

ABSOLUTE

Spring 1989

Absolute **Spring 1989**

Sponsored by the Institute of Communications and the Arts, **Absolute** presents a collection of original art and literature by students, faculty, staff, and friends of Oklahoma City Community College, 7777 South May Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73159.

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Oklahoma City Community College, Spring 1989.

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PREFACE

Two years ago, in my first issue as faculty sponsor of this anthology (Sprint 87), I pondered the possibility of changing its name. You let me know that that was not a good idea. In a world where so much changes so quickly, perhaps it is important that some things stay the same. In a world where there are said to be no absolutes, perhaps there should be at least one. And so I have left it alone. I hope you approve.

More recently, I entertained the notion of a change in format and entered into discussions with our art editor about a new size and layout. But the product that was emerging was a magazine, not a literary anthology. There is a difference. And so I backed down from that idea, at least insofar as ABSOLUTE is concerned. We have established an identity and for now, at least, I would like to maintain it. But the idea of a magazine is intriguing. We have a course in magazine article writing, we have courses in photography and photo journalism, and we have courses in commercial art and layout. Might it be possible, when budget constraints are overcome to initiate a magazine for the college? It would provide another showcase for our students' talents. Just wondering.

Elsewhere in this issue is a letter from one of our area high school teachers, Konni Gardner from Noble High. Now, usually we don't print letters, but this one provides a sense of the kind of continuity and staying-in-touch that exists between this anthology and its former contributors, between this college and its former students. Are there others of you out there who go back to the beginning? Let us hear from you.

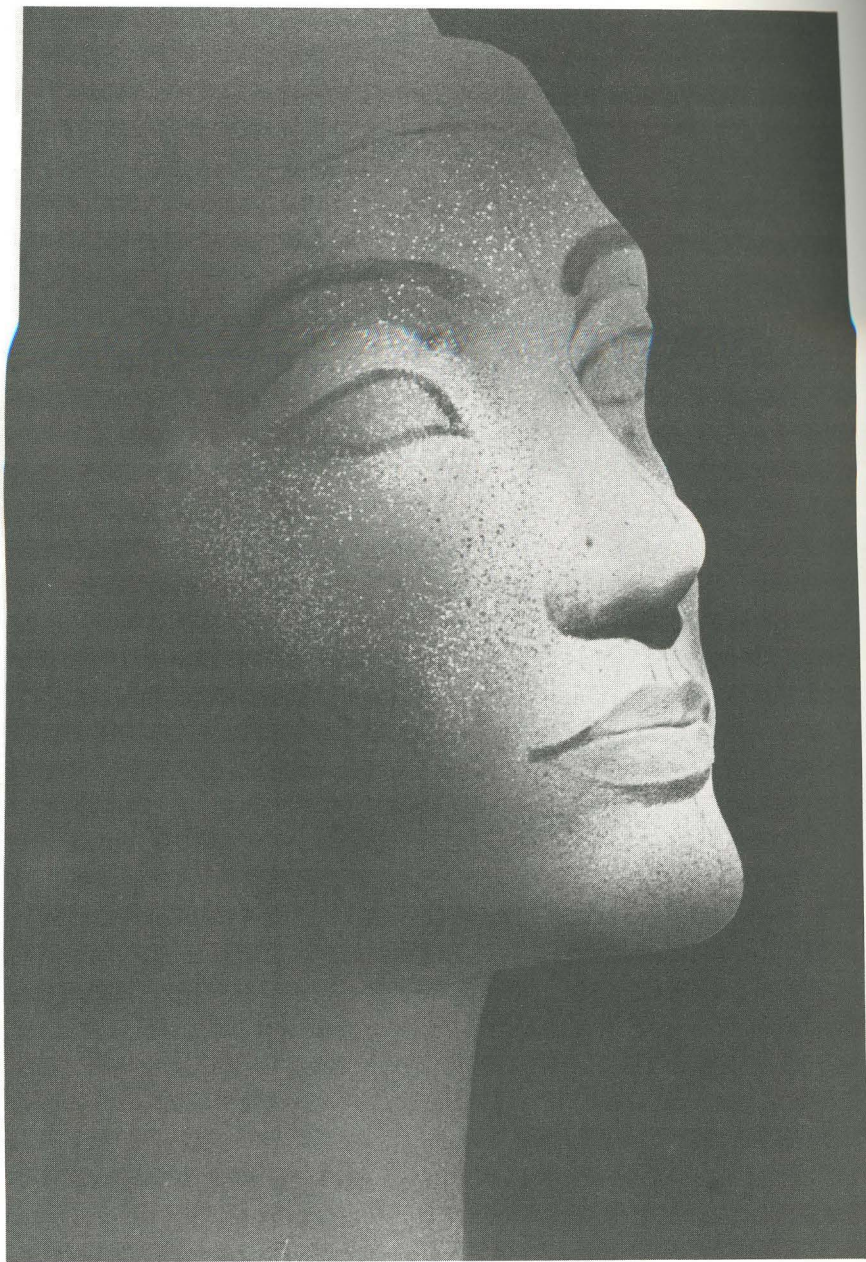
Gene Bragdon
Spring, 1989

I Wonder if She Knows

I watch the light fall
through her skirt and
I wonder which is softer,
the sunlight through the cloth or
the skin that it touches.

I wonder if she planned
such a day to walk in and
if she knew that I would watch,
waiting to see what the light would reveal.

—Charles Brooks



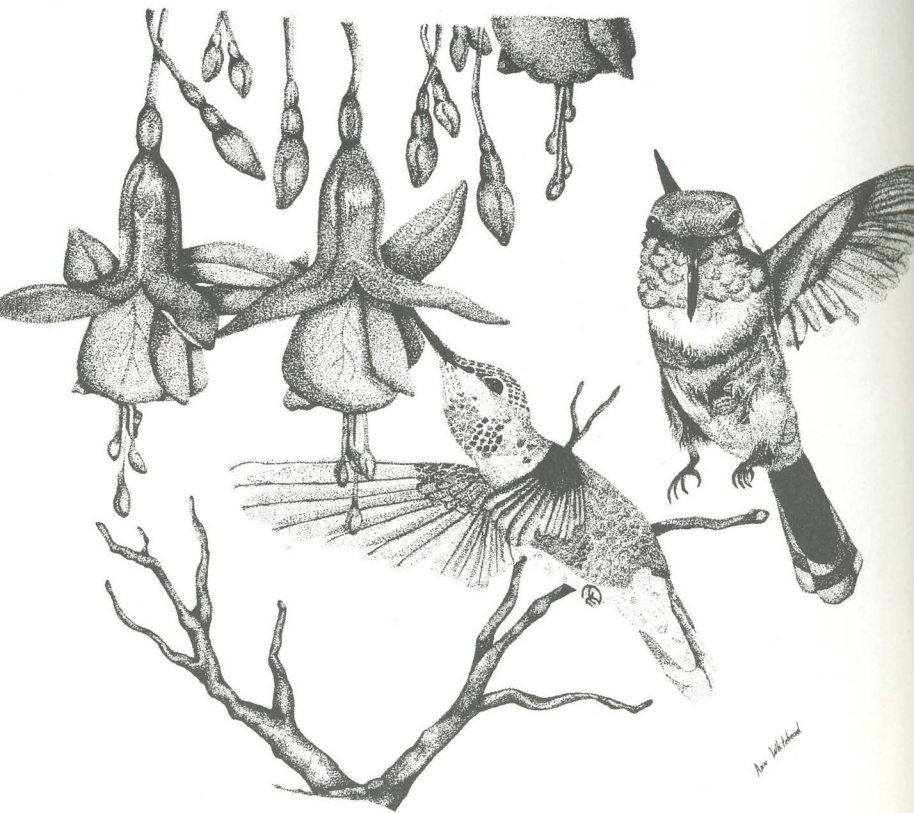
Airbrush

—Fadia Elkadi

YOU CALL

You call
and I lose my place
in whatever life I've managed
to snuggle into.
You call
and tell me of seasons
which are passing without me.
You call and I see myself
in a vision you describe
of us together
somewhere
that I chose not to go.
You call and I wonder.
You call and I know
the distance hasn't changed us.
I know the lines beside your smile
are still there.
I know your dreams are intact
and those who seek your answers
are being fulfilled.
You call and I am quiet.
You call and I hear my heart
beating faster
as the words begin to form.
You call
and I hesitate
before I say no
again.

—Barbara Rowland



Ink

—Anna Whitehead

SISTERS

I can feel the bond between us
my strong Truth Sister
as our words clarify the struggles
and all we've labored through together
to justify the hard directions
we've no choice but to go

I can feel the trust between us
my brave Hope Sister
as your fear comes to me
for easing
and reassurance
as mine, in need of the same,
goes to you

And I can feel the hate
that lingers in your heart
my forever Earth Sister
brought on
by the vision of your grandmother's pain
with the pale skin of my ancestors
reflected in her eyes

—Barbara Rowland

Evenings in the Park

If you go there in the evenings, you will see them.
They are always there, on the benches or on a blanket
on the grass.

I wonder if they see me. I doubt that they do.
I do not exist where they are.

They laugh, smile a shared joke or a moment, sometimes
nothing at all.

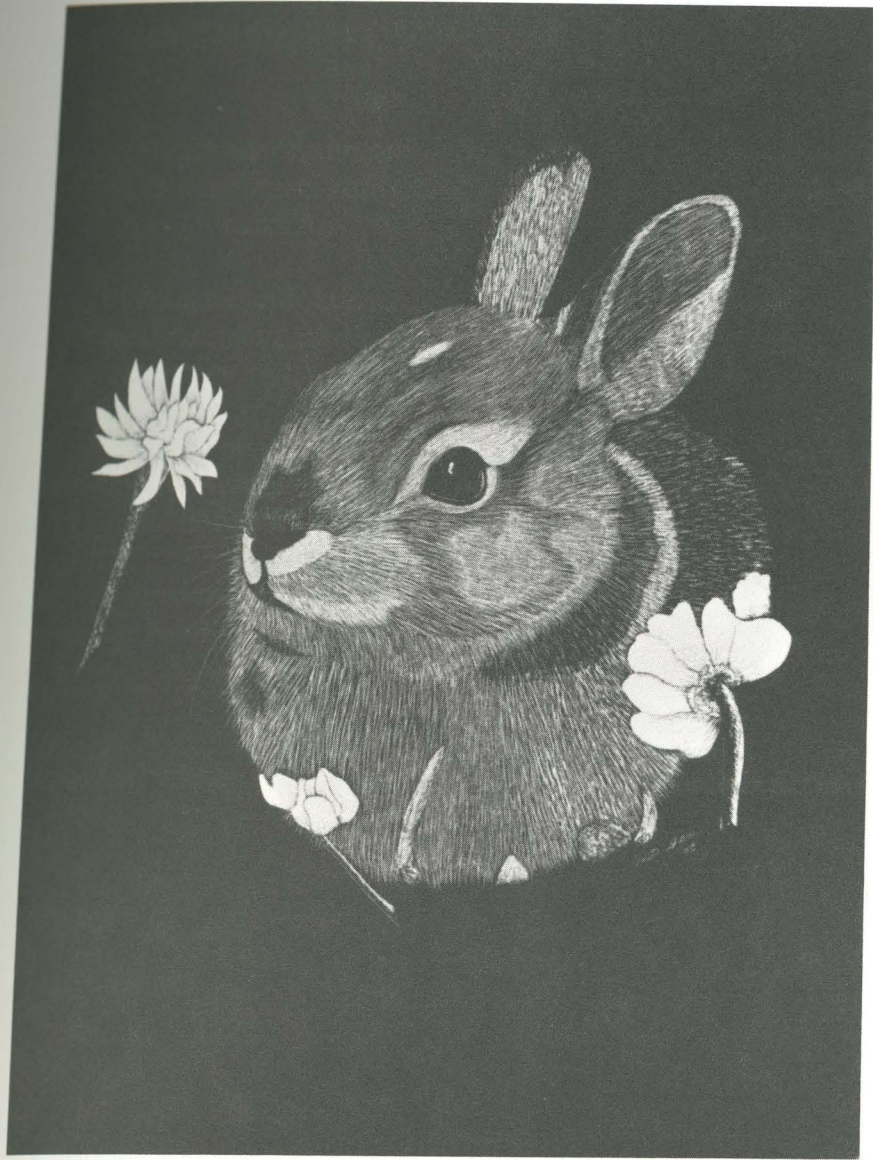
They have their own warmth, their own fire.
Shared fire, the combustion of two inexhaustible elements.

We shared a fire once.
It consumed us and now we run.

FIRE! FIRE!

They don't hear us.
We run from the debris and the flame;
they move closer,
warming themselves in the glow of the fire
in the darkness of the evening.

—Charles Brooks



Scratchboard

—Anita Shaw

When Sweet Dreams Leave

When sweet dreams leave
she never says goodbye.

"I have to go," she says.

She has to go.

This time she
will stay.

This time

I will

hold her.

I watch her walk

across the carpeted floor

from the couch to the door.

She waits.

I go to her;

I hold her.

We kiss, then

break away.

When sweet dreams leave
she never says good-bye.

Her husband and children
are waiting.

"I have to go."

She has to go.

—Charles Brooks

Wedding Bells

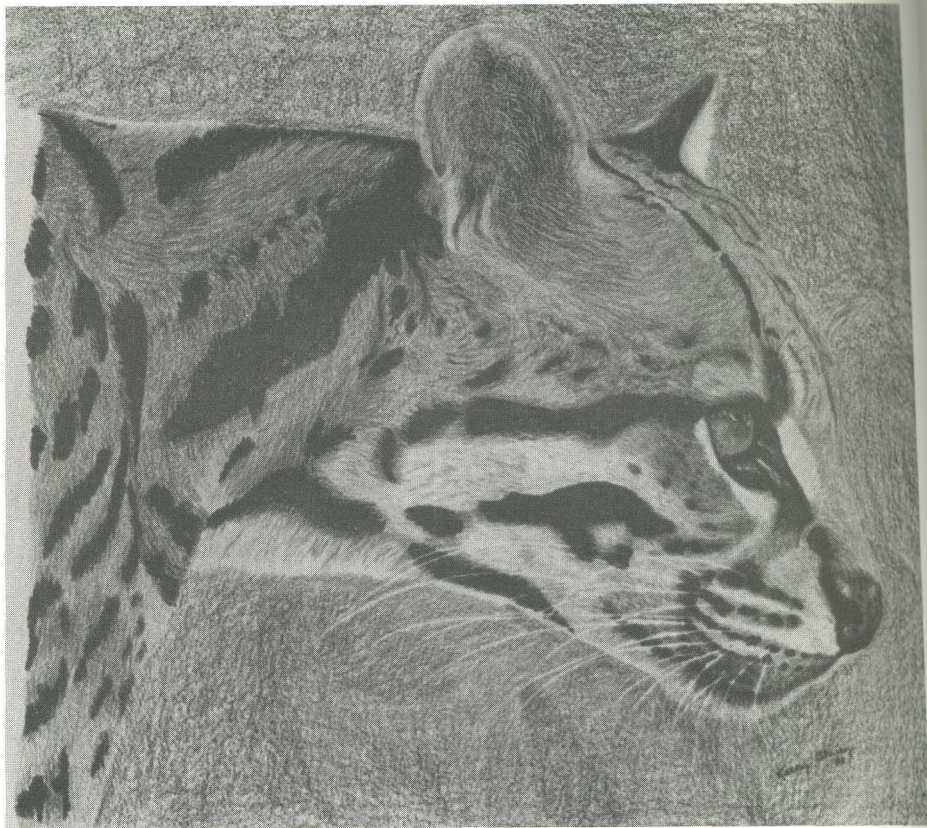
She rolled into my life like
a thunder storm.

A force powerful, unmatched, unstoppable...
by mortal man.

She caressed my soul and heart
with love-

I said nice to meet you and ran.

—Damone Butler



Scratchboard
and Colored Pencil

—Kathy Shirey

Red, White, but Mostly Blue

Last night I cried myself to sleep,
because my children didn't have
any food to eat.

I asked the Master for a soup
bone for my pot.

He shook his head and said
welfare and food stamps
can buy a lot....

God bless America.

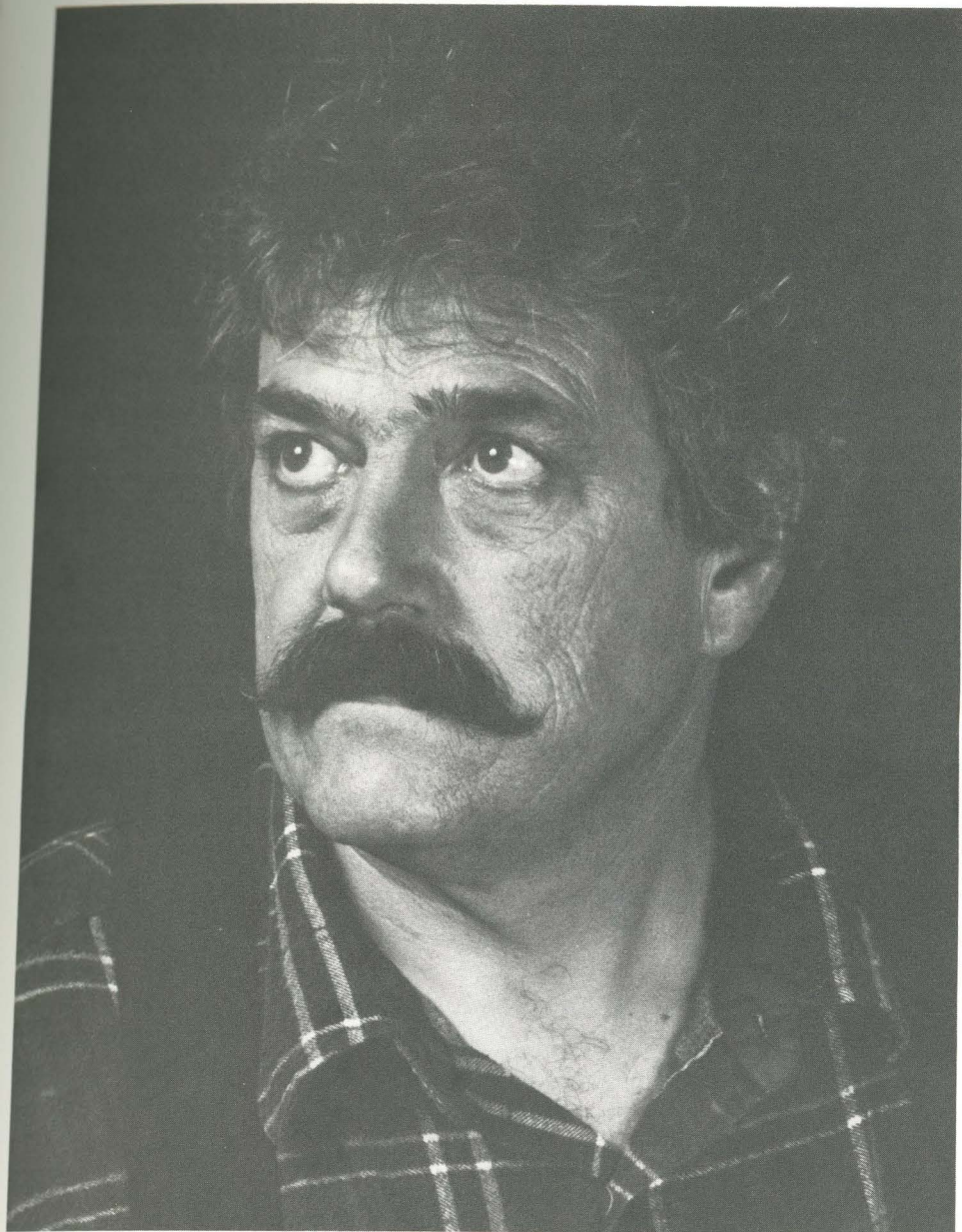
Love, Ronnie

—Damone Butler

Grandpa

My heart overflows with love
as I gaze at him - my grandpa.
His hair, snow-white streaked with
bits of gray,
I smooth back lovingly with my
fingertips.
His weary face etched with lines of
worry and fatigue, love and wisdom,
Gives me the strength I need.
His gnarled hand clasps mine tightly,
yet ever so gently,
His clear-blue, tear-filled eyes are
full of pride and deep love
As he speaks:
"You'll be all right. You'll make something
of yourself. I'm banking on you!"
And as my sight blurs with tears,
I know I'll never let this beautiful
man down,
This man who has instilled the wonders
of joy and tenderness, love and
hope in my life,
This man who will soon move on
to a more glorious world,
But will leave his spirit and teaching
in my soul forever.

—Diane Luce



Photo

—LaWanda Lavarney

Six Bits

I

Glass and steel boxes:
Boxes within boxes,
Lives within lives;
One public, the other...
Private.

Antiseptic living in a
Septic world.

Clear panes of glass reflected
Gracious rooms in their squares,
And the elevators never touched
Street level.

II

Turgid Canadian...
Muddy-bottomed, quick-
Sand trapped,
Your lower banks home
To rats, dog packs;
People.

Broken boards, scrap metal;
Bits and pieces
Gathered from dumps
Built hodge-podge shelters
For human refuse.
Community Camp;
Refuge of the unwanted.

III

Wealth is a matter of perception;
Flies feed well
Off the garbage of rich
And poor alike,
Whether created within
The soul-proof walls of uptown
Restaurants
Or one-room shanties:
Equality on the wing.

IV

An eye-sore, only
An excuse for politicking:
The banks were cleared,
The dog packs
Chased off.
City hall could rest in peace
While growing numbers of poor
Slept in alleyways
--decently hidden from view--
Forgotten for the moment.

V

Full circle;
Well-fed consciences
Woke up to the rising
Shouts from the streets:
Former inhabitants of old buses
Tar paper and tin can shacks
Battered against the glittering, multi-
Storied glass fortress.
Tired of charity, tired
Of the eternal handout,

Bag ladies spoke for themselves;
The poor discovered their voice
And roared aloud.

VI

New pass-times;
Through pleas for Africa
Marches, rallys
For the latest fad...the local poor .
Downtrodden homeless.
While children raised to adults
In tacked-together trash heaps
Stare on in amazement:
All that activity...
 ...down on the Canadian
Echoes of the Camp
Linger on.

—J. Leigh Perry

Homeless

When the light of day subsides

and darkness covers my body,

I stand in the corners of my

world--and watch.

People come, people die...

others aren't so lucky.

— **Damone Butler**

POOR LINES or WAITING FOR THE PELLs

Two women
in a line
in a poor line
in a country trying hard to deny
they exist.

"You're intelligent women," they say.
Snap out of it.

Two women, after their 40-hour weeks,
in a poor line
looking for ways to believe in themselves.
Smart women
with children to feed.

Frightened women.

"They don't care," she said.

Women who see where others won't look.

"Children's ears are busting," she said.

Women who know what others won't learn.

"It's true," she said.

"Children's ears are busting."

Women who weaken when ears go untended
when money for medicine is already spent
on food.

Mothers are watching it.

Mothers are watching the pain
on the faces of screaming children
mothers who spent the money on milk.

Hurting women.

"Don't they know," she said.

They must.

"How can they not?" she said.

How can they not hear the screams
of mothers and children?

How can they not feel the breaking of spirit
which follows indifference?
the breaking which comes when screams are ignored,
the breaking which comes to mothers and children
who cease to believe they deserve
both milk and medicine,
the breaking which separates
and quietens
and destroys.

Two women
tired and betrayed
looking for ways to believe in themselves
after their 40-hour weeks
in a poor line
with children to feed.

—Barbara Rowland



Jon Wright

Ink

—Jon Wright

Oklahoma Winds

Tormenting torrents of whistling winds
Force young slender trees
Wordlessly down on their knees before it,
Begging for the cease
Of the stinging, maiming air —
But uncaringly it continues on its way
Unmercifully twisting and turning
Every tender tree,
Every newly-budded blade of grass,
Every living creature in its inescapable path.
The wind seems to search the land —
Determinedly seeking revenge
On some unknown enemy,
Possibly the source of its blinding anger —
Until, at last, it lies spent and sorry,
Soothingly, sensuously,
Caressing the damaged, aching meadows.

—Diane Luce



Ink

—Danny Ellis

Mask of Silence

I fear to unstop the dam
The flood of strong words
-a gauntlet of emotions-
That will sweep away the boundaries
Of self-imposed silence.

I seem instead to choose a middle ground
Safe, secure in anonymity:
Rather than rip aside
The concealing curtain
And place in plain sight
The deep-rooted tree
Growing in my soul.

To pull myself from the circle
Of family, friends,
From the linking memories
Of shared love, shared anger
That binds us together;
Me to them...them to me.

For to howl, rage, scream
Speak freely of joy and pain
Is to run the risk of being discovered,
Stripped...naked to ridicule
Unknown and unknowable
Even to myself.

—J. Leigh Perry

We Were Heroes

We were heroes-

We held the world in our hands,
and made it dance through a ring
of fire.

We had a motive-

Fun

We had a purpose-

Foolish.

We were legends in our own time...

We had it all.

We were young.

—Damone Butler



Photo

—David Green

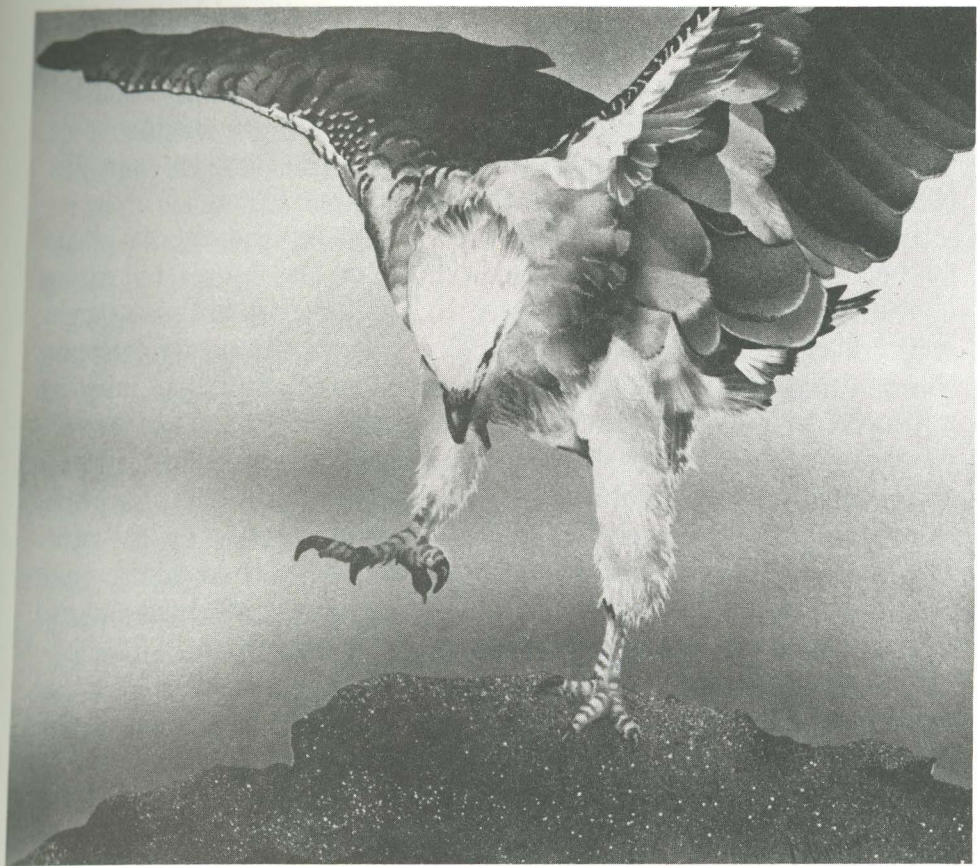
Over the Wall

No longer charging in
Both fists flying,
This fool
Has learned to tread carefully
Over eggshell arguments.

It's been said by wiser minds
That under thirty
Is the time of the heart,
Over thirty, of the head.
Over or under,
Head or heart--I'm tired
Of being in the vanguard--
Feet drag
Where they once raced.

This rebel's hair
Is swiftly turning gray;
My fingers are stiff--they won't reach
Around the banner's pole
To hold it upright against the steady
Winds of opposition.
Let someone else carry on
This unending war;
I'd rather advance
To the rear.

—J. Leigh Perry



Airbrush

—Susan Martinez

Ancient Comes Destruction

Commander Krog scurried through the scattered bodies of his people laid waste by the latest attack of the Enemy. The scene was nothing new to a soldier of his position but nonetheless, caused a great agitation. His eyes flitted from shadow to shadow as he quickly counted casualties. The Enemy would return soon. His count must be completed and returned to the Council.

The stench of death surrounded him as the mental digits flashed — 954, 955, 956. He concentrated on the figures, not daring to see the twisted faces, the vacant, staring eyes of those caught in the slaughter — 962, 963, 964. The toll was always greatest on the wide stretch of plain, no place to hide. But food must be gathered for the colony and food was abundant there. The fortunate who escaped to the east at the onset of the attack had a better chance at survival. Tall brush in that region offered sanctuary from the Enemy. Krog hated his turn at casualty count on the plain. The bodies seemed unending. But it was better than taking count in the nurseries. He had been given that duty but once and had used his influence to avoid a second such assignment.

Krog was getting nervous. He was an experienced soldier, had been in the military most of his life. He knew the Enemy well. His time was short. He must finish his count and return to the Council...and safety. He tried to pass the uneasiness off to his well-trained warrior instinct. It was said a good soldier could sense danger and thereby avoid injury. He tried to believe it, but the fear was new. He had been a soldier most of his life and never suffered this fear. Perhaps it was the destruction, the never-ending destruction. The Enemy had been particularly deadly in the past few months. His people were losing. He was not used to losing.

"Krog."

The commander froze at the sound of the death-rattled voice.

"Krog...help me."

He didn't face the voice. He couldn't face the voice.

"Krog..."

"There's nothing I can do, Rox."

Rox had been his second-in-command. They had trained together, come up through the ranks together. He had prayed that Rox had been spared.

"I cannot die here...Take me back to the colony. Let me die there, Krog. Let me die there."

"There's nothing I can do, Rox. You know the regulations. You are contaminated. To return you to the colony would place the entire population in danger. I cannot take you back."

Krog's voice was calm, even. He could not let his friend see his fear, hear his agitation. His position as an officer allowed him no fear.

"Then stay with me, friend Krog, stay with me while I live," Rox begged, his strength fading, his limbs beginning to shudder in the death throes which were the result of an Enemy attack.

"I will stay."

Krog eased his armored bulk to rest near his fallen comrade, still not daring to look at the prostrate, twitching body.

"Will they win? Will they destroy the colony? You know things, Krog. You are a favorite of the Council. I'm dying. I must know. I must know to die in peace."

Krog did know the fate of the colony. He had been sequestered in a high level strategy session during the last attack. Rox had led his mission on the plain alone. Another day Krog would have been lying alongside his friend.

"If the Council were to discover I had talked, Rox, I would be eliminated."

"I'm contaminated...dying. Who will I tell?"

At long last, the commander turned and gazed into the pain-seared eyes of his lifelong friend. The fear rose again, reminding Krog of a fast escape from a glacier region years before. Krog turned away.

"We will survive! We have survived for hundreds of thousands of years. We have survived countless enemies. We will survive this one. We will destroy the Enemy as we have destroyed those countless enemies of the past. We will survive!"

As Krog spoke, a peace fell over Rox's shivering body. But Krog continued, speaking more to calm his own fear than to ease his

friend's dying moments.

"We have a new weapon which will assure our victory. That's where I was when the Enemy attacked, Rox. I was with the Council. I have been assigned to lead the forces which will deploy it.

"It's biological, Rox. The Science Bureau has developed a chemical which will destroy the Enemy. All we need to do is infiltrate it into their food. It will cause them much the same agony their bombing causes us. But they will have no idea WE are responsible. They think us to be inferior creatures. HA! We who have survived for eons. We who have defeated greater enemies in the past. Inferior creatures! They will die and never know we have retaliated. His voice reached a fevered pitch.

"Rox...Rox..."

He turned again to view his friend. The twitching and rasping had stopped. Rox was dead.

The fear devoured Krog. His body twitched like the death dance of an Enemy bombing. He turned to meet his fear and suddenly knew it by name. It was death; mighty death had come to visit its clammy claws on Krog. He had stayed too long on the plain. The Enemy had returned with a blinding flash. Krog ran in the twisting, zig-zag style of military training, quickly to the east, to cover. But it was too late and he knew it. The fear had been death's warning. He would die quickly and with honor, not rasping and flailing as Rox had. There would be no time for the bombs. The Enemy would end him with one quick blow. He would not lead the attack, but others of his family would. Only the knowledge that his descendants would conquer this enemy as their ancestors had conquered countless others brought him peace as the enemy soldier, many times his size, crushed the life from his body.

Myrna Vining tiptoed carefully across the living room carpet and switched on the kitchen light as hubby Harvey opened windows to let the last vapors of bug bomb escape into the night.

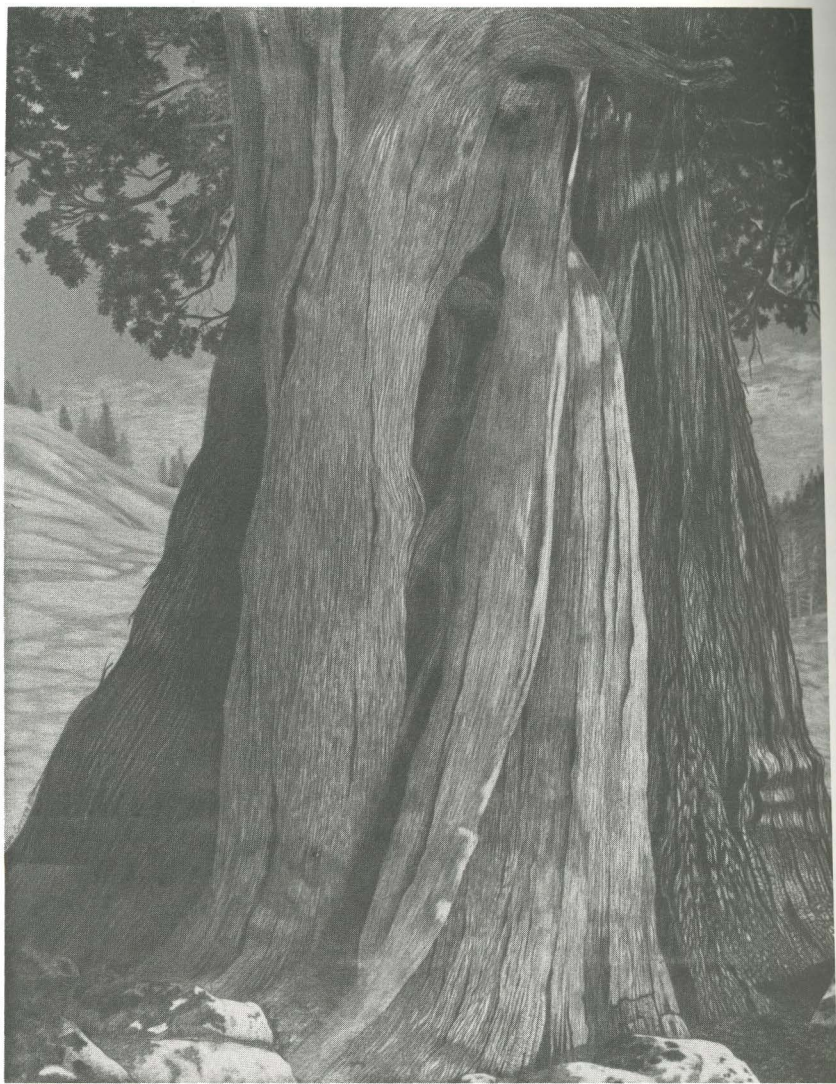
"God, Harv, there must be a million of 'em. Aw, jeez, this is disgusting, some of 'em are still shaking their little legs. Get in here and sweep these nasty things up before I throw up."

"Keep your shirt on. They ain't going no place." Harvey crunched across the kitchen floor to grab a beer before the clean-up operation started.

"Don't be so sure, wiseguy! That one's looking pretty lively...GET IT!"

Myrna jumped back as Harvey crossed the kitchen floor in two steps and landed a work-booted foot squarely in the middle of the tiny, escaping creature. "The only good roach is a dead roach, Myrna, my dear." He chuckled as he popped the top on a Coors Light and headed for the broom closet.

—D. Shell



Pencil

—Ann Smith

KNIGHTMARES

Something didn't quite feel right, but I really had no choice. If I didn't get help soon, it would only be a matter of days, or perhaps hours, before I lost my sanity.

Slowly walking up the carved marble stairs toward the huge, gray, windowless building, I couldn't help wondering about the true nature of the research that took place inside the Federal Sleep Research Center. Nearing the immense, revolving door, I could see two guards on either side, both armed with energy rifles. They paid me no attention as I entered.

Inside, the floors were made of polished marble and generously inlaid with fine ivory. I had no idea the place would be this extravagant. The walls were all part of one large Egyptian-style mural. Michelangelo couldn't have created a finer masterpiece. From the thirty-foot high ceiling hung a gigantic, crystal chandelier, casting prismatic splashes of color about the enormous room. To my right were three ten-foot-long couches and several chairs, all covered in what appeared to be soft tan leather. Directly in front of me was a large, semi-circular oak desk above which was prominently displayed the sign "Information Center."

Nervously, I stepped up to the desk and patiently waited for the curvaceous brunette receptionist to turn from her filing cabinet and assist me.

No such luck!

"Excuse me," I said in the sexiest voice I could find. "I have an appointment with Dr. Reynolds."

She turned and greeted me with a warm, enchanting smile that nearly made me blush. Her features were slight: deep, emerald green eyes, delicate nose, and a small, luscious mouth. Her thigh-length white dress was cut low in front and accented by her long, silky hair. There was something remarkably familiar about her, but I couldn't quite place it.

"And you are...?" she asked in a soft voice.

"Uhh...Marc Pennon," I replied, so fascinated by her beauty that I nearly forgot to answer.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Pennon. Have a seat. Dr. Reynolds will be with you in a moment."

"Your every wish is my command," I said, regaining my composure.

At those words, she gave me a knowing smile that left me somewhat bewildered. I turned and selected a vacant seat, which wasn't difficult to find since I was the only person in the waiting area.

"Worked here long, Gwen?" I asked, taking advantage of the name plate resting atop her desk.

"This is my first week," she said, hanging up the phone. "If you will excuse me, Mr. Pennon, I'll see if I can locate Dr. Reynolds. He doesn't seem to be in his office right now."

"Fair enough," I replied, closely watching her exit the room.

With that distraction out of the way, I focused again on the reason I had come to the Sleep Center. Three days ago, I had first gone to see my psychiatrist, Dr. Thorren, about my dreams. Dreams so real that I had awakened with a sharp pain in my right thigh from a wound I had received in my dream. Dr. Thorren, believing the pain was caused by my subconscious mind, referred me here. He told me that this facility would be better-equipped to help me solve my problem.

Abruptly the door opened, startling me. Gwen emerged, followed by a short, thin, balding man who appeared to be in his mid-fifties. His facial features were not too much unlike that of a ferret. He was wearing a fashionable black and gray, three-piece suit. I felt like a common beach-bum in my faded blue-jeans and slightly soiled, striped shirt.

"So glad to meet you, Mr. Pennon," he said in a weak but masculine voice, reaching out a hand. "Dr. Thorren tells me you have quite an unusual problem."

"I'll say. These accursed dreams are driving me mad," I replied while greeting him.

"Don't worry, Mr. Pennon. We have the finest equipment and staff in the world. If we can't help you, no one can."

Now there's a comforting thought. Something about him alerted something deep inside me, perhaps something atavistic. Dr.

Reynolds was not to be trusted. Still, I was in no position to walk out.

"Follow me," he said. "We have a few tests to conduct before we can begin with the observational stages."

"Just how much is this ordeal going to cost me?" I asked, hoping to avoid any unnecessary expense. That charlatan, Dr. Thorren, had already hit me up for nine hundred credits.

"This is a government-funded project, and there will be no charge to you for your treatment here, Mr. Pennon."

My suspicions grew stronger.

I followed him down a long, dim, narrow hallway. The lavish surroundings were no longer to be seen. He paraded down the hallway at a brisk pace, making our journey a short one. We then came upon a plain glass door, marked "Authorized Personnel Only," and went through it.

The large room we were now in seemed to be some kind of control center. The room was a pentagon with instrument panels along the walls. There were tinted windows above the panels all the way around the room. Through the windows I could see that there were four separate rooms on the other side, each containing furnishings similar to a hospital room, without the luxury of a holo-set.

"This is where we will monitor your dream sequences," said Dr. Reynolds. "There will be one of our staff members on duty just outside your room at all times — for safety — and there will be someone on duty here in the control room twenty-four hours a day."

"How long will all this take?" I asked.

"Oh, I think we can have you out of here within a few days; a week at the most."

That sounded good since I was scheduled to be on Mars in three weeks to negotiate a new contract between the Martian Miners Organization and Interplanetary Metals, the largest corporation in the United Federation.

Negotiations this time around would be extremely difficult. The union leaders were placing heavy demands on Interplanetary Metals, which could very well result in another strike. The last

such strike took nine months to settle, and with the recent ruling of the Supreme Council, the workers were obligated to remain on strike until an agreement could be reached. Rumors had it that the Supreme Council was heavily influenced by the big corporation and that a rebellion was brewing among members of all the labor unions. Personally, I sympathized with the workers, but without proper leadership and organization, they wouldn't stand a chance against the so-called "United Federation."

They ran the usual kinds of test--blood tests, urine tests, eye tests, more blood tests--as one might expect; I was even privileged enough to receive an injection or two, possibly three. The final injection set the room in motion, and all feeling faded from my edged nerves. Suddenly, the lights went out.

* * * * *

Fire shot through my right leg as the Pict's dagger plunged deep into my thigh. His next lunge was too obvious for my battle-trained senses. Easily evading his attack, I retaliated with a swift sword blow to the lower spine, killing him instantly. He had joined his four companions, who lay scattered about my feet at the bottom of a gulley. After wiping the blood off my superb weapon, I climbed to the crest of the hill, toward the sounds of battle.

From my vantage, I could see a raging battle between thousands. My army was faring well, much better than could be expected since they were outnumbered four to one.

Unexpectedly, a stray arrow came hurtling in my direction. As I spun to avoid the shaft, my injured leg gave out and sent me toppling to the bottom of the gulley. Aching all over, I removed my gauntlets and helmet, gasping for air. Wiping the sweat from my brow, I noticed a hooded figure out of the corner of my eye, walking in my direction. As he approached, I could see a faint aura about him. I tried to regain my feet, but was too weak. The mysterious figure came closer and closer, the aura growing stronger. I tried to rise again and a wave of intense pain, spreading from my thigh, swept throughout my entire being. My sight dimmed.

I was sitting in bed, my heart racing wildly and my body drenched in sweat. A man quickly came to my aid, forcing me to lie back. Now I remembered — the Sleep Research Center. I had had another "nightmare," as I had come to call them.

"Take it easy, Mr. Pennon," he said. "You'll be all right; it's over now."

My throat was so parched I couldn't speak. Promptly the room filled with doctors and nurses, running this way and that. A nurse wiped my face with a cold, wet washcloth and presented me with a glass of cool water.

"My leg," I said through clenched teeth. "It's happened again."

"What is it, Mr. Pennon?" the nurse inquired.

"Get Reynolds, quick!" someone shouted.

As if on cue, Dr. Reynolds came running through the door.

"What's wrong, Mr. Pennon?" he asked excitedly.

"Pain! In my right thigh!" was my anguished reply.

"Amazing! Just like before, eh?" Turning to one of the nurses, he said, "Give him seventy-five milligrams of Demerol." Then he looked back at me with fascination.

I didn't care for the look in his eyes, as if he were a child with a new toy. The pain subsided quickly as the nurse administered the medication. Reynolds left the room in a rush, taking several doctors with him. I wondered why I hadn't trusted my instincts. Now I knew how it felt to be a laboratory rat. It didn't suit me.

Several hours passed and I still hadn't heard from Dr. Reynolds. I wondered what the data they had collected revealed about my problem. I contemplated leaving many times as I waited, but realized that I couldn't without knowing the answer. I decided to give Reynolds a few more minutes; then the rat would go looking for him.

At that moment, soft footsteps from the hallway stopped outside my room. Slowly the door creaked open.

"Is that you, Dr. Reynolds?" I asked expectantly.

"Sshhh," said the feminine voice as the figure stepped through the door.

It was Gwen! I had almost forgotten about her. I still could not place where I had seen her before.

"What's up?" I whispered.

"We need to talk," she replied with a look of concern. "I like you, Mr. Pennon, and I don't want to see you hurt."

"At least we have something in common."

"This is serious. You have a problem."

"I know; that's why I'm here."

"No! You don't understand. I overheard Dr. Reynolds and some of his colleagues say that they are going to keep you here – permanently!"

"But why?"

"It has to do with your dreams. You're the opportunity of a lifetime for them."

"My dreams? What about them?"

"I don't have time to explain. If I'm caught here, there's no telling what they will do to me."

"Can't they see you from the control room?"

"Yes, but the man in the control room is a friend of mine. His shift is almost up, though, so I must hurry."

"Wait, please! Tell me about Reynolds."

"I really don't know much about it. I'll tell you all I know later, when I return. Right now, I must go. I just wanted to warn you."

"Thanks for the warning. I owe you one."

"Anytime," she said smiling. She kissed me on the forehead, then briskly left the room.

I gave this situation a lot of thought, finally deciding to play their game for the time being. I needed more information. When the time was right, I could make my escape, taking Gwen with me. I had a strange feeling that she would be glad to go, too.

I had almost drifted off to sleep when I heard my door open again. Dr. Reynolds came in with an aura of gaiety about him.

"Good news, Mr. Pennon," he said as he placed his black medical bag on the swivel chair beside my bed. "Your blood tests show that you have lead poisoning."

"My, that is good news," I said sarcastically.

He looked a bit irritated, then replied, "What I meant, Mr. Pennon,

is that this could very well be the cause of your nightmares."

"What about the pain I feel?"

"It's simple. Because of the severity of your dreams, your subconscious mind believes them to be real, thereby manifesting the pain within your conscious mind. It seems Dr. Thorren was correct, but now we know the cause. We'll need to run further tests, though, to discern the source of the lead contaminant."

"You want to run that by me again, in English?"

"Why not join us for dinner?" he chuckled. "I'll explain more then. We are having sirloin steak," he added, temptingly.

"You've got yourself a date," I said, feeling my growing hunger at the mere mention of food. I hadn't eaten in God knew how long. I was due for a good surfeit.

A nurse brought me a change of clothes and directed me to the showers. She gave me a watch so I wouldn't be late for dinner. According to the watch's calendar, I had been in the Sleep Center for a full day now. Just goes to show you that time travels quickly when you're having fun.

The meal was simply delicious, at least the third helping was. The first two went down too quickly to taste. Nothing much was said during dinner. Perhaps I couldn't hear the others due to the clanging of my fork as it slammed into the plate while speed-feeding my face.

Still sitting at the table, I looked across at Dr. Reynolds and asked, "How about that explanation?"

"Certainly," he said, leaning back from the table thoughtfully. "Somewhere, somehow, very recently, as a matter of fact, you have received lead poisoning. In small amounts, it can cause nightmares and vomiting, and be a general unhealthy nuisance. Larger doses cause death. We will have to go over everywhere you've been, everything you've done for the past month, and try to determine how the lead was introduced into your system."

"How will that solve my problem?"

"It won't, but we should find the source before you return to your environment to keep you from being poisoned again as soon as you leave here."

"Okay, but what about me?"

"We need to run another dream sequence so that we can pinpoint where the lead is concentrated in your system. I believe it's somewhere near the brain; that's why you're having such intense nightmares."

"What about the pain in my leg when I woke from my dream?"

"As I told you earlier, Mr. Pennon, your psychiatrist had the answer to that. The intensity of the dreams are so pronounced that your subconscious believes them to be real. As a result, your brain sends signals to the nerves in the afflicted area, causing severe pain. It's simply psychosomatic."

"I see." I didn't see. It sounded logical enough, but that atavistic instinct rang an alarm bell in my mind. I would play along for now, though, until I could learn what it was that Reynolds really knew.

"Why don't you get some rest now? We'll run the next sequence in the morning."

"What if I have nightmares again tonight?" I asked apprehensively.

"The nurse will wake you every hour or so to keep you from entering the R.E.M. state. We don't want you having a dream without our having a chance to monitor you."

"R.E.M.?"

"Rapid Eye Movements. That's the stage when dreams occur."

"Okay. Just don't let me sleep too long."

"You'll be fine, Mr. Pennon."

Easy for him to say.

The night was pretty much uneventful. The nurse came in several times to wake me, unnecessarily since I hadn't gone to sleep. I couldn't. I was afraid to.

Soon the room was once again filled with doctors, orderlies, and nurses, preparing me for another dream session. I grew fearful. I didn't want to go through this again, but it was too late now.

"How long will I be under?" I asked with a lump in my throat.

"Three or four hours," replied the nurse, as she stuck a needle

in my arm.

I didn't have time to ask any more questions. Her hospital smile was the last thing I saw.

* * * * *

The mysterious figure pulled back his hood, revealing worn, wise features. He had long gray hair and a gray beard that hung down to his chest. His deep-set eyes matched his hooked nose and thin mouth. His long, black cape was trimmed in silver and was covered with dust and grime. I knew him but could not remember his name or his station. If not for the black apparel, I would have thought him to be a medical man.

"Drink this, my dear boy," he said, pulling a small vial of clear liquid from a pocket within his cloak.

I drank the contents of the vial and found relief and vitality flooding over me.

"The dagger was poisoned," he said, matter-of-factly. "The potion has neutralized it and given you strength. You must rejoin the battle. Your men need you."

"Yes," I replied, trying to think, but my mind was muddled, as if in a dream. "I must help my knights."

I turned and climbed the hill once again, feeling a new strength within me. As I approached the outskirts of the fighting, I saw a friend, one of my knights, set upon by more of the Picts than he could handle. I joined in the battle, working my way toward him. I was a master swordsman, dealing death blows with ease. I tried to reach my knight, who was now being completely overwhelmed, but I was too late.

He had fallen.

In a frenzy, I swung my sword, dispatching one foe after another, until they had all perished or run away. I removed my helmet and gauntlets and bent down to my friend, lifting his head with my hand. Removing his helmet, I saw his face. I knew him well, but his name evaded me. He was alive, but not for long. He stared at me with contentment and opened his mouth as if to speak, but no words came out. He cringed in pain, then died. Weeping, I lifted my sword up high, screaming, "I'll avenge you, my friend!"

Suddenly, an eerie feeling came upon me. Slowly turning about, my greatest fear became reality. A figure was standing some two hundred feet in front of me. She — for somehow I knew it was a woman — wore a hood and long dark cloak which prevented me from seeing her face. She said nothing. She didn't need to for I knew her well. This was my archenemy. A most powerful sorceress. Though I was a master swordsman, it was clear that I was overmatched.

A bright, bluish light emanated from her fingertips as she began making gestures with her hands. She was casting a spell; I had to act quickly. My only chance was to rush her, but before I could, her spell was complete.

There was a blinding flash of golden light. When my vision returned, weakness overcame me as fear shot through my spine. I felt cold and helpless as I gazed upon my new adversary.

A dragon!

It towered over me, glaring at me like a cat stalking a mouse. It was a huge, golden dragon with two pearly white horns that curled back toward its long, snake-like tail.

I slowly backed away while trying to think of a way out of the situation. With a swift panther-like move, it lashed out at me with its tail, striking me along my left side, forcing me to the ground. As I regained my feet, I felt agony shooting through my left arm. I couldn't use it--it was broken. With an abrupt motion, before I could act, the dragon's tail swept my feet out from under me, sending me back to the ground, where my head struck something hard.

* * * * *

Opening my eyes, I could see that once again my room was filled with doctors and nurses. The back of my head was throbbing, and my left arm was aching. I flinched with pain when one of the nurses moved my arm too much. Another gave me an injection and I drifted back to sleep.

I awoke to the soft touch of a hand rubbing across my forehead. It was Gwen!

"Gwen," I said in a surprised voice. "It's good to see you."

"I've got to get you out of here, Mr. Pennon, before it's too late."

"Call me Marc. I hate being called 'Mr. Pennon.'"

"Get dressed, Marc. I'll wait for you outside the door, and please hurry," she said as she left the room.

I dressed as fast as I could and hurried out the door to meet Gwen. She led me to a door across from my room. It opened up into a small, dimly lit hallway. We proceeded quickly down the corridor.

"Gwen," I asked, "what's going on around here?"

"Dr. Reynolds is fascinated by the intricate detail of your dreams," she replied. "He has made holo-discs of both sequences. Your dreams are too close to reality, and he wants to study you--for a long time. He wants to impress the government so they will increase his budget for the Research Center."

"What about the lead poisoning he told me I had?" I asked, already anticipating the answer.

"He made the whole thing up to get you to cooperate. He doesn't use force unless it becomes necessary, but he will use it. You can count on that."

"That lying bastard!" I shouted, stopping in my tracks. "I'll fix him!"

"No! We don't have time. The alarm is going to sound any moment. We must hurry."

"Why should the alarm sound?"

"My friend. You know, the one in the control room?"

I nodded in agreement.

"Well," she continued, "he can only give us a few minutes head start. He has to sound the alarm to cover himself."

"I see. So, what are we waiting for? Let's get going."

We came to a locked metal door. Gwen put her right hand on the coding plate and the door silently slid open.

Without warning, the alarm sounded.

We emerged from the rear of the building. A densely wooded area stood some hundred feet away.

"We must run for the woods," she said, frantically. "We can hide

there. There will be guards everywhere in a few seconds."

Again I nodded in agreement. The girl was smart. I gave her that much.

We took no more than ten steps when two guards came running around the building, cutting us off from our destination.

"Halt!" one of the guards shouted. "Don't take another step."

Gwen looked over at me and said, "They won't shoot you. They're under orders not to, so run. I'll be all right."

"I can't leave you, Gwen. Not now."

"You must. It's your only chance."

"No!" I said harshly. "I won't leave you."

As the guards approached, I was careful to place distance between Gwen and myself. I glanced around, frantically searching for some kind of weapon, and grabbed up a long oak branch. If the guards wanted me, they were going to have a fight on their hands. They placed their guns back in their holsters, grinning evilly, and removed their riot clubs from their sides. One of the men swung his club. Instinctively, I ducked and counter-attacked with a thrust of my makeshift sword to his mid-section. The man grabbed his stomach as he doubled over and fell to his knees. I looked for Gwen, but couldn't locate her.

That was a mistake.

I was struck in the head from behind, and fell.

* * * * *

I awoke, finding myself lying on a huge pile of soft furs, inside a large, colorful pavilion. A small fire burned beside me, taking the chill out of the night air. Resting beside me was a knight, garbed in light, battle-worn armor and a long, tattered, blue cape. He was seated on the ground, his head between both hands, as if weeping. I knew this man well, for he was my friend and greatest knight.

"Lancelot!" I exclaimed.

"Blessed be the Gods," he shouted, springing to his feet. "The King lives!"

"Fetch me some water."

"Yes, My Lord," he replied, leaving the tent.

Had all this been a dream? Dr. Reynolds and Gwen?

That's it! I finally placed her. Gwen was Guenever, my beloved queen. But no, it couldn't have all been a dream. I lived an entire lifetime in that world.

Lancelot reentered, bringing me a golden cup of cool, clear water.

"Drink, Sire," he said, placing the cup to my dry, cracked lips.

"How long, Lancelot?" I asked. "How long have I been unconscious?"

"Only an hour, My Lord."

"That's impossible! I've been gone a lifetime!"

"As you say, My Lord, but Merlin brought you here only an hour ago," he said with a puzzled look.

"The battle! How did it fare?"

"Another fine victory, Sire. Morgan le Fay fled after the battle turned in our favor and she found that you still lived."

"How is it that I am alive at all?"

"Merlin, My Lord. Merlin used his magic to lessen the blow."

"Bring me Merlin. I must know more."

"Yes, Sire," he answered, going quickly to do my bidding.

Sitting up, I noticed that my arm was broken and was set in a wooden splint. I reached for the back of my head with my good arm and found a huge, tender lump. I had fallen on my head, I remembered, while fighting the dragon.

Merlin entered with an expressionless face. He wore his usual long black cape with silver trim. His long grey hair was uncombed and his beard was singed on one side.

"I'm glad you are well, Arthur," he said. "You are somewhat confused, I am sure."

"Tell me, Merlin, what happened?"

He took a seat beside me, near the warm fire. "You were sent into the future by a combination of spells, Morgan's and my own. It was the only way to spare your life."

"Then it was real, not a dream."

"Yes, Arthur, it was real."

"But how could I have lived a lifetime in that future world when I was only unconscious for an hour?"

"Marc Pennon and Arthur Pendragon are one and the same.

Pennon is your reincarnation, Arthur. He has always been you, and now, you will always be him. The barriers of time once separated you from your future self, but my spell has shattered the barrier. From the moment my spell was cast, you were doomed to share your life with your future incarnation. The alternative was eternal imprisonment in an empty dimension."

"I don't understand."

"When Morgan cast her spell, I had to act quickly. In order to save you from oblivion, I had to curse you, more or less. It is not an evil curse, and may even bring good fortune to you. You will, from this moment on, be doomed to travel between this life and that of Marc Pennon. The spell cannot be reversed. It is permanent."

"Then my nightmares will continue?"

"No, that part is over. You had them only because you didn't know the truth of your past. The initial shock gave you limited amnesia."

It was a word I did not know, but my future self recognized it. "Then I am doomed to be forever passed back and forth without warning?"

Merlin chuckled. "No, my dear boy. Now that your memory has returned, you may travel between worlds at your own will. Of course, this will take much training on your part, which I have arranged for you in the future time."

"You've been to the future, then?"

"Certainly. I was there with you all the time."

"I never saw you, Merlin."

"But I saw you. Guenever and I went into the future to fetch you back. I was Gwen's friend in the control room."

I was beginning to get excited over the whole idea of traveling through time. Jumping to my feet, I shouted, "Gwen, too? I knew it was Guenever!"

Merlin rose to his feet and walked toward the entrance.

"Wait, Merlin," I said excitedly. "What about my body in the future? Is it still there?"

"Yes, sleeping while you are here."

"Then I must go back. I can't leave my body in the hands of

those madmen."

Merlin walked out into the cool night breeze. Without looking back, he said, "Of course you will return, Arthur. Much sooner than you think. Now rest."

Lying back down on the skins, I began to worry about my future self. Somehow I had to get Marc Pennon away from those glory-seeking scientists. I closed my eyes, wondering how I could accomplish that seemingly impossible task.

* * * * *

I opened my eyes and found I was back in my old room, lying on my old bed. I was tightly bound with tough synthetic ties. This was the last straw. I truly believed I had lost my mind. It was not the doctors who were mad--I was.

I saw a faint glimmer of light out of the corner of my eye, towards the tinted glass window where the control room was. I turned to look and there he stood.

Merlin.

He winked and the straps that held me down suddenly snapped. In an instant, Merlin was gone, but I thought I could hear a faint laugh. The kind Merlin utters when he is being mischievous.

Suddenly, Gwen entered the room.

"Come, My Lord," she said, smiling. "We have much to do. You must learn to control your new power."

"You, then, are my teacher in this world?"

Giggling, she replied, "Of course, dear husband. Would you have another?"

"No way! This may not be so bad after all. What must we do?"

"First, we must escape. There is much work to be done. After all, you are 'The Once and Future King.'"

—David Fallwell

How Close Can You Come

How close can you come to eternity?

If you can dream it, live it.

From the innermost passions,
to the outer edges of the universe.

Accept no imitations or limitations.

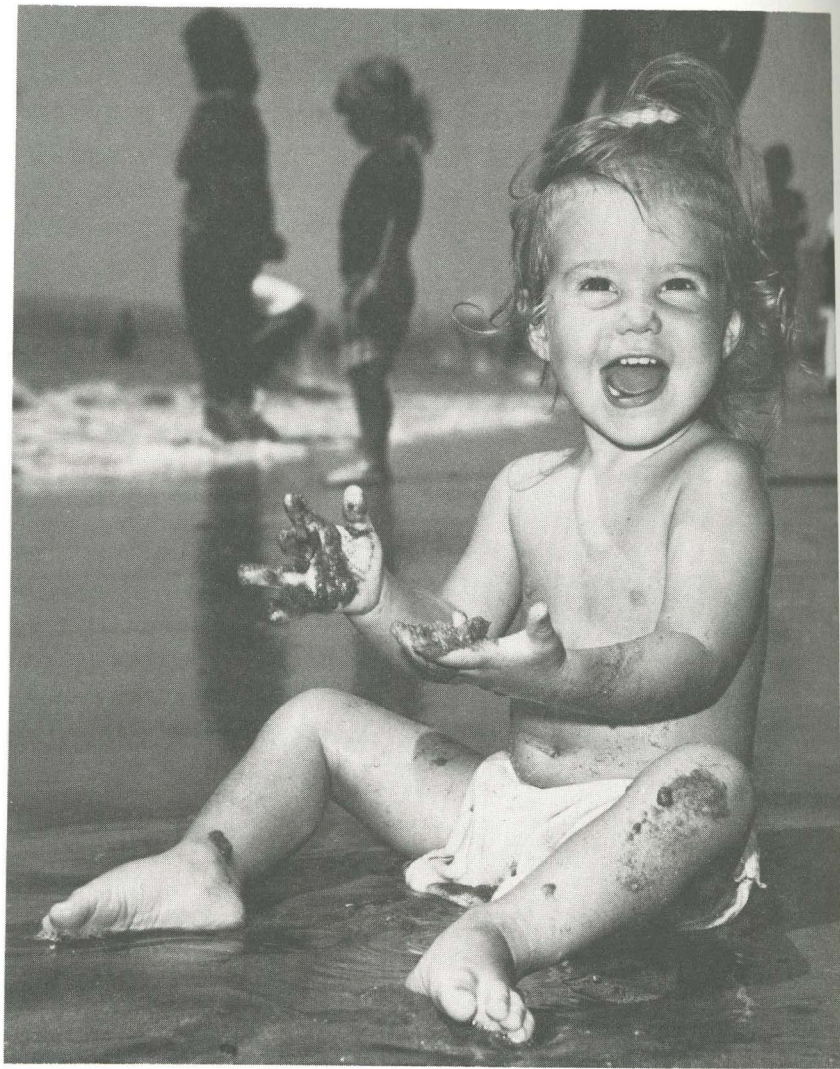
Looking for a life of thrills?

If you've got an itch,
scratch it.

Reach for the stars
and shine with them.

As far as you want to go.

—Lisa Woods
Noble High School



Photo

—Artie Hicks

Sounds of Racing Thunder

Sounds of racing thunder spread for miles
across the barren sky,
crying the many warnings never to let you
gain entrance into my heart.

Flashes of lightning across the sky so
bold and beautiful to the sight, but so deadly
to the touch,
Shatter the beautiful moments we shared
with your vicious, vindictive words.

Each raindrop falling from the dark stormy
sky,
is a drop of blood falling from the
white flesh of my wrist.

Beautiful rainbow rich in color, soothing
and nurturing nature from the furious attack
of the storm,
is every day I spend recovering from my
bitter-sweet life with you.

—Melanie Danielle Tutt
Newcastle

The Twisted Cross

SITTING in the corner, death rolling up through the cracks in the greedy walls, I prayed to God asking for reason to the simple word of jew. To merely a word supported by three letters I was about to divide my life. Beliefs had gone and mankind in red clawed at the dark hair as a scar of my religion. JEW- just another phrase to categorize our rituals at Hanukkah, but to a man with a cause it was his carpet to drag his feet on. My belief in God (stronger than his hate for life) could not be so easily torn as his swastika scraped away at our people. The struggle now unreal. I loved my God and believed in the kindness of mankind, yet because the word jew soured in one man's mouth I was about to die. THE children in the crowd of Nazis skipped rope and dreamed of the prince on a white horse who was coming to take them home. Their useless innocence only to serve as the fuel for his stone crypts. The end

a last gasp of air by our people
so he could breathe alone. A
skipping rope sizzles in the fire.

—Mindy Stiles
Heritage Hall



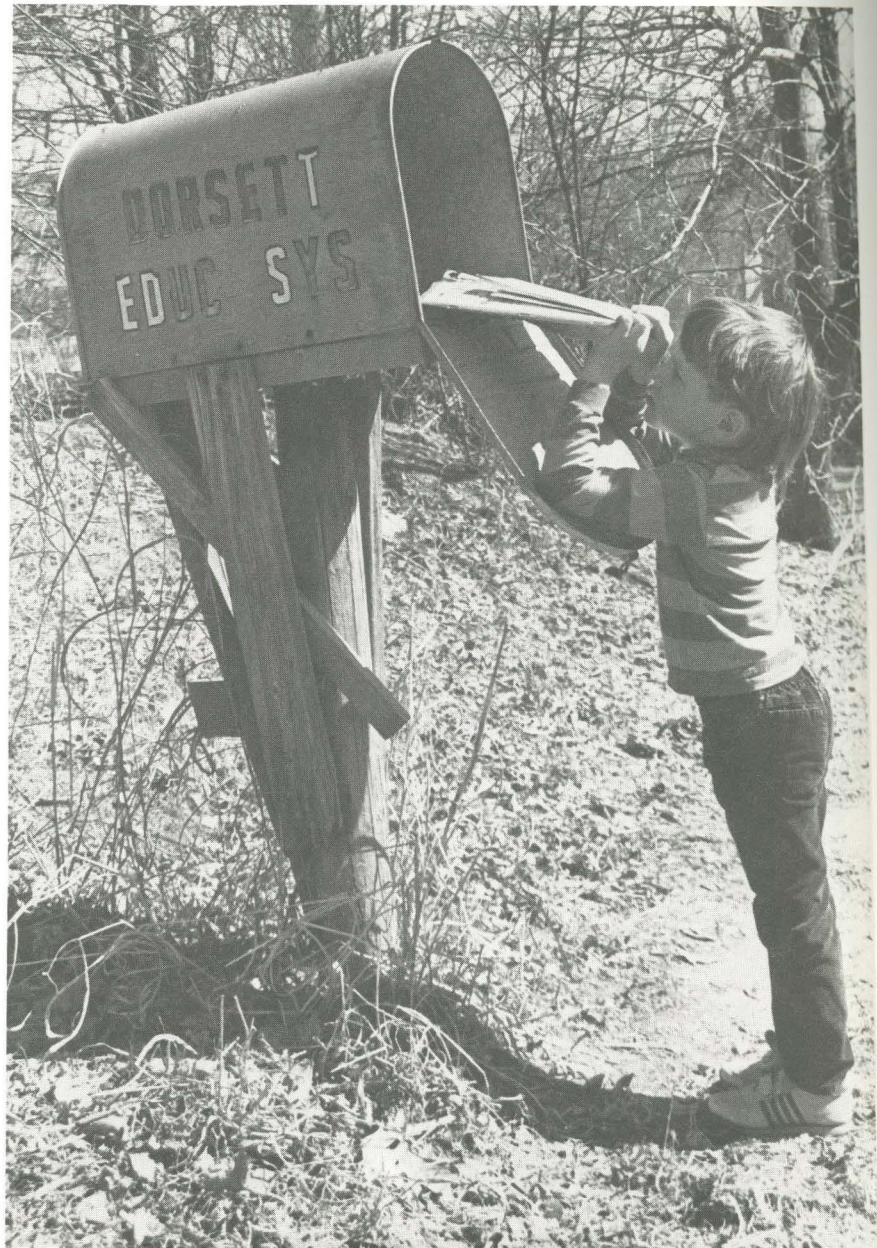
Photo

—Artie Hicks

Untitled

Running slowly down
hill, my heart becomes full of
wondrous tomorrows.

—Vandi Crisswell
Noble High School



Photo

—Tim Boggs

I'm Angry

I'm angry

Not revengeful
angry.

Not violent
angry.

Not swearing
angry,

But crying
angry.

Screaming and grunting
angry.

Quiet and along
angry.

—LeShawn Harrison
John Marshall High School



Scratchboard

—Lora Cox

I Remember...

The day we brought you home was the happiest day of my life. I played with you, talked to you, and sang you songs you could not have possibly understood. So many nights I stayed up until all hours, rocking you to sleep.

Your first steps were the topic of my every conversation. Photographs of you covered my office walls. Your first tooth, your first word, all of these things marked the early stages of your growing up. As soon as you were able to walk, I took you to the office with me, and you had the run of the entire floor. I enjoyed every minute I had with you. I remember the first baseball glove I bought you. For hours at a time, I would throw the ball to you, and you would try to catch it. Sometimes, you did.

Your first day of school was as hard for me as it was for you. I took you to your classroom and made sure that you were familiar with everything before I left. I remember the frightened look in your eyes as I left you behind.

That same year you started Little League. Every practice and every game, I was there, sitting in the stands, cheering you on. After the games, we would always go out for ice cream and talk, about nothing in particular, just "guy stuff," as you called it.

Back then, we had a lot of time together; fishing trips were your favorite. Your mother would pack a basket of food and we'd head out to the lake for the weekend. We had some of our best times out at that lake.

As you got older, and entered junior high, you would come to me for advice. That year, you went through a change I was not completely ready for. But no father really ever is. That year that you discovered girls, you would come to me at least a dozen times a week to ask me about them, what did they like, why were they so different, why they found "guy stuff" so disgusting? Then how to ask a girl out. Would she mind riding on the back of your mo-ped? Where would you take her? What would you do if she got bored?

Your first date I watched you nervously sit in the back seat,

not knowing what to say or do. Then, watching you clumsily fumble through your pockets for the money I had given you. You must have searched every pocket twice before finding it.

I remember your first real high school baseball tryouts. I sat in the stands, watching you step up to bat, so nervous you could hardly hold the bat. But once the pitcher pitched that first ball, you once again became confident. And everything we had worked on came back easily. You made the team, an honor for a freshman. But you deserved it. I don't think I ever felt so proud as when you ran up to me and told me the news. (I felt better in that moment than I have felt since that day.)

It seemed that it was during that year that you went through a drastic change. A change much different from the one in junior high. This was one I was unprepared for. Your life seemed to fill up. There was no time for any fishing trips or, for that matter, any time for me. You always had plans, plans that left me out completely.

Dates, parties, dances and baseball games took up all of your time. But at that moment, the full effect of the change that had taken place had not really occurred to me. I just considered it your growing up, and fitting in. Every baseball game I was still there, cheering as usual, but now it was as if you didn't notice. You never looked up into the stands to find me, as you had always done before. After the games, I would wait to take you out, but you would just wave and jump into the car with your friends.

When you got your license, I saw less and less of you. You were never at home. I would wait up, hoping that you would come home early enough so we could talk like we used to, but you never did.

One night, you came home later than usual. Your bloodshot eyes showed you had been drinking. I was shocked, but I could see that you were sick, so I dismissed the idea of lecturing you, thinking that after the sickness, you would have learned.

I guess I was wrong. A couple of weeks later, I received a phone call from the police. As I drove you home, I tried to talk to you, explaining the danger you were inflicting upon yourself or others. You weren't listening.

Week after week, you came home drunk, and I worried. My endless lectures went right through you. Your grades dropped and you were kicked off the baseball team. But you didn't seem to care. You had begun to hang around with the wrong kids, giving the excuse that your old friends were too boring. You had no goals and your life was headed nowhere. Then one night I got a call from the hospital.

I was directed down a long hallway to intensive care. Tears filled my eyes as I walked over to where you were.

There were tubes attached to your body all over. Bandages covered your head. You looked dead. I hardly recognized you. This couldn't be the same boy I had played with and held. Those same eyes that had looked up admiringly so many times were now swollen shut. As I sat there all that night and the next, my heart began to beat along with the beep of the respirator. It was as if I felt the pain you were feeling. I was no more conscious of life than you were. For days I waited, until it was over.

Sometimes I blame myself. If I had done something sooner. I could have taken your car, or maybe kept you at home. But, would that have helped you? Even if it could have, it's too late now. As I sit here staring at your grave, I remember all of the good times and try to forget the bad. You couldn't stop drinking. Couldn't you have just one time called home for a ride?

Seventeen years old. You took your life into your own hands. And you lost....

—Jheri Rowsey
John Marshall High School



Pencil

—Linda Etherton

Jagged edge of nothing

I know as I lay here upon my bed,
I have done wrong.

Gone wrong.

Took steps I shouldn't have taken.

Now I'm on the edge.

Edge of what, I ask myself.

The edge of reality, perhaps.

Or

Just

A

Jagged

Edge

Of

Nothing.

An

Edge

That

Does

Not

Matter. Ha!

Everything matters.

Even if it's the sharpness of your pencil lead
or the blinking of your eye.

Everything matters.

Even me.

—Vandi Crisswell
Noble High School

LOVE

What is love?

Root beer and chocolate chip cookies shared while reading Robert Frost by the fireplace.

Cover hogs in the middle of the night on the coldest night of the year.

Swanson's TV dinners after a hard day with no lunch.

Passing up the opera for his parents whom you've seen twice that month.

Long, lazy Saturday mornings spent in bed watching cartoons.

Making up after a big argument over what to watch on television.

Deciding to eat by candlelight anyway after the electricity comes back on.

A growing and becoming as you walk along together.

—Lisa Woods
Noble High School

Living Desert

These endless words drip from my heart,
into my fingertips and onto this page.
They used to flow, like expensive champagne,
now they come bit
by
tiny bit.

You made me think so clearly,
feelings rushing, a runaway river,
now there is a drought,

my river has long-since dried up,

I suffer,
and my heart is parched,
craving some new feeling,
to take the place of the ones I've lost.

I wait,
and hope,
you'll quench my thirst.

—Angela Lighty
John Marshall High School

The Child

Small and innocent, the child
moves slowly through life,

Feeling his way through the black
and gray blinded by the light,
The light that affects all!

Small and innocent, wandering
down the twisted path, aimlessly,

Always with the thought
of what's over the next hill.
Scared, scared of every turn.

Small and innocent, alone
and tired, depression settles in.

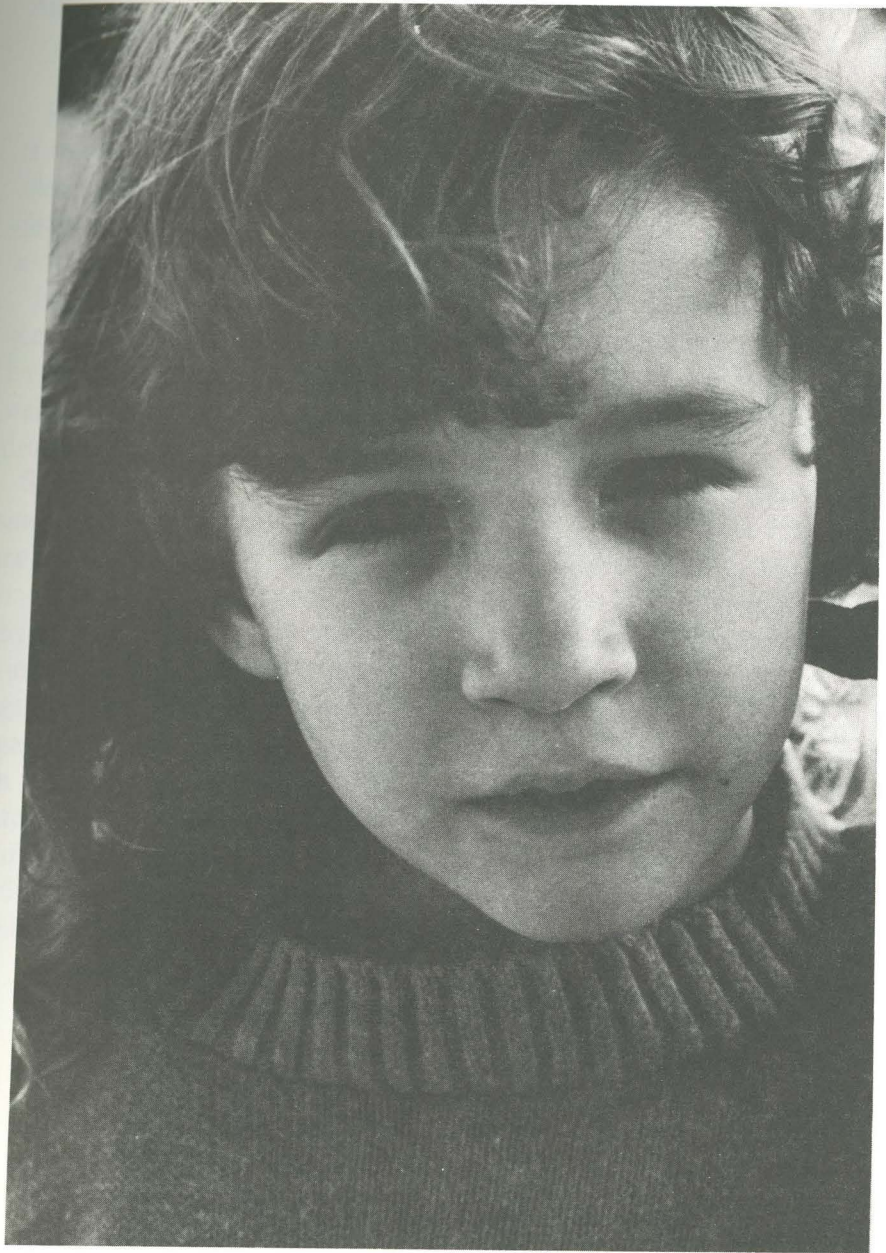
Always moving forward,
never backward.
Not even once looking behind.

Small and innocent, the child
moves slowly through life,

Climbing every brick wall, swimming every
lake, and moving in and out
of people's lives.

Small and innocent,
the child is no longer.

—Kristi Berger
John Marshall High School



Photo

—LaWanda Larawway

Daddy

My Daddy hit me again
last night.

It wasn't
too

hard,

it just left

a bruise on my cheek.

Just a blue-purple spot,

a reminder

of disobedience.

It seems as if

I'm always bad

these days.

Why else would

Daddy

hit me?

But it must be for

my own good,

because my Daddy

loves me...

doesn't he?

—Jerri Belew
Newcastle

Alone

She walked along the beach, a lonely figure against a bleak stretch of water, and no one knew who she was. It was a dreary, fog-filled morning. Even the sun seemed dull as it rose hazily in the distance. The seagulls swooped and mournfully called to one another before circling and disappearing into the heavy sky.

From somewhere, it seemed like nowhere, she appeared. Tall, slim, long hair blowing gently from the ocean's tangy, salt-kissed breeze. Suddenly, yet it seemed gradually, there she was. She walked slowly and steadily, her bare feet noiseless on the cold, damp sand.

She stooped down to pick up a shell, a small, perfect, star-shaped shell. She held the shell tightly, but with a gentleness that made me wonder whether she wanted to cherish it or crush it. Her long fingers opened, then closed. It seemed that she was searching the sea with her gray-green eyes. Searching for something, or someone. She put her hand above her eyes as if to shield them against a bright light that was nonexistent. She opened her hand again, brushed the sand from the shell, and carefully laid it down on the beach. She watched until the tide came to wash it out into the roaring ocean. Then she shrugged her tan shoulders and sadly shook her head.

She continued her walk along the beach, a lonely figure against a bleak stretch of water, and no one knew who she was.

—Heidi Burger
Heritage Hall

Dearest Daryl,

I went to the ridge
by the old farm house yesterday,
The one you told me about
time and time again.
You were right:
standing up there seems
like the edge of the earth.
I sat there all afternoon
looking at the clear blue sky,
hearing the trees rustle in the wind,
and the birds singing an endless tune.
I lay down.
Soon I was sound asleep
exactly as you did
when you were at the ridge.
I woke up to see
the most glorious thing.
The light around me
was a magical mauve
and the golden yellow sun
turned the sky into pastel rainbows.
There was silence.
The sun setting over the horizon
was barely visible.
The spectrum of colors disappeared
into the black so suddenly
it was almost unreal,
but the magic remained.
In those magical moments
it made me realize
why you chose this place-
to die

—Melanie Danielle Tutt
Newcastle

Dear Allison,

I miss seeing Dan.

I am trying to cope with the loss of his companionship.

But, as you suggest,

I did something to get my mind off him until he returns.

I went to the zoo today.

The grounds were covered with blankets of red and yellow tulips.

All the beautiful trees were wearing their green leaves.

The wind whispered wonderful laughter, and the sun was warm on my skin.

I could hear the animals singing and laughing and talking

in their own mysterious language.

As you know,

I love the lions.

They would parade around in their lovely golden coats.

They stood strong and proud.

They did not roar.

I sat on a wooden bench.

I brought a cheese and mustard sandwich.

It was in a paper sack.

It's tangy taste reminded me of a much younger time.

I made a decision there.
The yearning to see Dan was not so strong now.
Maybe it was better he went.
Thank you for the advice.

Affectionately,

Your best friend-

Claire

—Wendi Thomas
Newcastle



Pencil

—Roberta Vicker

Cold Reality

Childishly grinning, I
touched my face, only
to feel it harden.

It felt cold and damp,
as though evil had brushed
against it.

Through my eyes I no
longer saw the soft petals
of the flowers....

Instead I saw only
hard and prickly thorns.

—Kristi Berger
John Marshall High School

I AM ANGRY

I am angry

Not yell in the halls

angry

Not beat my fists against the hall

angry

Or even drink my mind numb with alcohol

angry,

But lock myself in a room with a box of tissue

angry

But scribble up and down on a sheet of paper

angry

And need to sit alone in the dark

angry.

—Gina Boyington
John Marshall High School

Eyes

Brilliant eyes

Back among the trees.

There are shining eyes

Gazing forth in hunger.

There are crimson eyes

Looking forth in blood lust.

There are sad eyes

Staring alone into vastness.

There are hating eyes

Ready to tear out ones throat.

There are quiet eyes

Awaiting the right time to pounce.

There are wild eyes

Flying through the air.

There are longing eyes

Searching for the lost prey.

There are brilliant eyes

Back again among the trees.

—Chris Dillon
Noble high School



Shadows on the Wind

PROLOGUE--EARLY SPRING, 1890

Seventeen-year-old Anna rubbed her throbbing temples with calloused fingertips. Impatiently, she brushed long chestnut hair behind her shoulders and twisted it to keep it out of her way. No matter how hard she tried, the numbers on her slate just wouldn't come out right.

She glanced around the stuffy schoolroom, first at the pot-bellied iron stove glowing red-hot, then at the other students, all much younger than she. Her slender fingers drummed on the rough desk scarred by past generations of unenthusiastic scholars. With each drum of her fingers, she counted: fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. Seventeen years old. Only a little longer and I'll be free.

She played with her stylus. She examined her dirty fingernails and torn cuticles in disgust, then pictured them as pink ovals surrounded by soft smooth skin instead of the rough, chapped skin she had now.

Looking up at the stained roof overhead, she saw warm spring sunshine peeking through cracked shingles. Escape holes for daydreams, she thought. She watched as a drip of melting snow hung precariously before plunging downward into an old pan by her desk that oozed water through a rusty hole. Split Hollow, West Virginia, she said to herself, it won't be long before I'll leave your dirty coal mines and your dead-end life far behind.

The door in the back of the room opened suddenly with a crash, startling Anna and the other students. A young man strode in, his hat pulled low over deep-set eyes. He stood with feet wide apart, thumbs looped through his belt. His patched clothes were covered with coal dust, and his hands and face were streaked with black. He searched the room until his glance found Anna. "Ma wants you home," he barked. "Now!"

Anna stood up and hurried to her brother. She took his arm, pulled him outside on the narrow porch, and closed the door after them, all but slamming it in her anger. "I told you not to interrupt

me at school again."

"Ma said to get you home."

"What's so important that it couldn't wait till later?"

He examined a knothole on the weatherbeaten wall of the school house. "Dunno."

"Do too. Look at me, Jed, and tell the truth."

Jedediah bolted down the steps and turned to face his sister.

"You're too old for this school business. 'Sides, you know more 'n that ol' vinegar face in there."

"Shush your mouth!"

"I shushed my mouth too much. You should'a been married with a couple young'uns by now 'stead of this schoolin' nonsense."

Before Anna could reply, the school door opened and the teacher appeared. "I warned you what would happen if your brother interrupted my school again." Miss Barker stood with her fists on her thick hips, her small dull eyes, hidden behind wire-rimmed glasses, boring into Anna. Her nose, with more than a hint of a hump, was criss-crossed with webs of tiny red veins. Thin, grizzled hair was pulled back in a bun. Even though school was almost over for the day, each hair remained obediently in place, just as the students remained obediently at their desks, heads bent low over their books. "Get your things and don't come back." She stomped back inside.

"You can't do that!" Anna hollered at her back. "I haven't finished yet." She turned on Jed. "Now see what you've done."

"I hain't done nothin' that shouldn'a been done two years ago." He strode a few steps down the path, then turned to face the school house again. "Ma's waitin'."

Anna clenched her teeth. Her mouth was a thin white slash in her face when she went back inside. Stiff fingers fumbled as she cleared her desk. Her slate fell to the floor with a crash loud enough to be heard clear in the next valley. Not a single student looked up, not even Anna's younger brothers and sisters. The jagged pieces felt cool as she collected them. The wooden frame, which had separated at the corners, was warm and rough. She bundled them in her shawl, and without a backwards look, walked out the door, not bothering to shut it behind her. The chilly air

felt good after the overheated classroom, yet she yearned to be back inside at her desk, the leaky pan at her feet.

"Maybe now you'll come to your senses," Jed said flatly. He turned and headed up the path.

Anna took long strides until she caught up. "My senses tell me that there's more to life than marryin' and havin' babies till you're all worn out." She was too upset to see the friendly blue sky, gabby birds overhead, or the shy spring crocuses hiding in dirty snowdrifts by the side of the path. Her steps matched Jed's, even though he was a head taller than she, and he wasn't encumbered with a heavy skirt.

"It was good enough for our ma and her ma before her and all the other women hereabouts, so it's good enough for you."

"We'll see about that." Anna's gray eyes, usually so soft and warm, were steely and cold.

"If you'd put your hair up, quit your fancy-pants talk, and learn to walk like a girl...," he looked disapprovingly at her long stride, "some man might even think you're still good enough to marry. You shouldn'a turned down all them offers. Now you're too old for anyone but a widower."

"Seventeen isn't old, and I don't want to get married, especially to some old coot with a passel of motherless young'uns. I'm going to be a teacher."

"What you want don't matter no more. Ma and me, we got plans for you."

Anna stopped. "Who are you to tell me what to do? You're only a year older than I am." She paused. "What plans?"

Jed kept going. "You'll see. Hurry up. Everyone's waitin'."

Inside the cramped cabin, Anna's eyes adjusted slowly after the bright sunshine. Her face was flushed, and it wasn't from the hurried walk home. The rude structure was run-down and almost bare of furnishings. Her mother, in her creaking rocking chair, was flanked on one side by Jed, on the other by a neighbor, Zachary Thompson. Silence hung as heavily as air before a storm. Finally, Zachary cleared his throat, the sound tearing the air. Anna looked at him, at Jed, and at last, at her mother who sat hunched in

her battered chair, wisps of thinning gray hair framing her face. A maze of wrinkles destroyed what had once been a fine porcelain complexion. Deep grooves between her faded gray eyes and on either side of her nostrils described a life of deprivation and hardship. Her hands, now little more than scrawny claws, curled tightly around wobbly armrests. She avoided Anna's questioning gaze.

"What is this about?" Anna's words split the air like lightning shattering a tree. "What? Tell me, Ma."

Ma quavered, "Zachary here wants to talk to you."

Anna examined Zachary's scowling face, his skin stained dark after years in the coal mines. His fists were thrust deep in his trousers pockets. A strong odor of whiskey and sweat made it hard for her to breathe.

"Jed wants to marry my girl, Ellie," he growled.

"That's no secret. What does it have to do with me?" Anna demanded. She glared at Jed. "You didn't have to get me out of school for this."

Zachary hitched his trousers up over a pendulous belly. "If'n Ellie marries up with Jed, I hain't got nobody to take care o' the rest of my young'uns, my wife bein' dead the past two years an' all."

Anna ignored the knot growing in the pit of her stomach. "Stop fiddle faddlin' around and say what you mean."

"I reckon I could marry you in exchange for lettin' Ellie marry Jed."

"Oh, you could. Don't you think I might have something to say about it?"

"No. We've decided."

"Who decided?"

"Ma, me, and Zachary did," Jed interjected.

"Ma," Anna appealed to her mother. "This isn't right. Tell them they can't do this."

Ma shook her head slowly as she finally met Anna's anxious gaze. Her eyes mirrored the pain in her daughter's eyes, but she didn't hesitate. "You should'a been married long ago."

The knot in Anna's stomach exploded and sent shafts of alarm

up and down her spine. "I thought you understood," she managed to get out at last. "All those times we talked, all those times you told me to keep my sights on a dream and never let go. Didn't you mean it, Ma?"

"Folks like us got to be practical." Ma's eyes dropped to her hands twisted into a knot in her lap. "Split Hollow is a coal mining town. Women take care of their men and have their babies. There's no room in our lives for dreams like you got."

"But my dream can come true! Just another month and I can get my teacher's credentials...."

"It's done."

Anna's voice was deceptively soft. "It's not done." She looked directly at Zachary Thompson. "I'm not marrying you."

"You hain't got no say so," Jed said coldly. "Hit's all arranged. Preacher'll be here in the mornin'."

"I'm not getting married tomorrow or any other day."

"Don't say nothing you'll regret," Ma warned.

"If'n you don't stand up with me of your own accord," Zachary interrupted, "I'll come get you. I can drag you kicking and screaming to the preacher if I haf to. An' if he hain't available then, I'll lock you in the house till he is. You'll be my wife, little miss, whether you want to or not." His frown deepened until twin ditches between his eyes threatened to split his face in two.

"No, Mr. Thompson." Anna headed toward the still open door.

Jed got there first and shut it solidly. He leaned against the worn wood and crossed his arms.

Anna was accustomed to the dim light in the cabin now. She stared at the rough board wall next to the door frame. A streak of light shone through a crack left where the chinking had fallen out during the winter. Seeing a splinter sticking out, she stripped the sliver away. She held the tiny shard in her rough fingers, turning it end over end, marveling at the dirty gray color on one side and the fresh clean tan on the other. Thompson moved to her side and placed his hand on the wall next to her, throwing his shadow on the sliver. She moved her hand slightly, and the shard was again bathed in sunlight. She looked up at the glowering face so close to hers. No man is ever going to tell me what to

do, she decided. Slipping the splinter into her pocket, she felt the piece of paper she had secreted there. A smile played around the corners of her mouth.

—Jean Tankersley
Newcastle School Instructor

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