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## Aurora, 1990

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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**AURORA**



**AURORA**

1990

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## Birth of Insanity

Jacquie Moore

Reech--Bam! The door always screamed like that when Sheila got out.

"God, I hate her," my mind complained as usual. I had to agree. The trouble with Sheila was her uncanny ability to ruin any occasion for me. We had been bumping along a country road somewhere down the road from Delphos in Tony's old creaky station wagon. Now, here we were at this run down road side rest waiting on that baby-burdened bitch. Not that I had anything against children or being pregnant, I just couldn't stand Sheila.

"Are you sure?" my mind asked.

"Yes," I snapped, refusing the memories that flew at me like furies.

"I wonder what's taking her so long?" Tony questioned the air. Gazing in the direction of the medieval outhouse, I noticed, surprisingly for the first time, the juicy orange of the setting sun over a nearby stubbly mountain side. It was fall, late fall, and for some reason, the mountains always reminded me of stumbly old crew cut men.

"Dezi, did you hear me?" Tony's voice came out of nowhere to bring me back to the car.

"What did you say?" I asked back.

"Why don't you see what is going on with her? You're a girl and can go in," Tony whined pathetically. He was ready to get to the arena to see our mutually favorite group in concert. Sighing, ultimately pissed at her attitude, I slung open my door and stepped onto cold hard gravel. I was barefoot due to the uncomfortable nature of my black, slender toed boots. Nude toes and all, I stomped across the parking lot. Tiny pin-like pebbles pinched my underused instep. I kept tromping.

"We can't let Tony know that he has perturbed us," my mind panted. My mind never cussed. It thought obscenities were a rude way to address anyone. The walk to the half mooned sanctuary that Sheila had chosen seemed miles.

"Couldn't she wait until we got there?" I mumbled and grumbled to the ground. The jagged rocks soon gave way to smooth, dew damp grass which was a grand relief to my raw piggies. Twilight was approaching fast. What had happened to Sheila? Approaching the bathroom, I detected a quiet whine.

"Who was that?" My mind stupidly asked. It had to be Sheila. No one was out here but us. Opening the deceitfully heavy door, I walked into the darkened dunghouse. Scents greeted me at the door, scents that I had met only in the middle of a Dickens novel or . . .

"In the clinic," my mind finished. Of course, I was talking about the stench of the streets that had floated into the window of the quietest house on the block. The house of death. I shook off the memories.

"Shelia, hurry up! Tony wants to get going," I shouted, receiving my own echo in response.

"Dezi . . ." A weak voice trailed. Horror froze my limbs as recollections of past slasher flicks flashed through my mind. Following the reverberations of the whisper to the last stall, I wasn't shocked by the ghastly white face of Sheila in pained contortions or the fact that she was writhing along the floor of the stall like a charmed snake.

"A very fat snake," my mind chuckled.

"What's wrong?" I queried, squatting in the squalor of this unlikely latrine.

"The ba . . . bee . . .!" She screamed now.

"Why didn't she scream before?" My mind, quite irked, asked.

"Maybe she did," I followed. I had long known how to tune out the screams of others. I

had to do it the day that I went to the back street butcher to . . .

"Get rid of the baby," my mind acknowledged my actions of so long ago finally. There was no relief as I noticed the growing puddle of blood on the uncaring grey cement floor. Shelia never wore underwear, even in her obvious condition. The slut didn't deserve to have a healthy baby. In a flash, I was back at the car. I hadn't even felt the rocks this time. A fresh scent was in the air.

"Rain," my mind commented off the cuff. It had rained the day that I was told my unborn baby was dead.

"Tony, Sheila's having the baby; go back to town, and call an ambulance," I screamed barely taking time for a breath before turning on my heel and dashing back to the putrid potty.

"Now breathe slowly, in through the nose and out through the mouth," I shouted as I entered the area where Sheila had been.

"Shut up bitch! What do you know about having a baby? You killed yours," Shelia maliciously hissed from her position on the floor. The entire day quipped through my mind and I laughed. I had to. The abortion had been the circumcision of my soul.

"Breathe, in through the nose and out through the mouth," I continued curbed only by a quivering jaw. Was I suppressing tears or laughter?

"Murderess!" She howled and was silent. I knew she was alive still. I could hear her breathing, or was that silent gasping for air the baby? I fancied that I heard the heartbeat of mine still. Hearing a gurgle, I turned around and lit a cigarette.

"Babies gurgle when they're happy," my mind silently played back all the advice my mother had told me before she knew the baby was dead.

"My baby had made that same sound as it oozed out," I said turning back around to face



Sheila and continued, "I can tell abortions weren't legal when your mother was pregnant too. The only difference being that my baby was dead inside of me."

"Dead," a faint sound came up behind me. I put out my cigarette. Turning back around to scrutinize the now still body of Sheila, I pondered if that single word had been a question or an exclamation of her state. She looked frozen, eyes open, face still gnarled.

"Dead," my mind echoed through my head.

"No," I said silently back. Kneeling between Sheila's legs, I slid off her Hide-a-Belly pregger pants and reached up inside of her.

"Dead," my mind said again.

"I promise, I'll be a much better mommy than this bitch could ever be," I panted pulling and straining. I had been given a second chance. I had been chosen!

"Dead," my mind quietly collapsed not to be heard from again.

"Give it here!" I screamed maniacally now. Blood, cold blood, slimed and clotted on my hands. Suddenly, out came the head. The rest of the body soon followed. It was so quiet and still as I picked it up, chewed off the cord, and rocked it to the pulsating rhythm of the approaching siren.

## Mountain Ghosts

New ghosts wisk about me now,  
Not of past failures or regrets,  
but of a past  
never known at all.

Ancestral ghosts  
surface from  
unleveled ground  
on the mountain-top  
and travel rugged slopes  
to tell me of whence I came.

They descend upon me,  
these dreamlike figuratures,  
and traipse through my sleep  
in worn overalls,  
or calico dresses,  
with calloused hands,  
and time-dimmed eyes.

They display the spring-time mountains,  
hills on fire  
with hues of rebirth.  
They braid wild roses  
in my earthen-brown hair.

When they leave,  
nothing remains  
of these dreamlike figuratures,  
and traipse through my sleep  
in worn overalls,  
or calico dresses,  
with calloused hands,  
and time-dimmed eyes.

They display the spring-time mountains,  
hills on fire  
with hues of rebirth.  
They braid wild roses  
in my earthen-brown hair.

When they leave,  
nothing remains  
of these mountain ghosts of mine,  
except a clod of mountain earth,  
pressed in the sole of my boot,  
and a single wild pink rose  
tangled in my hair.

Lisa J. Denney

## Memories

A quilt of faded patchwork,  
to comfort an infant  
on a chilly autumn night.  
The same which warmed  
a feverish child  
in decades yellow with time.

A picture that once hung,  
and a clock that once struck,  
each day for years,  
in the rooms of childhood,  
of a house long since torn down.

Once a packed, dusty cowpath  
that traced to the creek,  
now a baptism for weeds,  
through fifty years.

A name on a gravestone  
embroidered with moss,  
the final link  
of the present  
to the vibrant warmth  
of the past,  
childhood,  
mother,  
memories.

Lisa J. Denney

## The Days Have Passed

The days have passed now,  
bitter, pain-strangled days  
when I wished to simply die,  
to melt away  
an icicle hanging from a cliff in Spring,  
or better yet,  
just to let go and fall  
crashing to the earth  
with a final crystalline  
scream of rage.

The days have passed now,  
days when I felt  
unworthy to face the sunlight,  
too dirty to look upon  
the daisies and the children anymore.

Unclean, banished,  
a leper in rags  
cringing at the edge of town,  
spotted with guilt,  
immersed in crimson,  
praying mercifully to die.

The days have passed now,  
the children are my comfort,  
a dressing for my pain.  
The daisies, intricate cobwebs  
of what I was before.

The days have passed now  
no longer hungering  
to simply die,  
but willing to face the sun again  
a child once more,  
but with the heart of a wise old woman  
covered with leper's scars  
from some banishment  
long ago.

Lisa J. Denney

## Yellowing Decades

I delve into  
the granite past,  
seeking your names.

Upon finding the graveyard  
where you lay,  
I traipse rocky slopes  
to a weedy family plot,  
to touch your stones,  
trace your moss-laden names  
with my fingertip.

Hoping from this voyage into my ancestral past,  
to find  
some flicker  
of how I came to be.

I return from my pilgrimage weary,  
saddened,  
to never have known you at all,  
nor your strength,  
nor the touch of your calloused hands.  
But at peace, somehow,  
in knowing,  
that somewhere within  
this molecular structure  
that is my being,  
a molecular or two of you remain,  
to make your presence known,  
through the yellowing of decades,  
and evolution of time.

Lisa J. Denney

## Cycles

### Cycle 1

I was born, born, born  
in the still-birthing month  
of January, kicking my way  
out, fighting to live, only  
to discover death. I liked  
it and so I kept on  
dying.

### Cycle 2

A frost-bitten child,  
I learned soon what  
freon does to a soul  
when icy-hearted  
children circle round  
it and tie it to the  
nearest stake to be burned  
with dry ice.

### Cycle 3

I walked in Sunshine  
And loved Sunshine  
who with his fiery red hair  
and warm brown eyes  
radiated love, love, acceptance.  
My best friend, girl's best  
friend, he taught me to walk  
in sun.

#### Cycle 4

Birth, childhood, adolescence  
behind, I attempted  
adulthood, learned that cold-assed  
children grow up to be  
cold-assed adults, stopped  
being warm until at last I  
learned to walk  
in me.

#### Cycle 5

Still I managed to hold  
innocence, trust, hope around  
me like a warm wooly cloak  
on a chilled winter night  
until I tossed it away,  
watching it drift like  
a snowflake. . .  
away. . .  
away. And  
I was cold again. So cold  
I felt I would never be  
warm.

#### Cycle 6

Now I stand,  
frozen  
clinging to a shabby  
coat and trying to  
move, to be  
warm, to be born  
again. And still  
I keep on dying. . .

Laura Duncan



## The Plum

A plum, purple and sweet,  
you offered me  
and I took a bit,  
a small, entranced  
nibble  
of the cool fruit,  
which turned bitter  
in my mouth  
as I heard your  
tempting offer again  
and again, "Bite, bite?"  
This fruit you offered to me,  
to her, to her, to anyone,  
and it seemed not  
worth the trouble of biting  
in retrospect  
because it wasn't the plum  
you offered me  
but only a bite. I  
wanted the plum  
and so a bite was bitterly  
not enough.

Then suddenly I wanted a bite  
just one bite of the coolness  
to squelch the hunger in me,  
and you offered a bite and  
I took it and it was  
sweet and juicy and  
I wanted another bite  
but not the fruit. Plums  
are better had when  
savored  
bite by bite.

Laura Duncan

### Morning Audition

The pillow held  
Her head gently  
Sleep sogened lids  
Slowly flutter open  
Noticing first one  
Laser-like sunbeam  
Lending light to  
Pink-polished toes  
Escaped the covers  
And she wiggled  
Each dancing gaily  
In the spotlight.

Heather Yeoman

### Indictment

Relinquish that piece of my heart  
You thief  
I watched you stalk the forbidden void  
So cunning  
I couldn't stop the crime.  
No prison could ever house  
The sparkle in your eyes.

Heather Yeoman

The stars blink their eyes to  
The moon.  
The trees shudder.  
The grass sways, as if listening to  
Melancholy tunes.  
And my footsteps tap out a beat.

The hills roll on  
Past the brook,  
Past the woods.  
They continue where my night vision  
Stops, but my imagination travels on.

Michelle Charbonneau

## "Do Not Go Gentle"

David Alexander

He slowly walked away from the old red barn, occasionally glancing up the path that led to the aging white farmhouse. The house had a sort of pinkish glow in the late September sunset. He and his wife used to walk back from the barn in the twilight of late September days. That was before she got sick. Now, he walked slowly, his mind twenty miles west on KY 52 in a tiny hospital room where his wife lie motionless, thoughtless, humanless--kept alive by modern medicine. He was confused but sure of his choices. Somewhere across the acres of lush Kentucky farmland, a dog welcomed home his master.

He was only a boy then. Same house, same barn. Old Sugar (They had called her 'Shug') had run under the tractor tire. The dog's white fur had been turned crimson with blood, he remembered.

"Can't do it, Daddy. I just can't. Ol' Shug'll make it. She ain't hurt no ways that bad," he said.

"Look at her, Son. Ain't nothin we can do cept shoot her. Law a nature--ain't right fer a man ta let a animal suffer cause he ain't got guts enough ta do what Nature calls fer. Just ain't right, Boy."

"Maybe she'll live, Daddy. What if I go and shoot. . .What if she lives?"

"Look at her close, Son. That blood ain't comin out her mouth means she's all mashed up inside. She'll lay there an bleed ta death. She'll suffer if we don't put her out of it. She'll die slow and painful."

"I can't bear it. . .I go ta do it. They just ain't no way round it, they just ain't," he said.

"Member, Son, you doin ol' Shug a kindness. Ain't always easy to see things that way. Things ain't always easy ta see. Sometimes the right thing don't seem right," his daddy said.

He thought back to how it had felt to pull the trigger. He never did feel exactly right about it. Just one of those things a man had to do, but he couldn't put his finger on just why. He guessed it was always the same. A man caught in the middle of a struggle for Truth, trying to see through the fog into something bigger than he could imagine. He walked over by the fence, stopping to lean down and pick a piece of honeysuckle. The fragrance had faded by late September. Somehow the shriveled and discolored flower disturbed him, and he dropped it. He watched as the poor imitation of what once had been slowly fluttered back to the rich, red soil that had birthed it.

He turned back to the house, with the memory of something past calling him like an echo. He remembered bringing his only son, Dale, out to the barn to punish him. He had used the journey to the barn to explain another journey. He himself had learned it on walks to the barn with his father and in talks with his wife of forty-two years. Damn, he thought. He guessed that the boy would of made a good man, no, he knew the boy would of made a fine man. Damn the drunk bastard, he thought. He grabbed the fencepost and jerked it hard. Just as sure as April rains brought spring floods, some memories brought tears to Bud Spencer.

"Hello, Bud."

"Hello, Sheriff. What brings you out on a night like this? Snow must be couple inches deep by now."

"Can I come in, Bud?"

"Sure, Roy. Ain't no trouble with Dale is they? He ain't a bad boy. He's just a little antsy. . .a teen-ager, you know how it is."

"Sit down, Bud. Jesus. Ain't no easy way to say this. State Police just called. Been a wreck over in Clay City. It's Dale, Bud."

"Oh my God! God, please, no!" His wife said.

"How bad is it, Roy?" he said.

"He's dead, Bud. Jesus Christ, I'm sorry."

He dried his eyes on his old red and blue flannel shirt, so rough from hundreds of washings that it scraped his skin. It hadn't been the damn icy road conditions, he thought. The fault lie in a god damn country that thought alcohol was what it took to have a good time. His son had saved for three years to buy a car. He could see the twisted wreckage of the old red 1970 Ford Maverick. The Maverick looked like a car the way a squashed fly resembles what it was before. His wife's calm had surprised him, but then he didn't know Tassie the way he would come to know her. Damn, the woman was strong, he thought. A strong God fearin woman. He could still see her the day of the funeral, pained beyond pain, yet somehow composed and dignified. He had been the one to lose his cool, he remembered.

"I'm gonna kill the drunk son-of-a-bitch, Tee. Our only boy, only kid we got. What do you say about your God now, Tee? He took away your child bearin when Dale was born, and now the cruel bastard's taken Dale. You can have your God. He's the laziest man in town," he said.

He remembered how his wife had sat for a minute after he had said it. He could see her gathering all her strength as she slowly pulled herself up. They had never seen eye to eye on religion, maybe they still didn't--he didn't

know, but he knew that he would never forget what she said or the way she said it.

"You listen to me, Bud Spencer. I can't change what you think about what I believe, but you will not talk like that in my presence. Do you hear me? Are you really stupid enough to think the good Lord took our boy on purpose?"

"Think He just reached down out a the sky and said, 'Let's see how good ol' Tassie and Bud Spencer can handle a little pain.' Good Lord give Adam and Eve a choice. Didn't want em to choose the wrong way, but they did. Didn't want nobody ta get drunk on whiskey, but they do. Didn't want our Dale to meet up with no drunk driver, but he did.

"We wanted our own way, Bud. Can't ya see? The weeds grows in the middle of the seeds. You just keep quiet, Bud Spencer. You ain't the only one ever been in pain. You ain't the only one ever lost a son. You ain't gonna kill nobody.

"What's wrong with you? He was just a boy too. Some mistakes more serious than others, but be careful cause we all make em."

As he stepped up on the porch, he looked over to the white swing where he used to hold his boy, used to tell him about that fellow who threw apple seeds all over the place. Used to tell him about his own father, about what it means to work the land, to get up before dawn and watch the cattle lick the dew off the grass. About how it's good to go to school and get educated as long as you never forget that cattle lick dew off the grass. And never forgetting that the joy of a new born calf was just as real and part of life as a man killing another man. He jumped when the phone ran, jumped like he had ever since the night the sheriff's knock and pale face had permanently left a vacuum in a part of his being. He went in and approached the phone with a dread

that only illness or late night hours can put in a ring.

"No, leave it on. Leave it on, please."

The voice at the other end was trying to be calm and reassuring. But he knew that even people who had seen death, people who had death as part of their life, could never lose the hesitancy, the awful fear and dread, so they put on an aloofness, convincing themselves that it was painless and for the best. That somehow no life was better than pain, that dignity could somehow be maintained or assured if death came gently. He could never believe it. When he had his heart attack, he remembered the fear, no, the terror that gripped him as he fought for air. He remembered how hard he fought to stay awake, to grab for the last sliver of seeing. He had been unable to sleep at night ever since. The chilling darkness of a farm haunted him. For the last ten years his ears had been trained in the early morning hours to listen for the birds. He knew why they sang at the first echoings of daylight. They were joyfully saying, "I made it through the night--I made it."

He hung up the phone and stood motionless. The slow tick, tick, tick of the ten year old smiley face clock was the only voice in the old farmhouse. He looked over at the kitchen table, with its simple white tablecloth and yellow-backed vinyl chairs. It had only been last Christmas that they had got the news. He had been sure that she would get better. The first operation was supposed to get it all.

"Don't talk like that, Tee. The doctor says he thinks he can take care of it. Besides, it's Christmas Eve. Let's go sit by the wood stove and warm up."

"Listen to me, Bud Spencer. One thing I want clear. When the time does come, you tell those doctors to let me die. I don't want none



of those machines hooked up on me. You just let me die. I ain't afraid for nobody but you."

"Hush, Tee. Come on. The wood stove's a waitin. Remember how me and you and Dale would all huddle up here? What about that time you came runnin over the hill, hollerin a mile a minute. I thought the damn house was on fire. Your eyes was wild, kept repeating 'What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do?'

"All cause Dale found his toy train in the attic before ol Santa supposed to run."

"You hush now; you was as stumped as me on how to explain it."

"Dale, honey, Santa's extra busy this year, so he had to have some of his elves take presents early and hide them. That way he'll have room in the sled.' Damn big sled, too. You know the boy never bought that don't ya? Not from the start. He just knew he had a good thing in ol Santa."

He slammed the door shut on the old Ford pick-up. He smiled for a minute when he smelled the manure. But then he realized that no one would ever get mad at him anymore for not hosing the manure off the floorboard. He wished then that he had remembered to do it. He had driven the twenty miles to the hospital so many times in the last three months that he could have shut his eyes and still made every curve. Tonight it was different though. He had managed to sneak around the corners of his guilt for most of the past three days, but now, in the darkness of KY 52 and the hum of the road, there was little else to think about. He had never forgotten pulling the trigger on Ol Shug. He had been so nervous that he had missed twice. His father had grabbed the gun from him and done the job himself. The way Shug looked though. God. Hell, he had never even killed any of his own cattle. He remembered refusing to watch when his dad did it. Still, he didn't know what kind of man it was that didn't respect his dying wife's wishes. "Don't let her

die, Doc." That was all it took to maintain some semblance of life. He went goose flesh when he saw the lights of the hospital appear over a railroad overpass. He knew he didn't have long. He parked the car in his regular spot--to the left of the two big entrance doors, under the big mercury street light. He walked in, pausing to say hello to the nighttime desk lady, Jeane Snowden.

"Hello, Bud. How's Tassie?"

"Not too good, don't reckon. Doctor called and said her breathin was just cause of that machine."

"I'm prayin' for her. Don't you worry none. Good Lord'll take care of her no matter what."

Bud turned away quickly, grunting a "Thanks" that he didn't really mean. He couldn't understand why those kind always had to mention the Lord everytime something unpleasant was happening. Why didn't they just look in the mirror and say it. That's who they were trying to convince anyway. The elevator slowly rode him up to the third floor, and he held the "Door Close" button down for a moment when the elevator stopped.

"Damn it, Bud. Give me that damn gun, boy. Damn, boy, you didn't even get within ten feet of hittin the dog. You got to learn ta be a man, Bud. This runnin and hidin all the time's got ta stop. They ain't no runnin from it, boy."

"She's as good as dead, boy. Cept she stayin alive ta suffer cause you to yellow to be a man. Get your ass up ta the house. I gotta do it, and I ain't gonna do it while your snivellin all over the place."

Bud remembered going to his room and crying for hours. He didn't come out until it got dark. He released the button, suddenly remembering that someone might be waiting on the other side. The doors opened, and he walked out into the bright

lights of the third floor lobby. He guessed that the doctor had gone home. The machine was the only doctor that could help Tee anyway. He smiled at Betty, the graveyard nurse, then he got goose flesh again when he realized what he had called her in his mind. He slowly walked down the hallway, following the "300-314" arrow as he had done so many times. As usual he slowed to peek in at other people's misery. That's what Tee had always said when she would fuss at him for staring into hospital rooms. He couldn't help it, he thought. He wanted to know, to somehow understand the darkness. But the darkness, he guessed, had no desire to be understood. If he understood it, it would lose its power over him. He would sometimes hear them moan late at night, and he would curse being awake late enough to hear it. He could never quite fathom what was in that moan.

After what seemed like a walk long enough to get to the barn, he stopped, stared at the "313" sign, and read Tee's little paper.

Tassie L. Spencer

3/17/51: Erwin, KY.

That was it, he thought. Sure simplified things, he guessed. Just a name and some dates and a place on a slip of paper, kept you from thinking about it if you didn't want to. He stepped inside the dark room. He could hear the hum of the machine in the blackness. He reached back and opened the door to let in a little light. He walked over to the bed and turned on the little blue light above the bed, cringing because for a moment he had worried about waking her. Looking down at her, he couldn't get over how peaceful she looked. It was like the nights when he couldn't sleep. He'd look over at her and have to silently chuckle, though a little envious, because she looked about as peaceful as a cow with a good cud. He touched her hand, quickly withdrawing when he felt the coldness. She had always had such warm hands. He

remembered that he had noticed that when they were dating. All the other girls had had such rough, cold hands. Even though she worked hard, Tassie had always kept her hands smooth with a special mixture her mother had shown her. He remembered how they had laughed at the thought of putting it on the market; "Mamma's Moo Jelly: For the softest hands on the farm." They then realized that soft hands on a farm were about the last thing anybody needed. Still, Tassie had kept her hands smooth. Smooth and always warm, until now. It just wasn't Tassie without warm hands. He shuddered. He looked closely as the rise and fall of life passed before his eyes. Funny, he thought, how many times he had looked at Tassie in her deep sleep and checked her chest to make sure she was breathing. Standing in the purple-blue light of the room, his eyes slowly followed the thick black cord of the machine. He looked away before his eyes reached the special plug that had been installed in case of power failure.

Tears formed in his eyes as he walked over to close the door. He turned slowly, and the increased distance made Tassie look all the more unreal, like a wax statue, like Lot's wife lying in bed. How Tassie liked that story. He walked back over to the bed and saw Tassie's Bible lying on the little night stand where he would lay his glasses after he had read to her. He slowly reached for Tassie's favorite, and he guessed, only, book. He turned to the passage that he had read to her almost every night. He whispered the words to himself.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . ." He reached up and turned out the light, then continued. ". . .I will fear no

evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

As he slowly closed the book, tear drops inched closer to the floor. He looked up and held up his arms, sending his whole being far beyond the little hospital on KY 52. But his being again returned to him empty and numb. He reached up and turned the purple-blue light on, watching Tassie's chest.

"One of these days, boy, damn it, you got ta face it. It don't do a man no damn good to run to the end of the blessed world, boy. Your momma's dead, Bud. She's dead."

"She ain't gonna be here no more. Not tomorrow, not next week, not next year. Never."

He tried to dry his eyes, but his old shirt was useless against the flood of years.

"It ain't no use, Tee. I can't see it your way. But I can't run no more neither. I'm tired, Tee, real tired. I reckon I'll keep the farm. Don't know nothin else. I guess I wasn't much of a husband. But I'm gonna try to make up for it. Who am I to say you ain't the one knows the answer?"

He reached up and turned out the light. He slowly bent down again to his knees, noticing that his arthritis was making him stiffer every day. He reached for the thick black cord and got goose flesh when he found it. He followed it down. When he reached the life giving force, he tightened his grip on the cord and whispered, "It is finished."

Hot, Summer Nights

Hot, summer nights  
When the humidity forces  
My nightgown to be flung  
    On the floor  
And my sheets to be wet  
    With sweat,  
I leave my window open  
    And its screen up  
To breathe sweet honeysuckle cricket songs and  
    Wait for an immortal  
    To enter my house  
And drink the hot-blooded dreams  
    From my soul.

Susan Leathers

Rhyme of Reproduction

Hickory-dickory dock  
Goes my biological clock.  
The clock struck twenty-three  
Crow's feet I see  
Hickory-dickory dock.

Susan Leathers

Commitment to Water

Dreaming,  
I dive to the bottom;  
I rest on the riverbed,  
Blurred treetops and blue sky above.  
I do not struggle to surface.  
I do not gasp for air.  
I breathe deeply the water that fills  
My nose, my mouth, and my lungs.  
I surrender to weightlessness.  
I drown and  
My skin becomes lime, my hair moss, my eyes red.

Susan Leathers

## The Broken Pieces

I just finished sweeping what's left  
Into the tarnished old dustpan;  
It seems suited for such purposes  
Because it's broken and abused--  
Not unlike what it now holds.

It went plummeting in the direction of the floor  
Before I could stop or even recognize it;  
I hadn't expected it to fall,  
Yet I'd been made no promises--  
I really never wanted promises.

Somehow I know it's missing,  
Even though a trained physician might never know;  
I know because I saw the pieces,  
The broken pieces on the cold floor--  
They looked more vibrant when they were one.

Melina Jacina

## Everything That Is and Isn't

A momentary lapse of silence tells all;  
It brings together everything that is,  
As well as everything that isn't.  
Nothing and nobody can break (as we all know)  
This bond, this coalescence, of  
Substance and the absence thereof.

Melina Jacina



## God's Art

Looking out the window  
To take in God's art,  
I watched with nose inquiry  
The lives of lovers part.  
She was all in black,  
And he in striped grey.  
(Such dulling, depressing colors  
for this fine autumn day.)  
The wind blew his hair left,  
And hers went to the right.  
Not a word was spoken.  
It was a balm after the fight.  
Then, she took off his ring  
And threw it to the ground.  
Turning, she flew away from him,  
Followed only by a bouncing, metallic, sound.  
The sun fingered down gently  
And caressed his grey.  
It seemed to be promising  
That his pain would go away.  
But, he just jerked around  
And tromped off through the leaves.  
The foliage flew helter skelter,  
Giving colors to the breeze.  
Silently inquiring at his retreating back,  
I was suddenly taken by a start,  
And I turned my sight to the ringing telephone  
And away from God's art.

Jacque Moore

## Justice?

Drag the chain of social misconceptions,  
And bind me powerless to the pillars  
Of what is right.  
Shave me of my power  
With the buzz of your rules,  
And teach me to conform to delusion.

Jacquie Moore

## The First Rain of Spring

The first rain of spring  
Brings many things that make one think:  
The simmering cement  
As the rain taps along;  
The robin coming out for a drink;  
The loving warm scent rising from the ground,  
Emanating with quiet life;  
The song-like giggles of silly little girls,  
Playing the domestic wife;  
The cool, calming droplets  
On underexposed still-winter skin,  
Having the free fleshy flavor of the original sin.  
Why must mankind be so ignorant?  
Why must he be so dense?  
Why can't he understand the first rain of spring?  
Doesn't that just make sense?

Jacquie Moore

## Time

Time speaks often of sad things  
As urns sing unheard melodies,  
And few know the Distance on the look of Death--  
Time winds, whines, and wines  
To the dance of Dionysus.  
Gods of old--Stand ye proud!  
And do the dance of the damned  
With every turning century.

Jacquie Moore

## Understanding

The thoughts drip slowly  
Onto my page, and perhaps  
They are preponderances of past positions.  
The ideas leak liquidly  
Out of my mind, and maybe  
They are lamentations of missed moments.  
The creation comes creeping  
Out of my soul, and somehow  
I understand the subtle simplicity of personal  
sacredness.

Jacquie Moore

Day- Break

Shadow in the dark  
of life  
My lost reflection  
drowning in a sea  
of black-  
Misunderstood

Day- Break  
the stillness  
I emerge the gulf  
my lungs filled  
no longer with shadows  
but truth-  
Can we talk?

Donna L. Brockman

Nobody here but me  
And my thoughts of you  
To chase the chill.

Butterflies ideas like magic  
silver wings kissing  
My fantasy still.

Envelopes me in  
Web of wonder- smiles  
Hopes of future to fulfill.

Donna L. Brockman

## Thorn

butterfly  
on wall  
of roses  
flutter silk  
amidst bloody thorn.

cat watches  
from  
window seat  
breathing velvet  
cocoon of black and jade.

man waves away  
butterfly  
greedy attempt  
to possess nature's  
beauty  
and is pricked  
by rose's guardian  
red drops to match  
its hue

as black velvet  
laughs from  
window seat.

Donna L. Brockman

## Anatomy of a Fantasy

Gregory Wayne Stephens

It happened in the spring of his thirty-eighth year, at a time in his life when the turbulence and turmoil of his early years had seemed to settle into a growing contentment with life and the things around him.

It was a growing spring, the kind that often follows a long cold winter. It arrived suddenly after a bitter week of cold rains and high, erratic winds; first the air became clearer, and then the trees developed delicate buds and the flowers and weeds sent forth their tenacious tendrils to test and define the coming season. The bluegrass shifted from brown-green to a blue-green, while the horses stirred and pranced impatiently in their stalls, anticipating the new day. As he jogged along on his morning run he saw the bluegrass growing and inhaled the first cold breaths of spring into his straining lungs. It filled them with good things, like the delicate smell of dogwoods budding, and the earthy smells of tobacco flowers and horses that waxed and waned all along his trail. He felt the cutting edge of the seasons personally, and took a secret pride in the subtle changes that heralded each new one. It made him feel that he was more in tune with the rhythms of life than the rest of humanity.

It was his personal time, and he made good use of it, both to plan and fortify himself for his coming day and to inventory his life while mentally fondling the good things that he found growing there. It reassured and excited him to think of his successful career with the law firm, his lovely wife and his two beautiful children still sleeping in his new house on Tates Creek Road. His health was excellent, and people were always surprised to find that he was nearly forty. His wife, Penny, at thirty-four, didn't

look at all like the mother of a seven year old girl let alone a ten year old boy. She had been a good wife, and their years together had blossomed into a cornucopia of good things. It thrilled him to think of her, waiting for him in their antique walnut bed; immersed in her own dreams, while he rounded the last curve.

It happened at Easter. The Walkers were having the first of what would be a long series of barbecues, where their guests would be deluged with large amounts of over-seasoned, under-cooked beef, served with a very liberal dose of beer and development talk. Inevitably followed by equal amounts of bourbon and horse talk.

They arrived late, and Penny immediately deserted him in favor of a ladies council that was mustering for the annual "showing of the new drapes" or some such female bonding ritual. The development talk was in full swing with a debate over the ramifications of the new Toyota plant in Georgetown. It was a casual conversation, well suited for beer and ribs, promising a smooth, quick transition into the bourbon and derby debate.

He was well into his second beer and third denunciation of foreign speculation when he saw her. She strode lightly over the grass with the easy animal grace of a young thoroughbred colt. Her dark hair shimmered in the bright noon sun and offered a clean contrast to her creamy skin. She was clad in a royal blue Easter dress that displayed her long, firm, shapely legs to a definite advantage, revealing an occasional glimpse of chantilly lace like a secret surprise with every stride. Her face was decidedly angelic, with full red lips framed by strong elegant cheekbones and exotic, sea green eyes that telegraphed smoking sensuality with every glance. Her breasts were high and firm, accented by an impossibly flat stomach and framed by exquisitely rounded shoulders. As she passed him she knelt briefly for an inspection of some

errant piece of lace, and it struck him as the perfect pose to artfully display her perfectly rounded, silken clad, calves. She rose gracefully and proceeded on to the house where she disappeared into the foyer in a shimmer of color and shadow.

Her name was Amy. She was the Walker's daughter, and it was the beginning of her fiteenth year.

There is a cycle for every living thing and every season has definite characteristics. There is a time when a rose is in full bloom wherein its attributes and promises are realized and easily seen and felt. The petals are full and soft, and the scent is at its strongest, and the color is bright and clear. But there is also a time, just before the full bloom, when the bud is full and ripe, bursting with the subtle promises of things to come. It inspires by its innocence and may drive long-dormant desires out of hiding where the full bloom of a riper rose might leave them sleeping.

Amy was such a rose.

As they drove home he struggled to bring his mind dutifully to Penny's idle chatter about different drapes and new gazebos. But his thoughts were caressing images of bright spring sun on raven hair and smooth creamy skin. They ran free from there, across rounded fields of royal blue velvet, over supple creamy thighs, and at last into sublime sea green eyes that held his dreams and agonized his soul.

After they had seen the kids to bed, they had a light, silent snack and retired to their room. After some ritual chatter, they slipped between the sheets, and after the lights were out he reached for her. When he touched her his mind revolted and he found that he couldn't use her as a canvas upon which to transpose this new desire upon. He declined, feigning fatigue, she kissed him lightly and turned away. As he lay there, watching the coals glow in the small fireplace,



his desire grew. However, as the flames fanned his desire, the growing shadows defined and highlighted his guilt. While the shadows twisted and twined their way around the chamber, the threads of fear and shame entwined his soul.

He lay awake most of the night, assaulted by flame and shadow, while a dry spring storm rolled and thundered over the bluegrass.

When the morning came it came lightly. He rose heavily and quietly, rinsed his mouth, and donned his running gear without stirring Penny. Dawn had just barely broken when he left the yard. It was a wet, dewy morning and every flower petal and every leaf bud had its own crown of moist jewels. The dry storm had left no trace of its angry maraudings, and he began his run slowly, feeling his years in every joint. Upon his return he showered briefly and left the house.

He didn't trouble Penny.

On his way to work, he felt a loneliness that he hadn't felt in years. It was the first time since their marriage that he had felt this alone . . . and trapped.

It was a slow, uneventful day at the office, he drifted through it in a haze of green eyes and raven hair. When his secretary stuck her head in to check in before she left, it surprised him that the day had slipped by so quickly.

Upon his return to the house, he was pleased to find it empty. He slipped into the study and poured himself a shot of bourbon and sorted through his mail . . . nothing much, just a couple of legal journals and a few magazines that they subscribed to in order to "stay current" but seldom read. He idly turned a page in one of Penny's fashion magazines and encountered a slick pantyhose ad featuring a taut little brunette with long legs and alabaster skin. He sipped his drink and stared dreamily at her for several moments until he guiltily snapped out of it.

Determined to break his reverie with something solid and involving, he scanned his library hopefully, looking for some entertaining tale that might relieve his mind of its self imposed complications. At last he settled on an ancient leather-bound volume of Mark Twain's Roughing It that he had owned since childhood. He cracked the volume randomly, since the book was an old friend and anywhere would do to start, but before he could sit down he noticed an old photograph peeking from the inside of the back cover. He deftly extracted it with two fingers of his left hand, leaving his bourbon tumbler balanced between his palm and thumb.

It was a class picture of some young children, probably fifth graders, but the clothing style was all wrong for either of his kids. Then he noticed a brown haired boy in the third row with mischievous blue eyes, and he recognized him as Sandy, his best friend for nearly ten years, who had died in the Tet offensive while he was a freshman at the University of Kentucky.

Then it happened quickly. Instead of small children in a faded picture, they all became real people that he had played and fought with on an equal basis, little people sharing a little world at the Tates Creek Elementary School in 1961.

There was John who had given him his first black eye, and the Martin girl who always giggled shyly to herself and had died of Leukemia in the seventh grade, and there in the right corner of the front row was Susan, her angelic, creamy face flashing those bright green eyes, framed by the impossibly dark raven hair, a tiny temptress who had enchanted a small boy so long ago.

She was his first love, the first girl he had ever wanted or even noticed. He saw that hair and those eyes as soon as he had walked into the room that day as Mrs. Moore told the class his name and how he had just moved up from Atlanta. He was too captivated by her to indulge

in the little talk that followed about cotton fields, and whether or not he liked horses. He just wanted to gaze at those eyes.

But she had already picked a boy, and his first love would also be his first unrequited love, one that would last until middle school, when they had both changed into other people.

But the desire was the stronger for not having been satisfied. And it had secretly driven him like a subversive undertow through the years, all of his girlfriends in high school and college had been selected on these criteria, in order to act out and fulfill his earlier desires that had so shaped his youth. Even the little cocktail waitress at the Hyatt that had almost wrecked his marriage ten years ago was merely a note on the same theme. Of all these women only brown-eyed, dirty-blond Penny had been a real love based on realistic mutual attractions and shared interests.

The realization caused him to tremble and the crystal tumbler of bourbon slipped from his grasp and crashed onto the polished oak floor, and as it shattered into a thousand pieces, so did his dream.

The picture fluttered down onto the floor and landed amid the shards of crystal and pools of bourbon, and there on the oiled and waxed white oak floor of his study, etched in broken dreams and alcohol, lay the anatomy of his fantasy.

He found a pail and picked up the shattered crystal, piece by piece and deposited them one by one, in the trash. It was a difficult process, one that lent itself to uneasy reflections while the little shards rebelled against his sullen efforts and strove to lodge themselves into small nooks and crannies in the cracks and crevices of the tongue and groove flooring. But he persisted in his efforts, he loved the feel of the cool, waxed hardwood flooring on his bare feet too much to allow it to be soiled by a few shards of

glass. After he was certain that the last tiny shard was disposed of, he returned the picture to its secret little niche, replaced the lead crystal decanter in its little eyrie above his flintlock longrifle and retired for the evening into a heavy dreamless sleep.

When Penny returned at ten, she undressed and sat beside him until deep into the night, staring at the dying coals in the untended fireplace, wondering . . .

When he arose in the morning Penny was slumbering heavily beside him, curled up in her own separate, private, little ball. It was Saturday, the day that he ran late and stretched his run to make up for the little evils of over-indulgence that he allowed himself during the week, a sort of balancing of his physiological check book, as it were.

It promised to be the first really warm day of the season and he dressed sparingly in lycra shorts and a tank top. His pre-run workout went well. It didn't reveal any serious pains or problems. He stretched until he was totally loosened. He caught his wind early and it carried him easily over the rolling terrain, past the gates of his sub-division and on to the quiet, cool, bough canopied, country lane. It was a good feeling, these long runs gave him a true sense of his abilities and limitations and offered a solid way to sort his dreams from realities.

Cutting through the neighborhood on his way back, he encountered her. She was on the way to the pool, freshly oiled, wearing a scandalous little red bathing suit, with a white towel draped carelessly across a round shoulder. He was like a deer caught in a headlight beam for a second, but then something strange happened. She reacted instantly, her body subtly changing into a sexual snare. "Hi," she said, green eyes wet and glistening with the thrill of newly discovered power and unexpected conquest. "Hi,"

he returned, eyes down, moving on. He felt her gaze following him, and instinctively turned to meet it. Their eyes met and this time he really saw her, a little girl with a nice body and bright eyes.

Upon his return he took a long, hot shower, dabbled on a bit of cologne, and went in to awaken Penny from her uneasy dreams, and into the light of a new day.

## Perseverance

Like dejected old gentlemen in dark raincoats  
Three blackbirds scratch half-heartedly in the  
grass.  
Several yards away an orange-chested robin  
Also looks for food, with the erratic efforts of a  
child.

Unrewarded,  
He searches on.  
His stride punctuates with agitated hops  
While the others step, contemplate, step again.

From some untold distance sound loud, disembodied  
voices  
And squalls from a nearby catfight interrupt.  
The robin fidgets and considers flight  
Yet the blackbirds scratch on.

At length, giving in to some Pied Piper's call,  
The robin flies away,  
Still in his Peter Pan world.  
And just as if he'd never been there, the others  
scratch on.

Priscilla Chansler

## The World Without Onions

An improvement, certainly,  
the elimination of  
certain social barriers,  
the lessening of tears

Then  
would children grow up to know  
their carrots? Would French chefs float  
bread and cheese on parsley soup?  
Could endearments of lovers  
be entrusted to thinnest  
potatoskin, perfumed?

What  
flavor to go with memories  
of salami shared on late  
trains between Florence and Rome?  
What to replace their excuse,  
as in, nothing's wrong, honey,  
it's just the onions.

Sandra Lee McCord

## A Piece of Advice

Think I'll send this poem, she said  
offhand, to The Atlantic It's just one  
of those, you know, Atlantic-style  
poems, as if getting into  
The Atlantic was as easy as walking  
the dog. I could have told her I'd tried  
when young and foolish to get just  
one poem past John Ciardi into  
Saturday Review then heard, somewhere,  
that Ciardi said all he had to read was  
the first line to tell if the whole  
thing was crap and my poems neer  
got good till the second or even third  
line, so kid, I could have told her  
but didn't, make sure your first  
line is a good one.

Sandra Lee McCord



## Apple

Winesaps in a cardboard box, free  
to customers, take his eye. He tips back  
on Redwing heels then reaches  
in, sorting, knowing just the right  
feel of tight skin over juicy flesh a year  
in the making from folded bud to innocent  
flower, tough green bellyache making bullet  
to the sweet deepening of maturity. And now  
this: the payback of sun and rain,  
the work of bees and soil and time.  
He takes the perfect fruit into both  
his hands and bites gratefully  
into fall.

Sandra Lee McCord

"Why Isn't Grandpa Wearing His Green Sweater?"

Some say he was a hard man.  
Strict with a quick hand.  
He hand was gentle to me.

trickling butterscotch candy  
jingling silver coins  
walks around the block  
Grandpa's long legged stride  
his feet pound the pavement  
me pumping two pedals fast  
my tricycle wheels go clickety-clack.

I didn't understand at age three.  
"What do you mean he's gone to heaven --  
And where's his sweater he wears that's green?"

Carrie Ann Lemaster

## Plain Jane

My name is Plain Jane  
but you know that.  
I'm the one who sits two seats  
behind you and three rows away,  
the one who makes straight A's  
and earns resentment with good grades.  
I'm the one you never see, never really see,  
but who always, always sees you.

Am I so transparent? Am I so invisible  
that all you see when you look through me  
is the window next to me filled with blue sky  
and the blonde at my right?  
"Love me not for comely grace" would be very well  
if I already had the attentions of  
the one I love,  
but ineffectual and only romantic poetry  
when I still manage to miss being worthy  
of one glance.

I have more to offer you  
than those who cast their eyes at you  
and you reward with flattering stares.  
Just what is the appeal of ones so dull?  
But then, what good is being able to speak three  
languages  
when I can't even talk to you in one?  
If I did try what would I say?  
I am destined to be a silent worshipper.

But let me say this, even if it will be heard  
only by the wind, the walls, and me:  
I can be, could be, anything for you.  
I have passion and imagination enough--  
yes, I have both! who would have believed it?--  
to become any fantasy or character  
your mind can conceive.  
Anyone can be me, so I can be anyone.  
Not because I am weak or without thought  
or personality of my own--  
I have a mind behind this forgettable face--  
but because I live to be,  
and dream to be,  
someone you could desire.

I tire  
of tracing your name in notebooks  
with ballpoint pens and futile hope.

Kimberly Nedrow

## Sailorman

I've never been a sailor, like my father  
I lack the courage  
to bound freely to foreign lands  
tasting salt on my lips, frozen in time  
in a Cuban bar, money on the table, drink in hand  
whiskey hidden under my bunk  
My father never furled canvas while a prisoner  
in gray steel iron slicing smoothly through  
deep waters holding secrets within its heart  
My father was happy far from home  
dark, short, curly hair above a sun burnt face  
all tongues strange . . a young stranger at  
home in dark dusky lands  
Someday I'll find the courage hidden deep  
to run away from home at 35 and search  
other lands for the ghost of my father  
a sailor

Michael F. Bryant

## Butterfly

In a small stuffy jar  
upon a dreary shelf  
lies the bluest butterfly  
dying inside itself.

Placed there by clumsy hands  
gazed at by expectant eyes  
toying with the holding  
glowing with self pride.

The color is past fading  
the wings no longer fly  
another wonderment to find  
the jar is tossed aside.

Sharon Proffit

Upon Going Out To The  
Car To Get My Wife's  
Lap-Top Computer

I spied a six-legged period.  
Not able to tell if it  
Was noiseless and patient.  
A miracle that I saw, really  
The way the last-gasping sun  
Happened to cast a beam  
On Mr. Spider's last strand  
                  of existence  
Caught my eye and I  
Was a fly trapped in  
The mystery of the web.

The legged mark of punctuation  
Scurried up and down--amazing--  
From a tree to the car to  
Another car. Way up in the air.  
At least from a Spider's perspective.  
I wondered if the spider took  
Note of my entrapment, Fantasy  
Waning, other fare gripped its  
                  Attention and mine.

Mr. Spider figgled over my  
Way once more, then  
Clammered upward on the  
Silhouetted silver of  
Filament, swayed by  
The wind...and I,  
I turned to re-grab hold  
Of my own filament,  
Blown by the breeze of  
                  my existence.

David Alexander

## Granny

The sound of her rocking, in  
A haunting sort of way,  
Has made me see her strange.  
She sits there all day--  
Her cloudy gray-day hair  
Tightly wound in a bun;  
Hair so long to reach her knees,  
    used to scare me  
    when I was green.

She sits there, blue veins  
peeking through treadbare skin,  
    digging up lying bones.

David Alexander

Broken Hearts and Dirty Windows  
make life difficult to see, but  
every now and then one wishes to  
take the blue kerchief (the one  
we used to call a bandana), and  
with a few squirts and a wipe or  
two, clear some small space for viewing,  
seeing perhaps some clearing of the clouds,  
some settling of the uneasy pools, and  
our hearts stir within, but, alas,  
having done so we grow excited in  
the doing, breathe heavily and move  
close to the glass, fogging over  
whatever once was seen.

David Alexander



## Seeking

I have left seeking solitude  
and I am still not alone,  
for there are lovers on the benches  
which are under the old trees.  
The trees shave the light --  
allowing soft shades through,  
but holding a wall of privacy  
They are saying words perhaps  
I, myself, will never hear --  
but their time is private.

I have left seeking solitude  
and I am still not alone.  
For the railway engine drones  
the sound so loud.  
There are men upon that train --  
checking gages, staring out of windows  
watching the night roll by.  
They are having conversations, perhaps  
to ward slumber away.

I have left seeking solitude  
and I am still not alone.  
For the sounds of automobiles  
clash against the night.  
Perhaps a teenager enjoying  
one minute more of the night  
or a parent returning home  
from a night of work.  
Or even on their way to begin.  
Each vehicle holds  
a separate life, or two.  
A myriad of living --  
it interrupts my silence.

And as I listen --  
the lovers grow silent, sigh, and  
leave -- the railway car  
descends into the night -- and  
the vehicles reach  
their designations.  
Here I remain  
on my own stage with an  
audience of none.

Aisleen Faer

## A Sure Bet

Mike Sullivan

I was getting sick and bloody tired of the L.A. traffic. Six lanes of traffic starting and stopping like a mass of giant metal snails with epilepsy. The car was not enjoying this yo-yo effect either -- shuddering when in motion and making odd gurgling noises when still. No matter, I was getting off at the next exit and would soon be on route to Vegas to bet the last of my savings on the Superbowl. I was positive that I would win. I had been following the progress of both teams throughout the season and had correctly predicted that the pair would be in the Superbowl. After winning this biggie I would be able to get rid of this rusted "72" Ford wagon and get myself a real car, not one that everyone sneered at and encouraged snotty little kids to grimace at me when mom wasn't looking.

Finally my exit crept into view like a signal from above that I was to be liberated from this pack of metal slo-pokes. Impulsively, I wrenched the wheel to the right and shot out onto the shoulder accelerating toward my freedom with a wide, crafty grin on my face. Horns blared and fists shook in anger as my fellow motorists watched me depart them. Soon I was watching the standstill fall away from me as I zoomed up the exit ramp -- free!

It was a welcome relief to get moving again because the interior to the car had become the temperature of a steel mill at 3 p.m. in August in Egypt. Why? -- My electrical system was short meaning the electric windows and A/C were useless. My passenger window was open about 2 inches. That and the dust-choked vents on the right and left sides of the dash were the only source of air to this inferno. The only benefi

of not having an electrical system was it would be a wonderful excuse for speeding -- I had it all planned out:

**OFFICER OF THE LAW:** "Son, do you have any idea how fast you were going?"

**ME (with sure-fire excuse):** "Gosh no sir, ya see mah 'lectrical system's on the fritz so Ah ain't got no speedo see, an' I don't have no ideer how fast Ah's goin'."

**OFFICER (feeling pity for a dumb country boy without an electrical system):** "Oh, I'm terribly sorry about your problem. Well, try to do under a hundred next time."

Yeah right! I was just trying to bullshit myself into believing that so I could endure the asphyxiating heat. While diddling those thoughts about in my skull, a figure caught my eye on the side of the road. As I neared him I saw he was holding a sign reading VEGAS in his left hand and a rope leash in his right which was attached to a grubby-looking but rather hyperactive dog. "What the Hell" I thought as I pulled over in front of them. The drive to "Sin City" was a long and boring affair -- what better way to liven it up than some company albeit odd company.

I chuckled at their approach. The mangy little dog yipping and leaping about as if he was walking on an electric grid. His owner seemed oblivious to the fit of energy at the end of the leash, and walked with an odd sort of elegance toward the passenger side of the car. He was dressed like a fool for the type of weather we were having: A long, dirty trenchcoat, pleated wool pants with a rainbow of foodstains on them and a pair of well worn WW II combat boots. The only item of clothing he wore that was remotely seasonal was the tanktop he donned beneath his trenchcoat.

Why the hell was he **walking** up to the car instead of scampering up like most hitchers do when they get a ride? I threw the door open to speak (damn windows). "Hop in pal and throw the

dog in the back." He smiled a smile that looked as though his teeth had been targets in a pixie shooting gallery with many sharpshooters present. "Certainly" he said in a friendly tone and hurled the mutt into the rear of the wagon. The dog cartwheeled through the air silently but howled loudly as his journey ended against the rear window. The dog leapt up from the carpeted arm in the back and grinned, obviously unharmed. My new guest flashed his disturbing smile again, sat down and shut the door.

We introduced ourselves and I offered him a beer. (I kept a cooler at my side whenever I traveled in this oven because I was not fond of dehydrating in transit. Normally I wouldn't carry beer but this was a long straight drive and cops were scarce in the middle of the desert. He readily accepted the offer and immediately cracked open his ale. He spoke with an English accent so I asked him where he was from in England. He began a long, boring tale of all the magnificent cities in England he had lived in, of how rich he once was and how highly educated he was. I'd try to impress him with one of my accomplishments (which I would fabricate as I had no really interesting ones.) After a moment I came upon one that would **really** shock him. I told him that I had donated my body to science and that I had allowed myself to be injected with the AIDS virus in a study to see how long a human could survive with the dread disease. He recoiled in horror and demanded that I stop the car. Laughing, I told him that he was already infected -- the beer had been infected by the scientists in the study so that I could get other subjects for their study. He began shrieking in horror that he was too young to die and that his family back home would banish him, for they loathed homosexuals. I thought I would end his torment and reveal it was only a joke. After about ten minutes of convincing he believed me, but found no humor in the prank.

The halfway point in the journey loomed ahead, the glowing neon promising last-chance-gas and fast food both of which we needed badly. The journey had been rather quiet since the AIDS joke with my companion only muttering one word answers to my comments. No loss, I was getting disgusted when he talked anyway. His unshaven face and ugly teeth made him look like a fuzzy crossword puzzle. The dog had also been pretty quite since I had filled an ashtray up with beer and passed it back to him. Now he simply rested his head on his master's shoulder with his tongue hanging loosely from his jaw, a thin trail of saliva making it way down the sleeve of the coat.

I pulled into the first gas station I saw as I recalled the closer to the edge of town one got the higher the gas prices and the bigger the "LAST GAS FOR 100 MILES" signs got. The station was showing the age its constant exposure to the sandblasting the Mohave gave it. It looked as if the owner had abandoned the hopeless project of keeping the place painted a number of years ago. I was grateful that it was a tranquil day as a journey in a sandstorm was not my mug of beer. I topped the tank off and went inside to pay. The young cashier seemed startled when I walked in, and quickly put a copy of what looked like Playboy under the counter, smiling I paid and trotted back to the car.

My grubby companion was slowly strolling around the car as his canine emptied his bladder on my right front goodyear. Who cares? When I win at Vegas I will **give** the poor guy the car. When he saw me, he scurried over to the passenger side, threw the dog back in, and sat down on the vinyl. I cranked the engine to life and pulled back on to the road. I popped open a trio of beers and we all drank deeply as the car heated back up.

All went smoothly for about twenty miles and suddenly things went to hell. The dog seemed to be very merry in the back of the car but was

making me nervous with this gleam in his eye that met me every time I looked in the rear view mirror. Suddenly the dog leapt up in the front seat. To my disgust the mangy little bastard began humping on my right leg as if madly in lust with Fifi. His owner began laughing like an Indian on a peyote trip. I desperately shook my leg to get this horny canine off me, but he was on me like a leach. This struggle forced my foot down on the accelerator, pushing our speed up to near a hundred mph. As luck would have it, a cop was approaching from the opposite direction and his lights shot on as he saw this warp speed piece 'o' junk rocket towards him. I finally wrenched the wretched, lovesick creature from my leg and flung it in the back where it belonged.

The officer was on our tail now and gaining ground rapidly. It was foolish to try to escape -- his car was a good deal swifter than my aging beast, I pulled over on the shoulder cursing my luck, the dog and its still laughing owner. "I didn't tell you Scraps gets really hot and bothered when he gets a few in him." He laughed. I acknowledged his quip with a hateful grimace as the cruiser rolled to a halt behind us. The Lawman opened his door and trudged toward us through the dusty gravel until he was at my non-opening windows. I tried to explain in sign language that I couldn't open the window, and after a while he seemed to understand so I opened the door. I had given up on the non-functional speedometer ploy because it probably wouldn't work when traveling 35 mph over the limit.

"What's your hurry, youngman? Vegas will still be there if you drive the limit," the policeman said. I pondered on whether to tell about the dog and decided to invent a different tale. "Son, I smell beer. Have you been drinking?" Oh shit, I had forgotten about the beer. "Why don't both of you step out of the car and we'll give you a sobriety test." The grin on my semi-toothless companion had turned to an ugl

frown. We stepped out into the blazing sun and over to the front of the car where the test was to be given. "O.K. you first Mario Andretti," instructed the cop. "Raise your leg up to the bumper." Although I only was mildly intoxicated my balance failed me and was unable to stand on one leg without hopping about. "Looks like you have had one too many, wild man. What about your pal over here?" My traveling companion nervously attempted the balancing act and failed miserably by falling over on his back -- further dirtying his coat. "Well boys, looks like we have a D.U.I. on our hands. You guys will be spending tonight in jail," the sunglossed upholder of the law informed us. My jaw tightened and my mouth grew dry as the prospect of missing any chance to become rich was about to evaporate. I looked to my companion and he looked even more tense about the situation than I was. In fact, he had a desperate look on his face as if he couldn't allow this to happen. My attention was diverted from him to the cop who was yelling loudly, caught in the same predicament as I was earlier -- dog on leg. While the cop was distracted, my trenchcoated pal pulled a pistol from his belt and aimed it at the officer. His voice shot from his throat with an authority I had not heard on the earlier part of the journey: "ALLRIGHT PIG! I'm going to Vegas cuz I'm gonna win big and be a goddamn millionaire an' you ain't gonna stop me!" The cop and I both stood with our mouths agape; the dog stood frozen in mid-hump. Turning to me, my crazed passenger ordered: "Take him and handcuff him to the rear bumper. We're gonna drag this sonofabitch all the way to Vegas." I wanted to get to Vegas also, but not at the expense of killing a cop, yet I also figured this trigger happy idiot would kill me if I didn't obey him.

Obviously the cop had seen madmen like this in his short career and had raised his arms above his head, valuing his life. I reluctantly went



and handcuffed his right hand and led him to the rear of the car. He looked like he had aged a few years since he had leaned his boyish face toward the window. "Hurry the hell up!" prodded the gun-toter. I clamped the other cuff to the bumper and removed the gun from the cop's holster. "Let get moving" he cried. I grabbed the dog off the cop's leg and threw him back in his designated place -- the rear cargo area. "Are you sure about this?" I asked nervously. "Yesss" he hissed as he pointed the tip of the gun up my left nostril. I needed no further prodding, fired the engine up and began to pull out. It was horrible watching the cop in the rearview mirror. He was trying to run but eventually could not keep up as the car picked up speed. The dog was hopping about watching his "lover" bounce and scrape about on the asphalt. The man riding shotgun looked and laughed as the scraping noise began to increase as bare bone was now in contact with the road. The howls of agony had died down to moans and finally nothing. My view to the rear was obstructed by a film of blood on the window but the "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign was clear and shiny ahead. My "buddy" grinned and nudged my ribs with the pistol "Go to Caesar's -- they got the best odds." Caesar's Palace was only about a mile down Las Vegas Blvd. Hopefully we could make it there without the cop following our car with the bloody tail ornament. This hope was lost about a half mile later when one of Vegas' finest cranked up his lights and followed us. Obeying my commands, I sped up as the lunatic began firing out of the passenger door. When the police began firing back, I panicked, slammed on the brakes and screeched to a halt right in front of The Sahara Hotel and Casino. Two other cars pulled up in addition to our pursuer. I opened my door and got out with my hands raised. My enraged companion continued to fire until one of the cops put a bullet through his fore arm. I was cuffed and shoved

roughly into the back of a cruiser. The dog and his owner were also thrown into a cruiser, the owner whining like a baby without a pacifier. I sat there thinking of how to convince the cops to take me to a casino to bet on my team. After all, it **was** a sure bet. . . .





