

The grains of sand melt between my fingers,
My thoughts follow the waves.
If I turn to the wind,
I see you beside me.

Inspired by the beauty,
The mood is all yours.
You are another gull, another wave....
Belonging.

Your hand moves carefully,
Detailing with perfection.
Brilliance captures the gold of your hair,
As it flutters with the breeze.

Untouched by the world around you,
Concentration lies solely on your work.
Determination creases
The peacefulness of your face.

Your eyes move slowly,
Inspecting and evaluating,
Grasping the horizon
In a frame of your perception.

Your body is motionless,
Movement only intruding.
Yet your arm is detached,
Working with accuracy.

It is as if a hidden desire has escaped
Coming alive before me.
Your likeness strengthening,
The reality of my dream. I am the artist.

When I need you, you are there.
Accepting and understanding me.
Water in the containers of my mind,
You yield to my thoughts.

Open to my views,
You pour into my emotions,
Complimenting the uniqueness
That eyes may not see.

Enhancing the feelings I possess
You give me reassurance.
What of the hapless
Who search and find ice?

Janet M. Kues

Everybody's Got One

He knocked on the door again. This time he heard a few rustlings, the sound of footsteps, then an old familiar voice.

"Who the hell is it?"

"It's me, your number one nemesis."

There was a distant gasp heard behind the door.

"You mean it's YOU?" said the trembling voice.

"What...why...uh, what do you want?"

"Just to talk. Maybe have a couple of cokes or beers or whatever. I figured it was high time I got to know the competition a little better."

"Don't give me that bullcrap. You know all there is to know about me." There was a pause. "Hey, waitamminute," the voice nervous again, "it's not time yet, is it? Don't tell me today's the big day?"

"No, no, not yet."

"Phew, thank you."

There was a moment's quiet. The voice behind the door spoke again.

"Well, if today ain't the big day, what's up? It must be something big if you're showing up here in person. You usually send over one of your goons to do your dirty work."

"Coming from you, that's rather ironic," he smiled and chuckled, "I realize it's only part of your nature, but I wish you wouldn't call them 'goons.' They're a good lot, really."

"Bunch of fricking, yes-men pansies."

"Oh, you're just jealous. Always were."

"Damn right. You're always right, you know that? Sure you do. You know everything. Always got all the answers, always got your eyes on everything that's going down. That's why I can't stand you."

"Well, I'm not exactly crazy about you, either. But you'll have to do."

"Huh?"

"You've caused me a lot of trouble. Though I guess I should be grateful. You've kept me busy."

"Yeah, its been some kinda rivalry," the voice sounded yielding, almost nostalgic.

"And your business has been doing pretty well lately," he admitted. "You've been stealing away a large percentage of my customers. I've been holding my own on the open market, but the ol' enthusiasm just isn't there like it used to be. They've lost spirit, I guess."

"Well," the voice said cockily, "the consumers know what they want and they figure I've got it."

"You're some salesman, I must admit."

"Hey, like I said, you're always right."

A short pause. He spoke.

"Anyway, as to the reason of my visit..."

"Yes?"

"Strictly social. Why don't you let me in and we can shoot the breeze a while?"

"I've got nothing to say to you, and I sure as hell ain't letting you in here. Don't think I've forgotten what happened when that kid of yours came to call," the voice had a twinge of sarcasm, "Man, what havoc he caused. Who knows what **you'd do?**"

"I'm not here on business. Believe me, I haven't come to hit your place. Would I lie?"

"Well...no, I...I guess you wouldn't."

"So open up, willya?"

"Not so fast, not so fast! I still don't understand something. Why do you want to be so buddy-buddy all of a sudden. You want to talk, talk to your goons."

"I only talk at them. All they can do is stare up at me, smile till it hurts and babble on how wonderful I am, what a good job I'm doing, and how everything is looking up. They're unbelievably..."

"Boring."

"Yeah, boring."

"I'm beginning to understand."

"Please let me in. We can talk about old times, chew the fat. You were all right...once. Have you ever

thought you made a mistake, leaving the firm, starting your own business?"

"No way. I like being my own boss. Just like I said the day I left, though not in so many words."

"I remember. But I forgive you."

"Ha! You would."

The voice behind the door spoke again.

"You know, ol' pal, I always thought you had it great. Everybody running about telling you how wonderful you were, looking up to you, wanting to be like you, praising you, singing about you. You're sick of it. You want someone to look up to. But there ain't nobody, is there? You're the top dog, and you're stuck with it. So if you can't have that, you want someone who can look at you eye to eye and say you're wrong, to criticize you once in a while, to call you stupid or silly, a friend or a fool. And you figure I'm the closest you can get."

"I just...I...I wanted..."

"You know, pal, I've been trying to find a way to get at you for some while. I've tried every trick in my book to cause you and your crowd trouble. All I've wanted, besides your job, is to make you suffer. But all the while I was wasting my time. I needn't have bothered. I guess everybody's got one, huh pal? Even you. Well, you're not going to get any comfort from me, so beat it. Get lost. You go back to your hell, and I'll stay here in mine. Yes sir," the voice laughed, "ain't it lonely at the top!"

God turned away and began to slowly walk back to heaven. Satan smiled behind the door.

Daniel C. Collins

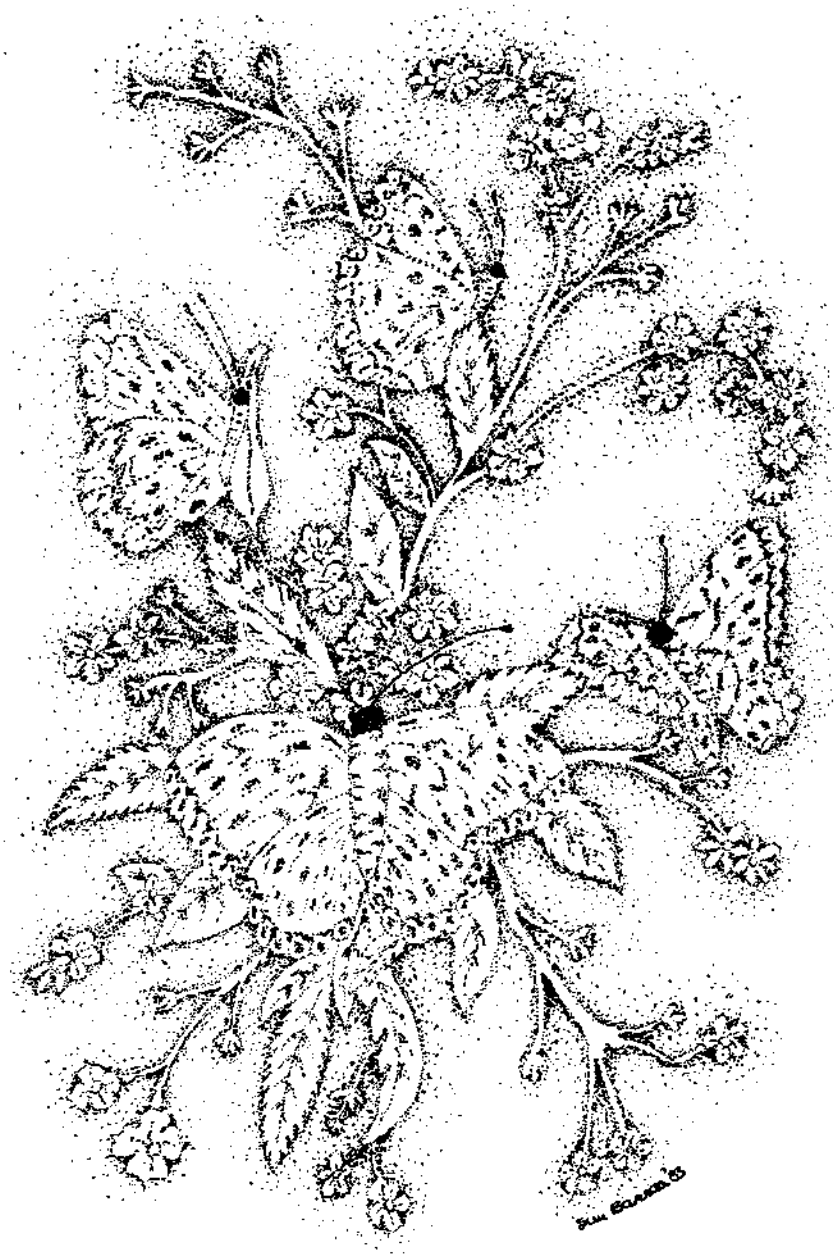
NOT QUITE A DOG'S LIFE

My cage is smaller every day
My admirers are few
They let me out two times to play
But I can't have fun on cue
They clean my cage when they see fit
Not really when it calls for it
A dog's life isn't easy
When you're really not allowed to be...
A dog.

My coat was shiny in its day
And passers-by would stop to say
"Oh, what a handsome pedigree.
Sir could you quote a price for me?"
Then, thru the glass expressions changed
And passers-by passed by again
A dog's life...

It's cut-throat here behind these bars
All vying for attention
I've learned to rest these weary paws, collect my doggie
pension
Mercifully, your seven years equal, for me, just one
For seven times this suffering would leave me quite un-
done.

Dale Simms



Lucrezia Borgia (1480-1519)

Oh, Papa, how I used to wish that you had lowered me
into that cool well in Subiaco,
before you and your son, Cesare,
learned what made me laugh and cry!
Those tears, which in those days flowed out of me
as frequently as the tide goes in and out
along the coast of the Aegean,
were tears of resignation
to two wills whose concerted efforts
could have supported the dome of the new St. Peter's,
or Bramante's Tempietto.
For what did my feelings count
against such a grand cause as the manipulation
of the kingdoms of Italia?
I was little more than an instrument of diplomacy
sent from one nuptial chamber to the next—
an ambassador of domestic affairs.

Oh, Cesare, in your cardinal's scarlet,
the only son of our father,
you proclaimed yourself ruler and guardian
over my existence,
and I paid homage to you
like a barefoot girl in the temple,
afraid not to bow before what I could not understand.
You have robbed me not only of the innocence of my
youth,
but of a husband who proved
that there were men who did not think themselves
divine.
And now you have married me off a third time.
I laugh and dance a challenge in your face!
Alfonso d'Este is not the pawn you had hoped for.
Nor is he weak.

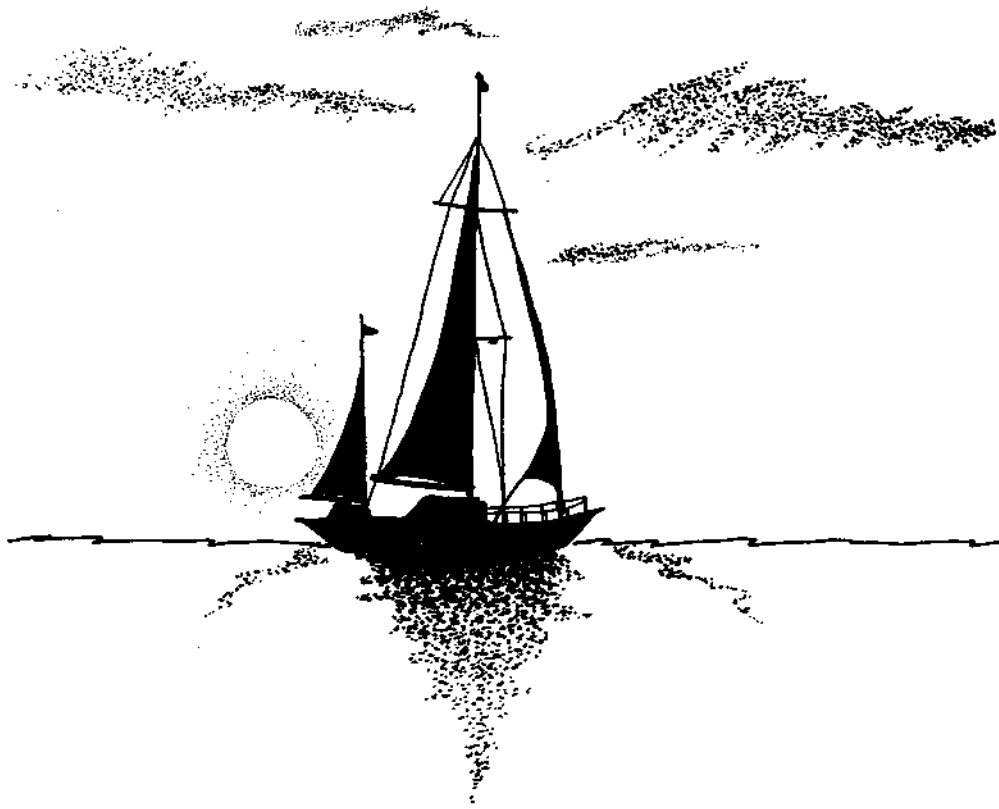
In Ferrara, with the strong stone walls around us
I can walk through the courtyard and know that
the footsteps I hear trailing behind me
belong to one of my children.

Lisa Pecoraro

mother, dying

small in her body's damaged replica, this prone,
nocturnal house.
she is already looking into the distance.
I see nothing outside that window,
but she is smiling.
memory is kind to some of us.
even the wind is welcomed with its one, solitary
tone, its loose wings.
someday, mother, you will wander back over this
endless meadow
of columbine and daisies,
your face an elegy of love, that kind
of statement.

Gayle Elen Harvey



Post-mortem

Everywhere dust. And pictures.
Vacations, and birthdays. Graduations, and
weddings; Some man in knickers.
Jesus. Lots of things with Jesus, too.
We sift like rats
Through the cigar boxes full of paper clips and
twist ties and pens,
Stacking dishes, and untangling a mass of
costume jewelry.
Reading personal mail.
The smell of moth balls makes me gag.
There I sit, atop a lace doily, for all eternity
upon Santa,
Beside an impatient, dying from neglect.

Jackie Gauss

Tristan

"My lady, I swear by my one name, Tristram of Lyonesse...that while I live I shall be beholden only to you." from the Book of Sir Tristram of Lyonesse chapter of Iseult the Fair of Le Morte D'Arthur by Sir Thomas Malory

"For two weeks?"

"Yes. She has to go to North Carolina. Said something about her mother. She may be sick. I don't know. I wasn't going to press the point."

"Is she paying you?"

"No. I'm doing it as a favor. She said she'd leave money for food."

"Leave her number. If you need anything, call. Are you sure you're going to be all right in that house alone?"

"Yes, mother! I'll be all right."

God, to be independent for two weeks.

I knew the general area, but I'd never seen the house. It was in one of those arty sections of town. The kind of place where you see just about everything. I wasn't at all sure about it.

This place was about as menacing as one of those Victoria Holt ivy-covered manors. I pulled my car into the driveway, a bricked courtyard affair: broken bottles of Thunderbird wine and rats hiding in the corners. I was sure of that.

The back door really got to me. It was heavy with flakes of grey paint that blew off every time there was a hint of wind. The vintage Yale lock groaned and protested as I fought it open.

O.K. Clothes, albums (I hoped to God she had a stereo), and some food. She was the type that ate out a lot and survived at home on what she brought back in doggie bags.

Then, I saw him, standing in the afternoon shadows of the buildings.

It took three armloads to get all of my necessary provisions inside. It was getting dark, so I left it all in the basement and called the dog down.

Lock the car.

The man was still there. Watching.

"Come on, dog! Do your damned business so I can get inside that door."

I couldn't stand it any more. I picked up the dog and carried it into the house. The stranger never moved. Just stared.

"You're a wonderful watchdog, Teagy!" My stalwart protection was a rheumy Welsh corgi that wheezed and coughed as it waddled around, dragging its stomach along the floor.

I guessed it used to be the servants' stairs. The stairwell was about three feet wide, illuminated by a single 100 watt bulb. I almost stepped on the dog getting up the stairs. It probably sensed my fear. I read somewhere that dogs have that ability. I've always wondered what fear smelled like.

The dining room was extremely Victorian. A huge mahogany table with clawed feet sat in the middle of a faded, dusty oriental rug. I loved the fireplace. Rose colored marble with swirls of cream. On the mantle sat a statue of a beautiful little boy. In his hand he held a torch, whose end was lit with a flip of a concealed switch. I turned on the bulb and saw my face in the mirror.

It didn't even look like me. The eyes weren't mine. They were large, glazed, dilated, framed by dark circles. I hadn't noticed that I was breathing heavily.

Was I being ridiculous? I had stayed in an isolated house in the country for a weekend in March and nothing happened. Of course, that was the time when Stephanie stayed with me. Fearless Stephanie. The only thing she ever worried about was moving her car when the people from the doctor's offices next door blocked her in for parking illegally.

I really hated the kitchen. It must have been a closet

once. The ceiling was about 12 feet from the battered tiled floor. Only one person could stand in there at a time, because the sink, refrigerator, Chambers stove, and single cabinet with the Roach Motel placed conspicuously in the corner claimed the room. I looked through the grimy window and saw the lights from the living room across the air shaft. God only knew what was in the bottom of that shaft.

I put some of the food away, covering the rest from whatever lurked in the bowels of that kitchen.

I went back to the dining room and looked out the windows. Strands of ivy scraped the panes sporadically. The windows ran from ceiling to the baseboards and were fashioned from the thick, distorting glass of the beginning of the century. Through these, I got a thorough look at him.

I stood where I could observe him, out of sight from his intense stare. He was an ordinary guy, about twenty or so. He wore filthy tan corduroys and a torn t-shirt. His hair was a dark blond, surprisingly beautiful in the harsh carbon light of the alley. I could see him shaking in the cool dusk. It was the unflinching stare of those lovely grey eyes that bothered me. I wanted to know who he was.

I had nothing else to do, so I called Stefan, Anne, and Chris. All three offered to stay with me, but I refused. I needed the two weeks alone. But not tonight. When I told Stefan about the stranger in the courtyard, my knight in pseudo-shining armor came over to keep me company and to help me finish a bottle of Seagram's. Stefan never was one for melodramatics.

I asked him if he noticed my stranger standing next to the garbage cans.

"Yeah. He's probably a junkie looking for a place to crash. Just ignore him."

"How can I? He keeps staring with those...eyes."

"If you don't pay any attention to him, he'll leave and look for an open garage or something."

I agreed just to keep peace. Stefan loves to be right and gets very defensive if you try to prove him wrong. He's about as stubborn as I am. Maybe that's why we get along so well. I'm also like him in another respect. I can't refuse a challenge.

After "Benny Hill" was over, Stefan mumbled something about getting up early for work. I walked him out to the car, and the stranger was still there. Steadfast. Immobile.

"Call me tomorrow, Stefan."

That night, I had a disturbing dream. I was walking through an alley, blanketed in thick fog. I usually have about one fog dream a week, so this was nothing unusual. However, when I turned a corner in the sickening slow motion of dreams, I saw the stranger. Just as he had been last night.

It wasn't a nightmare because I wasn't afraid. He beckoned me to come over with a slow, deliberate motion of the hand. As soon as my face was inches from his, our eyes met and locked. His eyes were an incredible grey. Stormy and flecked with specks of deep blue. His pupils were large pools of black, sitting in the middle of his beautiful irises. He opened his mouth to speak, and I was awakened by a heavy weight on my chest.

I opened my eyes to find Teagy sitting on my chest, breathing incredibly bad Dog Chow breath into my face.

"All right, all right! Come on. We're going outside."

As I walked down the stairs, I had that feeling of anticipation that you get in your stomach right before something important happens.

I fought the door open and blinked a few times to adjust my eyes to the early-morning summer glare. Teagy wandered around, sniffing and wheezing.

A rush of disappointment came over me. He wasn't there. I walked to the end of the courtyard where it intersected with the alley. A stream of executives in polyester business suits and wide ties walked by in the

street, interrupted now and then by colorfully dressed downtowners.

"Come on, Teagy. I'm hungry."

I couldn't find the dog. All I needed now was to lose it amidst the traffic and trash in the street. I found it in a passageway that ran from the courtyard to the street in between the pizza carry-out and a business office.

"You are the most ridiculous animal I've ever seen!"

It waddled behind me into the courtyard. I jumped when I felt a hand brush through my hair.

I spun around in my bare feet to find him standing next to me underneath the fire escape on the building next door. It was an institute for sleep research or something.

I had an incredible sensation of deja-vu. His eyes were exactly as I had seen in my dream. None of my dreams had ever come true.

We stood there, examining each other's faces. He had clear, perfectly toned skin that complimented his hair. His nose was shaped like those you see on Greek statues in the Museum. I couldn't get over how pretty he was, yet there was a definite masculinity that emanated from his interior. He never changed his expression of complacency.

"Don't speak," he said softly. "Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you."

I opened my mouth to reassure him that I wasn't afraid, but he laid his slender finger on my lips and shook his head.

"Don't say anything."

I was inexplicably comforted by his touch. There was a kind of electrifying energy that ran from his fingers through my body.

He took my hand and whistled for the dog, which immediately ran to his side. Against all reasoning, and defying all parental warnings about strangers, I led him into the house.

We walked up the stairs to the second floor and sat

in one of the few furnished rooms in the house. It was the sitting room where Stefan and I had been the night before. He sat on the couch and turned toward me, gripping my hands between his.

"Do you know why I am here?" he asked with his earnest voice.

"No." The word barely came out.

"I've always known you. We had to meet this way. I'm sorry if I frightened you."

"I don't understand..."

Suddenly, I became nauseatingly dizzy, my mind whirling and racing. I thought I was going to pass out.

"It's all right. It will pass soon." His voice seemed to be coming from very far away.

When I opened my eyes, I was startled by a feeling of recognition and familiarity. But, I couldn't explain it. He seemed so comfortable with me, and I with him. I felt I had completely taken leave of my senses.

He smiled, his face relaxing into an ethereal portrait.

"You begin to understand. I wasn't sure if the time was right, but now I see that it is."

"Please tell me what is happening!" I was beginning to feel panic rising in my throat.

"You will remember. Give it time." He took my face in his hands and caressed my cheek.

The sound of traffic stopped in the street. But I could still hear the startlings' cries.

"I am your Tristan, and you are my Isolde."

"That's impossible. I am Sarah."

He smiled gently. "No. You never were."

Debbie Donohue



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