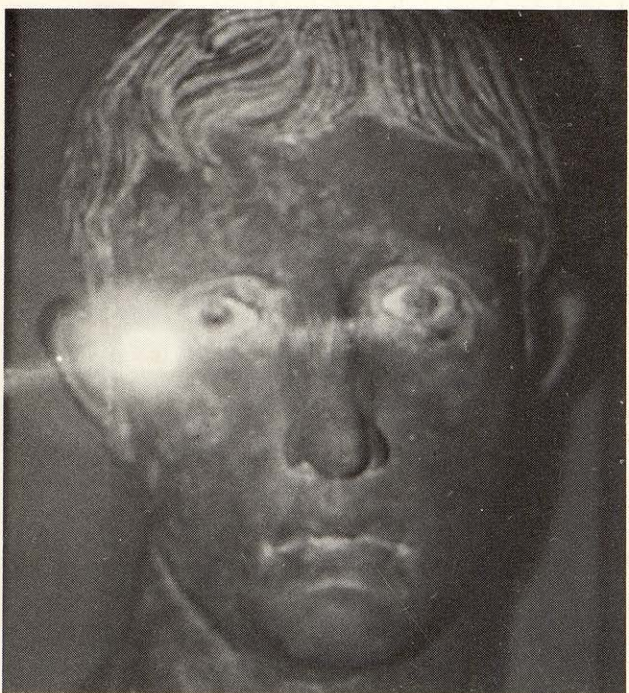


HOUCISH-ONZE



Lincoln Konkle
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TOUCHSTONE

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Errata: The Editors would like to apologize for and amend the following errors: Table of Contents: "John Appling Sears" should read "John Appling Sours." Page 53: "Sue Saniel Elkin" should read "Sue Saniel Elkind." Page 55: Kenneth Johnston should appear on the list of patrons.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONTESTS

High School

The MASTER Teacher is an educational company based in Manhattan, Kansas, whose sole purpose is the professional development of educators. Its world renowned publication, The MASTER Teacher, is used in over 15,000 schools in the United States, Canada, and eighteen foreign countries and is used by more than 150,000 teachers each week of the school year. In addition, The MASTER Teacher publishes professional development materials for school board members, school administrators and business people.

The MASTER Teacher conducts seminars and workshops, varying in length from one to five days, for individual schools and teachers. This year, with **Touchstone,** The MASTER Teacher is sponsoring a high school fiction and poetry contest. Both are proud to announce the selection by the judges, Professor Ben Nyberg and Professor Emeritus Will Moses, of this year's winners, **Ted Dace,** fiction, and **Ann Stoll,** poetry.

College

The English Department at Kansas State University, as part of its continuing effort to promote good writing habits and to encourage young writers, has this year sponsored, with **Touchstone,** its undergraduate fiction and poetry prizes. This year there were co-winners in both categories, and we are proud to recognize **Jim Stein** (this issue) and **Gary Johnson** (next issue), in fiction, and **Cheryl Shell** and **R. Hayden** (this issue), in poetry.

Preface

It has been a year to remember, for myself and, I think, for Touchstone as well. Next year I will move on to Duke University and leave the managing to Roger Friedmann, and to Debbie Leasure the year following; we are all dedicated to continuing to help Touchstone develop, to suit its growing markets and to provide a forum to the writing interests we represent.

In the second issue of our year, we welcome you to the product of a year's full growth. In this annual contest issue we have the winners of the Kansas high school and Kansas State University undergraduate contests contributing their new talents to the literary stage. Along with our prize winners, we also have a healthy group of more established writers of prose and poetry to balance the old and the new.

The editors are pleased to announce that, starting with the fall issue, submissions of art will also be accepted, in care of our art editor, Miriam Shaheed. In conjunction with this, I feel it is most appropriate to call attention to the artistic nature of the cover: in honor of the revitalization of Kansas State University's student literary magazine, we take the image of a similarly vital Roman emperor from the British Museum; in future issues we expect to feature local architectural and natural sights, beginning, appropriate to its renewal, with a photograph of Nichols Gym burning a decade and a half ago.

For the easement and voluntary aid given by our staff and by our advisors and our patrons and everyone who has been available for imposition, these thanks are what I give now.

The Dark is a Door

Susan Strayer Deal

The dark is a door
you can open or a window
or a curtain that
will slide free, letting
you in. The dark is
a door that will open.
The dark is tonight,
with stars pendulous
as white buds,
bobbing and blinking on
a huge black bush;
always on the verge
of blooming open.
We go into. We go through
the dark door into
the hush and alien splendor
of grasses at night.
Of crickets whittling
away at something.
Of the cool, damp trunks
of trees. Of flowers closed
and still and dreaming
on their stalks. We do not
talk. We move carefully
into the dark. Deep to our
right and left, before and
behind, the night things are
with us, awake and watching.
In this other world, something
in us aches of the familiar.
Dark, dark blood stirs.
We open the door of the dark
to enter a history, a memory.
Stones at our feet and gravel
reveal old faces. Noises
and whispers, wind in the leaves,
cries in the distance, speak
with a voice that we've heard.

We enter these nights trying
to answer. Close to a secret,
we tremble with words.
But the dark is a door we can
only voicelessly enter;
a place before the word.

HOUND

Bethany Schroeder

The sun was always up
in Southern California as I
slipped from under the sheets,
not wanting to roil
the jetsam of our double berth.

On the street, the dachshund
scuffed and tottered home.
The morning's urine wet
his feet, then he heaved on,
eyes wide with long-eared standing.

I thought, I'd swap sailor's bunk
for hound house now to see him
skip instead of scrape. Beast, broken
at the back from gutter shots,
from stabbing air reminds me

of us, of the hole
in the bed our bodies make
when we grope at the genital space
left by our pegless legs. By sunrise
we tried over and failed to jump.

**THERE IS A GREETING
AS WELL AS A PARTING**

Mindy Wolf

On Bridge St., in the 90 degree heat,
I loll against the brick buildings
waiting for the hours to pass
on the bank clock.

I think of friends who knock once
then go away forever,
of embarrassed new lovers
who turn the bedroom light on
and look at a stranger's body:
it is too difficult to begin again.

But it is in that turn toward light
when, from all the stories we narrate
so well, we must choose those
that tell ourselves.

We wait, shuddering awake, sheets
pulled to our chins,
for the words, like fugitives,
to come out of hiding
so that we might tell, without end,
the story of our beginning
again and again.

ASH WEDNESDAY

William Luvaas

Waiting in the front hall bottleneck of messing and milling at the end of the school day, Natalie shot her eyes down long corridors and demanded of no one in particular, "Where's Ms. P? I need music. You can't do a play without music--" Although she knew very well that it wasn't intermezzo music she needed most to discuss with Ms. Pearl but the basketball game they had dropped last night to the deafies at Helen Keller School.

Each time she had set to shoot, a shag-cut little monster heaved out her tongue, unleashed a spittle-laden howl, and the ball larruped in wild panic. Even Marney Mahoy who invariably dominated the key (not so much center as Sherman tank) went watery before a six-five deaf mute with hands the size of palmetto leaves. Today, half the team had skipped school in embarrassment and practice had been canceled.

"Hey! Listen to this--" Zack waved a fat paperback over the voice clutter. "There was only one casualty in the great May-hee-co City earthquake of 1973. Some hombre knelt in the street to pray and a bus wasted him." Laughter. Speculation about who would get the part at Emerson High. "I can see it now--" Karl spread his pudgy fingers "--ten thousand mourners crawling down Fifth Avenue...in kneepads!" He slid Natalie a look. Kneepads were the emblem of her plucky ball playing; everyone knew that.

"Screw you, Houseman," she said.

Karl gurgled. Barney bumped around on his knees like a dumb penguin. Jillie groaned. "I gotta finish my term paper--too-night..." Jerk Lydia was arguing with Marney Mahoy about penitential ashes. "They're human ashes," she insisted, eyes wider than doors of Saint Patrick's; "little crystals and bone chips...really!"

"Hotcha hotcha--" hooted Barney.

"Ouch!" shrieked Natalie.

She swiveled around to a head stuck sideways at chest height, skewed bizarrely upward as if listening. "Excuse me please," it said in a voice nasally mechanical, lips glistening as if they might drool. She stepped aside and with mocking graciousness made a sweeping motion with her arm. Ellory hummed past, wilted in the big wheelchair, a tower of books balanced on his shriveled lap. Karl had labeled him "the brain on wheels." "Creep," Natalie muttered. At the door, the chair spun neatly about and forced its way out in reverse. "Ellory, mah man--" Barney penguined in that direction, bouncing up as Dr. Lang emerged from his office. No one noticed that Ellory had not asked help bumping his wheelchair down the front steps.

Natalie was examining her barked calves when Ms. Pearl left the building. Jillie nudged her. "Hey coach--" Natalie made a fast break for the door: flying out--and skittering down the new ramp just installed for the wheelchair gang. Arriving in a graceless heap at bottom.

"Shit!"

She looked up sheepishly. Ms. P's eyebrows arched. "Very nice," she frowned. Inside, Natalie had drawn the biggest laugh of the afternoon. Karl grinned like a sick owl, even Ellory twisted his inscrutable, catterwhumpus face around at the corner. She wrenched out her tongue at him and he went on. Down the sawdust-floured ramp weaved tracks of unlikely hybrid: Ellory's wheels framing the scuttle of her ass. She recalled Karl's prophecy: "Pre-ramp there's only one Ellory, post-ramp there'll be an invasion."

"What do we need that stupid thing for?" she yowled. "Soon everything'll be for cripples. Basketball players will all be double amputees. And everybody normal will be put away."

Jillie stopped whacking sawdust off her friend's butt to regard her in mild shock. Ms. Pearl said in typical monotone; "I do believe it. Last night, for example, I had a whole team full of paraplegics."

"Wait a second," Natalie cried. "Every time I made a shot one of those creeps screamed and I nearly wet my pants."

Ms. Pearl frowned approvingly. Lungs Lang emerged with the sleepy-eyed carpenter, his voice whumping off buildings and ricocheting away down the street. "'Lo Miss Pearl... girls." As he went on bald-headedly, his Stentor's voice boomeranged back at them, bunching up air like a sonic boom: "Glad you're making use of the new ramp, Natalie." She aimed a silent kick in his direction.

The trio set out for the record shop on Broadway. Early spring sunlight angled down with near solidity as if thrown

from a bucket, washing buildings on the north side of the street, drunk deep into pores of brick and brownstone that opened with delight. They laughed and filled up with it, spread out and devised plays as they went, bouncing balls that popped like magic into the blue net of the sky. When a woman hurried past, forehead humbled with ash, Natalie rushed to the base of a spindly tree, scratched up a handful of dirt and brazenly daubed foreheads--would have gotten Ms. P's if she'd been just a little quicker.

They overtook a shuffling, disheveled derelict whose face wore the dreamy-drugged expression of one who has been drowsing in the sun. He stopped to watch them pass--two school girls and their athletic young teacher--one side of his face working in a moronic, chawing leer as he yammered to himself.

"Pee-you!" cried Natalie. He was pissy as a subway phone booth.

"That wasn't necessary," chided Ms. Pearl. "You may be in that shape yourself someday."

"Oh sure--" But Natalie glanced back at him--shuffling on, mumbling disconsolately--and was stung with something like shame.

Walking down Broadway, the city's midway, toward the Babylon of midtown, past fenced mini-parks where old men guarded benches, mouths hung wide as if expecting at any moment--out of this chaos--to behold the Messiah; or hang-head, drowning in eternal sleep. Taxis hurtled headlong mere inches from the curb, as if this absolute disregard for human life were the secret of their invincibility. On a street corner a bag lady fumbled a thumb in her nose and wagged obscene signs with filthy fingers. The girls laughed uneasily. Ms. P proclaimed that New York is where Dickens or Dostoevski would live if they were alive today. "I know--" cried Jillie, suddenly animated, double-stepping to keep pace with Ms. P's block-long stride. The girl, whose latest passion was the Brothers Karamazov and within it had found a new meaning in life, began spouting that the highest human quality isn't brains (even spiders are brilliant at what they do) but kindness. Ms. P cocked her head dubiously. Natalie, who had heard it all before, stopped to gawk in the show window of "Rightway Surgical Supplies." Straight out of Poe. Shiny stainless steel bone bolts, flesh-hued plastic limbs contoured to every prosthesis--naked and new, with a sales pitch of human anguish. She shivered deliciously.

"Altruism--" Jillie said it like the conceit of a vocab quiz "--is something only humans have." Her face glowed triumphantly.

"Wrong!" Natalie tore her eyes away from an evil looking

catheter. "Baboons risk their lives to protect the troop, and elephants bury dead elephants--"

"Don't forget St. Bernards..." said Ms. P with a fat smile for Broadway and the wide world.

"That just proves my point," cried Jillie. "Kindness is the highest instinct in the animal kingdom."

"Even Marney Mahoy is capable of kindness," mocked Natalie, as two nuns passed, faces lamb white under black wimples--living sacrifices, she thought, with little gray brands on their foreheads. She remembered how as a girl she always got it wrong and would cry out, almost in their faces: "Look Mommy, there go the nuts." The memory delighted her.

Around a corner ahead swung a man who Jillie might have conjured from a Russian novel. Incredibly, in this city of everyday deformity, they all saw him at once. Ms. Pearl's hands went out reflexively. Pedestrians scattered, for his gait required the entire sidewalk. He ambled drunkenly, first toward shops, then, as if slipping downhill, to the curb. Not a walk really, a quasi-mechanical shuffle, appearing to originate in some flagellate's cell of his brain and work downward in spasms and jerks. A forward thrust of torso, an arm slung back, one twisted leg scuffled ahead, shoulder following, and the other--with its brace catching the shoe in a stirrup--flung around like a hockey stick...there! catching himself in rigid transition, the labored process begun again. Head bobbing loose-hinged upon its neck. Long strings of hair a curtain against the world. A thermos, hooked precariously in the crook of a finger, bumped to the staccato of his limp. He wasn't much older than the girls, but his face was drawn and furrowed like an old man's and his eyes held the world with the severity of Ahab.

"He's disgusting," muttered Natalie; "even as cripples go he's disgusting."

"Shut it!" snapped Ms. P.

But wasn't it true? The many oldsters in this silver and senility zone seemed eager to avoid him, as though he embodied the ultimate futility of youth. A woman in an ersatz leopard skin coat eyed him warily as he rested a moment against a van in a painfully slanted "h," then turned her scandalized little eyes upon fellow passers-by to see if they shared his infirmities. He started off again, automatic as Ellory, launched in his bobbing dance headlong to the next resting place--steering directly for them. Natalie quickly found a jaunty, colorful display of deco Easter eggs in a shop window. She nudged Jillie, but the jerk could scarcely spare her fawn eyes for a moment from the cripple's

progress.

He stopped shortly to rest his forehead against a parking meter, staring at it with grim longing. "What's so special about him?" demanded Natalie. Though her eyes remained fixed on the little man when he hurried off--in a great rush, but near exhaustion too--on bandy legs that seemed about to buckle beneath him. Something about him fascinated her. It had to be terribly hard work, most likely painful, yet he shuttled off almost recklessly, contemptuous of his plight, knowing there would be no end to it. His head bobbed and long fibers of nerves appeared to snap and crackle about it like raw little whips. It could be seen as a game. Would he make the next base? Maybe he would smack into something. As he neared, she glanced at Ms. P., whose eyes were intent as if helping to steady him. "Isn't he creepy?" she whispered. "No," said her coach, "he's very brave."

Locomotion. The word leapt at Natalie from today's biology lesson. Three requisites of animal life: reproduction, perception, locomotion. The little man was an essay in the essentiality of movement. To move is to stay alive. He understood this implicitly. Of course, these old geezers, slanting eyes as if expecting salvation to pop off the midtown skyline like a cash register tab, understood it too: watching but pretending not (while many fleet pedestrians made a point of disregarding him--though often had to dodge aside perilously at the last moment); they were losing daily, hopelessly, but he refused to surrender.

Natalie was intent now as he tacked past, all her revulsion suddenly gone. She attempted to catch his eye, but he was looking far ahead. A black dude, strutting with a gone-from-here stride, pant bells washing like ship decks around his ankles, shades for eyes and a comb pitchforked in his hair, came along on a falsetto hum, not seeing till he had rolled past--spinning neatly on a heel, whipping his head about so her shadow made windows for his eyes. "Damn," he said and stared at her in profound puzzlement. While two smutty-faced little girls under a theatre marquee giggled and mimicked his gait with hang-tongue, moronic expressions. He didn't notice for he was focusing all that resolve upon the side street ahead. She had turned in fury upon the girls, who made obscene sucking noises and stalked along like apes. When Ms. P screamed.

He had stumbled out onto Broadway--impossible to tell whether an inadvertent zag or an intentional attempt to outrace the bus pulling away from the curb midblock with a hiss of doors. The little man listed far forward, legs shambling, tucked over, arms waving like wings before him, as if desperate to clear a spot for himself, falling--very

hard. Between jigsaw reflections of light off the windshield, hands steered the bus blindly towards the motionless form huddled in the street like a bag someone had dropped there, while the driver watched coins digesting in the hopper.

Ms. P crashed through first: body block to a business suit that released an outraged yelp. All three of them grabbing hold--shirt, arms, anywhere! Blackboard screech of leg brace across pavement. He was heavy as the world.

"Help us," yelled Natalie at forward craning spectators. She sensed the bus--looming, final--Ms.P's eyes whited up with effort, the cripple's closed, rabbinical, strangely peaceful.

"Help! you bastards!"

The bus: obliquely now, shrieking fiercely. Driver a study in horror, hands blurring at the reluctant, horizontal wheel, feet splayed almost overhead--like a man plummeting from a ten story building. Jillie screamed. Natalie stumbled backwards, hands inextricably tangled in the cripple's clothing.

"Damn!" barked a voice suddenly beside her. In one miraculous surge they were at the curb.

Natalie looked up at shades flashing, hands slowly releasing fistfuls of clothing, bunched in whorled peaks off the deformed body that seemed hunched in infant sleep, head resting on the curb. "Damn," said the black boy again, with what eloquence can be imparted a single word.

The bus came to rest across the intersection with a gasp of brakes. Horns honked. The driver ran over waving arms in the air, jabbering a high patois; the soft, eager eyes of the Caribbean winging in great gull's swoops from one of them to the next. "I din' see...hey, mon, I din' see noting. Like dat--foop! Jus' like dat!" Ducking his head to indicate the cripple had tumbled out of thin air. "Drunk--" yowled a voice. The driver seized upon it. "Ho yeah, drunk. Hey mon--" eyes gripped the black boy, who stared down at the forgotten little man and shook his head "--I can' be blame for all dem drunk...." A swarm of furious horns filled the blocked street, a taxi edged around the rear of the bus, imminently threatening to run them down.

Natalie looked from the black boy to the cripple: somewhere here, she understood, was the equation for what we all share under the skin. When she looked up again, the hero was bobbing away through straining, curious faces emerging crayfish-like from shops and restaurants.

The bus driver craned a look at the little fetus of a man lying as if asleep in the gutter and sucked air through yellow teeth, then danced backwards, alternately shrugging

at the violently gesticulating cabbie and making imploring gestures toward his bus, windowed with excited faces. "Gotta move bus," he pleaded, "gotta move--" The cabbie leaned on his horn with both hands, his face a malevolent howl. Ms. P pushed back crowded bodies and bent on a knee over the motionless form. "Can you move?" she asked gently. He didn't respond. "Dead!" decided a voice above her--a face with lips tight sewn, wattles of turtle flesh wagging off the outthrust chin, a scent of lavender not equal to the stench of sour flesh. She regarded her companion with canny slits for eyes and they moved on, delighted with their accomplishment of survival.

Could it be? Natalie stared intently into a face like that of the prophet Hosea. It revealed little more than a habit of stoicism in cheek hollows beneath a furze of beard, a smudge, perhaps a purplish bruise, possibly ashes, under a shock of hair. Never before when she had seen a leg brace or a white cane had she seen anything else, but this cozy alliance before a hostile world had changed that. His preposterous hobble had been so full of intent. The long suffered indignity of it had imparted him a dignity wholly lacking in these gawking spectators. Life was more precious to him. Like the deaf girls: winning meant more to them, so they had won. The tissues of his eyelids which lay profoundly untroubled suddenly opened wide and he stared directly at her. She stepped back, shaken. He made aimless writhing motions like a bug on its back.

"On to the curb," commanded Ms. P. The taxi bumped Jillie and she yelped. Cabbie waving them off, screaming like a lunatic out the window.

Natalie repeated into the ring of faces, widow's peaks, jaws glazed in the harsh reckoning of sunlight, "Help us." Not a request. A challenge. They stared back, watchful, but fixed in an accord of inaction. She screamed at them. All about her, the fury of horns and excited voices like the flapping of leather demon's wings in medieval frescos. She grabbed hold under the arms and, with the strength of fury, boosted the little man to the sidewalk. The taxi scraped the curb as it shot past. The bus let go a vile, ethery fart--driver singsonging still from the open door.

"What's wrong with them?" Natalie bellowed into a middle-aged gray face in a three piece suit, its eyes widening slightly. "They're sick!" Surrounding faces leagued together, side-leering back as if she'd got the shoe on the wrong foot. The businessman shrugged at his colleague. Ms. P hugged her. "What's wrong with people?" the girl moaned. "I don't want to live in such an ugly world."

The cripple, wriggling backwards on his shoulders, a

diminutive wrestler arching his back, with a jackknife motion folded at the middle and sat up. Jillie helped him to his feet where he teetered in that grotesque "h," self-sufficient again, checking right and left to see if his clothes were torn.

"Are you all right?"

He looked quickly one to the next, finding Ms. Pearl, answered, "I get by," without a trace of irony. "Your forehead is hurt," said Jillie. He mopped at it with his jacket sleeve and regarded the little slash mark of blood, then the handkerchief no bigger than a doll's bib that Jillie offered, with absolute indifference.

"Can we...we'll walk you somewhere," said Natalie, feeling immediately foolish. In response, he shook the thermos--still hooked as by magic in the crook of a finger--bounced it, cocked an ear and jangled it violently, looked up at her in desperation as though he couldn't accept the clatter of broken innards. Then let it fall listlessly to his side. Enormous anger lit his eyes, rage as profound as Lot's acceptance, as the bizarre, unnerving howls of the deaf mutes. He shuffled to a subway grating, uncorked the thermos and poured down an opalescent stream touched with bright slivers of light: lemonade and glass. Meticulously replaced the cap and--with the thermos shell still bobbing from his finger--labored past and on as if he'd had no dealings with them.

On a bench nearby, an old man crooked forward, watching with profound concern. His troubled eyes settled on Natalie. She suddenly remembered the dirt smudge on her forehead and wiped it quickly away with her sleeve. The two little girls with dirty faces, who minutes before had mocked and mimicked, stood now completely abashed. A tension in their bodies suggested they might chase after the little man to see what would happen next. Instead, they ran lickety-split down a side street, their pale legs flapping up either side like wings.

A Luncheon

Janet Krauss

"Why are there so many desperate women?"
my friend set in her singleness asks
the high ceiling air of the restaurant.
I listen to the story--her meeting
one who wore a fur collar and blue eye lids
out to lunch on two poached eggs
and dry whole wheat toast.
Was it too late to wait for the opalescent hand?
I see her sit in shadows, shoulders pinched
like the pleats in her living room drapes.
I listen while Indian music plays
to blur the edge of any urgency
as we eat our vegetable melange.
I think of Gandhi and his self-containment.
I think of my safe marriage that makes me calm.
I think of all this as my luncheon friend asks,
"Do you remember the picture on the magazine
cover...?"
The shock of recognition--someone I once knew
flashes of a moon-faced cancer victim smiling
riding over the chatter riding through the trees
of my vineyard. I rise to shake off the dampness
of night webs. I leave anxious to bring home
a piece of chocolate cake large enough for two.

Elk Refuge, Wyoming

S. A. Massaro

Once, treaties were made for as long as
grass grows and sun shines and wind blows.
But humans are hard to hold, even in such
generous boundaries. Take the elk and
trumpeter swan, even the buffalo--all
almost extinct. Yet they are here again

A Visit With The Folks

Jim Stein

The soothing vibrations of the Greyhound did little to calm Jack Price as he reached into his shirt pocket for another cigarette. The bus had just crossed the state line from Iowa into Illinois. So this was Whiteside County. He had never been in this part of the country before, so he kept track of his location by marking the route in a Rand McNally atlas he bought before leaving Idaho. He took shallow draws on his cigarette as he looked again at the map in his lap. Jack figured that he would be reaching Sterling in around forty-five minutes. The closer he got to his destination, the more nervous he became. For what seemed to be the hundredth time since he had boarded the bus in Wallace, he asked himself if he were doing the right thing.

Maybe his Dad had been right last week when he had told Jack to let sleeping dogs lie. His old man was always coming up with something like that. Easy enough for him to say it; he didn't have to live with the memories and nightmares.

Jack had been surprised to receive the letter from the Millers. He had not forgotten Pete Miller, but it had been about a year since he died. Now the Millers asked him if he would visit and tell them about their son. He called them the same night he received the letter. He thought that a call would help them out. He probably should have just written a short letter to decline their request. Now he was in a real fix because he hadn't been able to say no on the phone. Anyway, he and Pete had been about as close as buddies could get in Vietnam. It seemed like the decent thing to do for a friend. It would probably help the Millers too. He owed that much to Pete.

Jack had spent two days on the bus and still hadn't figured out exactly what he was going to tell the Millers. How do you describe the last moments of a man's life to his folks? It just wasn't pretty and neat like the Army's

official notification of death. No, it was much more personal. As he yet lit another cigarette, Jack glanced out the window at the countryside flowing by. Rolling hills dotted with barren oak and elm trees did little to dispel his gloom. The sullen, gray sky and dirty patches of late snow disturbed him. As he absently brushed some stray ash off the map, his mind focused on that night in 1969.

It had been a shitty night for an ambush. The four gooks, the Vietnamese side of the joint operation, were nervous because of the unending Monsoon rain. The grunts were apprehensive because the gooks were. Moving out at dusk that night, Jack had thought that the lieutenant should have cancelled the mission. Going out in the rubber plantation any time at night was dumb, especially in the rain. The red mud caked onto your boots and made the necessary silent movement to the ambush site impossible. Trang, their Vietnamese scout and interpreter, had summed it up best.

"Beaucoup dinky dau," he muttered to Jack. "V.C. no like rain. No come tonight." Yeah, it was very crazy, but they had no choice about it.

After they had set out the Claymores and trip flares to cover the roads, the squad had huddled under their ponchos to escape the steady hammering of the rain. As usual, Pete was on first watch. Since he was the squad's machine gunner, he got to pick his guard shift. He liked to sleep and always picked the first shift, so he could sleep the rest of night uninterrupted. After making sure that Pete was in radio contact with the base camp, Jack propped his M-16 against a tree and curled up under his own poncho. He was aware of Trang squatting alongside him and knew it would be a while before the scout crawled under some shelter of his own. Pete was sitting with his back propped against the other side of the tree that Jack had leaned his rifle against. All was in order and Jack had little difficulty dozing off.

Pap-pap-pap.... A sustained burst of gunfire jerked Jack awake. He was on his knees and reaching for his rifle, even as he identified the sharp cracking of an M-16 on full automatic. His gun wasn't where he had left it. He saw Trang, illuminated by the burst of the chattering weapon in his hands. The scout was leaning around the rubber tree, blazing away. With a sick feeling in his gut, Jack realized what was happening.

"No. Stop!" he yelled as he scrambled around the tree to Pete's side. Jack probed desperately at Pete's throat hoping to find the flicker of a pulse.

As Jack realized that he was holding the pulped head of a corpse in his lap, his mind raced ahead. Yelling for the medic to check out the body, he jumped to his feet and

lunged at Trang. Grabbing the rifle by the scorching barrel, he body-slammed the Vietnamese to the ground.

Jack was yanked back to the present as his cigarette burned his fingers. Cursing softly to himself, he dropped the butt and stuck his fingers into his mouth. He noticed that his map was getting scorched and picked up the cigarette butt before it did more damage. Ashes to ashes. Sheepishly, Jack tamped the cigarette out in the ashtray. Taking one last look at the atlas, he figured it would only be a few minutes until he was in Sterling. He closed the atlas and carelessly stuffed it in the backpack propped on the seat beside him.

Sterling's bus depot was located on the north side of town and was a combination bowling alley and lounge. After making sure his bag was taken off the bus Jack strolled into the lounge looking for a phone. Having second thoughts about immediately contacting the Millers, he hoisted himself onto a bar stool. Ordering a beer, he took a few minutes to sort out his thoughts.

He still wasn't used to the intensity of his war memories. Although he had been back in the States for five months, Jack was still plagued by black-outs and the occasional flashback. The ambush was just one of them.

When it was discovered that Trang had argued with Pete over his accusation that the scout had stolen some cigarettes, he was brought up on murder charges. The whole squad was taken out of the field for two days to testify at the trial. To all of them it seemed like a clear-cut case. Trang was just getting even with Pete. All of them had wanted to see scout hang for the crime, but the court had decided otherwise.

Trang had said that he was dozing when he heard a noise. Looking around the tree, he had seen what he took for a Viet Cong coming toward the position. Grabbing Jack's rifle, he had shot the supposed enemy. The on-site investigation had borne out this possibility. It seems that Pete had felt nature calling and walked out to take a leak. Coming back he fell victim to Trang's sleepy paranoia. Death was ruled instantaneous as a result of a sixteen round burst to the head. Another tragic accident was chalked up, and Trang went free. That was the official version, and that's the way the case was closed.

It wasn't good to dwell on it. The Army had awarded Pete a Silver Star and shipped the body home. Jack guessed he would have to visit the grave. Finishing the beer, he went to the phone and dialed the Miller's number.

"Hello. Mrs. Miller, this is Jack. I'm at the bus

station."

Mrs. Miller, looking a lot like a librarian ushering children in for the story hour, held the door open for Jack. "Just set your bags here in the hallway for now. You can take them up to Pete's room later. Why, George is going to be just tickled pink that you're here so soon. Would you like something to drink, Jack? Some coffee?" she rattled to Jack as she urged him into the house.

"I'm all right. Please, don't go to any trouble on my account," he replied.

"Oh, it's no trouble. I've got a pot on the stove. You must be tired after that long bus ride. Just set yourself down and I'll bring it out. I want you to just make yourself at home and relax." She led him to the easy chair in the corner of the living room. "I'll be right back."

Jack was thankful for the few moments he had to himself. He did need to relax. Settling himself into the chair with a sigh, he looked around. It was a nice room. He admired the aged, but highly polished, wooden china cabinet along the opposite wall. The overstuffed sofa and easy chair were well worn; the faded, floral upholstery was decorated with intricately crocheted slip covers which matched the doilies on the coffee and end tables. It was the kind of room that his own mother would have had, if she were alive. His mother had died while he was very young, and he had always felt cheated by her absence from his life. He could imagine that she would have been a lot like Mrs. Miller--considerate, friendly, and an impeccable housekeeper--at least he would like to think so. Yeah, given time, it was a room he could learn to be comfortable in. A small fire was flickering in the modest stone fireplace set into the far wall. Dominating the wall above the limestone mantle was picture of Pete.

As he stood and walked across the room to get a closer look, Jack was struck by the craftsmanship exhibited in the setting. Someone had spent a lot of time on what could only be termed a memorial to Pete. The frame was oak, dyed a rich brown to emphasize the grain of the wooden; joined not only by nails or tacks, but small wooden pegs. The perfection of the frame was enhanced by the blue velvet stretched ever so neatly and without a wrinkle as a backdrop for the items exhibited. Pete's picture captured Jack's attention. It was the standard portrait taken in basic training and presented a young man of about eighteen in an obviously poor fitting uniform. Swaggering innocence stared from the picture at Jack, and he felt a lump in his throat. He missed his friend. Carefully arranged in a 'U' configuration around the picture were the five medals awarded to Pete. At the bottom

of the 'U' was the Silver Star.

The army would much rather award a medal to a dead soldier than admit to the sordid nature of his death. Jack was well aware of this, and it was a measure of his character that he had insisted on the truth for as long as he had. Lying about the nature of the death and presenting an award for a fabricated combat action hadn't seemed like the right thing to do. He had been raised to always tell the truth and wouldn't allow himself to lie about the death of his friend. The lieutenant had tried to explain that the truth about Pete's death would only cause problems for everyone involved. With waning support for the war in the States, the Army couldn't afford to let it be known that Pete had died by the hand of an ally--that would only serve to add more fuel to the anti-war movement. The news would also certainly cause consternation for the Millers. Would Jack want to have that on his conscience?

Jack rejected those reasons and stood by his truth. If the Army suffered some embarrassment, so be it. It seemed to him that the Millers were entitled to the facts surrounding their son's death, as well. He had changed his mind, at the time, due to the lieutenant's final arguments.

Actually, they were more questions than arguments. Was Jack sure that he had done everything within his power, as squad leader, to preclude the accident? If so, why had it occurred? Given the findings of the trial, Jack had begun to believe that he might have been able to prevent Pete's death. If everything had occurred as Trang testified, Jack should have been able to organize the ambush to better provide for the safety of his squad. Jack hadn't been sure enough to press the issue back then, even though he realized that he was participating in a cover-up. It seemed a better way to handle the matter and he was able to get on with his job. He hadn't had to wrestle with his conscience over his decision until the letter arrived from the Millers last week.

Jack had regained his original perspective on the incident. He reasoned that at some time in one's life, you have to stand firm for what you believe in. He had learned that from his Dad and trusted in that sentiment. It made life much easier to live. He had felt obligated to deliver that truth to the Millers.

Momentarily disoriented, Jack turned from the fireplace to see Mrs. Miller setting two cups of coffee on the table. She had asked a question.

"Black is fine. Thanks, Mrs. Miller."

"I've got dinner on. Do you like pot roast? George will be home soon and we can eat."

"Sounds great," Jack replied. I wonder if she can handle the truth, he thought.

They were on their second cup of coffee when Mr. Miller arrived. Clomping into the entry hall, he hung his yellow tin hardhat on the peg by the door. Advancing purposefully toward Jack, he stuck out a gnarled paw of a hand.

"Jack, glad you could make it. Good to see you," he said. "Maggie, you should have called me. I'd have left the mill earlier."

Jack groped for words as he stood to shake hands. "I'm glad to be here. After talking on the phone, I wanted to meet you both. You've got a really nice place here, Mr. Miller."

"Aw, look, just call me George. Everybody calls me George. You want something cold to drink? Got some beer in the fridge."

"Now, George," Maggie interjected, "he just got here a little while ago. Let him be now. Besides, I've got dinner on and we'll be ready to eat in just a bit."

"All the more reason," George beamed. "A cold one will work up our appetites, gets the blood going. Right, Jack?"

"O.K. Sure. Sounds good to me," Jack answered. He was feeling awkward. George was unsettling. Tall, somewhere in his late forties, graying at the temples, with a pronounced receding hairline, he presented quite a figure. The denim bib of his overalls barely contained his swelling paunch. Yet, despite his girth, he was filled with an energy that belied his age and the anguish Jack assumed he felt over losing his son.

"Maggie, why don't you get us a couple of beers while I get to know Jack a little better," George directed. Settling himself on the couch, he motioned for Jack to sit down again. "So, how's it feel to be out of uniform?"

As Jack began to answer, with guarded replies, the generalized questions that George fired at him, he tried to relax again. He didn't want to blunder now. Sure, George seemed like a nice enough person, but he didn't want to talk about that night Pete died. Not yet, not until he was sure the timing was right. Pete had had a habit of drawing him out and making him say things he later regretted, he didn't want to allow that here, now. As Maggie returned and handed each of them a frosty bottle of Pabst Blue Ribbon, Jack wanted to forget why he was there. He and the Millers immersed themselves in innocuous conversation.

"You gotta excuse Maggie, Jack. She always gets wound up when company comes. You know, fussing all over them and

all," George said as he backed the battered blue pickup out of the driveway. "I kinda figured you might want to get away from all that mothering for a while."

"Oh, I didn't mind at all. She's just doing that to be nice. I don't think she means any harm," Jack replied. He tried to get comfortable on the sprung seat. It had seemed to him that Maggie was lavishing more attention on him than was usual for a guest. Nonetheless, he had enjoyed the attention. He couldn't remember the last time he had eaten so much. She didn't have a corner on the attention market; though, George seemed almost beside himself to show Jack a good time.

When George had an urge to do something, it seemed like nothing could stand in his way. Jack had been surprised when he wanted to go out tonight. He had thought that the Millers would want to talk right after dinner. Maggie had started talking about Pete, and George had changed the subject. As a matter of fact, Maggie had wanted to talk all through the meal and had kept asking questions about what his plans were: Was he going to work? Had it been terrible in the war? Did he have a steady girlfriend? Was he planning on going to college? Before he could really answer, though, George had cut her off. "Plenty of time for that later," he had said. George had filled the dinner with his tales of the steel mill, his dumb supervisor, hippies, and his own war stories from Europe--exaggerated almost beyond belief. Jack and Maggie had barely been able to get a word in edgewise. It had been fun. When George announced that he was going to take Jack out to the tavern, Maggie had seemed upset. She had objected that Jack needed rest after his trip and that she wanted to talk to him before it got too late. Winking at her, George mollified her with the promise that they would talk as soon as he and Jack returned.

Jack felt that he should have been uncomfortable with the situation, but found himself grinning inside. Besides sounding like something that happened in this house all the time, he found himself remembering Pete. When Pete had gotten excited about something, he was the same way as George. You couldn't put him off and you sure couldn't deny him what he wanted.

As they drove along the dimly lit streets toward the tavern, Jack wondered what the evening held in store for him. Maggie had certainly seemed anxious to talk about Pete. George, however, had been dodging the issue all evening. Maybe he just wanted to get him alone and talk man-to-man? None of it seemed to be making sense and Jack resolved to just handle it as it happened.

George had been filling the cab with more of his

anecdotes--this time rambling on about draft-dodgers. "Hell. I say let 'em all run to Canada. If this country ain't good enough for them, we damn sure don't need them. Right, Jack?" Not waiting for an answer, he went on, "Sometimes a man has to do some hard things. But at least he can hold his head up and live with himself. Sometimes it's hard...."

Well, here it comes, Jack thought. He felt relief that it was going to happen like this, out here. He would be able to talk to George.

"Well, here we are. Looks like a good crowd too," George announced, pulling into the gravel lot. Jerking the truck to a stop in the first empty spot, George had his door open and was stepping out as he turned off the old Ford. Jack followed him. Walking toward the building, he noticed the sign and laughed aloud. George looked at him quizzically.

"You like playing pool, George?" Jack asked.

"Bet your ass."

"Figured as much. Pete used to tell me about this place. 'The Corner Pocket' sounded like my kind of place."

George got excited. "Are you any good, Jack?"

"Fair enough."

"Well, then, let's go kick some ass!" George exclaimed, pushing the door open.

The next four hours passed rapidly for Jack. He couldn't count the number of beers he drank or how many games of eight-ball were played. He just enjoyed and let the game consume him. Meeting George's friends from work was no problem; the banter came easy, the games even easier. George shared in his animation. They took on all comers and only paid for their first beer.

Aligning his shot, Jack sank the eight-ball in the side pocket. Grinning at George, who came around the table to slap him on the back, he quaffed the last of the beer in his stein.

"I think that about takes care of everyone," George said. He cast a measured glance around him to see if there were any new players. "Let's have this last beer, then hit the road. Maggie's probably wondering what happened to us."

Settling themselves in the isolation of a corner table, the two began to recap the highlights of their games. Lighting a cigarette, Jack couldn't help but compare the similarities in style that George and Pete shared. From the way the two held the cue, to the habit of tapping the freshly chalked tip against the table before each shot, father and son were alike. Not really such a remarkable coincidence, since George boasted of having taught Pete everything about the game. All the same, the habits were pleasant for Jack--almost like recapturing old times.

The ride back to the house was considerably easier for Jack. With the evening's games to talk about, conversation flowed between them. Chatting and laughing, they entered the house.

"Well, you two look like you had just a grand old time," Maggie said.

"Good old time? Why, that ain't the half of it, Maggie," George exclaimed. "Jack and I make one hell of a team. We owned that pool table. Even Phil and Ernie couldn't beat us. That's got to be the first time in years I've seen those two lose."

"Aw, we were just lucky tonight," suggested Jack.

"Nope. That wasn't luck. It was pure skill, and don't you forget it! They sure won't," George laughed. "They'll be talking about that game for years down at the mill."

"Speaking of talking," Maggie interrupted. "I want for you and Jack to just sit down. I'm going to get us some coffee and then we've got some talking to do. We still have that matter to discuss with Jack, you know. You said we would when you got home."

"Why, I forgot about that, I was having such a good time. You're right, Maggie. Let's get it said," George replied.

Jack's exultation vanished and was replaced with dread. He lit a cigarette and exhaled heavily. Well, he thought, all good things must pass. He only hoped the Millers would forgive him for the pain. Time for the truth.

After setting the coffee service on the table, Maggie looked seriously at Jack. "George and I have been thinking about this ever since we got word that Pete was dead. Being our only child, we set great store by him. We had such hopes."

Before she could continue, Jack interrupted. "I know how you must feel and what you two have been going through," he said. He couldn't look at them and stared at his hands, nervously clasped in his lap. "I was there when Pete died. I couldn't...I wanted...I..." Jack faltered.

"Oh, Jack," Maggie said. "I'm sorry. We should have told you. We wanted to surprise you. We miss our Pete, but we're glad he had a friend like you. That has comforted us this last year, but that's not why we asked you here. Pete is dead and there's nothing that any of us can do about that. We have to accept that."

"Maggie's right, Jack," George interjected. "We're talking about helping you get to college, helping you get a good start on life. It's what we wanted for Pete. Since he's been taken from us, we'd like you, as his friend, to use the money."

Jack looked up from his hands to Maggie and George, then

over to Pete's picture. The image seemed hazy.

Maggie took one of Jack's hands in hers. "We always had high hopes for Pete. We thought he would go to college. George and I have been saving for years, just for that. We'd like you to take the money--for Pete."

Jack tried again to focus on the picture of Pete. The pressure of Maggie's hands reminded him that he had probably been the last person to have had live contact with Pete. He felt that he was again in the rubber plantation searching for a pulse and unable to find one. Pete was dead.

Letting Maggie keep her hold on his hand, Jack deliberately tamped his cigarette out in the ashtray. He looked at the Millers and saw himself framed in their eyes.

yesterdays were better

Sue Saniel Elkind

when you could leave the door
open for a neighbor
or elijah on the seder night

but after a stranger walked in
tied us up
robbed us leaving only
our furniture
we have two locks and a peep-hole
on the door now
and a dog

i hope elijah understands

For H. B.

Howard Faerstein

Everytime I'd go to the avenue
For eggs or razor blades
He'd be there.

Popping out from the deli
Waving from his perch at the OTB
Or sitting in an idle cab
With a collaborator.

He had nothing
A go-fer
Schemer
35 a bum.

And so his murder---

Crossing the street

Scratch sheet in hand
A Cadillac brushed him back.
He had words with the driver
Most likely mouthed some racial epithet.

To be slaughtered with a baseball bat.
Hit twice.
Hemorrhaging on the avenue.
Over that.

Loop Road

David Chorlton

I

Corner lots have fallen
where our footsteps burn
as we pass the doors that hide
the conspiracy against us,
the woman who wears 'Schlitz' labels
around her frothing brain
and grows shoes of dirt on her feet,
the one whose coat allows no seasons
to come inside, the man
offering me a watch as though
we could buy the time
to plan our escape.

II

Old trucks rust in dry cut creases
under frail black trees
where gardens fray into ground
that nothing grows in,
nobody crosses but to skirt
the hard rock's edge
on freeways, racing trains
pulling cotton and dark metal
across mesquite and creosote.

III

The Star Cafe is aging in its mirror walls which
make a corridor of glass
and glossy steel to sit
with coffee in and be soothed
by music we can almost hear.
This space is not defined, neither
is the sound of rivers in the evergreens
or calligraphy of roots in snow
describing how the wind can twist
around the aspen and make it sway
until its leaves reflect another fall.

IV

A layer every day, black steps
are beaten into copper, the mountain
sinks and air tightens
with misted ore. Morenci
stacks graves on the steep face
of a ridge facing ranges
thick with trees that are too many
for a man to uproot
even with another lifetime.

V

Below the groaning pines, where snow
sticks to shadowed ruts,
spring water lays a film across the path
that fire walked the year before.

VI

Through a dry creek's stones, the wind
remembers water. We cross
to paths of deer tracks
into lightshafts, bark, soft needles,
and textures birdsounds cut
in air. In rings of silence
the centre always holds a voice.

MONTY PARKER'S FRIENDS

James Sanderson

Monty Parker and his friends were in their booth at the Venice boardwalk, selling the smuggled shipment of leather goods. Wild Jack was using his one good hand and his hook to spread out some tooled leather belts across the shelves that made up one side of their booth. And Jack's woman was feeling her swollen, pregnant belly and talking to a blue-haired lady who was looking at some suitcases. Monty felt the salt-filled sea breeze slap his face, and its early morning coolness gave him a familiar slight chill. Then Monty heard the sucking sound of Barefoot George lifting his orange-tinted, caramel soles up off the boardwalk.

Monty could see the mud clots in George's kinky hair, and he could smell the wine that George had drunk for breakfast. Monty watched George force the words out of his mouth, while his head twitched to one side. "Harold O.D.'d," he said. "Man, I don't even want to touch him." Monty jumped over the booth and ran for their apartment. Wild Jack jumped over and ran behind him. Jack's woman and Barefoot George followed him.

Polly was waiting for them when they got to the apartment that they all shared. Monty watched her big shoulders shake and thought how god damned silly she looked crying, her thick eye make-up turning to muddy rivers running down her cheek. "He's dead, he's dead," she mumbled and held on to Monty's arm as he climbed the stairs to their apartment. He jerked his arm to get her hands off him and pushed open the door to their apartment.

Monty first saw several fingers curled into a claw. The dead arms were wrapped and tied with purple veins. Monty thought the arms looked like those of the Jesuses in Mexican Catholic churches. The wrists were white, the blood had stopped, forcing the fingers into that claw. The veins in Harold's nose had exploded, spraying the bottom part of his

face and white T-shirt with tiny, almost blue speckles of blood. A fly buzzed over Harold's open mouth.

Polly cried. Jack's woman cried. Then George cried. Monty and Jack stuffed and pulled Harold into a trash bag. Jack's hook tore the plastic in several places, so Monty did most of the work, with the buzzing sound of the fly in his ears.

They drove along one of the canyon roads north of town, made a fire on the top of a cliff looking out at the ocean, and burned Harold. While the body was burning, Monty listened to Polly crying, and George trying to chant something he learned from the Hare Krishna, Jack's woman muttered doctored versions of Bible sayings, and Jack sucked in on a joint. "You're not supposed to fucking die this way," Monty said to himself.

They drank wine and smoked dope until nightfall. While George was staring up at some stars and Polly was trying to find some light by which to file her nails and Jack's woman was leaning into Jack's arms, Monty kicked the last orange embers of Harold's fire off the cliff and into the ocean. He closed his eyes to shut out his friends and to silence the sizzling orange ember in his head.

Later that night, Monty sat in an all-night diner and drank coffee, because the sizzle in his brain kept him awake. Polly came in with a friend. How easy she forgot Harold, Monty thought. He looked up from his seat at the bar to watch the way Polly always kept some part of her body moving. Her legs had short stubble, pink welts and brown blood clots--the results of quick and clumsy shaving, showing through her dark hose. Her lips looked like they were always trying to form a kiss. He looked at the guy she was with, the guy who would take Harold's place, with his hand folded back over his wrist and holding a cigarette. He stood up, yelled, "You freak!" at her and left before she could answer with more than a howl.

The next morning, he sipped coffee that Jack's woman had made. He watched George, still asleep under the coffee table, jerking from trying to wake up without enough wine from the night before. He watched Polly come out of the bathroom, her wig on crooked, electrolysized damaged whiskers poking out of her chin. She looked at Monty but didn't say anything.

Jack turned on the television. Phil Donahue was on. "Why did you say that to me?" Polly asked in her scratchy, deep, early morning voice.

Monty threw his coffee cup into the TV screen. The cup hit Phil and went through the screen, leaving a jagged tooth grin spitting out smoke in the TV set.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Jack said and stepped

toward Monty.

Jack's woman stepped in front of him and said, "Don't hurt him." Monty knew as well as she that Jack could get mean.

"I want to eat McDonald hamburgers," Monty said.

"You're nuts," Jack said, his woman pushing him away from Monty.

Monty got out of his chair. "You're all freaks or bums," Monty said. Polly pulled off her wig and became Paul. "You mean me," Paul said.

"No. You're queer," Monty said. "And you're all gonna end up like Harold."

Monty saw George wake up as he walked out the door. That afternoon, Monty met Wild Jack's woman. He kissed her on the cheek because he was not sure that the baby in her belly was not his. Monty got drunk and left for Texas.

Near Junction, Texas he was riding in a cattle truck, not minding the smells of drying cow chips, but he felt the dull ache of another hangover. He sat against the tailgate. In a corner close to him, sat a wetback. The wetback's eyes were glassy and wouldn't look at anything too long; they'd just shift in his head. While Monty looked at him, the wetback reached into his back pocket and pulled out a switchblade. He flicked his wrist and the blade locked into place. Monty looked at the Mexican's eyes. The wetback lowered his head and folded his blade into the handle, then looked up at Monty, his glassy eyes starting to water, and he snapped the blade open in front of his face.

Monty muttered "crap" to himself and looked away from the wetback. Monty had seen wetbacks like him before, flashing switchblades to hide their fear that would force them to use the knife sooner or later. After a robbery or murder, this wetback would be a real pilaú, for a while. Then he'd be dead or in jail. Monty would rather smell the cow shit than watch the wetback, but he turned his head to see the wetback fold up his knife and put it back in his pocket. Monty closed his eyes and thought about California.

Wild Jack had found him in Los Angeles. He had taught Monty how to steal from Mexicans and department stores. He had even made Monty his partner when he started selling hot leather goods from Mexico to tourists. Monty's first night in L.A. had been spent in an alley next to Barefoot George. George gave Monty two sips of wine. Sometime later, after they wandered to Venice, Harold and Polly let them spend several nights on the floor of their living room. Wild Jack's woman slept with Monty several times.

But now times would be better. He was riding across

Edwards Plateau, soon the trees would get taller and thicker, the ravines would become valleys with creeks and rivers in them, and he would be in the Texas Hill Country. His home was on the other side of the hill country on the edge of Balcones Fault, where the landscape became flat, fertile farmland, where the rapid running rivers slowed down to form deep green swimming holes.

Monty opened his eyes when he heard, "Hey man," felt a tapping on his shoulder, and smelled dope. The wetback held a lit joint in front of Monty. Monty hesitated at first, then took the joint and sucked in on it. He handed it back to the wetback. They smoked three joints before they got to Fischer, Monty's hometown.

Monty banged on the back of the cab when they got to the Fischer cut off. The driver stopped the truck for Monty to jump out. The wetback jumped out after him. "Where you going, man?" the wetback said.

"Fischer," Monty said.

"Me too," the wetback said.

"Not with me."

Monty turned his back to the wetback and started walking down the road. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the wetback following him. Monty turned around. The wetback froze. "Get out of here," Monty screamed.

"Want some more dope?" the wetback asked.

"Fuck off."

Monty turned his back to him and walked down the road. Walking on the opposite side of the road, the wetback followed him all the way to Fischer.

It was Saturday in Fischer, Monty wandered around town, looking for things to remember. The wetback walked behind him. They peered into the Sears catalogue house. Their faces almost pressed against the glass. They walked across the street to Perry's discount five and dime and looked at the riding lawn mowers in the front of the store. They walked another block and crossed the street to the H.E.B. supermarket. Cars were pulling in and out of the parking lot, people coming out of cars and going into the store. While Monty sat on the curb in front of the store and looked for old friends, the wetback went inside the store. Monty thought that he had lost him, but the wetback came back out of the store with an orange for each of them. Monty peeled the orange, pulled loose a slice, then bit into it. He felt the spray of orange juice from his bite hit him in the face. Texas was hotter than California.

Monty looked back at the wetback. "I don't need no wetback following me all over town," Monty said.

The wetback looked at him; the sticky orange juice just

clung to and knotted the thin hairs that he used for a mustache. Monty knew from his look that the Mexican wouldn't answer him and couldn't stop following him.

Monty closed his eyes and pressed his palms against his aching forehead. He opened his eyes to see a woman, holding a baby, getting out of a car.

As she got closer, Monty watched her once familiar knees slip out from under the hem of her sun dress, and he admired the way she held the slumped baby in one cradled arm. She stepped up on the curb, forcing Monty to turn his head to see her. He could see the freckles on her chin that he had once teased her about. Just as she started toward the door, Monty stood up and said, "Betty." She turned around smiling, but the corners of her smile dropped when she saw Monty and the wetback sitting beside him. She tightened her grip on the baby and, with her free hand, she pushed the baby's face into her shoulder and stuck her chin over the baby's head. The automatic door swung open, she turned away from Monty, and walked into the H.E.B. store. Monty knew he had to get rid of the wetback.

After Monty took the wetback to the bus station and told him to wait for him there, that they'd catch a bus and go to Florida and pick oranges, he went to a bar. The bar had changed since Monty had been there last. The new owner had stuck two air-conditioners through the wall, and moved out one pool table to make room for two blinking, shiny pinball machines that rung and yelled. But the same type of tough acting kids hung out here. High school kids hugged the pinball machines with their hips. A farm boy with his baseball cap turned backwards on his head played pool with a friend who had an International Harvester cap on. The bartender leaned over the bar on his elbows. And, in a corner, by a table was Cow. Monty turned away from her. Monty put his belly against the bar and felt the smooth wooden hollow made by years of resting elbows, then took a sip of beer. "I know you," he heard a voice saying over the noise. He turned back around.

Cow stood up and walked toward him. Her buttocks and breasts shook when she walked because she was fat. And curls of bright red hair were pasted to her forehead by sweat running down from under her stained tennis hat. Monty remembered the hat and the red hair and the quivering fat of Cow. Grinning and spitting out slobber with her slurred words, she said, "I seen you. You remember me? I seen you in the movies. You left for California, and you been in the movies. I seen you." She turned around and looked at the kids.

The kid with the IH cap said, "Sure, Cow," then took a punch at the cue ball and scratched. "Shit," he said.

Monty and Petey Bates, Monty's high school best buddy, started calling her "Cow" because Petey said for two dollars she wasn't much better than a cow. "I don't know you," Monty said.

"Sure you do. You know me. I seen you, too." Looking around again, she said, "I seen him."

The boy with the cap turned backwards leaned against the cue, laughed at his friend's scratch, and said, "Shut up, Cow."

She looked at Monty, her grin disappearing. "You a movie star now?"

The bartender jerked up from leaning on his elbows and said, "Leave the man alone and go drink your beer."

Monty didn't want to answer the fat woman, but after hesitating, he said, "I was an extra for a couple of days."

She smiled at Monty, and the boys playing pool and the bartender looked at him. "I knew I seen you," she said, then walked back to her beer. Monty turned around and leaned over the bar, sipped his beer, and wondered if, with his hangover, he should get drunk.

Monty walked around town waiting for the day and his hangover to cool before he stepped on the front porch of his parents' house. His mother, looking shrunken in a blue-flowered dress, answered the door. When she saw him, she put one hand to her throat, then smiled.

"I thought I would drop by since I'm back," Monty said.

"Dinner's ready," she said. "Have you eaten?"

"No."

"Good. Good," she said and stepped out of the doorway to let Monty into the house.

Monty looked down as he stepped through the doorway. The carpet had frayed close to the edge of the door. Monty looked up.

He followed his mother into the living room. She stopped, staring at him, and then turned away, starting toward the kitchen. Taking two steps, she again turned to face him. "I'm glad you're back."

"I don't know that I'm staying," Monty said.

"I'm just glad you're back for now," she corrected herself.

His mother looked down, and then went into the kitchen. Monty looked at a shelf on one wall. On the top of it were some porcelain horses, sea shells from Arkansas Pass, some knitted pot pads, and a family portrait of his mother, father, and the sister his parents adopted just before he

had left.

At dinner Monty sat at the head of the table across from his mother. She looked at him, almost never dipping her head toward her plate, just so she could see him. Her gaze annoyed him.

Suzy, his sister, pushed her carrots with her fork and looked up at him, then down at her carrots, again and again. "It's my room now," she said. "He's not getting it back."

"No, I'm just here awhile," Monty said, raising his fork and sticking a chunk of roast in his mouth to keep from saying more. He looked at his plate, then looked over to his father--his big-bellied father, with loose flesh hanging from his arms.

"So you grew your hair," his father said, not raising his head or even looking at Monty.

"It's not like growing hair was all I did," Monty said.

"And now you wear an earring?"

"Ernie," Monty's mother said.

"And I'm not sharing the room either," Suzy said.

For the rest of the dinner, Monty looked at his father when he could and watched his arm, working like a shovel, scooping up food, pushing it into his mouth.

After dinner, Suzy ran to the TV set and watched Little House on the Prairie. Monty watched some of it, then went back to the table to help his mother clean it off. He carried dishes to the sink and stacked them for her. He turned on the hot water and pushed his mother to the side of the sink with his hip. "I'll wash," he said. "You rinse." Ever so often their hands brushed together so that Monty could feel the rough back of her hand, the rising veins, and the twisted joints of her long fingers. And once, in the soapy dishwater, his mother pressed her finger tips to his palm.

He and his mother washed dishes, never really talking, while his father walked through the kitchen to the backyard. Monty watched him walk down the sloping backyard to the drainage ditch that bordered their property. "You ought to talk to your father," Monty's mother said.

Monty walked down the backyard slope to the bank of the drainage ditch; the sun set in front of his eyes. His father threw rocks and dirt clods into the rotten smelling water that filled the ditch. Monty sat down beside his father and waited, not saying anything until the sun set.

The two of them sat there waiting until the lightning bugs floated in the darkness before them. His father squatted and pulled his legs up under him, and rested his forehead on his knees. "So tell me something," Monty said.

His father looked at him. Then slowly, pushing his hands

against his tiny knees, his father rose. Monty stood with him and watched the spark of a lightning bug around his father's face.

"You should never a gone," his father said, "and you should never a come back."

Monty stepped closer, "It ain't like I'm here permanent."

"You had the nerve to leave, making us forget you. Now you got the nerve to come back making us remember."

"So who the hell are you to say that?"

"I ain't trash," his father said.

"You're trash enough."

Monty's father squinted, and a vein in his forehead, just under his receding hairline, filled with blood and stood out. It was a mean look that Monty remembered, a look that was a mixture of anger and confusion. It made his father mean. His father swung a back-handed slap at Monty's face. With his left hand, Monty caught his father's wrist. As he held the arm, he looked at his father's face to see his jaws tensed, biting so hard that his jowls shook. He looked at his father, letting the arm go. He watched that mean look become pure anger, then pure confusion, then sadness. He backed slowly away, turned, and ran up the slope to the house.

He pulled open the screen door; his mother was asleep, so he stuck one hand in back of him to stop the door from bouncing on the frame and waking her. She was sitting in a chair, her arms folded on the kitchen table, her head resting on her arms. She had set the chair so she could see out to the backyard, but she had fallen asleep and was snoring.

Monty walked through the living room, down the hall, and opened the door to what used to be his bedroom. He stepped in. The walls were plastered with posters of rock bands and ponies and TV stars. His sister, lying on the bed, and earphone from a transistor radio plugged into her head, said, "It's my room."

"Anything of mine left in here?" Monty said.

"They gave your stuff away."

Monty looked at her scrunched up face. He turned away from her and started down the hall, out the front door, leaving the screen door bouncing, not caring anymore if he woke his mother. He watched one foot, then the other, shoot in front of him, hit the ground, pull him down the street. He kept running.

He ran until he got to the bus station. The wetback was lying across a bench. The wetback sat up and then stood up. Smiling, the wetback said, "Florida, huh?"

Monty breathed in for air and stared at the wetback, not

daring to take his eyes off the ignorant son of a bitch.
"Ever caught a train?" Monty asked the wetback.

"Huh?" the wetback said.

Monty sucked in for air and then said, "We can jump a train. Won't cost us money."

"Florida," the wetback said, nodding his head.

"No, California," Monty said. "I got friends in California."

Passion

Arthur Winfield Knight

We didn't argue anymore,
but I'd feel her stiffen
when I held her.
On warm afternoons
we'd go for walks
in Golden Gate Park
and watch the rowboats
on the little lake
and we'd hold hands
in dank theatres
where we watched
foreign films,
but there was always
that tension.
When we played Scrabble,
I still lost
even tho I knew my vocabulary
was bigger than hers,
but I didn't get angry.
I remembered running
along the hot sand
in the bewildered loneliness
of a blazing afternoon
two years earlier,
sure it was going to end,
after I'd ripped
her swimming suit off.
Later on, we both cried,
hugging each other,
our bodies limber.
Leaving her apartment
for the last time
I ran down the dark hall
into the deeper darkness
that was Ashbury Street

wondering
what I could tell her.
It wasn't the same anymore.

Calliope

Roger Hoffmann

Needle arms of silver, spider dancing
a web in the sunlight
catwalk of straw to calliope of silk
fresh spun, precious
billowing in sand spit breeze.
Pirouette. Again.
A ruffle of arms...
high kick finish
bow to your audience,
the wind.
Encore.

Beside the Brooklyn Bridge

Sylvia Gillett

Flatbush Avenue really exists
and so does the Brooklyn Bridge.
As for trees, not one, but many grow
outside the renovated brownstones,
where spider plant and philodendron forests
flourish on the fringes of oriental carpets.

Some blocks away, Muslims, Lebanese, Moroccans
walk Atlantic Avenue, fingering worry beads.
There delis smell of baklava and pita overflowing
with felafel,
and customers hunger after halva, rolled apricots,

goat cheese, pistachios.

Not far is Montague Street
and in the French Revolution the Hong Kong silk
of the mannequins
rustles softly at 9:00 each morning
when Mr. Leftolowsky unlocks three padlocks
and puts a sign in the window,
"Direct from Paris, from the Rive Gauche."

Nearby, matrons sip on Ceylonese tea
and sample clouds ears and tiger lillies
in a sauce spiced Szechuan or Hunanese.
The waiter carries promises in a porcelain dish,
"Your lover will never wish to leave you."

At dusk in an apartment high above the street,
reflected street lights bloom like stars
against the darkening corners of the room
where the oldest resident of the Hotel St. George
pulls her shawl around her shoulders
and puts on as always the Beethoven "Appassionata."

She pours some sherry into a small crystal glass,
then slowly sips and sits beside her window watching
all those passing arm-in-arm along the boulevards
of Brooklyn Heights beside the Brooklyn Bridge.



M. J. D. E.

Flying Through New York

Ted Dace

I stared at my son, who didn't look the way a real son should. For the first time in years, I was able to look at him. I no longer had the worries I'd been filled with all the years before. It was over, and I was free. I finally had the time and patience. He looked like a half-finished sculpture, like a piece of art someone had started, and then abandoned for lack of enthusiasm. Someone should polish him, clean off the rough edges. He held one eyebrow above another. Although he had carefully groomed himself, several hairs were out of place. It looked like he actually wanted those hairs out of place, as if he was leaving clues to a mystery about him I didn't understand. A button was loose on his shirt. A fingernail was longer than the rest. One of his shoes was untied. He had a slight grin on the left side of his mouth. Something was making him smile. What was it? I had to know, but couldn't ask. I just sat there, looking at my son.

My name is Nickolaus Nova. Three weeks ago I contemplated suicide.

Now I'm dead.

Suicide wasn't the cause of my death. I never splattered myself over the sidewalk. Somebody else took care of that. I was viciously murdered. My life really wasn't much. I died at forty-seven, had a son named Scott, who was twenty-two. For years I worked in a library in New York City. My father killed seven men. When I was forty, I quit my job and joined a political activist group led by an Englishman named Chester Mann. I once ran around an entire city block in New York drunk and naked without being caught. I consider that the highlight of my life. My son graduated from college with honors. I divorced my wife when my son was three. I shot my cat when he was four.

I used a double-barrelled sawed-off shotgun made in Paris

in 1946, serial number TD 6-2-66. Three days later, I threw it into the East River. A week after that, I read in the New York Post that a sawed-off double-barrelled shotgun made in Paris in 1946 killed seven women. I always wondered what the serial number was.

Chester Mann and I became best friends. We recruited several intellectuals to our organization. We had the crazy idea that there was something wrong with the world that we could change.

My brother was certified psychotic when he was twenty-four. He liked to torture small birds with electric can openers. He strangled an autistic woman with a stocking. He was electrocuted in a California state prison.

The organization I belonged to was called, "Humanity for Everlasting Advancement of Democracy."

We were communists.

HEAD was beautiful.

I never finished college.

I never rode on a roller coaster.

My favorite color is off-white.

My favorite number is 27.

I saw Citizen Kane once.

I saw Attack of the Killer Queen Bees fourteen times.

I suppose that sums up my life. Except how I died. I wasn't really splattered on a sidewalk. My murder was just as ruthless. It had to do with HEAD, my son, my ideals, my principles.

Disgusted with the world, I stared out the window, thinking of suicide. I was disgusted with HEAD, which was the only way I could help the world. Now it needed help. I didn't trust Mann, who was running HEAD into the ground, and he'd begun to dislike me. He wanted to rule the world. We pledged that we would die before abandoning HEAD. I thought about suicide.

The only thing that prevented me from jumping was the thought of leaving my son.

I was standing in our headquarters, the 22nd floor of an ugly building in the lower East Side of Manhattan. I remember watching a cockroach strolling through a spider web, when I heard the door to Chester Mann's office slam shut. I slowly walked out of a large room and into the hallway leading to the office. I thought of the roach, while I walked down the long, narrow, grimy hall. I thought of rolling Mann up and stuffing him in his desk. I wanted to kill him, to cut him up with an ax, then toss him out of the window like a wadded up piece of paper with a bad idea on it.

I knew that I had to say something to him. I thought of telling him I'd resign, that I thought his ideas were insane. I thought he should take a look back and look at what he was doing.

I clenched my fists and strolled magnificently into the room. "Mann!" I yelled and felt the presence of the large, overbearing son-of-a-bitch behind me, alone.

This was odd; he usually traveled with a bodyguard. He didn't actually feel that anyone wanted to hurt him. He just thought it looked good.

We stared at each other for some time. Then he slowly began to open his mouth. He paused for a moment, and then said, "Nick..." as if he were about to ask a question, but before he could say anymore, I angrily brushed past him, and headed for the elevators to go home. It had been a huge disappointment. I had so many things on my mind that I said none of them.

"I don't know what happened to him, Scott. He just changed."

"But you said he was once a great man."

"He was. Sometimes people change, and there's nothing you can do about it. The Chester Mann I once knew doesn't exist anymore."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. The money from HEAD supported us. I feel like I owe him something. It's just that he takes things too far. Sometimes he acts on impulse. Big events are planned behind my back. He makes agreements with terrorists. They want to shake up the world. They want to take all the countries, put them in a deck, and re-shuffle them."

"How will he do that?"

"I don't know. Maybe he will build a nuclear bomb."

"A nuclear bomb? That's crazy!" He looked shocked.

But he wasn't shocked. His behavior seemed deceitful. He put a shiver up my back. I didn't know who he was.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

I tried to make eye contact with him, but he never looked at me. I spoke to the ceiling. "I considered suicide, but I didn't try it. I want to help the world. What can I do? Everything is going backwards. I fear another dark age. And I feel responsible. Now Mann is too big to stop."

Scott said nothing. What was going through his mind? He just looked at his shoes.

"I don't know," I finally said. "Maybe I'll leave...go to some country far away where they'll never find me."

Scott suddenly looked up.

"Hey, maybe I really will!" This was the first time I'd

thought this. It seemed so simple. "We'll just pack the bags and be off to some mountain in Ethiopia!"

Scott smiled. "Mann will kill you."

"No he won't."

"How do you know?"

"I'll see him tomorrow and tell him I'm leaving. That will end the discussion!"

"Wishful thinking."

I frowned. I honestly didn't think it would work. I knew I'd have to do it. There was no other way out. I was turning into a nervous wreck. I was shaking the next morning as I dressed for my visit to Mann's office.

"What is your business, Mr. Nova?" the security guard outside Mann's office asked.

"I'd like to speak to Chester."

"**Mr. Mann!** Have you forgotten his last name?! Call him Mr. Mann!"

"Yes, that's right. Mr. Mann. Mr. Chester Mann." I tried to stay calm.

"What exactly..." he paused, eyeing me suspiciously, "...are you going to talk about?"

"I want to tell him about a flight I might take."

"May I ask where?"

"I'm not really sure. It will be a place far, far away."

"In a time long, long ago? Ha, ha, ha!" He laughed hysterically. He stood right in front of me, smiling, and put his hands on my shoulders. "Well, I'm not going to let you in!"

"Let me in," I said quietly.

"You know why not?"

"Let me in."

"It's because you're nothing more than a hoodlum, Nova!"

"Let me in." I was still calm.

"I can't trust someone like you alone with him."

I put my hands on his shoulders. "**LET ME IN!!**" I rammed him against the door to Mann's office.

He regained his strength and proceeded to smash me against the wall opposite Mann's door. "You'll pay for this!"

Suddenly the door flew open. "Guard!" It was Mann. "Let him in! Let him in!"

He pushed me aside and I walked past him into the office. Mann closed the door behind me.

"I'm sorry about this." He walked to his desk. "He gets anxious. Take a seat, Nick."

I sat down. I was nervous and scared.

"My God, Nick. You're shaking. Did he rough you up?"

"I'm okay," I whispered. I wanted to go to sleep for days and days on a soft bed away from New York.

"So, Nick...." He pushed his chair back slightly from his desk, putting his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a gold lighter. "What's your trouble?"

"I'm...uh...dissatisfied, Chester."

"Well...Nick...I'm...." He carefully pulled a cigarette out of a silver case, inserted it in his mouth, and lit it. He casually dropped the lighter back into his pocket, and puffed the cigarette a few times. "I'm...really sorry about that."

"I want to go. I want to leave forever."

"I can have that arranged."

"No, what I mean is, I'd like to leave HEAD...maybe live somewhere else."

"If that's what you want." He took another puff of the cigarette. I heard rain trickling down the windows of his office. It began to pour harder from the gray clouds. "Then that's what you got."

He stood up and we shook hands. He smiled at me. "Great knowing you, Nick." He looked at his pocket-watch. "You only have a few hours, if you want to catch a plane out of here today."

"I'll be leaving soon."

"Maybe someday our paths will cross again."

"Maybe they will." We paused. "Well, I'll see you, Chester."

I turned away and opened the door. As I left I saw the security guard. "Aren't you going to check and see if Mann is still alive?" I said sarcastically. "Maybe I roughed him up a little."

He slowly moved toward the door and put his hand on the knob. As he did, I grabbed his gun from behind. Holding the gun, I threw him against the opposite wall. I turned him to face the wall, sticking the gun in his neck. "I should kill you," I whispered. "I hate you. I really hate you. You wanna know why I hate you? You represent everything about Mann that I hate. Maybe, if I kill you, the bad side of Mann will go with you. You think I should try my little experiment?"

I didn't. I turned and ran, never looking back. I never saw that wretched place again. Everything was set. All I had to do was get out of New York alive. As I left the building, I felt the gun in my jacket pocket, hidden from sight. I felt safe.

It was past midnight and I couldn't fall asleep, though I'd have to get up at six. The flight was at nine the next morning. Scott was going to make breakfast for me. He was

wonderful. I could hear the television in the living room. Evidently, he couldn't sleep either. He would go to Peru with me and return later. I wouldn't.

I stared out the window in my bedroom. The only light in the room came from that window. The combined lights of New York City were enough to keep my room dimly lit. I was scared. I looked around my room. I could barely see two eyes staring at me from a picture on the wall. I looked at the closed door to the hallway.

I could hear someone on the other side of the door, breathing. Maybe it was my imagination. But what if it wasn't? He was going to kill me. He had killed Scott long ago. He was going to kill me, because I had tried to leave. And anyone who tried to leave was killed.

Suddenly, I heard a noise from under the bed. Maybe it was the building settling. Maybe it was some goon Chester had sent to do me in. Any second, he could pull out a knife and carefully, silently shove the knife through the cushion. With one big lunge of the hand, he'd pierce my back. He'd slowly revolve the blade in my spine, ripping out my vitals, stealing all expression from my face, all thoughts from my mind.

I heard a click in the closet. That's where he was! I heard his hand on the door handle. I was sure he clutched an ice pick or some instrument designed to mutilate. He slowly turned the handle.

I heard footsteps in the hallway.

This was real.

I've imagined many things in my life.

This wasn't one of them.

They stopped at the door, which flew open. "Still up, Dad?"

"Yes, Scott." I sighed with relief.

"Havin' trouble sleeping? We gotta get up early. Better turn in soon."

"Yes, Scott. Goodnight, Scott."

"Goodnight." He closed the door. I placed my hands under my head. I was asleep within minutes.

I stared at my son that morning at breakfast. He didn't look the way a real son should. For the first time in years, I really looked at my son. It was all over. I was free. I finally had the time and patience to look at my son. He was grinning.

Why was he grinning?

Why was he smiling?

Suddenly, he moved his chair back from the table. He had several hairs out of place. He put his hand first in his

left pocket, then in his right pocket. He pulled out a lighter which he immediately dropped. I put my fork down on my plate. I felt very sick. He put the lighter on the table, and brought out a pack of cigarettes. Each movement was deliberate. He had a look of great concentration on his face. He took a cigarette and shoved it in his mouth.

Why was he smiling?

This wasn't the Scott I knew five years ago. A button loose on his shirt. A fingernail longer than the rest. One of his shoes untied. What was it that was so strange about him? Why was he smiling?

I put my hand on my forehead and leaned back. "I think I'm sick, Scott."

"Maybe you shouldn't go on the plane, Nick?"

"Nick?! Since when did you call me Nick? You've always called me Dad!" I tried to stay calm, but shouted anyway. "And since when did you start smoking? I don't remember you smoking!"

A cramp clawed at my intestines. I leaned over and held onto my stomach.

"Well...Nick." He leaned back and puffed his cigarette. "I'm real sorry about the pain." Suddenly it all looked familiar. "But you're just gonna have to face the facts."

I stood up and demanded, "What facts?" A sharp pain shot through my chest. I fell back into my chair. I was sweating and breathing heavily. I leaned back and looked up. The ceiling was undulating.

"The fact is, Nick," for the first time in his life, he looked into my eyes, "I poisoned you. You are going to die."

Fighting the pain, I jumped to my feet. "Why?" I screamed.

"If I am ruthless enough to kill my own father, I am ruthless enough to be second-in-command of HEAD."

"NO! YOU DIDN'T! YOU DIDN'T!"

"Try not to be upset. Face the facts. You're dying. I'm taking over your position in HEAD." He pulled out a beautiful, gold pocket-watch similar to the one Chester had. "You only have a few minutes left."

I stood across the table from my son, looking into his eyes. I put my hand in the pocket of the jacket I had worn the day before. I didn't frown, or smile.

I pulled the security guard's gun from my pocket. I shot him. He fell back to the floor, blood streaming from his chest. Why was he smiling?

Dropping the gun, I ran swiftly out of the kitchen, and out of the apartment. As I leaped down the staircase, I could hear my heart pumping faster than ever before. It beat five times before I got down the first step. During my

second step, it beat ten times. On the third, twenty times. Thirty, **fifty, one hundred** beats per step as I ran.

Soon I was running down the center of a busy five lane avenue that led to mid-town Manhattan. Cars swerved to miss me. People pointed at me from the sidewalks. I was the greatest athlete in the world. Yet, I felt like I was moving slower than ever. People's heads turned slowly toward me. Cars moved in slow motion. Soon they were barely moving at all. My legs moved faster, but I was barely moving. My heart was a drum, beating at the speed of a locomotive barreling down the rail, every wheel clicking at each track.

I knew I would die soon. I took a giant dive forward, leaping as high as humanly possible. I saw the buildings lining either side of the street. I saw the trees next to the buildings. I felt the bitter cold air. The still images of men and women stared at me, racing through my mind. The cars wouldn't move. The city appeared stunned by a venomous sting. Everything instantaneously paralyzed. The white clouds obscured the sun in the eastern sky.

My body was spread-eagled, as I saw the ground approaching. I saw tiny black, gray, and white dots, that were like an enlarged, grainy photograph of the concrete street below. Each second carried me half the distance between myself and the street. I was twenty-four inches from the ground. Twelve inches. Six, three, one-and-one-half, three-quarters, three-eighths, three-sixteenths.

Each second carried me half the distance between my life and my death. Each second took me nowhere. For, I'm still there, moving faster than anything in the universe, approaching oblivion, but never arriving.

I've kept my head up, though. I can still see down that beautiful avenue in New York the same way it looked when I first took my dive. My consciousness has almost slowed to a halt. It never would accept death, so it just slowed down to avoid it. The result is life races on for others, but I never see that. I'm stuck. Nobody can pull me out of it. Nobody ever moves.

I'm not complaining. I'm still smiling--just like my son. My heart still beats--just like the locomotive. And I'm flying through New York.

High School Poetry Winner

In Vogue

Ann Stoll

The hot south wind combs the wheat
As the barber positions his stance.
The whirr of the razor cuts the quiet
When at last the scalping begins.
The clippers clip layer by layer
Until the field is smoothly styled.
The razor slows, and finally stops.
As the trucks haul the clippings,
The stylish steps down from the steaming razor
To accept his hire.

College Poetry Co-Winner

Answering the Call of Nature

Cheryl Shell

Get up when it's still dark;
("Why so early Pop? You don't have to work
anymore.")

Step across time-tattered linoleum.
No need to turn on lights except for one bare bulb
to negotiate bent-board stairs that creak a peevish
good morning,
down to a fragrant floor of earth
whereupon stands

in your neck.

We savored
each other,
bacon and eggs,
champagne.

I recall
the warmth
of your tongue
on mine

At the funeral
I couldn't cry.

Now, unable
to touch you
I remember

as I lie here.

CONTRIBUTORS

David Chorlton was born in Austria, grew up in England, and lived in Vienna before moving to Arizona in 1978. No Man's Land, a new book, has been published in June by Brushfire Publications. He co-edits Brushfire magazine and Laundromat, a cassette-tape magazine. He also has a chapbook coming out through Lieb/Schott Publications later this year, called "Old Water."

Ted Dace is a student at Manhattan High School, and this is his first published work.

Susan Strayer Deal appears in these pages for the first time, and we welcome her.

Sue Saniel Elkin was born 1913, began writing with no formal training five years ago, and has been published in Kansas Quarterly, Pivot, Panhandler, Louisville Review, Colorado-North Review, Wind, DeKalb Workshop Literary Journal, and many others. She started and runs the Sq. Hill Poetry Workshop sponsored by Carnegie Library.

Howard Faerstein was born in '47 in Brooklyn, NY, and is still there. He has received a BA in Psychology and a Masters in English. A chapbook has been published by Owl's Head Press--Play a Song on the Drums he said. Married and a father, a gardener and birdwatcher, he is a member of Poets Union. The atmosphere of "H. B." comes from association with the New York City Off Track Betting Corp.

Sylvia Gillett has written book reviews for the Baltimore Sun and is currently editing a literary anthology. Most recently, her short story "Sugar and Spice" appeared in Feeding the Hungry Heart, published by Bobbs-Merrill.

R. Hayden is studying at Kansas State University now as an undergraduate and is appearing in our pages for the first time.

Roger Hoffmann lives and writes in Conway, Massachusetts, and is appearing in our pages for the first time.

Arthur Winfield Knight lives and works in California, Pennsylvania, and is appearing here for the first time.

Janet Krauss has appeared in Cottonwood Review, Seattle Review, Poet Lore, College English, Negative Capability, and Tar River Poetry, among others. She teaches at St. Basil's College and Fairfield University, and is the poetry editor of the Norwalk News. She was a Pushcart Prize nominee for 1982.

William Luvaas, a writer living in New York City, has work appearing in Harper's Weekly, Northwest Review, and BlueLine. He is involved with Poets in Public Service, an organization of writers who apply their works therapeuti-

cally in hospitals and prisons.

S. A. Massaro has had poetry and translations appear in The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, Tendrill, Northwest Journal, Poet Lore, Theatre News, Interstate, and a few other small press journals.

James Sanderson lives in Odessa, Texas.

Bethany Schroeder is a Sage Fellow at Cornell University, and received a BA in English from UC-Riverside in 1980. She expects to complete an MFA in Poetry in June, 1984, and is working on a book of poems, some of which have already been published.

Cheryl Shell is studying English as an undergraduate at Kansas State University and appears with us for the first time.

John Sours is a practicing psychoanalyst in New York and has published poetry in The North Dakota Review, The Rollins Critic, The Wisconsin Review, The Mickle Street Review, The South Dakota Review, The Third Eye, Phantasms, Telephone and other publications. His first novel, Starving to Death in a Sea of Objects, was published in 1980, and he is completing a second novel, called "Dr. Dunham's Blindness."

Jim Stein is an English undergraduate at Kansas State University.

Ann Stoll, from Holton, Kansas, is finishing her high school work there, and appears with us for the first time this issue.

Mindy Wolf is enrolled at Columbia University in its MFA program and has been teaching composition at Jersey City State College in New Jersey this past year.

PATRONS

We would like to thank those who especially
have made this issue possible.

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