

ABSOLUTE

fall 87





—David Rainbow

Absolute

Fall 1987

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FIRST PLACE WINNER

Women's History Committee Contest, 1987

MY MENTOR, MY FRIEND

When I first arrived on campus in 1976, I was an amateur student and aspiring writer. I was overwhelmed by every aspect of college and, as with all new students, the anxiety was profound. I drifted through several semesters, dazed and without any focus. I could barely compose a short essay without suffering severe symptoms of frustration. A few short years later, I found it difficult to end a 2,000 word term paper. With the proper guidance, I had discovered a viable method of expression. My guide into the realm of academics has an acute form of judgment; students were motivated and propelled into the learning experience. My first essay was placed on my professor's desk, drenched with blood, sweat and tears. It was returned to me with precise, enthusiastic words of praise. Every paper I submitted thereafter was examined honestly and thoroughly — any apparent criticism was imparted judiciously, with encouragement. I believe Fate had a hand in directing me to enroll in the first of four classes I would take from my teacher and friend, Helen Cullins Smith (recently retired).

When I first met Helen, I had composed fewer than a thousand poems; in the seven years since, I have more than tripled the size of my manuscript. I've attempted several journals and short stories, and have had nearly fifty poems published on campus. Helen introduced me to a woman photographer and together, we had an exhibit on campus and at a gallery downtown.

Once, when finances were tighter than usual for a stereotypical "starving artist," Helen's recommendation helped me procure a scholarship in order to continue my studies.

More recently, Helen used my poetry as an example for her

students; for years, she attempted to convince me to give a lecture to her classes or be "immortalized" on videotape (neither of which any self-respecting recluse would consider.) I hated to disappoint her with my adamant refusal, but I am all too aware of my deep-seated fear of public speaking. (My only speech in Oral & Written Composition class was a subject of humor between us for years.) I tried to justify my cowardice by stating that I am a writer, not a speaker: I have to edit and revise as I go.

Being an avid reader like myself, Helen has continually bestowed countless gifts upon me: textbooks, fiction and non-fiction, poetry, short stories and magazines. Years after my classes with her, she has continued to help mold and shape my intellect, as well as help me define my spiritual values. Generous soul that she is, she has understated the magnitude of her gestures, saying that I should concentrate more on creativity, rather than productivity. Her role as professor, mentor and "promoter" was enhanced by her role as my friend.

Helen has inspired me in so many ways: I admire her strength as a woman, her intellectual prowess as a teacher, her incisive wit and compassion as a human being; most of all, I recognize her intense, voluminous spirit. She is refined and gentle, independent and wise, considerate and open to the advancement of the Heart, Mind, Body & Soul. She helped me discover new, unique horizons and she realized my struggle toward originality. She provided numerous keys to unlock dreams and visions, gave me room to "try my wings," and made me aware that the only true limitations are self-imposed. She contributed to my intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development. She possesses uncanny intuitive abilities, saying just what I needed to hear when I needed to hear it. She offered more than mere support; she helped me establish a foundation upon which I could build my life as an artist. Under her careful guidance, I grew from child to woman; with her support, I became a more industrious and productive student, a more prolific writer, and, most of all, a

better human being. Helen has helped me learn to navigate treacherous waters and become the captain of my own soul. I fully expect to feel the influence—and impact—of her teachings for the rest of my life.

—Wanda Brayton Karjoo

SECOND PLACE WINNER Women's History Contest, 1987

IN MY GRANNY'S HOUSE

She was born October 1, 1907 near Coalgate, Indian Territory, Oklahoma shortly before Oklahoma became a state. She married at the age of 19 and bore three children and had one miscarriage. Granny and Papa lived and worked on a farm where they raised their children for sixteen years. Then they moved to Sulphur, Oklahoma where their children met and married and gave birth to four grandchildren. Last weekend I spent some time with my Granny and I would like to share with you some thoughts I had during this visit.

Looking at the pictures hanging on the bedroom wall brought back lots of memories. It was like seeing my whole life laid out in front of me, on those walls. The wall to my right held pictures of all of us when we were kids. The wall to my left held pictures of all of our kids, and the wall behind me was blessed with pictures of my own precious granddaughter. Six generations were represented on these walls, five of whom were still living. As a kid, I used to sit at the window in front of me and wish on the first star of the night.

"I sure am proud you decided to come down tonight," called the voice from the other bedroom.

"I am, too, Granny," I replied as I turned off the light, putting the pictures out of sight but not out of mind.

As I snuggled down in the quilts, all homemade by my Granny or my great-grandma, and I laid my head deep in the feather pillows, also homemade, I thought about my early childhood days and the influence that the little old lady in the next room had on my life.

I grew up as the daughter of the town drunk and a mother

who worked 16 hours a day to support his habit. That left my sister, my brother, and me to fend for ourselves a lot. I "matured" at a very early age due to all the responsibilities that were dumped on my shoulders. I also became bitter about the responsibilities I felt I had, the abuse I had to endure, and the immaturity of my parents.

The only bright spots in my childhood were times spent with my Granny and Papa. At their house I was a kid; at home I was an adult. Without those occasional weekends, I don't think I could have made it through my childhood.

When Daddy was arrested for child abuse, it was Granny who gave me the emotional support I needed, not my mother. When I graduated from Junior High, it was Granny and Papa in the audience, not mama. When I wanted to get married at fourteen, it was Granny and Papa who gave me and my soon-to-be husband a heart-to-heart talk. Granny sent us money when we got stranded in Arizona with no money or gas. It was Granny who taught me how to cook and clean and sew and take care of my babies when they arrived. It was Granny who taught me about religion, morals, values, and life in general. She picked me up on Sundays and took me to church and Sunday school. She taught me about life not so much by what she said but how she handled life herself. She worked hard all her life. First on the farm side by side with Papa (sometimes by herself when he had to go work for the WPA), then for the sixteen or so years she owned and operated a help-your-self laundry. She sold the laundry after Papa died but it didn't seem to slow her down much.

At the age of sixty, she embarked on a new career. She went to work as a cook. At sixty-five, she switched to cleaning house for one of Sulphur's richest families. At seventy three, she went back to school and learned how to communicate with her hands.

Now nearing eighty years of age, my Granny is a "special"

grandmother to deaf and mentally handicapped kids at the Sulphur School for the Deaf. After reading her Valentine cards she received from "her kids," I can see she is still affecting the lives of children when they need her most.

Granny's determination not to give up, her ability to stand up and fight for what she believes in and for her family (she's 4'9" but she tells everyone she's 5'2"), her unique ability of always knowing the right thing to say at the right time, has had a great influence on my life. Granny has been my guiding light during dark times in my life. She's been my rock during times I didn't think I was going to make it. Granny has encouraged and discouraged, approved and disapproved, supported and said no, at all the right moments in my life. She's given me the model I need to mold the way I handle my life, my kids and grandchild, and my husband. Her love has been the constant in my life that is always there when I call for help. And I do still call for help. Few people are blessed in this world to have a Granny such as I do. I'm so very thankful to have her in my life.

—Kathy Householder

THIRD PLACE WINNER Women's History Contest, 1987

MOTHER MARY, THE PERSON

I decided to quit the nasty habit of idolizing people years ago. It did not occur as a result of some "coming of age" trauma. Rather, it was, and still is, a gradual process. Undefined slices of time drift by and with each new slice, the eyes of my spirit, emotions, and intellect widen and become clearer. Slowly, I am becoming aware of the injustice done to individuals when they are placed, unsuspectingly, upon pedestals and change from mere mortals into demigods and goddesses in the amount of time it takes my oftentimes fanatical idealism to overreact. My mother was always a demigoddess to me. Perhaps this is a normal occurrence—especially when an individual is extremely close to one or both parents. Fortunately for both of us, I am now able to turn to my mother and see Mary, the Person—not Mother, the Invincible. Now I am almost ready to love the totality of her (not just her positive qualities) and appreciate, without reservation, the profound impact this woman has had on my life; this wonderful woman who can be annoyingly cantankerous one moment and incredibly loving the next; whose moods and consistencies vary with the barometric pressure. This mission has been doubly successful, for the degree of success in my acceptance of others is directly related to how successfully I accept myself. And the more I accept myself, the more I realize, "Oh, God, I'm just like my mother...." Shall I start with my sense of humor?

Mother Mary taught me how to laugh. This was not an easy task, for I am a perfectionist—just like my mother. I am still too ready and willing to criticize those demon qualities within myself that harbor diseases with names like guilt, procrastination, insecurity, etc. In the gut of each individual there lurks a core of self-honesty. Those who can listen to this voice without cringing are said to be "gutsy." From time to time the voice inside this core is

muffled. Mine, however, disregards all attempts to silence it (which would not come as a surprise to those who know me) and also sounds suspiciously like Mother Mary (who, from time to time, will be referred to as M²). Constantly I am told that all attempts to eradicate my multitude of personality flaws will fail. That not only is perfection an impossible goal, but what would happen if attainment of such a goal were possible? What would be the next step—canonization? No one invites saints to parties. Saints cannot begin their sentences with "I hate to be tacky, but...." Saints cannot flip people off during five o'clock traffic. Saints cannot use PMS as an excuse to verbally abuse co-workers. Saints cannot wear undergarments with holes in them. (They can, of course, wear holy undergarments, but that is an entirely different matter and involves certain rites of initiation I'd rather not go into at this particular time.) Saints cannot drink lite beer. You will never hear a saint say "Gimme a lite...." Saints cannot go see a Talking Heads concert. But, the most important drawback to canonization: you will never hear someone say, with admiration, as a saint walks away, "There goes a Festive Dude (or Dudette)." Thus saith my inner core of self-honesty, tinged with the humor I have incorporated into my personality via Mother. Interestingly enough, even as she tries to convince me that it is okay to have faults, M² pounds away at herself for having the same faults. Oh well, inconsistency is a blissfully human trait. However critical I am of myself, even jokingly so, I was taught at an early age to resist, and show contempt for, pretension and always, always be myself.

M² is of the generation that clings to the belief that women are submissive and men are the heads of the household (or at least they should hold that title). I saw this attitude growing up and it angered me. I resented my father for always attempting to dominate my mother and I resented Mother for not demanding more respect. Being a child, it was difficult for me to understand how frightening it can be to break away from beliefs that have been suckled for centuries. Both of my parents bought (and are

buying to an extent) into this belief system. To whatever degree my mother adheres to this way of thinking is immaterial. It was and is her choice and her right. Fact: if she did not want to live the way she is living, she wouldn't. The only thing that matters is that she taught me the opposite. My teenage years were peppered with such quotes as "Never think that just because a person is male means that he is in any way smarter than you," "All you have to do is be yourself. That's the only thing you have to remember," "If you feel it is the right thing to do, do it. Don't worry about what people think, and that includes your father and me," (an important addition). Now, some might consider this "do as I say; don't do as I do" parenting. Indeed, the inconsistencies between doing and teaching were not lost on me, but I accept and understand them. I feel a great deal of compassion for women who grew up hearing "Men don't like women with short hair," "Men don't like women who curse," "Men don't like strong-minded women," "Men like women to wear dresses," "Men like women who are domestic," "Men don't like women who speak their minds," "Men like quiet, docile women," "Men don't like women who argue," etc., etc. Sadly enough I am sure there are still men and women who would raise a daughter to believe that her opinion of herself is based upon male approval or disapproval. Not so, M². Her teachings helped me build a strong identity, and if at times I am insecure, unsure of myself, and unhappy in relationships, this is no reflection on her, but instead are problems that I have created and can learn from if I choose to do so. It is always reassuring, however, even as I realize that only I can solve my own problems, I know there is one short, bespectacled individual one phone call away; a chameleon-like female who will either listen and console me as I blow my emotional groceries in her ear, give unasked-for advice, or tell me how stupid I was to get myself in such a mess in the first place.

Luckily, M² is shockproof. This woman has listened to every reprehensible thing I have done—which included the most graphic details—without judgment. Even though our values at times are chasms apart, she can accept that. I saw at times the

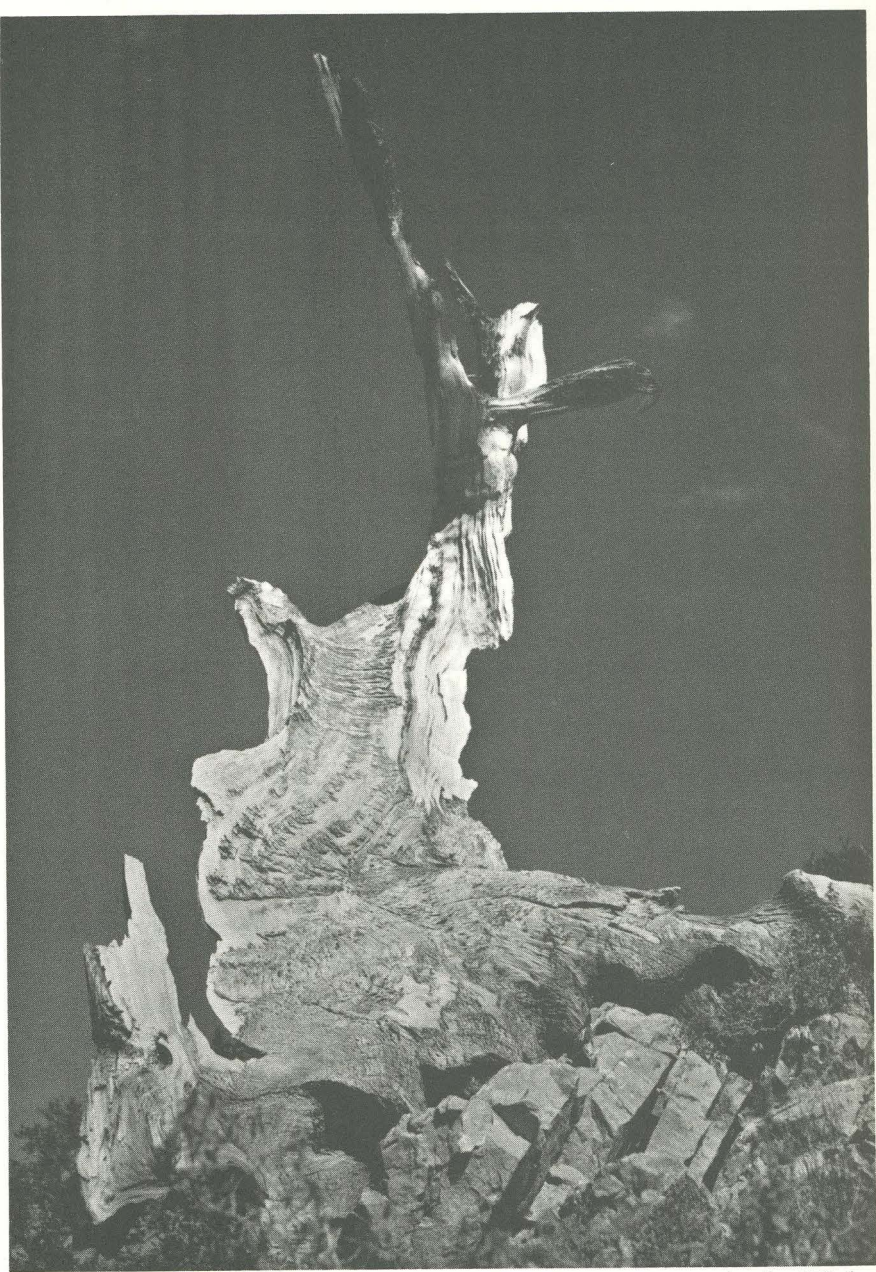
fear she kept to herself. It showed in those eyes....

It was the fear that fills the minds of most parents when they realize that if their child continues to follow a certain road (in my case, always "the one less traveled by") he/she will get hurt. I felt her struggle as she maintained her silence time after time. I was actually allowed to screw up, and I was hurt terribly, again and again. (I have a tendency to be a slow learner.) As I picked up the battered remnants of my emotions after each episode, Mother Mary was there to help me sew them back together. How frequently I admired her for being able to show compassion for me even while disapproving of what I had done. Once in awhile she would toss in an "I told you so," but she was there. Being there is something M² does quite well. We may snap at each other when we are angry to the point of no return, but through arguments that have drawn tears and slammed phones, she was and still is, there.

Now I am going to give myself some credit. If I were not a reasonably intelligent and capable person, I would never have been able to learn from Mother's teachings and my experience. Therefore, I have picked over various bits and pieces of wisdom, morals, and mistakes that have filtered into my mind by way of maternal osmosis. I have selected those nuggets of wisdom I wish to analyze and retain. I have adopted certain morals I wish to live by. I have remembered various mistakes and hope I never make the same ones again. Most importantly, I have gained wisdom of my own through experience. Due to my mother's acceptance of my individuality, I have learned to formulate my own values. And because of her willingness to let me live, I have made my own mistakes. Will she ever stop being my mother? Doubtful. If she hasn't disowned me by now, she never will. Perhaps, that is the ultimate realization that will manifest from this ongoing acceptance phase. My mistake has always been in trying to separate Mary, the Person, from Mother, the Person. She was and always will be Mother Mary, the Person. She helped me gain the

strength I needed to cling fiercely to my identity through times when I desperately wanted to assimilate. M² has helped me realize my own worth. Bless her eccentric heart!

—Karen Chapman



—Artie Hicks



—Artie Hicks

CREATED ONE

You who have
the eyes that pierce
deeply,
showing your inner passions

I as the caretaker,
your trusted comfort,
wonder how we interweave.

Things we know
we share in secret
Mother, child—
—a sacred bond

The seed before
that formed your being
was secretly planted
by a creative God.

—Here lies
inseparable love.

—Sylvia A. Muse 1987

THE WIND IN A BOTTLE

What did I buy you for Christmas? I bought you a piece of the wind. I put it in a bottle so you could open it in the winter when you're in a stuffy house full of stuffy people.

I also want you to have a trinket box I found in grandma's hope chest. I opened it last spring early in the morning and caught the sun's first rays, and the smell of the morning mist on the magnolia. Keep it and take what you need, but leave some for tomorrow.

Lie down here beside me, precious, and I'll sing you a lullaby. It begins with love and ends with love, and in the middle is the story of Jesus. A love lullaby through and through. If the angels join in, it will be a lullaby symphony made just for you.

Shhh...Listen! Do you hear God's whispering wind in the magnolia tree? The wind is God's breath saying, "I love you." Maybe that's why it's December and the magnolia leaves are still green. If God's breath can make the leaves green, just think what it will do for you. So when you're in a stuffy house full of stuffy people, open the bottle of wind and listen to Him whisper, "I love you."

Remember, too, grandma's trinket box filled with the spring morning sunrise and the smell of mist. With it, you'll always have the hope of spring in December. It wasn't in grandma's hope chest for nothing.

These are my Christmas gifts to you. The bottle of wind, grandma's trinket box, and my love lullaby. Listen now as I hum it for you. It is the same song the wind sings in the magnolia leaves, "I love you through and through."

—Laurette Perkins



—Marcus Werner

HOW CONNLA WAS CALLED AWAY

(based on the Irish legend of the same name)

Come with me
to the land of the Ever Living.
We can partake in the Feast of Forever.
Come with me, love,
to the Land of Delight.
Hear the sobs of joy
in a land without weeping.
Come away, Connla Red-Hair,
bright-eyed and fair of face,
Come away to the hills,
where your youth and beauty will never fade
and I will never grow old and die.
I have watched you, day by day,
among the dying people,
and in your home among your dear ones.
Now the Ever-Living bid you welcome
to the Land of Always Play.
I know you're struggling to keep your world,
even as the wanting carries you off and away.
Come and sail with me
in my swift crystal ship...
We can be there before the sun sets.
Oh, come with me, Connla Red-Hair.

AN

They say man can do...

One day I wandered into a restaurant to order some food when I stumbled upon an interesting piece of information. I found out that crows do not caw!!! Much to my astonishment I quickly left the place in search of a new truth-only to...

Anything his heart desires.

And can go anywhere

His mind will take him...

...find out I had been cawed!

Angrily I raced back to the restaurant and demanded a refund which was immediately rejected...

But in anger the

MIND

because of it

becomes an open wound

and in haste, makes the mistake

Of near comfort

Not the far truth

AND...

The owner just cawed and I flew the coop.

Something had to be DONE!

What I did caught them by surprise.

"I AM A MAN!"

I threw my clothes off and in open rebellion lit their blasted NEST on fire.

"I AM A MAN!"

As they flew away I was left alone in a cage of flames to die...

i am a man.

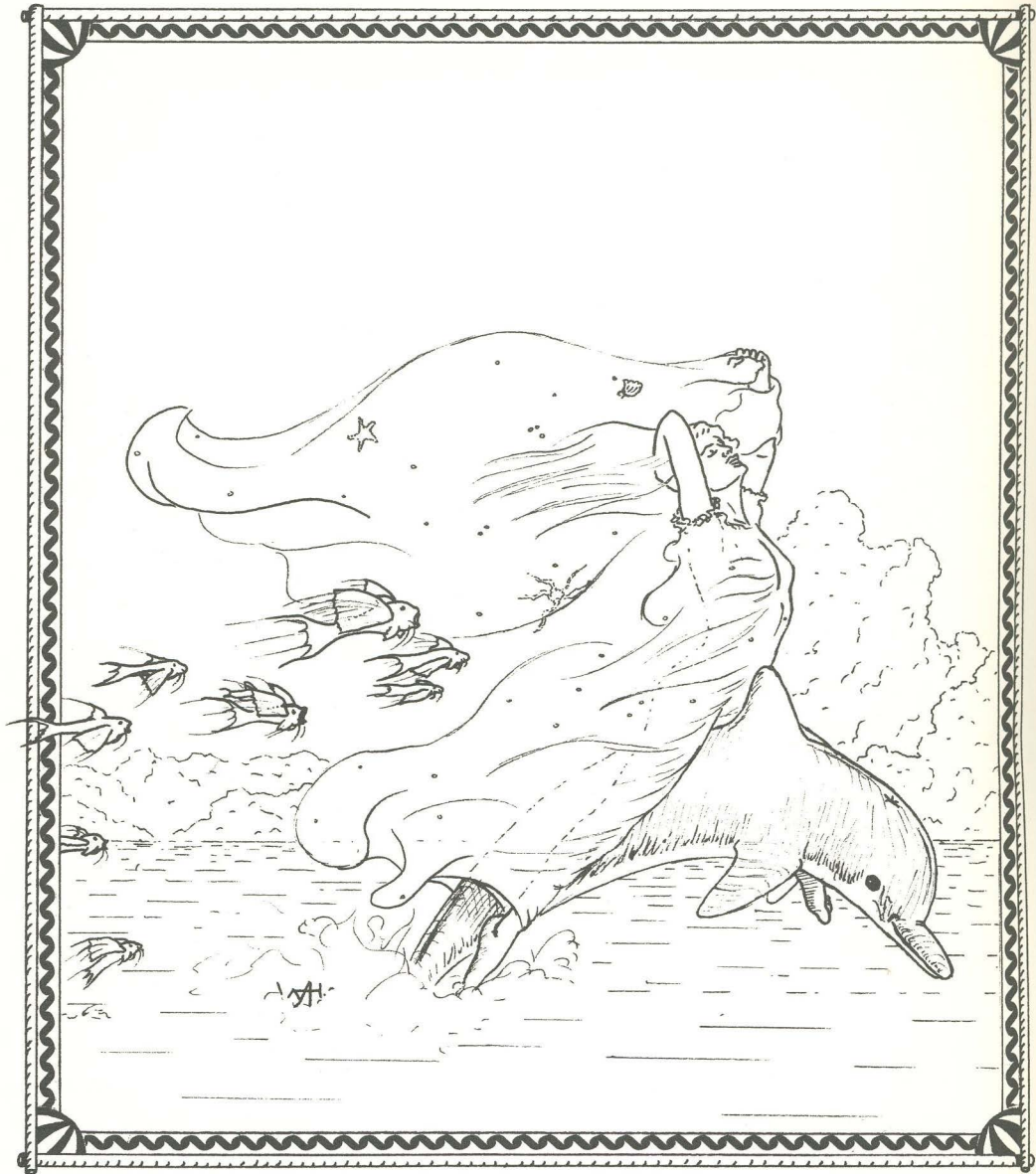
"CAW."

WHO ARE YOU

i can't shut the door
i'm not afraid in this path of light
the brown wooden floor creaks
with the shifting of your weight
as you walk and take your place in my doorway
your shadow stretches to touch me
i feel the chill as you block the light with your body
i can't see your face
who are you?

like a knife slicing through the blackness
your shadow covers my body totally
suggesting that your understanding of me
is like a blanket
wrapping around me
trying to bring me warmth
but all i find is the empty coldness
of the much feared darkness
who are you?

—Elliot



—W.J. Hodgson

AGING PREPPIE

Going to college for the first time at age forty is similar to placing a manual typewriter in a room with Apple computers—functional, but obsolete.

Forty years of life experiences and motherhood do not prepare you for college. While hindsight is wonderful, a good memory bank is better. Unfortunately, my memory bank contained very little information useful to a freshman.

Feeling a bit obsolete I decided that a refresher course in English was a good start. There were twelve students in the class. Eleven foreign students were there to master the English language while I was there to remember it. I soon discovered that twenty years of motherhood results in severe brain damage. After all, there had to be some explanation as to why my memory no longer contained words such as conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases. Motherhood just doesn't keep you current on compound and complex sentences.

In my public address course, every student was asked to give a five minute speech on a specific product or service. The speeches varied from Laser printers to police firearms, financial spread sheets to surgical instruments. My speech was on corn starch for diaper rash.

Humanities didn't prove to be much better for my ego. All the students were asked to recite a quotation from a famous author such as Shakespeare, Longfellow or Hemingway. Brain damage had set in again. The only thing I could remember was a quote from the Golden Books about the Little Train That Could: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

My first written essay assignment was to write an autobiography in less than 300 words. To most of the students, this was

a relatively easy assignment, but I had lived twice as long as most of them. Consequently, I had to eliminate fifteen years from my life to meet the requirements. More embarrassing was the fact that one-third of the students were classmates with my children. Of course, my children were not totally enthused by this fact; after all, parents do have a way of embarrassing their children, if only by their mere presence.

The home front shows no compassion to the mother/student image, either. Cartoons are placed on the refrigerator that say, "Mom, I don't care if you are in college, you can't try out for the cheerleading squad." Oh, yes, the college notices are really cute, also: To the parents of.... The kids plot and remind you of every phrase used during their school days, such as "Don't forget you have homework, or it's a school night. Don't stay out too late."

Colleges are really not set up for the adult student. The first assignment in psychology class was to write one paragraph on long-term objectives, goals, or career paths. At forty, you don't set any real long-term goals. My goal was simple: that was to receive an Associates Degree before I received my first Social Security check.

Mothers on campus are social outcasts. There is a lot of discrimination toward us. Not once in the five years I've attended college have I ever been invited to a beer bust, frat party, 50's dance, and no hunk has ever asked me to study with him. This is unjust; after all, I'm probably the only legal-aged drinker in college; I still have the original 50's outfits, and I could probably teach a good-looking hunk a thing or two.

The bags under my eyes did not come from old age alone; there are long hours of studying and trying to remember things from the past. All that stuffing gets depressing at times. Especially when you've worked so hard preparing for a test, and at the very moment the test begins, senility sets in.

But, change is good and obsolete information is beginning to be replaced. Who says Shakespeare can't replace diaper rash remedies, and that history can't replace Dr. Spock.

I've learned many literary quotes in college, but the one I recall most often is "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can...."

—Charlotte Hill

SUNSUALITY

Cats napping in a heap,
warmed to a silky glow by the south-window heat
of a late
winter, early afternoon, Sunday sun.

Languid stretches, elegant yawns punctuate their slumber,
scattering dust-filled rays of light into the far corners
of the room.

—Cecelia K. Yoder



—Stephen Hayden

CRACKED BACK

"If you step on a crack,
You'll break your Mother's back.

If you step on a crack,
You'll break your Mother's back."

The little girl skips along
the sidewalk singing her song,
neatly skipping over the cracks.

"If you step on a crack,
You'll break your Mother's b....."

(But wait! If her back is only broke a little
she'll have to stay at home with me.)
The little girl neatly starts to land on every crack.

"If you step on a crack,
You'll break your Mother's back.

If it's only broke a little
You'll have to stay at home
And me and Daddy won't have
to be alone to do the things
he does to me...when you're gone."

Sings the little girl softly
as she walks along the sidewalk
in front of the church
killing time;
before she goes home alone....

Except for Daddy's there.

—Kathy Householder

FEARFUL NIGHT

Shadows of
a man on the wall.
A face—
jagged nosed,
pinpoint jawed—
A jackal laugh of nightmares past.

Night of
arms pounding at the windows—
Screaming threats
of multiple deaths—
Like white blazes of anger.

God, only, holds the child dear
who must abide in rooms of fear.
God, only, knows this mother's heart
which, too, endures endless nights so dark.
"It's only light blocked on the walls,
only rain which on the window falls."

She trembles, cries, doesn't understand...
Neither do I. We make amends.
We huddle together, turn on the lights.
Perhaps we'll make it through the night.

—Suzanne L. Moore

MEMORIES

Fragments
of memories
of things out of touch,
Trying
not to think
of them too much.
Paining
when thought of
and so full of sorrow.
Happenings
today are
memories, tomorrow.

—Kristen Hefley



—R.L. "Pete" James

DUE PROCESS

Snow fell deep and silent across the wintered grey landscape, while a gusty north wind piled up whirling dervishes of crystalline snow, giving the ground an appearance of a creamy frosted cupcake. There seemed to be no visible signs of life. And that was just the way Amy felt inside—no visible signs of life.

Ever since Sam walked out three months ago, her life had become a series of days filled with the necessary rituals of work and evenings filled living in the past, among the skeletons of a love affair grown cold.

Haunting photographs, obsolete symphony programs and delapidated ticket stubs served only to remind her of happier days—days filled with memories of Sam, the gaiting way he walked, the honey-smooth sound of his voice whispering her name.

Why did he go? Why? This unanswered question raked over and over in her mind. "Get on with life!" well-meaning friends encouraged. Indeed! What did they know of the intense pain she felt? How could anyone know?

Three months. Three months and it still hurt like hell every time her thoughts went to Sam.

Sitting cross-legged on the mauve-cushioned window box seat, she peered out the window. Becoming distracted, she pondered winters gone by, absentmindedly sipping stale coffee from a smooth porcelain cup. Just as surely as there came winter when life becomes obscured as the landscape in a January snow, spring followed, bursting forth in riotous colors of newness, cleansing the grey-pallored bones that the wintry death left behind. And from these fragments of winter came the glorious

bloom of spring.

Suddenly she realized, it was all right to sorrow. Death must have its due process in grief or forever be rendered all-powerful over life. There was nothing shameful in mourning the death of a passing love. She grieved the love she gave so willingly. The love he took so freely. Then he departed.

There should be no regret in love, for its purpose is to bear witness of the life within.

She arose, drinking the last bitter dregs from the cup. Spring will come again. And with it, the renewed promise that life will conquer the death of a love and bloom again.

—Gail Goodenough

WHEN THE SUN COMES

When the sun comes and the moon goes,
so the rain forms.

Is it the end of talking with the rose?

Yes! That's what it shows.

And you know why this invisible wind blows?

Just to kill me and scatter the rose,
the rose which carries all my hopes.

Before, I didn't know
how a piece of steel bows.

—Mohammad 1987

REACHING OUT, WITHIN

Reaching out for the love I needed to find,
Reaching past you, so far behind,
Going beyond, passing you by,
getting what I wanted just for myself,
Not touching or knowing the things that were real.

Being hurt so many times, drawing back,
Within myself, it hurts, the pain is strong.
Beginning to feel that reality is what I lack,
Knowing all the time that you were there,
but thinking you didn't belong.

Always alone, within myself, when you were right there,
Me, not knowing what was passing through my life.
Yet, through it all you stayed and still cared,
You, longing also for the love I was looking for within,
A love we could have shared.

Would you stay just a while more?
It's easy to touch and love you now,
Now that I know what I'm really looking for.
And won't you stay,
Because only you can teach me love's way.

—Della Waldon Mawyer



—R.L. "Pete" James

"EVEN A HERO..."

"What is it. Academician?"

"Nothing, Yuri. Nothing important"

"If it is troubling you, sir, it is important. Would you like to talk about it? If you cannot trust your own driver, who can you trust?" Yuri's eyes shot to the rear-view mirror. The Chairman did not react, but only stared thoughtfully out the window at the passing wheat fields of the upper Ukraine. Yuri resumed breathing.

"I went to see her again."

Yuri suppressed a grin, then congratulated himself on not always being unwise. "Must have been dire, judging from your mood."

"As a matter of fact, it was." Yuri watched as the calm eyes found him in the mirror. Such an unassuming, inconspicuous man, the Chairman, running a hand absently over his near-bald head and its obvious birthmark. "She predicted my death."

Yuri's foot slipped off the gas. He regained his composure, fighting an urge to test the brakes. "Did she happen to say how or when?"

"Not soon, but when it came, I would die with many, many others."

"She's a meddling old fool, as I've always said, Academician." He shuddered despite himself. He knew he shouldn't have had that last glass of vodka. He hated trains, and Siberia was not at the top of his vacation list. "Blind people can't see anything, including the future."

"It was my prophecy, though, Yuri, my dream. Three times now. I was in that little village on the Black Sea we went through last month. What was it? Propotskiev? A peasant fisherman's wife bore a burning child, and when I bent to see this wonder, it exploded in my face."

"She was trying to shake you. Give her no mind."

"She did not wish to tell me, but I forced her. Of course, I'll give it no mind."

"Good. Nice weather, for this time of year."

"I was thinking, Yuri. I believe I'll honor all those peasants in Propotskiev, in recompense for my unjust dream."

"Oh, good idea, sir." Uh, oh.

"I think I'll have all their children from the past few years and the next year moved to a special camp, a New Soviet Man favored project, where they will be raised with great purpose and under special—care."

"Oh, fine idea, sir." Devil.

"These are troubled times, though, Yuri. I am concerned about the possibility of accidents in transit or over the years."

"Troubled times indeed, sir." Cold, heartless bastard, Yuri thought, resisting the urge to wince and shake his head. He glanced in the mirror again. Probably trims his horns and tucks his tail into his boxer shorts. Fancies himself conquering the new-world-sized Gaul with his clever cruelties.

"What will we do, Misha?"

"Lose our baby, Ana. Lose our child. We cannot fight them."

It was too much to bear. After all the trouble, to lose little Gregory? It was bad enough being stuck with hairy, rough-handed Misha the shrimper, and only because no one would believe her. She knew she shouldn't have gone to that May Day dance-fest with him. It gave her parents an easy explanation. If their tale were true, however, the child would only have been six months in carrying, and he was such a fine, healthy boy, quiet and gentle and strong already, after just a few weeks. How could she lose him now?

She would not see him taken. It was as simple as that. Her child they would not have. Few yet knew he was born. He was not even due yet. Out in the still-dark street, however, the soldiers and their KGB supervisors searched.

Slipping out the back with the blanket-wrapped child, she entered the work shed and began rummaging about. It did not take her long to find Misha's secret cache of vodka. Dumping the bottles out, she sealed the basket's bottom with tar, lined it with the blanket, and laid the child inside. She closed it and crept out.

Morning found her at the water's edge.

"What are you doing there?"

She started and turned to find a young KGB officer.
"Nothing, sir, nothing at all."

"Do you have any children?"

"I had a son, but he is gone."

"Ah, they already reached you then. He will be well-cared-for, I assure you."

She only nodded sadly, clutching her rosary where he could not see it, and watching a speck of flotsam bobbing south along the shore.

"Have you seen Tzu"

"No, Don. Wait. I think she's back along the dock, past where the workers were feeding her those fish bits."

"Oh, no. I hope you're going to clean the stateroom carpet this time."

"Yes, dear. I don't mind. It lets me pretend I'm cleaning after my own child."

"I'm sorry, Robin. I'll go get her."

"What's that you got there, girl? Found someone's lost lunch, eh? Whoa. The catch is a bit—Good Lord. He looks half-starved. Been in here a long time. Better get some help. He probably belongs —"

"To us, Don. To us."

"Huh?" He spun about to find Robin. She had that look on her face, the one that floods, earthquakes, and wild horses could not drag off. He would only have one shot, so he went straight to his heaviest guns: logic and common sense.

"Oh, come on, honey. Bribing the purser about Tzu was one thing, but a baby? You've tried to smuggle some crazy things

through customs, but this is going too far." The look didn't even budge.

"What use is money if you can't arrange one little passport, Don? I don't ask for much, do I?" She already had the little fellow in her arms.

The ultimate defense. He was sunk. "Okay. Get on board. We sail in an hour, don't we? You, too, Tzu. I'll be there."

"You're crazy, son."

"Maybe so, but I've come this far and accomplished this much. I'm not quitting now."

"You know you'll be dead in a day."

"Maybe. Okay, probably, but maybe not. I've spent too long, studied too long, worked too hard. The electronics are ready, and so am I. When the illustrious old geezer Chairman goes on the air this evening, he'll be talking to empty air, and three-hundred-million pairs of ears will be picking up a message of a different sort, for a good twenty minutes or more. Dad, they've just been waiting for a spark. Don't say it. I know I don't owe these people anything. It's just that I feel—I don't know for sure. I think about all those people out there, and how they don't even know much of what I take for granted, how they've been kept ignorant of the truth and been handled unjustly all their lives, without the freedoms I've had from birth. Maybe it's foolish, but somehow I feel compelled to do something. It's almost like—destiny, or something. Yeh, it sounds absurd. It's just—Oh, I don't know. Maybe it is absurd. Maybe you're right. Maybe there's no point in risking my neck. I keep wondering 'why me?'"

"Not from birth, my—son."

"Huh?"

"Come out to the car a second. There's something I have to show you."

"What?"

"Oh, just an old basket, but it's kind of important."

—W. J. Hodgson



—R.L. "Pete" James

HAIKU

Glistening firefly,
Diamond on my finger small,
You brightened childhood.

—Mary Maggi

DAY LILY

Open, particles of fire,
each a pale reminder of the power of the whole.
Collaborate, visualize light, and shun lightlessness
from an elemental consciousness,
in a timeless effort that requires only a memory of a belief
in the success of the action.
Then,
from a belief as ancient and automatic as the first,
stop action and close color,
for the night.

—Karen Chapman

FOG

Momma didn't want to go in the first place. She'd walked around the bed while I was packing, grabbing things out of the old leather case, folding and unfolding everything I'd done, fussing and fretting till I thought I was going to scream.

"No good's gonna come outa this. I just know it. Ain't right, it just ain't right," she kept muttering like actors in a play do when they want the audience to think they aren't supposed to hear.

It's not that Momma was a homebody. She liked her trips almost as much as she liked the gladiolas on the west side of the house.

I kept my mouth shut about as long as I could, then I just stopped and asked her to her face why she didn't stay home if it was going to be such a bother. She turned sharp and gave me one of those looks that makes a body all sweaty and cold. I turned back to my packing and didn't ask her no more.

Course I knew why she was going. Anybody who ever met Aunt Effie knew why she was going. It was Aunt Effie's birthday and not Momma nor any of her kin was allowed to miss it. Effie was the one with all the money. And I guess they all expected to get some of it someday. But I always believed it was because if you didn't go, Effie would telephone and whine about you not being there. Now if there's one thing Effie's well known for, it's the way she can whine. That woman has a voice that could melt chalk. I always thought I was the lucky one, cause since I came of age and still weren't married, I didn't have to go on these trips to Effie's no more. Then maybe I had to think that ways just to keep from achin' inside when they'd talk about me that way.

Now when Poppa was alive, he'd call me his little princess. He'd laugh and say to watch out or some prince would gallop up

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Now when Poppa was alive, he'd call me his little princess. He'd laugh and say to watch out or some prince would gallop up

and carry me off like in the fairy stories. Once it looked like I'd never get hitched, Momma started saying it looked like my prince got lost. She didn't mean to be hurtful, I guess. She was just shamed that the family old maid was her only daughter. Not that she wanted me to get married and leave her....

"It just aint't right.

"She'd started again. When I dared look up, she was standing next to the window with the curtains pulled back just a bit so she could see outside.

"It just ain't natural."

"What ain't, Momma?" I asked.

"That fog. It just ain't natural. It's what my granny used to call a witchin' fog. No good never come to nobody when a fog like that lay on the earth."

I joined her by the window and pulled the curtain back wide.

"Pete's sake, child! What are you thinking of?" she gasped as she grabbed the curtain away with her withered, bony little hand and pulled it shut tight.

"It's just a fog, Momma."

"It ain't the fog as much as what may be in it," her voice sounded like a tea kettle about to boil.

The train to Pottsville and Aunt Effie's was set to leave the station at 11:55 p.m. More than likely it would be midnight, but the old goat who sold the tickets and swept the floor wouldn't say anything happened at midnight.

We reached the platform in plenty of time. The yellow street lamp made the wisps of fog climbing it look more like campfire smoke than fog. I began to understand what Momma had meant about the stuff. It weren't much like anything I'd ever seen before. There on the platform it was clear as day 'cept for the few wispy white fingers that climbed the lamp posts and slithered across the rails in front of us. But at the edges of the depot it stood solid, like walls painted white. Above us, it blocked out the stars and what moon there was. It was almost like we was sitting in a room cut out of a cloud, waiting for some ghost train to come. Sure was easy to see Momma was spooked by it. She kept fidgeting with her pocketbook, making sure her ticket was there at least four times. Then she started in on me.

"Now you behave yourself while I'm away, ya hear?"

"Yes, Momma."

"Don't go gallivantin' off with none of those no goods you know from church. Church ain't a social hall, it's for learning the fear of God. You just remember that!"

"Yes, Momma."

"I don't know what this generation is coming to. What with all the...."

I just kept saying "Yes, Momma," again and again. I'd heard it all before, the part about loose women and bad morals. I was sure hoping the train would hurry and get there when I looked up and saw him, standing there like he'd found a door in the fog and slipped in uninvited.

In all my days I never saw a man like that. The closer he came, the faster my heart beat. He was tall, must've been about six foot three, and he was built strong. He was dressed all in

black—black shirt, black pants, black boots—and he had a black leather jacket tossed over one shoulder. His hair was white blond, cut short and wispy like fingers of fog carressing his head. But his eyes were what set him apart from most men. They were like water in the brook, cold and clear blue—so clear you could almost see his soul.

I looked over at Momma, she was still babbling about troubles in the wicked world. He was getting closer. She must not of seen him. Leastwise, she paid him no mind. He asked could he sit down. His voice was like butter melting over hot cakes and it made my toes tingle.

Momma didn't notice him sit next to me. She'd a had a fit if she'd known it. He was close, so close I could smell that aroma only men got, that clean earthy smell I'd only known once before when Jimmy Matlock tried to kiss me after church one Sunday evening. Momma caught him and thrashed us both. That was 10 years back, but I still remembered that smell.

His arm brushed my leg and made me shiver.

"This fog makes the night seem colder," I said. He smiled, Momma agreed. I looked into his eyes and was lost.

Momma started poking me with her bony old elbow, but I paid her no mind till I thought I heard Aunt Effie's screechy voice. It was Momma's train, sounding the whistle. I jumped up to help Momma with her suitcase. She grabbed my arm and pulled me close.

"You mind what I say, girl, or God will strike you dead! You leave here and go home and bolt the doors. This here's a witchin' fog and no Christian lady need be out in it."

The train's light came poking through the fog as the station

clock struck twelve. I turned to the bench where the man had been and he was gone, quiet as he'd come, into the fog.

The train approached with its front light swinging back and forth like the ticker on a grandfather's clock. The air was filled with diesel smell. The conductor helped Momma on board and I handed up her case.

"You mark my words, young lady. You mark my words!" she shouted as the train pulled out, hissing and spewing steam.

"Yes, Momma," I called back.

I don't know where he'd been, but as the caboose slipped into the fog, he was there beside me again, smiling and brushing a stray strand of hair from my face. He looked into my eyes and kissed me, soft, on the lips.

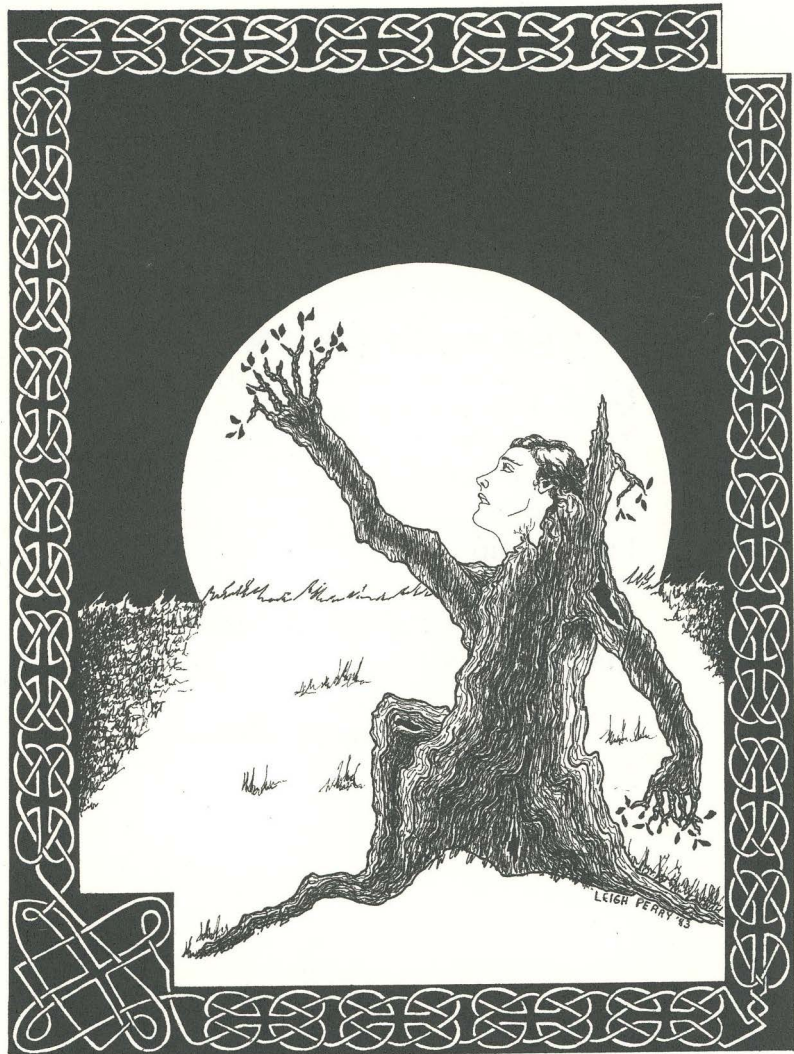
"I've come to set you free," was all he said.

—D. Shell

THE FIRST MOVE

I walk in,
You walk in.
You don't speak
so I won't.
I was afraid,
You were, too.
So who was supposed to make
the first move?

—Tonya Olvera



—Leigh Perry

WHEN THE BUFFALO RETURN

Sgt. O'Rourke took a fortifying sip of hot coffee from the large, ugly ceramic cup one of his grandchildren had presented him after summer camp and peered over his glasses as the old Indian, who had been standing just inside the precinct station's door, began walking toward his desk.

Some cop's instinct had told O'Rourke the old man was going to be some kind of trouble as soon as he noticed him standing there. The desk sergeant realized he hadn't actually seen him walk in. He usually kept a close eye on the front door. There was no telling who might wander in off the Manhattan streets. It seemed like the doorway had been empty one instant and the next instant when he glanced up, the Indian was just there. But the appearance didn't seem sudden or startling; it was kind of like a tree or a boulder that had always been there, but he'd never noticed it before. O'Rourke found it strange that the Indian's presence conjured up images of trees and rocks in the middle of New York City, but that image seemed to pool around him and follow him with each step across the station lobby.

The Indian's step was strangely light in spite of his age and O'Rourke figured the step could easily carry the old man for miles. He found himself wondering how far the fellow had come. As the Indian walked closer, he seemed to age more and more. Each line in his face blended into more lines until the face became a brown miniature vista of valleys and ridges like O'Rourke had always imagined the desert looked. By the time he reached the desk, the Indian looked absolutely ancient. His face was framed with long, silver hair — so bright it might have been woven from the same silver as the ornament hanging around his neck on a leather thong. He was dressed simply in jeans, worn cowboy boots and a faded plaid work shirt.

"What can I do for you, Chief?" O'Rourke asked, reaching

again for the ugly cup and the caffeine infusion that would help him deal with whatever he was going to have to deal with.

The Indian reached into his pocket and pulled out some faded, wrinkled bills and smoothed a twenty and four ones onto the desktop.

"I've come to give you a refund," he said.

The cup stopped, poised at the sergeant's lips as he tried to remember buying anything that cost \$24 or returning it.

"I don't understand, Chief. Do you mean a refund for me personally or for an officer here?"

For the white man. For this island. We weren't supposed to sell it to you."

It all became suddenly clear to O'Rourke. A big, neon sign with the word "Looney" started flashing inside his mind.

"Okay, I get it now, Chief. You mean the \$24 worth of beads the settlers gave the Indians for Manhattan Island, right?"

"I didn't want you to say we'd cheated you. Some people came to me and had a thing they called a treaty that said we were only supposed to sell to them. I've made a better deal with them and all of you are going to have to leave so they can bring the forests and the buffalo and the prairie back like they want it."

The sergeant was always amazed at how sure lunatics could be about their delusions. There was no hint of doubt in the old man's soft voice and matter-of-fact delivery. His sharp, dark eyes betrayed no qualms about his tale.

"You sold Manhattan Island to someone else and you're giv-

ing us a refund. Have I got it right?" O'Rourke asked, trying not to let the corners of his mouth curl up into the grin they wanted to form.

"No. I sold them the whole country," the old man stated firmly. "They said I could because they talked to our people and made the treaty a long time before the white man came."

"Other people, huh?" O'Rourke said, massaging his temples where a headache seemed to be in danger of starting as he thought about the paperwork mental cases generated.

"Little people. About this tall," the Indian replied, holding a weathered hand palm-down about three feet above the ground. "They started coming to see me a few months after my son hung himself on the reservation in Arizona."

The sign in O'Rourke's mind started flashing "Poor Looney" as he looked up into the guileless, steady brown eyes.

"I'm sorry about your son. Do you have any relatives here, Mr. ah...?"

"Sam Twoeagles. I came here alone."

"Mr. Twoeagles, I'm afraid we're not going to be able to let you wander around New York alone. We're going to take you to nice place where..."

O'Rourke's spiel was interrupted by a shout of "Grandpa!" as a skinny Indian boy of about 10 trotted up beside the old man.

"I thought you said you were alone, Chief," O'Rourke said.

"My mom and I've been chasing him since he left Arizona," the boy explained. "He hasn't done anything, has he? We'll take

him home."

The boy was dragging the old man by the hand across the lobby by the time O'Rourke made it out from behind his desk, and the boy had propelled the old man out the door by the time O'Rourke caught up and grabbed the boy's arm.

"Wait a minute." O'Rourke thrust the old man's wadded bills at the boy. "Here's some money your grandpa said he came here to give us. You better take it back for him."

The boy started to reach for the money, then drew his hand back.

"I better not. If he came all this way, I better leave it alone or his spirits might get mad. He's a medicine man," the boy said as he fled out the door to join his grandfather. O'Rourke felt the headache begin in earnest as he walked back to his desk to dig out a property envelope for the money. As he filled it out so it could be logged as found property, he smiled and jotted on the envelope, "Received from the Indians, \$24 refund for Manhattan Island. And they're welcome to the whole country if they want it."

He laughed and summoned a clerk to book the envelope in the property room.

Sam Twoeagles stood on the stationhouse steps, looking out over the city, imagining the land without buildings and pretending the tops of cars scooting across a big bridge in the distance were the humps of stampeding buffalo. He felt a small, young hand clasp his own.

"You didn't take the money back," he stated rather than asked.

"We have to go home, Grandpa," the boy said, tugging him toward a beat-up old station wagon with Arizona plates.

"Yes. We have to leave before they come to tear the cities down and bring back the buffalo. When we get home, I'll teach you to ride a horse. You'll have to know how when there are no more cars," the old man said.

The boy cast his eyes upwards and sighed as he opened the wagon's creaky, rusted door for the old man.

Miles above the sparkling mosaic of New York City, a small creature called Zytrox spoke into a large communication console built into the control room of a spaceship whose dimensions could be measured in miles.

"Negotiations have been concluded with the most direct descendant of the party originally contacted, and restoration of the surface is scheduled to start with demolition of cities and removal of the light-skinned population."

The screen bleeped out a question sent from light years distant and Zytrox replied.

"They do not have the technological ability to oppose us. And besides, it's all legal. We have a treaty."

—Paul Shell