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AURORA



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The Insurance Salesman

Paul Hicks

There was a diner just outside of town, up on the northern end by where the interstate highway flowed past toward the flat part of the state. People coming in off the interstate would stop there for coffee or to use the bathroom after a long drive before going the eight miles on into town. It was a club car diner. Nothing more than an old railroad car parked on rails that were set into poured concrete slabs. A dingy looking place painted in a pathetic, peeling green color with stools that ran the length of a once majestic walnut counter--black, scratched and marred from too much time and too many coffee spills. A row of booths on the opposite side, the front side, looked out the car windows over the parking lot. The brown leather of the stools and booth sofas was torn in places and soiled, and several of the buttons were missing from the seat coverings. The whole diner had a ragged, worn appearance.

In the rear booth, at the end of the car toward the interstate, two men sat leaning forward in their seats. They sat with their elbows planted squarely on the small rectangular table in front of them. The table was scattered with crumbs, and pushed to the side were two plates with ruffled napkins and the remains of what looked like chicken on them. The men wore rough denim jackets and pants, oily blotches here and there on the blue. One of them wore a red plaid shirt, and the other a blue service station shirt with the name Cowley on a tag that just barely stuck outside the unbuttoned jacket.

They were drinking coffee and looking out at the parking lot where their rusted pickup stood in the space nearest the entrance. It was the only thing in the lot except for the owner's Chevy that was parked nearer the end of the diner away from the interstate.

A pair of headlights broke in off the highway exit ramp and moved across the front of the diner lighting up the sign that said something about Grandma's Eats. The car swerved off the road into the diner's parking lot after just a second's hesitation, as if the driver had thought about going on, but pulled over at the last instant. It was a beige colored Continental, a new car that shined brilliantly along side the decrepit diner and the ragged pickup truck.

It swung into the space beside the truck, and a young man stepped out. Dressed in a chalk colored pinstripe suit with a striped satin tie and some type of gold medalion that hung on a chain around his neck, he walked toward the door of the diner swinging a large leather bag at his side.

Cowley and the other man at the table, whose name was Blotner, watched as the man got out of the Continental and walked through the half-light of the sign and the windows.

"Here's comin you a real winner," Cowley said. Blotner, who sat with his back to the diner's door turned his head to look as the man entered.

Pushing through the doors, the man with the black leather bag paused to look at Cowley and Blotner for a second then went across to the counter and sat on a stool.

"Did you get a look at that hunk of gold he got hung on his neck?" Cowley half whispered.

"Naw, what was it?" Blotner asked.

"I didn't get a good see, but it was big and gold and probably cost a fortune."

"Look at the way he's dressed." Blotner glanced back over his shoulder.

"Three dollar he's from up north somewhere," Cowley offered.

"No thanks," Blotner said. Then, in a near snarl, "I'll keep my money. You know he's got to come from up there somewheres, walking around in three hunderd dollars suit."

The owner, a man in his early thirties sporting a three day beard, came out of the boxed-off end of the car that served as the kitchen and walked the length of the counter to stand across it in front of the new customer.

"You're not Grandma, I hope," the customer said.

"No, there ain't no Grandma. Never was. It's just a name for the place. I'm Joe. You want a menu, or what?"

"No," the man in the nice suit answered. He spoke in a northern accent which Cowley and Blotner noted immediately--Cowley with an I-told-you-so grin on his face. "I don't believe I do," the man went on. "I'll just have a cup of coffee and a piece of the pie." The northerner motioned

toward a slice of pie in a glass case that glowed a funny color of red underneath the warming light.

"You ain't from around here, are you?" Joe asked as he stepped to the left and shoved his hand into the back of the glass case to bring out the pie.

"No," he said, "I've never been around here before. My first trip through, actually; probably my last trip here for a while too. I just have to go beyond town a few miles and see a Deacon Hardiman out at the church. It's business."

Cowley and Blotner were listening closely to the conversation, but from where they sat, so far down the dining car, they could only get snatches of the dialog.

"Probably my last trip ever to this dump," Cowley mimicked the little of the speech he had heard, adding his interpretation of it. Blotner frowned his agreement about the northerner.

"You got no kin around here at all?" Joe asked the northerner, turning to pick the round pyrex coffee pot off the hotplate, sloshing it around to wet the sides of the pot where it looked dirty from wear.

"No, no I haven't," the northener said. He looked down and inspected the pie. "I'm only down here on this business."

"You an insurance man, ain't you?" Joe asked. He said 'insurance' with an accent that made it sound like there was no 'r' in it.

The man in the pinstripe suit watched as Joe filled a cup and sat it on the counter by the pie. "Yes," he said. And then after thinking for a second, with a peculiar smile, "you might say that I sell insurance."

"Yeah, I thought you was. Lots of them insurance men coming around here with them black bags like yours." He motioned to the black leather case standing at the base of the stranger's stool. "I reckoned you was one soon as you come in. You got the look, with the suit and the policy bag an all."

"Oh, this isn't a bag of policies," the man in the suit said. "No, not a policy bag at all. There was never an insurance policy written on Earth worth this much." He tapped the handle of the bag as he talked. He tapped it reassuringly, as if to make certain it was still there.

"Got to be worth a lot to be that much worth."

"Well, I'll tell you," the man said, grinning broadly and leaning forward as if to tell the owner some great secret. "The printed stuff in this bag guarantees that all our people will get paid when their time comes."

The owner breathed deeply and bent over the edge of the counter to get a closer look at the bag. "Just what's in there will see to em all paid?"

The man shook his head and continued to smile broadly.

At the end of the diner Cowley and Blotner looked at one another and gaped, then turned to

stare down at the leather bag. It bulged in places, and Cowley and Blotner could see the outline of thick square stacks, one on top the other.

Joe leaned back in front of the man with the bag, back against the shelf where the cups were set, and stared at the base of the counter where the bag sat on the other side.

The man in the pinstripes looked at him leaning there. "A fork," he said. "Could I have a fork, please?"

"Oh," Joe said, snapping forward and reaching under the counter into a jar where forks stood with their prongs sticking up. "Sorry about that. Here you go. And a napkin." He pulled a paper napkin out of a holder and laid it on the counter, placing the fork on top of it.

"I don't know bout most you insurance salesmen though," the owner said. "They come round here sometimes trying to sell insurance. I tell them what I always thought about that." He picked up a dish cloth and began wiping the counter. "I always thought that they wasn't selling nothing real. I mean, sure it might be real to them and they might make some people think they're selling something real, but I never thought so. I mean, when you buy that stuff, what've you got? You got a piece of paper saying you got something that ain't really there."

The pinstripe man was chewing the first bite of the pie. He mumbled while he chewed and the owner must have taken it to be his agreeing about the insurance.

"So I figure, what's the use of it?" the owner went on. "I mean, if it's not really there, if nobody ever sees it then what's the use of it? But still yet, people do pretty good at it. Selling it, I mean. Millions."

"Oh, we don't make any money in the insurance I work at." Blotner and Cowley were so busy figuring something on a torn piece of napkin that they did not hear all of what the man said, only something about the money he made in insurance.

"My brother-in-law Bobby buys insurance on his house, and his car, and his tractor, and he even bought some for his cows. Now, I figure what he's done is throw his money away for nothin. You know what I mean?" Joe asked.

"Maybe," the man said, a rumbling in his throat where he was trying to swallow, "he looks on it as security. What if something happened to his flock?"

"Yeah," the owner said, leaning on his elbows where he had just wiped the counter. That's true."

The pinstripe man laughed a little, saying, "We have insurance especially for flocks."

"Farm insurance, huh?" Joe said.

"Yes, sort of. Flock insurance. Fire insurance too. Really pays off. Shouldn't be without it."

"Well, I got my little insurance on this place from Pat Mierson, right here in town. And it's good insurance, far as insurance goes."

"Yes, but mine is the best insurance in the world. And it's cheap, really."

"That's what they all say."

"And the dividends are the best."

"They all say that too."

"Yes, but this insurance has been used for years by thousands, millions of people, and never has failed to protect a true policy holder."

"So you think this insurance is better than my policy I got now?"

"Definitely."

"This company you're talking about is better than this one here in town?"

"Couldn't be a company anywhere do any better for you." He talked cheerily, assuredly.

Cowley and Blotner, in the back booth, sat quietly the whole time listening, trying to pick up all of what the man was saying, but still only hearing pieces.

"His insurance is better than ours," said Blotner sarcastically.

"Course it is," Cowley grinned snidely. "Didn't you hear him say it's the best in the world."

"And cheap, he says," Blotner added.

"I bet it's cheap," Cowley went on. "What do you s'pose that car out there cost?"

"I'd guess five hundred policies."

"Yeah, I guess so too. Probably more than we've made in years."

"More than the whole graveyard shift made in years is more like it. That big hunk of gold necklace he got hanging round his neck is more than we made."

Cowley frowned his agreement and stared at the side of the man's head and down at the black leather bag.

"It's the whole idea of insurance," Joe was saying then, leaning back onto the shelf with the cups again. "Seems like whenever people want to collect some they's always some little clause that says the company don't have to pay."

"Not this company," the man said, eating another bite of the pie. "This company really takes care of its people. Everything is written down in black and white. You can read all the benefits before you ever decide to take out your policy."

"Shore you can," the owner said. "How many thousands of clauses you got to read to understand what you're getting? Twenty books worth I imagine."

"No, no," the man in the pinstripes said, reaching down to make sure the black bag was still there. Patting the handles. "Our whole company only uses one book. All over the place--out west, in the east--all over we only have one book."

"Uh-huh," Joe said. "What kind of all things you insure against? Fires and floods and all?"

"Well," the man said, laughing again. "Fires we insure you against; floods we absolutely promise you've got nothing to worry about."

"How about break-ins? There's a lot of that round here. Seems like every night they's somebody's house gets broke into. People come by here going up to Grayson or over to Morehead on the interstate, they come in here for coffee or talk before going, and before they can even get back some of them gets their places robbed. I tell you that stuff's bad round here."

The man shook his head dejectedly, and after taking a drink of coffee said, "Yes, it's a shame, the shape the world's getting into. But I'm afraid even we can't insure against things like that."

Cowley listened to the last and then looked across at Blotner with an unusual smile on his face. Blotner smiled back and shook his head. "Things are gettin bad round here," he said. "Seem like somebody gets took every night. Sometimes two or three people a night. And right around here, too, just miles from this very diner."

"Well, I guess we better be careful then," Cowley said. "We might run into those hoodlums ourselves being right around here all the time."

"That's true," Blotner said. "Course, there's people right here close with more to lose than us."

Cowley smiled again, "I know what you mean, Blotner, I know just what you mean."

"Where's this company at you work for?" Joe was asking the pinstripe man.

He hesitated in answering, "Well..."

"You coming down from up north, I imagine it must be up above us?"

The man laughed outright and the owner looked at him strangely. "Yes," the pinstripe man said, "that's right. It's up there. Way up above here. It's a lot nicer up there."

At the far end of the diner Cowley pushed his coffee cup to the side of the table with the two plates stacked on it. "I think I heard enough about this here great insurance man and his company. How bout you?"

"Yeah, me too, let's get out of here. It's going to be busy at work tonight."

"Yeah," Cowley agreed. "Probably really busy working tonight."

They stood up and started walking the length of the diner. Joe looked up and saw them coming. "I don't know about 'nicer' up there," he went on talking to the pinstripe man. "I heard some of them northern cities is dirty, with them factories and all."

"Not this one, this one is so clean it shines." He pushed the pie away and placed the fork on the saucer next to the uneaten part, beginning to laugh at first, but then becoming serious. "I really shouldn't put you on like this. I have to explain what I've been saying, you see..."

"Hey, Joe," Cowley interrupted. "We got to be going to work."

"Sure," Joe said, walking toward the cash register at the middle of the counter, just a few feet from where the pinstripe man sat.

Cowley walked past the pinstripe man, nearly brushing his back in the narrow aisle of the diner. "How much for both?" he asked.

"Six dollar and a quarter." The owner punched the register open as Cowley counted out the money. "Thanks a lot," the owner said, dropping the money into the tray. "I guess I'll see you boys same time tomorrow?"

"Yeah," Cowley said, following Blotner to the door, not even looking at the pinstripe man, but noticing the black bag one last time. "Same time tomorrow night, before work like usual."

The two of them went through the dining car's doors and on out to the parking lot to get into the dented truck. As they walked past the shiny Continental Blotner smirked at the personalized plate which read 'ONE WAY' in luminescent letters. "Yeah," he said. "One way."

As they were pulling out of the parking lot, Cowley, who sat on the passenger side, looked through the windows of the diner and saw the pinstripe man and the owner laughing hysterically. Then the owner, still laughing, shook the man's hand and patted him on the shoulder. When they pulled away down the road toward town, Cowley could still see the two of them through the windows, still laughing madly. "Laugh," Cowley mumbled, "laugh."

When they were out of sight of the diner Blotner pulled the truck over to the side of the road and switched off the motor. Turning out the lights, the two of them slid down in the seat and waited. In a few minutes a pair of car lights broke into view. They waited, down in the seat,

until the lights were past, then sat up quickly. Blotner started the truck and went off down the tiny winding road toward town, some eight miles away.

Putting the gas nearly to the floor they shot around the tight turns, nearly throwing the old truck off over the steep embankments on both sides of the road. They caught up with the car a half mile down the narrow road and Blotner came up close to its rear end so he could read the plate. When they were close enough to read 'ONE WAY,' he looked across at Cowley and smiled. Cowley braced himself. "I wonder if he got any fender-bender insurance?"

Blotner laughed, pushing the gas pedal the rest of the way to the floor and starting around the car. When his front wheels were aligned with the car's door, he swerved to the right, hitting the Continental in the rear fender, smashing it in against the tire so that it rubbed badly. The Continental swerved toward the side of the road and slowed, but Blotner fell quickly in behind it.

"I wonder if his rear end policy is all paid up?" Blotner said.

"Best in the world, better than ours," Cowley said, bracing himself again.

Blotner rocketed the truck into the bumper of the Continental once, and then again, smashing it up badly and springing open the trunk. The car slowed even more, as if he were going to stop for the accident.

"Well, let's go up and give him our policy number, Blotner," Cowley said. "He can't file without our policy number."

Blotner started around the slowing car again. "Wait a minute," he said. "I'll pull over there closer so you can give it to him." Evenly along side the car, he jerked into it fully. The front wheels of the car caught on a rock or a root or something along the edge of the road in the darkness and plunged over the embankment, running through the short pine scrub brush. One headlight broke, the frame digging up furrows in the dirt, the front end denting and folding from the small saplings. It came to a stop thirty feet below the road.

The pinstripe man tried to push the door open on the driver's side but it was jammed tight from the dents. He kicked at the door on the other side, breathing heavily, his left arm bleeding where it had been hit. The opposite door fell open and he tumbled through it onto the ground.

Cowley came scuttling down the hill where the Continental had pitched a path through the brush. The pinstripe man was kneeling there at the side of the car mumbling something like a prayer. Mumbling something under his breath very much like a prayer. Cowley came around the front of the car to where he was kneeling, reaching his hand under his dirty jacket. "Don't you worry bout this car," he said. "I got good insurance. Best in the world. I just hope you got some of that life insurance you was trying to sell Joe back there at the diner.

The pinstripe man looked up at him suddenly as if he were going to say something, but Cowley brought the lug wrench from the old truck viciously down across his forehead before the pinstripe man could speak what ever it was he was trying to say.

"Blotner!" Cowley yelled up toward the top of the grade where the headlights of the truck

still shot over the road. He ran around the car, reached through the window, shutting off the motor which ran on despite the wreck. "Blotner! Come on down here and bring the lights."

Blotner came down from where the truck was, the motor still going. He slid and fell and stumbled through the darkness down over the grade until he banged into the side of the car--pitched there like it had come down from the heavens and tried to land on the side of the hill.

"Grab the bag out a there," Cowley said, taking a flashlight and going across to where the body of the dead man lay on the ground. He shined the light on the man's chest to take the gold necklace but stopped short when the light hit it. On the end of the chain was a large gold crucifix, glinting as the light struck it. He stood there frozen, staring down at it.

"It's locked up tight," Blotner said breathlessly, bringing the case around to where Cowley stood staring silently down at the corpse. "Give me your knife."

Cowley obeyed without a word, fishing the knife from his pocket and handing it to Blotner. Blotner took it and buried it in the top of the black case. He ripped it lengthwise, and then turning it upside down, he shook it viciously. Out onto the ground poured dozens of small green, pocket-size books.

Blotner flipped his flashlight on them and flung the case away, horrified. Jerking the light across to where the corpse lay, it ran across the bloody pinstripe suit and reflected off the

crucifix that lay on the chest. "Oh, Gawd, it's a preacher," Blotner said in a hoarse, shaking, trembling voice. "We killed a preacher! Oh Gawd, Cowley we killed a preacher!"

But Cowley was not listening. He was running past the car. Blotner followed him, the two of them scrambling back up the hill toward the truck, leaving the preacher there on the ground with the little green Bibles fluttering in the night air.



Slot B Reason

Walking in Maine once
on a back road away from things,
feeling wet, all washed in orange September,
rain and leaves.

And once, in Iowa,
this mad little teacher
waved his hands and said,
"reasons! reasons?
there must be reasons,
you like it; you hate it; you feel;
and there must be some reason"

some cold, logical,
fold flap A into slot B reason.

But walking in Maine once
i remember reeling, being drunk
all morning,
until i threw up on the rocks
and passed out for an hour,
dreaming a drunk dream
about an ostrich with electric-yellow feathers.

the finest hour of life,
i was too drunk to recall for years.

Paul Hicks

Christ Upon the Veldt

We know no terror here,
like children know in darkness
and old men know in clocks.

We have no visions,
no dreams to haunt us,

no ghosts in chains to rattle around,
only dry bones
in the dust upon the Veldt.

We go upon our knees for no One,
to prick our thighs to blood,
to scrape our shins upon the scalding sands.

We are the terror here,

with all our dripping
all our scraping
and all our rattles

rattling off old thoughts, old threats
in a dusted over place
where breath is hard.

We know no terror here,
where Christ came once, to die of thirst,
and Pilate left his footprints in the sand.

Paul Hicks

Dramamine Before Departure

In my dreams there are waves
that come in from the ocean,
and are green, like the emerald-backed frogs
on the pond at my father's Vermont farm.

And the sleepy old sailor
leans against the portal
and only wakes to chase the flies away
or look out at the sea from time to time.

The children scribble on the cabin
the long white words of curses
that he cannot read--
though he washes them away each day.

In the mornings he eats fish
that he catches in the nets
which hang along the starboard side,
walking out at evening
along beside the coming surf
with a child that has my face;
he kills the fish with clubs
and throws them in a sack.

In my dreams there are nights
when the waves crash on the sides,
and roll the house about like a feather
that jumps along in front
of my mother's broom.

And the sleepy old sailor
never even turns
or seems to notice all the rolling
as the storm moves closer in
and tosses taller waves
across the portside planking
down upon the decks.

Out across the havens
the children who wrote upon the cabin
are all just quiet and sleeping,
except the child who wears my face:
who sits up in the bunk
and looks down at the sleepy sailor's face,
listens to the storm, waiting for that wave
to come and wash them far apart
and jar him wide awake.

What Would You Tell Me

Should i come to it again
what will you tell me?

Will you tell me
that the world has gone to hell,
that the stinch is bad.
i know; i know.

Would you say that
the bathtub runs over on the floor
and my life is lying in it, face down,
floating, sucking water.
that too, i know.

Would you say anything at all,
in your half sick voice
that comes to me through the water,
through the years,
tearing out of the wallpaper,
grating across the rafters above the bathroom,
like mice coughing up some half digested cheese.

Paul Hicks

Etchings Within

In distance near you come to me,
Flipping through glimmerings of days behind
I find you captured on prints of time
Though no more clearly than etchings within.

Yesterday's cherished hopes still glow
Though paths may lead round different streams,
My heart recalls those oft-shared dreams
As friends revealed their souls' designs.

Never will sunsets erase my love
Which grew through tears and smiles - and rain;
I beckon destiny leave part of you remain
Forever woven into the fabric of my life.

Linda Leach

Where Light Goes

Someone was screaming --
He hoped they would stop
They could not silence the hiss of the respirator,
Nor quiet the clicks and clacks of the others.
The light glowed red, dimmed and glowed again --
An insistent summoning unheeded
For once her soul had begun its departure,
It never noticed the call at all.
Tomorrow, he thought, give me until tomorrow
Then go, but wait for now.
But the night closed in where day had been
And she went -- wherever light goes.

Linda Leach

Hope

Linda Leach

As she sat silently in the dim waiting room, the insistent clickings of the heart monitor and the sweetish scent of anesthetic gave Hope a strange gnawing sadness. It seemed that not only Cin's life was coming to an end, but also the dying of everything Hope had believed about the world. She could look through the polished window that separated her from the intensive care room, and see Cin lying there, so hushed now and fragile. She had been here for hours, but Cin had not moved. Hope turned away. The clock on the cream-colored wall showed eight-fifteen. The nurse was due back in forty-five minutes to check the glucose and all those machines that were keeping Cin alive.

Before Hope had seated herself on the bulky brown sofa in the corner of the waiting room, she was deep in recollections of the last few months happenings.

Hope twirled the straw in her pepsi as she sat, half-listening, to one of Cin's tirades.

"I tell you, I'm fed up with that fruitcake nun who's running Telton High! She'll push me too far one day. Can you imagine being required to go to mass! I mean really!! I have my rights you know."

"Mmmm," Hope continued staring into her glass.

"Sure, I guess it's a bit much ranting about Sis Hobitson this way, but she's only the beginning. Just because I was brought up in that god-forsaken

orphanage makes everyone think they can tell me what to do! No way. Things aren't gonna get any better, but I'll sure make the most of it until we blow each other up. . . Hope? Hope, are you listening to me?"

"Huh? Oh. . . ah, I'm sorry, Cin, I just seem to be somewhere else. What were you saying?"

"Forget it kid, it's not important."

She was offended now, Hope could tell. It was Cin's turn to stare into her drink and Hope looked at her friend's angry countenance. Sandy hair, kinked in the latest frizz, framed an oval face, which at the moment had flaming red cheeks, a furrowed brow, and sparking eyes. Although her frame was slight, she had the temper of a lioness deprived of her whelps. She had changed so since they had met in grade school. It wasn't the orphanage or school, it was Cin. Her clothes, her make-up, her talk. . . so different. She had started this after she heard about Chris, Cin's brother, the only relative she had, getting killed in the conflict over in Pakistan. She had acted crazy for awhile. She ranted about war and death and the end of the world. Now she had emerged as this. . . this bitter, selfish person.

"Sorry to break up your concentration, Hope, but I've got a Youth Rights Rally to attend this afternoon. I'll drop you home."

"Oh, yeah thanks."

"Would you like to go and get to know the group?"

"Ah, no, not tonight. . . homework. I've got some homework."

"Go ahead! Live in your little bubble! It'll burst someday and take you down with it. The world's going nowhere fast buddy. You cling to things that don't even exist anymore."

The car screeched out of the driveway leaving Hope stung by Cin's remarks. What was happening to their friendship? What was wrong with her? Was the world today really that different from that of yesterday? They were hoping for world peace. They were even going to start dismantling nuclear weapons. Everything would work out. Nothing was too wrong, yet, to be straightened out. She did not want to think about it. She remembered getting lost once when she was four, out in the woods behind her grandfather's farm. She had cried and cried, but soon her dad found her, and everything was all right. She had snuggled against him and shut her eyes. Peace returned. Everything was the same.

Hope turned away from the driveway, crossed the lawn, and entered the house.

"Mom, I'm home! I'll be in my room if you need me."

Picking up one of the toy Koalas in her collection, Hope stroked its furry coat with slender, well-shaped hands. "What do you think, Creampuff? Are we all just sliding into nothing?" Glassy eyes stared mutely into hers. Tenderly, she replaced it on the polished maple dresser top. She situated it first on one side and then the other, stepping back to get a better view. Finally satisfied, she grinned to herself and bent to tweak the tiny animal's velvety ear.

When she lifted her head, she automatically brought her hand to her black, shoulder length hair. She looked into the mirror, and stared placidly at the reflection that was looking back at her. Without dropping her gaze, Hope pulled a wicker chair close to the dresser. As she sat down, she propped her face up between her hands and became enveloped in the reflected image. Huge eyes of brilliant emerald hid themselves behind bright multi-colored glasses. Full brows, arched softly over her eyes, complimented her high cheekbones. "Well," her quiet, lilting voice broke the silence, "my nose is kind of cute." She smiled wryly to herself. Seeing the image smile, made Hope lift her hand to touch the full rosy lips, and then pinch her smooth cheeks, to give them a touch of color.

She dropped her hands into her lap, and continued to stare, transfixed. "Dull, that's what Cin said, dull!" What had Cin asserted? "Do something to yourself Hope! God! What's with you? You're living in another century. I know what you're going through kid. You remember when I used to be like you, but I've changed now. I've changed just like everyone else. I don't need anyone. I don't need to stand by any laws my parents, whoever they are, would have set down for me!" With that Cin had sneered, dropped her cosmetic kit beside Hope, turned sharply on her heels, and slammed out the door.

Hope reached into one of her dresser drawers, and pulled out the macrame bag, dumping its contents on the polished top. Not, of course, that make-up would have her acting like the new Cin, but it might get her face into the part. Why, she thought as she pulled the sweater she was

wearing tightly across her breasts, she would have to take all her clothes in two or three sizes to get them as tight as what Cin was wearing. Was Cin right?

Hope sighed as she picked up a tube of lip gloss that Cin had left. Grimacing at the color, she curiously glanced at the shade, "Crimson Delight? Oh, wow!" she mumbled to herself. She covered her lips with the gaudy color, until she was certain they would glow in the dark. She applied thick mascara, rich blue eyeshadow, and dark rouge. On a spurt of impishness, she drew a small beauty mark slightly below the left corner of her mouth. Still holding the pencil in her hand, she again searched her face. Slowly, tears pooled in her eyes and spilled down over her cheeks. She grabbed a kleenex and fiercely began rubbing at the thick coat of cosmetics she had added to the trace of make-up she usually wore.

"I can't, Cin!" she exclaimed as she looked gloomily at her smudged reflection. "I can't be like you, or anyone else! "To your own self be true." I don't know how to act like you, and I refuse to believe that you are right. There are still people who need each other. We will survive! You must be wrong!"

Hope ran from the room. She hoped that by leaving the face of the mirror, she could also leave behind the questions that it had provoked. She had to get a grip on herself. Cin was getting to her.

The next day Hope had avoided Cin. She thought that by staying away from Cin's influence she could hold onto the things she believed in: love, peace,

happiness. . . a reason to live. Certainly she did not see the future as destruction, violence, immorality and the bomb as a final end of all stress.

The growing gap between Hope's and Cin's friendship could not seem to be bridged. Hope refused to even listen to what Cin had professed as truth.

"No, Cin, not tonight. I've got a chemistry test coming up tomorrow," she mumbled into the mouthpiece as she traced lines in the fur of one of her Koalas. "No, not tomorrow either, ah. . . Mom wanted me to run some errands for her. What? No, I'm not putting you off. I'm just, ah, I'm busy this week. Huh? Oh, sure, talk to you later."

She replaced the receiver in its cradle. She was aware of a twinge starting right at the bottom of her throat. She appeased the feeling by immediately going to the desk and opening her chemistry book. She couldn't help it if she didn't like to be around Cin anymore. She was tired of being grilled by her. Tired of trying to think. Not wanting to think about the rapidly changing world around her. She shouldn't hang around Cin's type anyway. What would her parents think? Why, Cin had become some kind of creature from a bad fairy tale. It seemed all the kids at school were getting messed up like her, too. Even Rhonda, the silent, pimply-faced, wall-flower of the class had moved in with some guy, or dude as Cin called him. Cin! Cin! Could she never get her out of her mind?

She stared at her chemistry, NH_4 , NaCl , PO_4 . She felt the letter all spinning and jumbling in her mind. She felt so tired. . . so sleepy. . .

The vibrant noises echoed through her head from where she lay at the bottom of the damp hole. She could see the shadows gliding back and forth in time to the rolling music. She forced her tired body to move; Hope stood up; her head spun so rapidly that she had to cling to the clammy wall of her "prison" for support.

Her black hair hung damply on her face and clung to her neck. A musty odor of mold surrounded her. She must get air. . . must get out. She inched her hands carefully over the wall. Hope managed to find some small crevices to serve as footholds as she made her escape. She kept wondering how she had gotten here? She was sure the people up there did not know she was down here, or they would help her. The rocks tore her hands as she desperately made her way up. Everything was black and hidden. She yelled for help, but no one seemed to hear her. Finally, her hands reached the top. Just a few more footholds and she would - "oof" - the rock crumbled from under her feet. Quickly Hope threw her arms up out of the hole, supporting her weight with her elbows. She gritted her teeth as her feet sought for some crevice. Her arms and shoulders ached under the strain. "Oh, God, somebody help me!" At last her right foot lodged in a small nook. Carefully she put the pressure of her weight on it. . . it held, but she could not move.

"Help! Somebody, help! Help!"

But the swaying bodies never paused or looked her way. She squinted her eyes, and looked at them. The music roared, nearly deafened her, but they did not seem to notice its volume. Gradually, her vision focused under the flickering torches.

Cold perspiration trickled down her back, her stomach tightened with horror.

"My God! You aren't human! What are you?" her voice sounded strangely choked.

The torso was human, each wet and glistening, the hips and legs covered in matted black hair, the feet. . . cloven hooves. But, the heads. . . the head was that of a jackal! She could not mistake the narrow tawny head with its pointed muzzle. The muzzle of each of these. . . these things was smeared bright red, the teeth smiled as they dripped with fresh blood, the eyes glittered.

Gurgling noises were all that she could utter. Hope felt numb with fear, but she could not tear her eyes away from them. Some were holding shiny knives, and for no apparent reason, they would suddenly lurch at one of the beasts and stab it. Over and over their blades sank beneath the flesh. Dark blades stained with blood were raised above the quivering body. The creature moaned with pain, and then, like a pack of strays that surround a cornered alley cat, the bodies would close in around it and fall upon it.

They killed at random. . . as if no one was important. . . nothing mattered. Even the ones who held the knives could be killed.

The music seem to become louder and louder. The bodies swayed faster and faster. They were in a frenzy. . . killing--feasting--hating. . .

Then one of them turned its horrid face toward her, as if it had known she was there all the time. Its eyes gleamed, mocking her panic. Hope could

not move away. Its hot, rancid breath floated against her cheek. She tried to scream, but could not. It jerked her up out of the pit; Hope tried to run, but she could not run. She cowered against the wall of the dark cave. It moved stealthily toward her. . . closer. . . closer, its hot body nearly touching hers. . . And then, then she saw her and knew her. . . it was Cin! She had turned into one of these beasts. Everyone had. . . They were all the same; she was the one who was different. Hope fell to the ground, crouching, holding her knees tightly against her chest. Then Cin's jackal face began to laugh. The sounds echoed through the chamber before being swallowed up into the music.

"Cin?" her voice squeaked out. "Cin, we're good, basically I mean. Truth will stand. The world will get better; you'll see, no wars, no bombs, no killing. . ."

Again Cin laughed, as if mocking her childish beliefs, mocking everything that she had stood for. . . believed in.

"Never!" a husky, rasping voice from somewhere uttered. The beasts took up the word and chanted it to the music.

Cin, slowly pulled the blade from her waistband. Her eyes glittered. Again she began laughing. She brought the steel closer and closer to Hope's throat. . . The monstrous faces closed in around her. . . .

"No!" she jerked upright at the desk. She trembled as she switched on the desk light. It was past eight-thirty. She had dozed off.

A dream. . . only a dream. She remembered having felt just this way once before. It was when she and Ronnie, a neighborhood friend, had decided to do something fun on one July afternoon. She must have been about six, old enough to know better. She remembered helping Ronnie line the tiny yellow and green cowboys and Indians inside the windows of her plastic doll house. As he set the tiny house on fire, the plastic figures had seemed to stare at her with hatred, blaming her for their predicament. When the flames touched them, they had melted into bright puddles of color and dripped down the front of the blazing doll house. She had begun to scream by then, and had run away from the accusing, identical faces.

What was happening? Was she wrong? Would things only get worse as Cin had insinuated? Oh, God!

It had been about two months later that Hope had received the call from Dr. Moore. She had been standing at the living room window, watching the bitter January winds tear mercilessly through the bare oaks standing in the front yard. The trees seemed to shudder at the wind's harshness, and the slate-like sky.

Hope could not believe it when the doctor told her about Cin's tragic accident. The car, skidding on the ice, had careened out in front of a semi.

"An accident? Where? How did you get my number? I see, no, she doesn't have any family. . . How is she?. . . I don't understand those medical terms. . . oh, God! Will she ever regain consciousness? Yes, I would like to. . . what was that room number? She held the phone to her ear with her

shoulder as she scratched the number down on the back of the phone book. "Yes, I will. . . bye."

Hope's eyes turned back to the dividing window. She watched the lights on the machines that were holding life in Cin's body. In the window she could see her own reflection. Her face looked pinched and white. Dark circles underlined her eyes and disappeared into the disheveled strands of hair that hung around her face. She raked her fingers tiredly through her hair.

"What's happening to me?" she asked to the empty room with its erect-backed chairs standing at attention. "Where is life taking us?" Then, more determinedly, "Why it's taking us where we allow it to, that's where. We can better life only if we work at it; hold back the tide of things sweeping up apart."

The Telton Daily Bulletin lay folded on the glass coffee table. She absently picked it up, her glance flickered across the headlines.

RUSSIA DECLARES WAR ON U.S.

NUCLEAR BOMBINGS FEARED

CRIME RATE UP 89%
OVER LAST YEAR

84 DIE IN SABOTAGED
OCEAN LINER

She dropped it to the floor, as though it had burned her fingers. Had we become our own enemies. She was afraid to think.

Cold air, as though someone had suddenly thrown her out into January's arms, surrounded her. She peered outside into the winter sky, quivering. A storm was brewing.

Glancing down at the fallen newspaper a section in quotes caught her eye: "You are a child of the

universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. . . ."

Sighing aloud, Hope rubbed her hand across her eyes. So many questions, pressures. . . who was right?

The clicking of the machines quickened catching her attention. Hope pushed her face to the window. Cin's lips were moving, ever so slight. She could see the red emergency light flashing insistently. Hope slipped into the room and stood beside Cin's bed. She had not meant to betray her searching friend. She just hadn't figured out her own mind. "Please forgive my lack of understanding, Cin. I should have stood by you, helped you see, let you lean on me more, but now. . . A tear slid down the arc of her lashes, halted momentarily on the top, and then dropped onto the white laundered sheet. Hope clasped the moist white hand between the two of hers, and although Cin could not understand her words Hope prayed that her friend could feel her love.

"Hope?" Cin's fading voice asked. "Where's Hope. . . ."

"I am here. . . I will always be here."



The False Face

My hard and unfeeling personality
fooled even you,
a most classy person.
You think
that I know exactly what I want
because
I am so damned independent.
But if you take away
my halloween mask,
you will find
a most delicate child,
scared,
underneath.

Susan Willis

Julie's Darkness

Allison Jacobs

The screaming went on and on, echoing in her mind, growing louder, becoming monotonous. Make it stop! Please, stop! Then she was running, running to escape, running to hide from the screaming. Hands plucked at her, slowing her down. She hid in the darkness of the shadows and found relief at last. But it found her again, attacked again. She was running, her legs straining with the effort, her breathing labored. A fog enveloped her, a thick, fluffy fog, one that protects the valley from the morning sun. The fog seemed to pick her up and she floated effortlessly. The fog carried her easily, holding her comfortably, like a mother holds her child. She relaxed, secure at last. Then it became a dark, sinister fog, one that clings to the swamps after a heavy rain. The comforting arms were gone and she was falling, somersaulting toward a darkness below.

Julie jerked upright, her heart thumping furiously. She felt the face of the clock: 3:45. Trying to calm her flying pulse, she lay back upon the pillows. It was the same dream. Ever since the accident it had tormented her. It had been weeks; things were going back to normal. Except. . .

"Dwelling on the past won't change what happened," she sighed.

She was still awake when the alarm sounded at 7:30. She swung her legs to the floor, dreading the coming day. The floor was cool and smooth to

her bare feet. Searching for her slippers with her feet, she reached for her robe. It wasn't there. Panic overwhelmed her as her frantic hands failed to find it.

"Damn!"

Tears of helplessness, frustration, and anger, because of the unfairness of it all, were dammed up inside of her, threatening to overflow. But she fought them, and the temptation to call for help. Biting her lip, she continued the search. Groping for the bedpost, she took a few stumbling like a toddler who has fallen and is now afraid that the floor will betray him again. Julie sank to her knees and ran her fingers cautiously along the floor at the foot of her bed. She felt the fabric of her robe and jerked it towards her. Rising, she quickly sought the sleeves and thrust in her arms. Once securely enfolded in her robe, she sighed, then turned her attention to reaching the bathroom.

She knew it was straight ahead. All she had to do was take a few steps. Stretching her arms in front of her, she took a step. Maybe if I close my eyes it will be easier, she thought. Three more steps and she was there. Leaning against the door frame, she took a deep breath. She splashed cool water on her face, then fumbled for the brush. As she stood carefully brushing her hair, the brush stopped in mid-stroke. Julie stood there, facing what she knew was the mirror, but there was only darkness. Her eyes quickly squeezed tightly together, as if to hold back the memories that surged behind them. Julie's whispered "No" was lost in a gasping sob. She willed herself to take long, deep breaths, fighting the pain that

threatened to overwhelm her. Stiffening her jaw, she slid her hands along the wall until she reached the door. She finally found the stairs, using the wall of the upstairs hallway as a guide. Her hand circled the railing in an iron grip. She stood on the top step with the stairs seemingly moving beneath her feet. Fear possessed her, consuming the little confidence she had. A dull ache throbbed in the back of her head. She swallowed hard and tried to move, but her wobbly knees refused to bend. She forced herself to move and the first step met her foot easily. Her confidence slowly re-emerged as step followed step. Relief gradually spread although the pounding continued in her head. She stood for a moment, slightly stunned, a sleepwalker finding herself in the wrong place, not sure of what to do next.

"Good morning, Julie."

The voice came from the doorway. She wondered if her brother had watched her come down the stairs. Had he seen her nearly fall? His boots clicked on the polished floor as he walked over and took her elbow.

"Let's have breakfast on the patio. Dad's gone to town on business, so it's just the two of us. It'll be nice to eat outside. It's a beautiful morning."

"Maybe to you," she mumbled darkly. She wasn't in the mood for Bobby's cheerful morning chatter. Bobby said nothing, but led her out the sliding door. After directing Julie to her chair, he pulled out his own chair, the legs scraping across the concrete, causing Julie to wince.

"I'm going riding later. I thought I might stop by the pond for a swim. You wanna go?" Bobby's voice carried a tentative, hopeful note.

Julie nearly choked on her orange juice. Why, why was he doing this to her? Didn't he realize how painful it was, knowing she could never ride again? How frightened she was after the accident? Or did he take pleasure in twisting the sharp pain of the accident into her heart?

"Julie, you can't sit around here feeling sorry for yourself any more. I know this sounds like a bunch of bull, but you have to snap out of this. It's not the end of the world. You may think so, but it's not." Bobby stood up in one swift motion, glaring at her, wishing there was something he could do, some way he could change things, make the hurt go away. Julie sat there, silent tears sliding down her cheeks. Bobby swore softly and turned his back. Julie's words came weakly.

"Bobby I'm scared."

He took her hand and said, "I know, Sis, but you've got to try. You've got to start doing more things for yourself."

"I know that. I am trying, Bobby, but it's so hard. Bobby, you have no idea what it is like to be blind. You can't understand what I'm going through. I keep hoping that I'll wake up and realize that it has all been a terrible, terrible nightmare. That I can see again. But it goes on and on and on" Her voice trailed off. "Everything is so dark. . .dark. . . ."

"Why don't you let Aunt Martha help you get into some jeans, then I'll take you to the barn. Sunny misses you." Bobby hoped that mentioning her horse would coax her into going. When he saw the terror on her face he knew he was wrong.

"All right, you don't have to go." He started towards the door. Julie jumped up, reaching frantically for him. A sudden desperation controlled her. "Bobby, Bobby, please, I want to go. I have to go!"

He looked at her in surprise. Her face was ashen and for a moment he feared that she might faint. He grabbed her around the waist and led her inside. She leaned against him and continued to mumble, "I have to go. I have to go."

Half an hour later she was calmer as she walked to the barn with Bobby. As the wind carried the scent of hay to her, she realized how much she had missed working with the horses. She had thought she would never want to go back again. Sunny knickered as Julie arrived at the stall. Julie stroked her nose, taking pleasure in being with her old friend.

"Bobby, hand me the currying brush, then leave us alone."

Bobby hesitated, not sure it was a good idea, then handed her the brush. Julie mumbled a thank you as she opened the gate and went in.

After brushing furiously for several minutes, Julie let the brush thud to the ground. She buried her face in her hands, wishing to block the coming tears; the tears coming quickly, unexpectedly, a

sudden thunderstorm raging against the sky. She stumbled out of the stall, hands searching for the ladder leading to the loft. She threw herself into the hay, waiting for the tears to come. But strangely, the storm passed. She could see clearly in her mind's eye that day again and for the first time she didn't stop the on-rush of memories. The sky a beautiful, cloudless blue. The wind whipping her hair as Sunny raced across the fields. Then rocks of the ravine screamed below her. Darkness. Forever.

Julie bolted upright. She sat quietly, the seconds weighing heavily on her mind. The sweet smell of fresh hay engulfed her; she enjoyed the sharp jabbings of the straw as she relaxed in the familiar loft. Memories of some of the happy times she had had there drifted back. She could hear the clang of Sally's cowbell in the distance as she and the other cattle plodded slowly through the pasture. Below her Sunny moved uneasily in her stall. Julie soaked in the peacefulness of the scene, some of the pain disappearing as she explored the sounds around her. She smiled when one of the chickens clucked noisily nearby, then the furious flapping of wings told her that her feathered friend had returned to the barnyard. The pungent odor from the stalls drifted lazily upward, carried by a gentle breeze that caressed her cheek. She slowly crawled to the edge of the loft, found the ladder, and swung her legs onto the first rung. The rough wood biting into the flesh of her hands was somehow soothing. Sunny nuzzled her hand when she re-entered the stall. Julie's hand rubbed Sunny's forehead softly. Her mane was coarse beneath Julie's fingers. Julie's palm tingled, sending shivers up her arm, as she carefully slid her hands down Sunny's neck and over her withers.

Julie knelt on the ground, her hands continuing their exploration down Sunny's powerful legs. Rising, Julie looped her arms around Sunny's neck. She buried her face in Sunny's mane and whispered, "It wasn't your fault Sunny." Then, "Maybe there's hope for us after all."

Dreams

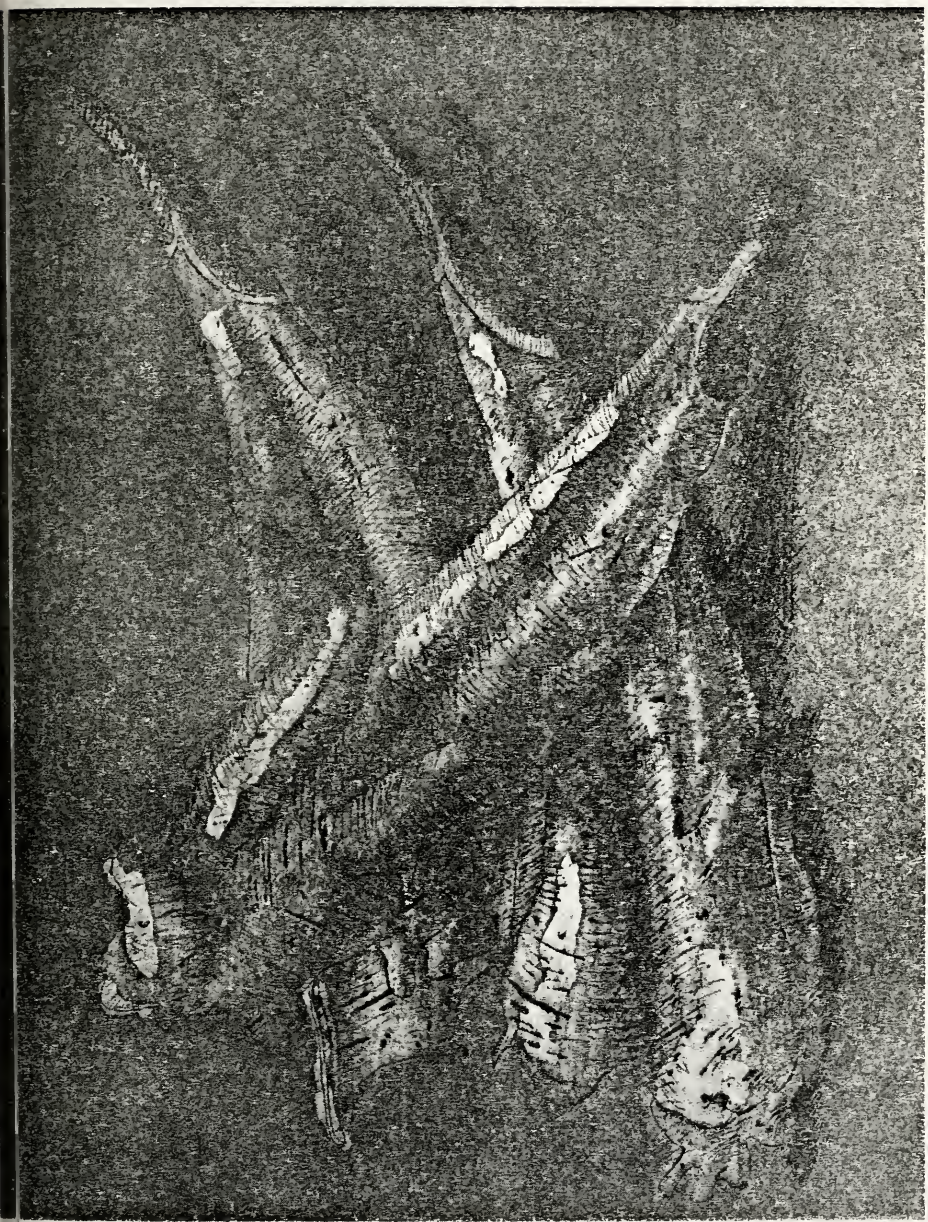
Where do dreams come from?
Are they plucked from the sky
Like gauzy butterflies,
or are they
brightly packaged baubles
found under a tree?

What fancies are dreams made of?
A fine spun gold
of tendrils so pure,
or perhaps
a luminous diamond
with facets of filmy brilliance.

Yet grasp the butterfly
too tightly, and its fragile
wings are crushed.
And though
the package be gayly trimmed
to fit expectations, inside,
all is sadly bare.

Gilt threads much stretched
can easily break,
the glitter turned to tarnish,
while precious gems,
now cold and hard,
may have their hidden flaws.

Amy DeVal



Sanguine

The scorching sun burns
down upon the pale bleached
sand.

Nothing moves; all is still.

Harshness attacks the air
with its prickly barbs.

Death now appears master,
yet,

in one small unforgotten corner,
a pulse of green emerges
to stretch and grow,
fighting the cruel waste
about it.

As this green flag strengthens,
its courage expands to swallow
the barrenness.

Hope is reborn.

Amy DeVal

Importunity

Kathryn Yount

Worthy came to live with the Gains when Julie was five years old. Julie remembered going to the kennel in New Jersey where there were many dogs of all shapes, sizes and colors. Julie and her baby sister, Betsy, romped around the kennel looking at dogs large and small, but Mama and Daddy stayed in front of one particular cage. They were looking at a dog they called a Newfoundland.

"Hey, Monkeys!" Their father called them, "Come here! How do you like this dog?"

The little girls ran over to the pen where the grown-ups stood. Julie leaned against the chain link fence and peered in. A huge, black, furry mother lay passively on the concrete floor while five black puppies chased each other around her.

"Mommy," Julie said. "Come see this doggie! I like this doggy over here. Please come see this once, Mommy, please!"

"Leave me alone, Julie. I'll talk to you later."

"How do you like this kind of dog, Julie?" her father asked her.

"Its okay. But Daddy you should see that one over there, he's so cute! And Daddy, he doesn't have a Mommy. He's all by hisself."

"Himself, Julie," her mother corrected.

"Himself. He's all by himself, Daddy. Please come see!"

"I want to see," Betsy said.

Julie took her sister's hand and they ran over to another cage where a small grey dog peered out at them with big, sad eyes.

"Look at this doggy, Betsy. He's all alone. He doesn't have a Mommy. His Mommy's gone and all his brothers and sisters are gone."

"Where'd they go?"

"Somebody bought them."

"They go bye-bye?"

"Um-hmm. They went away. Now he needs somebody to buy him, too."

"We buy him! We buy this doggy. Mommy, come here!"

"Girls, we've decided to buy a Newfoundland puppy. Come see the one we've chosen. You'll like her."

"No, Mommy. We want this one over here. Please come see him."

"Not now, dear. Our puppy's papers must be signed right now. Come stand over here and be good. Don't make so much noise!"

Julie and Betsy stood by their parents and looked at the little grey dog. Julie whispered to Betsy, "Look, everybody's sad. We're sad 'cause we want that grey puppy. The grey puppy's sad 'cause he wants us. And that black puppy's sad 'cause he wants to stay with his Mommy. And look at the Mommy! She got up and wants to come over here. She wants her baby back."

Betsy looked at her with wide eyes and didn't say a word.

It was almost a month before the family had settled on a name for their new member. Julie and Betsy had been calling her Blackie for weeks. One Thursday evening Daddy announced the puppy's name would be Worthy, short for Seaworthy. The children still called her Blackie in secret, but eventually they came to call her Worthy, too.

In the Spring the Gains moved to Kentucky. Worthy was getting bigger and bigger, and she loved having a yard to play in.

One day she was playing with a bunch of children in the drive way. Julie looked out and saw the children racing their tricycles and wagons up and down the driveway. She couldn't wait to play outside with them. "Mama, put my shoes on me!"

While Julie got her shoes put on she listened excitedly to the children's voices, the whirling wheels on the pavement and Worthy's happy barks. She was just about to hop down when she heard a

terrible yelp. "Worthy! Worthy!" she heard Betsy cry. "You ran over my doggy!"

Mama rushed out the door. Julie followed. "What happened?"

"Timmy ran over Worthy with his tricycle, and now her leg is twisted funny."

Timmy's mother helped Mama get Worthy into the car. The little girls piled in and they drove to the veterinarian's.

The veterinarian explained that Worthy's hip was broken; it was displaced and may never be quite right again. She had to stay in the dog hospital for one night, but the next day they took her home and put her in a box in the kitchen.

She couldn't play for several weeks. She just lay in her box and rested. Mama said Worthy didn't feel well and that Julie and Betsy must be quiet. They wouldn't want to make her feel worse.

Eventually she began to feel better and the vet took the cast off her leg. She always walked funny after that, though. Her hips swayed back and forth. Julie said she looked like a hula dancer. Mama said she looked like something else and that it was embarrassing.

Worthy grew up with the girls. She took walks with them, slept with them and watched tv with them. They brushed her shaggy black hair until it was silky and glistening or until they or she lost patience. Usually they lost their patience first. Worthy was a long-suffering dog.

The three of them would romp around the yard together, playing chase. Sometimes Worthy was the base, but other times she'd be It. Whenever they played like this, she was usually It. She was very easy to tag, and to escape, since she moved so slowly. It must have been confusing to her when her favorite little girls would run away whenever she approached them.

Worthy never bit any children, but once she bit a delivery man who came too near her little girls. He was very angry and declared loudly as he left, "Get rid of that dog. He's crazy!"

Julie hugged Worthy's neck tightly. "You're a good dog. Good baby, yest!" And then they played some more.

One night at supper Daddy said he had been reading a book about Newfoundlands. "They save lives," he said. "One dog saved a baby he was watching from a hawk, and another saved a child from drowning. Newfoundland are really good dogs. I'm glad we have one."

That weekend everybody went swimming in the creek. Worthy went along and got soaking wet. Her black fur was plastered to her body, and she looked only half her normal size.

"Look at Worth," Betsy laughed. "She's so little!"

Everyone swam and splashed and had a good time, but soon it was time to leave. Julie and Betsy climbed into the back seat. Betsy picked up her doll from the floor, while Julie called

for Worthy to hop into the back with them. "Here, Worthy. Come on, girl!" It was hard for Worthy to get into the car because of her crippled hip, but finally Daddy got her in, and Mama and Daddy got into the front seat.

"Everybody in?" Daddy asked, turning around.

"Yes, Daddy."

"Hey, where'd you get that doll? Let me see that doll," Daddy said.

Betsy handed him her doll. "What do you want it for, Daddy?"

"I'm going to see if Worthy will save it from certain death."

Daddy got out of the car and went around to let the dog out.

"No, Daddy, no! Don't hurt my doll! No! No! Don't, Daddy, please!"

"Daddy stop! That's Betsy's favorite doll. Don't hurt her! Bring her back!"

Julie and Betsy started to scramble out of the car after the dog, but their mother stopped them. "He'll be right back."

"Daddy, stop!"

"Don't worry! Worthy will save her!" With that he tossed the doll into the rushing waters in the middle of the creek.

Worthy glanced at the doll floating rapidly downstream, then ran over to the car where her two little girls leaned out of the back seat crying and screaming.

"My dolly? My dolly! Daddy, save her. Save her, Daddy!"

"Go get it, Worthy! Get the doll, girl! Go on! Go on!" Daddy pointed at the creek.

Worthy barked and jumped on the car.

"Don't scratch the car! All right, get in, let's go." He helped the dog into the car.

Worthy licked the girls' faces as they cried.

"Daddy, my doll! Please get my dolly! Please!"

"Please, Daddy, that was Betsy's favorite doll baby."

The little girls crowded around their father's neck. Their mother's hand pushed them away.

"Sit down and be quiet and let Daddy drive. If you hadn't been yelling and screaming Worthy would have saved your doll. The reason she didn't was because she was worried about you. The way you were carrying on, you'd think someone was throwing you in the creek. Look! See? She's still worried about you. Now be quiet!"

Julie buried her face in Worthy's wet fur and wept.

Betsy whimpered, "Baby doll."

"Not another word. I don't want to hear another word."

Julie's mind was filled with confusing and conflicting thoughts. Whose fault was it after all that Betsy's doll was gone? Daddy's? Worthy's? Hers? Mama had to be right, didn't she?

Years passed. Betsy grew fond of other favorite dolls. Julie grew fond of mini-skirts, panty-hose and boys. A little brother and sister joined the family: Greg and Paula. Daddy bought a motorcycle. Worthy got some grey hairs.

One night when Julie was babysitting for Greg and Paula she heard Worthy barking and crying in the basement. She went downstairs to find her standing in the middle of the floor crying. "What's wrong, Worthy? Why are you crying?"

Worthy waddled over and Julie petted her big head. Worthy seemed to be trying to tell Julie something with her moans and movements. But Julie, being a human and not a dog, couldn't understand.

"Oh, Worthy, I'm sorry. I wish I could understand, but I can't."

At that moment Worthy opened her wide jaws and out came a noise: "Waa-Waa."

"Water! You want water?" Julie hurried over to the faucet. Sure enough, Worthy's water pan was dry. She turned the faucet on and Worthy started lapping up the water before it even hit the dish. She drank and drank and drank.

Then she looked up at Julie and seemed to smile, before trotting over to her pallet in the corner to snuggle down to sleep.

When Mama and Daddy came home Julie couldn't wait to tell them that Worthy had talked to her. Betsy was the only one who ever believed her, though.

As Worthy got older Julie noticed that she lay around a lot more. Mama said Worthy was very old. Dogs get old faster than people. In her heart there was a special place where Worthy lived with her great-grandmother who was 84, Dancing Bear, whom she'd had since before she was born, and God. They were all alike in many ways. Besides their age, they had in common their slow grace, special magic and unending, uncriticizing love. With each Julie felt totally accepted and totally comforted. God and Dancing Bear would last forever, but Julie knew that soon Mammaw and Worthy would leave her to go to Heaven.

Mammaw did leave when Julie was twelve. She went to be with Jesus and all the people she loved in her life who had died before her. It seemed to Julie like part of Mammaw was still alive in Worthy and Dancing Bear. Even though she was gone, that special gentle quality remained, embodied in other old objects and people.

One night Daddy came home and announced the family would be moving to Philadelphia. How would you feel about moving to Philadelphia, Julie?" He asked.

"I don't want to leave my friends."

"You'll make new ones."

"I like these. I don't make friends too easy, Daddy."

"Easily," her mother corrected.

Julie rolled her eyes and heaved a sigh.

"You'll like Philadelphia," he said.

"I'm not going! I'll stay here and live with Grandmother. I'm not going!" Julie ran up to her room and slammed the door.

In a bit, her mother came into her room. "Now look young lady! Your father has worked hard for you all your life. He has never asked anything of you. You know he doesn't like his job here and wants to work for the firm in Philadelphia; but do you care what will make him happy? No, all you care about is yourself. You're a very selfish girl. I won't have you hurting your father! He's never hurt anyone in his life. He's a good father to you."

Julie's tears increased in her guilt.

"Now you go tell him you're sorry for acting like a baby. And I don't ever want to hear you say anything negative about moving to Philadelphia again. Do you hear me? You're going to be living in Philadelphia in a few weeks. You might as well make the best of it. You check your attitude, young lady!"

When her mother had left the room, Julie straightened her clothes, splashed some cool water

on her face and went downstairs to apologize to her father.

"I'm sorry, Daddy. I acted like a baby.

"Hmph!

"I'll go to Philadelphia."

"O.K."

"Well, bye." Julie walked down to the basement, lay her head against Worthy's black, tangled fur and cried.

The trip to Philadelphia took two days. Daddy drove the U-Haul truck with the furniture in the back, and Mama drove the VW Beetle with Worthy in the back. Julie rode in the truck with her father and Paula. At every stop Mama complained about how terrible the dog smelled.

The night before they reached Philadelphia they pulled into the Benjimen Franklin Motor Inn in King of Prussia. As they carried the suitcases and the babies into the room, Julie's father gave her an assignment. "Wash the dog! Put her in the tub and give her a bath. She smells terrible and we can't take her to Philadelphia smelling like a pig. I'll help you get her in the tub."

They put Worthy in the tub, and Julie turned the shower on. Worthy struggled to get out, but Julie managed to keep her in the bathtub. A half a bottle of baby shampoo later Worthy was clean and fresh smelling. Julie, however, was dripping wet from the crown of her head to the

tip of her big toe, and covered with long black hairs. The bathroom wasn't in much better shape. All four bathtowels were used to dry most of the water from Worthy's fur. They lay strewn around on the floor, in the sink and over the toilet. Black hair was everywhere: the tub was filled with it, strands stuck to the porcelain sink and toilet, as well as to the wall. Even the mirror was spattered when Worthy shook herself off.

When Julie and Worthy came out of the bathroom they had a surprise. "We're leaving," Mama announced.

"This place is awful," Daddy said. "It's steaming hot in here, and windows don't have any screens. Anyone could climb right in if we opened them."

"We called the desk and they said our room is right over the boiler room. We're leaving. Let's see. You'll need something dry to wear. Look at you!" Mrs. Gains rummaged through the suitcases. "Julie Gains, where are your clothes? I can't find them anywhere."

"I guess, in the truck."

"In the truck? Didn't you give me anything to pack for you?"

"No, ma'am. I...I...."

"Oh, well. Here, wear this." She held out Mr. Gains' underwear and t-shirt.

"No! I'd rather be wet."

"You can't go out in that cold soaking wet; you'll get pneumonia. Now go in there, dry off and put these on."

Julie did as she was told. She left the Benjamin Franklin Motor Inn wearing her father's underwear under her winter coat.

The next day the Gains settled into their new home in Philadelphia. Julie moved into the bedroom in the back of the second floor, overlooking the little brick courtyard where Worthy would live.

Julie learned quickly to love Philadelphia. She soon made many friends at her new school and was even invited to a party her first week there. She liked it even better than Kentucky. On Saturdays she and her girlfriends would go shopping at all the big stores. On Sundays they'd go to each other's houses and listen to records and talk about boys. Every day was exciting.

Worthy lay in the courtyard. She never moved unless she had to. Mama said her arthritis was getting worse from lying on the cold bricks.

Julie, busy with her new life, didn't notice for several days that Worthy was gone. One day she looked out the back window. "Where's Worthy?"

"Sit down, Julie."

"Did she die?"

"No, she's not dead."

"What happened to her?"

"A man from Valley Forge came on Monday and took her home with him."

"What? Why?"

"Her arthritis was too bad for her to stay on the bricks. She would have died a slow and painful death. This man has a big farm in Valley Forge where she can play and get lots of exercise, and he has a warm place for her to sleep. He seemed very nice."

"But why didn't you talk to me about it? I love Worthy!"

"We didn't want to upset you."

"Tell him to give her back. Who is he? I'll call him."

"Now, I don't know what you're so upset about. She's been gone for four days and you never even noticed until now. You say you love her, but you didn't miss her for four days. Four days from now you probably won't even remember her."

Julie ran up to the second floor bedroom overlooking the courtyard. Anger, frustration and sorrow tied together in a knot in her chest. Worthy was gone. She'd never see her again. She looked out the window and imagined she saw her walking in the yard. She'd never see her again. She remembered how it felt to wrap her arms around Worthy's furry neck. She'd never hug her again. Worthy was gone. There was nothing she could do now. It was too late.

She took a huge breath and let it out slowly. And in the exhalation she buried the emotions. She buried the anger and the frustration, but the depression.... Depression moved in to take dear Worthy's place.

Ten minutes later Mama called to Julie that she had to go out for a while. "Will you watch the children?"

"Yeah, sure."

Julie waited until she heard the front door slam shut, then crept downstairs to her mother's desk. She searched through the drawers until she found what she was looking for: a little, black address book. Small scraps of paper with writing on them fell out from between the pages when she opened the cover. So many names. How would she ever find the right person? Then she got the idea of seeing what the first three numbers of a Valley Forge number would be. She found the phone book and looked inside at the map showing the way the telephone company divided the city. VAL- or GEO- would start the Valley Forge number. Back to the address book. Julie wasn't sure how much time she had. Her mother could be gone an hour or two more, or she could come in at any second. Searching through all the tattered pieces of paper was a tedious job. Pieces of envelopes, index cards, legal paper, stationery. Finally she had looked at every piece in the book. She was fairly certain that her mother would not have written the man's name in her address book, but she looked through the pages anyway, with no luck. Perhaps she had stuck the paper with his name and phone number in a drawer. In the first drawer she found files, letters, stamps, pencils,

a hammar, a pacifier and a Barbie doll dress, but no clue to where Worthy was. In the second drawer she found recipes, a Bible, a parking ticket, three shoe strings, some rubberbands and a quarter, but no Valley Forge phone number. The third drawer contained a Social Security card, a bracelet, a child's tennis shoe, two paperback books and a ream of paper. In the kitchen she found no better leads. Discouraged, she sat down at the table and stared into the courtyard. She imagined she found the number, called the man and went out to Valley Forge to see Worthy. She would talk the man into letting her bring Worthy home. It would be easy because he could see how much she loved Worthy and how much Worthy loved her. But then she remembered what her mother had said, "You say you love her, but you didn't miss her for four days." Maybe she didn't really love her after all. She thought she did, but maybe Mama was right. Maybe she really didn't. Confusion ran around in her mind, scrambling up her thoughts and mixing up her feelings. Julie felt this way so often that most of the time she didn't know what her true feelings were. She would think she did, but then she'd talk to Mama and get mixed-up. She would try to sort through it all sometimes, but then she'd get tired and give up. It made her think of a fly she'd seen once that had gotten stuck on a spider's web. The more he fought to get free, the more stuck he became. Julie felt the same way. The more she fought to sort out her feelings the more tangled up in them she would get. Finally she would push them all away and try to pretend she had no feelings at all.

It just wasn't working this time. This time she couldn't forget. Everything swam in her stomach: her feelings for Worthy (whatever they

were), sorrow at losing her, and anger towards her mother for sending her away. She knew it was wrong to be angry at Mama, but she was. She was angry at Mama! Mama had no right to give Worthy to someone else without telling her. It was as if what she thought about it wasn't important. But it was! It was important! And Mama had no right to tell her how she felt about Worthy. How could she know after all? Julie was the only one who could look into her heart and identify the feelings there. Only she could really know. No one else really could. She did love Worthy, she did. She really did! Mama was wrong. She didn't understand. Julie's feelings were real. They were important. No one could take them from her. No one had the right to try.

Julie never found Worthy, but she had found something else, something that helped her trust in herself for the rest of her life.

The Jester

You tell me it's quite impossible,
And I tell you it is possible,
To feel and know,
To be myself,
And no one else.

Though I have made everyone laugh,
They don't understand,
They see what they want to believe,
And I play their silly game.

I realize how shallow my soul is,
Yet their souls are more shallow.

They want me to tell a joke
or sing a song,
They clap and praise,
For a job well done,
But they don't understand
what I have said.

Evelyn Stevens



No One's There

The rocking chair still creaks in
its corner,
Yet there is no one there.

The sun rises in its glory,
Yet no one sees it.

The wind blows gently through the
tree tops,
Yet no one hears it.

The flowers in a field are in full
bloom,
Yet no one smells their perfume.

The bee's honey is ready for harvest,
Yet no one enjoys it.

The family reunion is in the field,
But no one is there.

Evelyn Stevens

The Optimist

Dawn Marsh

Of the eight children, Mike was definitely the brightest. He was the only one smart enough to concoct a lie. He was small for a seventeen-year-old. It seemed that he always wore heavy work boots, dingy pants, and a long-sleeved shirt, the cuffs of which he had to roll up, revealing girlish, slender hands. His face was a living cartoon. He had phenomenally large ears and a monumental nose on a long pointed face that swallowed his tiny, round, watery blue eyes every time he blinked. Dirty was the color of his hair, but he combed his curls often. As with most mentally retarded people, and all of his brothers and sisters, his mouth was almost always gripped by a mindless grin that was sometimes delightful but more often maddening.

As I was opening the door, I saw his drooping shoulders. He wasn't intelligent enough to peer or gaze, so he must have been merely looking out the large window of the hospital lobby into the rain. His presence reminded me of the news. I remembered how I had said, "What a pity," without feeling any when I was told that his mother had cancer. For a while he would sob, raising the bony back of a hand to his face to wipe his eye or his nose. Then he would simply stare quietly.

I was not thinking of Mike even though it was he that I saw sitting there. I was seeing his siblings. One sister had died of tuberculosis. Two others, though severely retarded, were healthy and happy, the eldest married. The fourth had

created not a little gossip when she and the man with whom their mother had been living ran away together. I hadn't heard anything about her since. His younger brother was dead. Of what, I never knew.

His two older brothers and he were seldom seen separately. Together, they had supplied my family with many laughs. The eldest was little more than an imbecile, but he could do simple farm labor and he was a willing worker. My father had hired the three of them to help house tobacco on several occasions. During their first day, Dad asked Harmon, "How old are you?"

"Real old, Mr. Marsh!!"

"But how many years, Harmon?"

"I'm real old, Mr. Marsh," said Harmon rapidly, eager to please.

"When was your birthday?"

Long pause. "Last year."

Dad gave up, broken with laughter. Harmon laughed too, still eager to please. But Dad was convinced that Harmon could learn. After all, he knew his name. While the wagon rolled through the long rows, Harmon would hand the tobacco from the ground up to Dad.

"In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Harmon," said Dad, "when did Columbus sail the ocean blue?"

"In 1942!" grinned Harmon.

Harmon, like Mike, was incredibly thin, but he could consume huge quantities of food. As farm hands, they ate at our table. My brother interrupted his happy munching one day.

"Harmon, pass me some o' that there cornbread."

So Harmon picked up a wedge and pitched it across the table, of course. We all knew it would do no good to explain.

The other boy, Steve, though less entertaining than Harmon, had a face the like of which I shall never see. His eyes were huge, round, protruding, blue bulbs that veritably roved over whatever he looked at. Too much of his head was covered with wild black curls. I never saw his ears. His nose was comparatively nondescript but his grin, which was as mindless as the others' was more than adequate compensation. He had lost several teeth; some to rot, others to fights, but still others to a dresser that he stumbled into one hapless night. He had so few left that the combined effect was that of a gargoyle. Still, he looked helpless.

Helpless. As I thought of them all, I wondered how they were faring without their mother. Mike looked around when I closed the door. When he recognized me, that familiar grin found its place on his teary face. I wasn't prepared for a smile.

"How is your mother, Mike?" I asked, a little shyly.

"She ain't sick no more!" he giggled. He turned and stood. In his hand was a bedraggled rose.

Pink Babydoll

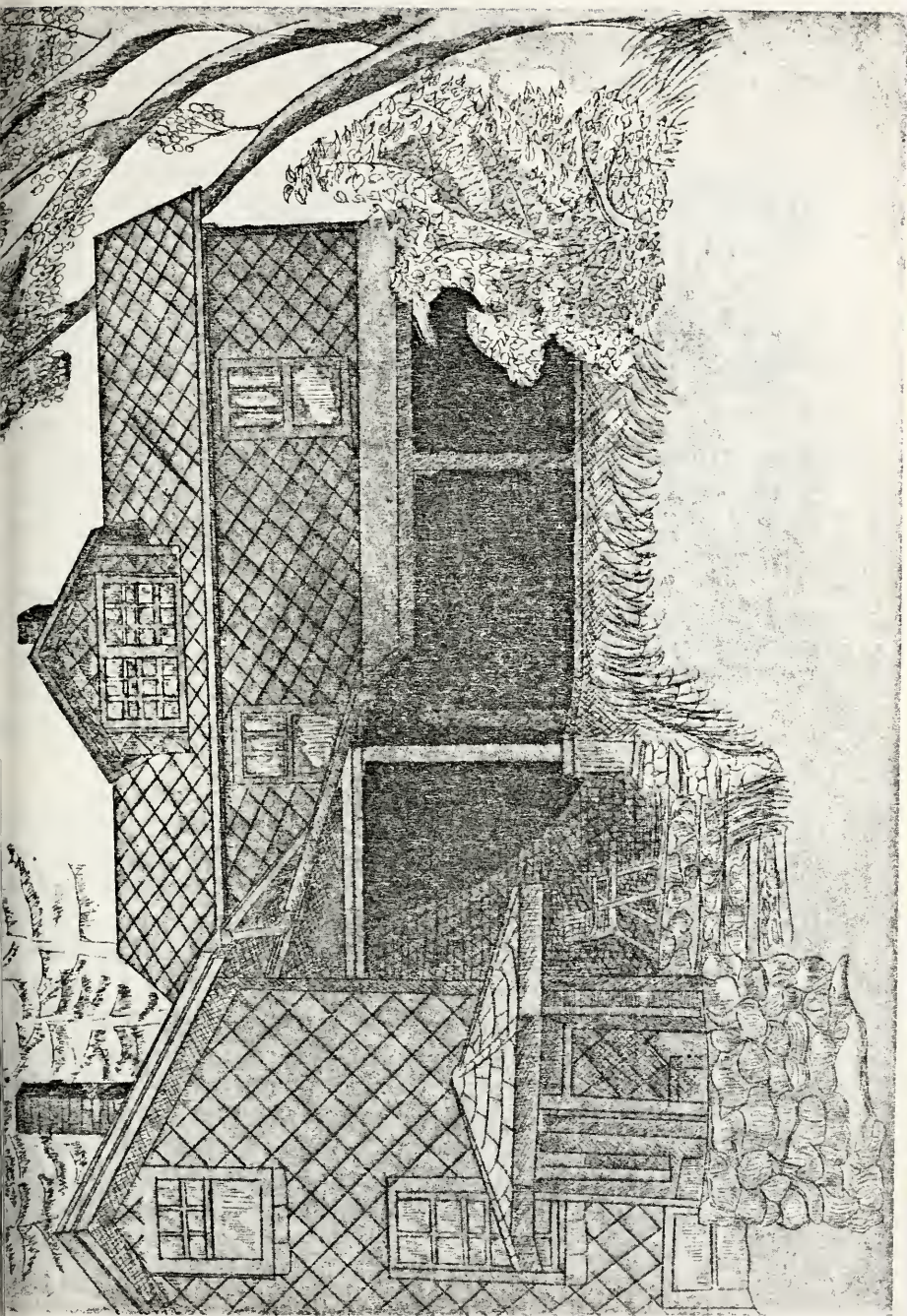
Roses were sent
To a tiny hospital room
Where floors sparkled and windows shined.
Ignorant to what the future had in mind.

The roses, a symbol of love
Were delivered because God gave
A babydoll, who was mockery's product of
Mommy and daddy's failing love.

Echoing from a deep crevice
In daddy's soul, a hollow cry
Beseeched him to bade good-bye
To his little pink babydoll's baby eyes.

Holidays, birthdays and one day a week
Were filled with joy
Bought with novelty and joviality,
Candy and toys--all credited to the signature of
Love Daddy.

Maryleigh Hayden



Little Man

Little Man in your hospital bed
What do you fear: The living or the dead?

A dear one visits. They chat and pat your hand.
Ignoring your plight saying they understand.

They admire the white daisies and roses red
They compliment your blanched cheeks flushed
with fever on the hospital bed.

Little man: Do you exist among the living
Or the dead.

Maryleigh Hayden

A Long Ago Sunday

Paula Ward

I can still hear that little boy screaming, even after all these years. I think his name was Piney. At least that's what all the local folk called him. Piney. Like the big evergreen trees that grew among the oaks and poplars on those towering mountains overlooking the tiny farm. I was sad that day. I remember crying as I watched them take Piney away even though I didn't know the kid. I didn't know hardly any of the people around there because we were new in them parts. We hadn't lived there but a few months and we'd been real busy trying to get out the crops. We hadn't had much time for visiting folks and getting to know people. The only reason I remember what happened that day was because we had been to the little church down the road and was walking the three miles back home when we saw the commotion and decided to stop and see what was going on.

The sun was shining but it wasn't as hot as it had been the few days before. I was glad the heat had slacked off a little because it was getting close to haying time and the heat would have made it almost unbearable. The Reverend Banks had delivered a specially fine sermon that morning on how us sinners should repent and seek salvation before the Lord came to strike us down with His flaming sword. It was enough to send shivers up my back and I joined in to singing "Bringing In The Sheaves" with extra gusto to cover up the guilt I felt for not walking down the aisle. After communion and more singing and a little back slapping and hand shaking, we left the church and headed home. Mama had a

big chicken all cut up ready to fry and we knew we'd be really hungry by the time we got back home and supper was cooked.

The sandy dry road raised little clouds of dust around our feet as we ran playing along the way. My sister stopped to pick a few wildflowers and I helped her braid them into a chain for her hair. They looked pretty enough for a crown so we pretended we were a royal family visiting from a strange country. We were still playing the game when we saw the crowd gathered at the old run-down shack which marked the halfway point to home. We stopped to stare and Mama caught up with us. We all stood there silently watching the goings on until we heard a woman scream.

"NO! Don't you take my babies from me!"

My heart felt like it had stopped and I looked up at Mama. She was pale as a ghost and looked like she had tears in her eyes.

"County welfare people," was all she said and nodded toward the big black car with the silver emblem painted on its side before she moved up through the crowd. I followed her and squeezed my way through until I could see what was happening.

I knew that the man who worked that little farm and lived in the house had died just a few weeks before. Mama had baked bread and made one of her special apple butter cakes and took it over to the family. She had come back looking all sad and I had heard her whispering to Papa late that night about what a pitiful shape the house was in and how ragged the man's three little children had looked. She had wanted to do something to help,

but as Papa told her that night, we barely had enough to live on ourselves. There wasn't a whole lot we could do. I also heard Mama whisper to Papa that folks said the man's wife was not all there in the head. They said she was crazy. But Mama told Papa not to believe any of the gossip because they didn't know if any of it was true or not.

Now as I stood there trying to be unnoticable, I saw three little kids. One was just a tiny baby still wrapped up in a blanket. There was a girl who looked to be about eight or nine years old. She had dirty brown hair that looked like it hadn't been combed in a fortnight and her calico dress was torn and streaked with grease. She didn't have any shoes on and her feet were ringed with grime. She had the skinniest arms and legs I had ever seen in my life. She looked more like a starved chicken than a little girl.

What really caught my attention was Piney. You couldn't miss seeing him because he had hair the color of fire in a winter hearth. His nose was covered with so many freckles he looked like he had splashed muddy water on his face and let it dry permanent. He wasn't dressed much better than his sister in overalls two sizes too big for him. His face was almost white behind the freckles and it made his eyes look like two dark hollows in a dead tree. He was hanging desparately onto his mama's skirt.

"Look, Mrs. Justice," said a tall woman in a black suit, "the county has found that you are unable to care for the welfare of these children. Now it's my duty to see to it that they be placed where they will be fed and clothed properly. You must understand this!"

"NO! Please don't take my babies away from me! I can take care of them. They's all I got since Virgil died. You can't take them away from me!"

Mrs. Justice was as ragged and skinny as the little girl and she was crying and pleading so hard I wanted to run over and help her defend her family against this county woman that was invading us.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Justice, but that's the way it has to be. Mr. Courtland!"

A fat, balding man in a fancy suit walked swiftly toward the county woman. He was followed by a fat lady in spike heels and a big flowered hat that matched her flowered dress.

"You have first choice, Mr. Courtland. We'll fill out the rest of the papers later."

The fat man nodded and turned to his wife for a quick conversation. A minute later he strode up to the porch and took the little girl by the hand. At first she refused to move like her feet were glued to the worn boards of the porch, but then the man gave her a tug nearly pulling her off her feet.

"Come along child! Don't you realize how much better off you'll be with us?"

She went, looking back over her shoulder at her sobbing mama. As she passed by me, I saw she had big tears running down her face, but she never said a word.

"She'll be able to earn her keep around the house once we get a little meat on her bones," I heard the fat woman whisper to the man.

A younger couple next came to lay claim to the baby. I didn't catch their names because my mind was still on the whispered comment the fat lady made. I do remember how sad the young woman looked to be taking away Mrs. Justice's baby, but she seemed kind of happy to hold the baby in her arms. She apologized for taking the baby and she promised to love it and care for it as if it was her own. Mrs. Justice didn't even seem to listen. Instead she tightened her grip on the little boy who already had a death hold on her skirt tail.

"You've taken two of my babies," Mrs. Justice suddenly said to the county woman in a low tone, "but you're not getting the last one. It'll be over my dead body that you take my boy from me!"

The county woman just sighed and motioned to a middle-aged couple standing off to the side of the porch. They hesitated for a minute, but finally they shuffled slowly up to where the county woman stood. For a while, they stood looking at the little boy with his red hair and his big dark eyes staring up at them so lost and frightened.

"We'll bring you back to visit your mama any time you want," said the woman. And she looked like she really meant it too. She didn't look like the other two couples that had left. Instead, she had on a clean, worn housedress and flat shoes. Her hair was pulled up in a tight bun at the back of her head and I could tell from the wrinkles around her eyes and the color of her skin that she was not afraid to work out in the fields alongside her husband. He was dressed in a clean, but worn pair of overalls and his work boots still had a bit of mud clinging around the heels.

"Please, little boy," said the man, "come home with us. We'll feed you and send you to school and I'll even teach you how to hunt and fish. You'd like that wouldn't you?"

Piney just stood there and looked at them. He never moved except to inch closer to his mama.

"Oh come along!" snapped the county woman. She grabbed Piney's arm and started to pull him off the porch.

"Don't hurt him!" cried both the man and woman at the same time.

"I'm not!" the county woman snapped again. "I can't spend all day here. I've got other things to do."

With that, she grabbed Piney's arm again and jerked him away from his mama. There was a ripping sound as Piney's hand came away with a piece of his mama's already torn dress.

It was as if Mrs. Justice came back to life with the sound of her dress ripping. She grabbed her skirt tail and with a sob, ran inside the house and slammed the door.

The man and woman stood there for a second and then reached out to take Piney by the hand. It was then he started to scream.

The county woman just turned around and walked back to her car. She drove away in a cloud of dust leaving Piney screaming his heart out and the crowd of us standing there, staring after her and whispering among ourselves.

The couple gently took Piney's hands and half carried him to the big horse they had tied to the apple tree in the yard. Up on the horse they climbed, the woman in front, the man in the back, and Piney in the middle still screaming as if his soul was leaving his tiny body.

I watched them ride away and it was a few moments before Mama's nudge and whispered, "Let's go" meant anything to me. Mama was crying as was several of the women in the crowd. I was surprised to find tears wet on my face too.

Most of the crowd had drifted off toward their homes and their all-but-forgotten suppers. We headed home too with the sound of Piney's screams louder in our minds than the pitiful sound that was slowly disappearing in the distance.

We hadn't gotten that far from the house when we heard the shotgun blast. Mama froze. "Go home and get your Papa!" she commanded in a tone that I knew better than to disobey. She turned and ran back to the old shack while I high-tailed it for the house yelling for Papa to come quick.

Mrs. Justice died with a gunshot wound to the head. I guess she really meant it when she said they would take her boy over her dead body. I had nightmares for weeks afterwards and Mama would sit up all night holding me while I cried over the screams that haunted me.

Even after all these years I can still hear that little boy screaming. I don't know what happened to him. Some people claim that his name was changed, but nobody ever knew to what. But I wonder sometimes if he grew up happy and if he even remembers or ever thinks about that long ago Sunday when he was taken away from that little shack.

Toe Shoes

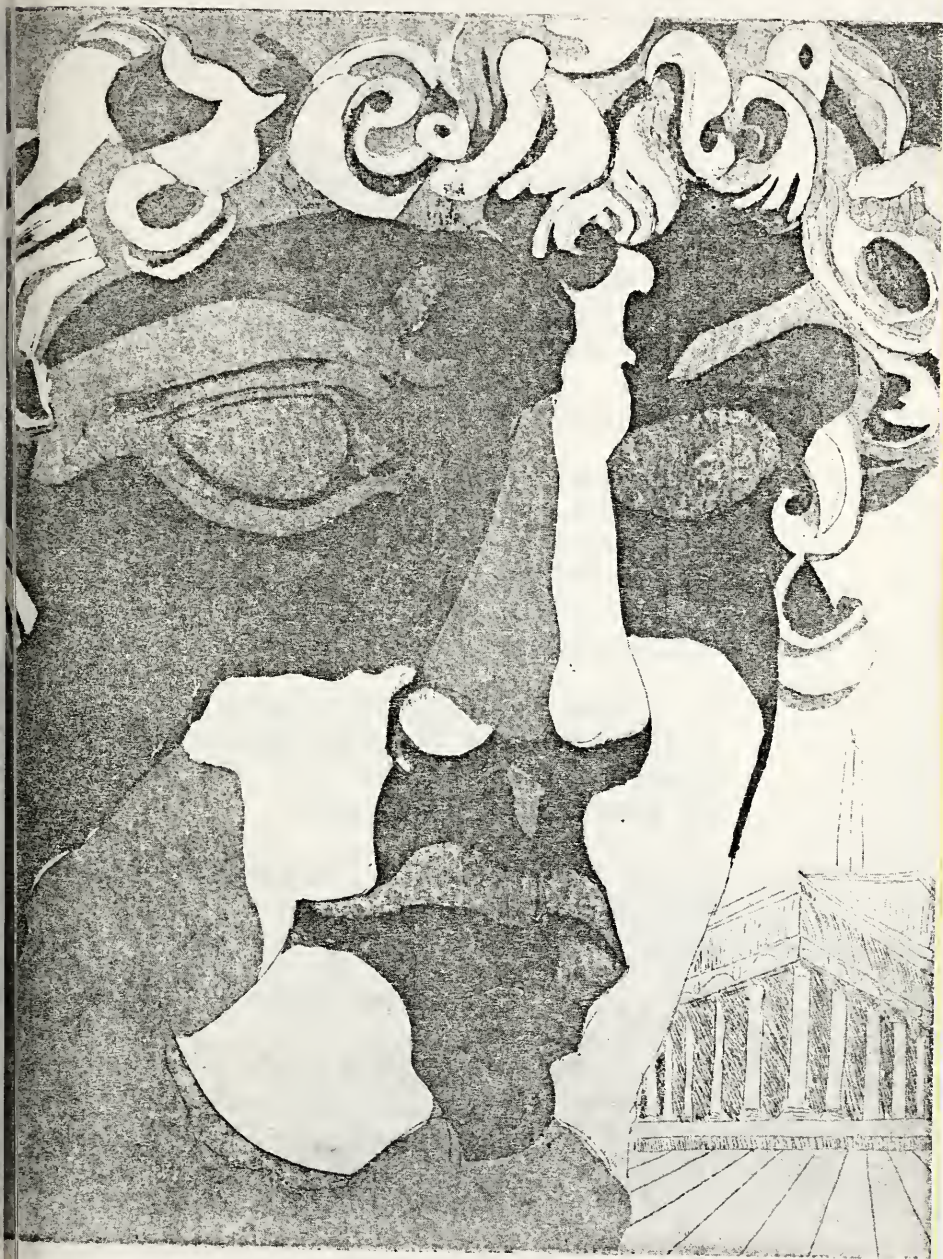
Run tiptoe from the tide, child
And grow to be a swan.
With arms outstretched
And heart to heaven, dance!
Dance. But only for the joy
Or want of it.
So die my swan, and die again.
A graceful exit
To leave the world on tiptoe.

Laura J. Epperson

Change of Plans

I asked you here, into my heart
I am the one responsible.
Poor planning though
You bring such complications.
Dreams can be changed I guess
And longings quelled.
But you will never be again.
So stop a moment
And let me join your someday.

Laura J. Epperson



We Three

The balloon man is selling inflated egos-----25¢

Red : boastful
Yellow : vain
Orange : overbearing

Percy bought three.

S-id(animal lover) saw
Percy with his three.
S-id(pleasure seeker) took
out his knife.
S-id(primitive thinker) burst
Percy's three.

Super---flying by---gazed at
this injustice(with x-ray eyes) and
slapped Sid's wrist(that put him in
his place Percy purred.)

...And the Austrian balloon vender
daydreams of Oedipus.

Terry Honchell

Mirage

grit
in the mouth
sand
in the eyes
Commanders orders...
Commanders lies...

Sentry duty, gun in hand
Heavy drowse, body caresses sand.

Sudden refraction

Pale pillars rise
ugh orange haze.
Silver stream flows
a whisper.
Blue powder butterflies coast
he breeze.
Sequin scaled fish snatch dragon flies
the air.
Bone white manteled maidens
e trays of honey cakes...

Sudden evaporation

Sand dunes loom
sun scorches the ground like the furnaces of hell
the victims of sin.

Sigh
in the mouth
Desperation
in the eyes
Reality orders
Reality lies

Terry Honchell

An Act of Courage

Teresa McIntosh

"Hi Sugar!" the old lady threw her hands up in delight and then gave Karen a big hug. "I haven't seen you in so long," she said.

Karen loved her grandmother's hugs. It was the best part of visiting her. She hugged then all as soon as they got there and at least three times before they left. She had a way of making everyone feel important too.

"Hi Nannie!" Karen said. That had been her nickname ever since Karen's cousin James had called her that because he couldn't pronounce Granny. Now all of Karen's cousins called her Nannie.

"Steve and Angie are coming," Karen said. "They're still arguing with Daddy to let them go with him."

"Hey Karri," James yelled from the other room. "Where's Steve? Did he come too?"

"Yeah, he'll be here in a minute," she told him. James was so gross, or at least Karen thought so. He had big flabby legs and huge rolls of fat hung over his waistband. And he was only ten years old. Karen hated him, but her grandmother didn't. Nannie thought that James was God himself come down to earth. She waited on him hand and foot, gave him expensive presents that they couldn't afford, and put up with his temper tantrums. He was a 180-pound baby.

"Where are you going?" her grandmother's voice interrupted Karen's thoughts.

"I'm going into town with Ray," her grandfather said.

"Too late," Angie giggled as she jumped up and down to shake the snow off her boots, "Daddy's gone already."

That was unusual Karen thought. He never went anywhere with Daddy. Or anyone else for that matter. He hardly ever went out of the house anymore since the accident. Papaw had hurt his back at work. The company's doctors said he was fine, but Papaw was always complaining about how bad his back hurt. He hadn't worked in months and he wore a back brace all the time.

Karen loved her grandfather but he was just such a nuisance. He piddled around the house, driving them all crazy. Maybe he'd go back to work soon. He'd have to, Mom said that they couldn't get by with no income for much longer.

"Hey Karri," fatso said, "Wanna play hide and seek with us?"

"No thanks," Karen said. "Besides," she thought to herself, "there's nothing in the house big enough to hide you."

Karen tried to ignore her cousin by looking at the photographs on the shelf. There was one of her mother and father, another of her uncle and his wife, and one of Karen, Angie, and Steve. But the one that caught her attention was of her grandparents before they were married.

Karen wondered what had happened to the girl in the picture. No one would have believed that the girl had grown into the woman that stood before her today. The stranger in the picture had a big beautiful smile and bright green eyes. And she was glowing with life. Around her neck was a modest diamond and emerald necklace, and she had earrings to match.

The girl in the picture must have worn all those beautiful old dresses in the closet. There were all colors of the rainbow, with ribbons and bows and lace. Karen could see the girl in the picture laughing and having a wonderful time, something she hadn't seen her grandmother do in a long, long time.

Karen could find no resemblance between the girl in the picture and her grandmother. She was all wrinkled, skin and bones. Broken glasses that she couldn't afford to have fixed sat on her nose still, somehow. Her hair was grey and black, and kinky from too many permanents. She had none of the sparkled and zest for life that the girl in the picture had.

Karen knew she wasn't nearly as beautiful as the girl in the picture, but she was kind and understanding and loving. Karen didn't love her any less because she wasn't like the girl in the picture.

Mom had explained to Karen once that her grandfather's father had left Papaw a lot of money when he died. So her grandparents had once been very well off, but they must have spent it all very unwisely because none of it was left. Papaw finally had to take a job as a janitor to support

. Nannie refused to talk about his job and acted really funny for weeks after he got the Mom had said that pride was a good thing it didn't put food on the table.

"Where's your grandfather?" Nannie asked. n looked up from her book and shrugged. The rs didn't even look up from the TV.

Nannie began looking through the house. Karen ed her book and went into the kitchen to get thing to drink. As she glanced out the kitchen ow she saw her grandfather walking down the .

"There he is, Nannie" she called. "Where is oing?"

"I don't know," she said. "He didn't say any- g about going anywhere. She watched him walk the road until he was almost out of sight.

"Nannie, where's my rope?" James yelled tiently.

"In the closet, James Honey," she said as she into the other room to look for it.

"No it's not," he shouted.

"Well it was last night when I put away your ."

"I don't care where it was last night, I want ow. And if you would leave my stuff alone I d find them when I wanted them.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"But we want to play cowboys, and we can't do it without the rope."

"Nannie," Karen called. "A care picked him up. I think it was Mr. Adams."

"Well if he didn't go for a walk then where is he going?" Nannie asked. She was beginning to worry.

"Hey Mom," Buddy called as he slammed the door.

"You have to go find your father," she begged him.

"What's wrong," he asked.

"He left, just took off down the road. And then Mr. Adams picked him up in his car. I don't know where he could be going, but you've got to find him," she said, crying now.

Karen watched her grandmother click her fingernails back and forth. She seemed really worried about him.

"He just went for a walk," Karen said.

"All right Honey," she said. "I'm just being an old worry wart."

The phone jolted her out of her thoughts and she ran to answer it.

"Buddy said that Mr. Adams let him out at our house," Karen said. "What could he be doing there?"

"I don't know," Nannie said. "Is Buddy going up there?"

"Yeah, he said he would call us when he found him."

"Well I can't just sit here, let's go ourselves."

Buddy's car was all ready there when they pulled into the driveway. Karen opened up the door and ran for the house while her grandmother parked the car.

The place felt eerie. She was running from room to room, but she didn't want to find him. She was afraid of what she might find. She didn't want to open the door or look around the corner. But he wasn't in the house.

Nannie was standing beside the car, waiting. She knew he wasn't in the house, because she had already seen the barn door swinging in the wind.

Buddy ran out of the barn and cried, "Come quick, Paw's hung himself."

Karen didn't want to go into the barn. She went around to the other side and her grandmother went inside.

She leaned against the back side of the barn. She didn't want to see him hanging there. She didn't want to have to look at him ever again.

She just stood there and cried. The sky was still blue and the wind was still blowing through the trees. But her grandfather was dead, and the world just kept right on going like it didn't care.

There was something about the land that always soothed Karen. Whenever she was angry or confused she walked through these fields and they always seemed to sympathize with her. But that wasn't working today.

"Get out!" she heard her grandmother scream at them. "Get out, I want to be alone with him."

Karen watched her through the slats of the barn wall. Nannie nelt down on the dirt floor and cradled his body in her arms.

"You're still warm," she told him. "Dead people are supposed to be so cold, but you're still warm. Silly old fool. The first strong thing you ever did in your life, the first strong thing and it killed you. How could you leave me like this? I've never been alone in my whole life before. Who's going to take care of me? The kids are all married with kids of their own and they don't need me. I thought you would always be there. I thought we would grow old together. How could you? Damn you," she screamed at him. "Leaving me to face this mess. And the shame, how am I going to face this? The janitors job was bad enough, but this. You, damn coward!"

She put her face in her hands and cried. "And look at my hands," she told him. "They're all wrinkled and spotted with age. How did this happen to us? We used to be young and so much in love, and it seems like just yesterday. Where did all those dreams go?"

Karen sat on the ground with her hands over her ears. She didn't want to hear anymore. No wonder he killed himself; her grandmother didn't even love him anymore.





