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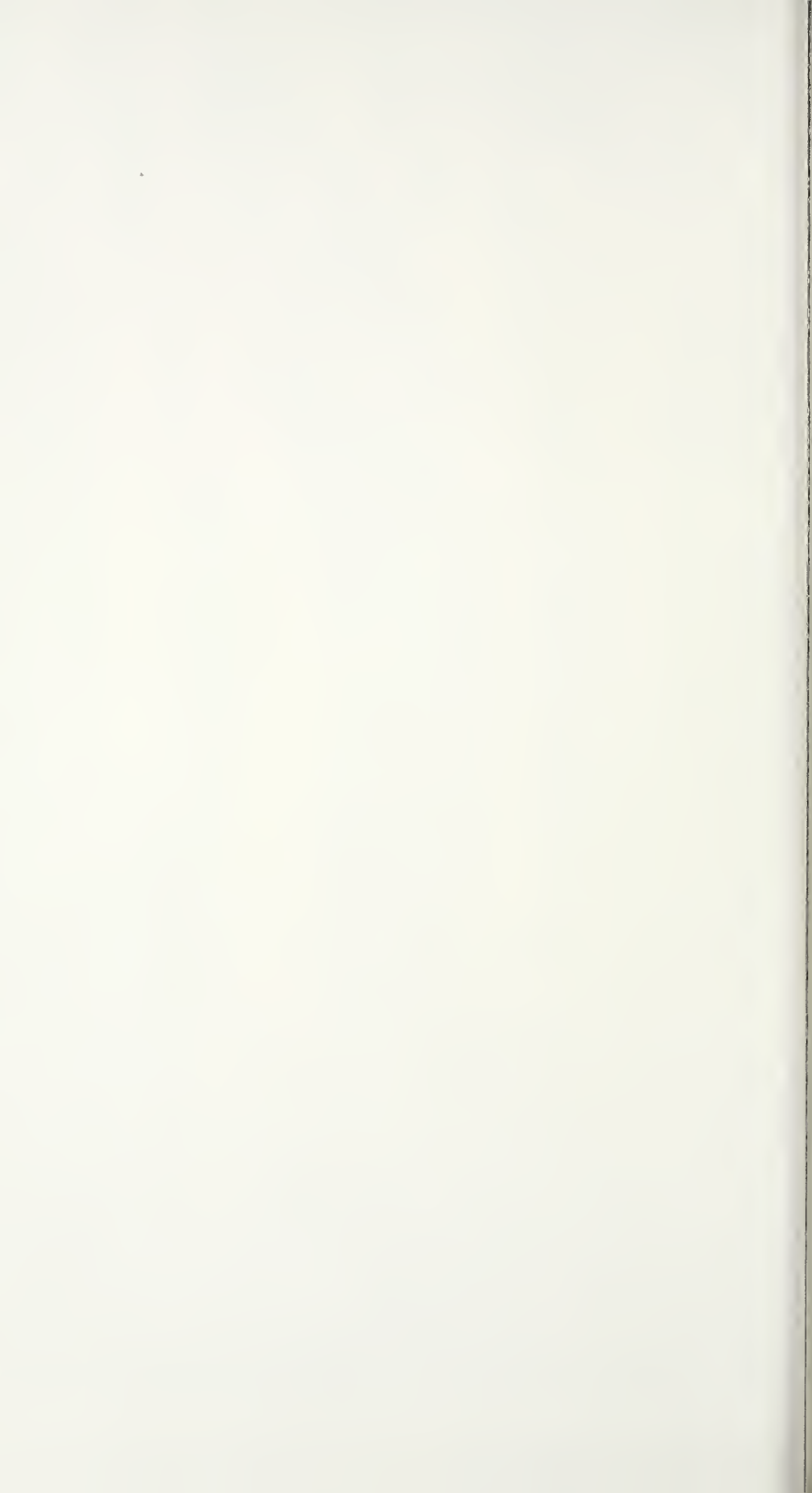
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AURORA



A U R O R A

1 9 8 2

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THE PRODIGAL

Paul Hicks

"Do you know how long it takes my father to piss?" Ricky asked.

"No," I said.

"Five minutes and fifteen seconds," he answered, pausing to build the joke. "Fifteen seconds to piss and five minutes to find his whacker!" He broke into a fit of laughter and laughed until he threw up out the window.

I was seventeen and my best friend Picky and I would drive out past the river to the hills on Friday night in his father's car. When we left we never knew exactly where we were going, only that we were going and that we would probably be back at about daylight on Saturday morning.

Ricky's father was a fundamentalist who believed that children were to be seen and not heard; Ricky had an immense sense of humor about this, and as I drove along on these pointless trips into the hills, he would get drunk on cheap wine and bootlegged beer and tell the dirty jokes: all of them about his father.

So we drove every Friday night and we never knew where we would be past midnight, except that it would be on a deserted dirt or gravel road, twenty miles in the middle of nowhere, parked beside a creek listening to the water, the wind, the rain, the snow, whatever it was that night, and Ricky telling the dirty jokes about his father. Both of us drunk and laughing hysterically. Then in February, on a Friday night, after leaving the iced-over parking lot of the church where my father preached, we were thirteen miles on the far side of the river, on a gravel road that we had not been on in months, and there was a dip, a valley, with extremely steep climbs on both sides that we had forgotten. It had been snowing since Wednesday and the roads were covered with a thick, compacted sheet of ice. As we came over the near side of

the incline, neither of us paying attention to where we were going, halfway down the hill we realized that we could not get the car back out.

So we sat there on the warm hood in the freezing air, drinking beer, and Ricky telling the lewd jokes. Occasionally he would finish a joke, throw an empty beer bottle in the snow, and getting into the car, he would make a mad dash at the hill. But half way up, the tires spinning hopelessly on the ice, the car would slide back to the bottom of the valley, smoking and smelling of burned rubber and oil. Finally, as the skies were turning light, we looked at each other and without a word, began laughing madly and walking up the road away from the car.

When we arrived at his home his father asked where the car was and where the hell he had been, and Ricky calmly told him that children were to be seen and not heard. I gaped at him for a second when he said it, not certain I had heard it, not certain that he had stood there in his father's face and said it so plainly and calmly, though afterward, long afterward, I was glad that he had. His father slapped him and Ricky walked out of the house and left for good. It was the last time I ever saw Ricky, and it was the last I ever heard of the car, and it was the last time I ever drove out to the hills on Friday night and listened to the dirty jokes about his father.

I was ten, and it was a May morning, the day lillies down by the creek, bright orange splotches along the banks, and they said my brother was dead. Just like that. Dead. One minute my brother was rolling out of the barnyard in the huge red truck that he drove for Stevenson Lumber, and the next thing the lillies were by the creek, waving orange in the sun, and he was dead. It was the way they told me. The car pulling up in the yard, a police car that I would remember was brown, and my father coming in from the porch with a look on his face. The look and the blank eyes. Then he told us, there in the living room where we had all sort of

gathered when the police car pulled up. I ran out of the house, out the back way, because I didn't want to see the look, especially not on my father's face, the blank stare in my father's eyes. So I went down by the creek and cried, and later, whenever I thought about it, I would see the lillies. Like they were put there for me to remember, just along with the cattails by the water. I stayed there for hours, by the creek, my knees curled up to my chin, staring at the flowers stretched out through the green weeds. Until a relative, much older, an Uncle I thought, came down and got me. Taking me by the hand and leading me up past the house, around the house, not through it, to the front porch where my father came out and said something to my uncle, and then to me. Saying, "Paul, I want you to go stay with..." And on his face there was the look, and it was the same look that my brother had worn two years earlier when he had shot my pony after it had fallen through the thin ice of the creek and broke its legs.

He had come in from the barn with the gun and found me home from school earlier than he had thought I would be.

I saw the gun in his hand as he walked into the bedroom we shared and asked if he had been hunting.

"No," he stammered, "no, I haven't."

"Shooting cans?" I persisted.

"No," he said again. And then there was the look come on his face and he leaned the gun against the wall behind the door and slid down to sit on the floor beside it. I thought it was unusual for him to do it, and with the worried look, he began to quiver a little.

"Paul," he said, "you know there's some things that you've got to do whether you want to or not." I was ten and I knew. "Well, I'm sorry," he began apologizing before telling me what for, "but I just killed your pony."

I was shocked by it, stunned, and I just stood there staring at him and shaking and beginning to cry.

Then he was stammering, "I didn't want to, but I had to; he fell through the ice on the creek and broke all his legs and..."

"But he would have lived?" I managed, and it was not like a question at all, because I knew that things did not die from broken legs.

He was shaking his head slowly. "But it wouldn't have been the same," he said. "His legs would have been crooked. He wouldn't have walked right. Forever."

"But he would have lived," I said again, "he would have lived."

It was a long time after that before I forgave him for shooting the pony, a long time before I realized what it was he meant; that it would not have been the same. And when my father came home from work later that night, he said it was a shame about the pony, but that it was part of some kind of holy plan; that I could not understand it. My brother had said nothing to that, only had the worried look on his face, and said that it was a shame that the pony had fallen through the ice, and all the time, for weeks afterward, he was saying that he was sorry to me. Like it was him who had killed the pony; which I would realize later was not true.

And it was the same look as the look on my father's face that I saw on the porch when he spoke to me and the uncle, and it was the same look that he kept as we drove past him in the uncle's car. As we were driving past the barnyard where my brother had always parked the bright red truck, where it had been sitting the night before. Then on past the barn and down the road beside the creek. Past the water and the cattails. And the orange, orange, orange day lillies.

It was the night before the wreck and my brother sat across the table from me reading a book with wide, tall pages that had no pictures. The book was written by a saint and though I was not all together sure that my father believed in saints, I

was sure that he noticed the title of the book which was the saint's name, but he said nothing to my brother when he first walked into the room from the back porch.

My mother was setting the table and badgering me with whether I had washed my hands or not and I said I had, not because I had, but because that was the right answer. My brother looked up from the book and, glancing across at me, smiled. He knew that I had not washed them, but he knew that yes was the right answer too, so he said nothing, only went back to reading the book. And as my mother finished setting the places, my father sat down in the chair at the head of the table and watched my brother read.

"What are you reading," my father asked at last.

"Oh, nothing really," my brother answered, closing the book and lying it on the table beside his plate, "just a book." He did not tell my father that the book was written by a real saint, and I am not sure what my father would have said if he had.

"What time are you leaving tomorrow?" my father asked him as my mother peeled off her apron and sat at the end of the table opposite him.

"Just about daylight, I guess," my brother said.

"You going to say grace tonight?" my mother asked, looking at my brother.

My brother gave me an unusual glance, a worried look, like he had made some important decision that was going to make him wonder in the future if he had done the right thing, but he said nothing.

"Daniel," she said to him, "did you hear me?"

"Yes," he mumbled without breathing, "I did."

"Well," my father said impatiently.

My brother just sat there, staring at me, looking straight across the table into my face with the look of worry imbedded in his eyes.

"Well?" my father repeated himself, "are you going to say grace?"

Finally with great effort, my brother murmured an answer. "No."

My mother's face turned a peculiar tint of grey, and glancing at my father, I could see the muscles of his face tighten, wrinkling his eyes and forehead. "Why not?" he asked, barely keeping the straining tightness of his voice from breaking.

The look on my brother's face, in my brother's eyes, turned from the worried look to a look of intense anger and bitterness. He turned to my father, and after a while, slowly and deliberately he answered, "Because I don't know if I believe in God anymore."

My mother half gasped and groaned, and knocking over her chair as she jumped up from the table, she ran off down the hallway wailing as if she had been struck. My father kicked the chair out from under him across the room and grabbing at a coffee cup, he hurled it across the table at my brother. It struck him on the shoulder; bouncing off, shattering on the floor in front of the sink.

With a great quiet and calmness about him, my brother stood up from the table giving me one last painful glance, and walked down the hall to our bedroom, closing the door behind him. And for some reason that I did not understand, when he first said it I began to cry and did not stop until several minutes after I heard the door shut behind him.

Later the same night, the night before the wreck, I walked as quietly as possible, into our bedroom and slipped into my bed. I lay there for a long time trying not to breathe, looking across through the darkness at my brother who lay on top the covers in all his clothes staring at the ceiling, his arm drawn up and lying across his eyes as if the lights were on.

After watching him lie there motionlessly for almost half an hour, I saw him, or the shadow of

him, turning over onto his side to look at me. I closed my eyes quickly to feint sleep, not realizing that he could not see me for the darkness anyway.

"Paul?" I heard him whisper, "Paul?"

In a second or so I decided to answer him. "Yes?" I whispered back, now knowing why we were whispering.

"Paul, why did you cry when I said that at the table?"

I thought about it and could not answer it with anything because I did not know why it was I'd cried. Finally I whispered back to him, "I don't know, I just did."

He was quiet for a minute before speaking again. "Are you mad at me? I mean, do you hate me for it?" His voice cracked.

I was ten years old and he was nineteen, and I thought it was an unusual question, asking me like that. "No," I said, "of course I don't."

"Good," he said, clearing his throat as if he were dry as ash and had not spoken for months, "because I want you to know that I love you."

When he said it, it was as if someone had slapped me with a cold wet hand. Neither of us had ever said anything of the sort before, and I was certain that I was supposed to say something to answer it, but I didn't; only lay there and watched him roll over onto his back again, bending his arm up and covering his eyes like before.

When I realized that I could not answer him, did not know how to answer him, I buried my face in the pillow and held my breath for long stretches, feinting sleep, until at last I did fall asleep. Hours later.

During the summer after the accident, after the funeral in which my father gave the eulogy, in which my father was so self composed, the air of eloquence in his sermons began to wilt and diminish. Then one weekend in late June, when the roads were dusty and the creeks were nearly dry, he came home one Friday night from work and there were

bulges in the back pockets of his work pants. And without a word throughout dinner, and without a word when he had finished, he walked out of the house and got into the truck and drove off down the road toward the river and the hills. Without saying where it was he was going, he simply finished eating and left-- with the bulges in his pockets and a cloud of brown kicking up from the tires of the truck.

We did not see him again until Sunday night, but throughout the weekend my mother did not say a word about where he was, or mention his leaving in any way. Somehow I got the feeling that she knew where he was going, but when I asked where he was on Sunday morning while we were preparing for church, she only shook her head and ran out of the room crying. I did not ask again.

When he returned on Sunday night he looked as if he had slept in the truck; unshaven, dusty, and his clothes mussed and wrinkled. He was quiet after that, unreasonably quiet, though he returned to work on Monday morning like nothing had happened.

This continued throughout the summer until one Sunday in August when I came up from the barn and found the truck in the driveway and my mother in the living room crying. Without having to ask, I walked down the hallway to my father's room and pushed open the door. Lying there, his shoulders and head on the floor, his hips and legs on the bed, like he had tried to get out of bed and fallen, was my father, an empty whiskey bottle on the floor beside him. He was dusty, and his boots, on his feet in the middle of the bed, were caked in wet mud.

"Plaul," he slurred drunkenly when he saw me stepping in the door. And it didn't sound like 'Paul' at all, but like it was spelled with another l-- 'Plaul'.

"Come here," he said, reaching for my arm. I thought of running but I was so stiff that I could not move.

He grabbed my arm, falling out of the bed completely and sitting on the floor, dragging me down into his lap. "Paul, honey, do you now how much I love you."

I did not answer. I did not answer because I did not think that he wanted an answer. "I love you so much," he said, "so, so much."

He was crying. Hugging me in his arms. Squeezing me too tightly against him, squeezing me until it hurt.

"Oh, I love you so much," he said again, rocking back and forth against the bed. "You poor little brotherless boy."

He was sobbing loudly then, and it was getting hard to breathe pressed between his arms.

"Paul?" He stopped sobbing and said it quietly, and this time there was no 'l' added to it, so it sounded right.

I tilted my head back to look up at him.

"Do you know why your brother died?"

I was confused at first, because it was a real question, because there was a pause for me to answer in.

"Yes," I said, a huge knot rolling up in the top of my chest, pushing at the base of my throat.

"He wrecked," I said past the knot. "He was driving the big truck with the logs on it and he runned off the road and got killed." It was difficult for me to say it, and as I did there was a vision of orange day lillies that pushed its way into my mind.

"Paul, Paul, Paul..." he mumbled over and over, the smell of whiskey wrapping around my face, his arms squeezing me even tighter.

"You're hurting me," I managed to croak, with what little breath I had.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," he whined, releasing me a little, but then taking hold of me even tighter than before. "I'm so, so sorry, I could never hurt you. I love you so much."

He began rocking against the bed again, crying louder than before, then more softly. "Paul?"

he said, "do you love me"

"Of course I love you," I said.

"How much?" he asked.

"Very much. Much, much."

"And do you trust me?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Oh, honey," he wailed again. "You poor little brotherless boy. Your brother didn't just run off the road. God run your brother off that road. It was God, that bastard, killed him, and sent him down to hell forever." When he finished he began to heave violently, and I stared, horrified by what he had said.

He held me for a long time, but said nothing else. Only rocked me and cried and breathed his terrible alcohol breath into my mouth and nose. When he stopped rocking and crying, and fell asleep, passed out against the bed, I slipped out of his arms and went down by the creek to throw rocks on the smooth water and at the tops of the cattails and lillies.

Thinking about what he had said, I suddenly understood where it was he was going on weekends-- or rather, why he was going-- that it was not important where he was going, only that he was going, and that he would not be back for church on Sunday. So afterward, when I understood, I begged my mother to let me go with him on Friday night. But she refused to even think of it, and I thought that she cried later because I had asked. Yet I wanted badly to go, so that I could be with him, so that I would not be there on Sunday morning when she left for church.

It was two years after the accident and my father had not been to give a sermon, or to hear a sermon in over a year. Still, my mother dragged me to church every Sunday, and we sat on the long wooden benches, on our long wooden bench, and I could tell by the way my mother watched the altar and the door that she was waiting for my father. She

had waited for him for a year and the rest of the congregation seemed to be waiting for him too. His seat to the rear of the altar where the preachers sat was still there; they had not removed it and no one ever sat in it.

But, sitting there on the bench, I knew that he would not come, I knew that he would never come, on that day or any day. That if he ever returned to the church it would be to stand on the podium, hands on the altar, leering drunkenly at the pale congregation. That he would stand there cursing drunkenly, telling them the truth, telling them what God had done to my brother. It had been a year since I first saw him drunken on the bedroom floor, and still there was the ritual of him coming from work on Friday night with the whiskey bottles full in his pockets. And there was my begging my mother to let me go with him wherever it was he was going. There was always the refusal, of course, and I never learned where it was he went, though I do not think that he ever knew where it was he was going. Only that he was going out to the hills past the river and that he would be back Sunday night after church was over.

So on the Sunday in July, in the hot church, more than a full year after my father had been to a sermon, two years after my brother's death, I knew that he would not come. Sitting there on the bench, I stared out the window, wondering where he was, seeing him driving drunken through the hills, wishing I were with him. The window blinds were drawn half way to block out the sun and there was a shadowy lightless air in the room. Then suddenly, like a flash bulb freaking and burning on with all its brilliance instead of dying instantly as it should have, the door in the back of the room pushed open and the sun streamed through.

The entire congregation turned with the entrance of the sunlight into the room, the preacher at the altar stopping in mid-sentence and turning with them. And there in the doorway, with sunlight

beaming in over both his shoulders and around his head, was my father.

He was dressed in the white shirt, and the thin tie, and the slick-worn black suit that he had always worn when he preached. There was a stern expression on his face, the muscles drawn taut, making the contours of his cheeks jut outward. His eyes were riveted straight ahead at the altar as he began to walk silently up the aisle across the white pine floor to the front of the church.

When I saw him at the door in his suit, my stomach had knotted instantly, and as he walked past me on his way to the altar, without even glancing at me or my mother, my stomach churned and I felt like throwing up.

As he stepped up onto the podium where the altar stood at the front of the room and whispered something to the other preacher, my mother began to cry. Then the preacher threw his arms around my father and yelled "praise the Lord," and began crying himself. The knot in my stomach tightened even more as the entire congregation began to applaud the work of the Lord and cry.

While they were applauding and crying, my mother stood up and walked past me and up the aisle to step onto the podium and put her arms around my father. By then the entire congregation was standing and crying, and, like they had been given a signal, they all turned and stared at me. I was twelve years old, but I knew what they expected: with the knot in my stomach turning to lead, I began to cry and stepped out onto the clean white boards of the aisle to walk to the front of the room and my father. As I made my way up the aisle, it struck me that I had never asked my father if I could go with him on his weekend trips, only my mother, and suddenly I wished I had.

As I came up to the altar I was crying uncontrollably like the rest of them. But I was crying like them, not with them. I was crying

For a reason not even close to the rest of the congregation, for a reason totally foreign to them. I wondered if they could see it, but apparently they could not.

When I approached my father he lifted me up onto the podium and pulled me up tight against his chest, then released me a little.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's all over now. I've come back to God." Then bending over me, smiling, kissing my forehead with his wet face he whispered to me. "Do you love me?"

All around us the crying of the congregation was turning into fits of joyous laughter, and there were people who were singing and shouting, and the room was filling up with scattered 'Amens' and 'Hallelujahs'.

My father was still staring down at me, though some of the smile was gone. "I know I'm your father," he said, "but do you love me now?"

In my head there were words forming, but they were not the right words, and so I said to him, "You're my father." I knew that it was not enough to say, that he had expected something else, something more, some words that had not been said but that would not come out. "You're my father," I said again, and it was all that I could say. "You ARE my father."

It was a Friday in February and it had been snowing since Wednesday and the roads were covered with a thick, compacted sheet of ice. I was seventeen years old and my best friend Ricky was waiting in the car. I did not know it, but it would be the last time that I would ever see Ricky, and the last time that I would ever see the car, and the last night that we would ever drive out to the hills on Friday night. But it was early in the night then, not quite midnight, though Ricky was already drunk, and we were parked in front of the remote church. I had told him that I had something to do in the church, and being my best friend, he did not ask questions when I

told him, only sat quietly when I shut the engine off and stepped out into the snow.

It had been falling steadily all day the freshness of the new layer popped and crunched under my feet as I walked toward the church house door, flakes hitting my face, clogging my eyes, and landing in the shallow tracks that I left behind me as I went up the steps.

The congregation had always agreed that the arms of God must be open wide at all times, so the door was never locked. I glanced back at Ricky one time-- he was slumped over in the front seat looking away from me-- before I pushed through the doors and stepped into the aisle that went up between the benches to the altar. The combination of the white pine planks, the chill of the still air, and the white front porch light reflected off the snow, gave the interior of the church house an icicle-cold glow.

The door swung shut behind me and I waited for my eyes to adjust to the dark stillness of the room after stepping out from under the white porch light. When the rows and rows of benches had made themselves visible all the way to the front, I walked slowly down the center of the aisle until I was half way to the altar, then stopped and stood motionlessly.

I was waiting for something, though I was not sure what, and when I began to speak it was as odd to me as it would have appeared to someone looking in through one of the frosted windows, wondering what I was saying in the dark, freezing, empty church at almost midnight.

"God?" I said, and I truly, honestly expected an answer. I paused for it, and when it didn't come, at first, I thought that I had not said it loud enough.

"God?" I said again, but louder.

I waited once more, lifting my eyes from the altar to the open rafters and the ceiling above them. Moments passed and the cold air settled

around my voice after just the tiniest echoe. When the answer failed to come a second time, I took another step toward the altar, still staring at the rafters, and without realizing what I was doing, I began to say it over and over again, louder and louder. "God? God?" Then I was screaming it madly from the bottom of my stomach-- "GOD!...GOD!...FATHER!"

Taking one last step toward the altar, I fell forward onto the floor with a jar, and later my nose bled, or I would remember it bleeding, but then it didn't bleed, though I wanted it to badly. Wanted to see the long dark strings of blood on the perfect white pine planks; wanted to feel the warm thick flow spewing wasted on the cold wood; wanted to get up from the floor and leave the empty church with large, round, caked splotches ruining the long thin lines of the boards. But I was not bleeding then, only crying, and I was vaguely aware that the tears would not be there on the floor when my father started preaching Sunday morning. So when I left, there was no blood. Only the echoe of my voice, crying and screaming at the rafters.

"God, you bastard. You lousy, lousy bastard."

MY BED

My bed - it don't work
no more...

It broke
and fell to the floor.

It broke
without conjugation,
of its own inclination,

So when I get up,
I couldn't be lower.

Mary Lynne Boxley

"LIVING in the MATERIAL WORLD"

The bank lets me buy a car
to get to work
to pay them back
for using the car to get to work.

I stay up all night doing the things I enjoy,
then get up early in the morning
to go to work to have the money
to buy the things
that keep me up all night.

I go to work when I'm sick
ruining my health
to save those days
for when I retire
so I'll have the time
to be sick.

Mary Lynne Boxley





WHAT SKY?

The lawn keeps grinning and growing.
The shrubs are winning too.
Dirty dishes live forever.
The bills are overdue.
The car is always thirsty.
They say the sky is blue.
I brush my teeth twice daily.
What else can I do?

Teresa Ann Hagan

FRONT PORCH VOYEUR

The swing moans softly
in rhythm with the push of my feet.
Feet bare and coarse.
Sometimes the wood groans so
that I believe it will simply sigh and collapse.
But it hasn't yet anyway.

I can hear the sounds of the far-off highway.
And I listen to the highs and lows
of the engines' whine as they draw nearer
and then fade away.

Next to the traffic's rush
the tired creak of the old swing
is a wistful sound.
My smile is wistful too, as I sit swinging,
letting my feet click softly on the porch.
I sometimes wonder; just where is everyone going?

Teresa Ann Hagan

CARNIVAL

Scent of popcorn
Drifting on warm evening breezes
Peeling blue wooden horses
Gallop in a never ending circle.

Eyes wide with wonder
Excitement snapping through the air
Pierce screams on rides runaway
Colorful metal cluttered ground.

Balloons dancing
Dragging strings behind them
Making their journey
To the sky.

Debra Lynn Baker

ROLLING STONE

I am a rolling stone
yet unmoved,

I am a musician
whose instruments lie on dusty shelves and in out
of the way corners,
unplayed, with strings untamed,

I am a poet
in a moment of passion with no pen

I am God incarnate
but only a pawn in the cold uncaring hand of Lucifer
and how many games has a solitary pawn saved?
A thousand thoughts have played across my brow
wanting life but getting shelved along with a
thousand untapped talents.

Mark Sweet

THE BIRD

Karen McLean

We sat cross-legged in a circle under the deck. The sun made lines on our faces as it came through the cracks between the boards. I dug my finger down in the cool soft dirt averting my eyes from the group. There were four others besides me and they were talking about poor Bridget. I couldn't talk about her like they could. My voice always broke when I tried and I couldn't let them see me cry, so I just played in the dirt. The grit stained the lines of my hands and got up under my fingernails. Mom would probably get angry for my getting so dirty, but I needed the distraction. They were deciding what to do about Bridget.

"Hey, Bird, go get us some ice cream money from Mom. I think I hear the truck."

They called me Bird because they told me I ate like a bird, but I didn't care. They were my friends. Mike and Birney always sat together. They were brothers and they lived across the street. Nobody ever thought they were related because Birney had orange hair and thousands of freckles, and Mike had black hair and black slits for eyes. Sometimes we called Birney "Howdy Doody," but no one called Mike anything. Scott was my brother. He was the oldest and tallest. Plus it was our house where we met everyday, so he was kind of the leader of the Cave Club. He thought up the name too, which I thought was neat. Mickey was also there today. Her real name was Monica but everyone called her Mickey. She was tall and blond and could outrun any of the boys. I loved Mickey. I wished my name was Mickey instead of Bird, but I didn't tell them that.

I ran out from underneath the deck and around to the front of the house to find Mom. She was pulling weeds from her flowers by the driveway.

Mom always looked and dressed for any occasion, even pulling weeds. She had on brown bermudas and blue deck shoes. Her t-shirt said something about "Everything's coming up roses" and she wore a huge brimmed yellow straw hat. She was a dandelion and I was a bird.

"Mom, can Scott and me have some ice cream money?"

"I guess. Go in and get two quarters from my purse," she said not even looking up from her dandelions. It must have been routine for her now because we asked nearly everyday. Usually she let us have the money and the truck would stop in front of our house everytime. I skipped inside, (I was into skipping) and grabbed fifty cents from her change purse. When I got back outside the ice cream man was a block away and the others were sitting on the curb. I tapped Scott on the elbow.

"Thanks, Bird."

We bought our ice cream and went back under the deck. They again talked about Bridget while I ate the chocolate off my ice cream bar.

"I think we ought to egg his house. Even if he didn't do it, nobody likes him and they wouldn't care," Mickey piped up.

"Yeah but we'd have to buy eggs if we wanted to do it. Besides he did do it. Mike said that Darryl saw old Watson put meat out for another dog in the neighborhood. Ain't that right, Mike?" Scott questioned him.

"That's right, Darryl saw it. Mr. Watson poisoned that other dog that used to live in the corner house. Bridget is the fourth one."

"Nobody poisons our dog and gets away with it. We should call the police."

"We don't have evidence."

"I know, we can spy on his house every night and take pictures."

"Man, Birney get serious."

"We'll get even," Mickey declared.

"How're we gonna do that?"

"He killed Bridget; we'll kill that parrot he always has in that cage."

I looked up from my ice cream at Mickey who was grinning at the group. Her eyes sparkled with intensity; her blond hair was in need of a brush. She looked wild. I was mesmerized.

"Now that's crazy Mickey. How're we going to kill his dumb parrot?" Scott said.

"I haven't figured it out yet."

"Let's do it," Mike said solemnly. He was as totally serious as Mickey was wild. I was fascinated at their behavior and let my ice cream drip on my hand.

"What do you think, Birney?" Mickey asked him. Birney blushed and repeated Mike's "Let's do it."

"Well Scott?"

"Alright but let's meet in the cave tomorrow and talk about a plan, ok?"

We decided to meet in the cave after breakfast tomorrow morning. The cave was our official meeting place. It was a little room built underneath the bottom of our stairs inside the house. It was totally enclosed except for a small door that was cut into the wall that let us come and go. Our house was the only house that had it, and Dad had put in a lightbulb for us. If anything were to be discussed that was top secret we met in there. I had dragged two sleeping bags in there one day and spread them on the floor. Scott told me it was a good idea. Ever since then he let me come to the meetings. Sometimes I came and sometimes I didn't, but usually I came. We even had a secret knock that everyone was required to know. I thought that was a good idea too.

The group started up a game of tag, but I wandered over to the driveway. Mom had progressed to the mailbox now and I sat back on my heels to watch her.

"What were you doing under the deck honey?" she asked. I didn't even know she saw me. It didn't surprise me though; I was certain she had eyes in the back of her head.

"Talking," I replied.

"What were you talking about for so long?"

"Bridget."

"I suppose you and your brother are still upset by that huh? Bridget was a kind and gentle dog and it's sad that she died that way. She must have gotten hold of something bad to kill her instantly. That's why I want you kids to wash your hands when you go inside and before you eat. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Good, now try not to think about it too much dear. We'll get another puppy for you soon."

"Ok, Mom."

"Hey I know. Tony is back home for a week. Why don't you go bring him that canister of cookies I baked?" Mom was looking at me now. Her eyes were tired looking. She was upset that Bridget died too. I could tell because she had cried when she told us that morning three days ago.

I skipped in to the house again, grabbed the canister, and let go of the screen door with a bang as I left the house. Tony was my crush. His name was Anthony Coy Greene and he came home from the Vietnam War every once in a while. We always wrote letters to him and sent him cookies. Everyone liked Tony, especially me. When he came home I would watch him wash and wax his car every other day. It was a bright blue day today so I knew I would find him working on his yellow GTO. He called it his '68 Goat and he called me Babe. I like Babe much better than Bird. He also told me he wished I was ten years older. That would've made me one year younger than his nineteen; I wished I was ten years older too.

Tony was underneath his car when I walked up to him. I tapped my finger on his kneecap.

"Is that you, Babe?" He yelled from underneath the car, and rolled his little cart backward. I looked down at his greasy face and giggled.

"What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a grease monkey before?" He wrapped his long arms

around me and picked me up. "God, you look great. What'cha got in your can? Some cookies I hope. I just love your Mom's cookies, but you know what?" I shook my head begging to know what. "I love you even better!" I giggled till my side split. He carried me inside his house and set me down in the kitchen. "Do you want some milk with those cookies?" They better be cookies 'cause your Mom makes the best." I opened the lid to reveal my treasure. "Chocolate chip, my favorite! Here sit down and tell me what's been going on in the neighborhood."

"Bridget died."

"Oh your kidding. When did this happen?"

"Tuesday morning."

"Man, I'm sorry, Babe. Bridget was your best friend wasn't she?" I nodded and stared down at my feet.

"Sh-she was poisoned by M-mr. Watson."

"It's ok, honey." I ran over to sit on his lap and cried into his shoulder for the first time since it happened. He brushed my hair and rocked me but didn't say a word. I never loved anyone so much as I loved Tony now. He leaned back to look at my tear-stained face.

"The C-cave club is gonna kill Mr. Watson's bird," I coughed through my tears.

"I tell you what Babe, I see my buddies killed right and left by the enemy and it makes me so mad that I can't see straight. I go in there and blast everyone of those yellow suckers I can find and it makes me-- well it makes me feel good: But then at night I can't sleep maybe three or four hours at the most because I have such horrible nightmares. Everything comes back to me only three times bigger and three times brighter, but I'm always still the same size. Little Tony trying to fight three foot lizards. Sometimes I wake up screaming." He was looking past the wall somewhere to a twisted world that I could only imagine. He snapped back to attention and looked at me hard until I cringed. "I'm sorry, I told you that Babe, but it's not like you to kill. It used to be not like me."

I nodded slowly and crawled off his lap. I left him to eat his cookies and drink his milk. I walked back to the house for supper.

Breakfast that morning was cold cereal and Hi-C grape juice. Mom made sure I ate my vitamin because I didn't eat enough to feed a bird she told me. Scott thought that was funny. Mom also made sure we had phone numbers to all the places she was going today. Saturday was her busy day with golf and whatever. Dad was working at the plant.

"Now be good today kids; don't allow your friends to track dirt in. Mind your older brother, honey, and get the hair out of your eyes." Mom kissed us both on the cheek and was gone. I stuck out my lower lip and blew making my bangs fly.

"Hey, Bird, let's get the cave ready for our meeting today. Grab some pillows off the couch and I'll call the gang," Scott said gulping down the rest of his Hi-C.

I trudged down the steps to our secret place. It was cold and dark and mildewy, but it was our place. I thought it was more my place than the others because I could stand up in the little room and the rest of them were too big. Scott was almost a teenager but he still crawled in for our meetings.

I was arranging the pillows when Scott knocked and entered with Mickey and Mike. I was surprised that Birney wasn't with Mike but apparently his Mom had taken him to the dentist this morning.

"I got a sure-fire plan," Mickey piped up. "Tonight when it gets almost dark, we'll go over to Watson's house and feed his parrot some rat poison I found at home. An eye for an eye, and a parrot for a dog. Old Watson eats supper at 7:30 and leaves his parrot on the porch alone. We'll meet across the street at 7:15 and everybody wear black."

No one said a word and I stared at Mickey's excitement over the hatched plan.

"What about it Mike? Scott asked.

"Let's do it. Tonight is the night."

"It's unanimous then 'cause I say we do it too."

We talked about some other stuff to do today and left the cave. I walked outside and looked down the street to see if Tony was outside. He was under the car again tinkering around. I turned my head to look the other way toward Mr. Watson's house. He was sitting on the porch whittling a stick. We were really going to do it. Tonight. I would probably have nightmares like Tony.

Mickey ran up and yelled at me to come with her. I followed her to her two-story home. Tall Mickey, tall home. She motioned me inside and put her finger to her lips. Mickey's Mom was in the living room watching soap operas while she ironed clothes. We tip-toed down to the basement. My heart beatin my throat. Mickey, the cat, slid her hand over the wall to find a lightswitch. The bulb flicked on and her eyes squinted at the sudden change.

"Come on," she whispered. She led me to the shelves that housed the cleaners and we searched together for the rat poison.

"I found it!" She brought out a red can with a grinning skull on it. Mickey grinned. "Let's take it back to the others. I didn't want them to come because they would've made too much noise. I could trust you Bird." I smiled at her and we stole away back to the house with the cave.

"Mickey, you did good," Scott praised her when we returned. "Ok everyone, remember 7:15 at Old Watson's."

Everyone agreed.

The sun was at the edge of the horizon as the five of us huddled in our dark clothes behind a bush. We watched as Mr. Watson puttered around the kitchen and finally sat down to eat his supper.

"How are we gonna get in the screened porch?" Mickey asked.

"I thought you had it planned," Scott whispered back fiercely.

"I forgot that his porch was screened in," Mickey shrugged her shoulders and started playing with a leaf.

"There's a hole near the screendoor where they haven't finished building the porch yet," said Mike. "I saw it today while I walked by. But, it's too little for us to crawl through."

"Bird can do it," Mickey came alive again. "She'll feed the poison. Bridget was hers anyway. You'll be real quiet won't you Bird?"

I nodded slowly as she pushed the red can into my hand. I looked at everyone's faces. It was unanimous. I looked back at Mickey. She was smiling proudly. I looked far down the road to Tony's. His yellow GTO was gone. I peeked through the large picture window in the front of the house. Mr. Watson was eating his dinner and watching Lawrence Welk on a small portable. Scott told me that he would whistle if anything went wrong. Silence. I took a step toward the small hole Mike had talked about. He was right, they were all too big to fit, but Bird could. A bird for a dog. A bird for a dog. I crawled through with no trouble and inched on hands and knees to the parrot cage. The bird was sitting on a small wooden stick near the top of the cage. It was a yellow parrot, yellow like Tom's Goat. I was going to kill that yellow sucker. The cage door opened under my trembling fingers. The bird was still. I reached in and poured the white powder in the tiny water dish. The bird was still and yellow and fuzzy and one of its legs was broken off. I froze. Scott was whistling loud and long. I turned toward the picture window to see Old Watson walking to the door. I dropped the red can and flew to the locked door. The latch turned as Mr. Watson stepped outside. I didn't look back as I bolted through the door and across the lawn.

"Did you do it Bird?"

"Is it dead?"

"A bird for a dog."

"Hey Bird did you do it?"

I looked at each one of them and nodded. "It's dead," I said.





THE THAWING

I have been to the frigid park
Watching ice cloaked trees
Cry out to snowbirds for company
Children's swing chains
Frozen into inactivity
Like my memories
Creak and shatter when disturbed
All this time spent with you
And still I ponder
If I love you
Or merely need you
You would say
The trees aren't frozen
But insulated
Was my heart only insulated
When you came to me?
It was summer
But I remember hearing
the crystal chatter of ice breaking
Under the snowbird's incessant beak
Long still swings
Swept the little girls' laughter into the air
I hear it in the clack of popcorn
Hitting frozen ground
The snowbirds feed happily
At my feet
I feel every one's beak hit the ground
And rejoice

for Keith

Lin Watkins

BATTERED WIFE

Autumn shadows have raked the tenderness
From his face.
His eyes hide from me at night.

The chill in my spine thrusts upward
To further the shadows across the floor
The familiar crash of angry waves
Pounds the cowering cliffs
Icy fingerprints crawl across my face.

His hands twitch like the string
Of a heartless hunter's bow;
He aches to hurt.
The scraped, bleeding shadow is me
And my heart pounds my bones.
My body shudders,
For he knows no other way to love me.

Lin Watkins

MY OWN GHOST

I am my own ghost
I haunt myself both day and night
torturing myself for something
I cannot see

I am a phantom of my mind
a spirit that stalks myself
drifting toward a blurred vision
of the person I could be

I am my own shadow
I follow myself to wherever my
footsteps may lead
I must travel until I find
my own image

An image that reflects me.

Janet Lynn Thomas

RAIN

Rain,
The tears of the world,
Forms a looking glass
Reflecting grey skies and
Weary faces,
Glistening hope
As its enchantment
Seeps into sands.

Maryleigh Hayden

ALONG THE SEASHORE

Thunderous sounds of pounding surf,
Beating against pale plateau sands,
Reaching inland grasping the earth,
Capturing her within,
 back to the sea.

Green foam rides on waves crest,
Slipping along a jagged shoreline,
Lusciously licking her craggy facade,
Sneaking into,
 crevasses dark.

Sands of time caress her breast,
Then hastily whisking away,
Back to lands unforseen,
 whence they came.
Sounding silently,
 on bygone tide.

Amy Arnett

KIEV, 1944

Adlai Paul Reed

Dmitri awoke with a start. The train was sounding its whistle very close tonight, usually it was much farther off and did not disturb him. But now the horn blast filled the room with sound; insistent, mournful, so terribly ominous it made him want to cry. He would not cry he told himself, he was fourteen and would be going off to fight soon. Did crying accomplish anything? Would it help him kill the Germans? No, he would have to be bold and determined, efficient and physically strong to survive. He would be like the combine his father piloted; a merciless, swift killing machine, cutting down Germans like rows of ripe corn.

When he would talk of the war his parents would shush him and tell him he didn't know what he was talking about. But he knew. The train had told him. The train was a good teacher. He stood and watched it during the day. The very same train that took pigs to the slaughterhouse in Kiev before the war was now taking men to the front. An almost constant chain of boxcars and cattlecars rattled on day and night. Two trains were working the line. One headed west full of happy, smiling men and boys, the other headed east with only dead and wounded.

Dmitri knew from the train that went east Russia had to be losing the war. He knew from the train that headed west Russia had to eventually win the war.

The westbound train was usually two miles long, but sometimes grew to five miles. There were two strong locomotives pulling it and sometimes, Dmitri figured, it reached 40 kilometers per hour. But only the westbound train. The train with the dead and wounded would creep along at no more than twenty, as if it were wounded too.

Dmitri also knew about the situation at the front. He knew there was no glory at the front, no matter what Commissar Mendeyev said. There was pain and there was death. He heard the cries of the badly wounded sounding above the trains' steady roar. He smelled the stench which lingered on a hot, sultry day. Once the eastbound train had stopped and the whole farm had been instructed to bring water to the wounded. Dmitri had wandered from man to man and could never have imagined the suffering he saw that day. The entire farm, nearly 2000 men, women and children passed out water all day and into the night. When the train slowly moved on, Dmitri stood and watched. He looked at the blood on his hands and clothes and wondered if there were enough doctors in Russia to take care of that many wounded.

In August the train ran by them twice a day, then three times a day; the roar lingered in his ears. During September the train went by four times a day and he noticed a third locomotive. He said to his mother and father calmly, "The Germans will be here soon" and they whipped him and sent him to bed, for if the Commissar heard this he could be shot. The next week Commissar Mendeyev said to prepare for the evacuation of all the heavy machinery on the farm. In October Dmitri watched the train roll past eight times a day, the muffled grinding and squeaking of metal on metal filled his mind with visions of grey-clad soldiers and no one could sleep. But the Germans did not arrive, and the train let them rest.

On November 18 Dmitri turned fifteen. At four-thirty in the morning he heard it. It sounded its whistle miles away, as if it respected this solemn occasion. Dmitri got out of bed, changed into his clothes and went outside.

It was biting cold and snow was falling. As he waited for the train he thought, which will it be? What will it tell me today? The sound grew louder, but it was still far off. He shivered

and went back inside. He went into his parents tiny living quarters and shook his mother awake. Her eyes fluttered, then focused.

"Happy birthday," his mother said and they wept.

They cried until the train shrilly beckoned to Dmitri to come and see. He arose stolidly and went outside. The train jolted along, and the sound filled the air.

It was the eastbound train.

The cattlecars had limbs jutting gruesomely out through the slats. The boxcars could not be shut, the bodies were so tightly packed. And the coal cars were piled high.

BLACK IS THE NIGHT

Black is the night
The dealer will dance
Ask for a ride
Light up; Take a chance.

Find yourself
In a bet with the Man
Cards with no numbers
No rules in the game.

Fight for the tricks
Lay your cards on the table
Look in his eyes
End up with a foil.

Queen of hearts
Full of grace
Honored among women
Beaten by the ace.

Faith lies in the face
Of the suicide King
Crying scarlet hearts
For those who believe

The question runs deep
With every card played
Ask for a hit
Or fold them and stay.

One thing to know
Will deliver the sinner
Whatever the game
The dealer's the winner.

Karen McLean





ADOLESCENT BROWN

What color was your adolescence?

--Brown; brown like dirt
like the cold brown boards
on the floor upstairs at the hotel,

and the short, fat, brown little maid
who sweeps the dirt out onto the sidewalks,
who only comes on Thursdays.

Brown days
that lie around like slow, spotted dogs
wagging their brown tails in the air...

--No, wait.
I am sorry,
So sorry.

But you see,
my adolescence was not a color,
my adolescence was barbed wire and razor blades
and rocks in my shoes.

My life was always done up in black and white,
no red blood,
just empty veins in steam lips.

And in my adolescence
i lost my taste for tea,
and now i never think of myself
except to say, that
death is like drowning,
and turning into a mermaid.

Paul Hicks

THE LAST HAIL MARY

Lying on the basement floor
chasing off the flies,
rolling the musty rocks
in the sockets where he should have eyes

Selling pencils on the corner
from a rusted battered can.
They clank the coins into his hands
and shake their heads and walk away.

A sign around his neck that says
'pencils, pencils, colored pencils,'
blue and black and purple
and a quiet, retarded color.

A man who burned his eyes with lime
and walked around like Jesus,
like Krishna in his robes,
preaching from the mind,
the hollow, empty, mangled mind.

and there, down on the basement floor
all quiet, rotted black and smelling
old as dinosaur bones,
between the racks of Chardonnay
and the rat's hole in the corner
Jesus sleeps, rolling the musty rocks
in the sockets where he should have eyes.

Paul Hicks

AMONG FRIENDS

Debra Lynn Baker

Bang. Bang. Bang. The window blinds kept time to the music on the radio. The lyrics of "Fade Away" drifted out the open windows and into the clear warm night. Tracy stared out into the night from her tenth floor dorm room. A tombstone reflected the light of the moon as it sparkled through the darkness. Dormitories don't always have the best views, she thought to herself. She lit a cigarette and blew out the smoke, watching as it made curling designs in front of her face. They were leaving tomorrow. And she would be left alone here in Kentucky.

She turned to view the room. The walls were bare now. All the pictures and decorations had been taken down and carefully packed to be taken to their new destinations. Chipped paint covered the walls from the many years of nails hammered into them. The floors were bare, the rugs having been taken up this afternoon. The room echoed as rooms do when their insides are uprooted and taken away. Only the bare essentials and the stereo remained.

This room connected to the one beside it. It was just as empty as the first. Tomorrow was the last day of school for the spring semester. She would be returning in the fall. Her mind wandered now to the other three girls who shared this home away from home with her. She had been a scared freshman when she had met them. Chance had brought her to them.

Patty had been a sophomore then. Her curly blonde hair framed her dark eyes in a blanket of gold. Her eyes shone with a mixture of joy and sorrow. Although she had a lot of problems at home, she was the one who could incite them into all types of mischief. Tracy laughed aloud as she

remembered the time that Patty had led them in toilet papering a friend's car. A warm spring night had found them with twelve rolls of toilet paper and nothing better to do. Now Patty was going to Kansas State next semester to get her Master's in Broadcasting. Her roommate of three years would be gone.

Now her mind drifted to Alice. Alice was the practical one. Always weighing things before jumping in. Alice had been the one they had gone to with their problems. Her green eyes held compassion as she listened to each of them. Never one to order advice, she was always available to listen. Tracy remembered all the times she had cried to Alice over boyfriends and school. She was losing a close confidant now. Alice was graduating and going back home. "Just to ride up and down the road and take it easy for a while," she had said.

Her thoughts came to Dena now. Dena with her wild mood swings was a mixture of the other two. Someone she could talk to and also one who was ready to try anything new that sounded like fun. Her hair was blonde like Patty's and her eyes were green like Alice's. Dena would be leaving, too. She had graduated from her Master's program in Psychology and was moving to Florida to hunt for a job. She had grown so close to these three.

The opening of the door intruded into her thoughts. Noise and laughter filled the room as Alice, Dena and Patty burst through.

"Hey chick, is this where the party is?" asked Alice as she plunked down two bottles of cheap champagne in the middle of the floor.

Dena ran over to turn up the stereo. Bruce Springsteen was bellowing out "Hungry Heart" over the din of voices.

"What took you guys so long?" Tracy asked.

"We had to get party hats and streamers," answered Patty indignantly. "This is a party, you know."

Pop. The champagne was opened and flowed over onto the floor. Dena got out the four champagne glasses as Patty passed out the hats. Next, Patty got to work putting up the streamers. Since she was in a hurry, she ran them from the sink to the windows and back again.

"How's that?" she asked as she sat down and picked up her glass of champagne.

"Lucky thing you're not in interior decorating," said Alice sarcastically.

"Oh, shut up," Patty replied goodnaturedly.

"Come on girls, get your glasses and let's make a toast," said Tracy. Solemnly she held up her glass and said, "To friendship." The others smiled and the clink of their glasses echoed in their ears.

"This is kind of sad," said Patty. "After all, this is our last night of being together."

"Come on, you guys, let's have a good time," said Alice. "Hey, remember the time that Tracy and Dena rearranged our rooms. Four beds in one room and the other made into a living room?"

"And remember, we had to rip off the chair from the study room to put with our other chairs to make a couch," threw in Patty.

"Alright, Alright. You guys have to admit you like it," said Dena.

"Wonder what they meant by 'unsanitary' that time they caught us all sleeping in the same room?" mused Tracy as they all broke into laughter.

"Time for another round," said Patty, as she poured the drinks. "Hey Dena, remember that time we went to a scary movie with Alice and then beat her back to the room afterwards and hid before she got there?"

"Yeah, I remember. And if I remember right she peeked under her bed and went hysterical when she saw you hid there. And then you laughed so hard you couldn't get out from under the bed and you wet in her pants that you had borrowed to wear."

"Okay, okay, I remember," said Patty, trying to change the subject. "Time for more drinks." More drinks were poured and this time Dena proposed a toast. "To all the crazy escapades that we have lived through." The others raised their glasses in agreement.

"In a way I'm glad that I have another year of school to finish before I get my Master's degree. At least it's one more year until I have to make any big decisions," said Patty.

"I know what you mean," replied Tracy. "What about your plans, Alice? Dena told me that Trent had asked you to marry him."

"You know Trent," said Alice as she pushed her light brown hair from her face. "He's ready to settle down anytime. But I don't know. I don't want to settle down yet. I'm afraid that I'll never want to settle down."

"I feel that way, too," replied Dena. "I always want to go on just like this forever. I wish it never had to end." The tone of the room became more serious as they each seemed to reflect on the coming departure.

"You guys had better come back and visit me," said Tracy.

"We will, we will," they all chimed in. But Tracy knew it would be harder now. They would be scattered with states in between them. She still in Kentucky, Patty in Kansas, Alice in Arizona and Dena in Florida. Fate isn't always kind, Tracy thought to herself.

The breeze gently blew the streamers back and forth as it flowed into the room. The "bang, bang" of the window blinds was still keeping a steady beat to the music. They finished their drinks and Alice emptied the remains of the first bottle into their glasses. Tracy eyed the others, reading the same thoughts in the other's eyes that were in her own. The last time. It had a sad sound to it.

"Let's open up our presents from one another," suggested Tracy as she got up to get her gifts to

the others. They each got up and returned with packages wrapped in newspapers and outdated campus bulletins. They had started a tradition of buying each other joke presents and the habit had continued.

"I'll play Santa Claus," volunteered Patty as she began passing out the gifts that had been piled on the floor. The rustling of paper mixed in with exclamations and laughter as they tore into their presents.

Alice surveyed the pile of opened presents before her. She was richer a pair of cat-eye glasses, a pack of sponges and a day old newspaper.

Tracy held up a coiled wire and asked, "What is this, Patty?"

"I don't know. I found it in the parking lot," Patty replied.

Tracy laughed and looked down at the rest of her riches - a Snoopy pencil box and a carton of empty Pepsi bottles.

Dena had been gifted with a Matchbox car, a light bulb and some hangers from the maid's closet. "Patty, this is what we needed when we tried to tie those doors together," she said as she examined her clothes hangers.

Patty smiled in reply as she sat holding her new coloring book and looking at the broken ashtray and window cleaner that she had received.

"Time for another toast," said Tracy as she popped the top off the second bottle of champagne. She filled their glasses and said, "Alice, you make this toast."

"Okay. Let's see...to a night to remember," she said as they touched their glasses together.

"That's right, agreed Patty. "Let's do something different tonight. Something we can always remember."

"But what?" asked Tracy.

"Let's camp out on the roof. It's warm enough," suggested Dena.

"That's good," said Patty. "Let's take our mattresses up there."

"No way. That's too much trouble," replied Alice.

"Well, you guys don't have to if you don't want to, but I don't want to sleep on the concrete," replied Patty. She was already dragging her mattress off her bed.

Soon the others followed suit since it seemed the best idea. Tracy grabbed up an alarm clock and Alice collected up the champagne, their glasses and her backpack. Finally it was all gathered together in the room. The troop filed out one by one, each dragging a mattress behind her and carrying provisions. Dena punched the elevator "up" button and they stood waiting. An odd looking bunch at best, Tracy thought. The elevator door opened and the girl on it stared unbelievably at the scene before her.

"Me and Patty will go on up and you guys follow us on the next elevator," said Dena. The girl on the elevator politely held the "door open" button and after much struggling the mattresses fit into the elevator. "See you in a minute," shouted Patty and Dena as the elevator doors closed.

Tracy and Alice didn't have too much longer to wait before the next elevator arrived. Luckily, this one was empty. They pulled down the emergency stop and the screaming alarm cried out into the night.

"Let's hurry before we wake up the whole dorm," said Alice as she tugged at her mattress. Tracy pushed from behind until it finally eased on. Then she pushed hers on and leaned it against the other one. "Okay, we're off," said Alice and she pushed the thirteenth floor button.

Meanwhile, Patty and Dena were having some difficulties dragging their mattresses up the stairs from the thirteenth floor to the roof. Alice and Tracy ran into them on the stairs.

"Let's take these up one at a time," suggested Tracy as they gathered around the first mattress. Four trips later they were getting settled in at last

It was a beautiful spring evening. The wind blew stronger over the top of the building. The warm air dipped and dived around the sundeck. The night was dark and clear. A full moon shone down surrounded by a sea of bright twinkling stars.

"This is beautiful," exclaimed Patty as she gazed at the thousands of stars that made up their ceiling.

Tracy threw down her alarm clock on her mattress. "Come on, let's sing 'Mr. Moon'." Their laughter filled the air as they joined hands to dance in a circle and sing.

"Mr. Moon, Moon
Bright and shining moon,
Won't you please shine down on me"

"Oh, Mr. Moon, Moon
Bright and shining moon,
Won't you come from behind that tree"

"Oh, my life's in danger
And I'm scared to run,
There's a man behind me
With a big shotgun"

"Oh, Mr. Moon, Moon
Bright and shining moon,
Won't you please shine down on,
Oh, please shine down on
Please shine down on me."

They fell laughing down onto the concrete and stared up at the sky. It had always been like this, Tracy thought. Crazy antics, children's games. If nobody else had done it, that was reason enough for them to try it. They had grown very close over the last few years. Always searching for different things to do. And always searching for the answers. The ones they couldn't find.

"Let's finish our champagne," said Patty as she poured the last round. The girls sat huddled in

a circle against the surrounding darkness as a gentle breeze cooled the sweat they had worked up in their dance.

Tracy pushed her dark hair from her eyes and sipped her drink. Dena plugged in the clock radio and they sat listening to the music and the sounds of the night. Somewhere in the distance they could hear a train making its solitary journey through the night. Patty broke the silence, "Let's make some plans. People always say they'll visit one another and then they never do. I don't want it to be like that with us."

"Neither do I," echoed Dena. "Let's make a promise. We'll set a date when we all will meet. We'll make a vow that can't be broken."

"We need a symbol. Something concrete to seal our plans," agreed Tracy.

Alice searched her backpack and brought out a sheet of paper and a pen. "Here's what we'll do. First, we need to set a date. Then we'll write it down and we'll all sign it."

"That'll be good," agreed Dena. "Then we can hide it up here on the roof somewhere where it will be safe."

Alice laid her pen and sheet of paper in the middle of their circle. "When's a good time?" she asked.

"How about this very night next year? We can all come back here. Tracy will still be here and we can camp out again just like this year," suggested Patty.

"That's a good idea," agreed Dena as Alice wrote down the date. Solemnly they passed the paper around and signed their names. Alice picked up the completed agreement and read it to the others. Her voice resounded in the stillness of the night:

"May 12, 1984
Among Friends
Tracy Belmont
Dena Breckinridge
Patty Forrester, and
Alice Browning."

"Now we've got to put it somewhere safe until we get here next year," said Patty. They broke up their circle to search out the cracks and crevices of the roof. Alice ended their search as she cried, "Over here, there's a crack between these bricks." Patty had been carrying their pact so she brought it over to the others as they stood in front of the brick wall. Carefully she fitted it into the crack until it wouldn't be noticed by someone passing by. Their deed accomplished, they walked back over to the other side of the sundeck where their mattresses lay.

"I'm pretty beat," said Tracy.

"Yeah, me too," agreed Dena.

They were all pretty tired by now. The girls slid between their sheets and echoed goodnights. The last conversation of the day was spent and soon all talk subsided. The only sound remaining was the gentle lull of the radio as the stars and moon reflected on the peaceful scene below.

"Hey, wake up. It's ten o'clock," Patty shouted. She had turned up the radio and it blared out a love song. The morning was already losing its freshness as the sun and heat were steadily getting stronger.

Tracy opened her eyes and then shut them quickly against the harsh brightness of the sun as she groaned and turned over. Alice was already up and trying to get her mattress to fit back through the door going down to the stairs. Dena was still sleeping soundly, oblivious to the commotion going on around her.

Tracy opened her eyes more slowly this time to adjust them to the light. Lazily she stretched and tried to come awake. "Hey, Dena," she punched her in the side. No response. "Hey, Dena," she yelled a little louder, as Dena groggily opened her eyes. "It's time to get up," she said as she threw back her covers. It was going to be a nice day. A little windy perhaps, but a nice day, she thought to herself.

Dena raised herself up on one elbow and watched Patty's humorous efforts of pushing her mattress through the door. She yawned and sat up in her bed. Languidly she stretched and eased out of her bed to join Tracy by the edge of the sundeck. They stood side by side looking at the view from their high perch. They could see a man mowing the grounds of the graveyard that sat directly behind their dorm. The whir of the lawn mower was barely audible over the rush of the wind.

"Let's check out our pact," said Tracy as she raced to their hiding place. Dena was close behind her as she reached the brick wall. There the paper set, safe and secure nestled between the bricks. It felt comforting to see it there, Tracy thought to herself. A promise, a vow that they could always go back.

Reluctantly they returned to their mattresses for the troublesome job ahead. They worked together so in no time at all they were back in their room.

Alice and Patty were busily packing when they eased their mattresses back on their beds. Tracy and Dena joined in and the last remnants of the room were securely packed away in boxes. Several trips were made to their already overstuffed cars. Finally the job was finished and they met back in their now empty rooms.

"Cigarette break," said Tracy as they sat down in the floor and lit up. Alice dug an empty paper cup out of the trash can for an ash tray. She filled the cup with water and set it in the middle of the group as she sat down. The girls sat smoking silently. The fire of their ashes made hissing noises as they flicked them into the water filled cup.

Alice finished her cigarette and turned off the air conditioner. The others finished smoking and then searched the rooms for anything that might have been left behind. Patty took the trash and Dena closed up the windows. The last things taken care of, they gathered in the middle of the ro

"Everybody got their keys?" asked Alice, her voice echoing in the emptiness of the room. Everyone checked. They shut up their rooms and filed out the door. Alice locked one door and Tracy the other. The elevator came quickly and they soon had finished checking out at the front desk and turned in their keys.

They moved out through the doors and into the sunshine. The parking lot was busily humming with the movement of people as the air collected and spread the sounds. They stood in a circle hugging and kissing goodbye as the wind whipped around them.

"Remember the pact," said Patty, as they all stood hugging.

"I'll be here," said Dena, her blonde hair dancing on the breeze.

"Me, too," said Alice, as she hugged each of them.

"I will for sure," laughed Tracy. With another flurry of hugs and kisses and some tears they parted. Looking back over their shoulders, they waved as long as they could.

It's evening again. The commotion is over and the dorm sets silently against the fading light of the day. The parking lot is empty except for the single car of the dorm director. The walls filled with laughter and sorrow such a short time ago now set vacant waiting for the return of the fall.

Up on the roof, the wind is whipping mercilessly. A storm is coming in from the east. The wind tears around the sides of the sundeck and flows down over the side. A single white sheet of paper is uprooted from its home and falls over the side of the building carried away by the wind.

The loosened paper rode the forceful winds across the parking lot and on over the graveyard. Suddenly it was dropped by the wind's sudden change of direction. Down it floated until it rested on the freshly mown grass of the graveyard.

The caretaker was just finishing his chore of raking the cut grass when he noticed it laying there. Laboriously, he bent over and picked it up. Slowly, he turned it over and read the message that had been written there so carefully the night before.

"Over here," he yelled to the boy who was helping him, "and bring that trash bag. We're going to have to hurry if we're going to get this place cleaned up before dark.

The boy dragged the half filled trash bag over to the man and into it he threw the battered piece of paper.





IMAGINATION

Water
from a washer-less kitchen faucet
drips into a sink of stainless steel,
slowly,
rhythmically,
seemingly louder and louder until...

Water
from the roughest raging river
rushes over a cliff,
taking me along.
It plunges into a silent pool
where I am pushed under
by the dropping force.
I may never come up;
May never...

Someone has stopped
the dripping faucet --
and my waterfall.

Susan W. Willis

TAUNTING GALES

Tonight, here alone,
Seeking answers unknown,
I hear voices from the past.
Above all that I fear
Is your voice, which I hear
Most clearly and soundly outcast.

Here, quite secluded,
I'd thought I'd excluded
You from my nightly thoughts.
But with those whistling gales
Comes your voice, which prevails.
Hence, lost is the serenity I've sought.

The wind through time
Brings to my mind
Sad remembrances with the breeze.
Harsh words once thought lost
In the night at no cost
Are blown back by the wind to tease.

Susan W. Willis

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