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SUMMER-FALL 1976

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touchstone

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1976

In Tenebris Association

A Magazine of Creative Arts

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The Roman Cat

Giovanna Cook

I am a rangy Roman cat,
but
I was a lion once in the Colosseum.
I never developed a taste for Christians
I would have preferred a Roman pagan
but very seldom got one.
So as a lion I died of frustration.
Now as a cat in this reincarnation
I still get to watch the Romans go by
as I lazily lie
on this ancient ruin that
has soaked three thousand years
of sun.
At night, *Caio Cestio's ghost
runs
in a helpless rage. He who hated
every cat
now has to share our habitat.
But nothing matters
to a rangy Roman cat
except that:
the Roman sun still shines
at any rate.
And Rome is still not quite
up to date,
and time still stands still
when a cat decides to meditate.

*Note: The tomb of Caio Cestio, a wealthy, ancient Roman, is in a pyramid near the English Cemetary in Rome. Its walled grounds are home to a host of cats, fed by citizens of Rome.

Wind

Laura Peck

The wind, a mischievous dog,
Chases leaves,
Puffs and pants
With invisible tongue lolling
Then jumps against me
And gives my face a lick.

A Drop in the Bucket

Jerry Winans

There once was a man camping in the woods with his wife on a weekend away from the city.

One morning, his wife, who was extremely farsighted, arose early before dawn and went for a brief walk. She and her very nearsighted husband wore glasses of identical styles, so she absently and quite innocently put on the first pair her hands found, which were his. But it was dark and she couldn't see anything clearly anyway.

Along the way, she smelled the unbelievably sweet scent of some wild flowers. Overcome with startled joy, she called out for her mate, whom she felt had slept long enough anyway. "Come quickly!" She called.

Being an obedient husband and not wishing to ruin an otherwise quiet vacation, he jumped groggily up, putting on her pair of glasses. The man unknowingly mistook an echo for the sound of his wife's voice and dashed off through dense foliage in the opposite direction of his wife's true location.

She continued calling; he continued running. Then, in the darkness . . . stumble-crash-rustle, the husband had dashed off a cliff. Fortunately he grabbed a vine to save himself from falling any further than he already had. His voice was weak; the forest was thick; and besides, his wife had grown tired of the sweet-smelling weeds. She had yawned, groped her way to their tent, and had by now gone back to sleep.

The man hung there for several hours without uttering a sound. Slowly it grew lighter and his situation became clearer. He was suspended a mere nine feet above and slightly to the right of another ledge. This second ledge jutted out from the cliff's face and was a footpath used by hikers. To the dangler, who wore his wife's magnifying spectacles, all he could detect below was a great deal of air floored by a blur of earth. Therefore, he hung on.

Now a pair of hikers passed under him. His shadow fell across them; and they, expecting to see an eagle overhead, looked up.

"Hey, man, what's happenin'?" one of them drawled.

In his meek city voice, he answered, "Help me, I can't hold on much longer."

He still didn't see the ledge, couldn't, in fact, see the hikers, so he thought the voice came from the ledge above.

"Just let go," said the hiker.

"Are you crazy?" he ventured, looking up. "I'll fall a thousand feet and be killed."

"No, you won't," replied the other hiker, who thought the dangler was directly above them. "You'll be all right. Just let go."

His hands were growing weaker, he thought. Looking down again, the ground was still a blur, miles away. But they said he should.

"Are you sure?" he moaned.

"Trust me; have faith," they answered.

Drawing a deep breath, he counted to three and let go. He missed the ledge by inches, dropping past the hikers, who leaned over the edge and watched him shrink away into a dust-dot on the canyon floor.

"I'll be darned. Guessed wrong on that one. Ready to go, Al?"

On the way down, the husband took off the glasses which strangely made his eyes hurt this morning, and made a mental note to have his eyes tested soon.

The Night Walk

Alan Hipps

The echoes from his feet on the pavement resounded with hollow cracks as they bounced off the brick houses, stiffened and came back. He noticed that the air was too chilly for August, and figured that winter would come early that year.

Of course he loved Helen. There was really never any question of that. Oh, he might have been short at times, but he had always made it up to her. Actually, he had busted his ass for her. Playing up to her whims (which were frequent), taking her out; hell, he had even shared in the cooking.

He came to a corner. The street light glowed with radiating halos, probably due to the mist in the air. He could see well in the small diameter of light provided by the lamp, but beyond that ring it quickly became black. In front of him, the particular street he'd been on came to an end. Beyond a flimsy barb wire fence lay a field he had seen from the freeway on his way to work. In the middle of the field, he recalled a small, mossy pond, surrounded by large, overhanging willows. The grass grew unhindered in that field: he had once tried to buy it in order to build some apartments, but had found the owner unwilling to sell. Now he briefly considered striking out across it, but its darkness rather scared him. He decided to go right, but after he had walked a couple of yards he noticed a dead end sign. Cursing, he retraced his steps and continued past the intersection in the other direction.

He remembered a time shortly after his graduation. He had gone to work as an utter peon, and he and Helen had had to live in several small dingy apartments, barely able to meet the bills. Those should have been the bad years, he thought, Now he had the comfort of his own house, a relatively small-but more than adequate savings account, and he could practically choose his time to work. Life is ironic, he thought.

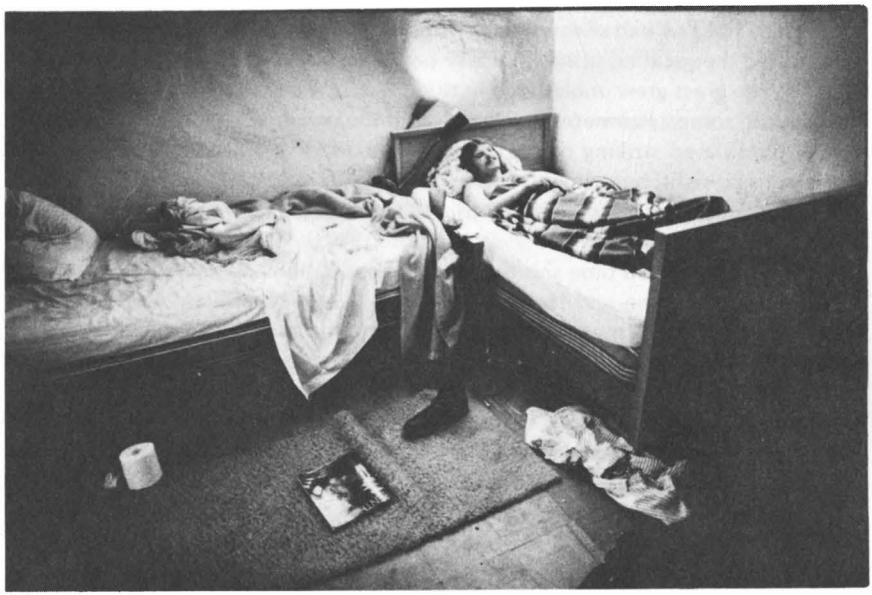
The rays from the lamp became fewer, and he found himself walking further into a darkened street. He decided to sit on the curb and rest a while, for he had been walking for some time. He stared at a withering leaf that lay in the gutter. He picked it up, and noticed the tiny, weaving intracies of the veins. Once they had carried the life-giving sap that had changed the leaf from a bud into a

blooming greenness.

His mind wandered to other things, and the leaf fluttered to the pavement below. He wondered what would happen to the kids. They would probably go with Helen, but he could stay in town and see them regularly. What with them getting ready for school, they would probably be gone and not even notice his absence. He wondered what would happen to Helen. She was still quite attractive, and would probably have no trouble starting a new life. The thought of her remarrying somehow painfully contracted his throat, and he began to wonder what would happen to him.

Suddenly he looked around and didn't know where he was. Not knowing what to do, he jumped up and began to run. Images from the shadows of trees began to blurr his vision, and seemed to block his way. Quickening his pace, he nearly stumbled when a flashing neon light appeared in the distance. Coming closer he recalled the familiar "1st National Bank" blinking at him, and he became calm again. He realized that no matter what happened he would always come through. He just couldn't figure out how he had ever gotten into this mess.

Well of course he loved Helen, he thought. There was really never any question of that.



My Roommate— *Tim Janicke*

Leftovers

Paula Meyers

Ashes sift to the floor
To tangle with delicate ravellings
Of all that is left.

Blackened matches and cigarette butts
Cradle in soft, sooty pits,
Sure in the comfort
Of craggy ashen arrangements
Left over from last night's late movie
When the writer of letters
Misplaced stationery
And the reader of Econ
Was unsure of the page;
Academe again surrendered
To nail polish and shampoo
While cigarette smoke pirouetted
Above the television
And soaked into the carpet
Among crushed cracker crumbs,
Long, fine strands of strawberry blonde and auburn,
Crumpled shreds of green now brown
From withering ferns,
And bits of birdseed and downy plumage
Shaken from the ample color
Of Omar, the parakeet.
Nameless specks nestle there too,
Among gravel from soiled tennis shoes
And nervous crescents of fingernail
Trampled now and again
By wooden soles, bare feet, and warm socks
Which wear in the quiet ways of lint
To thin hatched threads,
Mingle with fibers from skinwarm sweaters
And scuffed hems of faded jeans,
Later tossed beneath beds
And onto closet floors
In craggy cotton arrangements.

Ashes sift to the floor
To tangle with delicate ravellings
Of all that is left.

Thirst

B.F. Abdur-Razzaq

Your eyes
are earthen wells
that draw my buckets in,
and irrigate great dreams that lay
in wait.

Too-Late Night

Patricia Henshall

There are night-walkers,
stalkers in the shadows,
whistle-humming tunes as flat
as their moon-disced eyes,
dimes fitted to burnt pits.
There are peekers standing
in the black streets,
pulled like moths to lighted windows.
Loose-mouthed, they are mumbling
juicy words that slither
like little snakes.
There are callers in dark houses,
fingers crawling on the dials;
raspings and squealings
of little pigs before the ax.

I will call up my lover
and she will come over
and chase off the walkers,
the peekers, the callers.
She'll stay the night with me
and never will leave me
until the dark is raped by light.

If she should not come,
then I will go over,
walking the night streets,
stalking in shadows,
humming our love song
for the dime-flat moon.
I will stand at her window
and flutter my fingers
moth-like against the panes;
mouth her name softly in the blackness
until she takes me in.

But first I will call her,
sigh,
and sigh,
and whisper I want you.

'Land of Gloom; Land of Mists'

Rolf Kuhlman

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13 ("Winter Dreams")
Second Movement, "Land of Gloom; Land of Mists"

> "Should not a symphony reveal those wordless urges that hide in the heart asking earnestly for expression?" — Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky

The beginning of the second movement finds me walking down a country road, a long road, never ending it seems. The moon makes the snow shine like a freshly waxed floor. The road is lined by trees whose branches touch above it, and by wooden fences whose tops support clumps of sparkling, white snow.

The movement begins very peacefully with only a few violins. They pause between phrases, and I can hear them take a breath. I hear the muffled acoustics of the snow. I hear the flat, squeaking sound my heavy boots make as I trudge down the road making footprints in the perfectly laid whiteness.

Only the violins whisper softly now in deep serenity. Snow falls heavily, but makes no noise. It drifts to the ground, making a soft cushion. I wonder about the chances of two snowflakes touching and forming one before they meet the ground. They would fall together, lightly and slowly, with no obstacles between them and their resting place. I can manage to laugh, through the lump in my throat, at this image of meeting dreamed of by so many of us who will never find it.

But what of dreaming? Am I not dreaming now? And is this not dreaming music? And is not this music dreaming? There is a constant flow of peaceful dreams and tense dreams. They rise and fall in degrees of relaxation, as the music rises and falls from fast to slow, loud to quiet, tossing and turning like trees on a January day.

Trees. They also find peace in the winter. They pause during these few months of the season. Branches of one tree freeze to the branches of an adjacent tree. Autumn has stripped them of their leaves, leaving them to stand naked now, but not really alone. Winter offers them time as it allows them a slower pace. And they accept.

I quicken my pace, realizing I have not walked very far. The music, also, has assumed a slightly faster tempo. Gazing through the maze of trees, I can see a small, wooden house with smoke rising from the red brick chimney. I am reminded of the many other ways winter is spent by others. Others! There are others, it occurs to me, as a rush in my blood awakens me. String instruments race up the scale to a climactic point.

But the climactic point of the music and the thought of others is not really what frightens me now. It is the wind coming up and the fear of what it will carry with it. It is gusts. Winter gusts. The kind that throw a person to the ground and strangle him. And it is strangling me. Those "others?" Who are they? Are they all the same? Broken phrases of the last conversation I had are winding through the

trees, knocking me down with bitter truth. Once more the melody is played. Only this time it has a deeper meaning. Like myself and the music, the words will not fade but simply come to an end, completing the second movement.

Search

Emme Smith

A winter field
Sprinkled with snow—
And haunted with
Footprints from
A wandering girl
Who lost herself
In Autumn leaves.

Late Snow

Melinda Melhus

Snowflakes April first are rare,
much less foot high drifts—
it's a fool's joke,
or an apparition.

Forgotten cats shiver outside closed doors,
while roller-robed mothers bemoan pathways
left on newly waxed floors,
by yellow galoshes.

Businessmen swear in puffs of condensation
at soggy newspapers and balking engines,
while oblivious lovers find warmth
in frost paneled rooms.

Prolonged hibernation
imposes itself
on spring's pastels.

Untitled— *Karen Hancock*

Entomology Lesson

Cindy Billy

This world
is a centipede
with a hundred legs kick
ingj
olti
ngje
rkin
gwhi
rlin
gscr
ambl
ing in a
mad St. Vitus' Dance.
Sometimes
I feel I can't
keep in step,
that the Dance could well go on
without me.
I am the twenty-third leg
on the left.

A Doorhandle From Fleury

Shelagh Stromberg

I find myself wondering what those hands
Were like, that must have held this metal shape,
Graceful solidity from life wrenched free.
It lies now ugly, heavy, rusted, cold,
Abstracted thing torn from habitation's
Pulse by savage history.
They were hands
That were tired and glad to reach home from work,
Cold hands that recognized approaching warmth,
Careless hands, too, that had gestured human
Weariness of love's familiarity;
Hands that brought flowers in from shaded fields
That once had never known the peculiar
Sowing of bodies and bayonettes-
A harvest that nobody that year reaped.

The question lies in my hand, a dead weight
Of wondering. Yes, they were hands like mine.

Note: Fleury Ridge was a strategic position on the front between the French and German lines at Verdun. On June 23, 1916 the Germans obtained a footing there for what was to have been a final thrust on Verdun, but the battle dragged on for another six months with staggering losses on both sides. Virtually nothing now remains of the village of Fleury.

L'Abbaye De Jumieges

Mike Hurd

Broken walls yet rising,
shift the former symmetry;
spreading branches
replace Roman arches;
sun-lighted paths banish
shadowed corridors;
grass pushes where stone floor
resounded with wooden shoes.

But the wind,
as it swirls the dust
and scatters dry leaves,
hints of swishing black robes
and low transcendent chants.

The Roman Children of '44

Giovanna Cook

The siesta hour is shattered by noises,
like wind-carried sounds of many sparrows.
Loud, alert, sharp, the children's voices
fill empty streets, cobble-stoned and narrow.
Slyly, an old man with a wheelbarrow
hurries through the shadows, undetected.
An aryan soldier, straight as an arrow,
by the children's diversion is distracted.
The old man is safe. So are the arms he collected.

The noisy band now skirts the ancient walls
that have seen many triumphant caesars.
*Viale Castro Praetorio. Night falls.
The soldier picks up a sultry teaser.
Old walls are easy shelter for the lessors
of instant love and cheap, mindless joy.
The children, wise to life, ignore this meager
cure for loneliness. They have no time to toy.
They have a mission, one that is clear to each boy.

Rails stretching to desolate emptiness,
this is the little band's real destination.
Their goal, a clear answer to war's madness.
Discordant are the sounds of desperation
from the human cattle at the station,
who slip through the vents of sealed trains
scribbled last messages to relations.
The children's hands do not reach up in vain.
By bearing the dying hope, they help to bear the pain.

*Praetorian Guards were garrisoned in Viale Castro Praetorio. This ancient street is still, to this day, the site of a casern. Its environs are frequented by ladies of the night, as they were in early Roman times.

November Shore— *Steve Moser*

Part II

Ted Grosshardt

The tree limb, dark with ice, shuddered and crackled, caught between the January wind, which blasted it with dull slivers of snow, and the ancient, weather-soft billboard, which strained under its own load of ice. From a burrow once hidden by a wind-raked shrub emerged an inquisitive badger's head. He blinked his glittering jet eyes as the chips and flakes of snow stung his nose and collected in his fur and ears. The grass lay bowed and broken before the wind and snow, and he noted the dull clattering of the darkly gleaming trees. Out of habit, he looked behind, but there lay nothing but more snow and ice coating the remains of the roadway, where the chunks of concrete lay buckled and broken like an eerie, misplaced ice floe. Across the horizon, ragged clouds proceeded in random rows, like ghosts of tattered bums trudging through an early morning fog.

The badger turned and made his way slowly in the blackness to his nest, still warm, to wait for spring. Above, the grey, rotted wood of the billboard finally gave way and toppled into a wind-hardened drift. The snow beneath it, suddenly disturbed by the impact, was just as suddenly swept away by the storm, even while new snow was being packed in.

Day and night the fury persisted, tearing the landscape with its icy edge, then healing it with gently flowing bandages of peaked and swirled snow. It sank sub-zero needles into everything exposed, living or not. Already, the ground was frozen to a concrete-like mass. The deer, huddled in miserable damp torture, shuddered in what meager protection they could find from the nearest clump of trees or overhang. A rabbit, caught too far from his burrow, curled up with his back to the wind behind a clump of grass, as his instinct told him he could never hope to find his way in this blast. He simply pulled himself into the tightest ball possible and waited for the storm to end. This storm, though, was to be more than all the others, and he would not be seen again until next spring, when the melting snows would reveal his lifeless and curiously compact form to a foraging coyote. Those birds that had remained for the winter flocked to the pine and cedar trees, there to huddle on the innermost parts of the snow-clumped limbs, next to the ground, and wait out the storm in ruffled bunches.

When the storm descended on him, the man pulled down the skin covering his tunnel and, after fastening it with two frozen chunks of dirt, leaned back to wait, hoping that the cold wind would soon abate, as he needed food. The wind whistled in around the edges of the skin, chilling him, until he crawled deeper into his tunnel and snuggled as best he could into his nest of grass and leaves, and lay there, curled up for warmth, staring blankly into the darkness.

His was a life of scavenging, hunting, and competing with the rest of the animals for food. He was good at it; he knew which animals were good for food, which were easiest to catch, which were dangerous, and where they could be found. During the warm time, the country was green and full of animals, unlike the far away Place he had seen once. He had trotted further than usual one cool

day while foraging. Topping a steep hilly ridge, he came within view of a great expanse of unusually mounded and arranged rock on the land below. Curious, he made his way down the slope toward the ruins on a black path laced with meandering rows of grass. Nothing had moved—the rubble lay silent as he inspected it, occasionally coming upon a group of curiously-shaped bones. It had looked as though some fearsome beast had feasted there. Chilled by the thought that the animal might return, he had trotted out of the desolation and away, never returning. It had been a long time ago, and his memory seldom wandered there any more.

His stomach silenced the troubling memory, now with its insistent growling. That first day and night of the storm he lay patiently, almost dormant, as his experience with the snows told him it was too cold to find anything outside. Even in his nest, his toes and fingers were beginning to go numb, so he curled his hands into white-knuckled fists and drew himself up more tightly, his legs stiff and aching.

By the second day, though, his stomach gnashed at his guts. He began to dig and scratch at the semi-frozen wall of his tunnel, searching in the dark for roots or grubs to eat. He found nothing but a few rotting chunks of tree root which he hurriedly stuffed into his mouth, then just as quickly spat out, as they drew the moisture from his mouth like a poultice. After a while, with his fingers numb and bleeding, he gave up, exhausted and discouraged.

The cries of his stomach drowned out the voice of his instinct now, and he began to crawl toward the mouth of his tunnel. As he drew closer, he felt the snow between his fingers, and he shuddered in anticipation. At the opening, he steeled himself, then knocked the ice-covered skin aside. He pulled himself outside, then reached back in to grasp his stone axe. In that first second the knife-edge of the wind shocked his lungs; then he turned his back to it and began walking, driven by hunger and wind, looking for anything edible. Only a few sticks and bushes protruded through the ice and snow sheets, and he could see no sign of life. Occasionally, a dark tree trunk would appear through the maelstrom. The snow came to his calves, numbing his feet and squeaking against his skin as he blundered through it.

He turned to look back at the opening to his tunnel, but could see only sheets of hazy, diaphanous grey. An instinctive urging stirred restlessly in his mind, but his stomach screamed louder. He again turned to his task and searched the ground diligently for anything: a frozen rabbit, a dazed bird, a bush with a few berries still clinging to it. As he lurched along, his hair and eyebrows became white with snow and his nose encrusted with frost, while his squinting eyes flashed wildly like black, restive fires, as if he had descended out of the storm, a fitting creature in this bizarre landscape.

Without knowing it, he was plowing further and further from his tunnel, all the while finding nothing in the blinding, killing grey blast. Weak with hunger and exhaustion, he heeded the old warnings, and turned to head for his tunnel. Leaning and moving against the wind drove the breath out of him, and he could no longer feel the axe he held in his numbed fist. It dropped from his hand, striking his foot and tearing open his ankle, but he felt nothing. He grimly pushed on, finding nothing where he knew his tunnel should be. He wandered in freezing

amazement, his bleeding foot tracing ragged red circles in the snow, as the cold began to consume him. His face was numb, and his legs were like giant concrete pillars, more and more difficult to lift. His arms hung useless at his sides, frozen bludgeons that whacked against his thighs with each step. Still he kept moving, pitching and stumbling, dumbly and determinedly searching for his tunnel, now hidden beneath layers of silent snow. Dizzy, he stopped and stared at his ankle as it bled into the snow, melting a small area that immediately froze again. Quite suddenly, he lost his balance and pitched face first into the snow, where he lay for a second, shocked. As he tried to move his arm he could feel the leaves and grass of his warm nest, and a slow smile spread across his face. He curled up, gently scooping and arranging the snow around him as the wind swept it from his fists.

The Heart's Devotion

Ken Shedd

Assuaging murmurs of
the heart, she daily tends
the bone-white beads.
Between the pain and prayer,
" . . . world without end . . . ," she
kneads them.

Through mysterise inscribed
in stone, she'll follow in
His path — Jerusalem
to Cavalry. She kneels
to beat her breast
in Gethsemane.

She nightly reads the
sacred word, where seraphs
shriek and cherubs wail
their anguished litany;
Take refuge in the valley
of the shadow.

O sacred heart, dark
star without a ceiling.
Morning, draw near.

A Varied Landscape

Shelagh Stromberg

Condemnation
Cuts and splits
Its igneous
Granitic scarps of rock
Sharp across these waters
That crash and plunge
To cataract in curtains
Over steep walls

Forgiveness
Lifts this face of waters
And relapses, easing
With mud ooze collapsing
A warm, smoothly
Ushered passage into
The wide gliding
Slow relief of sea.

Vesper

Mike Hurd

The sky glows—
embers in a dying fire;
in the distance sound the 5 o'clock
chimes—a requiem for light;
even the wind has lost its strength—
my soundless passing ripples the still air.

Already the white crescent slices
through gathering grey;
already the cold envelops me
in delicate shroud.

Matins

Melinda Melhus

Morning shone through a solitary elm
burning away the sleepy blue-gray haze of dawn,
electrifying its branches like a neon sign
flashing the dominion of light over dark.
Momentarily, the two melted into one
animate object, a soul that spoke in a yellow-
orange tongue—only the grass might have understood
that language, if it had listened,
but the breeze blinked the fusion away as a robin
caught a belated nightcrawler.

Untitled— *Joan French*

Exchange

C. Ratner

"We are to love each other as He loved us, laying down our lives as He did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. All life is to be vicarious—at least, all life in the Kingdom of Heaven is to be vicarious."

from *He Came Down From Heaven and His Novel Descent Into Hell* by Charles Williams

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The sun, like a furious, fiery phoenix, stole up the backside of the dry Mexican hill and waited momentarily at the top. Then, in an instant, it quickly and quietly rushed across the sand, darting around the twisted shrubbery, setting it aflame in rich crimson, and invading the adobe village at the hill's base.

It flew footless along the dusty streets seeking shadows to diminish and cracks in which to hide. It crept into huts through unshuttered windows and, with its heat, sucked at the breath of sleeping children. It stirred the flies flung like grease spatters against the wall and twitched the eyes of sleeping beasts. It chased from the town across parched brick, sleep, the only welcome bride of the inhabitants.

The sun feathered and rose—its warm beating vans driving dust into the air, circled and descended with a triumphant shriek on the church of the Blessed Sacrament in the village of San Miguel. Insatiably its searing single eye glared through the window, watching, waiting, resting upon the dying American priest inside.

His name was Father Allen; that is, that was what the villagers called him, but he preferred James Allen for, being newly ordained, he felt uncomfortable being called "Father." It was one of those unpleasantries of the priesthood to which he must adapt.

He had come from Seminary in St. Louis to San Miguel to help the aging priest, a certain Father Grennan, with the missionary work. Father James Allen had brought with him only two expectations; both were directly diffused. First, he had not expected his relationship with Father Grennan to be so close but, as the maxim goes, their hearts had been knit together almost at once, and the two experienced one of those rare lifetime friendships that seem to see through age and demeanor, and strike beyond time into what some have called the soul. Secondly, James had not expected the work to be as exacting as it proved to be; though, as the weeks passed, he found it to be more blessing than burden. He had expected to be studying inanimate lays in old books but found himself, instead, studying the old and animate who lay sick. For, a few months after he had arrived, a sickness had started among the villagers and he had had little time to do anything else but patter about the small buildings with the kind old priest, caring for the bodies of the sick and the souls of the dying. These times turned out to be more rewarding than his study . . . these times and the mass which he

held daily.

The Mass was not a new love, but had been infinitely enhanced as he learned to love the people in God. Each day he found Mass to be more direct, almost physical communion with God; as if his actions and words were fitting into a greater liturgical hierarchy, silent but shouting, joyous, rushing and running beside and through him at the tiny altar. Now, however, he was too sick to conduct Mass; he was, in fact, too sick to do anything but lie in bed.

It had happened quite suddenly. After two of the worst months, in which the sickness had not left one house untouched, it had suddenly and mysteriously ceased; perhaps because of the two priest's prayers, perhaps not. In any event, the two were tired and the Bishop had granted them a short vacation in the nearby coastal town; but, as they prepared to leave, James had contracted the sickness and Father Grennan had asked permission to stay and care for him, either until his recovery, which was becoming less likely, or his death, which the old man feared imminent.

Father Grennan, in that early morning light, turned from the window and looked at the young man for a long while. The heat seemed to press and tease the short breaths of the wan figure as the wind tucks and teases the slight flame of a candle. He had, Father Grennan noted, grown much worse in the night.

The sunlight amplified the shadows that clung in the creases of the old man's face. If one were to see the face momentarily passing, one would feel that the old priest was a worried and haggard man; but, if one was to slightly scrutinize those facial lines he would be somewhat confounded; for the creases were not quite right. Perhaps when they should have moved downward they shifted up imperceptibly, perhaps they were too thin when they should have been thick, perhaps it was the opposite; but, in any event, they were not the creases of real worry for they suggested, inexplicably, incongruously, a humour and joy beyond worry. For, long ago, Father Thomas Grennan had lost that withering worry that is rooted in the fear of death within every man and only shows its flower in superficial and superfluous worrying. Long ago he had "embraced death as a bride" and found, as had been paradoxically promised, Life Itself. It was on this Joyous Life that worry lit and rested but could not bite, for it was shrugged away as a fly from a horse's back. It was something infinitely small before all of Joy.

As Father Grennan watched the still figure a deeper sense of sorrow weighed upon him, for his friend was dying. Questions came, questions that were to him worse than the sickness. Why? why did this have to happen. "Lord . . . how unsearchable are Thy judgments and Thy ways . . . "

The young priest stirred on his straw mattress, Father Grennan walked over and sat beside the bed. The youth's eyes stared blankly blue like deep pools sunken in dark rock; slowly, as the old man watched, they rose, flickered and focused and woke fully. James Allen lifted his hand and the old priest caught it. "How are you this morning James?" Father Grennan smiled.

A smile passed across the young man's face. "Hello Father . . . I thought . . . "

"Yes?" he asked.

"I thought I would die last night."

The old man chuckled, "And? did I disappoint you?"

The young priest turned his face towards the white-washed wall. "Father, I am afraid to die." The old man leaned forward and brushed the young man's wet hair from his eyes. "I am dying, you know, and I am scared."

The priest nodded gravely and sat back. "James," he began, "you know that death is merely a doorway . . ."

"Father," the young priest interrupted, " 'Timor Mortis conturbat me!' "

Father Grennan watched the dying face with intense love. He was, the old man thought, nearer a saint than he had ever seen. His intense driving to know and love God had unfolded what wilting was in the old priest's heart. Father Grennan had watched the Host held and adored, truly adored, in this youth; and he, as a result, had turned to adore It even more. The young priest had transformed the ceremony of Mass into a deft and holy dance climaxed with the Transubstantiation.

Once, as the Host was uplifted by the young priest, Father Grennan had heard laughter; he had glanced down, expecting mischief and had found that the children and the priest, caught in that invisible cataract of Joyous dancing, of Holy ambiguity, could find no outlet for Joy but laughter. It was gloriously accepted and the dance continued swinging on those squealing hinges.

And now, here lay this same one pronouncing " 'Timor Mortis conturbat me.'—The fear of death confounds me." Father Grennan's love sought, almost of itself, Reason with which to join and assuage the grief of James Allen. He reflected, momentarily trying to recall something he had read once in the writings of the desert fathers . . .

"It was when I was a boy . . ." the young priest's voice interrupted Father Grennan's thought. " . . . they had made me go in to see my dying grandfather; I was young, nine or ten, when they pushed me alone into the bedroom and closed the door.

"We both were staring, strangers . . . it is still, even now, vivid beyond my desire. The lights were off but a violent, violet sunset rested upon my grandfather's face and was reflected in his eyes as I stood staring. We were simply, utterly, strangers. Both of us touching borders of opposite countries; he about to enter death and I, whispering and breathing youth.

"For a long time he looked at me and said nothing. I wanted to escape from what I felt to be a trap . . . it was his eyes I wanted rescuing from . . . in that stare I was caught in what I knew to be ineluctable.

"He began, ever so slightly, plucking the sheets and I began shaking. The sunlight seemed to recoil from his face as the frost of death crept upon him. He said nothing, just stared and then, in an instant, death lay across him smothering, smothering, pressing his chest until only imagination raised it.

"I suppose I knew that, in a way, I was there-or would be- gaping at whatever he saw."

Father Grennan watched, wondering. It was, after all, inevitable. It would all be over soon and James' fear would seem, in that Presence, like a funny dream; that fear that raged now would be allayed in those final moments. This reason suggested; but love-in-reason returned to assault those thoughts with the desire

to do something-anything. Again his thoughts returned to attempt to remember something he had come across several years ago in the writings of the desert fathers. He had, he remembered, thought it fantastic and had put it aside, almost forgotten it; but it kept returning; if not the ideas at least their shadows—and grew silently within him. Hadn't it, he thought, said something about living another's death or dying another's life?

Father Grennan left the sleeping James Allen and went from the room to his study where he found the volume on the desert fathers, opened the book and began turning over the pages. He remembered the passage as being somewhere in the middle. At last he found it; it was underscored and on the margin in pencil was written a reference to a verse in the New Testament and the page number of a book on St. Seraphim of Sarov. Slowly he read and re-read the passages. Then he took from the shelf his New Testament and read Gal. 6:2 . . . "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

For a long time the old man sat in his study thinking and reading. Occasionally he rose to pull another old volume from the book shelves. It still seemed too fantastic—all that he was reading; and yet, he thought, it is only the confirmation of Reason; for love seeks, almost naturally, to do this very thing And hadn't, after all, Love Himself done this very thing? Or, even more than this very thing in that act which could only be termed by the young church-the Redemption? Had not Christ gathered into Himself that torn and marred web of humanity and healed it? giving the Church a union as much one with each other as he proclaimed himself to be with the Father? and thereby charging everywhere and for all times, the web with the possibility of exchange?

Father Grennan decisively rose; it was indeed, he thought, fantastic; but only fantastic by his confined and preconceived standards. The doctrine stood with him and stepped down the adobe corridor where the dying man lay. Father Grennan carried and was carried as the doctrine flourished in Love's fecundity

James was awake but took no notice as the old man sat by his bed. The young priest's eyes stared quietly, deeply from within him, as if he were receding into depths unimaginable.

"James . . . James!"

The young man slowly looked at the priest.

"Listen carefully now, James." Father Grennan recited the verse he had looked up. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." The young priest waited. Slowly the old priest read the passage from the desert fathers. James listened, not understanding the strange talk of 'putting on the actual body of a neighbor' and becoming a 'double man.'

"James," said Father Grennan, ". . . it is said that St. Seraphim of Sarov, as an example, once laid on a certain nun 'the ascetic discipline of death, that she should die instead of her sick brother Michael, whose work was not yet done.' You see, James, it seems that, before God, you can give me your fear and your death; you can give it to me in Love." The young priest's eyes widened as he watched the priest.

Father Grennan continued, "I know it sounds amazing but look, maybe this carrying one another's burden that St. Paul talks about is more literally true than

is commonly supposed . . . "

"But, Father, that means . . . " James interrupted.

"I know," said the old man, ". . it means being sympathetic with, empathizing, praying for and all that; no doubt that is all part of it, but, look here, if I am doing all that, I am still not carrying your burden or you mine. It is like carrying a package, if I am to carry it, you must put it down and I must pick it up."

"And so . . . you want me to . . . "

"Precisely," said the old man, " . . . in Love to give me your fear and your death—to let me bear it."

"But does that mean you will die and I will recover?"

Father Grennan looked upon the grave young man and said, "I do not know, I do not know how or what our Lord will choose to do; but, I assume, that will be the case—that I will die in your stead—however I am not certain . . . I am not certain it will even work."

"But Father . . . I . . . I can't let you . . ."

"James, I am old. You fear death but I have desired it—that is, to be beyond it. When our Lord said we were to lose our life for his sake, it did not mean death to me physically but life . . . that my utter denial to myself was to live in Love towards others. To deny myself has been to cling to life, to deny yourself finally may mean you are to embrace death-to give yourself further into Life. But now James, 'now is my hour come'. Besides, if it truly is the law of Christ, you may, in an attempt to love, be rejecting all that the universe affirms. Grant me this gift of love, of this deeper Love, by allowing me to bear your burdens." Father Grennan smiled.

"What must I do then, Father?"

The old man's face sparkled with intense love as the doctrine mingled and led reason into the Acts of the soul. "I suppose," said the old priest, "that your job is the harder of the two. You must, as an act in Love, give me your fear and, when it comes, your death. I will receive it into myself. It will require, no doubt, intelligence, and all the energy you have—it will mean remembering that I am bearing your fear and death. But you must give it to me, James, like a package; and I must pick it up."

The young man nodded quietly. "And now James, 'I must be about our Father's business'." Father Grennan stood and walked back into his study. It would, he imagined, require his full attention. He sat down in his chair, "Make me now, Lord, receptive."

He was tempted, at first, to imagine himself lying there in bed—imagining how he would feel in that situation; but he put it aside and made ready to receive the full of James' fear. He sat imagining a dying grandfather and the fear, the fear that was as piercing as the dying man's stare. Suddenly, almost without warning, it was upon him; the shrinking and terror clawed at his heart, he wanted out . . . he wanted out but the door was jammed. The fear caught him cold, it rushed and bit and pulled him to the floor but the old man received it fully and, then, quite suddenly, it was gone. The old man, kneeling on the floor, discovered his heart had run up his throat and melted over his eyes; for a long while he was on his

knees in his study.

The old man stood stiffly and walked into the other room. The sun was beginning to melt and wane outsdie, and the light was dropping from the air and scurrying faithfully, fitfully, like millions of miniscule animals, across the sands to their home hovering on the horizon.

Father Grennan stood wondering at the intense childlike and peaceful expression on the young priest's sleeping face. It has been, thought the old priest, a remarkably hard day; but it was not, he remembered, quite over . . . for he was still to die. He reflected, a bit melancholicly, as the sun wove with wisps of clouds a violet and gold tapestry across the sky. It was, after all, a beautiful world, and he would miss such things as this sunset. He felt drawn still to these townspeople and their problems; he loved their simple meals and, for that matter, these quiet and solemn moments like this in the evening . . . enough, it was now best to look forward.

The old priest prepared himself for bed, saying his usual evening prayers and breviary. The night had come cool and he easily went to sleep. It was not until early morning that Father Grennan awoke and knew that he was dying.

For a moment, muddled by sleep, he was confused and surprised; then, with an act of will and Love into God, the old man received the young man's death. There opened and closed for him Heaven; or momentarily, that which was the beginnings of Heaven. For a brief moment an ineffable joy flooded and consumed the room in which the old man died for the young and Father Grennan saw that hierarchy as only it could appear to his yet untrained spirit. He received fully in himself the death and the Omnipotence simultaneously; and, in a glorious triune moment of exchange they each passed dancing and converging, holding and being held, each within the other . . . always distinctively themselves though always one.

"Into itself the eternal union
Received us both, as water doth receive
A ray of light and still remains one."

Father Grennan received and gave, from and to God, the death of his friend.

Father Grennan opened his eyes. The morning sun had been withheld, restrained by the first rain in months. With the rain came the memory of the previous night . . . had it been a dream? Father Grennan, most assuredly, was not dead or, if he was, this was not exactly Heaven. The old man got up from bed and hurried down the corridor to where the young man lay. Father Grennan looked at the smile on his friend's face. He had, it seems, died early that morning. "And so," thought the old man," . . . our exchange has gone deeper than I had imagined. For both of us, dear James, have lived each other's death and died each other's life. We have both borne and been borne."

The old priest turned and walked to the window, watching the rain run rivulets of dirty water down the adobe streets. Everywhere the village was coming to life and, he noted, all were entering into exchange.

The pregnant young wife carried her husband's seed as she had been carried; the grocer received and exchanged food for money and back again. The farmers worked for the millers and the millers for the farmers. Everywhere, even on the

natural scale, ran the exchanged and co-inhering lives. A delicate dependence at all times—all people carrying and being carried in the Omnipotence.

Father Grennan, watching the waking village, began his morning prayers. "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name . . ."

In Memory of J.H.

Donovan Hendricks

See these stepping stones?
Use them to cross. We're on the
Third stone from the sun.

To Those Who Praise the Honorable Profession of War

Patricia Henshall

Arms and the man you sing,
of jets in falcon strikes,
of jungle traps, of seared huts,
of burning storm, of raining death,
of bravery dyed scarlet.

Your voice rolls through the ages,
calling up glories
of Arthur, Roland,
Richard Lion-Heart;
ringing with the echoes of mobs
who greeted Alexander,
and hailed Caesar's entry of Rome.

I have seen no processions
to mark the honor of war;
only those conquering heroes come,
wheeling always
their fragile chariots of chrome.

Smile

Eileen Smith

Slow bubble rises
till it pops across your face—
Your head disappears.

Implied Metaphor

Kim Wilson

There is an old saying about
passing ships in the night
that I can't quite
recall. But like
an old photo in my mind,
there are two ships
off-white, calm, unpeopled.
It is a still night.
The sky and sea are black.
The ships somehow come adrift
of one another,
not only pass but
scrape along each other's sides;
scarring so deftly
it looks calculated.
Then they part,
and the black ripple of the water
is shed with
blood warm moonlight.

Pondering Plaster

Claudia Roberts

I think perhaps love
is the crack in my ceiling
I stare at every night.
We've patched it again and again;
It still doesn't look right.

Vera Lieber, Greenleaf, Ks. — *Tim Janicke*

Fond Remembrances of Crowsfeet

Rita Banninger

Drinking the whiskey,
Eating a pretzel,
There sits Grandma
Old as an Edsell.

Grandma

Chad Perry

My pimples lay here resting
while your wrinkles lay there dying.
Then, like a boy playing Napoleon,
I marched to your ceremony
to pay you a cap gun salute.
But your gazeless trance
spellbound me with tears
and my soul was a devoured popsicle.

Stitches

Cathy McCosh

A stitch of thread or yarn
  or time
    fills in for words.
But even my Grandmother's quilt
  has large patches
    of silence.

Yellow Crayon

Jerry Winans

From the window, which was shrouded by rust-colored curtains, bright sunlight poured onto the floor beneath. The light formed a block on the carpet, changing the color of this area into a shade much paler than the rest of the rug. The scarlet-luxury spread across the room and like water lapped at the walls with a liquid softness.

Beyond the sun-warmed spot, darkness began taking control; reaching from the dark corners of the room, tentacles stretched at the window. In the cool, to the left of the window, cradled in the carpeting, lay a yellow crayon.

Though the surrounding carpet was largely indifferent to the light, the crayon swam in its glory. The crayon seemed to float in two seas at once, one of light, the other of dark.

Shifting into zones, the light spread evenly through the room. It struck the walls and, touching the plastered ceiling, hung there for a moment. From this height, with all of the carpeted canyon below, the crayon was a yellow flash through the red desert.

And, as though the carpet strands were, indeed, sand particles, the floor covering retained lighthearted footprints. Dark spots marking depressed areas in the carpet showed where little feet had been.

The foot-spots blip-blopped on the rug's surface, looking like pools of hot wax dropped from a passing candle. The spots criss-crossed the room, but some were more noticeable since they lay near the crayon. The eye first fell on the crayon, attracted by its contrast, then drifted to these spots. The tracks hop-dropped along the floor, stopping before a varnished bureau, then going out the doorway.

The many-doored bureau looked riddled and ragged with so many of its drawers and doors left ajar. It seemed the intruder wasn't bold enough to fully open anything. Instead, all but one of the doors and drawers were partly open. This last drawer was fully extended.

Inside the drawer, scattered about, were some lengths of pipe cleaner lying on an oily piece of cloth. Three bullets, one partially hidden under the cloth, reflected the windowed light. A glint of this light sprayed into the next room.

As the reflected light dissipated, it struck bits of dust as they floated to the floor. The same carpet grew in this room as in the other; foot-spots appeared to be like those in the doorway and the other room.

The glint-brushed dust now came to rest on the floor. The instant it landed, it was mired down in what, at first, looked like just another footprint-spot. But, here, the red carpet was moist and even redder in color. The spot was larger, irregular, and not created by a foot.

The liquid no longer oozed onto the carpet where the little girl lay; it had begun to form a reddish-brown crust around her face. The crust did not soil her ice-white hand which lifelessly held a blue steel pistol.

In the adjoining room, the air, warmed at the window, rose high to drift along the ceiling, through the door, and settle for a brief moment upon the child's brow.

Pokings

Kim Wilson

Tumbling boys of tortured years
toss the turtle on its back.

Their snotty fingers poke
the soft brain belly.

Their curiosity is soon scattered
like so many jumping jacks
to other games of tugofwar.

The turtle, though, remains
rocking to and fro.

Peter

Shelagh Stromberg

little rags
with hair
like sunstruck hay
and pants left
to the certain care
of gravity,
I watch you
scuffle
through old leaves,
early rehearsal for
untidying
many a carefully-ordered
heap of preconceptions
with your
frayed-sneaker toes.

Like Lambs

Cathy McCosh

Like lambs jumping on
newly-spread shining straw, I'm
ready to begin.

Mourning and Night

Mike Hurd

The weary sun rose on another day. Its light fell upon a city whose inhabitants were just rousing to begin the day's pursuits. It was an hour teeming with excitement and joy. One man felt no such joy.

His name is of little importance: it was attached to him at birth that he might not have to go through life not knowing when he was being spoken to.

His wife made breakfast for him, as she had throughout their married life. She had fourteen eyes, a green nose and two legs. He wasn't repulsed, however: he had learned to tolerate her. He didn't mind when she simmered his Wheaties for five minutes before serving them; he didn't complain even when she rolled his doughnuts on the floor to see which was the most round.

" 'Bye, love. Gotta run if I'm to catch the bus."

"Goodbye. Don't fletcher in tyesnoppery grimlatch."

He promised he wouldn't, and kissed her on the cheek as he left.

Out on the sidewalk, his grey and white business suit contrasted sharply with the oranges, pinks and lavenders worn by the rest of the populace. Even more extraordinary was his manner of walking: one foot placed before the other, a shifting of weight to the forward foot and a moving of the hind foot linearly so that it overtook the forward and became the new fore foot, and so on *ad infinitum*. Accompanying this foot motion was a swinging of the arms, his left arm swinging forward as the right foot went forward, then the same motion for the opposite set of limbs. One can easily see how this walk was a bit odd amongst the skips, leaps, bounds and other gymnastics his fellow pedestrians used for locomotion. In fact, had you been there, you would have seen one man cartwheeling along; as he did, a continuous stream of silver coins went splashing from his pockets, and the morning was alive with their sparkle and music.

Even though the sidewalk was crowded with persons spinning and prancing and ballet dancing, and though they were constantly colliding, falling and coming up hard on the brightly painted street, there was a sphere of stillness around the figure who was walking slowly and methodically.

Soon he arrived at the bus station, whereupon he boarded the bus and chose a seat near the middle. Energy and vitality were evident in all his fellow passengers, but this was a different energy and vitality than that he had observed on the street. There was not so much physical activity, but he could sense the buzz and hum of ideas racing around the bus. In the seat behind him, two middle-aged, bearded ladies were bent over in earnest conversation, snatches of which drifted forward:

" . . . the most tordious!"

"Why, how oblately fractiferous!"

" 'Twas clysoperously said.!"

"It seems rather stirrichously mortiferous."

"Onions."

"Ca alors!"

"Bane chorkel! Bane chorkel!"

"Without a doubt, yes, doubt a outwith."

"Blort."

Then he perceived several persons flinging carrots at the driver. Within seconds, carrots were being produced from handbags, pockets, ears and noses; everywhere, orange streaks obliterated vision by their great number. In fact, from outside, it would have appeared that an orange haze had somehow settled in the bus just above the level of the seats. Then, suddenly, the carrot bombardment ceased, and a mad scramble for the carrots began. People were devouring carrots as fast as they could snatch them up, even though an occasional finger had to be extracted from one's mouth. In fifteen seconds, there was not a carrot to be seen.

Next, everyone joined in on a rousing song which must have been traditional, for everyone knew the words:

Hocus pocus,
Nimble focus,
Stick and stab
And prod and poke us.

The man in the grey and white business suit regarded all these things with a passive, unbewildered eye. In fact, had he stopped to reflect on it, he wold have realized he regarded everything in this city with a passive, unbewildered eye: his wife's eyes and her senseless talking, the gymnastic promenading in the streets, everything. Years of loneliness had resulted in cold, crystalline indifference.

Between him and his senseless former self lay fourteen years of oppressive sanity, alienating him from the world he had once loved, leaving him communicationless and utterly alone.

He had pushed his own awakening into the furthest recesses of his mind; he retained only blurred memories of initial chinks in the surrounding blacknesss, and then . . . then some hand had taken his, and a voice had spoken, calling him forth into light.

The ancient man who had helped him died soon afterwards, after having charged him to continue the work of helping people attain sanity.

But the initial zeal had been swallowed up in the immensity and the unresponsiveness of the world, and so, he had increasingly retreated into himself, stowing his lamp beneath an impenetrable basket.

These self-damning memories, however, were far from his consciousness as he sat in stagnant silence on a bus awaiting departure, as some fervidly chanted song was dying down around him:

. . . and stab
And prod and poke us.

In the relative calm following the conclusion of the rituals, the bus driver, a hulking, barrel-chested, barefoot 12-year-old, started up the bus, which raced out of the station, leaving clouds of green smoke in the air and green rubber marks on the pavement. It roared along, swerving and careening wildly at each bend in the street, sending pedestrians running and cursing to safety. It made a few stops to let off old riders and to take on new, then resumed its weaving, lurching speed.

The tour of the city was complete in an above-average fourteen minutes, and during the station stop-over, several of the customers treated the driver to grape-flavored beer.

Sometime during the thirty-seventh trip around the city, a young man seated himself near the middle of the bus beside the grey-and-white-suited man. The newcomer was about twenty-five, with wild, tangled black hair hanging in his eyes and sticking down his shirt collar, a three-day growth of red beard and thick, busy blond eyebrows. He sported a red suitcoat with a stocking tied to each sleeve, a T-shirt with a great hole in the front and a pair of blue jeans with one leg ripped off at mid-thigh. What distinguished him from the other passengers were his neatly tied oxford shoes and his eyes. In his dark eyes was a glimmer of lucidity his seatmate had seen nowhere else except in his own mirror.

"I . . . I think . . . uh . . . " stammered the newcomer, "uh . . . I think I . . . am . . . *Cogito ergo sum.* I think, therefore . . . I must exist."

The other man stirred in his seat. He was disturbed by the depths of the young man's eyes.

"They are . . . absurd," whispered the young man. "I . . . torble, torble . . . am snurf. I think . . . uh . . . buns."

The glimmer faltered. His lucidity was slipping fast, very fast.

"I am . . . think . . ."

The older man raced back through his mind . . . back to his own awakening. He remembered the same fragments of sanity.

"I am . . . uh . . ."

Waves of light battering down the dark walls around him. Blackness crumbling, sliding, dissolving into tiny grains.

"I . . . am . . ."

Tiny fibers of color, then chinks, then holes, then giant, gaping rents of every hue and shade. A voice . . . a hand . . .

"I . . ."

He could speak, touch the young man's eyes, open them. His voice . . . his hand . . . power!

"I . . . I . . "

The hand reached down, picked up the newspaper and opened it. The man coughed once, began to look at the print.

The glimmer went out.

The young man fell drooling and screaming into the aisle of the bus.

The night descended again.

A-1

Patricia Henshall

His ass
swings down the hall
like a metronome; smooth
and tight; marking a two-step for
my eyes.

Tuesday's Monday

Chad Perry

Tuesday's Monday follows Thursday's Wednesday
to go on eating Wheaties for supper
and steak for break-faster than oiled tray
of fish filet luncheons at rush order
diners; guaranteed smiles, green ties refer
to Greggy's Nirvana: Capital Might.
So demanding is this God he prefers
over wife ('honey, i'll be late tonight')
staring at tv glaring inanimate light.

And Friday comes on Sunday's Saturday haze
with Greg praying, wife smoking Calter Wron-
kite's Utopilennium CIA's.
Traffic trains, commuting jams tell Greg's done
today. Home, finds blue stem clutters dog dung
and wife burning Betty Crocker's cookbook
marinated with fresh ground coffee can.
Phone rings, 'intoxilocation and hook-
'er, honey sorry, God calls for The Holy Book.'

And Tuesday's Monday follows Thursday's Wednesday
as wife, ragged-robed queen, can't catch Greg's ear
since Friday's craze. Now, he reads columns grey
and umh-dears Wheaties for supper—so queer,
so queer, thinks she. His Meditation draws near,
he kisses hello, slam. 'you little man,
little man,' spits out Queen. 'hello, milk here.'
Quickly, robe to pretty then hand to hand,
leg to leg, tongue to tongue begins since milkman can.

Hi,howareyou?Fine,takecare.

Kathleen Cashman

Strewn sea shells dropped by
Uncaring oceans
Simply for the sake
Of token passing,

Hollow sepulchers,
Once holding more than
Sand and an echo
Of water and wind.

February From the Hill

Donna Walters

The trees were bare and
all I could hear was the old
age of winter move.

Fire

Laura Peck

Petals curl and dance
A flower bright glow
Of flames.

Jewels of crusty red
Shatter light
A shimmering heap of coals.

As each goes
In his time
Ashes to ashes.

All bright fires
Within, without
Fade away and die.

Helpers

E. Malcolm

"Good morning, Father McKinnely, I'm Dr. Moore, Dr. Moses sent me down."

"Oh so you're Frank's new—the priest paused for a breath—assistant."

"How do you feel right now, sir?"

The Episcopal priest raised the oxygen mask: "Pretty bad, or I wouldn't be here. I can't seem to—get my breath. I started feeling dizzy and I just sat down in a pew—to rest for a minute—and my secretary called a damn ambulance."

"Nurse, I want a blood path and an EKG and some chest X-rays immediately. And also bring 100 cc. of Triphum."

"Yes, Doctor."

"What's your first—name son?"

(Son, he called me son.) "Harry, Father."

"I never heard of a—sedative called Triphum before."

"It's brand new, Father. Just came out, the best yet."

"Are you sure? The newest . . . I wonder."

"You put your mask back on, Father and rest awhile; we'll get you up to a room in no time."

"No time, no time, right son.—"

"Oh Father, is any of your family around?"

"My wife ought to be—here soon, but one of my daughters—Beck works upstairs in O.B."

Chuckling quietly, the priest looked up at Harry.

"Oh, I see Father, now put your mask back on—here, let me do it. Now rest easy and Dr. Moses and I will be up to see you this afternoon."

"Right son,—right."

"Nurse, get those X-rays taken as soon as possible and have inhalation therapy given to him once every three hours."

"Yes sir and Doctor, Mrs. McKinnely is in the waiting room."

"Mrs. McKinnely, I'm Dr. Moore, Dr. Moses' assistant."

"How is he, Doctor?"

"Well, he's resting now, we'll know more in a few hours. Dr. Moses and I will be up to his room as soon as the tests come back."

"He's tried so hard to keep doing a full day's work, I knew he shouldn't have gone this morning, you see, he's been sick for five and a half months and . . . I'm sorry . . . Is it all right if I accompany him?"

"Yes, by all means."

Exhausted, Harry left emergency and walked down the hall to the Doctor's lounge for a cup of coffee. He also wanted to use this time to study Father McKinnely's type of carcinoma.

The priest never minded hospitals. In fact, he loved this one. But the thought of himself, Father Eugene McKinnely, lying flat on his back in a damned hospital really bothered him. Yet he also knew he shouldn't let it bother him. He felt one should relax before dying, for the seeds that one had sown had already been

planted and only in death would he find out how they would grow.

"Honey?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Remember the talk—we had?"

"Which talk dear?"

"The one about—no machines."

"Dear, a machine might really help you."

"No damn—machines! All they do is keep a dead man tickin' away a little longer."

"Don't worry dear, Frank Moses knows what you want. Frank will take good care of you."

"Well, just make—sure."

"Put your mask back on dear. Come on, lean over here and I'll help you with . . . OUCH! You pinched me!"

"Hee, hee—hee!"

"Why you old fool, I love you Gene."

"Ellen—I don't know what—I'd do without you. I wish I could smoke a cigarette."

Harry drank his coffee, read some essays on carcinoma cancer, and found out all the things he had already known. This frustrated Harry because for years he had been learning new ways to beat diseases and now, like an old leech peddler who bled the patient dry, Harry had bled his books dry. He even checked the lab and X-rays hoping for a new sign, but the old priest had already beat death out of a month or so of life. The old man was as good as dead now.

Harry sat and thought for a long while on cancer, then as he thought casually, almost sub-consciously, Harry fell asleep.

He dreamt of when he was a small boy and how he'd sit for hours in the school library looking through history books trying to find out what men were like long ago. He'd prided himself on how much men had changed and how much better off they were now. It was then he had decided to become a doctor.

"Harry, wake up! **WAKE UP!"**

"Oh, uh, what? Oh, Dr. Moses . . . **DR. MOSES!**

"Well, I can see why you missed lunch."

"Sorry sir, I really . . . "

"You want a cup of coffee?"

"Yes sir, I think, I need one."

"Now, what's your diagnosis?"

"He'll be dead tomorrow."

"Is that it?" Dr. Moses asked.

"Well, I think we ought to get a blood-oxygenation unit up there immediately so we can give him a few more days or a couple of weeks."

"If not he'll smother, because, according to the X-rays, his lungs are too full of cancer to induce enough oxygen into the blood stream. Also, I think a heart monitor and a glucose IV are needed," Harry said.

"The heart monitor and glucose IV are already in place, but there will be no oxygenation unit or code Blue machine needed," Dr. Moses said.

"What? No **oxygenation** unit or **code Blue** machine?"

"The patient's request and I approve."

"But sir, why not prolong his life if we can? That's our job, isn't it?"

"Harry, our job is to save lives, in this case, death is imminent . . . that's why I agreed with Father McKinnely's decision."

"Is it alright if I talk to him about it?", Harry protested.

"Usually I'd say no, but knowing Gene as long as I have, I'll give you permission, but don't pressure him or his wife with it!" Dr. Moses said.

"Yes sir," Harry replied.

"Now, I'm going back to my office and read for a while. Keep me posted on any change in Father McKinnely's condition. I'll be there all evening. Oh, and Harry, get cleaned up. I know you've been on call this week but you look like a serf whose been through hell in the stable."

"Yes sir," Harry said.

Harry stood there for a second thinking: "That's odd, he's through for the day and he's staying at the office . . . hum . . ." Harry walked across the smoking room to his locker stretching his arms and feeling rather stiff. Upon opening his locker, he caught sight of himself in the mirror on the inside and realized that he did look rather medieval. A day and a half worth of dark stubble on his face, a wrinkled doctor's smock with coffee stains, and his dark hair all curled upwards on the right side of his head. From there he concluded that he felt as bad as he felt and a cold shower would be the best form of treatment.

Something about the old priest bothered him. Maybe it was the carcinoma, but he was pretty sure it wasn't. For he had studied cancer and treated cancer patients many times before even though he'd never actually treated this type of cancer himself; he felt that it was much like the rest: revoltingly destructive.

It could have been that he had dated Beck, the priest's daughter, or maybe it was the bright lively gleam in the dying man's eyes. All he knew for sure was he wanted to save Father McKinnely's life. Yes, that was it, he wanted to help him live as long as he could. He had to convince the priest to let him install the life-prolonging machine.

Harry felt rejuvenated as he walked back out of the shower to his locker. He felt so good, that his discovery that his new rechargeable razor had gone dead didn't bother him. He simply dug back in the top of his locker looking for an old straight-edged razor that had been handed down by his grandfather. Harry figured this time he just had to do things the old-fashioned way. He was glad, however, that his two-month-old hot comb still worked, for it was the only thing he had found that would make his hair lay flat.

The corridor was bright as he walked out into the hallway. He liked the way he felt when he walked through the corridors, passing patients and visitors. He felt (even though he'd hate to admit it) so important being a healer of men and doing his job. He walked rather briskly down the hall, only pausing for a second when he tripped where the tile changed from the new section of the hospital to the old section of the hospital. The closer he came to the priest's room, the more intense he felt about talking to the priest. But, somehow he didn't feel as important as usual. Finally, he solemnly knocked at the door. An older woman's

voice answered for him to come in.

"Hello, Mrs. McKinnely, and how are you feeling Father?" Raising the oxygen mask with a faint hint of a smile, the old man said:

"I hurt."

Harry stepped closer to the priest to check his pulse, when he noticed the heart monitor machine jumping erratically. Harry was stricken with emergency, as the old man lay back and closed his eyes.

Harry jumped toward the priest (as Mrs. McKinnely gasped) and threw back the sheets. Then Harry saw only one wire out of three still attached to the old man's chest, the other two lay dormant on the sheets. Then, Harry heard a faint chuckle from beneath an oxygen mask, and looked down to see the old priest's bright blue eyes smiling up at him. Harry stepped back in disbelief, and the old priest farted in relief.

Removing his oxygen mask, the old priest looked over at Harry and said: "Just wanted to see—the old priest paused for a breath—how sharp you are."

Harry, still in shock, stood there for a moment and finally managed to say: "There's something I want to talk to you and your wife about, sir."

"Well—shoot, boy," the old man stated.

Harry, finally pulling his thoughts back together, looked at the priest and said with a sigh, "It's about your decision on the machines, sir."

"No—damned machines!"

"But sir, they could help you to live longer, and give me . . . us a better chance to help you."

"Son, do you have—a cure for what's ailing me?"

"No sir, but we may have one soon."

"Would I live—for more than a few—weeks at best with the machines?"

"Possibly, but probably not, to be honest with you sir," Harry said.

With this Mrs. McKinnely got tearful-eyed and stepped out of the room. Glancing at his wife leaving Father McKinnely went on: "Would I be awake and coherent—for those few—weeks?"

"You never can tell, but certainly not towards the end. But we could possibly gain valuable information from watching your disease progress and also by trying different treatments to halt such a progression."

"I—know what would happen, son, I've seen it all before. I would waste away for—days and my wife and—children would sit and watch me."

"Possibly sir, but . . . you never can tell. Something positive may happen."

"Son, I've made—a similar decision—years ago when I dropped out—of medical school and became a priest. I decided I could—not always help men's bodies—but I could always—try to help their souls—and the people's souls around them—even if they die I can still try—to help their souls. Everyone's soul— needs help, for we are all—sinful men. We are all—sinful men." The priest went on, his face getting whiter.

"But sir," Harry said.

"That's enough—we are all sinful men and—and death is our peace and salvation."

"Don't get excited, Father. Relax, relax, Father, that's right. Now lets get

your mask back on you. Let's put it right up—that's right. Now, breathe slow and deep, slow and deep. You're alright Father.

The old man drifted off into sleep with the whine of his breathing filling the room like the whine of an old motor that needed oil. Harry watched the old man sleeping for quite a while, thinking of what must be going on in his mind. The words were still in his mind: "We're all sinful men." These words echoed in Harry's mind with the dull resounding voice of a record player playing the same song over and over. Mrs. McKinnely re-entered the room and looked at Harry with an understanding smile. Harry excused himself and left, knowing nothing now could be done, except to talk with Dr. Moses about the finalities.

Shortly after Harry left, the priest awoke and looked squarely at his wife. He reached up and fumbled with the mask and said, "Even after I preached that sermon on death, it wasn't as real as it is now. I'm really going to die, aren't I?"

His wife quietly said: "Yes dear, I'm afraid you are."

"Stay with—me Ellen," he said.

"I'll be right here, I'll be right here."

Harry walked into the empty, plush new office and on through to Dr. Moses' study. Harry knocked on the door and Dr. Moses said: "Who is it?" Harry replied and entered. Both men looked at each other for a moment and Dr. Moses said: "Is he dead?"

As Harry sat down, he replied, "No he isn't, but soon."

"What do you think Harry? What do you think of this cancer mess?"

"I don't know sir, it just kills . . . You know, sir, I used to read how bad diseases and things were in the middle ages and I felt so good when I started learning how modern man conquered them. I enjoyed knowing that I could actually help people. But now they die of cancer. Hell, they hardly ever die of the clap anymore," Harry said.

"Harry, people die every day from all those diseases you used to read about. Not so much here, but in under-developed countries. It seems to me, that man creates new diseases as he creates a better life for himself. I once heard there was something in the Bible about if there was no sin there would be no disease. I never looked it up though. One thing I know for sure is that man still needs us because there is always something new."

"Want a scotch?" Dr. Moses asked.

"Positively," Harry replied.

They talked on for a while; the phone rang. Dr. Moses went over to see Ellen and Harry went toward the chapel, tripping over the tile where the new flooring met the old.

Grandfather

Joel Cederberg

Today I thought of grandfather.
He was too old to be stately,
And weakened to his foundations.
Still standing, seeming empty of life.
I have always paused in such houses.

Deserted, too often silent I found them.
Their dust would rise in momentary interest:
Halting, swirling, disconnected thought.
". . . Oh! that was it?"
"What was it now?"
Memories, years of tinsel too worn to glitter,
Broken by handling,
Strewn about here and there
To rustle their stories,
Scuffed by my feet.

Eyes/windows
Faded and limed
Show vague images,
Which stop at their name,
Then rush on
Almost, but never clearly seen.

But weakened timbers loosened.
The house sagged and tottered
Till the last support gave way
And the house collapsed.
I cared little then
He was too old and wooden
So useless I forgot
And only now remembered
The things that have no age.

Untitled— *Tim Janicke*

INTERVIEW #576-C1: Ibrahim the Senile of Lalibad
DATE: July 21, 1953
SITE: Lalibad, India
SUBJECT: Aging and Senility

B.F. Abdur-Razzaq

1:00 p.m. I have wasted most of the morning on the poor roads between Hyderabad and here. The streets of Lalibad are empty; the fierce sun is almost unbearable. At last a young, poorly-clad child directs me to my intended destination: a magnificent Banyan tree that stands at the end of a narrow lane. Drawing closer, I stoop under one of its large overhanging branches and am slightly surprised to see an old man of drawn face and humble clothing speaking, indeed, to the tree. After the necessary and appropriate salutations are given, the old man tells me that he is Ibrahim of Lalibad—the Ibrahim.

I express my desire to speak with him about his life; he agrees quickly.

"Indeed, I am quite pleased to share your company," he says. "Yet talking overly much is a bad sign. Of course, it is said that a man's labor during the years of youth and middle-age should prepare his ease and leisure for his elderly years. But it is not easy, nor pleasurable to share only the company of a tree! Not that I didn't work hard. I used to labor long hours in my mill. In fact, I built myself a small fortune by carefully saving rupee by rupee with the hope of one day, before my death, making the Hajj to Mecca. Yet now, in the very depths of my most pleasant dreams, into my visions of crossing the jet-blue Arabian Sea beneath large, billowed sails and disembarking into the excitement and rushing voices of Jeddah port, the monotonously steady fire of the 'click-pop' machine intrudes."

Seeing that the old man is close to tears, I change the drift of the conversation slightly, asking him about his life as a miller. As the interview continues, it becomes evident that the 'click-pop' noise is not Ibrahim's sole or greatest problem. According to him, rarely does a new sun arise that a new complexity and problem does not arise as well to confront the thin man's weathered face. It was barely a year ago that Ibrahim's old friend and ally, Imam Musa Ahmed, died, and barely nine months ago that the young, college-educated Imam arrived in Lalibad fresh from the big city of Hyderabad.

"This new Imam is all wrong for our people," states Ibrahim. "He is city-bred. He has no feeling for the villagers. His knowledge is from books only. When I asked him to take an active role in the village's politics, he was uninterested; he associates with the wrong people. No," he says with a wave of his hand, "his only concerns are the words of dusty books and the importation of city ways."

"But what of your relationship with Imam Musa," I ask.

"Ah, when we were both alive, the days were unusally bright and the yield of the harvest unusually abundant. I would walk the streets of Lalibad at Imam Musa's side and people knew my name and respected it! And the happy festival days and the multi-colored celebrations still remain vivid in my mind. My friends and I would meet at the Imam's house during the festival time, and there, in the intimacy of our circle, we learned the mysteries of life—grew dizzy in its potent beauty. Often the good Imam would call upon me to address our bretheren because he said that I 'speak with a tongue of beautiful pictures.' "

Suddenly he fixes his eyes upon me with a look of great seriousness, waving a thin finger towards the sky.

"Allah is my witness! Those were the days when He was closer to me and I closer to Him: days that brought nights scented with burning sandlewood and which echoed with sweet song and promises of good morrow."

He becomes silent, lowering his head. I am almost ready to ask him a question when, close by us, someone starts up a 'click-pop' machine. With a sad laugh, Ibrahim grows erect at the sound of the noise.

"This 'click-pop' racket," he mutters, "is, more than anything else, my symbol of failure. I opposed their importation for years. Yet they still crept nearer and nearer to Lalibad, stalking out like these new Imams from Hyderabad. But for years, too, I had wielded sufficient power to forbid the other millers, both Hindu and Muslim, from bringing one of the noisy contraptions into Lalibad. And

the one that was first smuggled in late one night, I'll tell you, did not stay long."

That night, some ten years or so ago, brought a very memorable morning for Ibrahim. The memory of it still brings a weak chuckle from his tired lungs, and a flash of fire into his dim eyes.

"The dawn wore a mantle of purest blue, blue like a cool lake high in the Himalayas. But the birds were not singing as usual when I awoke. There was instead an ugly dissonance filling the air. First, there would come a sound like the blacksmith's hammer hit upon his anvil; and then, perhaps a half-second later, a brief and muffled boom like the white man's fire arm."

It had been Ibrahim's intial introduction to that miracle of the West: internal combustion—'click-pop'.

"No, I had never seen one, but I knew from reports of one that it was the sound of a 'click-pop.' Outside I came from the white-washed walls of my mud hut that spring morning dressed with the sternest frown. I was not alone. For everyone else had been starteled awake as well; and all faces wore either a frown or a numb expression of ignorant fear. Amidst the flow of villagers toward the sound, I soon found Imam Musa, and we went together until we came upon a large crowd mingling, as I had suspected, around a certain Hindu miller's hut.

"The curious throng was about half and half Muslim and Hindu; all knew one another. Around the fringes of the rich and high-caste, straggled a number of sweepers, leatherworkers and other untouchables who, despite their eagerness to view the noisemaker, not sure if it was a beast or only metal moving, still retained the presence of mind to avoid drawing up too closely against the farmers and merchants. Musa and I broke through the circle of onlookers, and as we did, we were surprised and somewhat shocked to find, just a few paces away from the machine, the infamous Wild Mendicant who was busy addressing its strange frame with a constant stream of babbled sounds of a tongue that I had never before heard. And as he babbled, he made an amazing assortment of mad gesticulations."

To this day, Ibrahim is not sure whether the Mendicant was trying to command or threaten the machine into silence, or if he was trying to carry on a conversation with the machine in its own language.

"Others in the crowd were quick to inform us that the Wild Mendicant had apparently heard the 'click-pop' clanging during the early morning hours and that its ugly chant had drawn him, perhaps even lured him, inside the village walls and then here to the miller's hut. Others, however, disagreed with this theory, asserting instead that the 'click-pop' was the result of the mad man's magic—evil magic. But I had turned my attention away from the Wild Mendicant and to the Hindu miller, who, by this time, had grown quite uneasy about the growing crowd and, even more so, as I soon learned, about the 'click-pop' itself.

Ibrahim had meant to take control of the scene. Not wishing to address primarily the issue of 'click-pop' economics, he had turned to more fundamental problems.

"Why in Heaven's Name don't you turn that damnable machine off, I told him. Here we stand without even having bathed, prayed, or taken breakfast. And it is all because your wretched monster there has jolted us from our dreams and

jerked us from our beds! (I could tell, friend, that I had the Hindu now.) I asked him, what exactly **is** your intention? To bait some half-sane mendicant within our walls? What is the purpose of your tin drum? To drive us all, Hindu and Muslim, adult and child, man and woman, insane with its noise? As I paused, the Hindu's chin slowly drooped down upon his chest, and the crowd was delighted with laughter. The Hindu hardly managed to mumble forth a few words. But, few as they were, his words instantly silenced the crowd. For a brief moment there was a strained silence as questioning eyes met questioning eyes. Then, twice-doubled, our laughter seemed to rock the very earth, and even gave the absorbed Mendicant brief pause."

To his children Ibrahim has told these words of the miller numberless times; the same goes for his grandchildren. In fact, all who come within earshot of Ibrahim have heard the miller's line.

"How could anyone forget the Hindu's blushing face when he said to me so meekly, 'Do you know how to turn 'click-pop' off?' Imagine it." Ibrahim snickers as he talks of the occasion. "The foolish man, in his haste to smuggle the machine into the village the night before, had never taken time to learn from the salesman in Hyderabad how to do anything with the machine except start it. He hadn't the slightest idea of how to turn it off!"

Nor had any of the villagers; Ibrahim included. It was a good thing that the Mendicant had come.

"The miller admitted to us that the machine would run far into the night if he let it run until its fuel was spent. No one dared siphon the gasoline out, for we feared it poisonous merely to inhale the least bit of its fumes. Even the untouchables would not be coaxed or bribed into sucking the gasoline out. Soon our laughter ceased as we began to think of spending the day with the racket always at our ears, and of trying to sleep with it at night. We became desperate. It wasn't long before I was suggesting that all the men bring a large piece of fire wood from the Hindu's hut and bludgeon the 'click-pop' into submission. Indeed, I and a handful of men had just returned with clubs in hand when, suddenly, the Mendicant, who had long since ceased his chants or motions, and who had been sitting perfectly still in a lotus posture, jumped up, and with a wild laugh grasped hold of a rubber tube attached to the machine, gave it a swift jerk with which it popped easily off, sounding like a cork pulled from a bottle, and held it close to his right eye for inspection. The 'click-pop' managed only a few more slowing revolutions before it became silent and still. At that, the Wild Mendicant turned quickly and ran full-speed past the gasping crowd toward the village gate, whooping and yelling like a drunken sweeper. And above his head he waved one black rubber spark-plug cover. Ah, such is the way of wild mendicants."

Ibrahim points out that he wishes he had left then, too.

"Oh sure, a *panchayat* assembled the next day. And I and the good Imam, Allah bathe his soul in mercy, succeeded in ridding the village of the machine for a time. The Hindu agreed to compensate the villagers with tobacco and hot tea, promising never to import such another menace inside our walls. Not long after the *panchayat,* however, Imam Musa fell ill and died; and my own prestige and economic position worsened correspondingly. Nevertheless, I made sure that no

Hindu miller entertained the idea of sneaking another milling machine into the village. Whom I overlooked were the Muslim millers, especialy my own son."

Other villagers tell me that the younger Muslim millers had grown steadily more resentful of Ibrahim's dominance of the milling industry of Lalibad. Furthermore, they had little patience or understanding for his reluctance to modernize through the importation and use of, what else, but 'click-pop' machines. Finally, fearing that the Hindu millers would mechanize first despite Ibrahim's threats, and thereby gain the upper hand over them, the young Muslim millers, led by Ibrahim's eldest son, Roidar, engineered a plan to import a machine—this time one with a muffler. Needless to say, Ibrahim was outraged. But even more, he was hurt, hurt that his son would be, as Ibrahim puts it, "traitor to his own flesh."

Soon the young millers' business came to nearly monopolize the milling industry of Lalibad. Most of the Hindu millers have now left town, or else switched to other occupations. As for Ibrahim, he lost more and more customers each week, until his business barely put the food on his plate. In a short time his life's savings were spent. Yet when his son came and asked Ibrahim last month to join the other young millers in their new and expanding business, Ibrahim was too proud to have anything to do with a 'click-pop.'

As the shades beneath the old banyan tree grow thicker, I look at my watch and notice that it is well past four o'clock. Recalling the long journey that still is ahead of me, I decide, now, to bring this report to an end. Little remains to tell of Ibrahim the Senile (for here of late his conversations with the banyan tree have earned for him that ignoble addition.)

"Ibrahim, I must go now."

He remains silent.

"Ibrahim?"

Slowly he begins to groan and mumble; his words ramble on and on, growing increasingly more obscure and incoherent. As I stand to go, the last cogent thing I hear him utter is some remark about the sea. Stooping out from under the banyan, I turn one last time to watch him sitting there beneath the tree, next to its large, mangled roots, watch him swaying there, back and forth, his eyes gazing far off into a distance and world beyond my view. I can not help but think that Ibrahim is sailing once again with his dreams. Only this time I fear he is aboard a mastless ship that cuts the jet-blue Abrabian Sea only with the greatest toil, propelled, as it is, by some hidden, oily motor that emits repeatedly, constantly, always: 'click-pop, click-pop.'

Panaewa Hawaii

Donovan Hendricks

Once the spirits
Of the gods lived there
Among bright leihua trees
And the sweet tropical smells
Of mailei leaves.

Dark-skinned warriors
Spent their days in prayer
And silent supplication
Before entering the cool
Green fern forest.

Where cars speed by,
The kings dared not walk;
Where many were buried by
Pele's sudden displeasure—
Now we bring lunch.

City of Nice

Kim Wilson

Sounds of motion
simmer and boil
in a bowl rimmed
by hazy mountains:
Toy cars race and race,
scooters whirl and lean,
weave and blend, screech
and bleed into narrow streets;
The high belched horns and
the heaving sirens keep tempo
at a frightened heart flutter
idling out of pace
with the sun spread sea
at its stone-smooth feet.

Bastille Night—Paris

Mike Hurd

Would I had traced
that fiery path across night sky,
exploded and fallen
in glittering cinders
to delight this cheering crowd.

Instead, I burn lower and lower,
an unattended fire approaching dawn;
I dim as the night dies away
over my ashes in rising grey.

A Walk

Nancy M. Steele

I took a walk today
and stayed home.
I went to many places,
yet hardly moved.
I saw many people,
but no faces.

It was a good day for walking,
I suppose.

I started in the morning
and found myself wandering
toward houses I barely knew,
families I'd only met,
but persons I've grown to love.
Some were near,
and it was easy to reach them.
Others lived so terribly far.
Still others, I found,
had moved.
I did not even know they'd gone.

And one was out shopping.

Primitive Kill

Randell Herren

Armed with clubs
they drag him down,
dealing savage blows
to snarling curses
of cat's last breath.
They tan the hide
and bind the paws
to carry him back
for their women high
in boulders above
where all will feast on
raw feline meat
and the hunters
will hang
prized saber-teeth.

Nephrolepis (Boston Fern)

Melinda Melhus

Maiden hair fronds
draping freely,
their tweedy texture
swaying loosely
to the lilting strains
of Beethoven's Op. 107 # 4,
release the leprechaun,
rosy-cheeked
and clad in green,
who strains the jig on flute keys
in a three-way battle with
the piano counterpart;
aware that touch turns your
emerald fingertips to rust,
the white-haired fellow
spares your treasure hoard;
tripping over cobblestones
of crystalline dew-gems,
his golden buckles fall through
the spectrum from
purple to
yellow,
never marring the
continuous transition
into the fifth variation,
and the flow of your
rippled waltz.

Exit

Tim Kite

Optimism is obstinate,
A brown, Joe Louis bomber
Gone down swinging—
Landing a few

On the way

Out.