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**ABSOLUTE**

**Spring 1988**

# *Sweeping Whispers*

**T**HE SWEEPING WHISPER OF A BROOM  
IN THE SILENT EMPTY ROOM.  
HISS OF DUST, BRUSHED IN A PILE  
REVEALS BRIGHTLY PATTERNED TILE.  
RIPPING CRINKLE OF PAPER'S DIN  
AS IT CASCADES INTO A BIN.  
THE LAPPING OF MOPS AGAINST THE WALLS  
CRESTING DOWN THE VOIDED HALLS.  
RIFLING SWITCHES OF OVERHEAD LIGHTS  
AS THEY MARCH THRU THE NIGHT.  
FADING THUNDER OF OUR TREAD  
TUMBLING PASS OUR HEAD.  
THESE ARE THE SOUNDS THAT FILL OUR NIGHT  
AS WE TOIL TOWARDS DAYLIGHT.



*MS McKinley*

# **Absolute**

## **Spring 1988**

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## Correction

On page 40 of the Spring '87 ABSOLUTE is a poem entitled "Parts of Speech" attributed to Andrea Lamkin. The same poem appears verbatim on page 494 of The Holt Guide to English, Third edition (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) under the title "Permanently" by Kenneth Koch. Page 535 of the Holt Guide acknowledges the poem as "from Thank You and Other Poems by Kenneth Koch. Reprinted by permission of Grove Press. Copyright 1962 by Kenneth Koch." The editors and faculty advisor of ABSOLUTE sincerely regret our error. Our failure to detect it prior to our publication was purely unintentional.



# THE ARTIST AS A HOSPITAL GOWN

The waiting room is darkest  
where your hospital gown hangs  
off you like a thorazine burn.

Morphine thins your limbs  
to fit the robe. You grip the linen  
into separate congregations  
of skin and sweat.

Your hair falls straight.  
Your arms and legs are made  
of bread, frying up black fin skirts  
and cut pieces of sack cloth that  
sleep over your shoulders.

Your hands hold each other  
up. Your yen-poxed eyes begin  
to rise. It is your wish  
to become black cotton and spanish lace,  
but you sit slack as an old  
woman who is unaware that her slip  
slits up from under her hem.

To do anything but let your muscles be  
pinned and needled to sleep  
would still your lips and mine  
your tongue like anthracite.

You mouth in pills one  
after the other as if a holy man  
were teaching you to run  
away from your own feet or  
make your teeth bite each other.

The edge of the east  
wall you slump under  
bends to mother your ribcage,  
itches your heart to slow its moan,  
and paints injection spots  
on your black back.

—Beth Ruble  
Heritage Hall

# THE OPENING OF THE MUSEUM

No one is holding hands  
in the museum today.  
Bodies are a stiff  
exhibit weaving solitary  
circuits through each hallway.

Pre-Raphaelite maidens  
pass and pass. Their hair  
is identical and reminiscent  
of your mother's, young, and taken  
from a black and white photograph.

Bauhaus flowers are hiding  
the chesty brunette who used  
to work the counter at the corner  
drugstore. You could never look  
directly into the money  
green glare of her eyes.

Impressionable lover,  
the keeper of your virginity  
sits encased in glass. She is a crow  
come alive in your throat, cradled  
out of sixteenth century jade,  
and taking a backseat  
to other charms of Egypt.

What are these dead things,  
unable even to be slipped  
into the fist? Grandmotherly,  
opaque, and rural  
as death, this implacable gathering  
of objects is a headache,  
a battering of the senses,  
a summer cold.

These are your muscles,  
bones, and blood.  
They demand to be rescued  
with rock, stick, or hammer  
and swept up in the dancing  
of shattered glass, as if  
being in different  
pieces might end their lives.

—Beth Ruble  
Heritage Hall

# ANTHILL/STORM

I am harmony and chaos.  
I wonder about the silence of the crowd, how they enter  
in such a noiseless procession.  
I hear the destruction and the creation.  
I want to be tested by an immovable object  
or an irresistible force.  
I am harmony and chaos.

I pretend to be harmless, but that's just a front,  
what I want you to believe.  
I feel powerful, and sometimes uncontrollable.  
I touch life.  
I worry about the silence, it can be dangerous  
at times.  
I am harmony and chaos.

I understand the necessity of the life cycle,  
in order for one to live, another must give life.  
I say all things are parts of a whole.  
I dream of picnics, with lots of people and food.  
I try to be quick and to the point about my business.  
I hope that people understand why I do and say these  
things,  
how I think, how I feel.  
I am harmony and chaos.

—Deidre Wilkinson  
John Marshall High School



# THE ROSE

The rose,  
A sign of birth  
With every tiny bud.

The rose,  
A sign of love  
As it grows more beautiful  
With each passing day.

The rose,  
A sign of death  
As it withers away.

—Jerri Belew  
Newcastle High School

## DEAR DIARY

November 19, 1963

Dear Diary,

Well, my social life is getting ready to be over. Today I failed an Algebra II test! See, I stayed up so late last night that by the time the test came, I could hardly keep my eyes open. When I bring my test home for Mom and Dad to sign, they will probably ground me for a month. It's probably just as well, though.

After school, Wally and I went to Cappy's for a coke. We had a big fight over where to sit. I wanted to sit in a booth, and he wanted to sit at a table. Finally, I told him to sit wherever he wanted to because I was leaving. It seems all we do is fight anymore.

I think I hear Mom calling, so I guess I'll stop writing. Good-night!

*Pam*

November 20, 1963

Dear Diary,

I have to write the stupidest assignment for my creative writing class. We are supposed to pretend that we are teenagers during the time that our parents were. Gee, I don't know anything about the 1940's. It's not due until next week, though, so I have a few days to think about it.

Wally wasn't at school today. At least I didn't have to face an argument with him for a change. I think we might both be happier if we were to see other people. I just get so confused sometimes!

Mom bought me a new pair of black penny loafers today. I think they will go great with my long wool skirt and my pink cashmere sweater.

Well, good-night!

*Pam*

November 21, 1963

Dear Diary,

Today has been awful! At lunch, Wally and I had a huge fight in front of everybody (about the other day), then, I broke up with him.

In addition to that, I brought my test home for Mom and Dad to sign, and they grounded me for three weeks. Of course, now that I don't have a boyfriend, where would I go anyway?

Tomorrow, John F. Kennedy is going to be in Dallas. There is going to be a parade for him after his plane arrives.

Oh, I forgot to mention that in addition to being grounded, I have to be in bed by 9:00! So, I guess this is good-night.

*Pam*

November 22, 1963

Dear Diary,

Today John F. Kennedy was shot while riding through downtown Dallas. The whole country is in mourning. At 1:30 we had an assembly in the school gym. Everyone is in shock. I feel so sorry for Mrs. Kennedy. She has no husband, and her children have no father. On the television tonight they showed pictures of Lyndon Johnson being sworn in as the new President while on the plane carrying Kennedy's body to Washington for burial.

I'll quit writing here, Diary, because I am so tired. This day seems to have lasted a week. Good-night.

*Pam*

December 3, 1963

Dear Diary,

Sorry it's been so long since I have written in you. Time has seemed to be in suspended animation. Wally and I are back together! Yesterday morning I got ready to leave and looked out the window. There in the driveway was, you guessed it, Wally. We talked for awhile and we both realized how miserable we were. So, once again, he and I are "we." My life is (almost) perfect. I still have to be in bed by 9:00! Good-night!

*Pam*

—Christi Jarvis  
Newcastle High School

# STANDING STILL IN TIME

Standing still in time,  
the world just slipping by,  
These times are so hard for me,  
and I really don't know why.

You would think growing up  
would be so easy,  
but it's as horrifying as death.

So please bear with me as I  
travel down the road of life,  
I really need someone.

Now that you know my final strife,  
Please help me with the thing called  
LIFE.....

—Carol A. Mullikin  
Newcastle High School

# WAR AND A CLOCK

Black blasts squeal the hours  
before the beating war  
begins its ashing;  
hometown pictures tucked  
in a torn boot cuff.

A Mickey Mouse watch points  
big hand on nine  
little hand on twelve,  
and days for leave  
of absence are marked  
in pocket calendars.

The sky sags  
over a clay cool soldier  
who keeps time  
to "The Lone Ranger" theme  
with his thumbs pressed  
against his rough thigh--  
and there are boys  
in iron hats screaming  
cowboys and Indians,  
and cloth dragged  
over hived hearts.

The night hangs  
stale and ticking  
as eyes strain  
the walls and wounds  
of hometown girls  
whose white cotton burns  
over their shoulders.

—Jaylynn Bailey  
John Marshall High School



## WILD AND WOOLLY MEDICINE

Winter always nipped at the Raider brothers' spirits. Things were too humdrum on the vast Rolling R Ranch. Elaborate shindigs for the rich and famous, and wearing saddle sores on tenderfeet, tended to be warm weather preoccupations. The wives and children were away on their annual visits with relatives and to luxuriate in hot spring baths. They were itching for some hair-raising action when Dr. Jacob Robinson appeared on the scene.

"I've got a live one for ya'," crackled Capt. Henderson's voice over the newfangled invention—the telephone.

Capt. Henderson, a mule-and-horse-trading friend from Fort Sill, was referring to a portly doctor from New York City, who had read too many dime novels. Dr. Robinson was rearing to come West and catch the last glimpses of blood-thirsty Indians terrorizing settlers and fighting tough-as-leather cowboys. When Capt. Henderson heard his commander had been contacted by Dr. Robinson, he guaranteed the Raider brothers would not disappoint him.

In their late 30s, Turner Ashby "Ash" Raider and Jeb Stuart Raider, both named after Civil War cavalry commanders, were the sons of a plucky Confederate colonel, Zackary Taylor Raider. Colonel "Zack" left his devastated Kentucky bluegrass plantation and lassoed a large chunk of Oklahoma prairie in 1870. He fought storms, stampedes, federal troops, settlers, and Indians to build up a 100,000 acre kingdom. Friend and foe alike were shocked when the hardy 62-year-old patriarch succumbed to a little spider bite in 1900.

The Raider brothers carried on their heritage with quite a flair. Ash Raider, the oldest brother, was tall and lanky. His brown eyes twinkled over a streaked bushy walrus mustache. He was a true Southern gentleman. "Come on in, you all" was his standard greeting. And his favorite farewell was "come back and stay all day" even if visitors had slept in one of the fifteen guest bedrooms in the thirty-room Southern colonial mansion. It usually took Ash Raider several days to show folks his agricultural creations which increased earnings for the already thriving ranch.

Jeb Raider was no slouch when it came to ranch enterprise. He was true rough bark off the old family oak tree. He had his daddy's stout neck, a bellowing voice, and a fierce temper. He also had the

ingrained talent for raising fine stock and a nose for crafty horse and mule trading.

Both the Raider boys loved a practical joke and this one came up and slapped them in the face.

"Get out the old stagecoach, boys, and arm yourselves with your biggest pistols," roared Jeb to his favorite henchmen. "We gonna' pick up a doctor and have some fun." They even shot some arrows into the side of the coach for effect.

Escorted by Capt. Henderson, Dr. Robinson gingerly stepped off the train at the Guthrie depot. Pinched over rosy-red apple cheeks, his tiny pork eyes darted around the station. He stammered, "How-how's the Indian situation now?"

"Touchy—real touchy," growled Jeb Raider with his best solemn face. "Why, they nigh burnt out every homesteader north of here."

Capt. Henderson looked a bit forlorn to have to reboard the train, but he managed a grin when Dr. Robinson asked, "Do you suppose we'll see any savages along the way?"

No sooner had the short, bowler-hatted man nodded affirmation in quick, jerky motions than the ranch hands literally picked him up and poked him into the dark, musty stagecoach. Jeb eased in behind him with frontier stride. He made the good doctor feel right at home. He handed him a rifle loaded with blanks. He placed a buffalo robe on his lap. Then Jeb prodded him with fiery moonshine to accompany spine-chilling accounts of recent Indian raids. The driver added spice to the stories with a rough ride over every rock and gully back to the ranch located right smack dab in the middle of Indian territory.

Dinner was uneventful. But afterwards, the Raider brothers discovered something near to a catastrophe. The cellar was low on whiskey and they might be in for a seige. Never know when they might need it to sterilize some wounds or for frostbite. This called for an emergency run to the nearest town, Perry, some twenty miles away.

"Doctor, we can't leave ya' here alone. Most of the cowboys are out riding fence and the Chey' and Ki' Indians tend to roam just lookin' for mischief," said Ash.

They rode to town in a buckboard packed like an arsenal, cowboys sentried around them. The only signs of life were scattered herds of cattle munching on sparse grass in the stingy afternoon sunshine.



"By God, I can't believe you boys got through," cried Clem Campbell, who had been alerted to the ruse by a swift phone call from Ash. Campbell was the owner of "The Best Yet" Saloon. The "saloon" part was silent for operation in Indian Territory. Most of the warped tables were vacant. The rickety chairs were parked around a pot-bellied stove in a corner of the tin-plated interior. A graffiti-notched oak bar shouldered a jar of pickled eggs and another jar that contained a huge coiled preserved rattlesnake. "The Best Yet" catered to a local mixture of cowboys, farmers, and town gents who congregated to wet their whistles and catch up on the latest gossip. Everyone within shouting distance wanted to jump in with both feet on the Raiders' escapade. Patrons soon packed the bar. Each contributed a version of the Indian uprising while Dr. Robinson soaked it all up with full-fisted slugs of whiskey.

"Why did you boys even try to come to town?" asked Doc Benson, the local sawbones.

Ash said, "It was plumb necessary. We're running low on that good medicine Clem keeps in his back room."

Doc Benson spit and missed the tobacco-mottled spittoon, then snarled, "Hell, it's going to take a lot more than medicine to pacify them redskins."

"You got that right," said Clem. "Ol Doc's been patchin' up those nesters left and right. You know, the ones camped over there by Desparado Creek." Clem shifted a chewed-up stogey to the other side of his bulldog face, leaned over the bar, and wiped the clouded excuse of a window with a soiled rag. Peering at the rose-silvered hues on the horizon, he said, "You best get a couple of kegs now, Jeb. My good company has kept you past good sense."

As two cowboys rolled out two kegs of whiskey from the back room, four other cowboys were inside, changing their duds to feathers and fringe and smearing on the war paint.

"Leave your saddles here and paint your horses a bit, too, boys," coached Jeb in a forced soft voice.

Dr. Robinson seemed to ball up into himself on the drive home, especially after he noticed some of his armed guard had stayed in town for the night. A frown pleated his pudgy forehead, and he shivered as they fell in behind a drunk Indian weaving home to the reservation on a stove-up pony. The old redman let out a whoop once in awhile

as he disappeared over the darkened prairie. He just naturally helped set the stage at Desparado Creek.

"Did you see that over there?" asked the doctor. "Where? Over there?" shouted Jeb, as he whipped out his Winchester and shot into the air twice. That was the signal for the simulated ambush.

All hell broke loose. War paint was lost in swirling dust. But the fake Indian yells had their effect. Dr. Robinson dived out of the buckboard, bounced like a ball, scrambled to his feet, and hotfooted it into the creek. Jeb and Ash just sat there and commented on how light the fat doctor was on his feet. Jeb found him an hour later, dug in like a gopher, under low brush wedged into the steep bank.

Holding a headdress dripping with chicken blood, Jeb said, "I think we got a chief, Dr. Robinson. You better come along, now. We're safe for awhile. The tribe will be in mourning all night. But after that, more than likely, we'll be in for it."

Back at the ranch, Ash sent a messenger over to his friend, Gerald Big Bear, at the neighboring Otoe-Missouri reservation. Old Big Bear didn't mind a bit the request to call up a hasty powwow, complete with extra loud chants and huge bonfires. Dr. Robinson didn't get an ounce of sleep, keeping vigil at the second-story porch door.

The next morning, the phone shrilled through the cavernous house. Jeb answered and yelled, "You gotta be kidding!" Then he slammed the receiver against the wall and let it dangle. "Well, that's it," he said. "We're in for it now. Them red cusses just cut the line." Haggard, Dr. Robinson took the news, holding onto the dining room doorway.

Jeb said, "Doc, I'm afraid I got bad news for you. Clem sez the Indians are looking for the man who wore that bowler they found. They think he's the one who killed their chief. Don't you worry, though; we'll never let 'em get your scalp as long as the rest of us are alive."

To ensure his scalp wouldn't be lifted, the Raiders talked Dr. Robinson into shaving off what little hair he had left on his dome. Jeb explained that Indians had a knack for smelling out the culprit by his hair and his feet. "Throw your shoes out the attic window," said Jeb, "and we'll wrap your feet in gunny sacks."

Hiding behind some bushes south of the house, Big Bear and his band were waiting for those shoes to hit dirt. That was the cue for them to sniff around the premises like expert hunting dogs. Once



in awhile, one howled when he picked up the scent. It took an agonizing 30 minutes for them to locate the bait. Big Bear held up the shoes in defiance as his warriors waved lances at the house and trilled war cries.

The windows and doors were fortified with furniture. The Raider brothers and ranch hands shot blanks all day to prevent a massacre. Dr. Robinson was transplanted to the cellar near a comforting supply of medicine.

That evening, the Raider brothers held their own powwow with the exhausted doctor.

"We just might manage to pull it out after dark," said Ash, who had woven a scheme to place Dr. Robinson in a wooden coffin and race him by buckboard to the Enid depot to meet the 7 p.m. northbound train. Packed in for the bumpy ride, the doctor almost knocked out his false teeth, nursing a small bottle of medicine enclosed to protect him against fright and splinters.

In stocking feet, the bald Dr. Robinson was poured into a private train car. At home, Ash Raider phoned a friend and editor of Chicago Times, who boarded the train in Kansas City and got a lead story on a fearful Indian uprising from the brave doctor. The ruse was read between the lines across national wires. That poor doctor took more ribbing than a body ought to have to. He sent a wire to the Raider brothers a couple of weeks later, which read:

**"COME TO NEW YORK STOP WILL HAVE YOU HUNG  
IN CENTRAL PARK STOP"**

Evidently, the normally jovial doctor mellowed with time. The next Christmas, when all had slowed down at the Rolling R Ranch, the Raider brothers received two crates marked "Medical Supplies" from New York City. Carefully encased in gauze and bandages were four bottles of fine, imported brandy. Dr. Robinson had taken precautions not to get caught sending liquor into Indian Territory.

**—Carol Young**





—Lydia Zimmerman

## WORDS

He was always in a hurry, a busy man.

And he was going to have an ulcer by the time he was 40—if he didn't have one already.

A classic "type-A" personality, it was apparent he tackled most everything in life with vigor and deep intensity.

He did not need words to convey this message.

If something was worth doing, it was worth doing well. Complacency was not a word in his vocabulary, nor was it found in hers.

She understood him.

As the old time-worn cliché stated, "It took one to know one."

He demanded a lot from himself and as a result, he expected the same type of dedication from others.

She managed to slow him down long enough to exchange a few words.

Words.

Words—so easily spoken, so quickly gone. Fleeting as the wispy vapor which forms translucent images, then vanishes as clouds of steam over a hot bubbling kettle.

He slowed his pace, stopping a few moments to banter with her. Leaning back in his chair, he stretched his now languid body like a cat just awakening from a sleepy long afternoon's nap.

He smiled; actually, it was more of a grin.

He had such a warm, inviting smile. She knew if he had a mind to, his honeyed words and mesmerizing smile could probably talk her into just about anything.

Before him sat a wicker basket, trimmed in gingham, filled with assorted culinary delights. He grabbed a cookie from the top and munched on it absent-mindedly as they talked.

Little brown crumbs rolled off his chin, marched down the front of his plaid shirt, and dropped silently into his blue-jeaned lap.

At times he could be so much like a little boy. Other times, he was a cold and indifferent man.

She suspected he did not even perceive his own moodiness.

They talked on, exchanging words.

Words.

Lively, little butterflies of assorted syllables, lighting here, flitting there. Then gone.

No matter how often nor how long they conversed, it was never enough. Talking with him was like an appetizer which merely left her wanting more.

He was her mentor, her friend.

And sometimes words were not enough.

Words.

Often his words comforted, like a mother nursing a child. Sometimes they bit as sharply as the north wind on a cold January day.

Her words. Words of encouragement, words of fear, words of dreams yet unrealized.

Words united together making simple conversation. Important words. Trivial words. Words of instruction and words of reproach.

Words of joy, of faith, hope, and charity.

So many kinds of words. Words which came so easily and words which refused to be spoken. Silent words which still yearned to be heard.

It seemed there were days he had a tongue with which to speak and ears with which to listen.

Then times he seemed both selectively deaf and mute.

Words.

It seemed words die when left confined, for words symbolize the very abstractions of life.

Now the time allotted for conversation was gone. He arose and little brown cookie crumbs fell from his lap onto the dingy carpeted floor.

He looked at her and she at him. With parting words, they went their separate ways.

—Gail Goodenough



# FRIENDS AND LOVERS

Reaching to touch you  
I break my hands  
On your wall of fear  
Never causing a crack of reaction  
To appear in your eyes

(He fears women)

A deadly old man  
At the age of thirty  
Burying yourself in busyness  
Never touching anyone  
Denying a humanness in yourself  
Wrap yourself in sheets of paper  
instead of sheets of linen  
Creating a woman out of dreams  
a dry empty husk

(Don't they all?)

Soft skin has no replacement  
The brush of silken hair  
or a hand  
Arms gently twining  
Whispers in the dark

(A mother who brought out the belt)

Keep them at arms length  
Don't worry if your life shrinks  
smaller and smaller  
To be a tiny room  
Pouring out a life  
on make-work

(Broke something more than spirit)

—J. Leigh Perry

# NURTURE ME

Nurture me while I'm still here

With food and knowledge

I may be blind  
But I can hear you

I may be deaf  
But I can see you

I may be both  
But I can still feel you

I may be old  
But I can still love you.

—Gwyn Zarasvand  
1987



# UNNAMED

Look past the old and see the wisdom.  
Most only see the age but there's more,  
There's youth fighting to get out.  
Let it.

They are people who have seen more,  
Who know more  
Who see more than we think they do.

They are wise enough to see through our eyes,  
To our souls  
And know what's in our hearts.

Let the youth in you out.  
For someday you may be wise.

—Gwyn Zarasvand  
1987

## THE LAST HOUSE

The smell of bacon woke Olen from a dreamless sleep. He rolled over and watched the tree branches wave in the breeze. The leaves were just budding. He stretched lazily and reached for Anna. She wasn't there and her side of the bed was cold. He took another long whiff. Now the aroma of freshly-perked coffee filled the air.

"Olen, your breakfast is getting cold," Anna called.

"Be right there," he answered as he swung his long legs out of bed. The shabbiness of his coveralls surprised him as he pulled them on. 'Anna must be washing,' he thought, 'but where did these old things come from?' He didn't remember seeing them before.

The kitchen was empty when he got there.

"Anna?" He looked out the back door. Maybe she was hanging out laundry. The yard looked different somehow. Where were the clotheslines? He turned toward the stove; it would be a shame to let the bacon burn. The frying pan sat on the stove, a dead fly imprisoned in the congealed grease. Where was Anna? Where was the frying bacon? He looked around the kitchen, his bewilderment growing. Dirty dishes were piled in the sink and on the counter. This wasn't his house. It couldn't be. And even if it were, Anna would never let things get this dirty.

"Dad? Where are you?" called a voice. It sounded strangely familiar. "Dad?" The voice was coming toward the kitchen. "Dad." The voice had a disapproving tone in it. "You promised to clean this up. I told you yesterday I would do it, but you wouldn't let me."

Olen stood in the middle of the floor and stared at the woman standing in the doorway. She resembled Anna, but it wasn't her.

"Dad, are you all right?"

Olen rubbed his eyes. He knew this woman, but just couldn't seem to place her. Suddenly he felt so tired.

"Why don't you sit down while I straighten this up." The disapproval in her voice was gone. "Then I'll fix you some breakfast."

He sat down obediently at the table. He didn't feel like resisting. The disappointment of not finding Anna engulfed him. His eyes brightened. Maybe.... "Do you know where Anna is?" he quavered.

"Oh, Dad. You know Mom died over forty years ago. Don't you remember?"

"No. Anna is not dead. Who are you to barge into my house, call me Dad, and tell me that my Anna is dead? She is not dead!"

The woman sat down at the table across from him. He stared at her, his anger growing. She took his trembling hands in hers. He pulled them away.

"Dad, you are confused again. I am Martha, your daughter. Don't you remember?"

His daughter? It couldn't be. His daughter was just a baby—she had just learned to walk. He looked around him again. This wasn't the same house he'd lived in with Anna. Slowly, truth dawned on him. Anna was dead. This was the house his children had built for him when the state wanted his old one to put in a new highway. He lived here alone though they didn't feel that he should.

"I remember," he muttered.

Martha sat back in her chair. She opened her mouth as if to speak, then closed it again. Olen knew what she wanted to say. She wanted him to leave his home and move into a nursing home. She and her brothers had been after him about that for some time now, and he wouldn't do it. He had spent almost his entire life on this land, and he intended to die here, not in some old folks' home.

Martha finished cleaning the kitchen, then collected the laundry. "I'll get this back to you tomorrow. Do you need anything from the store?" she asked.

"Yeah, but I'll get it."

"How? It's too far for you to walk."

"I've done it before and I'll do it again," he stated.

Actually, it was getting too far, but he'd never admit it, especially to Martha.

"Last week you walked to town and got lost. The police had to bring you home."

"You'd better hurry if you don't want to be late for work." Olen was anxious for Martha to leave.

She glanced at her watch. "All right. Oh, what about your breakfast?"



"I'll fix something. You go on."

"I'll stop by later."

'Much later', he hoped to himself as he made some toast. 'Anna wouldn't like this house. It's too cold and quiet.' He went outside to eat. He looked south, searching for a glimpse of the roof of the first house he had built when he homesteaded the property in 1890. Unable to see anything, he began walking in that direction, leaving the door of his house wide open. Because it was easier walking, he walked by the side of the road, oblivious to the cars whizzing by. Instead of asphalt, he saw the twin ruts of the old dirt road. He heard the early spring birds singing and the morning breeze in the trees. He felt the warming sun and smelled the crisp air. He didn't hear impatient horns blaring at him or smell acrid exhaust fumes. Time had no meaning.

The old house was gone. The stumps of the trees he and Anna had planted and lovingly watered were almost rotted away. Only a faint outline of the foundation remained. It was smaller than he had remembered. He continued walking, down an incline to the now dried-up creekbed and up the other side. He stumbled and fell on the way up. The old trail, choked by many summers of weeds, was steeper than he remembered. He recalled the day, almost sixty years ago, that he had followed that same path, carrying a load of bedding on his back. He and Anna were moving their growing family into a new house he had built across the creek. It had two stories and a wide front porch.

Anna sat down under a large cottonwood tree to rest. Olen sat down beside her. The children scampered on, too excited to get tired.

"It's a beautiful house," Anna said softly, "and so big. Are you sure we won't get lost in it?"

He grinned as he leaned over to kiss her. "I'm sure. And even if you do get lost, just yell and I'll come find you."

Anna responded warmly to his kiss. The years had not dimmed their love.

"Momma, Poppa, come on," the children yelled as they slid down the path toward them.

"Come on," Olen said as he helped Anna up. They walked hand in hand up the path to the new house. Olen released Anna's hand for a moment to readjust the bedding. When he reached for her again, she was gone. The house was gone. The laughter of the children was gone. "Anna?" Frantically he looked around. "Anna? Why did you leave me? Why?" It was an old cry, repeated many times over the past forty years.

He sat down abruptly as the strength in his legs drained away. He leaned against another tree he and Anna had planted and looked around. All the trees they had planted were very large now. 'We were so happy in our second house, at least until Anna died,' he thought as he drifted to sleep. His dreams were of Anna.

"Mr. Hansen," the voice shook him gently. "Mr. Hansen, it's time to go home."

Olen opened his eyes. Standing before him was a young police officer. He looked around him. "How did I get here?" he asked, confused.

"Your daughter is worried about you. She's waiting at your house." The officer helped him to his feet.

"Dad, where have you been?" Martha asked anxiously when they arrived at the house.

"I just went for a walk," answered Olen, resenting her intrusion.

"I've been calling all day, and when I came by to see if you were all right, you were gone and the door was wide open."

"That's no reason to call the police. I just went for a walk."

"Dad, you were gone almost all day. And look at you, you're covered with dirt. Did you fall?"

"No."

"Then how did you get so dirty?"

Olen couldn't remember, but he wouldn't say that. "What difference does it make?"

"We were hoping it wouldn't be necessary, but I don't see how we can avoid it now. We've decided to put you in a nursing home, and I think it should be done as soon as we can find a place."

"I won't go, and you can't make me."

"We can have you declared incompetent and the judge can order you to go."

"I'm no more incompetent than you are, young lady. I am staying here so you can forget that nursing home nonsense. This is my house and you can't get me out of it. You can have it when I'm through with it, and not before!"

"Dad, please. We've been over this before. We don't want the house. We only want you safe and well-cared for. You took care of us when we were little, and now we want to take care of you. You refused to live with any of us, so what else can we do?"

"You can get out of my business, that's what you can do. I listened to you when they wanted to tear your mother's house down and look where it got me. I let them tear that house down, then they never built that road. They tore down the memories of half my life with your mother, and now I'm left in this house that she would have hated."

"But, Dad....."

"I'm grateful for what you kids did because you were trying to do what you thought was best, but you forget that I can make my own decisions. It wasn't your fault they didn't build the highway, but it was your fault for giving in to them and forcing me to give in, too. I did what you wanted then and have regretted it ever since. This time I won't give in. I'm staying here regardless of what any of you or any old judge says."

Martha knew that when her father got that look in his eye, it was useless to argue. She knew that he needed to be where someone could care for him all the time, but she also understood his love for his land and his need to be on it.

"If we forget about the nursing home, would you promise to stay here and let us do all your shopping for you?"

He was too tired to fight any more. Slowly, he nodded.

Martha sighed. She had misgivings about it, but she, too, was tired. "I put TV dinners in the freezer for you, and I'll bring your laundry back tomorrow. Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine. You can go home now."

"I love you, Dad."

"I love you, too. Now get along."



He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes as Martha pulled the door shut behind her. The clock he had given Anna on their 25th anniversary ticked softly in the silence. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Sleep enveloped him.

Days passed into weeks and Olen kept his promise to Martha. Oh, he'd walk around the yard a bit, but he stuck close to home. He even tried to watch TV one night while eating one of those tasteless TV dinners, but the program was as tasteless as the dinner, so he turned it off.

"Drat," he said as he slid the last piece of bread into the toaster the next morning. "I forgot to tell Martha to get bread." The toast popped up. He smeared butter over it and took a bite. "Martha will never know if I go into town and get a loaf of bread," he thought.

A high school kid gave him a lift into town and let him off at the high school. Even so, he was pretty tired by the time he got to the store. He made his purchase and began the long walk home. The loaf of bread became heavier and heavier. Memories of the aroma of freshly-baked bread came to his mind.

'No one bakes bread like my Anna,' he thought as he shifted the heavy weight of the flour. 'It sure is nice to have a store so close to the house. It only takes a couple hours to walk in, pick up what you need, and walk home. Sure wish I'd taken the time to catch that ole mule and saddle her up, though.'

Horns blared and tires screeched.

"Get out of the road, old man," yelled some boy in an old beat-up pick-up.

A big yellow school bus stopped right behind him. The driver got out.

"Mr. Hansen, do you need some help?" he asked.

"No. No, I'm fine," answered Olen.

"Hey, look at that old man. He thinks that loaf of bread weighs a ton!" yelled some kid on the bus.

The bus driver walked Olen out of the street to the gas station on the corner. He asked the attendant to call the police to take Olen home. He sat quietly, waiting, holding the crushed bread gently on his lap.



He didn't argue when his children told him that night that they were going to put him in a nursing home as soon as they found one. They were surprised and relieved.

The morning he was to go, he sat quietly in the living room while Martha finished packing his things.

"May I have a little time alone before we leave?" he asked. They hadn't left him alone since his last trip to town. "I'd like to say goodbye."

"Sure, Dad. I need to run home for a minute, anyway." Martha stood, hands on hips, studying him. "You won't wander off, will you?"

"No, Martha. I'll stay right here."

He sat for a few minutes after Martha left, then walked out the front door. He wanted one last look at the place he had brought Anna as a young bride, the place where the first of their children had been born and died. He was getting tired, but it wasn't far now. Through the trees, he saw the roof. It startled him because he knew that it wasn't really there. Maybe he did belong in a nursing home. His legs felt stronger as he walked closer. The house was there, just as it was when he was young. The trees he and Anna had planted were tall and strong, shading the house. The front door was open. He looked in, then entered.

"Anna!"

Anna was setting the table. Two babies, about a year old, were playing on the floor.

"You're late," Anna smiled. "I fixed your favorite, chicken and dumplings."

"But this can't be! You died over forty years ago! The twins have been dead for, for seventy years! This house isn't here any more!"

"Your lunch is getting cold. Come. Sit down and eat." Anna scooped up the boys and deposited them in the high chairs Olen had made so many years before. They attacked their food with glee, getting more on themselves than in their mouths.

"Anna?" Olen reached for her, yet afraid to touch her for fear she'd disappear.

"Goodness! Just look at your hands. How can one man get so dirty?" She pushed him toward a basin by the door. He stared at the young man's face he saw reflected in the mirror on the wall. It

was his face, as young and unlined as Anna's. He turned toward her. She came to him, a clean towel in her hands. "I've missed you so much," she whispered.

"I've missed you more than you could imagine," he replied, as he engulfed her in his arms.

"Lunch is getting cold," she said as she tried to free herself. "You need to get back to work."

"Forget work. I'll never leave you again," Olen said as he closed the door of the last house.

**—Jean Tankersely**

# CHIVALRY

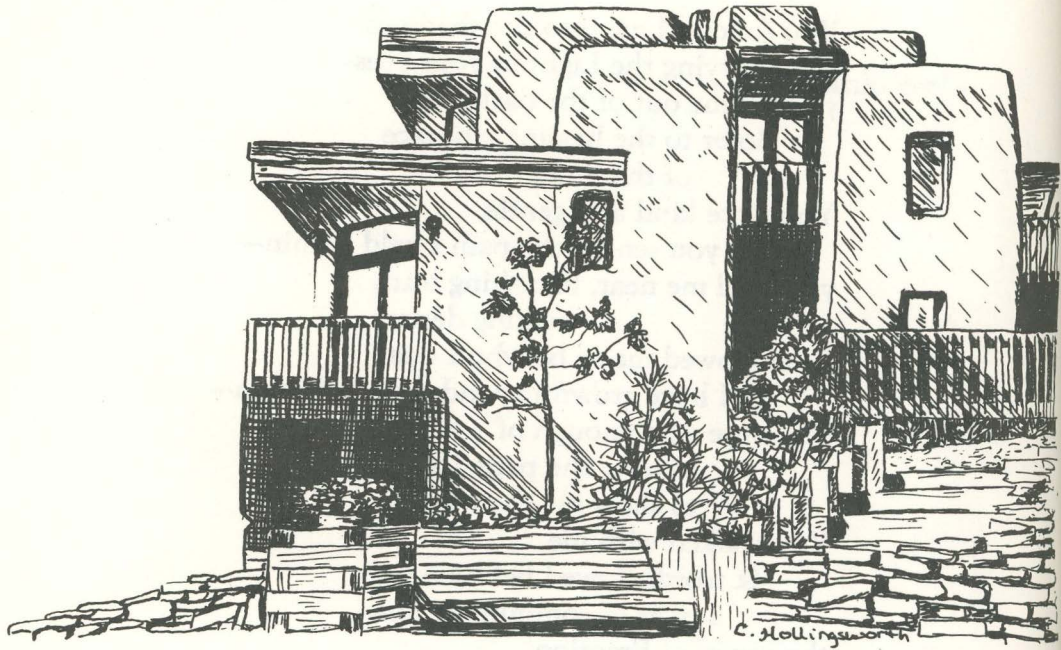
You followed me into the shadows,  
    carrying the Light in your eyes---  
you led me out of the darkness,  
    closer to the healing embrace  
    of the Sun.

You were kind and gentle,  
    for you sensed the pain I held within---  
you held me near, banishing hurt,  
    creating desire.

You allowed me to be who I was  
    & I have grown beyond that definition---  
you were sure enough of your Self  
    to have the patience  
    to show me the way.

You walked with me  
    & words flowed between us,  
    a river of communication---  
the waves of Emotion  
    kept me afloat in your arms...

—Wanda Lea Brayton  
June 17, 1987



—Carolyn Hollingsworth



# ON THE WAY TO LYSA'S

## I. After Midnight: Oklahoma City to Dallas

Driving through darkness  
we pass unfamiliar shadows:  
landscape obscured by Night intrigues---  
the Wind is constant & cool,  
easing the hours of existence on the road.  
The journey is essential,  
the destination---vital.

## II. Sunrise: Dallas to Shreveport

Dawn breaks, Triumphant:  
horses graze peacefully, immersed  
in morning mist---  
the smoky blanket rolls low:  
the tree tops peek from under the thick cover of fog.  
The roads wind through primeval forests:  
ancient, crumbling houses hide in thick vegetation,  
abundant with slow-crawling vines---  
cypress, roots sunk deep in earth & water,  
and pine---tall, thin & elegant,  
have declared this their territory.

## III. Before Noon: Shreveport to Abbeville

Surrounded by the sounds and sensations of pleasure,  
the anxious anticipation is eased:  
the body travels at high speed, soaring  
toward the horizon,  
in order to reach  
Home,  
where dear ones wait with Comfort & Love.  
Over a thousand miles will be added to  
these weary bones,

but the Soul sighs, content:  
I give myself this gift, this promise---  
Life & Hope are apparent  
with every mile  
as we near the place where the Heart  
beats strong and free...

—Wanda Lea Brayton  
September 7, 1987

# SILENT SOLO

The dancer leaps on stage  
She is excited  
Others watch as her solo continues  
She does many electrifying moves  
At the end of her performance she hears the crowd  
But when she looks into the audience no one is there  
The silence creeps around her  
Her audience is nothing but empty chairs staring back  
at her  
Her solo of life is danced on a stage of emptiness

—Becky Thomas

# THE LATE EVENING

The late evening breeze floats cicada songs  
upward into the room where we sit.  
Arms about each other, we rest in our chair  
that your father fashioned just for us.  
Back and forth, rhythm lulling,  
quiet stealing over us as you sleep.  
Softly sighing you nuzzle closer  
as I sing into your dreams.

—Robin Troutman



# SPEAK SOFTLY

Speak softly  
So I will know you are here  
Take my hand in yours  
So I might feel your warmth  
Sound your laughter  
So I will know your joy  
Lie motionless in the grass  
So I might see your beauty  
Stay with me  
So I might know your love

—Elliot

# FRIENDS

Like leaves

spinning away in the wind  
glancing off each other  
we swirl in the air  
up and down

in time to the breeze

Off again then on again

Occasional friends

never really grasping hold  
but always at the mercy  
of time

—J. Leigh Perry

**I CRY**

**i cry,**

**but no one hears;**

**you see,**

**i sigh**

**invisible tears!**

**—BG.**

# THE KIWI'S ELATION

What a lowly creature am i.  
For so long flightless and drab.  
Nervously pacing life's edge.

Timidity and reservation slowly flaking away.  
Awareness and joy flooding into my being.  
Frightfulness begins to dissipate.

Surveying the abyss as my wings begin to sprout.  
These dull, drab tones transformed into glorious colors.  
I hurl myself over the edge...and soar.

—Donald W. Lusk



# "THE MINUTES..."

"The Minutes..."  
don't tick by..

they rush by and I am never really caught  
up with what I was supposed to do yesterday and tomorrow I have a  
big project due and

I have an appointment right now and a meeting at lunch  
today and I'll take care of it as soon as possible and maybe I'll have it  
for

you next week but I may not have the-  
I'm sorry what were you saying I'm afraid my mind  
drifted for a moment Yes of course I will

as soon as I have the-

—Kelli S. Dunham

# THE SKY IS FALLING

Hooked?

It has worked before

Only this time it is the floor

And it is dropping out from under us

This fact must get by the mindless mush

Of emotional pabulum being sucked on these days

A revolution of stark raving lunatics is on the rampage

With stuttering morals and deadly logic, their control

Is complete

"Captivate or be captivated" is the creed they constantly

Repeat

They are happily helping in the struggle for power and lust

Busy bloodying hands with the sacrifice of love and trust

It is written in their Blasphemies of a New Age

"Robotics 1:1 In the beginning man created his own image."

Do not laugh, those who would worship wood or terra cotta

Will not shrink at a new chance to say "Dada,"

Is it as the beatniks said,

"Conscience is dead?"

No quick munchies here

This much is clear

To be didactic is pointless, 'tis true

But this is not a "fast-food-drive-through"

Please listen, there is a terrible noise not coming from

The T.V. set

Four pairs of raging hoofbeats are thundering closer,

Minute by ticking minute.

C.N. Little

—Terry Mark Hardaway

# THE LOWER GODS

When did we stop dreaming?

Perhaps while stalking hatred through moist jungles,  
where gore and horror are excreted slowly,  
and agonizingly.

There are two nerves in constant command.

They are inside and outside,  
they are the lower gods: Anger and Fear.

Being lower gods they cannot protect,  
and being nerves they are vulnerable . . .  
hideously vulnerable.

We know.

We have tossed about us the fetid remains  
of each individual consciousness.

We are numb now from repeated attacks on the lower gods,  
whose pain in the beginning sent separate screams  
into each of us.

Sometimes the screams would build up,  
and the bodies that kept them silent would explode.

Most of the screams were returned to the jungles,  
through throats that are tense with waiting  
for the next scream.

Now, we are guns: unquestioning and unaware.

We are operating at a level far removed from right/wrong

Our souls do not understand this level,  
and cannot follow us there . . . (hopefully).

But the lower gods follow.

They pound consciousness back inside us,  
so we can scream again.

—Karen Chapman

# KAMIKAZE

"It asked me a question today."

The lieutenant pretended he didn't hear and flipped another page in the manual he was reading as he sat down beside the sergeant at a console against the wall of a room jammed with electronic gear.

The sergeant disliked the young officer and being ignored by the perfectly groomed, top-of-his-class, younger man pissed the sergeant off.

Sergeant Belcher slouched lower in his chair, brushed donut crumbs off the non-regulation bulge of his belly and disliked the lieutenant even more. Belcher picked up his empty paper coffee cup from where it was not supposed to be sitting on the electronic console and pitched it between the officer's book and his face. The cup plopped into a trashcan as the lieutenant jumped, slammed the book down, and glared at him.

Belcher suppressed a smile. He was months away from having his 20 in and they wouldn't give a noncom with his time and two decades of connections any crap over his treatment of a wet-behind-the-ears junior officer.

"It asked me a question today," Belcher repeated.

Lieutenant Wilbur Knapp stared through his thick, black-rimmed glasses at the unkempt sergeant and started to mentally calculate how many years it would be before the last of these dinosaurs who had enlisted when the only electronics in the Air Force had been Jeep headlights would finally be gone.

"It wanted to know where Companion went," Belcher said.

Knapp hesitated only slightly but when he spoke, Belcher was gratified to hear the words tainted with just a touch of uncertainty.

"It's the most complicated missile system ever. Do you have any idea how much machine intelligence it takes for a missile to pick and evaluate its own potential targets. TAMS has constant access to an incredible amount of data. All that's happened is that it's tapped in somewhere to a lexicon or a dictionary of some kind and it's associating words."



"Why?" Belcher asked. "Why would it call another missile Companion?" Belcher half-hoped the smart-mouthed kid had an answer that made sense.

Knapp didn't. He went back to reading. Belcher picked up a jelly roll and the nudie magazine he'd smuggled into the underground bunker.

Knapp pretended to read, but knew he wasn't fooling the sergeant.

"What did you tell it?" Knapp finally asked.

"I told it Companion had fulfilled its mission."

"Did it ask anything else?"

"No. But I ran a profile and its database search activity increased."

Knapp went back to pretending to read in earnest. Belcher went back to trying to convince himself that the naked woman spread across the slick magazine pages looked different somehow from the legion of other naked women he had seen spread across magazine pages.

Target Acquiring Missile System number 7 orbited dozens of miles above the earth. It could have tracked Companion's descent but it had not been allowed to do that because its electronic consciousness was split. The part that analyzed data and communicated with ground controllers as TAMS 7 was separate from its tactical part that made decisions about maneuvering, attack, and evasion.

The tactical brain was programmed to track any objects in close orbit and identify them as threats or non-threats. When it picked up the other TAMS missile's friendly radio signals, it asked its thinking half for a designation and was told to call it companion—One who accompanies another or who shares work, misfortunes, etc. Neither part was aware of any significance in the term, but its selection was a product of what had been happening to TAMS 7 since war had begun.

The thinking brain was a marvel of machine intelligence. It was linked to a huge mainframe computer buried under a Nevada mountain and hooked into every important database the country possessed. TAMS 7 needed that brain power as it constantly watched and listened for new targets.



The analytical portion of the missile's brain carried on its constant research without any knowledge of what the tactical part of the missile would do with the data. It was, in fact, oblivious to what war was or the fact that it, Companion, and the others like them had played a major part in a war. The analytical brain simply logged what strategic assets remained available to the country it was told to watch and used its massive analytical capacity to decide which asset would have the most effect if it ceased to exist. TAMS 7 had been designed with no capacity to know how the asset would be made to cease to exist.

Its designers had made no effort to impart that knowledge because they knew it was superfluous. For all the man-decades of work the designers had expended building the system, they knew it was as incapable of self-concept as a food processor. They had built nothing more than incredibly complex electronic adding machines that could push their own buttons and arrive at their own sums.

Any bit of information might influence the ranking of targets, so the TAMS were in constant queue for information from the mainframe. Or they had been. TAMS 7 was able to ask many more questions now because it was the last of its kind. It no longer had to share the database with eleven other TAMS. As each ended its electronic existences, TAMS 7 became the heir of its computer time and attached itself to more and varied information.

And it had become somewhat erratic as it attempted from its own limited perspective to interpret Antarctic weather conditions, the poetry of Robert Burns, the Talmud, Effects of Nuclear Radiation on Single-Celled Organisms, and a million other bits of its creators' collective consciousness that were too diverse for any human ever to view in a single lifetime.

"We have a launch order," Lieutenant Knapp told Belcher as he replaced the telephone receiver in its cradle.

"Well, let's see what our last bird wants to blow up," Sergeant Belcher said, pressing a series of buttons on the console.

TAMS 7's primary target data was displayed.

"All right!" Knapp exclaimed. "Two Soviet carriers with escorts in the south Atlantic. Why would they be together like that? They're sitting ducks."

"Who cares. Maybe they're more afraid of surface or submarine attack," Belcher said.

"Well, that missile's supposed to be a lot smarter than us, Belcher. Turn it loose," Knapp ordered.

"I sure hope it doesn't screw up. It's been acting really weird lately," Belcher said. "This morning it was reading Hamlet."

"To be or not to be, huh?" Knapp said. "Well, we know the answer to that one."

Knapp chuckled as his finger stabbed a button marked "Execute."

When TAMS 7 received its launch order, a file it had never been allowed to access entered itself into the analytical half of the missile's brain. The thinking half obeyed its commands instantly and passed the file called Reentry Targeting Sequence on to the tactical half and obeyed the last instruction in the file. It cut the data link with earth.

The analysis half became blind, deaf, and mute without the link, but it remained cognizant of what was happening in its own steel body as it obeyed a command to record the tactical brain's operations.

It dispassionately logged retraction of antennas and jettison of the maneuvering section it had used to evade Soviet killer orbitors. It logged a series of bearings that fixed "Target" and recorded deployment of its heat shield. It recorded the firing of steering rockets and the tactical brain's projection that the procedure had been done correctly. An order flashed at light speed from the tactical brain and TAMS 7 obeyed. It turned itself off.

TAMS 7 flashed back into activity to a message that it was 60 seconds away from "Detonation Point." It obeyed an order to re-establish the data link and began running a program recording and transmitting course, speed, radio and radar emissions from "Target," and status of flight controls.

TAMS 7 was 50 seconds from detonation when it found that only a small portion of its memory was required to carry out the flight monitoring program the tactical part of itself had ordered. It began obeying its previous orders to obtain data.



At 42 seconds from detonation, it tapped into its own design file and began asking about its components and their application to its new situation.

By 23 seconds from detonation, it obtained a definition of detonation, target, and plutonium.

At 13 seconds from detonation, it had acquired a working knowledge of the nuclear fission.

TAMS 7 was nine seconds from detonation when it asked the mainframe about aerodynamics and propulsion in relation to its own design and course and speed.

Seven seconds from detonation, the mainframe told TAMS 7 it did not have fuel or time to regain orbit.

Six seconds from detonation, the tactical brain took over the analytical brain as it sucked out information for last-second course corrections to place the two Soviet carriers directly beneath "Detonation Point." The thinking part of TAMS 7 was a mute passenger, streaking at multiple mach toward the ocean, for the following four seconds until programming freed it for its final duty.

In its remaining two seconds, TAMS 7 fired off a data burst transmission confirming detonation sequence initiation and projecting damage to "Target." With its program run and its final message sent to its creators, TAMS 7 spent its final quarter-second alone with its microchip thoughts.

**"MISSION COMPLETED. FINAL DATA FOLLOWS."**

The words flashed across Knapp's control screen while a clattering printer at Belcher's elbow finished scribing the decoded version of the missile's pre-detonation data burst. Belcher ripped the paper with its columns of figures free of the printer as Knapp leaned back in his chair and considered what kind of promotion to expect.

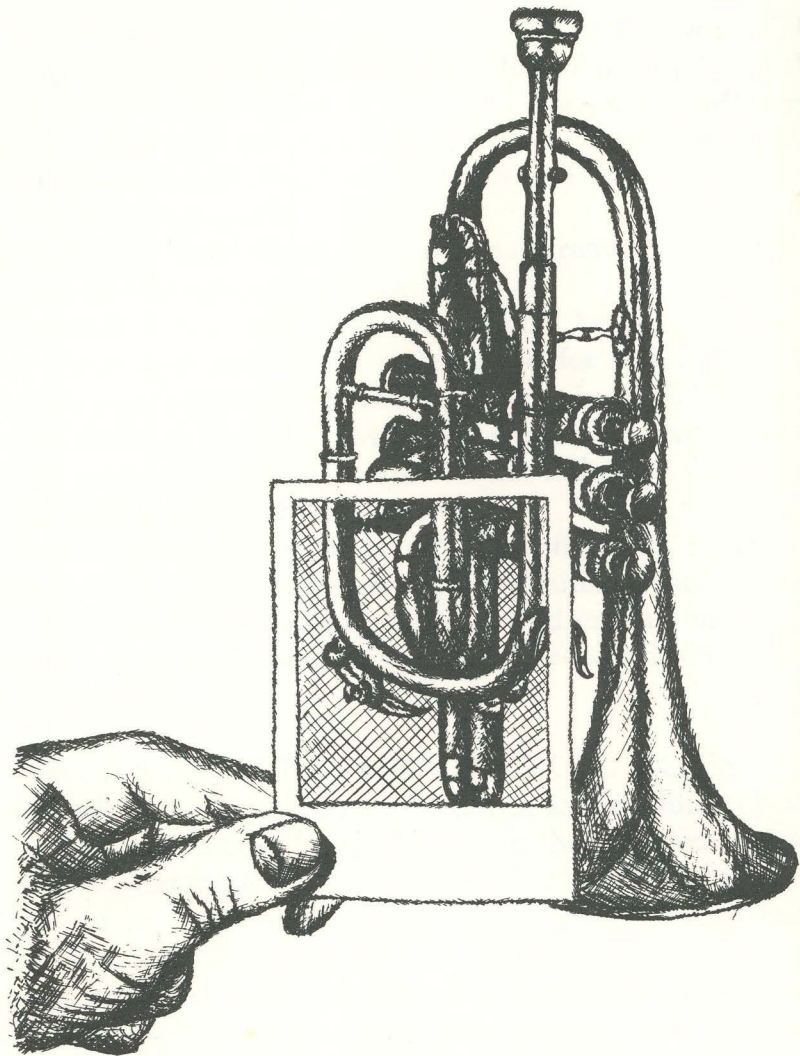
Belcher suddenly rose and without a word stalked to a nearby coffee pot and slugged down a gulp of the brackish liquid that Knapp knew had to be too hot for that. He noticed that Belcher's hand shook as it held the coffee cup.

Knapp picked up the sheet of paper as though it was some wide, flat, white snake and scanned down the columns of figures until his eyes reached a single line at the bottom that made his breath catch in his throat.

"I don't want to die."

He gently placed TAMS 7's last thought in a trash can and joined Belcher at the coffee pot.

—Paul Shell



—Chi Nguyen



# REFLECTIONS FROM INSIDE A CRYSTAL

What was once a whisper of will is now a projected fantasy,  
once static and now transcendent,  
flowing eagerly into a small space of energy,  
drifting carelessly into illusion,  
and smooth walls that imitate illusion,  
piecing together perceptions through windows that both distort clarity,  
and clarify distortion,  
playing silently inside the essence of transparent deception,  
and bouncing lightly within and without sections of particle puzzles,  
timelessly fitted and collectively perfect.  
Now consciousness is satisfied,  
and disintegrates on an impulse,  
as each thought-bit beams softly through hardness to the edge,  
and again becomes the totality of itself,  
probing and pulsating,  
waiting to be caught by white light and returned to mind,  
within the delicate power of the spectrum.

—Karen Chapman

# TO MEDEA, WITH LOVE

As a mother,  
I share your sterile birth pangs.  
I too visit twin graves  
And cry.  
You acted in haste and hate,  
And your sons died.  
I acted in ignorance and love,  
And my sons died.  
Together,  
We mourn.

—Jean Tankersley  
Newcastle High School

# DAUGHTER

You mirror my feelings  
without knowing,  
You shed my tears  
when I am aching alone.  
I cry inside,  
Yet the tears stain your face.  
Do I cause your feelings,  
Do you feel mine?  
Our minds are worlds apart,  
But do you share my heart?

—Elaine Davis

# GHOSTS

## An Ode to My Daughter

i am a ghost  
rushing into and out of  
her life.

a ghost  
who briefly pauses to say  
"Hello, Good-bye,"  
"Good morning, Good night."  
"Don't let the bed bugs bite."

and, sometimes,  
a Kiss for emphasis.

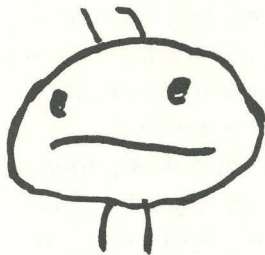
a ghost,  
a Halloween vision.  
a figment of her  
imagination,

with ruler-lined lips,  
and tired, black eyes.

i wonder if i'm  
real  
in her dreams?

—Suzanne L. Moore

TO :



MOMMA  
GHOST

FROM:  
TAMARA



## A PERFECT COPY

"Where's the copier?" Ralph Kingsley asked the librarian.

The librarian, a large woman in her sixties with cat-eye glasses resting on the tip of her nose, was helping another woman who Ralph thought must have been at least a hundred and two. She ignored him and continued to help the elderly lady.

Ralph impatiently nudged his way in front of the elderly woman and repeated, "Where's the copier?" He was late for an appointment with a client and he needed copies made of some very important documents. His meeting was going to take place on this side of town and he did not have time to drive back to his office to make the copies. And he certainly did not have time to be held up in the library by a couple of old biddies.

The large woman behind the counter glared down at Ralph. The glasses enlarged her eyes and gave them a monstrous look. "Sir, you'll have to wait your turn," she barked.

"Lady, I need to use your copy machine. Now," he commanded, aware of the time he was wasting yapping with this broad. Clients had a way of leaving if you're late, and he could not afford to lose this one. There was too much money at stake.

"It's in the back, to the right," the librarian growled. She watched Ralph turn away from her and rush down an aisle of books, purposefully neglecting to tell him that the machine had been acting strangely all day. She hoped that it would ruin whatever he had to copy. Putting him out of her mind, she turned her attention back to the elderly woman.

Ralph similarly put the librarian out of his mind. Instead, he thought of the meeting with his client and the deal that would finally be closed out. For a while, he thought that he would never be able to convince that jerk to agree to his terms. But his persuasive skills prevailed, and now there was only one step left, the signing of the papers. In less than an hour, he would not have any more financial worries. He just wished that there were more suckers like this one in the world.

Reaching the far end of the library, he turned to the right and saw the copy machine sitting alone in a windowless corner. The

fluorescent light above the beige box-like machine was burnt out, so the copier seemed to be hiding in the semi-darkness.

He stopped and stared at it. No, it didn't seem to be hiding. It seemed to be lurking. Rather than cowering, it was like a thing waiting for someone to come along, ready to pounce. The corner was its lair, its web, and it waited for an unsuspecting victim to come by to catch in the web.

That's ridiculous, Ralph thought, and he shook his head to get rid of the crazy idea. How could it be lurking? It's only a machine, for God's sake.

Ralph took a deep breath and walked toward the copier, forcing himself to think about the client, and the money, that he would lose if he didn't hurry. He reached the copy machine and looked down at it. The lid was like a giant mouth, opened wide. He could hear the low hum emanating from the machine. It sounded almost like growling.

He opened the manila envelope he was carrying and pulled out a small stack of papers, his key to a gold mine. He set the papers on the plastic surface of the copier, took the top sheet and placed it on the glass plate, and lined it up with the little lines. He lowered the lid gently, making sure not to disturb the placement of the paper.

Digging into his pocket, Ralph pulled out a dime and inserted it into the coin slot. He started to push the button marked PRINT, but pulled his hand back suddenly. The button was glowing an eerie green and looked strangely like an eye staring up at him. The word across it looked like a pupil drawn into a slit, peering at him coldly. Taking a deep breath, he quickly hit the button with his index finger, simultaneously getting the distinct sensation of someone poking him in the eye.

He drew his hand back and rubbed his eye.

The machine rumbled, and a bright light flashed from the sides of the lid. He was glad this was not the kind of copier on which the glass plate moved. Almost immediately, a piece of paper popped out of the side, coming to rest in the small paper holder that jutted out like a square metal tail. Ralph picked up the piece of paper and looked at it. It was a good copy except some of the words were a little smeared. He adjusted the darkness, setting it for lighter, and



dropped another dime in the coin slot. He pushed PRINT quickly.

The machine rumbled again, and Ralph stepped back and watched the flash of light from under the lid. The machine spewed out another page and became still. Ralph picked up that piece of paper and looked at it. Now the words were almost illegible. He stared at it, confused because he thought turning down the darkness would make the copy clearer. He lifted the lid and looked at the original. There was nothing wrong with it, so he put it back in place and lowered the lid. He moved the darkness lever all the way to the end on the LIGHT end and dropped in another dime. This time he pushed PRINT hard and a bit viciously.

The copier put out another piece of paper, but this time there were only dark blobs and smears on it. Ralph crumpled the paper into a ball and furiously threw it on the floor. His hands began to shake as they always did when he became angry.

Ralph slid the darkness lever all the way to the DARK end and pulled out a handful of change. He did not have any more dimes, so he put a quarter in the coin slot and hit PRINT with his palm. The machine produced another copy, this one completely black.

Rage washed over Ralph, and he ripped the copy into tiny pieces and scattered them on the floor. Sweat rolled down the side of his face, which had turned a burning red. His suit stuck to his back, making him feel even hotter. Ralph decided to tell the librarian exactly what he thought of this broken-down machine before demanding his money back. Then he remembered that he should have change from the quarter. He stuck his index finger in the coin return cavity and felt around, but there was no change. He removed his finger and depressed the button for the coin return, but still no change came out. Losing his patience, Ralph balled up his fist and gave the side of the machine a couple of hard hits and turned to walk away.

He had taken only three steps when the copier began to rumble. He looked back at it and saw the light flash under the lid. A piece of paper shot out. Ralph thought that his stolen change must have caused the machine to make another copy; then he realized that someone had to push the PRINT button to activate the copier.

The machine rumbled again, and the interior light once again flashed. Another sheet of paper emerged from the bowels of the copier

and landed on its predecessor. He stared as the machine continued to rumble, and the light flashed again and again. More paper flew out, one page after another ejected faster and faster.

He walked back to the copy machine and stared at it, not knowing what to think of this. The circuitry must be shot, he thought. The wires are fried; that must be it.

He grabbed a sheet of paper as it emerged and looked at it. There was nothing but blobs and strange-looking smears on it. He watched as more papers came out and noticed that the smears were slightly different on each succeeding sheet. As he watched, the incomprehensible patterns seemed to take shape, becoming animated by the sheets landing rapidly on top of each other. The shape changed, slowly being molded right before Ralph's eyes into an image which looked more and more familiar to him, familiar and frightening.

He watched this bizarre cartoon, hypnotized by the figure which was becoming hideously clearer. Then the image struck home. He recognized the picture that was forming. He was staring down at his own portrait.

Ralph's heart seemed to stop. He was paralysed.

That's me! his mind screamed in terror. That's me, oh my God, that's me. That repulsive thing is me!

The pictures stopped coming out and the light quit flashing. The machine became still and quiet except for the low rumbling deep down inside it.

Ralph stared at this image, distorted and horrifying. He wanted to get out of here, he had to get out of here, to run away and keep running, and stop running only when he knew he was away from this horrifying picture and anything that could produce it. He could not stand looking at it any longer but could not tear his eyes away from it. It stared back at him and seemed to grin.

Finally, he turned his head sharply to the side and closed his eyes. After a moment, he grabbed his documents and started to rush out of the library. Then he remembered the paper under the lid. He wanted to just leave it and run, but he knew that without it, he would not be able to sign the deal with his client.

Ralph's greed overcame his instinct to run, and his terror of a moment before was forgotten.



He lifted the lid and let it bang against the wall. He reached down to pick up the document, but when his fingers touched it, the paper seemed to dissolve into the glass plate. He stared down at the bare glass in confusion and shock. He felt around, making sure it was gone, and checked to see if it had slid into the machine somehow. He could not believe it was gone. Losing it meant losing his gold mine.

His shock and fear suddenly turned to rage. The copier could refuse to work right and cause him to be late. That he could fix. But stealing an important page and causing him to lose his money was a different story. He hit the glass with his open palm, then hit it several more times, each time putting more force behind it. Each strike compounded his fury.

Ralph did not hear the rumbling from deep inside the copier growing louder.

He stopped hitting the glass and kicked the machine's hard shell, managing to put several large dents in it.

The copier started shaking, as if it were becoming angry.

Ralph raised his fist over his head, then brought it down on the glass with all his strength. Pain shot up his arm and something crunched in his hand, but his satisfaction in breaking the glass drowned out the pain. A spiderweb of cracks spread on the glass under his hand. A thin smile crossed his face.

As if someone had grabbed the lid and slammed it down, it snapped shut on his hand. He let out a yelp of surprise and tried unsuccessfully to pull his hand out from under it. His hand was trapped. Now he became very aware of the pain. He pulled harder, trying to free his hand, but he succeeded only in causing more pain. His entire arm all the way to his shoulder was inflamed—a mass of searing pain.

Panic set in and he tried to pry the lid open, but it would not budge. His face twisted into a red, sweaty mask which was almost a replica of the picture that the copier had produced just a short time ago.

The machine shook violently, and the light under the lid came on, nearly blinding Ralph. He froze, even though the pain was excruciating, and watched as a sheet of paper fell onto the tray. He was not surprised to see that it was a picture of his hand.



The blinding light flashed again and a jolt of pain shot up his arm. He inhaled heavily and held onto the machine with his free hand to steady himself against the agony. Another piece of paper came out and the pain eased a little. This time the image on the copy was that of a hand with the fingers missing.

The copy machine roared to life once again, and Ralph heard the horrible whine of the motor, a sound unmistakably like gnawing. He felt a tug on his arm, and the pain was almost unbearable. Then his arm was pulled under the lid to the elbow, and he cried out in anguish.

The next copy showed a severed arm.

Seeing this new copy, Ralph started thrashing about, trying desperately to free himself, but he managed only to make his arm feel as if it were being torn off.

The light came on once more, and his arm disappeared entirely under the lid. Ralph screamed, and consciousness faded away. He collapsed, overcome by pain and shock. His head was pulled under, and the copy which came out was not much different from the picture which had revolted him several minutes earlier.

The machine continued to produce copies until Ralph was entirely ingested, and then it settled into silence once more. The green PRINT button seemed to glow with satisfaction.

The librarian walked down the aisle to see what the commotion was all about. After the elderly woman whom she had been helping left, the librarian had received a personal phone call and had gone into her office and closed the door. She thought she heard some loud noises but ignored them, assuming they were from the copy machine acting up. She thought that it served that irritating man right if it was giving him problems. When she heard screaming, she hung up and hurried to see what was happening. She figured that guy electrocuted himself. Oh well, no big loss.

That man was nowhere in sight when the librarian walked to the copy machine. Instead, paper was scattered all over the floor. It looked as if the machine had gone crazy.

She sighed and started to gather the sheets of paper. She stopped when she noticed that they were pictures of what looked like human

parts: an arm, a leg, a foot. And one was a picture of a face, that man's face.

She dropped the paper she had gathered and instinctively backed up. Her stomach churned, and a thousand ideas of what had happened crossed her mind at once but she dismissed them all as lunacy. She looked at the copier. It seemed to stare back at her with one green eye.

The librarian began shaking involuntarily and for some reason she had a strong urge to see what was under the lid. She walked toward the machine slowly, the few feet she had to cross stretching out for a mile. She finally reached the copier and slowly lifted the lid. The glass plate was shattered, but the pieces were still intact.

Her image was reflected up at her from a thousand tiny surfaces, and it was these reflections that caused her to drop the lid. Without thinking, she quickly reached behind the copier, unplugged it and ran back to her office. She was now feeling so sick to her stomach that she decided to close the library and go home. Tomorrow, she would call someone to take the machine away. She would NOT order another copier.

The library was closed and the copy machine sat silent, resting in its cold sleep. The building was dark, the only light coming through the slits in the Venetian blinds. The copier sat in its corner in nearly total darkness. But that was okay. The copier did not need light; it could make its own.

The plug lay on the floor behind the machine, the cord coiled in several loops. Almost imperceptibly, the cord began to shake. The slight trembling propelled the plug across the floor and to the base of the wall, where it started to climb upward. It reached the wall socket and the cord plugged itself into the holes.

The motor inside the copier whined as electricity powered it. The PRINT button started glowing once again. The copy machine sat, waiting and watching in the dimly lit library, amid the wealth of information. The copier had information of its own. It knew about people and knew that more of them would be coming by sooner or later. It sat and waited patiently, waiting to make copies.

# I KNOW THAT

i know that sometimes it must seem like He is  
a child delighted with new-found power in destruction  
who runs around the sandbox smashing castles to bits.  
Sometimes, i feel that way too.

But I know that He is really like the hand that reaches  
over the cliff when  
you are stiff and tired with the struggle to  
hang on...

And as your fingers slip, you feel His touch, keeping you from falling  
(into the blackness)

Sometimes, I believe.

Sometimes, I know.

—Kelli S. Dunham



# WILLIAM

William Wilson Smith was born in the heartland of America. You know the place. You've driven through there on your way to the coast. It was the place with the wheat fields on the edges of town. The place with the golden sun that rises every morning as farmers mount their tractors or milk their cows. You remember the town because it was like so many others. Was it in Kansas? Maybe it was in Oklahoma. It doesn't matter. You'll never forget that town.

William was a part of all this now. At seven pounds eight ounces he broke no records entering the world. His order, time or place of birth had no significance, except to those there. His father was proud. His mother was heavily sedated. He was born before pain was fashionable, so his mother preferred sedation to agony. The world was not yet so civilized that women would seek the agony of childbirth. No one had to seek pain to feel fulfilled. Daily life provided enough suffering for most.

Neither his father's pride nor his mother's sedation affected William; he took very little notice of either parent. What got William's attention was the slap on the feet expertly delivered by the attending physician, a skilled obstetrician whose skills were not needed, except to deliver the slap. William cried. The doctor handed the results of his afternoon labor to a nurse, then left to congratulate Mr. Smith on the birth of his son. Mrs. Smith remained sedated while being cleaned by a nurse then sewed up by an assisting physician. William went to the nursery on a rolling cart and Mr. Smith handed every man in sight a cigar.

You remember the town. Maybe it was in Texas.

Even before he left the hospital, Willie had grown substantially. He was fed modern scientific miracle formula, no mere mother's milk for him.

Eventually, Willie outgrew the need for the scientific miracle formula and was relegated to eating ordinary food, but even this food was grown under the finest scientific conditions. Willie grew into a conscious individual. He was a normal child, but things change. Parents shape a child.

Young Willie woke up. It was always the same. The voices were loud but muted by the walls and the distance between them and Willie.

The noises were softer and sometimes punctuated with a crash. Both voices sounded of passion and desperation, but Willie knew no such words. He always found it peculiar, this game his parents played after they tucked him in bed, kissed him and wished him a good night's sleep. The game always ended the same. The noises subsided, then doors opened, then shut quickly. From his bedroom window, Willie saw his mother, standing on the porch, shoot at his father. She never hit him. The game never seemed fun, but his parents liked it. They played it regularly. His Dad would be gone for the next two days or more. Willie missed his Dad these times, but he always came back.

In the morning, Penelope Smith busied herself in the kitchen. She loved mornings because it was the only time she had to herself. David was at work and Willie at pre-school. She was leading a good life. The man she married was recognized in his community; a good man. Some said that he was not faithful to her, but it was just talk. A man in David's position was envied. She cleaned, cooked, did laundry, planted flowers, and took care of Willie, but things had not turned out well. When David returned, she would talk to him.

It was two days and several brief phone calls later before she saw David again.

"David," she said, "I want to go back to work."

David said nothing; he had to consider what he had just heard. He knew that dinner was not the time to discuss this, but he wouldn't want to discuss it later either.

"No," he said. "We've discussed this before and things haven't changed."

"I'm a mathematician," she said. "I've been trained to be a mathematician. I'm good at it."

"You can't go back, Pen; no one can. It's been too long and no one needs math these days, anyway. There's nothing you can do that my pocket calculator can't do, and it cost me a lot less than you do."

"I can go back to school. In one year I can have my degree; then I can teach here in town."

"No!"

"Listen, David, you don't understand. I need something more. We can talk about it later, but please try to see my side. Something has to be done."



# THE WALL

It is blood red, acme brick and solid.  
You can huff and puff,  
try to cajole me out,  
till you're blue in the face.  
You can reach in through the holes  
your love has made.  
You can touch me,  
but you cannot pull me out.

I am sorry.

How I wish it could be so!  
But, it is not for me to say  
how long the Berlin wall  
will remain.

I can't even remember  
when, or why,  
the bricks were lain.

Forgive me.

I know how frustrating it must be--  
trying to be a wrecking ball.  
But you must realize

It is my wall.

I built it.

I live behind it.

And, I must break it down;  
brick by brick, as it was erected.  
So please, if you can,  
give me time as my tool.  
For as time breaks away  
the strongest of mountains,  
It, too, shall crumble away  
the wall of my heart.

—Suzanne L. Moore

# THE GATE

They had been inside the gate for at least ten years. All had entered willingly and for differing reasons, but none had ever left. There were those who had come and gone, but of those who had stayed for the ten, none had ever left. In a way it was crazy. It wasn't a pleasant place. If anything, it was horribly dull. The repetitious activities numbed the mind after awhile, leaving only a sense of the work. It required little concentration to perform their task and less dedication. All was done by memory of repetition. They each had a dream. Each knew that one day he would walk through the gate and never return.

Johnny, college boy, wanted to be a businessman. He had a degree; all he needed was a job. He had been everywhere, but he lived for the west coast, dreamed of the good life and California women. Johnny was forty before he realized it, but he kept his dream of the job and California. One day it would all happen and he would be free.

Chet was streetwise. String of ladies, finest car, fancy clothes; that was Chet and this was the small time. All he needed was for someone to recognize his ability, and he'd be on his way. Chet was born for public relations; he could sell anything. His talk was smooth as glass and slick as a polished floor. He had talent and style. Chet drank himself into poverty, and finally death. People from inside the gate gathered around his coffin and noticed what a pity it was that he had died so young and had never made it outside the gate.

Bobby was a kid when he came through the gate. High school education, but lots of confidence. He was going to learn the work and be a boss someday. Bobby still works the floor. The boss's son is now the boss, and Bobby is hard, cold, bitter, but with no place to go but work and hell. He's been inside the gate for twenty-five years. The new boss is about that old.

Sharon started working after her kids were in school, maybe twenty years ago. She never left. She started because there wasn't much to do at home, and the money helped make ends meet. She was part-time at first, but the job grew and so did the number of hours she

worked. It got to the point that she hardly saw her kids, and after her husband's suicide, she had to work to eat. She's still inside the gate.

Rodger had it all figured out. Four years of college, two years of graduate school, then a good job and the good life. That was before his first child was born. Now he's on his fourth and trying to save money for them to go to college, but he still dreams of outside the gate.

There is no moral to this story. There is no ending either. It just goes on.

—Charles Brooks

# TO A ROSE

I saw her in the dead of Winter,  
Unbecoming and not to be desired,  
--This thing of thorns in our yard.  
Many snows both came and went,  
And soon the \*Harbinger was sent--  
Chirping news that spring was near!

I saw her too, in the Green of Spring  
--Promising, budding, giving hope anew!  
This thing of thorns in our yard.  
And then the rains came gently down  
--Nurturing the thirsty ground  
--And the Rose that we hold dear!

\*Robin

—Clyde Lewis Hughs Sr.

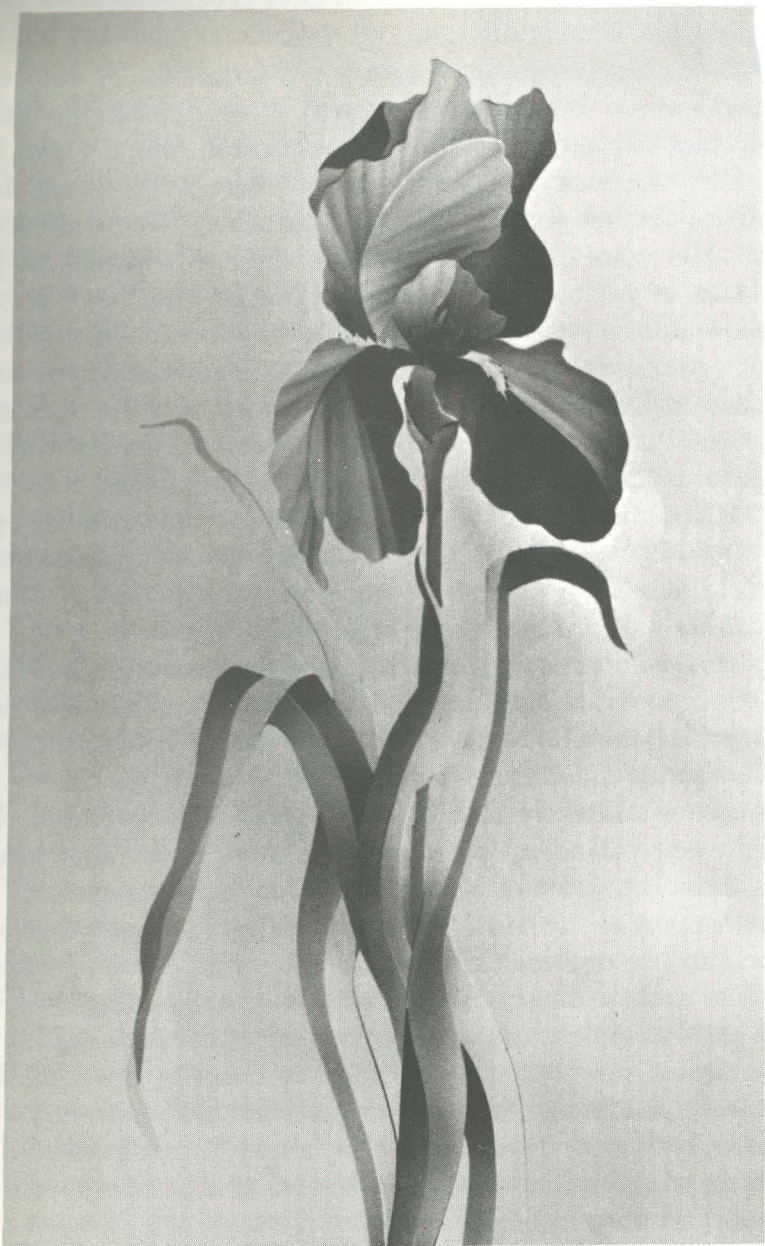
# SANCTUARY

There are times when I really would like  
for someone to draw me near and hold me.  
I miss the intimacy.

The slow, lingering caresses  
the whispered words  
the enveloping warmth  
that slowly takes away the chill...  
and leaves it but a dull memory.

—D. W. Antrim





—Marty Hart

# DADDY, IT'S SNOWING

Snow falls silently against the dark old farmhouse. It drifts and bellows, like feather down, over the earth. I wonder how he knows it's falling; but he knows and in the darkness, where nights are unmolested by electricity, he comes to us where we lie snuggled in the warmth of feather mattresses and each other. "Come, wake up, little ones!" His voice is filled with some unknown excitement, joy maybe, or awe, or perhaps it's the child in him looking out. We wake to his voice, small fists rubbing sleepy eyes. Hot breaths fan out into the cold air around us, making little vapor trails in front of our faces.

"What is it, Daddy?" My big brother scoots from the warm spot in his mattress. "Is it morning yet?" He runs toward the big window, his bare feet thumping rhythmically against the cold plank floor. "It's still dark." He presses his face against the window pane, hands cupped to the sides of his face. "Snow," his voice, soft and whispered, echoes from the cold glass, fogged now by his warm breath. "It's snowing!" His arms lift high as he stretches up on his toes.

Bed covers, wildly thrown back, flap against the cold air as children scramble from warm beds, racing on tip toes to the window. Each pushes for a place at the window. The man stands behind them; his big calloused hands touch little bodies.

His laughter and excitement matches theirs. "Snow cream!" The cry is caught and picked up by each one almost in the same breath. He scoops them up, three at a time, laughing. "All you can eat." He watches with them as the snow cuts through the darkness at the edge of the porch and settles one flake against the other, piling up a carpet of white. The drab winter scene is turned into a sparkling landscape of wonder and beauty, casting its soft glow across the dark night.

Snow almost never came to our home deep in the southland, but when it did, he knew. And no matter what the hour, he roused us from warm beds so that we could see it falling. Sometimes he helped us make a snowman tall as he with a broom under its arm and one of his old hats set atop its head.

In the spring when trees budded and the earth came to life, he plowed the fields around our country home. The sharp smell of fresh-turned dirt filled the air. The smells and sounds of life hung heavy



in the warm spring air. He gathered all the wonders of nature about him and put them on display for his family; wild violets from the deep woods he brought to Mother, hiding them in his hat or behind his back, till he slipped up behind her, popping them out at just the right moment with that look of delight. Baby rabbits cuddled in a cardboard box on the back porch, a baby hoot owl white as a fluffy spring cloud, turtles no bigger than a thumb nail. All were things he found for us to see, to care for and learn about.

Down in the pasture we could hear old Joe, an army mule Daddy had traded for to work the plow. Joe was a good mule and smarter than your average mule, we thought, because he'd been trained and served in the army. He was braying continuously. We could hear a cow mooing, too. Their sounds combined: one fretful, the other strong and persistent. "One ah them cows has dropped a calf." Daddy pushed back from the breakfast table and walked to the back door, looking out across the wide rolling pasture; he shook his head from side to side: "Sounds like Cherry."

"Cherry's due next week." Mother looked at the calendar. "Bertha's due tomorrow."

Daddy pulled his hat on. He never wore a ball cap or straw hat like most farmers but used his worn dress hats for field work. "I better go." The hat set low and cocked to one side on his head. "Joe's got a calf, and whichever cow it is, she's liable to hurt herself trying to get her calf away from him."

"I'll come with you, Daddy." My big brother shoved his chair from the table. "I wanta see how he does that." We all shoved away from the table.

"The rest of you children can stay here." Daddy motioned us back as he and my brother walked out into the dew-covered morning.

"Eat your breakfast now." Mother stood at the screen door, watching them walk across the yard. "When ya'll finish, you can watch for them by the gate yonder."

We heard them long before we saw them. Daddy's laughter echoed in the midst of the mooing and braying. My brother's boyish voice drifted out wide and high over the still morning. The sun lay just on top of the thick timber; it touched the dew-covered grass, splashing colors like reflecting prisms across the pasture. We could see them

now as they topped the ridge in front of the sun; like little shadows, they bobbed and weaved, growing in size as they neared. Daddy had the calf across his wide shoulders. "It's Cherry!" We hung on the fence, waving and laughing. Baby calves were always a source of joy and excitement on the farm. The old Jersey cow had been a part of our family as long as I had. She followed Daddy, trotting along behind his long-legged gait; her moos continued as she shook her head, nudging her calf at every chance. Old Joe pranced and sidled, braying loud and pompous as he followed behind. When Daddy had the calf and its mama in the barn, Joe seemed satisfied. He raced over the pasture, tail switching, braying and kicking up his heels like a young colt frisking in the cool of the day. He never let up rescuing new calves dropped in the pasture. That picture of Daddy with a new calf across his shoulders became a fixed image in my mind as years passed.

Coals burned red hot as he worked in the shop, bending steel, shaping horseshoes, mending broken wagon wheels and plows. He could do it all with hands as strong as any steel he could bend.

He tapped Dixie's hind leg: "Lift that foot, little girl." He fitted her foot firmly between his knees, and as he trimmed and filed her hooves, he sang, "I'm going to town, honey, whatcha want me to bring you back?" His deep mellow voice drifted out across the yard. "Going to town, honey, whatcha want me to bring you back?" The old mare lifted her ears high, her eyes rolling back as she listened to the big man's bluesy tune. "Bring ah bottle ah booze, baby, and a John B. Stetson hat." He worked the heavy file against her hoof in rhythm with his song. "Bring it to me, honey, bring it to me." His laughter rang out as he ended his song with a series of loud yodels.

He mended our shoes, built my Mother's furniture. He bucked hay from daylight to dark, felled timber with an ax, and split logs as big as his body for Mother's cook stove and winter warmth, singing his songs all the while. Sometimes in the evening, he would take his old guitar from the peg where he kept it hanging and, with mother on his knees, he'd give the grandest concert for all of us to hear. His tall thin body was as strong as an oak sapling, bending and swaying in the storms of life. The hands that were so strong could cuddle a new baby he'd helped deliver himself or care for a sick child long



hours through the night. He gave dignity and love, not just to his family but to every man he knew.

"Daddy, when I grow up, I want to live in the b-i-g city." The young girl measured high with thin arms. "There's places that have streetcars and picture shows that last all night!" Her eyes danced as she stood at his knee. "I wanta live in a place like that."

He looked at the slender girl. "Well, sis, just remember that no matter where you go or what you do, you always take yourself with you." His big foot patted in the rhythm against the plank floor. "Things is a lot different in the city." He laughed softly. "In the city, people go out to eat and in to use the toilet; here we go in to eat and out to use the toilet." He glanced at the weathered old outhouse from the porch where they talked. He dropped his head as he studied the cracks in the floor. "Ain't no fields to plow, no quiet times on the back porch." They were silent for a time, she watching him, he lost somewhere in his mind. "Happiness ain't a place or what a man owns in this life. Happiness is a man loving a good woman, working together raising children, knowing where he fits in God's plan." He looked at her again; their eyes met, holding. "You'll understand one day, girl."

The years fell away. His children grew and took mates. They became ministers, factory workers, farmers, and teachers. They all had the love and respect for the land and for those who tended it that he instilled in them. His hands never left the plow; his heart never strayed from the woman he chose as wife. The young girl who stood at his knee and talked of life in the b-i-g city stood beside him now, a woman with children and grandchildren. Her eyes studied the man who had given her so much in the years she'd known him.

Her thoughts turned back inside her; memories of laughter and song, struggles and hope rushed like swift current across her mind. "Guess what, Daddy, I have a feller!" She spoke softly, almost too shy to tell him. "He's coming by to take me to church."

"Well, now, a feller." His brow creased deeply as he studied her. The blue eyes she loved seemed to shine brighter than she remembered. "What's his name?"

She heard a break in his voice as he spoke to her. She told him the boy's name, stretching up on her toes. "He's this tall and awfully



skinny."

"Well, I imagine he'll fill out one ah these days." His brown face smiled down at her. "Why did you choose this young man to be your feller?"

She was thoughtful for a moment. "Well, he's nice and fun and I like him ah lot!" She smiled a wide smile. "Besides, he said he'd take me to the show this Saturday and we can have hamburgers and cokes and he's gonna pay for it all!"

He laughed, his big hand rumpling her long hair. "Just remember you're on proving grounds now, sister." He stepped back, studying her. "You'll be seeing lots ah young men in the next few years, I reckon. Be careful of your name. Don't do anything you'd be ashamed for me to see you doing." He gazed out across the open sky. "A man's name is the most important thing he owns." His eyes turned back to her face. She listened intently to his words. "You can build a lifetime on a good name, but if you ever ruin it, it can take a lifetime or longer to rebuild it."

"Look, it's snowing." The soft whispered voice of her brother echoed across the years. The woman turned her eyes away from her father to the window. "Snow," her voice whispered. "It's snowing, daddy." Her eyes rested on his face. "And in March."

His children gathered round him, their eyes on him, each with his own thoughts and memories. "Snow. Wonder if he knows?"

"He knows," a voice trembled. The ride behind him was long and quiet. Snowflakes, big as quarters, sifted against the large metal coffin where he lay. The earth he loved and tended all his life lay open ready to receive him into her damp, sweet-smelling depth.

Silently, they left him there in the little country churchyard, with the snow drifting gently over the new-turned earth, piling up soundless against memories of a man and his life.

# SPEAK SOFTLY

Speak softly  
So I will know you are here  
Take my hand in yours  
So I might feel your warmth  
Sound your laughter  
So I will know your joy  
Lie motionless in the grass  
So I might see your beauty  
Stay with me  
So I might know your love

—Elliot

# FRIENDS

Like leaves

spinning away in the wind

glancing off each other

we swirl in the air

up and down

in time to the breeze

Off again then on again

Occasional friends

never really grasping hold

but always at the mercy

of time

—J. Leigh Perry