

Absolute

NINETEEN NINETY-SIX



In memoriam
Karen Snyder Edwards
1944 - 1995

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Essays

Doris Ann

by Tammy Williford

My aunt Doris Ann eloped at eighteen just to get out of the house. Every dime-store romance she had ever given a surreptitious glance got the devils dancing in her head. Visions of fancy cars and clothes lay within her grasp just beyond the screen door. When she closed her eyes, she could envisage clearly, almost tangibly, a new life filled with rich scents, laughter, and the clinking of stemware. The soft music would then envelope her and tingle in her virgin Baptist feet, moving her around the room as a faceless young man wrapped his warm flesh around her delicate bare shoulders.

The night of her planned escape, she wrestled out from beneath the “chester drawers” the only suitcase she owned. It was a Mouseketeer issue with Annette’s mouse-eared face smiling up at her, her printed hand raised in a waving gesture.

“My sentiments exactly, Annette,” Doris Ann replied to her childhood sleepover bag, flopping down beside it on the bed she had shared with her sisters since birth.

“I’m gettin’ the hell outta’ here.”

Doris Ann threw her dad a kiss that night as he dropped her off at the church for the Senior lock-in.

“See ya later, Pops!” she cried as she hopped out of the old station wagon.

She ran inside and made a beeline for the gym. Cleve, the pimple-faced bridegroom, was meeting her at the locker room window on the backside of the church. When she got there, he was waiting, nervously taking short drags from a cigarette and pacing from his car to the window. Doris Ann popped her head out of the window and screeched at the top of her lungs! Cleve dropped his smoke and fell backward onto the car and into the gravel lot.

“God damn, Doris Ann! What are you tryin’ to do?”

She rolled with laughter and climbed out of the window, landing on her feet in the crunchy gravel.

"Let's go!" she said, beaming from ear to ear.
The family was abuzz with news for months after she left.
"I always knew that girl was missin' a few screws," claimed one aunt.
"A nice Baptist girl!" whispered another.
"Did you know he's a divorcée?" squealed another with almost wicked delight.
Everyone blushed and giggled. My grandmother, I am told, was taken to the hospital the next day and treated for "one of her spells."

For exactly two years, four months, and three days, Doris Ann was a wife in the truest fashion. She cooked, swept, and ran her husband's bath water. Every day, she starched his blue workshirts, the name "Cleve" prominently displayed on the front of each of them in red-on-white embroidery.

The divorce court judge awarded her the lion's share—nothing more than a post-war cracker box on the south side of town and a 1963 Plymouth. Cleve got his shirts and some kitchen utensils. She let him keep the iron. One year later, she sold the house and used the proceeds to get a boob-job.

One evening in her new apartment, she assessed every item she owned and every hair on her head. She tried on clothes for hours while standing on the bed to get a full-length view from the mirror above the dresser.

"Nope," she insisted as she dropped every item to the floor or tossed it over the lampshade.

"Oh!!" she exclaimed in frustration. *"I hate these clothes!"*

Having no luck with her wardrobe, she progressed to cosmetics. She played around with her makeup and worked on the way her mouth looked when she talked.

"Doris Ann," she crooned.

"Doris."

"Dori Ann."

"Dorian?"

By the end of the evening, "Dorian" had Marilyn Monroe's voice and a good set of cookware with the receipt intact. The next morning, her pouty lips explained to the assistant manager of the Sears housewares department that the pans were defective. She left with two new dresses and a bag full of perfume samples.

On a fine spring morning, five years after her escape, my Aunt Dorian drove up to the old homeplace in a shiny new red Cadillac. The old folks sat in painted metal lawn chairs on the porch and raised their eyebrows at the busty brunette approaching them.

"Doris Ann?" exclaimed my grandmother, jumping up to greet her in disbelief. "Is it you? Is it really you?"

The old folks quizzed her relentlessly as they bustled her into the house. Dorian removed her floor-length white mink coat, which was absurdly warm for the weather, and tossed it casually over the edge of a dusty reclining chair in her parents' small, colorless living room. She greeted her family with kisses and allowed them to fawn over her and her presumed success. That night, she slept in her old bed with her little sister Stephanie, who had just begun her first year of college.

"I can't believe it's really you, Doris Ann," she mused. "After all this time. We didn't think we'd ever see you again."

"I know, kiddo. I'm sorry if I hurt you." The guilt was fast approaching, so she changed the subject. "You've really grown up, pigtails," Dorian teased. "So, how do you like college?" she inquired.

"It's great!"

"What about living here?"

"That's not so great," Stephanie admitted, "but it's okay. They finally let me buy a car," she sighed.

"You know, Steph, if you knew what was good for you, you'd be out of here, on your own. There's a whole world out there, just waiting to be claimed. Look at me, Steph. I've got everything I could want."

Stephanie quieted and averted her eyes.

"What's wrong, pigtails? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"You broke Mama's heart, you know. She hasn't been the same since you ran away," she softly chided. "I couldn't even date until this year."

Dorian tried to make her little sister understand. "Stephanie, that's exactly what I'm talking about! There's a world outside these walls, honey!" She stood, lifting her hands to illustrate. "Trust me. I know!"

Stephanie thought about it and replied, "How did you do it?" Her gaze fell immediately to Dorian's new breasts. Embarrassed, she quickly specified, "All the money, I mean."

"Well," Dorian stated bluntly, "it's my boyfriend's money."

"Your boyfriend!" Stephanie exclaimed. "Why didn't you bring him?" she beamed excitedly.

"Oh, he's far too busy," Dorian said.

"But you're getting married, aren't you? Don't you think Daddy should...?"

Dorian cut her off. "We're not getting married, Steph."

"But, I don't...."

"He's already married."

That was the year I met my Aunt Dorian. She was beautiful, funny, and always *en vogue*. She was always flying back from somewhere exotic. Dorian had furs, diamonds, access to private planes, and a fresh drink, "if you please," at the snap of her fingers. Her luggage brimming with trinkets and shell necklaces, she would shoot out of the airport gate like a beam of light from the heavens. When we brought her back to the house, she would dress us up, and we'd run around the house like "the natives," banging drums and chanting.

"This is from Uncle Michael," she would squeal, lavishing us with gifts from all those faraway places. "And this one he bought for you, and this one...." His name rang throughout the house like church bells. I adored my Uncle Michael although I didn't actually meet him until I was twenty-two years old. By then, he was old, at least fifty-seven, and not nearly as good-looking as I had always imagined. His head was too big, and his ears had started growing again, as the ears of older men tend to do. But she loved him with all her heart.

They were an odd pair by then: he with his gargantuan head and she looking ridiculously youthful in a tight, yellow shorts set and a matching hairbow perched like a canary in her tall bangs. It was at Wiley Post Airport that I met the love of my dear Aunt Dorian, just two weeks before his untimely demise. That August, they found his plane belly up in a pond in southeastern Oklahoma.

When the news came, the family rallied around Aunt Dorian. Her faculties had been failing her slowly for some time. We walked on eggshells when she spoke of him. It had been a closed casket service, and Dorian was forced to hide behind a dark veil, alone. Michael had left her without a dime, and she had devised quite an interesting explanation for his mysterious death. Michael, she deduced, had faked his own death. Why else had he left her with nothing? He was obviously coming back, or so Aunt Dorian believed.

"For a person to go to such extremes as to fake his own death," she spoke in complete belief, "he surely must have been involved in a terrible crime." The Mafia, she gathered, was after him for something. She remembered their trips, all impromptu, spur-of-the-moment jaunts, and imagined now that they were probably drug-related. He would leave often from the hotel to pick out little gifts for her. He must have taken the drugs with him to drop-off sites. All of us made concerted efforts to reason with Dorian.

“He’s dead, and he was married, dear; he left his money to his wife and children, and that’s it, Doris Ann,” reasoned my grandmother. “It’s time to let go.”

Dorian would not hear of it. She created grandiose ideas of his hiding and of subtle clues he might have left to lead her to her share of the money. He was just hiding. She knew he wouldn’t leave her penniless.

Dorian began visiting a psychic, who would reach deep into her subconscious to retrieve bits of information on Michael’s whereabouts. The psychic told her that he was alive and that he had left her a sizeable amount of money in a cabin. Dorian remembered a cabin where they had spent a weekend. One night, in bed, he told her he wished they could stay there forever. “No one will ever find us, Dorian.”

This led her to the mountains near Logan, Colorado, where she and a friend took snowmobiles into uncharted forests. They found Michael’s cabin and tore it apart looking for money and clues of his whereabouts. Their efforts were futile, and they trekked back home. A year after Michael’s death, Aunt Dorian was a basket case. So well did her siblings remember their Mama’s “spells” that talk was made of taking Dorian in to “rest up.”

“Her mind is just so tired that I’m afraid she’s going to hurt herself,” my mother confided in me, with concern in her voice. Dorian, however, did not rest, could not rest until she found her beloved or his hidden funds.

She had concocted a scenario, still an untold secret, that had her believing he had escaped to Washington, just a few miles from the Canadian border. She sold her house and bought a Winnebago. The family tried to stop her and even threatened to have her committed, but Dorian, tenacious as ever, got her way and headed cross-country.

She was as inconspicuous as one could be in a Winnebago. She dressed like a tourist, barefaced, in shorts and sneakers. Dorian was afraid the Mafia might be following her. As she neared Washington, paranoia set in. Afraid to eat in a public place, she stopped at the Friendly Food Mart in Waksah, Idaho, and loaded up on Twinkies, Diet Coke, and Tampax, throwing in a few batteries and a flashlight for good measure. She saw them everywhere. Men in dark glasses, sitting in cars, thumbing through magazines at the checkout counter. She paid for her groceries and bolted for the motorhome. Once inside, she fumbled for the keys. Finding the ignition, she started up the beast and took off like a bat out of a belfry. She drove for ten hours, straight through, stopping only once to take care of necessities but never leaving the motorhome.

She finally stopped after several hours of seeing nothing suspicious. Dorian parked her Winnebago at the Welcome Home motel, two hundred miles from the

Canadian border. She took a room for the night, glad to be free of her motorized asylum.

She locked the bolt, chained the door, and tried to get some sleep. Sounds came from the parking lot; car doors slammed, keys jingled. Someone entered the room beside hers and shut the door. She heard the television come on, and it murmured in the background.

Dorian shot up from her pillow in the middle of the night. She was truly frightened. Her sleep had been plagued with nightmares, and she had trouble distinguishing them from reality. The men had found her! She could hear them outside, talking. She didn't know what to do! The only light in the room peeked in from the parking lot through a crack in the curtains. Her eyes were beginning to adjust to the darkness, and she could make out the details of the room. Her mind whirled, trying to find a way out. Suddenly, a vent leapt from its hiding place on the wall.

"Of course!" Dorian realized. "If I can just reach it." She stood on the desk with her nail file and quietly but quickly removed the screws. Her duffel bag was the first thing to go inside. She then managed to pull herself into the small opening in the wall and tied the cover back on from the inside with dental floss.

When Dorian awoke, she was very cold. The light shone through in stripes from the room beneath her and from a vent in the side of the building. From her vantage point, she could see only the door, which was standing ajar, inside her room. She heard someone rifling through things and became very still. She heard them rip the sheets off the bed, even turn the mattress over.

"Oh, God!" she prayed, "don't let them find me!"

For two days, my Aunt Dorian hid in the crawl space. Two days without food or water. She was delirious and frightened, but she realized she had to leave her refuge. She watched the parking lot for an hour, waiting for signs that the coast was clear. When she felt it was safe, she lifted the cover to the outside vent to assess her proximity to the ground below, looking for window ledges or railings from which to climb. She spotted a ledge about eight feet down, and, tying her panty hose to a slit in the vent cover, she ventured out. Her stockings ripped immediately, and she fell straight to the ground.

Later that day, a tourist found her crumpled body and called an ambulance.

We visit Aunt Dorian about twice a month. It's only about forty-five minutes to the Norman facility where she now resides. She talks about him often, her Michael fading in and out like a radio station on a country road. Mostly static but with a few disjointed tunes now and then.

On a recent visit, I chanced upon a scene that lingers in my mind. Aunt Dorian's chair had been moved to the terrace so that she might enjoy the nice weather. As I approached her, I saw a man. With his back to me, he bent down to kiss her cheek, the silhouette of his large, dark head eclipsing hers in the bright, summer sunlight. And I wonder, I really wonder.

Elephants in the Refrigerator

by Barbara Bash

At this stage of my life, I have settled most of the burning questions, such as birth, life, death, and poverty, to my satisfaction.

The remaining mystery is what do men see when they look inside the refrigerator?

They go in after milk, but have to stand there and wait for further instructions.

My husband squats down in front of the open refrigerator: "Where are the peppers? We don't have any peppers."

I come up from behind the open door and, without looking, hand him the peppers.

"I hate it when you do that," he mutters.

My eleven-year-old son leaves empty-handed from a search for string cheese, which is in plain sight and brightly wrapped. As I take pity on him and hand him the cheese, curiosity gets the best of me, and I have to ask, "Son, tell me; what do you see when you look inside the refrigerator?"

"I dunno."

"Do you see shapes? Colors? Forms? Are they moving? Do they shift around behind each other?"

"I dunno." Just like his father.

This behavior also occurs with cabinets and drawers but seldom outside the kitchen.

One theory on this phenomenon that I have toyed with is that perhaps cleaning products or freon create some sort of vapor barrier which interacts with testosterone to distort vision and memory.

Somehow, a tool or a Christmas present may be so well-hidden that you think no one will ever find it, yet they home in on it within hours, but put an elephant in the refrigerator, and your secret is safe.

My mother keeps valuables and important papers in her refrigerator because, she says, it is the last thing to burn in case of a fire. Come to think of it, she was burglarized once, and nothing was missing from the refrigerator. That was the first clue the burglar was a man.

The experts can say what they want about the differences or similarities between men and women, but one thing remains unchanging: while men still rule most of the world, they will never find our chocolate stash.

No Name Woman

by Ann Nguyen

When my mother came back home from VietNam on May 24, 1995, she told me that "the northern woman," our neighbor, had died.

Where I lived was a small village of eighty people. Its bamboo walls and long narrow paths kept us from the busy life of Ho Chi Minh City until one day in the fall of 1993, when this peaceful kingdom was disturbed by the appearance of a strange woman. On the path that led to the market, our villagers were talking about how strange and suspicious she was and how irritated they were by hearing her northern accent. Her appearance provoked the villagers' anger for what they had endured in the past, the VietNam War, which brought about the unity of our country but couldn't heal the wounded hearts of our people.

I still remember the day I first saw her. She was small and skinny in a shabby brown blouse and black sweater. She wore her long hair in a single braid. Her face was pale with many wrinkles. Her eyes seemed tired. I guessed she was about fifty-five. The adults called her "V.C." (Vietnamese Communist) and so did the children. I called her "northern woman."

I passed by her house every day as I went to school. Where she lived was a deserted place which had a bare, rough floor and two walls. A big blue nylon sheet was her roof by day and her bed at night. Sometimes I saw her making tea in a porcelain bowl in the morning. Other times, I saw her lying on the floor. She pulled her legs near to her chest. I was a curious person, and her house had no door. My neighbor. She was as isolated as if she had come to a holy land and forgotten to take off her shoes; her northern accent kept her out of the kingdom forever.

One night, the police came over to her house. They searched her in order to identify who she was. None of our villagers wanted to be a friend with her, but most of them were there. She pulled out a worn picture from her bosom. There was a man

and two young boys in it, but I couldn't see their faces clearly.

"I came from the North." She paused. "My husband and my two sons had gone to the South during the war, with no return." She started sobbing. She could wait for her husband and her sons no more. After eighteen years of waiting, it was time for her to go and find them.

She lived in our village for three months, and then she disappeared. Her disappearance returned the stillness to our village.

One day, I saw her sitting near a flower seller at the market. Her long hair looked dirty; it was stiff and unbrushed. Her face seemed paler and older. There were many holes and patches in her garment. She was not the same as I knew.

Reaching her place, I saw a bowl, the bowl I saw her once using for her tea, with some money inside. She held a yellow squash in her arms as a mother would hold her baby. She was singing:

Oh! my lover. Oh! my boys.

Where you go is where I go.

I love you with all my heart.

Come to me 'cause I still wait.

Oh! my lover. Oh! my boys.

Some people passed by and dropped money in the bowl. She was still singing. Her face was overflowing with tears, the tears of today, yesterday, and many days before. I stood in front of her for a while. She looked at me with no response. Her eyes opened still. I trembled, bent down, and placed money in the bowl. My neighbor. She was a panhandler and insane. I walked away from her really fast after that moment. I tried to convince myself that what I saw was illusion.

"Mother, how did she die?" I asked.

"Poor woman! Some guy driving a motorcycle hit her as she held a squash and crossed the crowded street near the market. She had no family so the police buried her at the common yard," my mother sighed.

"Oh! my lover. Oh! my boys...."

My neighbor. She had appeared in our lives as a stranger; nobody said hi to her. She had died as a stranger; nobody said good-bye. She didn't belong to this world; she has found her home. It is a place where she is united with her husband and her sons, where there are no more tears and suffering and where she is not punished by the madness of people.

For Love of Mary Anne

by Gaylon Kaiser

Change is always painful; it's not anything pleasant. I suppose that's why most people had rather complain about their present lot than go through any changes necessary to make it better. It's not easy for me to admit that flaw in my own personality, but I must. I've been recalcitrant just about all my life, and I've been miserable and frustrated. Mom used to say, "Gaylon, you'd cut off your nose to spite your face," which meant to me that I'd rather die than admit someone else was right and I was wrong. She was right. I would.

Dad called me "bullheaded" because I would never apologize for any of my actions, no matter what. I told him that I was willing to suffer the consequences rather than apologize. I suffered a lot. Dad spanked!

My younger brother Dick hated my self-righteousness and fought with me constantly because of it. He was one of the reasons I got spanked so often.

By the time I was a young adult, I was deeply troubled but unrelenting. I developed several methods of making myself look good in spite of my anger and stubbornness, but none helped me hold on to a good job. Most jobs require submissiveness on behalf of the employee, and I just couldn't submit. I had to be the one in charge, or I would quit and move on, searching for better employment.

In the summer of 1990, I felt my search had ended. I acquired a new job with a title that appeased my desire to be big chief. "Weekend Supervisor" seemed a fitting title for me, and I wore it proudly. I had been thoroughly trained by an obese registered nurse named Marie, and though I didn't like the woman, I admired her educational background. She was in charge of several homes for Down's Syndrome women who were in the process of learning self-reliance to prepare them for ultimately living alone. My job was to relieve Marie every other weekend in one home in Kingfisher, Oklahoma. I was to supervise twelve women for forty-eight straight hours, helping

them learn the essential skills necessary for their survival. Marie had taught me well in a classroom setting, but I was not to meet the “clients,” as they were called, until my first weekend. Had our roles been reversed, I would have introduced all the students to the clients first, but the Center of Family Love chose to honor Marie’s way. That irritated me, but it was their choice. I had to submit or lose my job before I even started it. I was full of fault-finding ideas as I drove the hot, dusty thirty-mile trip to meet the Down’s syndromes.

As I walked up the petunia-lined walkway to the brown brick home, I tried to remember everything Marie had taught in class.

“They’re clever,” she’d said sarcastically of the Down’s Syndrome women. “They may look odd and you may pity them for what they are, but don’t! They’ll use your pity against you if you aren’t on guard all the time. They’re smooth manipulators, and you can’t trust them!”

I sucked in my breath, straightened my back, put on my best supervisor attitude, and prepared myself to take on the clients. *Just let them try to put one over on me*, I thought to myself as I rang the doorbell.

A Down’s Syndrome woman about forty years old opened the door and smiled broadly, revealing decayed front teeth.

“HI!” she yelled. “YOU MUST BE THE NEW WEEKEND SUPER! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!”

Before I had a chance to resist, she had grabbed me around the waist and was hugging me fiercely. I didn’t know what to do or say. She had caught me completely off guard with her open friendliness and was nothing like Marie had led me to believe. Surely this little elfish woman with her tiny slanted eyes, small ears, and pug nose could not be the devious creature Marie had portrayed. I was dumbfounded. Short little arms hugged me tightly as if I were her best friend in all the world, and I found myself wanting to nurture her. I fought that urge, reminding myself to be harder, stronger, and even more stubborn than Marie if I hoped to keep this good-paying job.

“Thank you,” I said stiffly as I pulled her arms from my waist. “What is your name?”

“DIANE!” she yelled, as a private would yell at a sergeant.

“Please don’t yell so loud, Diane! Show me where to put my things, and let’s get on with everything.” I picked up my suitcase and forced a smile.

Diane squinted her little eyes at me and hobbled into an early-garage-sale living room where eight or ten other Down’s syndromes sat watching *Sesame Street* on television.

“THE NEW SUPER IS HERE, EVERYBODY!” she yelled at the top of her lungs. “THE NEW SUPER IS HERE! OH BOY, OH BOY!” Diane jumped up and down on her warped legs, twisted from carrying too much weight.

Piercing, slanted multitudes of impish eyes turned to look at me. I felt the way a queen bee must feel when trapped under a glass. Then, before I could move, several chubby bodies wobbled toward me in a blur of flesh and enthusiasm. All of them pushed, pulled, and stammered in unison, wanting to be the first to squeeze me. Much like children, they screamed anything that entered their minds.

“I LOVE YOU! YOU’RE SO PRETTY! CAN WE HAVE POPCORN TONIGHT? LOOK AT HER PRETTY LEGS! YOU’RE NICE! WILL YOU SLEEP IN OUR ROOM TONIGHT? DO YOU LIKE MOVIES? CAN I SIT BY YOU AT DINNER?” They were overwhelming, very much like children.

“Stop this instantly!” I said with determination. “We can’t act like this, now can we?” I caught my breath and pulled several sets of short arms from my body. My words had no effect on them, and they came at me again, pushing me onto the couch. They all laughed hysterically.

“I SAID STOP IT!” The words flew from my mouth as anger surfaced. They stopped in their tracks and stood, staring at me in confusion.

I pulled myself off the couch, straightened my blouse and shorts, and stood in the center of the room, distancing myself from them.

“I hope you guys don’t go around hugging all people that way!” I used my best authoritative voice. “You just can’t do that! And don’t squeeze people! It’s just not PROPER!”

Eyes downcast like three-year-old children, all of them moved away from me. Several went to the kitchen while others went back to the television. I had won my first round with Down’s syndromes.

As I began unpacking my suitcase, I noticed a short, dark-haired client standing in the doorway of the bedroom to the left of the living room. She just stood there quietly, focusing her slanted eyes, tilting her head, and plucking at a frazzled strand of hair on top of her head. Her staring made me uncomfortable.

“Who are you,” I asked, “and why are you staring at me?” I hadn’t meant to sound so rude but I had. I consoled myself by remembering that Marie had insinuated the clients were not mentally competent, and my words had probably not meant anything to the woman.

“My name is Mary Anne,” she said in a normal tone of voice, “and I’m not staring at you! I’m studying you.” I flinched. Perhaps she had understood, after all. I felt like

apologizing but couldn't get the words out. Instead, I toughened my attitude even more.

"Well, don't study me. Go back to what you were doing!" I picked up my favorite blouse and laid it on the loveseat.

"I was writing in my journal, and I'm done. I'd like to talk to you if you don't mind." There was nothing childish about her words. Had she looked more nearly normal, one would have thought she was normal. I was surprised at her very normal attitude and words, but, true to my nature, I was unrelenting.

"OK, you can talk!" I sounded stern. "But talk quietly while I unpack. And above all, do not hug me!"

"I won't." Mary Anne sat on the couch, watching me pull out makeup, clothes, and shoes. She sat like a lady, all prim and proper.

"So. You're Gaylon. Marie told us your name before you got here. I'm very happy you're here." Again, her vocabulary astounded me.

"Thanks," I replied stubbornly, determined not to be taken in by her soft words.

"Have you noticed that I am a Down's syndrome?" She smiled.

"What...uh, what did you say?" I could hardly believe my ears. She had actually said she was aware of her condition. Marie had not told me about any awareness. Somehow, it had not come up in our discussions. Now, knowing that this pathetic little woman actually understood her handicap made me feel awkward and extremely uncomfortable. I stood frozen to the floor, my head whirling in confusion.

"I said I am a Down's syndrome. I am handicapped. Down's Syndrome is my handicap. We're all Down's syndromes here. You can see that. Our handicap is visible." She smiled again, revealing small, baby-like teeth.

"Uh...yes. Yes, I can see your handicap. It is visible." I couldn't think of any other response. I felt like a fool, and I resented her for my confusion.

"You are handicapped, too!" She spoke matter-of-factly. "Your handicap is NOT visible. It is hidden inside you where it hurts the most! Poor lady!" She reached up and patted my shoulder like a mother soothing an infant.

My soul responded to her words before my brain could. I felt like a child, struggling to protect myself from her words—words that cut like a knife into the festering, ripe boil of anger that had hardened inside me, painfully affecting all aspects of my personality for years. When the sharp prick of the word "handicapped" opened the hardened, painful boil in the depths of me, it hurt. I hurt, but I stopped struggling as the anger spewed forth to reveal itself to me. It was clearly visible, and I saw myself as others must have seen me in all my ugliness, and it was not pleasant. The wounding

words were the knife that opened the boil, and I felt a tremendous relief. Healing had begun.

Mary Anne's truthfulness was the truth that set me free from years of anguish and turmoil, and I instantly loved the pain of knowledge. I reached for my little dwarfed redeemer and hugged her to me.

"MARY ANNE," I hollered, "YOU ARE A GENIUS! I LOVE YOU!"

She looked up at me, her elfish little face beaming, and squeezed me hard. I didn't mind at all.

A Visit

by Marcia Benedict

I went to visit a friend yesterday.

I knew where to look for him on that cold December day; I had been there before. As I entered the gates, I knew which tree to look for. The memory of the green awning, the red carnations, the sea of black swept through my mind. I stopped the car and walked.

From stone to stone, I searched for that name, the name that reminded me of my oftentimes eccentric friend. I had gone over in my head what I would say when I found him, but when I finally did, I couldn't think of anything to say.

I remember thinking how he often kept a low profile and laughed. His marker was temporary; even six months later, the stone wasn't there yet—a testimonial to his lateness. For Matt, whenever he said he'd be in at 9 a.m., it really meant noon or maybe even later. The fresh grass hadn't been mowed, and weeds had slightly covered the marker. A single, withered, yellow carnation lay near.

His grave was as unkempt as his curly black hair had been, as unkempt as his desk, scattered with newspapers, copies of his story revisions, and packets of unopened Taco Bell hot sauce. His grave now mirrored the lazy, disheveled look he always managed about him.

I remembered the two of us going to get something to eat at the mall last Christmas, and the look on his face when he opened the present I gave him. It was *Zen in the Art of Writing* by Ray Bradbury. He had the greatest smile on his face. After we left, Matt was so excited to show me his apartment. He was so proud because he had cleaned all day.

I kept remembering him at the Christmas party the week before he died. Smiling, laughing, I could still feel his arm around my waist. The images of the pictures don't show a man who is about to end his life. I never thought he would.

I missed hearing his voice on the phone: “Hey, Marcia—do you always have to capitalize Republican?” I remembered his strange compliments: “If someone stood the two of you side by side and asked me which one I’d rather see without clothes, I’d choose you.” I remembered some of the odd story ideas he would throw out at the paper when he got desperate: “How about a story on why there aren’t any good stories?”

I remembered him walking me to my car on late Thursday nights after the newspaper’s deadline. He joked that he wasn’t protecting me, that I was protecting him: “I wouldn’t mess with you,” he said. I remembered how every time I ordered pizza, he always said he wanted anchovies, just to hear me shriek. I remembered the blue-and-green tie with the whales that was always strewn across his desk, “just in case there’s a meeting.”

I wanted so much to hear him say again, “Hey, Marcia,” or “Let’s go get some Thai food.” I wanted to see his name in print on a byline on a metropolitan newspaper the way I always believed I would. I wanted to read another editorial on how he hated the holidays between Thanksgiving and Valentine’s Day. I wanted to taste his infamous Mexican lasagna. I wanted him to drive too fast and smoke without hearing lectures from me. I wanted to give him more advice on women. I remembered his advice: “Once you say ‘I love you,’ it goes downhill from there.”

And it did. I wanted to hit him, but all I could do was cry. I wanted to dig beneath the surface, through the layers of dirt, and pull him out and shake him, but all I could do was stare at the ground.

I got back in my car to head home. The song on the radio kept going through my mind, about how we are just “mortal clay...blood, water, and bone.” He’s a free spirit now. He isn’t trapped anymore.

I tried to praise God for rescuing him from this life. I thought of Matt tripping over his white robe and saying, “Cool, huh?” But the reassurances failed, the selfishness remained, and I wish I could have gone anywhere else to visit my friend.

Short Stories/Screenplay

Willie Likes to Stare

by Michelle' Langston

The dog was staring at her again. All she wanted to do was read her book. She looked down at the small ball of long-haired black and gold fluff that had been her sister's sole source of companionship for the past four years. His gaze had not faltered. Odema self-consciously raised her book in front of her face, trying to avoid looking directly at the dog's unwavering gaze.

She felt oddly uncomfortable during these quiet times when her sister was sleeping and she was left alone with the dog. She knew that the time alone with Willie would become more and more frequent as her sister's condition continued to deteriorate.

Odema often wondered why she never felt more at ease with the dog as the amount of time she spent with him greatly increased. Instead, she became more aware of his presence and especially more aware that he stared at her constantly.

"Why do you look at me that way?" She asked Willie, not expecting an answer or even a clue why he could spend hours on end just staring at her.

Willie's ears perked up and he tilted his head slightly to the side. Nothing at all about his demeanor indicated to Odema that he was not happy that she was giving him the attention that she assumed he craved. She could almost swear that the dog's left eye seemed to widen as if he had eyebrows and had raised the left one in smug defiance.

"What do you want?" she asked, with a certain air of uneasiness and frustration. "You can't possibly be hungry! You ate a better lunch than I! I still can't believe my sister has spoiled you so. Really now, who ever heard of a dog eating McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken? You will never catch me feeding you by hand, that's for sure!"

Odema became more and more uneasy although she did not know why. She tried to resume reading the book she had been waiting weeks to read. She was thrilled when she finally received the postcard from the public library, stating that she could come at

any time to pick up the book she had placed on reserve many weeks ago. She had been looking forward to sitting down and delving into her long-awaited book but was finding it very frustrating that she could not concentrate. She now realized she had been reading the same sentence over and over again.

Deciding she could take no more of the animal's incessant preoccupation with her state of being, Odema stood up, straightened and smoothed her skirt, and proceeded to the kitchen.

She opened the back door and softly, so as not to waken her sister, called, "Willie. Come here, Willie." She was startled to find that Willie had been at her side all along.

"Go on, now. You go outside," she said impatiently to the dog. Willie slowly went across the threshold of the door, looking over his shoulder at Odema as he went out into the cold afternoon air.

She returned to her chaise lounge and gingerly picked up her book. "Now, maybe I can get some reading done," she determinedly said aloud.

The house was silent, and when she finally glanced up from her book, she noticed that nearly two hours had passed. She decided that she should go check on her sister even though it was not unusual for her to nap four or five hours at a time.

She quietly opened the door to the room where her sister lay sleeping. Odema could hear the soft noises of breathing, and, satisfied that she should let her continue in her peaceful slumber, she softly closed the door and returned to her reading.

Yet her thoughts kept drifting to Willie. He annoyed her so. She did not dislike animals. Quite the contrary. Throughout her seventy-six years, she had taken care of many animals. When her children were young, they had brought home every living creature they found. At one point, her house had seemed more like a habitat for animals than for humans. She had willingly taken care of mice, turtles, white rats, ducks, chickens, snakes, cats and dogs.

Odema was quick to tell people that she did not hate animals, but, in her opinion, animals had a certain place in the grand scheme of things. She did not want to feel required to greet, touch, or pet an animal when visiting with relatives or friends. She would also never even begin to entertain the thought of allowing an animal to sleep in her bed, eat off her table, or lounge in her lap.

About the time she was feeling guilty for having left Willie outside so long, and knowing her sister could awaken at any time and want Willie right there with her, she heard a loud knocking at the back door. She stood up, clutching her book closely to her chest.

The knocking continued, and a voice called out, "Odema, let me in! It's cold out here!"

Odema did not recognize the voice. It was a man's voice, and she was now very afraid. She tiptoed into the kitchen and peeked out through the curtains.

Standing there on the back porch was a short man of slight build, who appeared to be in his late thirties or early forties. The man had a shock of unruly black hair and a golden tan, which Odema thought odd since it was the middle of winter.

"Please, Odema," the man called out, "let me in! I'm freezing!"

"Go away," cried Odema, "or I'll call the police!"

"Now, why would you go and do a silly thing like that when I live here just the same as you?"

"You must be sick in the head! No one lives here except my sister and I."

Then it struck Odema. Where was Willie? What had this man done to Willie? She looked out the window again, frantically searching the yard for the dog.

"What have you done with my dog?"

"Oh, so that's how it is? I'm yours now, am I?"

"I don't understand what you mean. Where's my sister's dog? What have you done with him? She'll be so upset if you've let him out. You don't understand; she's sick, she's dying, and she'd be so upset if..."

"Really now. We're wasting time. And besides, I'm hungry. I want some more of that chicken."

The man began to throw his body against the door, which was quite ineffective at accomplishing anything except terrifying Odema. She braced her body against the door and screamed, "Stop that! Stop that!"

"What's going on in there?" Odema's sister called from the bedroom. "Who is it?"

The man at the door said loudly and matter-of-factly, "It's me, William."

Odema looked down and thought it funny to see the floor rising quickly. She promptly fainted away.

The Witch Mask

by Phyllis Davidson

It rained the morning Ann Sedae became a witch. She had slept with her hair curled around sponge rollers and tied up in an old scarf, as usual, but by the time she had stood at the school bus stop for ten minutes, the humid air had reduced her bouncy curls to limp strings hanging around her face. The bus plowed through a bank of fog on the way to the small country school. Ann got off and hurried to the sixth-grade classroom. She slid into her seat in the rear of the room and hid her face behind her geography book.

During second hour, the entire elementary student body was summoned to the auditorium. It did not take long for the students to assemble because the classes were small and each classroom opened directly into the auditorium. As soon as the last student was seated on one of the long gray benches, Mrs. Smiley stepped behind the speaker's podium.

"We've called you together to announce this year's school play. The play will be *Hansel and Gretel*. The first grade girls will be butterflies, and the boys will be blackbirds. The second- and third-grade girls will be dancing buttercups, and the boys will be woodland elves. The following students have been chosen to have speaking parts: Hansel will be played by James Taylor, Gretel by Elaine Parker, and the witch by Ann Sedae. The rest of you will be in the chorus. Play practice will begin next week in the gymnasium."

After a few more words of encouragement, Mrs. Smiley dismissed the students for recess. As well-wishers began to gather around James and Elaine, Ann quickly turned and escaped to the girls' restroom. There she remained, hiding in a stall, cheeks burning with shame, until the noise of the other kids going out to recess died down. She tried to understand why she had been chosen to play the witch. She would have expected someone like Opal Smith or one of the other truly ugly girls to be chosen. Did this mean

that she was as ugly as they were? She knew she was far from pretty, but was she really that bad? She came out of the stall and examined her face in the mirror. It was long and thin with freckles, crooked teeth, and a frame of black hair hanging in limp strings. Ann knew she didn't always look this bad. It was because of that awful humidity, she decided. She wiped her shiny nose with a tissue, fluffed her hair with her fingers, and left the restroom.

Ann went directly to Mrs. Smiley's classroom. She was not afraid of Mrs. Smiley who had been her first-grade teacher in school as well as her teacher in Bible school for several years. She was a jolly, kind-hearted person who was quick to praise and slow to criticize. She sat at her desk, grading crayon drawings and stamping them with happy faces that looked remarkably like her own. Even the crow's-feet beside her eyes were curved upward. She looked up as Ann slowly entered the room. "Now, what can I do for you, Miss Ann?"

"Mrs. Smiley, please don't make me be the witch. I'd be happy to be Gretel, but I just can't play the part of a witch," Ann pleaded with a slight catch in her voice. She paused to steady her voice and continued. "I would just be too embarrassed."

"Well, Ann, I'm surprised at you." A hurt, rejected look transformed Mrs. Smiley's face. "The other teachers and I thought you would be honored to get the biggest part in the play. We chose you because you are one of the taller girls and because you're so good at memorizing lines. You did a great job in last year's play."

"I would have loved being Gretel," Ann said, "but the witch is so ugly and mean. I don't think I can act that way in front of the whole school. You understand, don't you?"

"Why don't you give it a chance? I'm sure you'll do a great job, and it can be a lot of fun for you," Mrs. Smiley coaxed. "We need someone with your ability to take this part."

Ann had never been one to stand up against friendly persuasion, so she shook her head as if in disbelief at herself, composed her face into a mask of politeness, and said slowly, "I'll try. And thanks for choosing me."

Mrs. Smiley opened her desk drawer, picked out a blue duplicate of the playscript, and handed it to Ann. The smell of the duplicating fluid brought back happy feelings of being in the first grade and receiving pretty pictures to color. She managed a faint smile as she said goodbye to Mrs. Smiley. Once out in the auditorium, Ann turned as if to go back, but then her eye caught the opening lines of the play, and she continued walking away.

When Ann got on the school bus that afternoon, she went all the way to the back seat. As she rode along the gravel road, a cloud of brown dust flew up from under the

wheels of the bus. As they passed the Crenshaw's white house, a black dog ran out, snarling and barking at the bus. It chased behind the bus until it was swallowed up in the dust. Ann took it as a personal affront. Her humiliation burned like last year's brushpile. When she got off the bus in front of her own house, the shades were drawn and the front door closed. The weeping willow tree beside the front porch drooped its fernlike branches in despair. Not a breath of air was stirring anywhere. Ann half expected the door to be locked, but it swung open with a faint squeak, like a small cry of fright.

In the kitchen, Ann's mother stood at the sink, peeling potatoes. On the radio, Patti Page sang "Mockingbird Hill." Ann laid her books on the kitchen table, gave her mother a quick hug, and immediately began to tell her about what had happened at school. She was somewhat comforted when her mother agreed with Mrs. Smiley.

"I don't see anything to be embarrassed about. I think you should feel honored that they had enough confidence in you to give you the part," she said, turning back to her potato peeling. So that was that. Her mother didn't understand, either.

Ann picked up her books and carried them into her room, closing the door behind her. Her ceramic mask collection grinned mockingly at her from the wall. "Well, I may have to play the part, but I'm not going to act mean and ugly," she told them.

She took out the script, flopped across her bed, and began to read. It soon became evident that the witch was stuck in the "hee-hee-hee" mode. Almost every line began with witchly mirth. Ann didn't see how they could expect her to ring out with hideous cackles in front of all the other kids, and boys, too! It was just too much to expect.

Ann got up from her bed, went to the closet, and dragged out a box of old clothes. She dug until she found the old black evening dress. She slipped it on over her skirt and blouse and pulled the attached train up over her head like a scarf. It actually fit her now instead of dragging the ground, the way it used to, as she followed her older brothers Tom and Tim down the gravel road to the neighbor's house, empty paper bag in hand, to play trick or treat. Her blackened eyebrows and front tooth had given her a delightfully hideous look. When they had returned home with some old pennies in their bags, a family of cousins had come to visit. Ann had taken three-year-old Steve aside and given him her most fearsome witch's cackle. He had run screaming and crying out onto the back porch where his mother sat visiting. Ann guiltily slunk into her bedroom, where she cleaned her face and took off the costume before innocently appearing on the porch.

But that was then. She was far too mature for such foolishness, now. Mrs. Smiley would just have to be satisfied with an innocuous little "hee-hee-hee." She grudgingly

begin memorizing the lines.

Almost from the first day of play practice, Ann could tell that the teachers weren't satisfied with her performance.

"Ann, we need more expression. You're supposed to sound like a wicked witch," prompted Mrs. Smiley encouragingly.

A tight feeling began to grow in Ann's stomach. She responded by delivering her lines a little louder but in the same tone of voice. She was well aware of the many disgusted looks exchanged among the teachers. She knew she was not doing as well as she could, but she simply could not force herself to act so ugly in public.

On the final day of practice, the frustrated admonitions of the teachers were beginning to wear on Ann. It was like they were beginning to think she couldn't do any better, and she began to want to show them that she could. As soon as she got home from school, she went to her room, closed the door, and fell down on her bed. As she lay thinking, the joker's mask on the wall seemed to mock her. The princess and the bandit smirked.

"Show us what you can do," they jeered.

"Gra-ha-ha," she responded, and again "gra-ha-ha." It felt good. The tight feeling in her stomach began to dissolve. She stood before her dresser, called up the most wicked cackles from the depths of her childhood, and unleashed them on the mirror. They were bad, really bad. She ran to find her sister Brandy and tried them out on her.

"Wow, I'm impressed. That's pretty bloodcurdling," Brandy said. "I think I'd go for it."

When Ann arrived at the school dressing room that evening, Mrs. Smiley was there to help her get dressed. She brought out a long black dress, a wig, and a horrid rubber mask with a long, humped nose.

"Wow, I didn't know I got to wear a mask," Ann said. She got into her costume and looked in the mirror. A complete stranger stared back. The tight feeling in her stomach turned into a quiver of excitement. She went to take her place in the gingerbread cottage before the gymnasium began to fill up with people.

The play began. The chorus sang, and the witch watched from behind the curtains as Hansel and Gretel skipped through the construction-paper woods to her cottage. She went out to meet them.

"Oh, you poor little children," she purred sweetly. "Come into my cottage and have some gingerbread." As Hansel and Gretel trustingly placed their hands in hers, she suddenly grasped them tightly and exploded with a "gra-ha-ha."

Both Hansel and Gretel took a step backward, their eyes widening and their faces turning pale. They exchanged fearful glances. As the witch spoke the familiar lines, they recovered their composure and responded with only slightly quivering voices. For the next hour, the witch cackled and badgered the children with real gusto. When Hansel stuck out a chicken bone for the near-sighted witch to examine, she growled with frustration. When the second examination showed him to be no fatter, she stamped her feet in a dance of rage. Then a cunning sweetness entered her voice.

"Fire up the oven, Gretel, so we can bake some more cakes for Hansel," she coaxed. "Make sure the fire is nice and hot."

Gretel strongly resisted the witch's attempts to draw her near the oven.

"I don't know how to do it. You'll have to show me," she whined. When Gretel finally pushed the witch into the oven, the audience burst into enthusiastic applause.

When Ann crawled out of the brick oven, Mrs. Smiley was waiting with a huge grin on her face. She hugged Ann tightly and exclaimed, "You were wonderful. We were so worried that the play wouldn't be any good, but you really came through for us. I'm so proud of you."

When the family returned home after the play, the porch light shone invitingly. The weeping willow tree nodded approvingly in the wind. Ann's brother Tim had brought home Jerry, a new friend, to spend the night. Ann overheard their conversation as they passed her bedroom door.

"Man, did you hear that witch? She was really bad," Jerry said.

"Yeah, she was something, all right," Tim replied thoughtfully.

Little River Crossing

by Gaylon Kaiser

A bright April sun rose slowly over the Kiamichi Mountains in eastern Oklahoma. It revealed fertile farmlands that would soon produce an abundance of vegetables. As beams of light penetrated an evergreen forest near the small community of Eagletown, a rooster crowed and flapped his wings to greet the day. His song created a chain reaction of crowing throughout the rolling foothills, soon reaching the plump, red rooster belonging to Taylor Epperson. Feathers flew as Taylor's rooster clucked, flapped, and joined the chorus.

It had rained hard the night before, and droplets still clung to leaves, creating little sparks of light when the sun caressed each tree. A thin mist hung over the waters of Little River as it wound slowly through hills and forests.

A doe rose slowly in a pine thicket two miles from Taylor's farm and began to graze.. Her ears perked up with each new sound of crowing, and she returned to eating when she realized there was no danger.

As light neared Eagletown, the red Coca Cola sign on Eagletown's only grocery store swayed lazily, displaying the message: Drink Coca Cola, Only a Nickel. A Mister Planter Peanut sign beckoned people to come inside and sit a spell. Streams of chimney smoke began to rise and blend with the fog. Eagletown was awakening.

Taylor Epperson's small, thin body stirred beneath a hand-sewn quilt, and his eyes flew open. He rose quickly and put on his plaid cotton shirt and bibbed overalls; then, careful not to awaken Amanda, he walked slowly to the living room, wooden floors creaking with each step.

A cast-iron, potbellied stove stood in one corner of the living room, waiting for the first fire. Taylor stuffed wads of paper, kindling, and split logs into the mouth of the stove, and lit the fire with a long wooden match. He stood watching quietly until the kindling blazed.

Satisfied, he went to the kitchen and poured himself a small glass of corn liquor. The clear white liquid burned as it flowed down his throat, causing him to shudder.

"Brrrghh," he sighed to himself, shoulders shaking.

A pine table, unpolished but smooth, stood beneath an uncurtained window. Six matching chairs tucked neatly under the table represented six months of Taylor's labor, and he smiled with pride each time he saw them. He had made the set for Amanda when they were newlyweds, and it was still like new in spite of their four growing children. Taylor patted the table as he sat sipping his liquor.

Still in her long flannel nightgown, Amanda entered the room. Dark brown eyes, heavy with sleep, glanced at Taylor. "Mornin', Husband," she mumbled.

"Mornin', Wife," Taylor replied without turning his head.

Amanda went to the sink and began pumping water for coffee. She smiled to herself as she watched the pot fill. Remembering their years together was a part of her morning ritual. She never failed to thank God for her marriage to Taylor. This morning, she found herself musing about their introduction fifteen years ago. Her cousin Bill Golden had introduced them at a dance in Cisco in 1908. Taylor had casually looked at her large-boned frame, nodded politely, and said the words that shocked her speechless. "You're a big one, Amanda Green. You're beautiful. You'll be my wife within a year, mark my words." Without another word, he turned and left the dance hall. Amanda stood gazing after him. Bill just shook his head. Two weeks later, Taylor had found her hoeing cotton in her father's field, and the courtship of Amanda began. Six months later, they were married. She had never regretted her shy, quiet "yes" when he proposed to her.

"Did you sleep good, Wife?" Taylor's words jarred her out of her meditation.

"Yes, Husband, I did," Amanda spoke softly. "Did Ole Henry's crowing wake you up?"

"Yep," Taylor said. "He always gets a bit louder after a big rain."

"I'll go get dressed and then fix breakfast after you get the fire started."

Taylor smiled as she left the room and walked to the kitchen stove to start the fire. The smooth, flat surface of the iron stove was clean and shiny. Amanda always cleaned it with salt and hog's fat before going to bed, and Taylor respected her clean habits. As he loaded wood into the stove, he carefully brushed each log free of debris.

When Amanda reappeared, she had pulled her dark, braided hair into a round ball at the nape of her neck. A plain flour-sack dress, covered by a white apron, hung loosely on her body. High cheek bones, smooth and freshly scrubbed, shone in the early morning light.

“You’re a handsome woman, Mandy,” Taylor said as he turned to look at her affectionately.

“You’re prejudiced, Taylor,” she replied. “I love you, too.” She walked to a cabinet and began scooping handfuls of flour into a large, wooden bowl.

“Taylor,” she said thoughtfully, “I know I’m not supposed to tell a dream before breakfast, but I really have a strange feeling about the one I had last night.”

“Yep,” Taylor said, stoking the fire. “You’re not supposed to tell one before breakfast. You know superstitions as well as I do.”

“I know, but this was such a different kind of dream,” she said. “It was harmless, I’m sure. It probably means nothing worth talking about, but it troubled me for some reason.”

“Well, now you’ve got my curiosity stirred up,” Taylor grinned. “Maybe it won’t hurt nothin’ to tell just one dream before breakfast. Go ahead. Tell it.”

“Well,” Amanda said slowly, “I was sitting in the living room in my dream. All of us were in the living room just visiting like we do all the time, and a noise caused us all to run outside and look up.” She stopped and looked out the kitchen window.

“Yes,” Taylor urged. “What happened then?”

“We all looked up and saw a white wagon pulled by six white horses in the sky. Like Ezekiel’s wheel, y’know? Am I thinking of Gabriel’s chariot? I don’t know. One or the other. Anyway, it was a glowing wagon, and a woman dressed all in white was driving the horses. In her hands she held three white doves. Three of them.”

“A woman, driving a wagon, was holding white doves,” Taylor grinned. “Now, there’s a silly picture. I think you’re fairly safe to tell that dream before breakfast. There’s not a chance it could come true.”

“But that’s not the end of the dream, Taylor,” she said. “There’s more.”

Taylor sat down. “Well, finish it,” he said impatiently but not with anger. “There’s not much left to tell, is there? I need to feed the horses before we go to see your dad today.”

“No. Not much more,” Amanda said softly. “Well, the doves flew out of her hands and down to us. One dove lit on my shoulder, one on Charles’, and one on Olivia’s. You, Nancy, and Hortense just stood and looked at the three of us with the doves on our shoulders. What on earth could it mean, Taylor?”

Taylor stared at her and shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. Sounds like maybe the three of you are blessed in some way. I don’t know. Who can figure dreams out? I can’t.”

Amanda shook her head. "I can still feel that dove sitting on my shoulder. It felt...well, it felt like it was some kind of message for me and the kids."

Fourteen-year-old Nancy Epperson walked into the room, rubbing sleep from her eyes. Blonde hair cascaded down her shoulders softly, unaffected by her night's sleep. She wore a long flannel nightgown almost identical to her mother's. Yawning widely, she asked, "What about us kids?"

"Oh, I was just telling your Pa about a dream I had last night," Amanda said as she began kneading biscuits.

"You told a dream before breakfast?" Nancy asked. "Mama, you know dreams are supposed to come true if you tell them before breakfast." Nancy was shocked that her mother could have neglected the age-old wisdom.

"I know the superstition," Amanda responded. "It was just a silly dream. Nothing to worry about. I'll have breakfast ready in a while. You go get dressed and get your brother and sisters up. Remember we're going to your Grandfather's today. We have to leave right after breakfast dishes are done. Have Charles wear those new pants I bought him yesterday, and have Olivia wear the green dress I made her last year. It still fits her, for the time being."

Nancy interrupted her mother. "You told me all this yesterday. I haven't forgot."

"*Forgotten*," Amanda corrected. "There's an *e* and an *n* tacked on there. *Forgott..en*" Amanda cut a biscuit with a cookie cutter and smiled. "Learn English properly, young lady."

"Yea, Mama. Forgot...ten. I'll get the kids up." Nancy retreated to the bedrooms, and the sound of children's protests filled the air.

The baby, Charles, was eleven months old and wanted his bottle. Nancy soothed him and cradled his small body in her arms. Olivia, age three, stumbling and half awake, entered the kitchen, and six-year-old Hortense stooped to aid her baby sister.

"Olivia, wake up," Hortense said to her sister. "Quit stumbling."

All the children sat around the kitchen table, waiting patiently for breakfast while Nancy helped Amanda set the table and fry the eggs.

"We're going to Grandpa's after breakfast," Amanda announced to the children. "So, get dressed really pretty after you eat." She put Charles in his high chair and began to feed him scrambled eggs.

After breakfast, while the children were getting dressed, Taylor went to the barn to get the team of horses ready for the day's travel to Cisco. Amanda came out of the house with all the children and helped them into the buckboard wagon.

“You kids are being really good today,” Amanda complimented. “I’m sure Grandpa will have a good treat for you when I tell him how good you’ve been. Isn’t that right, Taylor?”

Taylor looked up from beneath the belly of a strong filly and grunted, “Yep.” He fastened the belt around the filly and climbed into the driver’s seat of the wagon. “Grandpa will be happy to see all of us.” Smiling, he patted Amanda’s leg.

The ride to Little River Crossing was pleasant. The children sang nursery rhymes for the first ten miles, with Nancy acting as choir director. By the time they reached Little River Crossing, everyone was ready for a rest.

“We’ll stop a minute or two and visit with Bill Golden while you kids go pee and get a drink of water. We’re not going to stay long, so don’t dilly-dally,” Taylor said as he pulled the team into Bill Golden’s front yard.

Bill’s home was nestled twenty feet from the north bank of Little River. The fog had lifted hours ago, and the river meandered peacefully as it flowed past his front yard. Bill came out to greet them when he saw the wagon pull up in his front yard.

“Mornin’, Taylor. Mornin’, Mandy. You all must have got an early start to be here before noon. Roads must have been good,” he said.

“They were fine, Bill,” Taylor replied. “No mud to speak of. Guess the sun dried it all up. Sure did rain last night, didn’t it?”

“It poured down here, let me tell you.” Bill spit tobacco as he spoke. “Come on in and sit a spell.” He opened his front door. “You folks headin’ to Cisco today?”

“Yep. It’s been six months since we saw John, and Mandy gets concerned. You know how women are?”

“I sure do,” Bill replied. “Well, you folks be careful when you cross the river. It’s pretty dry in spite of last night’s rain, and it should be fine, but I’ve seen many a team of horses get scared when they see the river. Just last week, Sam Turner’s team bucked up a storm when he tried to cross. Nearly threw him out of his wagon. ‘Course, you got good control of your team, and I know that, Taylor, but...well, I’m a worrywart, I guess,” he smiled at Taylor and Amanda. “You folks be sure to tell John he owes me one. He’ll know what I mean.”

Taylor sipped from the tin cup Bill handed him. “We’ll be careful,” he replied. “I’ll give John your message.”

“Well, we’d best get goin’. Thank ye, Bill.” He hollered to the kids outside, “You kids get in the wagon. It’s time to go.”

Nancy helped the little ones into the wagon. Amanda held Charles in her lap.

Bill walked to the edge of his yard and watched the wagon enter the sloping north bank of the river. The water was barely three feet high, but already the horses were getting fidgety. Taylor yelled, "Gid-ap." Instead of obeying his command, the horses grunted and stopped in the center of the narrow river.

"Gid-ap, gid-up," Taylor yelled again. Both horses pricked up their ears attentively but did not move.

"What's wrong with them?" Amanda asked as she pulled Charles closer to her.

"Stubborn jackasses...gid-up, haw!" Taylor used the whip to prod the animals, but they remained still as stones, listening as if hearing some invisible enemy coming toward them.

Then, Bill heard the terror. Above the horses' snorting, above Taylor's prodding, he heard the roar that filled him with a crippling fear. He stood rooted to the river bank, hoping his ears were deceiving him. But the flash flood was real. A wall of water carrying stones, tree stumps, debris, and dead carcasses from upstream was bearing down on the Eppersons' wagon.

"Oh, my God!" Bill screamed as he saw the fifteen-foot wave charging the wagon. "Taylor! Mandy! Jump!" But it was too late. His words were never heard.

The wagon, horses, and bodies were hurled high into the air and tossed to the opposite side of the river. It all happened so fast he could do nothing but stand helplessly and watch. Huge, uprooted trees whirled in the murky waters and disappeared from view almost as quickly as they had appeared. Bill knew no one could survive the force, and he sobbed as he stared at the vanishing death water.

Then, to his amazement, he saw Taylor bobbing up and down in the muddy, frothing river. In each of his hands, he held children's heads above the water and struggled to swim. Bill jumped in and raced toward the trio, half-running, half-swimming, frantically screaming their names. "Taylor! Nancy! Mandy! I'm coming. I'm coming!" As he neared the trio, he saw Taylor had Nancy and Hortense in his arms; the others were nowhere to be seen.

When the two men got the girls to the edge of the river, Taylor laid Hortense on the slope and rushed back to the water. "I'm going after Mandy and the kids," he hollered breathlessly to Bill.

"No, Taylor," Bill shouted. "They're not here. The water carried them downstream. You can't find them now. Stay here. I'll get help!" He laid Nancy beside Hortense and held out his hand to Taylor, beckoning him to stay. "You're hurt, Taylor. Stay here!"

Blood trickled down the left side of Taylor's head. He paused, brushed his head with his hand, and slumped to the ground. Even in his state of shock, he knew Bill was right, and there was nothing he could do. He gathered his two daughters in his arms and sobbed.

Three days later, the bodies of Amanda, Charles and Olivia were discovered two miles downstream. Sam Turner found them and pulled them ashore with his pitchfork. They were buried the next day at Eagletown cemetery.

Taylor chose a single casket for the three bodies. Charles and Olivia were placed tenderly in Amanda's folded arms, and they each held a rosebud in their hands. Dark, thick clouds began to gather in the northeast as the casket was lowered into the soft earth. Nancy and Hortense cradled themselves in Taylor's arms and cried softly. Taylor raised his head and looked at the darkening sky just as three white birds flew eastward.

What Color is 10 Years Old?

by Kathy Stevens

Thursday, August 24, 1972

I started 5th grade today. My teacher is Mrs. Greyston and she smells pretty. She said we should start a diary. The boys can call it a journal if they want. She said that this year would be a turning point in our lives because this is a year of change in Oklahoma.

The school I go to now is a long ways from my house. I used to walk to school every day with my brothers Phillip and Kermit. One day I walked all the way, a whole mile, backwards 'cause Phillip bet me I couldn't. He's always making up some kind of stupid bet or dare for me. He always says, "Girls can't do this or that," but I proved him wrong again that day. I walked backwards the whole way even after I ran into that mailbox and cut my head. I got in trouble for getting blood on my dress, but I won the bet!

I now have to go to Culbertson Elementary way downtown because of some man named Luther Bohannon. My dad calls him "Lucifer" Bohannon because he's making us kids be bussed and integrated. That means ride a bus a long way across town to go to school where black kids go. My dad says that's stupid because we live close to a school already.

Anyway, I like my teacher and lunch was o.k., but at recess I didn't play with anyone. I just sat on the steps by the door. Some boys got into a fight, and one boy got paddled for saying "nigger."

Friday, August 25, 1972

Last night I heard my dad yelling again about forced bussing. He said, "Whites should go to school with whites, and niggers with niggers." I told him about the little boy getting paddled for saying that word. He said he wasn't a little boy, and he could

say anything he wanted. I guess only grownups are supposed to say that word.

We took a reading test today, and I got advanced to a special reading lab. There aren't any black kids in that lab. I asked the lab teacher why not. She said, "Because black kids don't read as good as white kids." I said, "I thought we were supposed to go to this school to learn 'with' the black kids." She told me to hush my mouth! Then she sent me back to my regular classroom.

I sit next to a black girl named Angela, and she has funny hair. She let me touch it, but it didn't feel like a Brillo pad like Phillip said it would.

I sat on the steps again at recess. I wanted to play jump rope with Angela and some other black girls. Angela wanted me to play, too, but the other girls wouldn't let me. They said, "No fat white girls allowed!" That made my tummy hurt, but I didn't tattle. I like to sit on the steps in the shade. The steps are painted yellow. I like to peel the paint off in long thin strips and stick them in the cracks in the concrete.

My teacher says I don't have to write in my diary on days we don't go to school, so I won't.

Monday, August 28, 1972

We stayed at church for a long time yesterday. The grownups were talking about starting a school at church. I asked my mom if it was like Bible school, and she said, "No, it's going to be a school-school." When I told my teacher about the school-school at my church, she got sad, real sad, but I don't know why.

My bus driver is so nice. He's old and black and funny. I like it when he laughs because one of his front teeth is gone. I asked him where his tooth was, and he laughed right out loud and said he couldn't remember. Today, he had a big box full of little white-powdered and chocolate-covered donuts for all the kids on the bus to eat. When I looked into the box, I turned my head back and forth, back and forth real slow-like. Then the bus driver said, "What are you lookin' at, child?" I said, "Your donuts are integrated!" He laughed again and said, "Girl child, I guess you're right."

When I got home, I told my mother about the donuts, but she didn't laugh. She said she guessed she'd just have to drive us to school from now on. That made me kind of sad, but I like it when Mom drives us, so I guess it's all right.

Tuesday, August 29, 1972

We went to music class today. We are learning a song called "Black and White" by a group called Three Dog Night. I told my teacher that my brother has that record,

but I like the song about the bullfrog better. She said, "We don't go to school with frogs." We're supposed to make a picture about the song and bring it to class on Thursday.

Wednesday, August 30, 1972

I didn't like school today. I had to wear my orange- and brown-checked dress with the burnt orange tights. I hate 'em! And I hate green beans! We've had them three times for lunch already this year. The recess teacher wouldn't let me sit on the yellow steps. She kept saying, "Go play," so I walked along the fence. Angela walked with me. I guess it's o.k. to walk with fat white girls as long as you don't jump rope with them.

A funny thing happened in P.E. class. One of the little black boys asked me if he could touch my hand. He said, "I want to see if you is as soft as you look." He said he wished he had red hair like mine, and some other boy said, "You stupid boy, I'd rather be dead than red on the head!" I hate that! I hate it a lot!

Thursday, August 31, 1972

I took my picture to school today for music class. I put white tissue paper on one half and black tissue paper on the other. I put a black child on the white side and a white child on the black side. Then, I made them holding hands. My mom didn't seem to like it much, but I do. Mrs. Greyston likes it, too. She hung it on the bulletin board.

An odd thing happened on the way to music. Angela came up from behind me in the hall and grabbed my hand. All the girls hold hands with their friends, so I guess Angela's my friend. But when we stopped for a bathroom break, I told her I needed to wash my hand. I told her, "My mother gets really mad if I don't wash my hands a lot." But that was a lie and Angela knew it. She looked at me for a long time, and then she walked away and didn't come back. I feel like I did a real bad thing. My insides hurt, and I can't make it go away. I like Angela and her funny hair. Why did I do that? I prayed for God to forgive me; I prayed for Angela to forgive me.

Friday, September 1, 1972

I started 5th grade AGAIN today at the school-school at the church. My teacher is Mrs. Wellborn and she doesn't smell pretty....

An Eye for an Eye

by Odema McCormick

Ben David Goldstein was born in Tel Aviv, Israel, to Orthodox Jewish parents. For thirty years, he lived a quiet, unpretentious life.

One morning, Ben David was summoned to Jerusalem by the high priest. Ben David Goldstein's family name had been discovered in the register of the genealogy of priests. He was a descendant of the tribe of Levi. He was amazed when he learned that he qualified for the priesthood.

During childhood, he had been ridiculed by his peers because of his short stature and extremely bowed legs.

How awesome that God could accept and use such a misshapen man as me for the priesthood! Ben David thought in wonderment.

Ben David Goldstein stood on the top of a hill and scrutinized the surrounding hills and valleys. The black openings of caverns dotted the hills. There was no movement or sound anywhere.

Israeli soldiers were somewhere in those hills. They had been sent to infiltrate the countryside south of Judea, to guard against a rumored invasion of this territory by the Palestinian army.

Today, Ben David had been dispatched here to join the soldiers, so he would be available—as their priest—to aid, encourage, and minister to them, especially the wounded.

The silence of the hills was broken by the drone of a plane. Suddenly, a Palestinian plane appeared. It swooped low and strewn bombs across the land.

Ben David dived into a cavern and crawled toward the back. He leaned against the wall and clutched his left arm. His shirt sleeve felt wet, and he groaned in pain.

"You've been hit," a voice said quietly.

Startled, Ben David glanced across the narrow cave toward the voice. The dusk outlined a large shadowy figure.

"Yes, I'm wounded," Ben David said.

The man crawled toward him. "Let me see if I can help you."

He opened a duffel bag and took out a flashlight. He pulled away Ben David's hand that clutched the wounded arm, turned on the flashlight, and checked the wound.

"You're losing a lot of blood," the stranger said. "I'm going to apply a pressure bandage."

Ben David watched as the man took off his jacket and quickly unbuttoned and stripped off his shirt. He flipped open the long blade of a pocket knife, cut strips from his shirt, and tightly wrapped a strip around the wound on Ben David's arm. Ben David groaned.

"It has to be tight," the man said. "A pressure bandage to stop the bleeding. Cover the wound with your right hand, and apply pressure."

"Thank you, friend," Ben David said, "I'm Ben David Goldstein, an Israeli priest."

"I'm Ahmead Emani," Ben David's benefactor said. "You called me friend. I'm enemy. A general in the Palestinian army."

The two men sat in silence, staring at each other through the dusk.

Ahmead reached into his duffel bag and took out a canteen. He opened it and handed it to Ben David.

"Drink some," Ahmead said. "It will ease the pain a little. Swig as much as you can."

The liquid burned Ben David's throat.

"Thank you," he said as he returned the canteen.

Suddenly, the sound of exploding bombs and bursts of gunfire shattered the silence.

Inside the cavern, the men sat quietly. At intervals, Ahmead changed the bandage on Ben David's wound. Once, he poured some of the liquid from the canteen onto it. Ben David flinched, groaned.

"Medicinal," Ahmead said, "and the bleeding has lessened."

The sound of gunfire and bombs continued. The men sat quietly. They dozed.

"Ahmead," Ben David whispered some time later, "it's quiet out there. The gunfire has stopped. No more planes or bombs."

Ahmead reached across and felt the bandage on Ben David's wounded arm.

"Your bandage is dry. The bleeding's stopped," he said. "It's night now. I'm going to leave you. You will be all right until your soldiers find you."

“Where are you going?” Ben David asked. “It’s dangerous out there. Especially for you.”

“Ben David, three days ago I got lost from my troops while scouting. I accidentally crossed into enemy territory,” Ahmead explained. “By day, I have hidden out in caverns; by night, I have tried to find my way back to my troops. I’m going to try again.”

“Ahmead,” Ben David said, “I have something I want to give you before you go.”

Ben David dug his right hand into his pants pocket and pulled out a small leather pouch. Carefully, he removed two coin-shaped disks: one small, the other slightly larger.

He reached out and grasped Ahmead’s right hand, placed the two coin-shaped disks into the palm, and tightly closed Ahmead’s fingers over the disks.

“Guard these with your life,” Ben David said. “They are your passport to safety. Your territory and troops are a few miles due west. Travel cautiously and speedily. If anyone stops you or questions you, immediately show them the disks. One glance at them, and any Israeli will allow you to go free.”

“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life,” he added.

The Iguana

by Edy Bauer

“The ad starts today,” she chirped at me with a grin. “Ooohhh, Mom,” I said, staring directly at her, willing her to see the disappointment in my eyes. Yet she was right, or at least she was being fair. I had broken the rules and I deserved the punishment. This past week had changed my life forever. Nothing would be the same again.

It all started on June 29, 1995, my twelfth birthday, the greatest birthday. I had gotten the gift of my dreams, what I had wished for for at least four years. A boat. Yes, I got a boat from my Grandpa. Not a fancy boat, mind you, but to me, it was a most beautiful boat with a five horse-power Mercury outboard motor. This is the kind of motor that you steer from the back of the boat with a handle. You twist the handle, like a motorcycle throttle, to go faster. The motor doesn't have a key to start it; you just pull the rope like a lawn mower engine. The best part, though, was the paint job. The boat was camouflaged, like army vehicles. Someone had done a do-it-yourself job with cans of spray paint. A blob of green here, a dab of brown there. The end result was perfect. It was so ugly it was cute. I immediately christened her *The Iguana*. I could hardly wait to take her out. Grandpa and I had fished every inch of shore line in the cove behind his cabin, now we could explore around the rotten stumps and submerged trees in the deeper water. Grandpa lived in a redwood A-frame house at Lake Eufaula, right next to the water. It wasn't on the big part of the lake, but back in a tree-lined cove about two football fields long and a hundred feet across. Old dead trees, their roots drowned by rising water, littered the banks. Some had fallen over into the water, providing excellent hiding places for the beautiful black bass we loved to catch. Grandpa had taken me fishing for as long as I could remember, and we had always talked big about how many more we could catch if only we had a boat. A boat. My dream and now I had one. *The Iguana*.

In the spring, the rains caused the water level of the lake to rise. Eufaula is fed by three different rivers and hundreds of creeks. The flood gates at the dam have to stay open to keep the water from flooding the homes along the shoreline. Even so, the water had risen so high it came within ten feet of Grandpa's back porch. The high water made everything look eerie: familiar landmarks were gone, the old dead willow trees and moss-covered stumps were covered by water, sand and rock beaches were swallowed alive. All that was left were hundreds of trees, stranded and desperately trying to hold their leaved branches out of the water. It was like a postcard: almost too pretty, too perfect.

The maiden voyage. We hoisted *The Iguana* up and off the trailer. She was heavy, but I felt as strong as Godzilla. After we pushed her down the slick grassy bank into the water, Grandpa began to tell me everything he thought I needed to know about boats, motors, and water safety. Mom stood nearby, quietly appraising his lecture. Then she added her three RULES.

1. Boaters will wear lifejackets at all times. No exceptions.
2. The boat will never go so fast as to leave a wake in the water. That confined my speed to under six miles per hour.
3. The boat can never go past the mouth of the cove. In the body of the lake, the wind is often brisk, and the water will whitecap. That is no place for a twelve foot boat.

So off we went. Grandpa showed me how to push the motor handle from left to right to steer the boat. It was just backwards; you push the handle right to go left and left to go right. Unless you are traveling in reverse, then you push the handle right to go right and left to go left. It sounds confusing, but I easily mastered it and became a true "Captain" of my ship. I practiced my boating techniques and guided Grandpa to all those fishing spots unreachable by the boatless fisherman. I watched him cast his shiny lure into the smooth water. Reeling quickly, the buzzing bait broke the top of the water, whirling and spinning, sending droplets of water flying everywhere. His rod directed the lure from side to side while the reel kept the speed such that the lure churned the water with its propeller-like blades. The bass was uncontrollably attracted to the lure; snapping with frenzy, it grabbed the lure tight and leapt into the air, showing the world its prize. What a guide I was.

There were many more "catches" as I led us expertly through the cove. I think Grandpa was proud. Grandpa, a big gentle man with enough patience to take a lonely child fishing, a child content to do nothing but listen to an old man tell stories, sometimes the same one, over and over. A child, thrilled to fetch slimy minnows from

a shiny metal bucket, enchanted with writhing brown earthworms dug from the damp, morning soil. Two souls enthralled with the beauty that God had created for them at this lake: proud white egrets, with their stilt-like legs, plucking slow shad from the shallows; red pileated woodpeckers pounding madly at aged trees; and flat, saucer-shaped soft-shelled turtles, stacked two high, sunning happily on felled logs, their BB eyes peeking for predators, their hard underbodies making plopping sounds as they escaped into the water. The blueness of the sky, the whiteness of the clouds—this was a place the weatherman called “green country” but Grandpa called “God’s Country.”

It was getting late; Grandpa thought we should go in and clean the fish for dinner. Mom could fry fish better than anyone. My mouth watered with that thought. Besides, it was almost five o’clock, and Grandpa never missed his five o’clock cocktail.

Dinner was wonderful, as I expected. As the sun cast orange streamers through the branches across the cove and made its last feeble attempt to stay above the trees, Grandpa announced, “Looks like a perfect time for an evening spin in *The Iguana*. He rose out of his lawn chair with a little difficulty, third martini in hand, and headed toward the boat. I dashed ahead and steadied her bow so he could crawl in to sit on the wooden bench that ran across the middle. I stepped gingerly across him to the back and jerked the pull rope to start the motor. It caught immediately and purred as if in anticipation of the cruise.

What an excellent idea, a sunset cruise. The air was still warm, and the water’s surface was like glass. The little V-bottomed boat wove in and out among the trees stranded by the high water. I felt like a snow skier on a slalom run. Faster and faster we went, the breeze blowing our hair back, making us squint our eyes, whipping the words from our lips. I could hear Grandpa laughing, shouting “Good job!” and “Is this as fast she will go?” I twisted the throttle all the way. We must have been going twenty miles per hour—it felt like flying.

I pushed the handle to the right, hard, turning us sharply to the left, circling around the end of the cove in front of Grandpa’s porch. Now, I’m not sure, but I think Grandpa must have leaned a little too far into the turn because the next thing I remember is the quiet muffled sounds under the water and then a thump on my head as I hit the boat. *The Iguana* must have taken on a little water on the left side as I turned, which just flipped her upside down, belly-up! Grandpa was tossed clear, but I came up underneath the boat. She was sinking fast, so I took a quick gulp from the pocket of air trapped under the hull and swam clear. When I came up, Grandpa was still laughing, holding his now lake-water-filled martini glass. On the shore, I could hear Mom screaming, “Are you

okay?” Standing with both hands on her hips, she shouted indignantly, “I was afraid something like this would happen!”

The next morning, with the help of Larry, Grandpa’s neighbor, we located the *Iguana* under ten feet of water. We dragged her to shore and bailed her out. The boat was just fine, but the motor needed a mechanic. I guess motors aren’t designed to be submerged. Larry said he would fix it, and he mentioned how he sure could use a metal boat like this. He had a little motor, but he didn’t have a boat to put it on. Mom thought it was an excellent idea to trade MY *Iguana* for the mechanic’s fee.

“You broke the rules, you pay the fine,” Mom justified as she placed the ad to sell the repaired motor in the monthly Co-Op newsletter.

This morning, Mom goaded me to the mailbox. “I think the mail has come. Go check and see if the ad is in there.”

I walked slowly, obviously pouting so Mom could see, and retrieved the mail. Opening the flyer and scanning the ads, I found it:

FOR SALE: Old Mercury outboard motor,
5hp, 232-2233. “*Will trade for canoe.*”

Long shot toward corner; camera tracks toward corner

Zooming down from wide angle, cut to

A close-up of played cards, drinks, ashtrays.

Zoom back

Show hand with glass and character taking a drink.

Cut to

Close-up of character inhaling, exhaling cigarette smoke.

Track back

Woman is sitting in a chair in the corner, facing camera, while man has left side/back toward camera

Man's point of view

Man's hand of cards is in foreground with woman in screen, also.

Some cards are lying on the table face up; card game has played a few hands. Smoke swirls from candle flame are in low-key lighting.

Man's cards are in high-key lighting.

Zoom toward woman

Woman's face is lit low-key from the angle of the candle. Woman is back-lit. Woman looks worried and very protective of the few life stones she has left.

Zoom in

To show protective gestures of woman's hand hovering over remaining life stones.

Zoom out

To show woman tap hand, lay down a card with motions of her hands in the air as if she is summoning a magical creature. Smoke drifts into camera frame.

High-angle shot from woman's point of view

Over her right shoulder and shows man as face on. Man taps hand, places a card on the table with hand motions with a final 'fling'! Camera sees smoke drift into camera frame.

Cut to

Over man's left shoulder but is concentrated on drifting smoke which shows creatures in battle. The red Shivan Dragon destroys the blue Azure Drake in another puff of smoke.

Focus shift

The only thing that is sharp is the warring creatures.

Tracking backwards

Focuses on the two card players again.

Close-up

Woman's hand angrily brushing away all but two of the life stones.

Cut to

Woman's face, and notice she has aged.

Close-up

High-key lighting of life stones.

Medium close-up

Of woman, worried and frantically tapping hand, playing another creature card.

Extreme close-up

Of a 2/2, flying, trample Silver Erne creature card.

Medium close-up

Of the woman, to show body language, facial expressions, and tension as she intently watches man.

High angle, low-key lighting

Shot of both players and table.

Cut to

Woman's point of view as man calmly taps hand and plays a red Disintegrate card. Lighting is back-lit, concentrating on showing man as the star, glowing soft, calm, self-assured.

Match shot

Camera perceives woman in foreground, leaning forward. Cut to man's point of view to show woman, leaning to read man's card.

Cut to close-up

Show woman's face as she realizes what card has been played and she is destroyed.

Track backwards

As woman pushes herself backwards from the table and card with a startled look, man is now in screen.

Long shot

Woman propels herself backwards on her feet with the crashing of her chair and a gathering of smoke and flashes of light. As the man slowly rises, the woman tries to ward herself from disintegration as the man twirls his cape across the camera lens. When the cape clears the camera, the viewer sees only smoke hanging in the air.

Dissolve

To a bit of scorched blue cloth floating to floor and landing on smoldering ashes.

Track back

To long shot of the man smirking to himself as he picks up the Disintegrate card.

Cut to

Close-up of Disintegrate card.

Cut to medium close-up

Of man as he puts his Disintegrate card in the card stack (his Library) and pours his life points into a black bag. He turns as if to leave. Changes his mind, reaches back, and takes the woman's remaining cards. Leaves with a swirl of his cloak.

As man leaves stage right, we see the Barkeeper entering frame from stage left.

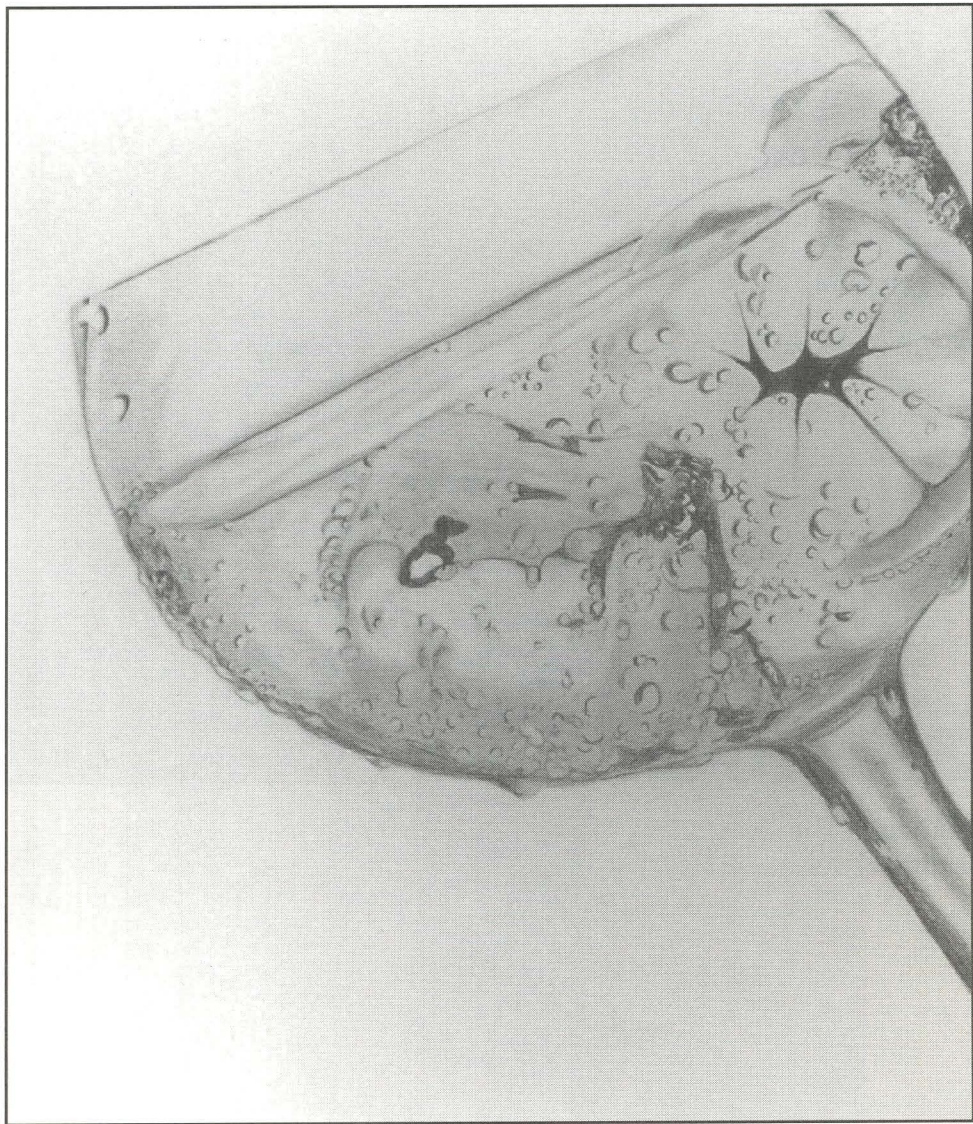
Pan to

Barkeeper. As he begins to clean up, he comments,
“These Sorcerers always seem to have another surprise up their sleeves.”

Fade out

Extreme close-up of Krovikan Sorcerer card; zoom to card's quote which is a repeat of the barkeeper's comment. Fade out into darkness.

Art and Photography



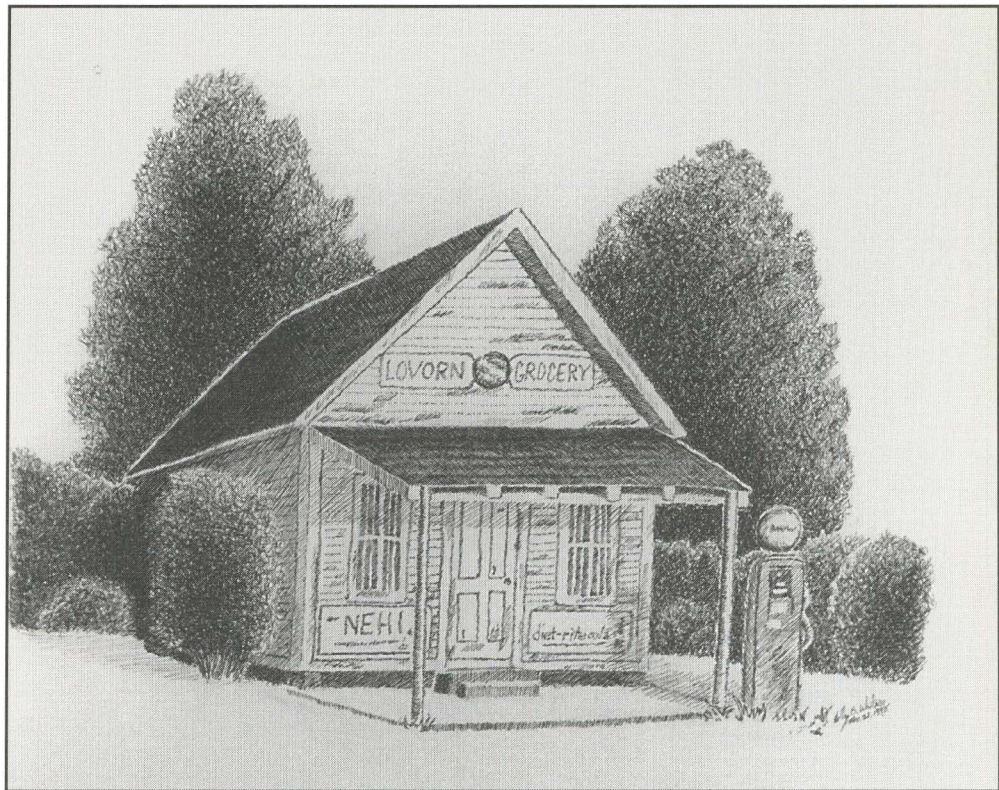
Wine Glass
Aimee Brooks



Old Man
Joanna Owen



Monkey
Glenda Duncan



Lovorn Grocery
Holly Whitney

Poems

Drive By

by Julie Shilling

traffic near the mall
red light
I stop,
several cars
from the intersection
check out the scenery—
grass
trees
carefully tended flowers
homeless man and child

incongruous—
black smudge
on white paper

each clings
to a cardboard sign
crude lettering
the man-
“will work for food”
the child-
“homeless—please help”

quick glance
toward my purse,
knowing-
three dollars in the front pocket
but
a thought creeps in
and stills my reaching hand

Howard's Donuts

by Katherine Kershen

That song came on the radio
you know, the one that makes you want to
swing your head
and sing along
And we were there sitting in her car under the
20 foot
glowing neon
Howard's Donuts sign
with the boy who looks like he has a halo on but
when you look closer, you see it's just a
paper
kitchen-worker
hat
And maybe that's a statement about human nature
but we don't care now at 3 a.m. as
we wait for them to buy the donuts
She says, "Let's dance"
so we roll down the windows and
crank up the music
we jump out onto that black asphalt parking lot
and begin to sway and bob and
make up all of our own movements
He says, "Hey, I've never seen you move like this"
If only you knew I'm the
Groove
 Queen,
you think to yourself
but you just smile and keep on dancing
Cars go past
Some honk
he comments on how he hopes no cops go by

but you know they'd just laugh to see these three crazy kids
jamming in the parking lot
at 3 a.m.
under the Howard's Donuts sign
and anyway
you know that as long as the music plays
you're
invincible

Making Your Bed

by Edy Bauer

Flipping, unfurling crisp
White lies.

Stretching the truth tight,
Tucking in all corners.

Retracing steps
And covering tracks
With a light top sheet

Of excuses and smiles.

Tossing on a couple of padded,
Foam-filled alibis

And burying them all under a thick
Blanket of guilt.

mla baby

by Jessica Harkey

hands
still stained
the color of work
pencil lead
marking fingers and the
fleshy side of my palm
last night
last chance
two in the morning
another pot of coffee
to stoke my creative
juices
writing, rewriting
revision sweating out my pores
everything's perfect
nothing sounds right
i can't do this
i have to do this
IN THREE MORE HOURS
no more rough drafts
typing tires my fingers
is fourteen noticeably
bigger
than twelve
forrest claims not
my fingers are slippingg from the keys
why can't i type like Marie
what does the MLA say about this
do i really care anymore
isn't there a support group
for people like me

if i pray will you print
final attempt
done at last
i could go to sleep
or savor this victory
another hour
'til i leave for school
ugliest baby i've had to birth
yet.

The Love of Water

by John Soos

it is night, a cool breeze flows up
from the valley floor
I'm sitting on top of a mountain
in northern Huong Hoa province of South Vietnam
total darkness except out at sea,
a far distant light
I never knew I liked being still and
feeling the air dark around my body
hidden as a rock
I don't like fear sitting just down
the ridge as a man holds a rifle

I didn't know I loved the smell of trees
washed in the hot sun with rain falling from
transparent clouds
is it all right to lick the leaves dry
when the heat sizzles on your tongue?
bullets never touch you when you
drink the power of the trees

Here I've loved only water,
falling from the sky and earth and my own sweat
washing fire from my mind
I know you can't touch death and be the same
I know I will become the stone on which I sit
and the rain will wash all away
to bring me back to shore again
I know war is human laziness to love and talk
and I know every person knows this
and will do nothing to end it except die

Selling Fairy Tales

by **Elisa Harmon**

Come on in
my pretty little muppet
we'll make up a quick bunch of curds 'n' whey
just to make you feel at home
figure out the chemical bonds and
!wham!
down comes the celestial foot on Mr. Spider
quivering legs dance spasmodically
come on home, where life is lovely
and the three pretty bears in their
three big chairs
are sharpening their claws and waiting
dreaming of a yellow curled girl
(she looks a lot like you, so I'd advise
this bottle of raven black dye)
Pretty lady in your red hood
forget grandma's goodies
and come into the playhouse
I can really make you move
Come with joy
this is unlike anything you've ever known
Madam Bo-Peep and her kinky young sheep
there ain't nothin' lost there—but their souls!
Under the beaded curtains from thailand
Cinderella and her prince are
makin' babies 'n' sweetcakes
You'll enjoy it every second of every day
indubitably
Why don't I speak in English?
Because idiots like you could understand me then,
and this is a fairy tale, after all—
at least, I hope it is.

The Love of Water

by John Soos

it is night, a cool breeze flows up
from the valley floor
I'm sitting on top of a mountain
in northern Huong Hoa province of South Vietnam
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a far distant light
I never knew I liked being still and
feeling the air dark around my body
hidden as a rock
I don't like fear sitting just down
the ridge as a man holds a rifle

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When They Were Together

by Gary Pence

My mother's mood,
as predictable as Oklahoma weather,
brings memories of broken glass and pain,
flying objects with no warning.

Also memories of love, as strong and unconditional
as the oak she planted years before, the support
of a father's arms. I remember the loss when he left.

Memories of church,
wednesday and sunday nights,
Sunday mornings, my mom and dad in the front
listening to the sermon and songs.

I remember hiking and camping when they were together,
and my father's promise,
"I will never leave you, son."
He must have meant my heart.

When All Moments Were One

by John Soos

You look into the mirror
seeing someone you think you know
or could have known when you were younger
but something has done something
to the mirror
or the face or the moment
it's shifted and slid a little wrinkled
where it used to look straight or more solid
and you pause, hanging on the familiar shape
of this partially known face
you think it could have been a guy
you were in the service with
or wasn't that old, oh, you know
the guy who climbed the chapel spire
and stuck a flag somewhere,
I can't remember
was it your face or your mother's or your father's
that, while they were passing the mirror,
they took it off and gave it to you
which was given to them
going back to the time
when all faces were one
they're dead now, aren't they?
or is the mirror just another memory
partially forgotten?
You watch the mouth curl slowly up
teeth snarling into a smile
like an animal
but who is he over there
on the other side of the room
staring back

like he knows a secret
about this face
that's looking around your naked bathroom
you try not to take it personal
but even he's not sure
so you touch your face
and he touches his in a similar way
his hand is a little different
his nails look dirtier
his beard looks shorter than yours
so you start to mention it
but think he will say the same thing to you

Will the man who fits this description please come forward?

by Deidre Black

Thinks I'm funny.
Smarter than me,
but won't tell anyone.
Thinks three-hour naps after
twelve hours of sleep are normal.

Can interpret the cuddle-cues.
Tingles my toes through my lips.
Knows my eyes are yellow,
Not hazel.
Thinks my crooked tooth is cute.

Writes letters like he speaks.
Talks with his hands while he drives.
Listens to Patsy, Zeppelin, and Nat.
Watches old movies over and over.
Eats breakfast for dinner.

Complete without me, better with me.
Learns from mistakes,
Apologizes sincerely.
Knows me before he loves me,
Tells me before he forgets.

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