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TOUCHSTONE MAGAZINE

Volume 23

1989

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Jana Leep
Touchstone Fiction Award Winner 1989

Skirting

6:04 AM

I squat slightly, holding the jar right where I hope I am aiming. Sitting here, I experience what I know to be true: The female species will always be confined to civilized non-directive peeing, unlike the male species, who with their natural endowments, can take a leak about anywhere, anytime, and at anything. I am surprised though, when I withdraw the jar, for it is half full: maybe we women are more capable than we are told to believe.

I study the jar and its contents: lemon-lime in color, clear, and bubbly. It really does look like Mountain Dew. I can just picture myself flying through the apartment door, hot and thirsty from the long trek home from school, lunging toward the fridge, to pull from it what I think to be cold pop, and chugging it down. What a nightmare . . . and so after tightening the lid until my hands ache, I stick the jar at the back, back, back of the refrigerator. An unreachable little spot much like myself.

6:11 AM

As I scrub and rinse, and then comb and part, I feel myself transforming. My morning cleansing rituals compensate very well for my habitual absence from Sunday morning worship service. But this morning, my spiritualism isn't flourishing as usual. I catch a glance of myself in the mirror, and hold it for a while. Darkened half moons cup my eyes from below, while the eyelids are weighed down, puffy and swollen.

8:16 AM

I have always loved long, free-flowing skirts; they are so much less constricting, and so much more flattering. However, on this morning, I hate my favorite skirt and I hate it for constricting me. I have refused to wear it for two weeks now. But this morning I wear it.

The denim gathers of the skirt swish and sway with the rhythm of my step, but the waistband, the part hidden beneath my long stretchy sweater, is tightened around my middle. Smiling, I fake my way across campus. Nearing the finish line, I miss a step as I make my way into Williams Hall, tripping though the door, as if a breeze blew me in. The thud of my feet gives me away.

10:37 AM

Only a couple more hours of this skirt, I think, while forcing a gap with my hand between my stomach and the waistband. Philosophy class just doesn't have the magnetism needed to keep my mind from roaming like a buffalo. Instead, I imag-

ine myself as a striptease artist, flinging endless layers of skirts from my anxious body, breaking free of conservative social mores, but never free from the tension around my waist. How is it that I, a woman of the 80's, is stuck in such a predicament? Isn't it only my mother and grandmother who are supposed to have had to suffer through this female phenomenon? I have the choices, and I am supposed to have the control.

11:21 AM

The masses creep out of the classroom. The masses creep down the stairs. The masses form a slow-moving body along the sidewalk, a tortoise, so to speak, while I envision myself a hare. A foursome congregates in the middle of the road and all I need and want is a loud horn to blast them out of unconsciousness. But "excuse me," said politely yet forcefully does the job. I am amazed at the loss of sensory/motor skills that often occurs when certain people come into contact.

He is there, I can see him perched under that small, delicate tree, off to the far left where student traffic rarely treks. I cease to hurry. I cease to feel my feet impacting the cement. I cease to notice the bodies beside me, before me, behind me. I cease to regard time as a tyrant. But I don't cease to struggle with that tightness around me.

"You don't have to go with me . . . yes, it would be nice to have you there, but it would be uncomfortable for a guy . . . it won't be too bad, they just test the urine sample and I'll just do homework as I wait . . . yeah, um, how about 1:45? My appointment's at 12:30, give me an hour there, and then 15 minutes leeway . . . where? well, right here would be great . . . you know me, I am always 'chipper' and especially after Philosophy class is over and it's home for lunch . . . yeah, today's different, but not too much . . . you know, you're worrying about me . . . Don't. This is routine stuff, part of the game. You know what my Mother always says—"You gotta pay if you play" . . . Sorry. I guess I just see it differently than you. I have to admit I even toy with the idea of not going . . . well, because—I really feel better today, no tightness, no sickness. You know yourself, that it is highly probable that this child lies quite developed in my imagination while very undeveloped inside my womb . . . No, you are right, I will go. It will be good for me . . ."

12:30 PM

Real good for me. A smiling pudge of a woman greets me into the official, non-profit, volunteer organized and operated "Free Pregnancy Testing Center." The deliberate hominess of the environment sets me suspicious. Cute little crafts crowd the walls; color coordinated wallpaper stretches to each corner; and even the carpet, chairs, tables, lamps, pictures, phones and wastebaskets look predestined and prearranged by the maternal goddess of home education.

I give her my Mason jar full of Mountain Dew. She asks if I want the jar back after the test. Of course I do, I want to drink out of it every morning, noon and night in

commemoration of this pivotal moment in my life. “No, thank you, I have plenty where it came from.” Actually, it is my last one.

I sit alone in the ‘Confidentiality Room’ while she starts the test. I have already filled out the information sheet, and continue to read over each answer until she returns. She sits too close to me; I am afraid her smile will suck me in. We play “20 Questions,” and she ends the game with a loaded one—what would you do if you were pregnant? I tell her what she wants to hear—adoption, of course—for I have already picked up ten references to the Almighty.

It’s my turn now, so I ask in innocent curiosity—how long does this test take anyway? She quickly answers me with just as innocent of a smile, releasing her shoulders raised in dramatic anticipation—the test takes a matter of minutes—she has had the results the entire time—it is negative. I don’t move. I can’t remember whether negative means good or bad. Her omniscient eyes meet mine again. Negative means not pregnant. She dons a smile that widens until her lips form the smooth, fleshy tissue of a scar running from cheek to cheek.

My lips part, my head nods, my eyes fall down to a stare. And then I laugh inside—this woman wants to pin me to a cross.

“Have you and your boyfriend ever considered abstinence?”

She looks at me as if she knows something that I don’t. And I look at her with all the sincerity of a child, learning her first lessons about good and evil. Playing it coy, I answer her question—Well, for awhile, of course. Wrong answer. Her jaw, tight and rigid, juts forward, and indignation wells up in her eyes like a storm about to be righteously shed.

“You know dear, sexuality is not to be toyed with. Responsibility will call sooner or later. In fact it has called you, or you wouldn’t be sitting before me with fear in your eyes.”

Her eyes open wide, head cocking to the left, as if to say—Am I right or not? She thinks she’s the Almighty’s right-hand-man, perched in her chair, her throne.

“That’s why God did not make birth control 100% safe. You can never feel sure, in your sexuality, in the mutuality of your love, in your protection from pregnancy. Thus I, as a child of God, would suggest thinking over your sexuality. God implants insecurity and fear purposefully.”

She humors me. If she’s right, God’s gotta be male; a female would not purposely implant women with fear and insecurity, as well as the granted privilege to house the male sperm, bearing the weight of humanity as well as a few extra pounds. I want to ask her if giving birth would be less painful if performed within the legalities of marriage—maybe HE would pull a few strings? But I would rather not be rained down upon again, and anyway I am more interested in her “sex” theories; theories probably with no empirical, experiential data backing them. And so I ask—how did you come to find these truths?

“My husband and I waited to have sex until we were married in the presence of

the Lord. Looking back at twenty two years of marriage, I thank the Lord I had the discipline to abstain. Because of our initial restriction, sexuality is now a playground of exploration for my husband and I. We are still discovering things about each other every day."

A playground of exploration—they probably take turns nailing each other to the cross, "Crucify me, crucify me."

"I feel I must warn you that those who engage in premarital sex seem to miss out on the type of emotional bonding that must happen between partners, if a lifetime relationship is meant to last. There's no security, no commitment when sex is the focus."

It seems to me that sex is her focus, not mine. I am not a sex-crazed pup, I am a woman, blossoming in the water and sun of sexuality.

I smirk an amused, half hidden, half blatant little smile, and with my mask slipping slightly, she reads me with a hunger. Drawing back into her chair, her eyes are intent upon holding mine.

"You know when I was your age I was tempted too. And so was your mother, and grandmother, and all the women before. I knew not the plan the Lord had for me, and I allowed Satan to hold my hand, just as you allow your boyfriend to hold you in the night. But I didn't, your mother didn't and your grandmother didn't have birth control and so we women had to be self-disciplined. We focused on sex too, but guarded what was ours. It took strength.

Your generation is just the opposite, you guard your right to have sex, making just as many sacrifices as we did, sacrifices for pleasure, not of pleasure. But is pleasure what it's all about?"

Of course, pleasure's just a part of it, and not even the most important. And then I remember what I am there for—not for just a quick, convenient stop, for a check of the Mountain Dew in the Mason Jar. I hedge her question with a—darn, I've got to be going.

I had planned on asking for my jar back as I left, hedging the thought that I might need it again, horrifying the pudge of a woman with my irreverent disregard—but I can't do it now. All I can do is leave, thanking her, closing the door behind me, the same door I so carelessly swung open before.

1:11 PM

I follow the dirt path, winding behind and between the residential houses. I want to be home. I want to be alone. I want to be a child, but not a child of God. I lie down on my double bed, the bed I share with him, morning, night or day, and sense the weight of my body. My heartbeat pumps through the silence. I want to feel the angles of my body, and not the round curves that never end with an answer. I want the bony hips of a man; hips with no weight to carry.

I pull the skirt from my body. The tension releases around my waist, but not

within me. I am crying when I notice the sound of the apartment door opening. He saw me leave and tried to catch up but I didn't respond to his yells. I didn't hear him. I didn't expect him.

He wants to hold me. I tell him I don't like people seeing me like this. He says he isn't "people," he is him. He holds me, and I feel something more than just his soft fingertips dancing across my skin.

Jennifer Jarmel
Touchstone Poetry Contest Winner 1989

“Receptionist”

The most trivial position.
She feels nothing as she files
and smooths
long thin lines
from an unpregnant shirt

The ring.
Validates the bulge
in glittery chip

She will feed it
as she feeds
the Chow dog now,

She will love it
as she can only love
a fragment of herself

She has gained the power
in another
trivial position.

Jennifer Jarmel

“When You’re the First One on Your Block to Get Your Mortality”

No, it isn’t
big dripping letters
of black and red
marquee ooze,

But the kind of fear
that just sits there

Alarming as fizzing bee’s wings
frozen still

On your nine year old knee.

Watching you watching it
while you both wait
for the sting.

John Hallis

jesus changed
the world. and . . .
when i cried
there was no one.
to ease my pain
i died. father
left the home
and me
alone.

Christa Taylor

Goodbye, Rose

The sky looked friendly, but appearances couldn't make up for the heat. The air was dry as dust and uncomfortable to the back of Hope's throat. The fruit trees were thirsty too, but she didn't really know how much to water them. They were Jeramiah's. So she left them to themselves.

"Is he back yet?" Rose asked from the table.

Startled, Hope pulled her head back into the kitchen, letting the screen door bang loudly. She stood there a moment gazing at her daughter. The heat made her head ache.

"No," Hope said, realizing she meant the dog. With her wet hands she smoothed back the loose hair from her hot face trying to tuck strands back into her braid. It looked like frazzled rope twisting about her worn face. But Rose's hair swept about in its usual dark curls, impervious to the heat. Wiping her hands on her gingham apron, Hope poured herself a glass of water and went back to the dishes.

"Well I don't think he's coming back," Rose mumbled over a cookie. "No matter. He didn't like anyone but Dad, anyhow."

Hope nodded and traced bubble clusters in the cool water with the tips of her fingers. The dishes sat eggfaced and ignored at the bottom, unable to catch her attention. She'd been thinking about her dead husband Jeramiah for most of the morning. That in itself was not very unusual. It was her manner of thinking that was odd. He darted around in her head illogically, like a goldfish too big for its bowl. So for the third time that morning, she nervously pushed him to the back of her mind to concentrate on something else.

"Is David coming home this weekend?" Hope asked, taking a sip of water.

"No, next," Rose sighed. "But I should get a letter from him today," she remembered cheerfully.

"He could come and see you more often," Hope replied coolly.

"He'd like to, but his college is too far to come every weekend. It's almost 400 miles." Rose brushed cookie crumbs onto the floor with the back of her hand. Hope noticed and took it as a deliberate offense.

"Then he could call," she said. "He never calls."

"He calls, but he's saving up for our wedding and stuff. You know that."

"If you say so." Hope scooped up a plate and washed it grudgingly.

"Besides," Rose went on, "his letters are nice, real nice." She unconsciously betrayed their nature with the impish smile a mother knows to watch out for. "And it isn't every guy who sends 15 page letters once a week. He promised me a tape with his voice on it too. It might come today with the letter. David is wonderful, really, really wonderful."

Hope kept her doubts. Sometimes she suspected Rose only thought she loved David. He had helped her through her father's death. Hope knew her attitude was probably wrong—David seemed like a good catch. But she couldn't reconcile this with her feelings. She worked away at the dishes.

"Will you call me?" Hope asked suddenly, sounding strange.

"Huh?" The girl looked up.

"When you're in Muncie, with David, married. Will you call me," Hope repeated loudly facing the window.

"Yeah sure, Mom but . . ."

"But." A cup jumped into the rinse water with a splash for emphasis.

"We'll have to save money at first you know, especially if I don't find work right away." Rose awkwardly crossed the checkerboard floor tiles and put her glass in the soapy water. "I'll write, though. I promise."

"15 page letters once a week?" Hope asked moving away.

"Really, Mom you don't need to be that way. You'll get your letters," Rose snapped back, questioning her with a look.

"Sorry." Hope yanked the drain, not looking very sorry. "I'm just worried about the dog," she said. "It might not get on alone and I'd feel awful if something happened to it."

"It probably found another home—one that fed it."

That hurt. Hope had felt guilty enough. "Dry these, will you? I'm going to call it again." She stuck her head back out the door and looked.

"Mom, you never paid attention to that dog before," Rose said picking up the towel.

"BONES," Hope yelled across the large browning yard. There was a big bare spot in the shade of the house where it used to sleep.

"You always wanted Dad to get rid of it." Rose came up and stood behind her.

"BONES," she called louder.

"He always snuck out pieces of food to it from the table and made you curse like hell," Rose went on.

Hope whistled loudly for half a minute and gave out one more emphatic "BONES."

"Mom, you hate that dog!" she said. "Besides, you're more likely to hail a cab down this dirt road than get that deaf dog's attention."

Hope let the door bang shut and sat down at the table.

"I can call it if I want to. Maybe I miss the damn thing!" she yelled, not making a bit of sense.

It was actually an awful dog, Hope thought, lazy and ugly. It just slept in the dirt all day looking like vulture pickings. She never knew why Jeremiah kept it in the first place.

Miah just wasn't sensible sometimes, like when he bought this place. Hope thought it was the saddest most decrepit farmhouse still standing in Indiana. It had nothing going for it but size and 4 acres of land. And foxes in the woods, he loved the foxes. They never did need the extra room because they only had Rose. And they didn't need the land. Miah was an English professor, not a farmer. But, she had to admit he did make something of the place He'd planted a bunch of fruit trees that mostly took. Even the house came out better than she'd expected, once it was patched up and painted red.

It looked quaint, like a greetings card picture, with a big front porch, french

windows, and a steep peaked roof. They furnished it with antiques and doodads from farm auctions. Some rooms were pretty cluttered with the stuff like a Jackdaw's nest. But Hope liked it, so long as she had help with the dusting. She knew it would be a lot of work when Rose left. The place was already too big for two. It would seem enormous for just one. But the thought of selling it seemed wrong. She wanted everything just where Miah had left it.

The girl finished up the silverware. Tossing the towel on the counter, she said something about reading bride's magazines up in her room. And gave her mother a queer look as she left. Hope waited until she was gone and rose up from the table to get her dusting equipment out from under the sink. She headed upstairs for the library. She tried to dust and vacuum at least 3 rooms on Saturdays because the house was neglected most of the week while she worked.

Usually, she looked forward to doing the library. It was her favorite room in the house. But today, as she stepped inside, it looked too much like a chore. Because of the numerous bookshelves there were hundreds of corners to check for dust. And among the books on nearly every shelf there lived odd little bookends and things that might collect more dust if she let them. The room was beautiful though. Even her headache couldn't disguise that. The walls were a dark rich green that felt like velvet to the eyes and everything was trimmed graciously in dark wood. The books weren't decorative, though. Many of them were worn paperbacks, Miah's vast science-fiction collection.

Hope dusted an end table between the window and a big red stuffed chair. She remembered how Miah used to sit there reading to Rose. One would expect an English professor to read his kid Charles Dickens—instead, he seemed to always have her wrapped up in Martian invasions. There was still a faint sweet tobacco smell in the curtains from his pipe, but it was disappearing. Hope put her nose to the thick green fabric and decided to put off washing them a while longer. It would be too much of a hassle to get them down.

She went over to some of the shelves where there was a high concentration of knickknacks, mostly little animals. Taking them down one by one, she ran her cloth over them, even around the backs. Not all of the things were Miah's. Quite a few had been found by Rose. She had loved to go to antique shops with him and shared his talent for finding the stuff. She was like him in a lot of ways. Hope remembered the game they played in this room a long time ago.

"Look what I've found! This is new isn't it?" Rose exclaimed running up to her father with a little wooden horse. She must have been about six Hope thought.

"Now where did that come from?" Miah smiled leaning his large frame back into the chair. His hair was dark and curly and he wore a beard. He didn't have a handsome face really, except for his large eyes, sea-blue and precocious. Hope was glad that Rose had inherited them instead of her own brown eyes.

"It came from that shelf over there," Rose said pointing with excitement. "And I know it wasn't there before, because that's the G's and I was looking in the G's yesterday."

"How clever you are, Rose. Now give him a name and put him back. There's more to find." Miah was as excited as the girl.

Rose named it George. "Because he's in the G's," she declared.

Miah's smile broadened all the more. "She really is very smart," he said to Hope proudly, once the girl had skipped back across the room.

The game was sort of like an Easter egg hunt, only more frequent. Miah hid the little things he'd brought back from antique stores and junk shops. Then Rose tried to find them among the library shelves. They kept on playing it now and then when Rose got older, but she got to hide the things she had bought, and sent her father searching. Hope wasn't sure which version they'd like better.

Hope dusted the horse, then sat it down carefully, putting the little feet on the prints that marked their places. She should have known this room would be hard to do today without thinking of Miah. But she'd already begun, and she knew she could summon her control easily, though it seemed a bit thin. She'd used it so often in the six months since he died. Hope remembered how strange it felt to be able to comfort Rose without breaking down herself.

She had found Rose up in her room shuddering on the end of her bed, crying too hard for much noise. With her knees drawn up to her chest, she seemed small and fragile, like a child. Hope couldn't recall just how long after the event it had been, maybe a week. It wasn't the first time Rose had cried about her father's death, of course. But it seemed to build up to that one afternoon. Her face was wet and as pink as the buds on her wallpaper and the color of the soft bedspread. When Hope went to hold her, she let a few tears out herself. But they were for the girl. Rose seemed to take it the hardest. After awhile Rose slowed her breath enough to ask all for the "why" questions in an angry voice. She sounded unfamiliar to Hope, like an actress in a funeral scene. But she knew Rose's feelings were real. She just couldn't feel them herself. Hope talked to her about heaven and God, though she was awkward on the subject. She thought she must've given some of the right answers, because the girl laid down and cried herself to sleep in a half an hour or so. And Hope quietly left the room, calling her numbness up around her like a blanket.

When she returned to the present, she was surprised to find her dusting nearly done. Her head felt worse and she attributed it to all the thinking she had been doing. She wished she could stop. Everything, the dog, Rose, even the tobacco, was reminding her of Miah. She laughed to herself as she drew a connection. All of those things were either fading or leaving. Rose seemed to be doing both.

Hope finished up the last shelves quickly and then went back downstairs to get the vacuum cleaner. But it wasn't in the closet where she had put it. Rose must've left it somewhere. Standing at the bottom of the stairs, Hope called her. There was no answer. After several calls, she uneasily wondered if Rose was still up there.

Her hand held the wooden rail too stiffly as she went up so that the friction burned a little. But she didn't notice until she was nearly at the top. Rose had been awfully quiet, she thought. When she came to the hallway, she walked faster. The girl's room was on the end and the door was half open, but she couldn't see anyone. As she entered the room, her momentum carried her half-way in before she saw Rose on the bed. Startled, the girl looked up and removed her headphones. Hope noticed a new letter spread out in front of her.

"I've been calling you for the last ten minutes!" Hope exploded.

Rose's mouth dropped open and her arms folded. Hope imagined her the perfect picture of a defiant teenager. "I told you I'd be up here. Why didn't you just come and get me?" Rose snapped.

"Obviously I did!" she yelled back. "You know, you and that dog of your Father's have really been driving me crazy."

Rose looked confused but jumped to her own defense. "I obviously couldn't hear you. I was listening to a tape from David." Then she added spitefully, "As for your being crazy, I doubt it's my fault, but I certainly agree!"

"Me?! I'm not the one who's running off at age eighteen to marry a pen pal!" Hope hadn't wanted to say that, but it came out before she thought.

"Don't make me wish it was further, Mother!"

Hope looked down twisting the end of her apron tightly. She hadn't meant to be mean. She'd only wanted the girl's attention. She'd only wanted the vacuum cleaner, for Christ's sake. More quietly she said, "I'm sorry. Something's wrong with me." She felt a little sick. "I don't blame you for leaving me, you or the dog."

Rose sat still for a moment looking confused. "What are we arguing about?" she asked. "You aren't making any sense today." Hope kept her face down. "If you're upset about the dog we can go check around the county for it. It probably didn't go far," Rose volunteered.

"Yeah, I guess so . . . but it's not that." She looked down at her daughter.

"Then it is my leaving. I wasn't sure. The way you've yelled lately I thought you might be glad to get rid of me." They both laughed, and Rose stood up and went over to her. "I'm going to miss you too," she said sincerely. "But it's okay, we still have over half a year together."

"If I don't drive you off," Hope said half seriously.

"You won't."

"What if I stop feeding you?" she joked. "No, don't worry. I'll do better, really. I'm just going to have to get used to letting you go. I like David and I want you two to make it." Then she added, "I just hope he doesn't mind having a nut for a mother-in-law."

"You're not crazy, Mom. You're just having a bad day," Rose said seriously. They were quiet a moment.

"It's more than that . . . I really feel like crying."

Rose smiled and put her hand on Hope's shoulder. "That's normal, I get that way a lot. Sometimes without a real reason."

"No you don't understand." Hope paused. "I feel like crying for your father."

It took a little while for both of them before what she'd said sunk in. Then Rose spoke. "That's normal too." She squeezed Hope's hand and her voice conveyed more than understanding.

"Thanks." Hope smiled and turned to leave.

She walked down the hall. Her throat was tight with unfamiliar emotion, and she was surprised how good the ache felt. When she came to the library she imagined how nice it would be to sit by the thick green curtains and breathe in the last traces of his tobacco. Hope went in and shut the door behind her.

Patricia Y. Stein

“Honor”

A butterfly
bound in honored traditions
unfolds to pleasing perfection.
Wings woven
in Chinese custom
flutter like silken fabric.
She embraces familial virtue—
her destiny, the precious thread
between honored fathers and sons.
Within the family shelter,
a fragile chrysalis shell,
she muses the illusive notions
of emerging womanhood—
she's lifeblood, soul,
the essence of her civilized world;
like a delicate fragrance,
a blend of respected alliances.
Now a fatherless daughter,
she shudders,
aroused from her flickering dream.
Family virtue to be sold
for brother's opiate pleasures.
Consigned to her chambers,
she's left with disillusioned musings
of a graceless existence.
Alone
in the dark
wings fold
behind the veil of a dream.
Vial poised
she succumbs to his embrace,
kissed but once
by the mightiest lover.

Vicki L. Monical

“Rachel”

I can still see her
huge eyes as dark as bruises
in her thin, freckled face,
it's paleness emphasized
by the frizzy hair
somewhere between the color
of new rust and wet sawdust.
She was all skinny legs and arms
huddled in close,
making herself small.
Loud voices made her flinch,
sudden movements would make her shrink
back, her eyes suddenly shuttered.
When her parents called her name she would stop cold
and come cringing back like a mongrel
hoping to avoid a whipping.
We wanted to help her,
to do something,
anything.
But she wouldn't talk about home
and there were never any bruises.

Todd Robins

The Dancers With Their Fiddles

*Was there a time when dancers with their fiddles
In children's circuses could stay their troubles?
There was a time they could cry over books,
But time has set its maggot on their track.*

—Dylan Thomas

Morgan Riley Teague was sitting at the kitchen table, nursing a hangover with a cold tomato beer. It was July, mid-July actually, and at eleven AM, it was already ninety degrees outside. Morgan's pits were damp, but he was boiling inside as well as out. He took a healthy pull of his beer and walked over to the door that led down into the basement of the three story house. His other six brothers and sisters were asleep upstairs, or else working someplace, but Regina, eighteen, and one year Morgan's junior, was downstairs in the basement. He knew she wasn't asleep.

He opened the door and eased his way down the creaky, wooden steps. It was darker and cooler at the bottom than anyplace else in the house, though it was still plenty steamy. In the corner of the room, lying on one mattress piled on top of the other, Regina looked pale as she lie on her back. Morgan sat down in the frayed chair beside her.

"Get out of here," she said. "I'm trying to sleep."

"I noticed," he said.

Her hand came up from under the covers and she rubbed her forehead.

"I feel like a piece of shit," she said.

Something harsh and unforgiving crept into Morgan's head: guilt.

"Never," she said, "never again. Please God let me feel better. Then never again, I swear."

He took a shot of his beer, finished it. He belched to himself and looked at her. Then he turned away.

"I told you," he said, "don't do it but once in a while. Do it more than but once in a while and you gone feel like shit. It's real goddamned simple."

She turned on her side, away from him. Her hair was red, like a bonfire, on the white pillow. She coughed and nearly gagged. "It's not that big a deal," she said. "Don't worry about it. I'll just lay here for a while, and it'll all be fine, like always."

"Yeah," he said, "relax and don't think about it. It'll go away in a while." He wanted another beer.

"You know what?" she said, and turned over again on her back. "We've been sad, haven't we?"

"Yeah, but who wants to talk about it? Not me. I'll stay out of it, thank you."

She bit her lip and closed her eyes. Her face was sunken where it had once been fat and sassy. He was surprised his dad, Hertel, hadn't noticed. Hertel, Morgan decided, had had a lot on his mind like everybody else.

"Hey," he said, "I'm gone get another beer. You ready?"

"No," she smiled at him onerously. "But something else sure sounds good, yes indeedy."

He looked at her. "Just say the word."

She began to sing, softly, like Sinatra. "Doobey doobey doo, somebody roll one; doobey doobey doo, somebody pull one."

He wondered if he should smoke a joint with her. She didn't seem to be handling her drugs very well. But he figured a little pot wouldn't hurt. He smiled. "I told you, just say the word."

He set the empty beer mug on the table beside her bed and got up and went up the stairs. He went through the kitchen and found Lenora and Victoria in from of the TV, watching cartoons. "You guys behaving yourselves?" he said.

Lenora hit his leg as he walked by. "Don't worry about it," she said.

She was nine, Victoria seven. Morgan knew they were probably hungry. Still, he didn't want to bother with it. It pissed him off that he was left to mess with it every fucking time.

He went into his bedroom and got into the drawer where he kept his stuff. He spread it out on Sports Illustrated and went to rolling. He slid it behind his ear and covered it with his dark hair. Then he walked back out by his two little sisters. "You guys want to eat something?" he said, and kept walking toward the kitchen. "How bout a little cereal?"

He fixed them Captain Crunch and left the box and milk on the table, in case they wanted more. He said, "If you guys want anything, knock on this door real loud." He opened the door to the basement.

"Hey," said Lenora, "Can we come down when we're done?"

"No," he said firmly, "you guys better just hang up here."

Lenora looked down at her cereal.

An hour or so later, still down in the basement, Regina giggles wildly. She kissed Frankie Jones on the cheek. He was her boy. Frankie took one last pull on the burning roach and put it in the ash tray. He smiled. His eyes looked like slitted cherries.

"I told you guys," said Morgan, and he laughed, "I told you guys the weed sucked. Did anybody get a buzz? I didn't. I'm not the least bit stoned."

"Yeah," said Frankie, the smile still painted on his face from one ear to the other. "Big waste of my time coming over." Then to Regina: "I'm glad you called. This was just what the old doctor ordered."

She kissed him again on the cheek, put hers up against his. "I just wanted you to be here," she said.

Morgan looked at them on the bed and in spite of his high he had it laying in the back of his mind that eventually he'd have to do something, though he didn't know what exactly. Regina was using the white stuff entirely too much. It seemed like every time he saw her she was on it. Thinking about it all made him want to yell, made him want to holler like a coon dog. He could feel his world coming apart all around him.

"What's on your agenda this afternoon?" said Frankie.

"Fuck, I don't know," said Morgan. "Maybe pull down to the Beer Garden later."

"Yeah, that's probably the ticket," said Frankie.

"Hey, you're playing tonight aren't you? Down at the dance?" said Regina. Morgan shook his head. She had brought up another subject better left alone.

"Hell no," he said. "I told you five six times I ain't playing in that band anymore. I gave that shit up for lent and never picked it back up, remember?" He took a sip of his beer.

"I don't see why," she said. "If I was good like that I wouldn't quit. I know why though. Just cause mom split you don't give a shit—"

"Fuck that bitch!" he yelled and stood up. He heaved the beer, half full, across the room. It popped against the plastered wall and dripped down in a cloud of fizz.

"Hey," said Frankie, "calm down. You alright man? Maybe you ought to come over, I'll set you up—"

"Fuck that too," said Morgan and headed up the stairs. "You can't solve every fucking thing with that, Frankie."

Upstairs, he closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. He couldn't get the picture out of his mind. In his mind's eye he could see his mom at the kitchen counter, slaving away with the homemade bread. She had left them two months before, without a trace. She had been gone for two months, and no one had seen or heard from her. Morgan knew what had happened, or at least he thought he did. He wrestled with it every night in his sleep. Hertel hadn't been home most of the time, always working. When he did come home he drank whiskey until he went to sleep. Being home alone with eight kids had made his mom crazy. Morgan wondered if she was still alive. "I'll be at the Beer Garden," he told Lenora and Victoria. "See you later."

The Beer Garden, as it was called, happened once a year. It was part of the little western Kansas town's tradition to celebrate the end of the wheat harvest with loads and loads of beer. Later, that afternoon, there would be a parade too and then the dance that night. Everybody in town, except the southside Baptists, looked forward to it as soon as the summer began. There was not usually much to do in the tiny little town. The band, of which Morgan had been a part for two years, played lively country music. Morgan had been the fiddle player. Hertel, who came from South Carolina, had taught him how to play years and years before. The band, after giving him several opportunities, had dismissed Morgan for constantly missing practices.

He walked through the back yard and got in his dad's old Ford pickup. He was, in fact, headed to the country club to talk to his dad. Hertel was the country club's greens' keeper. He was there from sunup to sundown every day of the week. Lately, the weather had been extremely hot and dry, so Hertel had had to work nights watering the greens. Morgan felt for him.

The little go-cart which Hertel scooted around the course in was parked be-

side the work-shed. Morgan parked beside it and went inside. His dad was bent over a mower, cleaning stinky dead grass off the bottom of it.

"What's up, dad?" said Morgan.

Hertel looked up from what he was doing. "Scraping more shit," he said.

"Looks like it," said Morgan.

Hertel, fifty years old, still had a thick shock of dark red hair. He was as thick as a noseguard. "Everything okay at home?"

"Everything's fine."

"The kids eaten?"

"I threw 'em some pork scraps."

"Don't be a smartass."

"Bowls of cereal," said Morgan.

"They are my kids," said his dad.

"I'm aware of that," said Morgan.

Hertel let the mower come down on the cement floor. He stood up and wiped sweat from his brow with his shirt sleeve. He began to clean his glasses.

"Well," he said, "I don't mean to get on you about it. It's just that I worry about the little ones without your mother around."

Morgan nodded. He wished he could tell his dad the little ones were the least of his worries. Hertel looked at his watch.

"Well," he said, "unless you got something pressing to talk about I'm gone. I got greens to mow."

Morgan sucked his teeth. "Nothing pressing," he said.

"I appreciate all the help you been giving me," said Hertel. "It ain't easy I know with your mom gone—"

"I don't wanna talk about it," said Morgan, and he felt the rage burning again. "That don't do either of us any good."

Hertel looked out on the course. "Yeah," he said, "well, take care." He walked to the corner of the shed, where the greens mowers were. "I'll be home after dark," he said.

It was early afternoon. Morgan knew the beer garden would be filling up. Even so, he didn't want to go just yet. He wanted to get out of town for a while. He decided to go for a drive. He started the pickup and got on the little dirt road that led back onto old ninety-six, which he took south of town. He slid a Skynard tape into the box and put his foot on the gas. Before he knew it, he was driving eighty. He held it there; the old Ford was liable to explode if he drove any faster. It felt good with the windows down. He got five miles straight south of town and then came to a little bend in the highway where it met short, stubby elms and the Arkansas River. He parked by the side of the road, in front of the bridge. There was a dirt path between the weeds that led down to the water. Morgan decided he wanted to hunt a little. He reached behind the truck seat and pulled out a twenty-two pistol, black, and headed down. When he got to the sand by the water, he sat and yanked off his sneakers. In his bare feet, gun in hand, he waded into the water. At first, it came to his ankles, as he kept walking against the stream, it crept to his waist. He made his way slowly, careful not to fall. He held the gun up like a bank robber. For a half mile, he walked. He came to an old beaver dam

where the river made a turn. Some rotting limbs hung out over the water; it splashed over and through them like it would through a strainer. Morgan walked to the corner of the dam, with his foot he felt where the water got deeper. He stopped on the edge.

The sun was coming down square onto the water. Morgan could see any fish that swam close to the top. By the bank, a few feet away, he could see several channel cat moving against and around a log. They all looked small. He looked down as far as he could see, to where the next bend in the river was, and then back to the place by the bank. The little channels still moved in the water.

He and his dad had walked the river more than once, seining minnows for bass fishing. That was in the good days, in the days before the price of oil went to shit. His dad had had a well service shop, and for a while had prospered. Then things had changed. First he'd laid off some of his workers, but it hadn't helped. Business was nonexistent. Bourbon became his only source of pleasure. Every night, he drank himself to sleep. The business slid out from under him.

Morgan stood steady against the current. He was waiting for a big channel to move against the bank. He waited, gun in hand.

He mother had shown no signs, at least, at the time, it hadn't seemed like it. "A baby a year," he'd once heard her tell a friend. The friend had lit a cigarette. "You're crazy, Estelle," the friend had said. His mom had laughed and poured more coffee. "Got a cigarette for me, honey?" she'd said. That was in the good days.

One night, last year, during his senior year of high school, Morgan went out with his friends. Hertel was drunk when he left, jiggling ice in the heavy glass tumbler. "Your ass better be home by one," he'd said. "That is, if you want to take your lazy ass out ever again." "Fuck off," Morgan had said, and bounded out the door. Frankie waited for him outside, Frankie Jones, Regina's boy. He'd been Morgan's friend for years. "That bastard," Morgan said when he'd gotten in the car. "One of these days he'll pop off and I'll lynch him, I ain't lying."

"Hey," Frankie had said, "don't you worry. I got just the thing for you." On the seat between them, Frankie reached and lifted the magazine which covered the stuff wrapped in paper. "Wanna do a line?"

Later in the night, sometime before sunrise, the boys were still hard at it.

"How much beer we drank?" Morgan had asked.

"A case," said Frankie, his eyes alert. "Shall we drink another?"

Morgan put the straw to his nose. "No," he said, "I better get home. Dad'll probably be up, too. If he talks too much, I'll have to kick his ass."

"He won't be up," Frankie had said. "If he is, he won't know what hit him, will he?"

"I'll own him" Morgan had said.

Hertel, with red hair flopping in his face, glasses on the table, and the bottle of Weller's empty on the floor, had been waiting.

He'd said, "Where you been, boy?"

"Oh," Morgan had said, "here an there. Not that it's any of your business." He'd caught a glimpse of his mother in the dark, watching in her nightgown.

Hertel had picked him up, with his two arms had pinned Morgan against the

wall. He pounded his head into the plaster, let Morgan fall to the floor.

"Don't do that ever again," Morgan had warned. Hertel had knocked him out. When he'd come to, he'd heard babies crying, howling like the end of the world.

He had come to the next bend, had been standing and waiting a long while. A big channel lurked below him. It paused and Morgan caught its shadow. He blew a hole through it and heaved it up on the sand. It probably weighed two pounds.

On the bank, he decided to leave the fish for the coons. He saw where they'd been lurking, saw their tracks in the sand. He made his way back to the truck. He walked as long as he could on the bank, felt his arm grow heavy with fatigue.

His sister had been awkward in Junior High, with long legs and no tits. Then she'd come around, had turned into an exceptional quarter miler. She stepped it off in fifty-seven seconds flat. "Man," Frankie had said one day at the track, "Regina can fly. I'd like to take her out."

"Ask her," Morgan had said, and Frankie did the next week. She accepted. They went around for months. That spring, things piled up on Estelle. She left without a trace.

"Hey," Regina had said. She'd caught Morgan in his room with a straw. It was a week or so after Estelle had gone. "Can I have one of those?"

"You'd better not," he'd said, and sucked the stuff off the mirror. A little more laid in a small pile.

"Come on," she'd said. "Draw me up one. I've done it with Frankie before."

He'd looked at her, lanky, nearly as tall as him in the room, her red hair down past her shoulders, green eyes measuring him, like a witch, like a Celtic goddess.

"I'll bet you have," he'd said. He had drawn her up a line. She took it without pause. She said, "Let's do another one." They did. Then they went over to Frankie's to do some of his. He spotted them all the stuff they needed. They stayed at Frankie's until one in the morning, since his parents were rarely home. Then they went home to make sure Hertel knew they were on time. Once they saw the old fool was snoring good, they went back over to Frankie's. They didn't do but a few more lines, only enough to keep them up until sunrise. Sometime between three and five Regina got a nosebleed. She didn't talk about Estelle that much, but when she did, she said, "If we ever see mom again we have to make sure she and dad get their shit together," and then later she said, "You're the only thing keeping me sane."

Back at his house, Morgan left his sneakers lay in the grass outside. They were covered with sand. it was on his feet too, caked between his toes. He wriggled them but the sand stayed on. He decided he needed a shower. It was moving in on late afternoon.

When he came out of his room, clean, with jeans on and a t-shirt, Frankie and Regina were in the kitchen.

"Where you been?" she asked, her face was flushed below the eyes. "We've

been at the Beer Garden," she said before he could answer. "But nobody copped a buzz. We've been, you know," and she laughed and looked at Frankie. Frankie was at the kitchen table. His face was flushed below the eyes too. Morgan looked at him. Frankie was rich, at least richer than everybody else in town. When the oil had gone bad, his family had lost some money too. But Frankie still drove a shiny red Mustang.

"You should see the crowd at the Garden," Frankie said. "Drunks everywhere. The dance ought to be kick ass tonight."

"Yeah," said Morgan, "whatever. Where's the girls?"

"Oh," said Regina, "we took them to the pool. We figured it was a good day for it. We'll pick them up in a little bit." Then: "Hey, wanna do a little one?"

Morgan looked at Frankie by the table. He looked at his sister.

"Hey," said Frankie, "I got one right here if you want it." Frankie looked at Morgan, then over to Regina. Morgan didn't say a word.

Regina bounced up out of her chair. She walked over to where the stereo was standing in the corner. "I feel like dancing," she said. She flipped on some tunes. The Steve Miller Band came rolling out of the stereo. Frankie bounced up out of his chair, and there in the kitchen, in-between the refrigerator and the cabinets and the stove, he and Regina went to dancing. The spun on the tiled floor and wiggled their asses. "Come on," she said to Morgan. "You're a fucking light weight anymore."

He grabbed his keys and went to the Beer Garden.

He was there, in the Garden, under the tent. He still had on jeans and a t-shirt, and he had several empty beer cups in front of him. His face had gone flush. He was getting a buzz on.

Hank Schneider, a friendly old farmer, sat across from him. He patted Morgan's hand. "How's that dad of yours getting along?" he said. "I ain't seen him in a while."

"He's alright," said Morgan. "He works a lot, then comes home and gets some shuteye. You know Hertel."

"Yeah," said Hank. "Some things never change," and he laughed.

Morgan looked at all the people in the tent, getting drunk, most of them already polluted. He thought, Hank ain't lying. Some things never change. Hertel doesn't. He still drinks whiskey every day of the week, drinks it like there's no tomorrow. He thought about it as he looked around him and back to Hank Schneider, drunk in front of him. He ordered another beer.

A little later, a girl who was still in high school came walking up to Morgan. It was a friend of Regina's. Her name was Debbie. "Hi," she said when she got close to him. "I thought I'd better tell you, I've got Lenora and Victoria in the car. I was life guarding and it came time to close. Nobody came and got them. I figured you'd be here." It had gotten dark outside.

"Was anybody at home?" he asked.

"I didn't check," said Debbie. "I knew you'd be here, so I came here."

"Hey," said Morgan. "Thanks. Could you do me a favor? Could you take them to my house and if Hertel's not there, could you wait for him to get there?"

Debbie looked at him funny at first; then she saw he was not kidding.

“Sure,” she said. “No problem.”

Morgan was in the pickup, easing down the lane that led up to Frankie’s house. The lights, the headlights from Morgan’s truck, were turned off. He wanted to take them by surprise. He parked a little ways down the lane, climbed out, and eased the door shut so that it just barely clicked. He walked around to the side of the house, where Frankie’s bedroom was. His parents were apparently gone, for no one was visible through the window. Morgan had been to Frankie’s house a million times. He couldn’t believe it had come to this.

Frankie’s room was upstairs; there was little veranda and a sliding door leading into it. Morgan put his foot on a window ledge and pulled himself up on a lower part of the roof. From there, he maneuvered his way to the veranda by Frankie’s room. He peeked inside, made sure they didn’t see him.

They were on the bed, naked, their faces flushed apple red. She was on her knees, her head against the wall. Frankie was driving for all he was worth. The stuff, white all over the mirror, was on a table by the bed. Morgan clinched his fists and stepped away; he felt the rage, the all-consuming anger growing like cancer within him. It surprised him more than a little when for once in his life he controlled it. It surged within him but he did not try to quell it. Instead he let it fester. He began to climb down from the roof. When he got to the lower ledge, a terrifying thought crept into his head. It said. And when does it stop And when does it stop. And that was all.

He walked fast to his truck. He told himself tomorrow he’d do something radical. Tomorrow, when Regina was clean, before she could get any more up her nose, he’d set her straight. One thing was certain though, he couldn’t do much about it now. Telling a stoned cokehead she couldn’t have any more was like telling a slobbering black labrador he couldn’t eat the steak bones you’d just laid in front of him. It was impossible, and Morgan knew it. But tomorrow, he told himself, he’d come back over to Frankies’ and break his fucking neck. He’d tell Regina she was through with him for good. He’d do all this tomorrow.

The trouble was, he didn’t want to wait. He needed to do something now. He needed to do something he could believe in with all his heart and soul.

In his pickup, he backed out of the lane and headed for home. He was there in a matter of minutes. The lights were on inside the house. Morgan shut the idling truck off and went inside. Hertel was in a rocker in the living room, Lenora and Victoria perched on his lap. A book was in one of his hands.

“What you breathing all hard about?” he said.

“Nothing in particular,” said Morgan. He headed for his room. The fiddle was in its case inside the closet. He took it out and walked back out past his dad.

“What the hell?” said Hertel.

“I’d stay and chat,” said Morgan, “but there isn’t any time for it. I’m on my way to the park.”

He drove to where the cars had begun to line up along the street, several blocks from the park and the dance. He parked and walked fast with his fiddle in his hands. He didn’t think he would ever get there. He jumped the fence and

made his way to the stage. People had crowded all around it. He pushed his way to the front.

The band had just finished "The Cotton Eyed Joe" when Morgan placed both feet on the stage. Jim Keller, the bass player and leader, looked at Morgan with his fiddle and broke into a grin. "Hey," he said, "looks like we got our fiddle player back. Hey everybody, we're gonna do an old Johnny Horton song for you now. It's called the 'Battle of New Orleans.' "

Morgan heard the crowd roar, put the fiddle to his chin and swallowed. Then he went to flying. The crowd roared loud below him as he shuffled amazingly on one leg. For a change, he felt good. He wondered if he could play all night.

Christa Taylor

“Trespassers”

Stepping over the angry sign
rusty barbs and slim
green tickling stalks

into the easy blue breeze
going through my blouse
like your fingers
through the leaves

we'll enter up crumbling
stone steps with flowers
in their fissures
and bits of sun sneaking
in the back door
like virgins coaxing
a sister on . . .

Gayle L. Bandt

“Insanity”

Incased in a shell of plumpness
Is this soul unique.
But, through struggles of insanity,
I search a better physique.

Humor my obsessions.
Gone are the chocolate bars,
That fuel my passion fires,
While leaving mournful scars.

Stifle my new found compulsion.
Gone the yogurt cones,
Decked in toffee and almonds.
Gone the K-State Union scones.

Curse the one who guided my steps
To the recreation work out center.
Aerobics make me sweat and groan,
Trying to be a model splinter.

Incase me again in my plumpness.
Let me find my soul unique.
No more struggles of insanity.
I give up the search for better physique.

Brenda Allen

An Impulse Kind of Thing

The first Saturday of summer—the night to party on some tropical beach with gobs of bronze, gorgeous guys waiting on your every need—and I was spending it with my brother in a country bar in Piqua, Kansas. Mail addressed to Piqua residents just said: John Doe, Piqua, Kansas, even if John Doe lived in the country. The town paper was a little old lady named Fern, the clerk at the Co-op. If you wanted to find out the news all you had to do was call, or ask the next time you went in to buy feed. However, Piqua had two things that made it more than just a spot on highway 69. It had a brand new bank (it looked more like a house than a bank) and a Knights of Columbus. One doubled the town's economy, the other—on Saturday nights—doubled the population.

The thing that made the Knights of Columbus such a party spot for me was that they would let anyone in who looked at least 18. And best of all, they didn't card at the bar. Consequently, the age group was usually a conglomeration ranging from age 14 to 60. In essence, it was a good place to go and get trashed.

The crowd was relatively young tonight, probably because of college just getting out for the summer. The huge dance floor running down the middle of the building filled with a mass of laughing, bobbing, wiggling, inebriated people. The beat pounding overhead was as intoxicating as the beer I was drinking. I wanted to dance, but my brother was cramping my style.

Now don't think I'm an ungrateful sister; I would have been ecstatic to dance with my brother. My brother simply didn't want to dance. He was content to sit and watch. That was just the way he was. I have no idea how we grew up in the same family. He reminded me of a neutered pit bull; he had a very mellow disposition, but his 6-foot-2 farm boy frame was extremely intimidating. Consequently, since the other interesting men in the crowd probably didn't know he was my brother (I said the bar was filled, but I didn't say it was filled with locals), I couldn't expect them to fall all over themselves in a rush to ask me to dance. I knew I had to do something. I excused myself to go get another beer.

I stood up and carefully adjusted my white mini-skirt. On the way to the bar, I screened the tables to find someone to "accidentally" be caught staring at. Disappointed at the selection, I bought my beer and went back to my brother's table. I'm also very picky. Tired of sitting, I leaned against the edge of the table to scan the dance floor. There had to be someone worth checking into. Leaning back on one hand and bending one knee, I arranged my shoulders and hips into a soft diagonal. Mom always told me that diagonal lines were the most pleasing to the eye, in this case hopefully the male eye. I kept my eyes focused on the various dancers as I bent my head forward to casually sip my beer. The result was uncomfortable as hell, but I'd seen my college friends do it and it looked pretty cool.

Maybe it was just a blast from the air conditioner overhead, but after it was over I was positive that I was psychic. My expensive tan acquired across the street from my dorm room at college began to tingle. I turned my head to find out where it was coming from. A tiny orange light two tables down brightened, catching my

attention. The blue lights from the dance floor illuminated the broad, masculine shoulders and short hair of the cigarette's owner. Once he caught me staring, he crushed his cigarette, stood up, and began walking toward me. His walk. His body. It was all so familiar. Fighting to control my excitement, I buried my head in my beer. It was Bryce Laidlaw.

I first met Bryce at a rollerhop when we were both in the sixth grade. He didn't have any of the awkwardness of the rest of the boys my age, and possessed the exciting quality of being an out-of-towner. He had sexy bond hair and blue eyes that would render you helpless. My friends and I could have sworn he was at least fifteen and we all thought he was gorgeous. On the other hand, I was the epitome of awkwardness. I was tall, skinny, and had the figure of an ironing board. My friends were short, cute, and some of them even had boobs—a fact that made me insanely jealous. But the amazing part was that out of all of us, Bryce asked me to dance. I never could quite figure that out.

We danced all the slow songs together and he even sang some of them in my ear. He had a great voice! And then (as if I hadn't already had enough surprises that night) during "Even the Nights are Better," he stopped singing and kissed me on the mouth smack dab in the middle of the dance floor! (Hey, it was a big deal back then, not to mention one of the brighter spots of my junior high career.) At the end of the night I gave him a long, hard bear hug. I don't know why I did it; we had already said our "see ya later's." I had come back for my jacket and he was still there. It was an impulse kind of thing.

I didn't see him again until basketball season of my freshman year of high school. We were playing his home town. My friends and I, caught up in the grown-upness of yelling our graduating class cheers, had yelled ourselves hoarse. I knew Bryce would be there, or rather I hoped Bryce would be there. I had been hoping since the basketball schedules were printed. The back of my Lab Science workbook was covered with the name Laidlaw (and an occasional heart here and there).

In my daydreams, our eyes were to lock across the basketball court, or we would be destined by fate to bump into one another on our way to the water fountain. (I watch entirely too many movies.) I think that is how I'll meet my future husband some day, I'll bump into him. That scenario is in my daydreams often enough.

Well, our eyes didn't exactly lock. I saw him walk in and I was too embarrassed to continue staring. At half-time I saw him leave for the concession stand, and so I decided to try and help fate out a little bit. I placed myself in the hall by the water fountain. He had to pass by it to get back to his seat. I asked my best friend, Sheri to go with me so I would at least look like I wasn't waiting for him. He finally came down the hall, drinking a coke and talking to an older man. When he passed by me, I called out "Hi, Bryce!" His head snapped around to see who had called his name. When he saw me, he said something to the older man and walked over to where my friend and I were standing.

"How ya doin?" he asked looking down at me with this fabulous smile. High school had done wonders for him, if that was possible. His body had filled out the way boys' bodies do, only his was much better. His arms and upper body were very

muscular, but not too muscular. They were the kind of muscles developed from hard work and not from steroids or weight-lifting. He was relatively short for a guy, only about four inches taller than 5-foot-4 me. But that was O.K.

Incredibly exited to see you, I thought. "Fine," I said. "How're you?"

"O.K.," he said, his eyes flitting over to Sheri who was watching all this with nosy interest. Even though she was my best friend, at that moment I didn't care if she became a missionary and moved to Mongolia just as long as she was anywhere but here. Unfortunately, she stuck by me like I'd asked her to. Why do people listen to me?

"So, you're fine then," he said.

I would have been a lot better if he would've grabbed me and kissed me like he did at the rollerhop. "Yeah," I said.

"It's really good to see you again," he said never losing that incredible smile.

If only Sheri wasn't here! Leave, Sheri! Leave! "It's really good to see you too," I said.

"What've you been up to?" he asked.

Planning our marriage. "Nothing," I said. "How 'bout you?"

"The same," he said. We both laughed. "Well, game's about to start."

Leave Sheri! Leave, leave, leave, leave!! "Yeah," I said.

"See ya around?" he asked hopefully.

"Of course!" I said. He wanted to see me again!

"Good," he said. "Well, bye."

Kiss me, you fool. "Bye," I said.

He turned and walked back into the gym to sit with the older man. So much for romantic interludes.

I never forgot Bryce, but after the basketball game my hormones turned to other interests. That is, until football season my sophomore year. I had been elected our high school mascot, a position I valued most highly. The mascot the previous year wore this stupid, moth-bitten, musty, old orange fur suit. I fought desperately for a new one. "Let's modernize the Cub," I said. "Do what you want," they said. "As long as it doesn't cost us any money."

I scrounged around and finally came up with some of my own black sweats, a tail made from the old suit, the ever present Cub head, and an old practice jersey "borrowed" from the football team.

It was number 25. At first this fact had absolutely no significance. Until the night that we played Bryce's hometown. Printed across my chest was the same number printed across the chest of one Bryce Laidlaw. After the game, the cheerleaders went to congratulate our players on winning. I went to talk to number 25 on the opposing team. He was walking towards the bus when I caught up with him.

"Bryce!" I yelled. He stopped and turned around, the loss showing on his face. "I thought you played a great game. Anyway, even if you did lose, you've still got great taste in numbers."

"What?" he asked.

I patted the number on my chest.

Recognition crossed his eyes and he gave me the fabulous smile again.

"Well, maybe my luck is changing," he said.

"Maybe it is," I smiled.

"Hurry up, Bryce!" yelled his coach from the bus.

"Gotta go," Bryce said. "See ya."

"Yeah," I said.

I never did return that old jersey.

The next few times that I saw Bryce were again at football games, only this time I was a junior, news editor of our high school paper, and up-and-coming ace photographer. Bryce had given up playing football and instead became a photographer and journalist for his high school paper. Another coincidence! Yes, those were the games that I fought to sign up for. The game where I could walk the sidelines with him armed with a camera and sweaty palms. But, even though I was sure we were destined to be girlfriend/boyfriend, we never got together. It was very frustrating. By my senior year, I had begun to give up on any hopes where Bryce was concerned.

Then came that magical day in chemistry about three weeks before our senior prom (guess who still didn't have a date). My lab partners were discussing this fact when one of them, who soon afterward became a very, very dear friend of mine slipped me a suggestion. He leaned over to the table and said, "Why don't you take Bryce Laidlaw? I hear he wants to go out with you."

Something resembling a Cinderella movie was on my mind for the rest of the afternoon. I rushed home to sit in front of the phone for two and one-half hours before finally getting up the nerve to actually call him. After one wrong number (I called his grandparents, how embarrassing), I reached Bryce and stammered out the question. He said yes!! I couldn't believe it; the day was too incredible. Nothing could go wrong! We made arrangements to talk again and make further plans. I didn't want to hang up the phone. I had an actual date with Bryce Laidlaw!! I never thought that weeks could actually blur, but that's exactly what the next two weeks did, blur.

Maybe I expected too much, I don't know. My date with Bryce was, well, nice. We danced; we ate; I wore his bow tie; I sat on his lap; we danced some more. He was an excellent dancer and told me that it was his favorite thing to do. When slow songs came on, it was like we returned to that rollerhop in sixth grade. He still sang the lyrics to certain songs softly in my ear. I wanted desperately for him to kiss me again like he did before, but the Principal always seemed to have his eagle-eye on us the whole time. Public displays of affection were definite no-no's in our high school.

The night's planned activities went on until about six the next morning. (Prom is a big deal in my hometown.) Bryce drove me home and we walked to my front door holding hands.

"I had a great time," I said.

"As did I," he said. There was that smile. He looked like he was about to kiss me, so I tilted my head to meet his.

The door opened. It was my dad.

"Oh, it's you," Dad said. "Wondered who was driving up the lane this early in the morning."

Dad just stood there and wouldn't leave. It reminded me of a certain friend at a water fountain one time.

"Well, uh, see ya 'round," said Bryce. "Nice to see you, sir."

"Yeah, see ya," I said.

He left me standing there with my dad. First the Principal, now Dad—the adult male population seemed to want me to be a spinster for the rest of my life.

I saw Bryce once more after that at a track meet; he was taking pictures and I was running. I wanted to tell him about how everybody at school claimed that we had the best pictures and what a cute couple we made. But I didn't. Graduation and then summer came and went, and I left for college. Bryce had gone off and joined the army in Arizona. I was positive that I would never see him again. Thoughts of Bryce were placed on a back burner so that I could concentrate on other things.

I could write books about college and the things that I experienced—getting drunk for the first time, throwing up for the first time, fraternity parties, bars, dancing, dirty dancing, male stripper shows, on and on and on. Everything about my lifestyle changed. However, I wasn't sure if I like all the changes.

And then I came back home for the summer. I had decided to take my brother out and taste the night life in Piqua. And here was Bryce, walking toward me.

I thought that I had forgotten everything that I had felt for him. I was dead wrong. Those feelings were still simmering, had been simmering on that back burner for one entire year. But this year, those feelings were a little different. There was something new. In that dark, smoky room the sight of him coupled with the alcohol in my body brought those feelings back to the surface with an overwhelming force. He looked like something out of a movie, a long playing movie.

"Hi," he said when he reached my table. There was that same unchangeable smile. For a moment I thought I recognized it. It almost looked like the ones I had seen on countless other faces in the bars at Kansas State. But then the moment was gone.

"Hi," I said. "I thought you were in Arizona."

"Yeah," he laughed. "I came back for Yates Center Days. You know, the parade, all that. I thought I'd hang out and see everybody, you know."

"Oh right," I answered. "I forgot that it was this weekend."

"So what's up?" he asked.

"The sky," I said. He didn't get it. "Never mind, just a little joke. I'm fine."

"Oh," he said. "How's college? You're at K-State, right?"

"It's over, finally," I answered, nodding my head. "How's Arizona?"

"It's great," he said. "I go out just about every weekend."

"Sounds like fun," I smiled. About this time a slow song began.

"Wanna dance," he said with that smile.

"Sure!" I answered.

The more we danced, the more we talked. When we weren't dancing, we were drinking and talking. We talked about Arizona, K-State, prom, our football jerseys, everything. He sang in my ear again. I think he knew exactly what it

did to me. And this time there was no principal watching. Our faces were no more than two inches apart the whole time. But the rest of our bodies, well that's another matter. All the alcohol that I was consuming enhanced the tingle that was moving through my body. Everything was beginning to look unreal. I was in a dream world and I loved it. I had totally forgotten my brother and everyone else that was in that place. At one o'clock the band stopped playing and the lights came on. We were still in our own little world even though the alcohol had worn off somewhat. Then Bryce asked the question.

"What are you doing now?"

"Nothing," I replied.

"You might want to come to Yates Center and cruise around for awhile," he said, with that smile.

"I might do that," I said encouragingly.

"Hey sis, you about ready to go?" It was my brother. He was yelling at me from the table he had been sitting at all this time.

"Oh, I forgot. My brother is with me," I explained to Bryce.

"Well, take him home and then come to Yates Center," Bryce offered.

My home was only five miles from the bar and fifteen minutes from Yates Center. I had waited all this time, thirty more minutes wouldn't be that long. "Great idea!" I answered.

"Cool," he said. His smile widened.

"Cool," I said, a smug smile broadening on my lips.

We stared a bit longer passing wordless messages. We both knew what we were proposing and we both were consenting wholeheartedly. We separated. We left.

I drove my brother home thinking of all the fantasies that I had locked up all these years and how now, finally, I would see them turn to reality. I walked with my brother into the house thinking about Bryce's lips on mine, my football jersey, our dancing on the dance floor, photography, our bodies touching, water fountains, on and on. I went to my room.

I fell asleep.

I heard he went back to Arizona the next day. I knew that this time, I really would never see him again. I don't know exactly why I didn't go to Yates Center that night. Maybe it was an impulse kind of thing or maybe it's because I prefer Bryce at a simmer, rather than at a boil.

Gwendolyn Harra

“Sweetie, I think you better stay home today”

You have to start a couple of days early,
If you want guaranteed success
Get the heating pad from the close shelf,
And your Mom's plant mister from her utility room.
Hide them beneath your bed.
At supper, don't eat dessert,
Even if it's your favorite.
After dinner, lay on the couch.
Watch TV, but don't laugh
no matter how funny it is.
Don't argue at bedtime,
Just go.

Sleep with the heating pad on high all night.
This will make you sweat and toss and turn.
In the morning, heat up your face.
Then mist your face for a little extra sweat.
Don't over do it!!
Just one squirt on the extra fine adjustment.
When Mom comes upstairs
Tell her you slept through the alarm.
She'll look at you and get a thermometer.
When she has it in your mouth weakly ask for a drink of water.
While she is gone use the heating pad to make it read 100 ' .
Don't go any higher.
She'll call a doctor.
As close as you can get to 100 ' ,
Without going over,
Will win you two aspirin,
And one day home from school
Without supervision.

Tim Taylor

Tempting Fate

Susan noticed that Jack was getting increasingly tense as the traffic slowed down. Huge wet snowflakes nearly obscured their view of the road, and despite the work of the wipers, the windshield was slowly caking over with ice.

"Damn," Jack said. "If we would have started when we were supposed to, we wouldn't be here now. We'd be past this storm and halfway to St. Louis." His voice sounded a little accusing.

Susan sighed. "Okay. I'm sorry that Dawn and I wanted to stay around long enough to say goodbye to my mom."

The interstate was a dirty gray with deep ruts in it. The snow had only been falling since 10:00 that morning, but it was coming down at an incredible rate. The cars in front of them slowed down some more. Susan couldn't see the speedometer very well from where she was sitting, but it sure seemed slow.

Jack glanced over at her, and his face looked like he was trying to apologize. "I'm just frustrated with myself, Babe," he said. "It's still the middle of Christmas break and none of us felt like moving very fast this morning . . ." He was watching the road again. "No use saying anything about it now, but sometimes it seems like we're always creating unlucky situations for ourselves."

He stressed the word "creating," and Susan knew he probably saw some kind of weird irony in the situation. In the few months they had been married she'd been most surprised at the things he'd laugh at.

Dawn interrupted her thoughts from the back seat. "What's going on?" Dawn had been immersed in a book of Ayn Rand's early short stories ever since they'd left Chesterton and seemed oblivious to the fact that they were driving through a blizzard.

"Hell if I know," Jack offered helpfully. "Maybe there's an accident up ahead."

In another minute or two they were stopped completely and they all strained to see what they could through the storm.

"There's a firetruck parked across the highway," Susan said.

"And a couple of police cars," Jack confirmed. "There's a cop out there directing traffic off onto an exit. What exit is that anyway?"

Susan was in charge of the map and she had been paying attention to where they were. "I think we just passed a sign saying it was for US 20."

"I don't see any wreck up there," Dawn said.

Probably they've got some severe problems in Chicago because of the storm," Jack said, "and they don't want to make them any worse by letting more people drive through. I bet that's what it is."

"Well, what are we going to do?" Dawn asked.

"Get off on US 20," Jack said. "Unless you want to park here until the snow melts."

It was getting pretty stuffy in the car so Susan rolled down her window an

inch or so. Huge flakes floated in and piled up on the arm rest. "What she means," Susan said, "is are we going to take 20 north or south?"

"If we go north we could swing around and be back at Mom's in a couple of hours," Dawn said.

"Yeah, and maybe get stuck there for a week or so," Jack said. "It's not that I have anything against your mom—I love your mom—but I need to get back to KC to work."

"I know," Dawn said. "But maybe this whole thing wasn't such a good idea in the first place."

Jack was looking in the rear view mirror with a kind of tight expression on his face and Susan figured he must be looking at Dawn. She turned around in her seat. "Come on, Dawn. You'll love staying with us for the rest of your break. And I miss having my gorgeous big sister around to make me jealous."

Dawn pushed her perfect blonde hair back, leaned forward and put her hand on Susan's cheek affectionately. "You're such a muffinhead. I don't know why I put up with you and your ridiculous side-kick." But she was smiling.

"Because I make you feel good," Susan smiled back. Susan remembered how in junior high, if a new boy came into their school and he hadn't shown a lot of interest in Dawn by the end of the week, Dawn would feel pretty hurt. It was silly, but it was true. And Susan had always been there to give Dawn a big hug and reassure her that she was the prettiest girl in the school. It seemed like Dawn still needed a lot of male attention.

"Is there any way we can get past Chicago without using the interstates?" Jack asked.

Dawn looked over Susan's shoulder and they consulted for awhile. "If you take 20 south there is a route that will get you onto I-55 headed for St. Louis eventually," Dawn said.

"Eventually?"

"You have to cut back east a couple of times and there are a lot of roads marked in gray," Dawn said, "if you want to risk it."

All three of them knew about the roads marked in gray. Ever since they'd traveled through the wastelands of northern Indiana on their way back from Muncie a week ago, they'd developed an intense hatred of the roads in gray.

Jack was drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. The decision was pretty much up to him. He was the only one of them that felt really comfortable driving on the snow, so presumably he had some kind of feeling for whether this was safe or not. He looked tortured. Susan waited impatiently, knowing it was crazy, but hoping he'd go south. She couldn't take another week with the step-siblings at Mom's house.

Finally it was their turn to slide down the off-ramp and Jack steered them to the left. "Hell this isn't so bad," he said. "I was out on I-70 in a real storm once . . ." He turned south.

A couple of hours went by slowly. Jack was busy concentrating on the road, following the tail-lights of the car in front of him, which was about all there was to see. That and the cars off in the ditch on the side of the road. Jack pulled over

once to scrape the build-up of ice off the windshield, and then they had some heart-pounding excitement while they wondered whether or not they were going to be able to get back onto the road. But other than that, things were pretty uneventful till they passed Valparaiso, the local county seat. From Valpo on, there was no safe place to stop and no way to turn back till they got to I-55.

Somehow they talked Dawn into telling them about the story she was reading in order to pass the time.

"So the woman realizes then that her husband has really, totally fallen for the other woman and there's no way she can get him back," Dawn explained.

"How can she be so sure of that?" Jack asked skeptically.

"Women just know these things," Susan told him. Jack looked at her strangely.

"A lot of Ayn Rand's characters are very passionate like this," Dawn said. "She's made the idea work very well in some of her novels."

"Go ahead and read the story from where you are now," Jack said.

Dawn continued until she got to the point where the woman was at the restaurant acting scandalously so that her husband would have a good reason to divorce her.

"I don't believe this," Jack interrupted. "This chick is off in fantasy land."

Dawn sighed. "This is one of Rand's earlier stories. She was probably still having some trouble using the language the way she wanted to and overcoming the cultural differences between Russia and the United States."

Jack was practically glaring in the rearview mirror again. "I'm not attacking her writing style," he said, "I'm attacking the idea that it's good for people to act this way, which I don't believe they would anyway."

Susan wondered what was with him. He and Dawn didn't know each other all that well. They had seen each other briefly when Jack had come up to see Susan before the wedding, and since then, they'd written some letters, but other than that, this Christmas vacation had been the first time Jack and Dawn had really gotten to talk to each other. Mostly they seemed to be getting along very well.

Susan remembered last Thursday when she had made her obligatory visit to see uncle Dick, and Jack and Dawn had declined to go with her. Of course, that was no surprise. At her mom's house, if it was even suspected that uncle Dick might be calling, everyone would stay away from the telephone. Ever since he had gotten his head caught in the stamping machine, he had been a little odd. But she had been surprised to find her husband and her sister missing when she got back.

"Oh," Mom said, "I think they went out to Pizza Hut for dinner. Your step-siblings have been out wreaking havoc some place and I didn't feel like fixing anything for just the three of us, so Jack said he'd keep his sister-in-law from starving." Mom was working nights, so she wasn't always real coherent during the day. Or real eager to do anything. "Those two have been talking all day long. I'm glad they left finally. Makes it hard for a person to get any sleep."

At the time, Susan had been so pleased to see the two people she cared about most in the world getting on so well together that she'd almost forgiven them for

going out for pizza without her. Presently though, they didn't seem to be relating so harmoniously.

"I still maintain," Jack said, as he skillfully drove past the thirty-fourth car they'd seen in the ditch so far, "that the woman has a really backwards concept of love. I mean, first of all, she's manipulating her husband's life into what she thinks is best for him and destroying herself in the process. That's not love. And I can't believe that any real person would act that way."

"You're missing the point," Dawn said. "She's simply seeing the facts of the situation and accepting them and doing the best she can according to her moral values or whatever. Susan knows what I mean, don't you Susan?"

Susan felt a little uncomfortable. "Well I understand what you mean about her moral system."

"Well, maybe," Jack conceded. "But what about this other 'love' then? I don't believe that 'love' can just strike you and overpower you and force you to do things like this."

"Yeah, I know you don't," Dawn said. "But can we assume, for the sake of the story, that there is another set of morals involved here that make this inevitable love a sort of rational inevitability?"

Jack looked annoyed for a moment, and then he laughed shortly. "I apologize. Sometimes I forget that I haven't uncovered all the secrets of the universe yet."

Dawn was quiet momentarily. "Are you saying I might have a point?" She sounded like someone who wants to laugh but isn't quite sure they've gotten the joke.

"I hesitate to go that far, but it was rude of me to interrupt you. Go ahead and read the rest of the story and maybe it'll all make sense."

Dawn nudged Susan's shoulder and winked at her. "When this all makes sense to him, then you'd better keep your eye on him."

"I do that already." Susan bit her lip. What the hell did Dawn mean by that? Suddenly the discussion about the nature of love seemed to be more personal than abstract and a vague suspicion began to form in the back of her head, but she pushed it away.

It was nearly 9:00 at night now and it was quite dark. The snow was still coming down thick and heavy, but the wind wasn't blowing them around quite so much. They'd been on I-55 for awhile now, and snow-plows were out clearing the road a bit, so that they were able to travel about half as fast as normal.

A huge lighted sign for an Amoco station looked like a UFO hovering above the next exit. Snow and ice had obscured its letters and it was impossible to see its supports through the storm, but it had the right shape and color. They had been traveling in a sort of a pack with 20 other cars whose drivers were also sufficiently deranged to be out in this weather, and when the first car in line turned off at the exit, everyone else followed.

Cars milled around in the parking lot, waiting for an opportunity to drive up under the shelter, under the lights by the gas pumps. They were all sort of gray

formless blobs with the dirt and snow from the road caked onto their sides and huge chunks of ice hanging from their bumpers.

Susan and Dawn went inside for a cup of coffee while Jack filled the car with gas and got the wiper blades replaced.

"How much longer can this storm last?" Susan asked rhetorically.

"How much longer can Jack last?" Dawn asked.

Susan grinned involuntarily. "As long as he has to I guess." She reflected for a moment. "Once he decided about something, he doesn't change his mind very easily." She and Jack were so much alike in that way.

"One of these days," Dawn said, "he's going to have to get cured of that."

Susan looked at her sister sharply. Why Dawn? she wanted to ask, but she shrugged. "Things always seem to work out okay."

"That's such an irresponsible attitude." Dawn's voice was getting irritating. "I don't know how many times I've told you you're too young to get married."

"Yeah, you've always told me everything I ought to do," Susan said.

It was a worn out argument. She and Dawn had always done everything together. Dawn was only a year and a half older than Susan so for most of their lives they'd borrowed each other's clothes and stuck up for each other in school and generally been best friends. But Dawn was a perfect kid and Susan wasn't. Dawn always got along with her parents and teachers and made straight A's. Susan, however, couldn't just do what she was told—she always asked the stupid questions and had to do everything the hard way. Dawn had had several intimate relationships, but she had never gotten really serious and never would until she was out of college and financially independent. Susan, on the other hand, had gotten married in the middle of her freshman year. Over the years they'd had millions of discussions over what was essentially the same topic and Susan didn't want to hear it again. I wish I could be like you, but I just can't! she thought.

Dawn had stared out the window into the storm after Susan's last remark, instead of giving her lecture number four million or whatever they were up to now. Maybe she had problems to worry about, too.

The intensity of the storm decreased as they got closer to St. Louis until it disappeared about 20 miles from the Missouri border. Susan knew he had expected to drive straight through to Kansas City that night, but then, when they had originally planned this out, they had figured on about five hours from Chicago to St. Louis instead of eleven.

"Do either of you feel like driving?" Jack asked.

They didn't.

"Well I can't go any further tonight," he said, "if you think I should, I will, but I'm about to nod off right now."

They got off at the next exit and stopped at a Best Western which was just a block down the street. Jack went in to get a room while Dawn and Susan rummaged through the trunk to find the suitcases they needed to take inside. In a minute or so Jack came back.

"We're lucky," he said as he took a suitcase out of Susan's hand. "The guy

at the desk said everyone and their dog has been stopping here because of the storm, but he had a few rooms left on the second floor."

Jack led them through the lobby to the elevator. The lobby had a vaulted ceiling and an open walkway passed through overhead connecting the second floor hallway from one end of the building to the other.

They got off the elevator and found their room two doors down on the left hand side of the hall. Dawn claimed the shower first.. Jack flipped on the TV while Susan ordered out for pizza. Then Jack held her down on the bed and kissed her ears.

"Why do we do these crazy things anyway?" Jack asked, smiling, holding his face close to hers and looking straight in her eyes.

"What? Wild, passionate necking on the bed?" Susan asked in mock surprise.

"You know what I mean. I shouldn't be so stubborn. What makes us take risks like I did today?"

Susan tickled his ribs. She could make him absolutely helpless with laughter by tickling. "Well, in your case, the forces of nature are intervening to rectify an obvious mistake. I don't expect you'll survive yourself much longer."

She had some trouble getting the last of it out as he squirmed on top of her, exploding with little bursts of laughter and trying to pin her hands. "And in your case," he said when he had finally gained control, "I suppose you believe the universe couldn't produce a totally perfect being, so your lapses of reason are your one minor flaw."

"Of course," she said. "Although I hadn't expected someone of your mental capacity to fully apprehend the concept."

"You're such a muffinhead," he smiled at her, and then he leaned forward and growled in her ear until she took it all back. She laughed, but she wondered how serious Jack's question had been. They didn't always make the best decisions.

They were sitting next to each other watching MTV when Dawn emerged from the bathroom, looking like Venus and wearing her BSU t-shirt. Susan felt a twinge of jealousy as she inadvertently noticed Dawn's perfect legs. Jack glanced at Dawn, and then looked back at the TV.

"You can have the shower first, Babe," Jack said to Susan, as he continued to watch the Aerosmith video. "I'm going down to the lobby and play some video games while I wait for the pizza." Susan hugged him gratefully.

She finished her shower quickly, pulled on her sweats and a t-shirt and stepped out of the bathroom to find only the TV waiting for her. Damn, she thought with a smile, everytime I look the other way Dawn and Jack disappear on me. Well, Dawn had probably gotten bored watching TV. Susan looked at the AT&T commercial and decided that she was bored too. She snapped off the TV and stepped out into the hallway, not quite willing to admit the vague tight feeling in her gut.

She called the elevator and then stepped out on the walkway above the lobby. The video games were located toward the back of the lobby, and Jack was there playing Galaga with Dawn looking over his shoulder. There was a certain sort of

secretive thrill Susan felt in the knowledge that she could probably call their names and they wouldn't see her for a moment or two because people don't think about looking up.

"I used to be pretty good at this when I was in high school," Jack said. "That was back when these things were really popular."

"They're still popular with my little step-brothers," Dawn said.

"Yeah, but it's not like it used to be. They used to be new and exciting to everyone. It was like magic. But I guess after you've lived with something for awhile, it loses its charm."

"Like monogamy?" Dawn asked.

Susan gripped the handrail on the walkway tightly. The elevator dinged behind her, but she ignored it.

Jack, still looking at the screen in front of him, laughed abruptly. "Well, Dawn, it's not exactly like a video game," he said. "You have an interesting sense of humor."

"So do you," Dawn said. "I suppose I haven't known you long enough for you to lose your charm."

"You will in time."

"Never," Dawn said, "but some things do have to be that way. Life is easier if you figure out what's really inevitable and give into it."

"Are you implying that I should have quit driving before I did?" Jack still sounded amused.

"Maybe. But then I might be implying something else, too." She kissed him.

Susan felt dizzy. What was Dawn trying to do? Through her rising nausea she saw Jack turn away from the video game.

"What the hell are you talking about now?"

"Don't be so stubborn. You can't deny facts. I know what you feel about me."

How could Dawn do this to her? Susan wondered. Her body was cold and she was trembling.

"Maybe you do," Jack said finally. "Do you really know how you feel?"

"Yeah."

"I'm really glad we've gotten to know each other, Dawn. You mean something to Susan, so you mean something to me. You feel the same way about me, that's all."

Silence for awhile. "I guess maybe you're right," Dawn said.

"Of course. Force of habit." Jack looked back at the video game. "Damn, that was my last ship. Do you have a quarter I could borrow?"

Susan pried her fingers from the railing and stepped carefully backward, not making any noise. How would she feel if they saw her now? She wanted to lie down.

Susan was not really watching *The Witches of Eastwick* when Dawn came in a couple of minutes later and sat down on the other bed. She felt Dawn looking at her, and she glanced quickly back, but Dawn looked away at the TV.

Jack came in with pizza ten minutes later. He put the pizza down on the table by the window and opened a box. "Help yourselves." When neither of them responded, he looked at Susan. "You okay?" he asked.

She forced a smile. "Yeah, sure, as soon as I get something to eat." She got up and went over to the table.

"I know how you feel," Dawn said. "I'm starved."

You can have the half with cyanide on it, Susan thought, but she didn't say anything. She wanted to hate Dawn, but, in a way, she understood. Nothing had come of the incident. It was all over now, and after awhile she'd quit feeling hurt. Like in a couple of years. It would take longer than that for her to want to be like Dawn again.

For some reason, Susan woke up early the next morning. The room was still dark and she felt terribly hot. She crawled out of bed and went over to stand by the window. As she put her fingers against the cold glass, she looked out over the deserted street and the highway, thinking. It took awhile for the significance of what she was seeing to sink in. The snow piled up on the ground and more of it falling. While they had slept the storm had passed them.

She thought about unlucky situations and it came to her that perhaps some things were never really "all over."

She crawled back in bed and put her arm around Jack's chest possessively.

Leah McCoy

“Freedom”

While the wind blows,
She talks to me.

Times she whispers,
Times she cries.

She dances in my hair,
(Seems to make her home in there.)

Joyfully running in song,
Her theme unknown.

And catching my thoughts,
Laughing, throws them away.

Till I am as
Giddy as she,

Forgetting all—
Woes and fears alike,

And to dance
Through the field,

Hand in hand,
Arm in arm,

Just as one fool
With another.

Kevin Olbrysh

“Too Thick For the Day”

Walk in the sun
With your over-skin on,
The robins proclaiming
The sly, vernal heat.
Your coat weighs upon you
Like a dinosaur's hide;
A liability in the transient climb.
The thin and the robins delight
Under the sun's warm umbrella—
Its power compounded
Owing to your thickness.

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