

**Absolute**





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11-58-80

Steve Disney

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

—Walt Whitman, from  
“My Barbaric Yawp,”  
in *Song Of Myself* . . .

# **Absolute**

## **Spring 1986**

Sponsored by the Institute of Communications and the Arts, **Absolute** presents a collection of original art and literature by students, faculty, staff, and friends of Oklahoma City Community College, 7777 South May Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 73159. — Printed at the college, the magazine is issued twice yearly, in the fall and spring.

**Cover art by Steve Disney**  
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## Hardhat Job\*

Good poets are like strong women:  
Inside out, transparent,  
Ridiculous and brave,  
Impossible

Unicorns.

We look into their glass hearts:  
We stop in our tracks

Amazed...

And then we throw rocks.

—Brooke Smith  
(*Instead Of Children*, 1983)

\*Written after reading Joyce Carol Oates' criticism of Anne Sexton's collected works...

## To The Artist

To one who imagines a reality  
with infinite choices,  
whose final decision is color and structure,  
paint me liquid—  
in a world of solids—  
so that my mind and spirit combined  
may pour into what I perceive  
as hardness,  
to be understood  
into softness.

Make me a tear clinging to a lash,  
blood clotting around a hot wound,  
or rich, salty sweat squeezed from newly-found strength.  
So that I will know the essence of where I have been,  
draw me formless  
to accept form.

—Karen Chapman-Wilkey

**eastern Colorado**

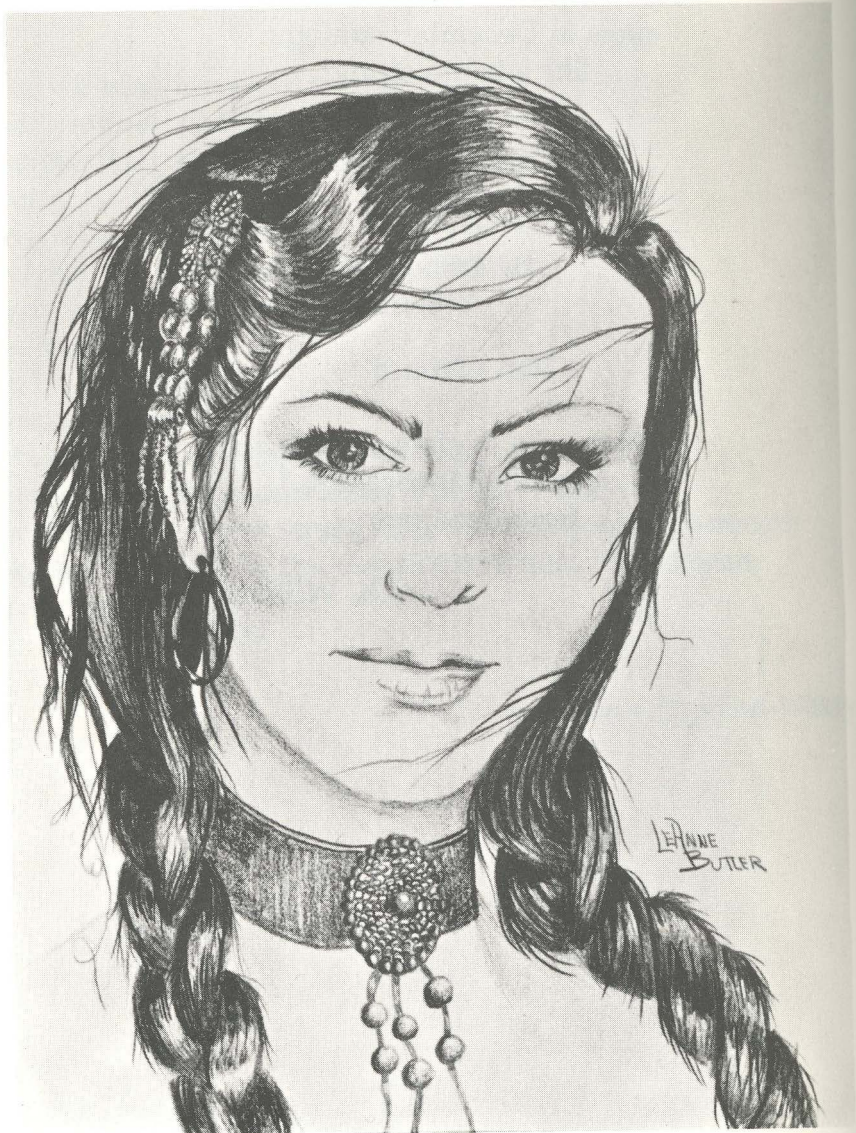
prairie horizon  
rings in December sunlight  
like a banjo string

**—G.K. Williams**

**Van Cliburn**

Blue-vein spiders pounce  
spin silver intricacies  
from dead ivory

**—G.K. Williams**  
**1985**



LeAnne Butler

# Chaco Canyon Love Song

wind is full  
bone marrow dots the sky  
ancient souls float softly  
caught on mesa and rabbitbrush  
swimming through sandstone smooth  
magic churns here  
pulsates in the pattern of afternoon  
i hunt food  
life food  
my cracked feet  
leaving precise tracks  
in hot silk dust  
each breath  
clears my vision  
lace webs linger in squatting pinon  
embrace the dust  
breath  
becomes dust  
becomes heat  
i too pulsate  
and move with  
the surge of wind  
as rain beats rhythm  
through unroofed kivas  
i watch  
strong.

—Mary Ann Peters

Note: This poem is reprinted, with the author's permission, from *Kansas Quarterly* (Winter/Spring, 1985). Mary Ann Peters is a college teacher in Oklahoma.



## The Gaping Maw

Jim pushed his worn-out sedan through the murk, wishing he had started earlier in the day. The affair was bad enough without the cold of a late-autumn evening, end of a day of storm. The gloom under the dark, lowering clouds may as well have been night, and his heart sank as low and as dark. He did not want this. He never wanted this.

Through the slushy drizzle, he could see the little rows of paired candles lined up on the far side of the highway, dancing along toward their warm homes. Not he. As the candles shot past, they were fanned into tiny pairs of flame-points, turning his side mirror into a window opening onto the dancing tongues of hell.

None of them knew what was in store for Jim, though. None of them cared. His was not the path of normal folk. He headed for his doom. He had tried to avoid his lot, to delay the inevitable, even to plead for mercy, but he had been manipulated, bent to a stronger will. The confrontation had been arranged behind his back, and now he hurtled toward an appointment with grim fate, all because he had to claim human weakness, human frailty and need, and hunger.

Now he would pay the price.

He yanked the wheel from the chosen course of normal folk and into the slot toward the dragon's den, that pit of grinding torture he had avoided so long that he'd thought he might cheat it, only to find that he had compounded the payment due.

He had been there before but had escaped — narrowly. The memory still came to haunt him on dark and stormy evenings such as this. Jaws of death, of pain. The rack. The needle and the knife. The gaping maw. The groping.

Slobbering in fear, drooling in helpless numbness. Oh, the wretchedness of it.

Why rail against his fate, though? Could it be avoided? Without still more pain? No, not even then. Eventually it would have come to him, bringing all the more ill treatment in recompense for his bravado in reviling his lot.

He stomped on the pedal, angry now. He hoped anger could carry him through, but then he saw it. The place was smaller than he remembered, low and squat, hiding in the lap of the land, waiting for him as always. It seemed innocuous and normal, but he knew the truth. He knew.

He pulled up before its doors, and the last of his resolve crumbled. A single pitiful sob welled up in him, and he could not stop it. Grovelling and sobbing would do no good, though. No mercy for him, no pity. He gazed not at the name on the door but at the symbol afterwards, the ancient code of ill that had brought pain and relief, brutality and healing, in equal measure to untold thousands over its bearers' reign of terror: D.D.S.

—W.J. Hodgson

## The Way It's S'Poized Ta Be

I'm having our baby  
And the morning after we found out  
He put a thank-you note by the coffee maker;  
And He lays His head on my stomach  
And talks quietly and fatherly to the baby.

And His kids get along with my kids.  
Saturday night they all painted each others' faces  
And dressed up in funny clothes  
And made up a skit to perform for us;  
We took pictures and laughed a lot.

My daughter announced that she would marry Him  
'Cause I was Toots I, but she was Toots II  
So that was O.K.  
And I told her that I would have to beat her up  
'Cause He was already married.

One morning the baby got excited while we were making love  
And I couldn't help it, so I giggled,  
And it was okay (we still make love).  
He's the best cuddler I have ever known  
(Including my children, and that's going some).

We agreed one time that He should spank my son  
(Though I don't believe in spanking)  
But He waited until I wasn't home so I wouldn't feel bad  
And He talked to my son, and my son agreed that he should be spanked  
And so He did.

And now they are very good friends;  
They have an understanding.  
And they're learning to fish together  
Although He practices ahead of time  
So that He will know just a little bit more.

He calls me big'un and threatens to  
Send me to a Pregnant Farm when I get in a twit.  
And we hold hands and eat cookies  
And watch Judge Wapner so we can debate the cases.

And I feel great  
And I look cute  
And for this one brief, precious moment  
Everything's just the way it's s'pozed ta be.

—**Carlotta W. Hill**  
**1985**

Note: Sara Glynn Hill was born February 26, 1986.

# Open Letter To Emily Dickinson

How did you accomplish the incredible magic  
of turning loneliness into Solitude?  
What wizard's wand did you wave to change  
the Shadows of Despair into a Dawn of  
Faith?

How did you alter your Self  
from enchanted to Enchantress?

I've read between the lines—  
between the dashes—  
between the symbols—  
and still, Vision is vague.

Did you add flame to a secret candle  
to allow your radiance  
a possibility of Growth?

Did you chant past Midnight  
while the World slept, dreamless?

What power did you hold  
in your trembling Heart?

How lightly did you grasp  
your Time,  
and how did you know when  
to release it?

How could you conceal the Mystery  
from those around you so well for so long?

Madame, I admire  
your strength of existence,  
your words that explode  
like strategically-placed land mines—  
placed there not to harm, but to capture  
the attentions of those  
who pass by without seeing.

How could you love so strongly?



Your love was a bird of Spirit,  
given flight  
toward an unknown horizon—  
you were never sure of its return  
to the home in your Soul  
where Creation occurred,  
but you were proud of the gift  
of Freedom.

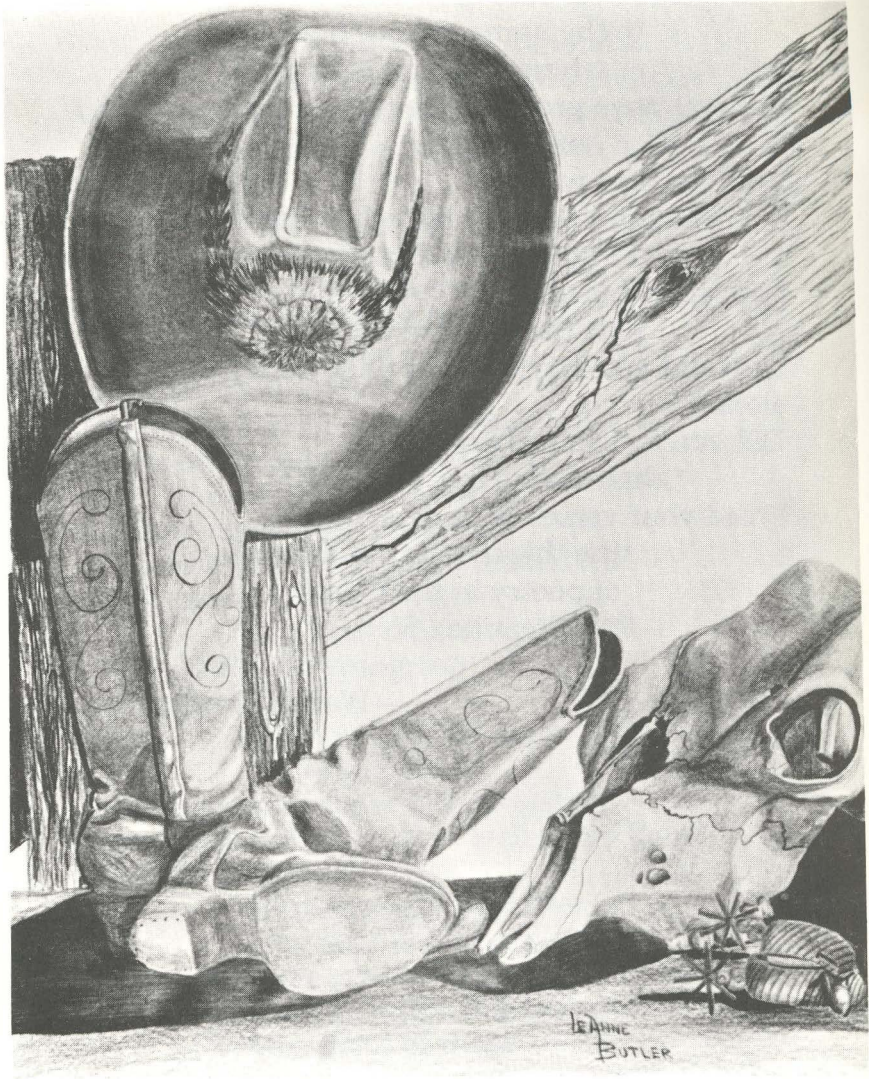
You, too, had wings,  
though you were bound to Earth  
by Time & Circumstance—  
you were able to soar  
past the limits of the flesh.

How did you stay on your unswerving Path,  
alone?

Did you feel a need greater  
than that of most mortals?

I read your verses & understand  
the thickness—the warmth—  
of poetry in the Blood  
& fire in the Soul...

—Wanda Lea Brayton  
1986



LeAnne Butler

# Rhythms

When I was small and played at games  
Of hide-and-seek or jumping rope  
I marked the rhythm of the call,  
"One, two, three for Rosabel,"  
Or the soft song of skipping feet  
Lifting, rising, until once more  
They touched down where they began.

When I was young and wore high heels  
And whispering taffeta petticoats  
I listened to the tunes we hummed  
As we danced across the floor.  
I marked the rhythm of your breath  
And matched it with my own...  
Point, counter-point, note for note.

When entrusted with a child  
I heard each soft whimper  
Like a starling on a downy nest,  
And echoed the iambic meter  
Of the first attempts at speech.  
I sensed the seasons spinning by  
Seeing life through a golden door.

Now I sit and reminisce  
And nod in listening to the sound  
Of winds that blow a little harsh,  
Of forceful rains that pelt the pane,  
And record the crackling of the fire  
That spews and flickers on the hearth  
Remembering all the rhythms of my life.

—Vida Mathey

## The Lie

Three weeks ago, to this very day, my husband, Sam Hadley, had drove a wagon-load of cotton to the gin in town by hisself. His pappy weren't feelin' very pert and sed he didn't feel up to the trip. So, Sam got the payment for the crop and went to Taylor's General Store to settle up our bill.

And standin' right there, bold as brass, talking to Matt Taylor, was the Yank! Oh, Sam recognized him, all right. A man don't spend all afternoon and night starin' and studyin' another man's face without his recordin' the features on his brain like a tintype.

I'm the only livin' soul who knows the truth. Sam told it to me right after we was first married, over five year ago. Poor Sam, it had gnawed and poked at his innards 'til he was half-crazy. Not what he done, you understand, but the lie that grew out of it.

And it weren't Sam's lie. It were his Pappy's. 'Fore you kin even understand it all, you got to know about the Hadleys, especially Sam. He was always known around these parts as a "near-do-well." Not like the old sayin', a "ne'er-do-well," but like a man who, despite all his hard work and struggles, ain't never gonna do no better than git near to success. Not that Sam were looked down on as a complete failure, but more like he was a joke of some sort. Wasn't fair, of course, but people act that way sometimes 'cause it makes them feel more important, I reckon.

Anyway, Sam told me that when the War broke out, the minute the whole town heerd about Fort Sumter, he figgered this was about the best chance he'd ever git to lift hisself up. He didn't fret jest about what the neighbors thought about him, nor his Pappy, but hisself. He figgered he'd be able to git some measure of worth jest by bein' a soldier. He didn't



give thought to bein' a hero, but jest a soldier.

So, Sam rushed to town and swore the loyalty oath and got hustled off to join up with a pack of other men. Some of them were crackers, like hisself, but others looked more like outlaws skippin' out on warrants from sheriffs clear across the South. But he liked bein' taken at face value and treated just like everybody else.

I don't know how he ended up at Bull Run, but he did. He sed he didn't git no uniform, jest a gun, and was sent in with a batch of others thet day. They was goin' through a clump of trees and somehow Sam got lost, or left behind. Anyway, he was all alone and could hear the sound of Yankee boots comin' at him from everywhere. The gunfire was gittin' closer all the time and he didn't have no idea which way to go, so he jest started runnin' straight ahead. Whilst he was rushin' around tryin' to find his men, he tripped over the root of this tree and fell down a embankment of sorts. Jest as Sam was startin' to git to his feet, he looked up—square-dab, right into the barrel of this Yank's gun!

Sam sed he didn't even remember if one or the other fired first, but thought they done it at the same time. Sam don't even remember pullin' the trigger. Sed he just shot because of the gun barrel in his face and the gun in his hand. The blasts nearly deafened him. 'Course the Yank's bullet tore the top of Sam's ear off. His right one. Blew it plumb away! Sed he didn't realize it was gone 'til he felt somethin' sticky and warm on his back. It was the blood from his ear, so he tied up his head with his neckerchief.

But Sam's bullet had shot away the Yank's left kneecap. Blew it clean off. The Yank jest sort of crumpled down to the ground, what with nothin' to hold him up no more. And worser yet, the Yank rolled down right on top of Sam.

Sam said first off, he screamed, he was so skeered. Then he pushed the Yank over to his side, too skeered to move, so he laid there and listened to the Yank's moanin' and groanin' til,



finally, by the grace of God, Sam sed, the Yank passed out.

Sam sed he couldn't bear lookin' at the Yank's leg, it was sech a god-awful thing to see. So, to keep his mind off the leg, Sam started studyin' the man's face. He had this thatch of bright red hair, high cheek bones, and a sort of birthmark, or scar, on his right cheek. Sam sed it looked like a patch of skin had been stretched too tight in that one place and made it look paler than the rest of his face.

Well, the two of them jest laid there all afternoon and night. Sam sed he never prayed so hard in his life! He prayed the Yank wouldn't die, 'cause he hadn't meant to kill him. He hadn't even meant to shoot him, you see. Sam sed he would a'carried him someplace safe, but he didn't have no idea where that was.

The next mornin' a wagon come by. Two men dressed in white coats all smattered with blood was pickin' up the wounded and puttin' them in this cart. They told Sam they was leavin' the dead, jest gatherin' the wounded so's they could git them to the field hospital. They put the Yank in the wagon and told Sam to walk along behind with the other wounded. They was a bunch of men, from both sides, walkin' behind the wagon. Nobody sayin' much, jest hopin' to find some water and food pretty soon.

As he walked along, Sam sed, he kept rememberin' what his Pappy had told him. "Jest you watch a man's eyes. 'Fore he shoots, you watch. He'll squint up his eyes to aim. The minute you see that squint—you fire!"

But Sam sed he didn't remember 'til this day if the Yank had squinted or not since he never seen nothin' but the gun barrel.

The field hospital was a bunch of tents strung out, and there was a pile of arms and legs stacked up outside each tent. Sam jest followed them inside a tent when they carried in the Yank he had shot. But a doctor told him to go someplace else to get his ear patched up, they was only doin'

surgery. He wandered around 'til somebody put some salve on his ear and a bandage. He couldn't find out if the Yank had died or not. He asked a lot of people walkin' around in white coats, but they told him most men who lost their limbs didn't make it—they jest bled to death.

Next thing Sam knew he was to go back home. He couldn't hear a thing out of his right ear, so they told him he weren't no good as a soldier. He tried to tell them he could still hear out of the other one, but they jest laughed and told him to git along home.

When Pappy seen him he was prouder than any peacock ever strutted across MacMahan's lawns over at the plantation. His boy done come home, wounded, and he wanted to know everthing that had happened. How many Yanks Sam killed. He was pesterin' him all the time.

Sam didn't want to even think about it, let alone talk it over. But Pappy, well, he jest kept a goadin' and a puttin' words together, like stringin' beads on a thread, til the first thing Sam knowed, he was a hero. Pappy told it all over the place how his boy had done killed a Yank. Cost him his ear, but, by God, he'd taken a damned Yankee fer it!

Since Sam didn't know if the Yank had died or not, it made it easier for him to believe the story his Pappy was tellin'. The more he heerd it, the more Sam believed it was true. But, deep inside, Sam sed, the lie begun to grow, like a tiny bird in a thin shell, 'til it pecked its way through and hatched to a full-fledged truth.

And Sam did love bein' a hero! Tweren't nobody lookin' down on him any more. He and Pappy was treated like people of class, and not poor white trash. Men dressed in suits begun tippin' their hats to Sam in greetin', and he liked it. Pappy told the story over and over, addin' a bit more to the tellin' each time. Sam didn't say a word, but jest sat there and listened and gloried in all the attention.

But three weeks ago, Sam come back from town as pale as

any ghost I ever heerd about. He took me out to the barn, so his Pappy wouldn't catch what he sed, and he told me all about it.

"Bessie," he said, "he's here!"

"Who's here?"

"That Yank! That damned Yank I was supposed to have killed. Who'd have ever thought of it? But, I tell you, he's here! Standin' right there in Taylor's store, bargainin' to buy the place. Oh, God, why didn't he die?"

"Sam, are you sure it's him?"

"Sure? Of course I'm sure. Same red hair, same scar on his cheek—and if thet ain't enough, he's walkin' around on a homemade wooden leg, for God's sake. His left leg! I'd know thet man if I met 'im in Hell, I tell you. It's him!"

"But, Sam, I don't see what's upsettin' you so. Truly, I don't."

"Don't see? Why don't you see? You know what's gonna happen. Bessie, he's buying Taylor's store. Everbody ends up in Taylor's store, sooner or later. And thet Yank's gonna be asked how he lost his leg. He's gonna tell 'em. And when he does, people are gonna start puttin' two and two together and they's gonna come up with the true story. The fact is, Pappy's lie is gonna be known fer jest exactly what it is—a rotten, stinkin' lie! Oh, God, Bessie, what am I donna do?"

"I don't see nothin' you kin do, Sam. Ain't nobody gonna all of a sudden like come up to you and call you no liar, now, is they?"

"The hell they ain't! It's jest a matter of time."

I seen Sam take the pistol outen the oat bin and unwrap it. He put a bullet in it and stuck it under his belt and walked over to his wagon and drove straight back to town. He didn't even say goodbye or nothin'.

That night the sheriff and his men brung the wagon back to us. I recall how the sheriff tried to console Pappy and me. Sed everone guessed Sam had jest plain gone crazy, all at



once. Told us Sam jest walked up to this one-legged man over at the hotel and shot him once, right through the heart. Then Sam turned hisself in to the law. Wouldn't tell nobody why he done it, though.

The sheriff asked me did I know anythin' thet might clear it all up. I jest shook my head, "No."

You see, when Sam told me about the lie, all those years ago, he first made me swear on the Bible I'd never, in all my life, tell anyone. Besides, I've got a baby boy now. He'll be three weeks old tomorrow.

—Vida Mathey

# Curiosity

As I stand looking at the World,  
I want to see everything!

Venturing out to see something more,  
I want to know everything!

Isn't it wonderfully big, and exciting?  
Colorful and inviting?

Oh, but it frightens me and I scurry home  
to be safe and secure once more.

Maybe another day, another time,  
I'll want to see everything.

—Donna Lyn Lusk



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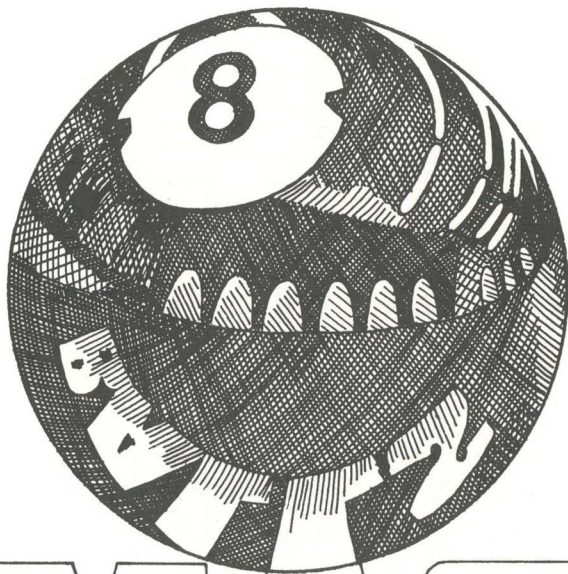
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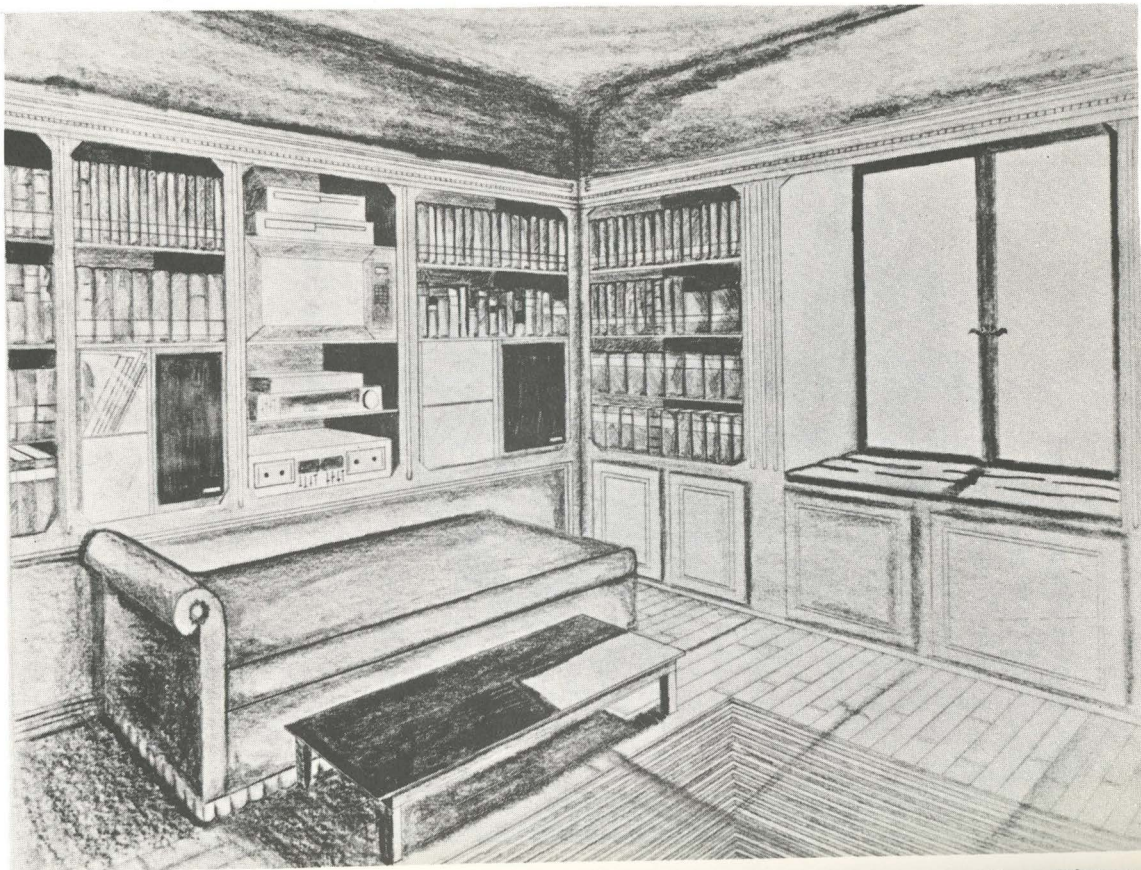


RAVLS

# Sunbathing

My eyes are closed  
And I am reading  
The lightning calligraphy  
Of electric blindness.  
Laid waste by marigold explosions  
I am a sunspot  
I am a hole burned into summer  
I am dumb and dripping  
Time and sweat  
Trickling  
From my belly  
"Pears and sweet melons,  
Who will buy?" sings the silence.  
"Love apples ripe on the vine"  
Croons the heat.  
And blond boys everywhere  
Just out of reach  
Echo  
Sunshine.

—Brooke Smith



Steve Disney

## The Journey's End

### A Sequel To "The Journey"

Karen slowly awakens. Her eyes open and move questioningly about the sparsely furnished room. She stretches her long arms and legs to the far corners of the bed while her mind tries to pinpoint exactly where she is. After a few groggy minutes, events rush back and she remembers—she's here again! Back at Valley Hope.

Only yesterday she said goodbye to her husband and two daughters and sadly resigned herself to the fact that she had returned. Full of anger, resentment, and humiliation, she'd made a second journey to this drug treatment center in Cushing, Oklahoma.

Due to an unbelievable, but true, set of circumstances, the insidious symptoms of drug addiction had begun again during the past year. Before anyone, and especially Karen, realized anything was wrong—it had happened! And now—here she is.

Karen has an eleven o'clock appointment with Dr. Davis to find out how her three drug dosages will be decreased. During morning communications she hears her name read in the list of patients scheduled to take their admission testing at 1:30 p.m. And she's to talk to her counselor at 10:30. This is going to be an extremely busy day. Including the important visit to her doctor.

Pauline, one of the center's nurses, drives Karen to a Cushing clinic. What Dr. Davis tells Karen almost sends her into shock; it is certainly not what she expected to hear.

"The Nembutal will be stopped today," he announces. "You won't be getting a decreased dosage of this barbiturate. Do you know it's a Class 2 narcotic?"

"No," Karen answers numbly. But she does know



barbiturates should never be withdrawn "cold turkey." She can't believe this doctor's told her he's going to do just that.

"No, you don't dare!" she wants to scream. "That method is totally wrong." But who is she to say anything?

"Beginning now, Karen, you will get four Dilantin pills daily. Then, in about ten days, the Limbitrol will be gradually reduced—and finally the Elavil."

When her doctor's appointment is over, Karen goes back to the waiting room. The receptionist hands her an envelope containing Dr. Davis' instructions (for the Valley Hope nursing staff) and dials the treatment center's number for her. A few minutes later Karen's ride comes to take her back.

The afternoon finds Karen and the other new arrivals in the testing room. She's sitting at one of the long tables, trying to concentrate while every nerve in her body is screaming to be put out of its misery. She feels absolutely terrible. She can barely manage to sit in the chair and hold onto a pencil. Soon she can't read the lines of print on the test papers. The words keep jumping around. Although psychological testing is one of the first things scheduled, to sit in this room for almost four hours is to slip past the point of endurance.

The first several days of treatment have now gone by, and Karen is a jittery mess due to the abrupt discontinuation of the barbiturate and a decrease in other dosages. She can feel herself shaking on the inside much more than the shakiness is outwardly visible. It's even affecting her voice.

It quavers when she reports to the nurses' station four times a day to get her pill allotment. She's really frightened. She has no idea what may begin to happen during the next few weeks. Nothing horrible, she hopes! She remembers last year's withdrawal from Valium—a terrible experience. A nightmare that can never be forgotten.

Only three days elapse before unnerving events start to occur. Karen begins seeing black spider webs on the walls,

floor, and fixtures of the recovery room's bathroom. She tries many times to rub them off, but the ugly black webs remain attached. Then, when her fifth night arrives, all hell breaks loose.

Arms, legs, hands, feet, eyes—God, millions of eyes. Whole bodies. Parts of bodies. Long arms waving wildly through the air. Short, stubby legs violently jerking and kicking. Outstretched groping hands with thin, bony fingers. Pounding feet, stomping louder and louder. The room is full of eyes. Blinking eyes, staring eyes. Haunting eyes that never move; glowing eyes of red, blue, and green. Vivid colors flashing everywhere. Some of the colors Karen knows. Others are strange hues—totally unfamiliar. The women's recovery room is going berserk, and Karen feels engulfed in this world of madness.

The room changes abruptly into an endless display of rapidly moving images now projected on the ceiling. Karen watches ten different scenes wildly spinning and constantly changing. They appear to be parts of her life, but flash by so quickly she can't comprehend what she sees. She lies on her bed and stares intently at a whirling, spinning merry-go-round of motion. Please, someone, make the ceiling stop! Trying to escape the utter chaos on the ceiling, Karen glances over at the open closet area and sees her spotted tan suitcase.

At last, something she recognizes! Suddenly, the spots turn into a picture that lifts off the front of her suitcase and comes out into the middle of the room. The largest spot becomes the grass skirt on a witch doctor. His grimacing face is painted chalk white and his piercing, black eyes glare down at Karen. He dances toward her, shaking a rattle in one hand and thrusting the other hand out for her to see. She shudders at the gruesome thing he's carrying—a human head. A face with one eye open, one eye closed. Karen knows those eyes—her mother's eyes after brain surgery.

Bolting upright on the bed, almost frozen in terror, Karen

is surrounded by unusual light. The witch doctor quickly vanishes; and now, glowing in the semi-darkness of the recovery room, dazzling white spider webs cover the four walls. These are not the intricate, shimmering webs one sees in books, but large, irregular splotches. Each one is joining others, multiplying into hundreds brightly illuminating the room.

Exhausted from this night of horror, Karen finally manages to fall asleep. The next morning she discovers that sometime during the night she'd waged an assault on the sleeves of her nightgown. The wide, white lace, neatly stitched on the ends of both sleeves, now hangs in huge loops ripped completely off the pink material.

Karen dresses quickly. She *has* to get out of this room, and she knows she must appear perfectly normal as though none of this craziness had occurred. No one must know what happened. But as she dresses, Karen can't believe her eyes. Even though bright morning sunlight is filtering in through the thin, yellow curtains, she can still see glowing white spider webs on the walls around her.

Slowly, deliberately, Karen closes the recovery room door and steps out into the hall, hoping to instantly erase her memories of a terrifying night. But it is not to be.

Karen stops by the nurses' station to get her first pills of the day and a breakfast meal ticket. As she walks out the front door of the treatment center, she's relieved to see very few people going over to eat breakfast. She's in no hurry to talk to any of her fellow patients.

Karen strolls along the sidewalk leading to the new building that houses the kitchen, dining room, and chapel. The feel and smell of early morning air are delightful. But, soon, blistering August heat will beat down relentlessly for the rest of the day.

Walking through the dining room on her way to the kitchen, Karen observes a few patients already eating breakfast. She moves down the serving line and picks up only a glass of grape juice. She's definitely not hungry!



Joan is sitting alone at one of the tables, so Karen goes over to join her. When Joan has finished eating, they walk back to the main building and sit down on the steps of the large front porch.

Karen glances out past the south edge of the Valley Hope property and sees several oil storage tanks she'd never noticed before. Suddenly, the oil tanks begin to slowly move around. The colors blend together: Karen can't distinguish the white tanks from the silver. The houses of a new residential area of Cushing join in this sea of motion and move from side to side, up and down, around and around.

She's completely absorbed in this weird, unexplainable motion when someone yells out the front door that it's time for morning communications. The crazy motion ceases as Karen carefully walks back into the building. She hurries to the recovery room, grabs her notebook and pencil, and heads for the lecture room in the basement. Half way down, the stairs begin to float around from side to side. Steps leading down in front of her are no longer there, but have melted into a flat, moving surface. At the bottom of the stairs, she quickly sits down in the closest chair and discovers the sickening motion has again stopped.

After communications and the nine o'clock lecture are over, Karen decides she simply must talk to one of the nurses. In the short time she's been here, she's heard the counselors lecture about what drugs can do to the brain. She hopes hers isn't already pickled! Karen is still terrified from all she's seen happen the last several days and is desperate to know if she's gone insane. She finally works up enough courage to walk over to one of the nurses and begin talking.

"I'm completely spooked out," Karen says nervously. "I've been seeing some very strange things for the last three or four days. I think I'm going crazy."

She goes into detail about some of the wild events of the past night. She's aware the nurse is probably laughing at the

ridiculous tales a grown woman is telling her.

"I've seen it all in brilliant 'living technicolor.' Surrounded by colors I couldn't recognize," Karen continues.

"Karen, you can certainly hallucinate in 'living technicolor,' " the nurse responds without a moment's hesitation.

That sentence suddenly helps make everything fall into place. Karen had never realized that this acute mental phenomenon of barbiturate withdrawal was what had been occurring.

"Karen," the nurse says and puts her hand on Karen's shoulder, "you are *not* going crazy."

But as night approaches, Karen is becoming apprehensive. Fortunately, she won't be alone in the recovery room. The nursing staff has scheduled several patients to take turns staying with her during the evening and on into the night in case more problems develop.

Karen desperately hopes nothing will, for this has been the strangest journey she's ever made. A journey into an eerie world of bizarre distortion, unceasing motion, flashing lights, pulsating sounds, blinking, spinning, blinding colors shooting through space, and grotesque bodies appearing hardly human. Hallucinations. Terrifying.

As the weeks go by, Karen's intense dislike and mistrust of a few Valley Hope staff members lessen. She slowly discovers they are trying to help her get her life back in order.

Her feelings of resentment and humiliation also subside as she becomes friends with more than sixty fellow patients. Men and women drawn together by one similar circumstance in their lives. Karen quickly realizes she's only one obscure, insignificant person among many fellow-travelers also making this journey.



Valley Hope's patients come from all corners of the United States. Representing all levels of income and education, some are professional people; others are laborers; a few are convicts released from prison and sent here for drug rehabilitation. They work, learn, play, eat, sleep, and live together, heedless of anyone's past.

The group spans all age brackets, ranging from the teen-age years into the seventies. This menagerie of patients, gleaned from all walks of life, presents a charming array of personalities and an unusual variety of occupations. Karen's already become acquainted with a university English professor, a waitress, a priest, a judge, a nurse, a chiropractor, and a "carny." Also in treatment with her are several housewives, car salesmen, secretaries, farmers, students, and teachers. Yes, they're all drug addicts and alcoholics; but, more important, Karen has found most of them to be wonderful, caring people. They are hopeful for their own recovery and truly interested in the recovery of everyone else.

The shrill ringing of Karen's alarm clock shatters the early morning silence. At 6:00 a.m. another day begins. Her mornings are filled by attending communications, two lectures, Marital Group, and an occasional film. She eagerly looks forward to the one hour of free time after lunch before the afternoon sessions begin. They include the dreaded Hot Seat and Small Group (definitely not her favorite hour of the day). To help keep muscles in shape and mind relaxed, recreation is scheduled one afternoon each week. At different times during the mornings and afternoons, Karen is assigned several conferences each week with her counselor and chaplain.

Evenings bring Patient Therapy Hour and then Big Book. And once a week a guest speaker comes to the center for "How It Happened Hour." When all the required daily sessions are over, the patients can spend the remainder of

the evening in activities of their choice. The TV room and card room quickly fill, and a few people can be found playing ping pong and pool in the basement. The majority of patients, however, gather on the large front porch for the pleasure of talking and sharing.

This is Karen's favorite time of day. The beauty and tranquility of a summer night are most apparent just as dusk approaches. Slowly gliding birds and the chirping of insects only gently break the calm and serenity of an August evening at Valley Hope. Sitting outdoors, transfixed by the brilliant changing colors of a sunset sky, she watches as yellow, gold, and orange shade into pink, red, and purple. Then the sky darkens into the black of night. It's a time to be quiet—a time to reflect.

Karen has felt strange all day. Nausea comes and goes. But pain stays. She's been watching TV but begins to feel so sick she returns to her room.

"Help me. Get them away!" Karen suddenly screams, kicking at the small blue creatures she sees crawling around her feet.

One of her roommates walks in and quickly summons a nurse. A wheelchair is rolled in and Karen is transported back to the recovery room. During the ride, her arms and legs begin shaking and jerking. Then her head. Her back jerks so violently she almost slides out of the wheelchair. Fierce, gnawing pain assaults every inch of her.

She spends the rest of the night watching walls move and strange objects fly around in the air. Periodically, the uncontrollable jerking and shaking begin again. And a fire rages through her entire body. Two patients at a time spend two-hour shifts in the recovery room with her. Like the

"Changing of the Guards," they come and go throughout the night.

As long, monotonous days stretch into weeks, Karen's withdrawal symptoms continue at an intensified pace. And the nursing staff extends her length of treatment an additional week.

Karen has many sleepless nights. During others she jerks so often she keeps waking herself up. Her hands have been numb for several weeks; trembling fingers are a daily occurrence. Her nerves stay razor sharp, always on edge, and she's aware of strange feelings in her head. Pain is a constant companion.

Running parallel to all this is the roller coaster ride of emotions. Karen embarks on this ride, careening from the heights of exuberance and laughter to the depths of discouragement and despair. And she travels this emotional gamut again... and again... and again.

Almost daily, patients are dismissed from Valley Hope. It's a scary time for most, leaving to go back to wary family and friends. How will they react? And how will the patient manage to get through that first day, week, or month back home? The road to recovery leads to one incredible obstacle—the person himself.

Others could help at first, making a person realize the necessity of treatment. A friend had taken this giant step for Karen. And now the battle to get off the drugs is almost over—at least the worst part. But Karen's battle to *stay* off is just beginning.

As her dismissal day draws near, Karen's thoughts turn to painting her cup and preparing a short speech for her "cup hanging day." She can't wait; what a wonderful day it will be—her last at Valley Hope! She's been trying to decide how to decorate her cup and has made many trips to the basement to look at the hundreds of brightly painted cups already hanging in a profusion of color on the lecture room walls.



At last she's planned her own cup and she and Carolyn spend hours working together on their "masterpieces." Karen's proud of her cup—wiggly letters and all. It's brown with white lettering and with eleven multicolored pills painted on the front. She feels a strong attachment to this cup; she's gone through hell to reach the day when it will hang on display with the myriad of others.

It's here at last! The day she's spent almost six weeks earnestly believing would never come. Today is Karen's "cup hanging day" and she has a terrible case of the jitters. But she survives making her speech and, as she finishes, turns and solemnly hangs her cup on the hallowed basement wall.

Despite the joy of leaving, it's also a sad time. A time to say goodbye to new friends found when they were needed the most. Friends who saw Karen at her worst, but still had a hug and a cheerful word always ready to give. And so today, amid hugs, there are a few tears as goodbyes are said.

Karen's husband, William, has arrived at the center and helps carry her belongings to the car. Others grab a suitcase and boxes and soon the car is packed. She's ready to leave.

The aging yellow brick posts still stand hauntingly beside the long, narrow entrance road. They seem a little less sinister now than on the day of her arrival. But still very intimidating. As William drives on, Karen turns, looks back at the gate, and sees the main building growing smaller in the distance. She's really leaving Valley Hope—the journey's over. Karen's on her way home!

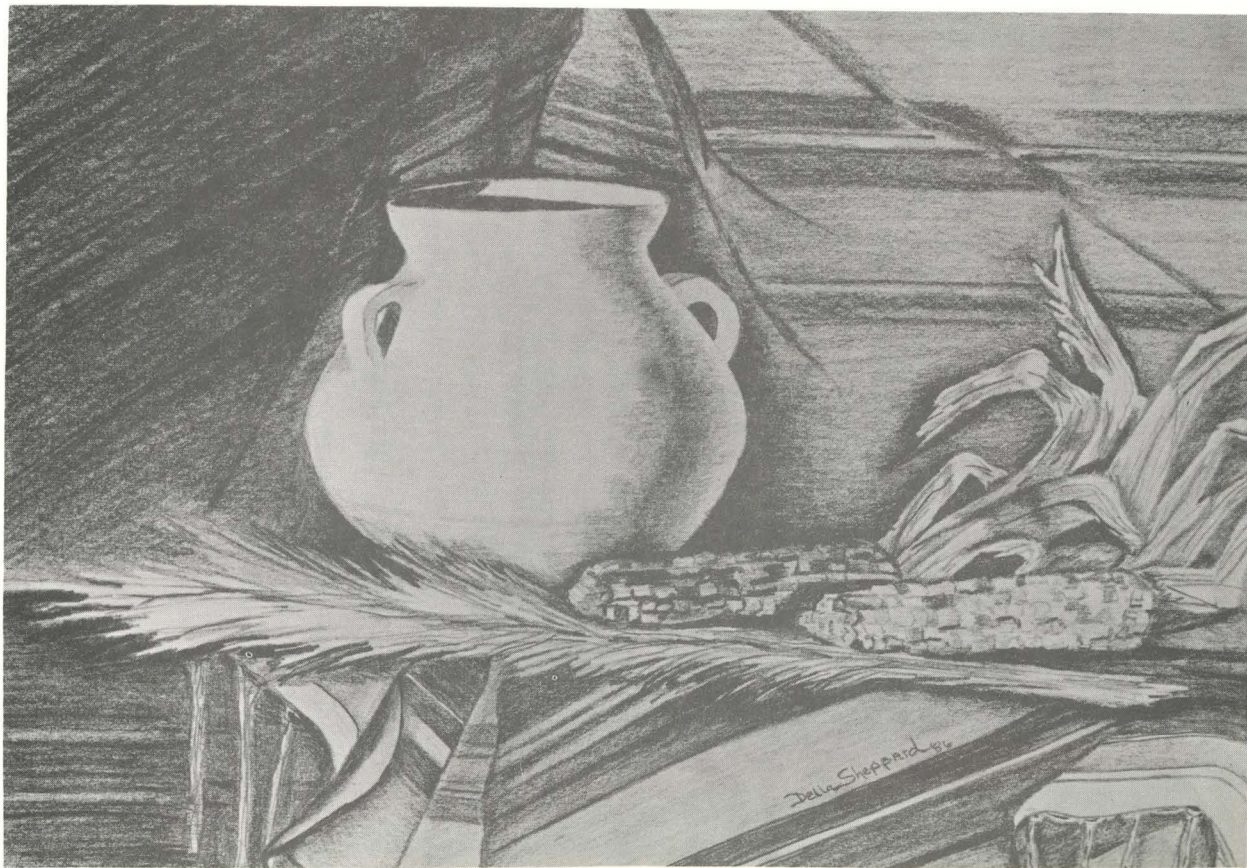
—Kay Hickman

## Storm's Prelude

The air is strangled  
by swollen silence.  
All movement repressed  
into a single leaf  
being pulled to earth  
slowly by thick cords  
of gravity.  
The sky — a bruised  
and billowing anarchy  
of some olympian realm.  
No shouts — no cries of  
thousands —  
can puncture the paroxysmal  
quiet  
of this moment.  
Or the next.  
When the violent suggestions  
of the atmosphere  
evolve.

—Karen Chapman-Wilkey





Della Sheppard

## he thinks hell

he thinks hell  
lives only on the battlefield

he scratches out words on the  
bullet's bite & the clamour of depravity oh he's  
been there yes your authorized guide to  
hell on earth

only one of the davenport family  
made it to saigon — if you can't read a  
c-ration can you can't join can you?

davenports lived on columbia street in  
springfield — the whole damned clan — cousins  
uncles nephews babies — in an old run down three-  
story mansion

running water sure... sewer? don't step in the mess out  
the back door! dim lights & tobacco smoke made like  
a humid yellow fog creeping through the house slime  
on floors & walls filthy mattresses & chairs &  
moldy cellar to attic the place smelled like excrement

davenports didn't hardly notice at all the old man  
stayed drunk on rancid murky moonshine that he  
produced & sold & so did the rest of the family while  
babies bobbled & crawled from kitchen to bathroom &  
upstairs & down looking for things to do in america

dante never mentioned the warmth a 12-year-old might  
find inside the sunless sepulcher of a cybernetic

world still  
here were children with dull glazed eyes some  
retarded & the old man was loaded the old  
lady sat in front of an old tv rocking herself to  
tuberculin death while  
upstairs in the dark damp corners of the rotten  
house filthy children just played & played...

one day davenports opened the front door &  
a cop gave them the news: "your boy joey was  
killed by a truck  
when he stopped to fix his junk car high  
on angel dust in the middle of  
the freeway..."

another day they opened the  
front door & another cop said: "we found  
your daughter rhonda dead in a cheap hotel  
bathtub raped & beaten with a dirty  
needle in her arm..."

luckily, many davenport babies  
cushioned the blows  
lessened the losses...

some nice boys had to suit up &  
travel half way around the world just  
to see death fear injustice proudly they sent  
their mothers postcards & woeful  
letters souvenirs from  
hell evidence of manhood

only one of the davenport family  
made it to saigon roy

could read a c-ration can & he  
could multiply to seven times nine &  
he booked to nam in june of '68

come july roy wrote home: "it arnt so  
bad heer" & sent a photo of himself sitting  
on a couch with a pretty 15-year-old  
asian girl

in august, roy deserted

bullet bites & the clamour  
of depravity don't mean diddly  
on columbia street

—wd housden  
newcastle  
14 june 1985





## The Final War

Bloodthirsty maniac. I'd kill him if I could. He's too good, though, too fast and clever and cautious. And I'm too slow, with this mangled leg and weighty conscience.

There is certainly no one else to do the job. He saw to that.

All along, all he could talk about was war, war, war. I watched all the scheming, all the manipulations, the sabotage. It's not a valet's place to speak against his master, but the way he talked made my blood run cold.

It doesn't matter now. It's over. I have to hand it to him, the way he pulled it off: arms race, terrorist activities, surreptitious supply lines, even infiltration into and exploitation of the largest nations on earth. Clever, bloodthirsty maniac. He made and spent fortunes like water and spent other men's fortunes and manipulated the manipulators.

And then came the war. He started that, too, in a way, stirring up those little Third-world hotbeds, supplying one side with unbeatable technology. Of course, he hadn't told them that he had given the same technology to the other side. It was only a matter of time and a nudge or two before the powers got dragged in. The real destruction, however, did not start until he used what he call "the *big* black box." It was actually rather small, but it did manage to fool just the right machines and people into believing that a firing order had gone out.

It was quite a display on the screens in his war room, what with little white lines going this way and that. Little X's appeared on cities, ports, and military installations the world over. Little X's. I hesitated to think how many people had lived where there was nothing but little X's.

The "hot" clouds spread almost exactly as he had

predicted. People died, and peoples died. At least I couldn't see them. If I had, I probably *would* have tried to kill him. I've considered poison many times. I'm a poor actor, though, and someone must be left besides him and the slutsie twins in the end.

Did I not mention the twins? They're anything but forgettable, with those long, smooth legs and soulful eyes, as though they have any more of a conscience than he does. Neither is very smart, but they certainly have their good points, not the least of which, from the master's perspective, is that they don't want children.

He doesn't like children — says they're too noisy and quarrelsome. Funny, coming from the man who became for the world the Four Horsemen in one.

They don't like me, do the twins, which is fine, since other than noticing the exquisite way they and their light golden skin fill out and set off their ever-matching gowns, I don't care for them. All they've ever done is sit around and clap their hands and give false little squeals when the master would pull some clever tid-bit of destruction out of his endless hat. I have fantasized, a time or two, that the master might fall and break his neck, and I would flush their little pills, and I would have a little laugh, among other things. Maybe then there would be a last ray of hope.

I did get to do a little laughing at one point. While the clouds eventually overtook all the surface ships at sea, it seemed that a few submarines had escaped destruction, despite the intelligence he had passed from one superpower to the other. It also looked for a while like parts of the southern hemisphere would survive thanks to air circulation patterns and whatnot, and there seemed to be a few pockets of life left elsewhere. Winter came early and brutal and foodless, though, and then there was that one little panel that I had always wondered about. It turned out to be a cut-in on a special override which the Soviets — oh so

trusting of their men — had installed in some of their missile submarines. The two that still had some of their missiles soon didn't, and the rest of the world died. Eventually even the last of the subs took its final dive.

I celebrated by getting drunk. I'm still not quite over the depression. I keep hoping that maybe, somewhere, a few brave, hardy souls are holding out against the end. It's not very likely, though, as he said just this morning. Even the big shots in their deep, deep shelters didn't survive the clever little earth-buster he passed to both sides — via their own researchers — for use with certain warheads. I keep hoping, but the satellites find nothing, and the world is shattered, barren, and he says they're all gone.

So. There's nothing left but to try to keep my hand steady long enough to get the contents of the little vial into his tea, and up we go. I know where he'll be. He always takes his afternoon tea in the round room atop the elevator, high in the mountain where he settles back in his biggest leather chair with a twin on either arm and looks out his special window on the ruined, lifeless world. Bloodthirsty warmongering bastard.

"Your tea, master. I took the liberty of making your favorite pound cake to go with it today."

"Thank you, Charles. Leave it. I'll get to it in a few minutes."

"Ah, ladies, you look ravishing. Blue and green may be your best colors. Shall I pour you some tea?"

"No, thank you."

"No, thank you."

"Just as well. Cake might ruin those lovely, perfectly matched hour-glass figures, the last of their kind — and it is perhaps fitting that the last be two of the finest."

"Why, thank you, Charles."

"Yes. Thank you."

"You look a little flustered, Charles. Sit and pour yourself a cup."



"Oh, thank you, sir, but I really must be getting back down. I have a goose basting."

"Nonsense. The bird will wait. Sit and drink. I insist. Here, I'll even pour for you. There you go. Drink."

"Really, sir, I —"

"Drink. What's so funny?"

"Nothing, sir. Just tired, I guess. Tired of everything. Yes, I believe I would like a bit of tea."

"Ah, isn't this the view, Charles? Look at the world out there. I always hated war."

"What, sir?"

"War. I always hated it with a passion like no one I've ever known. How's the tea?"

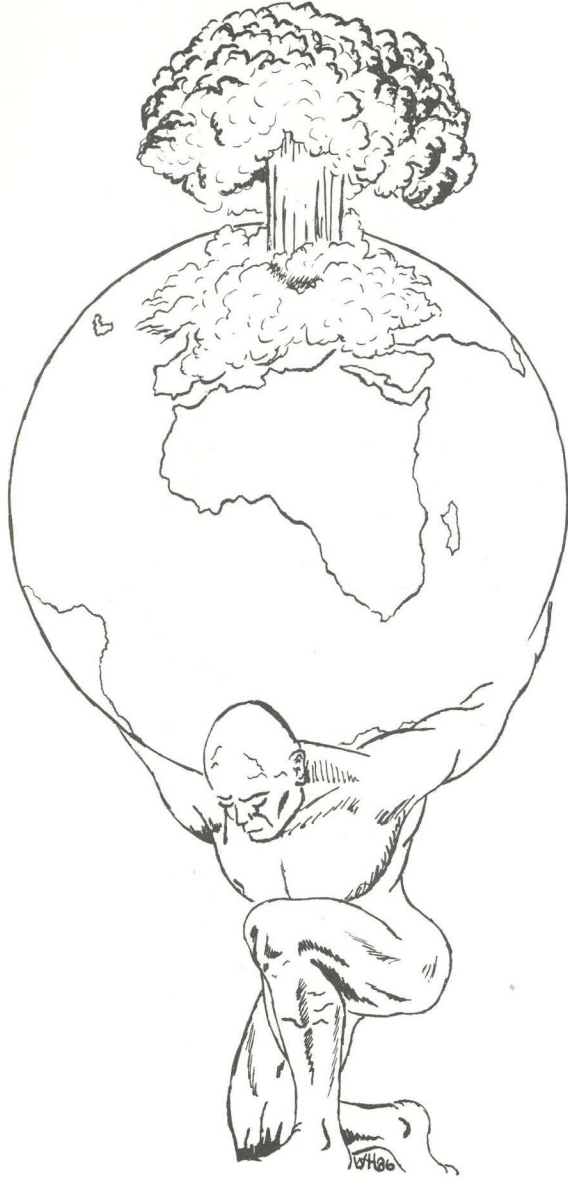
"Splendid. Why don't you have some?"

"Later, I think."

"I never knew you hated war, sir. I hope I'm not being impertinent, but that attitude does not exactly match your actions over the past decade or so."

"Oh, you're wrong, old friend. Ah, good, glad to see you relaxing. You really don't look well at all. Yes, Charles, you've gotten it a bit wrong. Everyone did, I think. I hate war. So I ended it. Look at the world now. There is indeed nothing but peace. Isn't it beautiful?"

—W.J. Hodgson



W.J. Hodgson

# Shark Incident

They fished him  
                  dripping from the sea,  
Not knowing:  
                  already  
He was eaten alive.  
And when they unzipped his  
Black and shining skin  
He spilled his secret  
Over their feet.  
I, too, have been submerged  
                  down there,  
                  recently rescued —  
Take care how you undo my skin.

—Brooke Smith

# The Sheriff's Memories

(After Reading "Wash," A Short Story By William Faulkner)

Shouda knowed things wan't going to be right. Somethin had been brewin all week, what with dogs howlin, birds wheelin and cryin, and the sky all sorta yellow with dust storms. Worst of all, I dreamed of muddy water — a rollin, tumblin, foammin crick that overflowed it banks. Hadn't dreamed about muddy water since Mama died.

(We sat in the warm April evening, remembering. He slumped in the straight-backed wooden kitchen chair, now and then tilting it against the side of the shed. He gazed into the distance, not meeting my eyes.)

Sure would like to forgit that day, but that crazy women's club jest has to remember the Colonel's birthday — he was "illustrus," the Widder Blackmon says. Brave and illustrus. They remember and talk about the battles he fought. And he *was* brave. That paper from Gen'ral Lee says so. Most everbody round here remembers how he lived. One or two of us remembers how he died. His birthday is in April, too, you know.

Everbody was watchin the Colonel and Wash — just watchin and waitin for somethin to happen. You jest cain't suck up to a man like the Colonel forever. One of these days he's goin to get tard of havin someone like that hangin around, 'specially when that someone begins to show signs of gettin uppity. And Wash was. The rounder his granddaughter got, the bigger Wash grinned. We all knew what he was a-thinkin. Ain't likely the Colonel thought that way, though. Colonel only thought of his horses and the jug. The war took a lot out of the Colonel. Never saw a man so proud. Sure brought back a lot of memories to us who knew him well to see him on that big black stallion — how he used to be. That's how he was when he was up on that black — he seemed to drop twenty years.



(He pushed himself out of the cane-bottomed chair, walked slowly away from me to stand under a low branch of the huge oak tree whose buds were just ready to burst into leaf. He stood, shoulders hunched, head lowered, staring at the ground.)

Colonel shoulda never started to fool around with Wash's granddaughter, Milly. Little slut. Her with her pale eyes like her granddaddy's. Everbody knew what kind she was. She sure knew how to please a man, though. Man, did she know. Didn't take any more'n a yeller ribbon to have your way with her.

(He glanced at me with a sly grin, winked, and shifted position in his chair, remembering. Crossing his long legs, he looked across the yard toward a line of dark trees that marked the river. The grin faded and he rubbed a stubbled chin slowly, reflectively.)

Cain't figure out why she settled on the Colonel. She coulda had some of the others — maybe even the Major. Maybe it was because she lived on the Colonel's land. He was closer. Colonel shoulda left her to rot in that shack.

And then she got pregnant. Colonel shoulda let one of his nigger women take care of that right away. Dicey would have knowed what to do. Why, I remember talk about the Colonel's daughter while he was gone to war. Aw — but that was just talk. Dicey would have knowed what to do with Milly — if the Colonel had wanted. Maybe he thought — since there was goin to be a kid anyhow — it was maybe a boy. Colonel sorta missed his boy.

Shoulda never let anyone know when I'd be back from runnin the hounds that Sunday. My, they done well. It's gonna be a pleasure to hunt with them dogs. Marsh is a really good trainer. Shoulda stayed over to his house with him and let the deputy handle that affair out at Wash's shack.

(He shook his head often as if that could erase a memory.)

Lord, I'll never forgit that night. I've seen bears tracked and killed, and I've seen cows that painters has jumped, but I

ain't never seen a slaughtered animal that looked like the Colonel. Wash must've stood over him and sliced him and sliced him like he was mowin' down weeds. That sickle wasn't even sharp. I'd never a-suspected Wash was that strong. The ground and weeds around the Colonel was black where his blood had dried on 'em. Even in the lantern light — even in the light — you could see how surprised and feared the Colonel was when the sickle hit him. I still see his eyes—wide open, starin up into the light. He musta tried to stop that blade with his hands. One of 'em was layin three or four feet away from the rest of him. Wash musta gone plum crazy for some reason, to turn on someone who had been good to him for so many years.

Cain't figure it out. From what Dicey said, Colonel wan't mad about that baby. He'd a probably felt about it the way he felt about Wash—keepin it around, takin keer of it and Milly, lettin 'em live in that shack as long as they wanted, just like he done Wash. 'Course, if it'd been a boy—

(He shook his shaggy head slowly, a bit sadly. Hunching his shoulders, he leaned forward in his chair, twining and untwining his fingers as his hands dangled between his knees.)

The Major and the others was a-talkin lynchin but I told 'em, "Naw, we'll just take him in. He'll get justice."

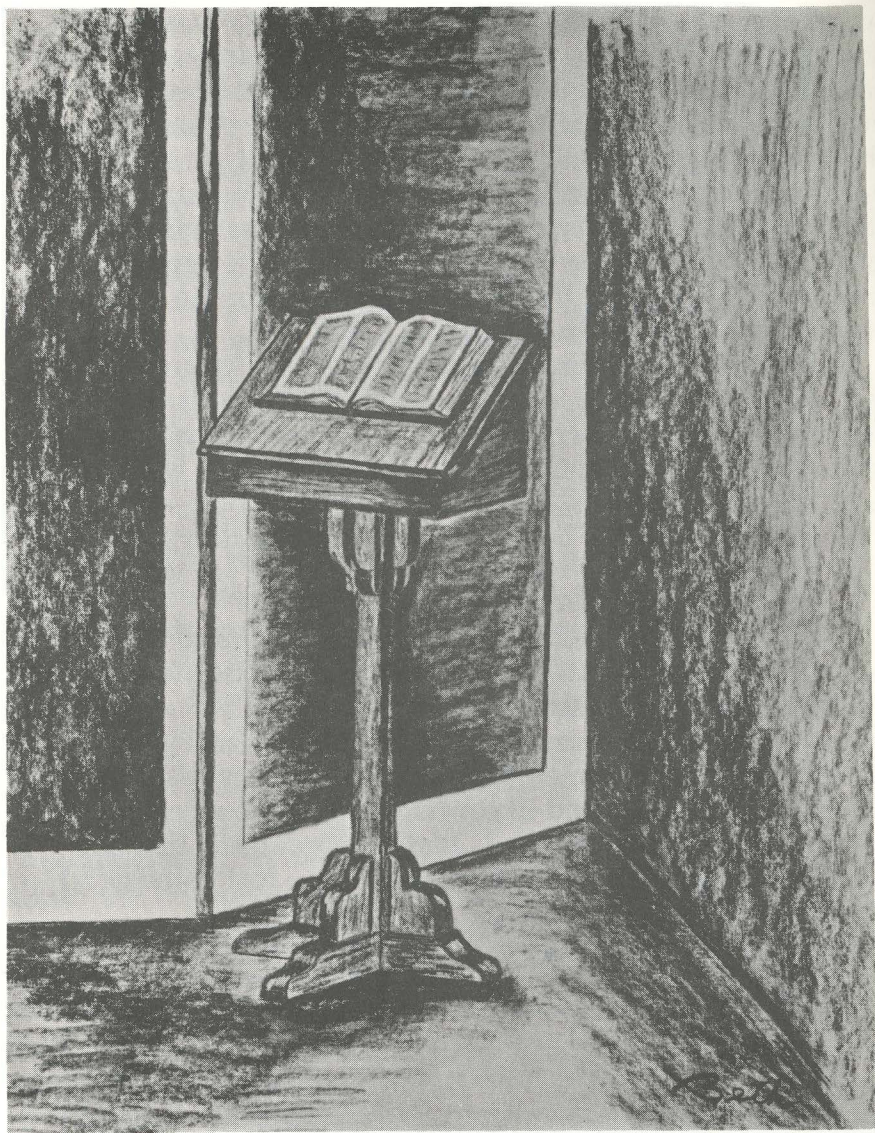
Wash didn't yell or scream or nothin when he run outa that shanty. Almost like he didn't have no voice. He never made a sound, just come boilin out of that burnin shack, wavin that sickle around like a crazy man. There jest wan't nothin to do but shoot him — had to stop him. If he'd got even clost to the horses — why, we coulda lost some good animals.

But there wan't no call for them men to run their horses over Wash the way they done. Over and over him. Justice woulda been done.

I ain't ever told anybody 'bout that. Nobody else told, either. It wan't a thing to talk about. You won't tell it, neither. That's jest b'tween you 'n me.

—Naomi Christofferson





Beth Schafer

# The Man Who Disliked Washington

President George Washington ranks second only to Abraham Lincoln in the affection of the American people. And, unlike Lincoln, Washington's apotheosis began before his death. It seems, then, strange to reflect that there were those who did not share the high regard Americans had for Washington, that there were a few who disliked him intensely.

Charles Lee, a former British officer removed to America, was felt to be indispensable to Washington's success in the early days of the Revolution. Lee had a low regard for Washington's abilities as a military man and tended to think of him as a misplaced Virginia farmer. Washington's severe reprimand of Lee following Lee's debacle at the Battle of Monmouth earned for the Commander-in-Chief Lee's undying public resentment. General Joseph Conway may have spearheaded a move to replace Washington with General Horatio Gates, the hero of Saratoga, as the supreme head of the American army. Ironically, the man who disliked Washington the most did not make a public statement against him, participated in no cabal, and left little historical evidence of the fact.

The first commander of American troops against the British was not Washington but General Artemas Ward of Massachusetts. Between April 19, 1775, and July 3, 1775, it was General Ward who commanded American troops. It was Ward and not Washington who commanded American troops at Bunker's (Breed's) Hill. Following Washington's appointment as Commander of American forces, Ward received the rank of First Major General and was second in command.



It was the jealousy of General Charles Lee that contributed to the trouble between Generals Washington and Ward. Lee undermined Ward's efforts and once described him as "more fit to be a churchwarden than a general." Washington reprimanded Ward for the slowness with which the defenses of Boston were being prepared, and Ward explained that the defenses were progressing even though he had only half the men required for the work. After the British were driven from Boston, Ward asked to be relieved from command on the grounds that ill health prevented full attention to his duties. Ward regarded Washington's attack on his performance as a betrayal and never forgave the incident. As late as 1792 Ward was glad to be ill so as to have an excuse from participating in the celebration of the President's birthday. Shortly after his retirement from public life, Washington wrote Ward a letter expressing "the highest regard for the character of General Ward in all the departments of public duty in which he had acted." Ward never acknowledged the letter.

—Ray and Sonya McCullar

# To The Memory Of Lloyd Shultz

Today the sun will shine... without him.  
The wind will blow through the trees,  
caressing the warm waters... without him.  
Today the wars will rage on;  
The people of the world will continue  
to starve... without him.  
Today our hearts will bleed with sorrow,  
our souls continue to ache... without him.  
Today he will lie cradled in the Lord's arms  
Forever.  
But we will be without him.

—Deborah Bachman

# A Poem About Something Other Than Myself

Slowly blinking eye against  
a petal  
prodding with soft filaments  
for nectar  
wings — woven palettes of silk  
so supple  
so vulnerable  
soon to be powder on a childish  
finger.

Escape, butterfly,  
flutter through hot, captive hands of those  
who would try to possess such  
honest radiance  
only to shrug at quiescent  
wings.

—Karen Chapman-Wilkey  
1983





# Evolution

I have been  
a silent stone  
under a waterfall,  
subject to the subtle pressures  
of Change.

I have been  
a wildflower  
in an otherwise  
barren field—

I have tried to be  
a prism of Color.

I have been  
a shadow  
in the glow of the Moon,  
flickering in the darkness—

I have hidden  
in the embrace of Night.

I have been  
a butterfly  
in Summer's  
last breath of Glory—

I have felt  
the powerful  
essence of Life...

—Wanda Lee Brayton  
9 February 1986