

APOGEE '87



Spring 1987

High Point College

The Apogee
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Awards

Literary Excellence in Poetry . . . To My More Creative Friends
Rich Mullins
Artistic Excellence in Photography Bob Parkinson

Editor's Note

Welcome to the Apogee '87. This year we have fought, discussed, 'cussed,' and worried over submissions in poetry, fiction, and art so that we might present to you, the High Point College community, the best possible publication we could.

I would like to thank the Apogee staff for their patience and help in this production. But most importantly, I would like to thank Dr. John Moehlmann, our advisor, for his guidance and patience in this endeavor of art.

Please note the awards presented to the winning "best" works. They appear on the page below the winning submission in that category.

This brings me to the most important part of this magazine; our contributors. Without them this would not be possible. Thank you all!

AB Billings
Editor

LIGHT

Seema Qubein

Busily
your skillful fingers
knot the strings (that descend
in loose straightness)
tugging them
into meaning.
Strands and strands,
rippled in your hands,
are transformed
as coherence
idly
emerges
in bounded beaded beauty.

Testimony

Kristie Honeycutt

Your Budweiser
can tell the truth
Lodged atop Kleenex, gum wrappers
and orange peelings.
Its bent middle smiles
(or frowns depending on which
end is up)
You don't understand
and admit it.
I don't understand
but I say I do.
My uncrumpled coke
can lie.

My Friend

Melissa Mize

Nimble fingers move so quick.
The ebony and ivory are her pick.
The sound so sweet, but who is she?

Teasing the keys with her gentle touch.
She loves her music, but not too much.
The guy looks on, but who is she?

The days tick on.
She's moved like a pawn.
She loved the guy, but it couldn't be.

She's unsettled, wants to move.
Just can't find a comfortable groove.

She's my friend, She's Elizabeth.

To My More Creative Friends

Rich Mullins

Your pen understands
in red, in rose tones
purple, Sunday, black
green, azure, unlazy.

you call upon it
to color your ideas
with paint
which seeps
through silk screen
to paper
impressing printed patterns
of intricate words
which smell fresh
of tempura, latex,
open window.

Observing your verse,
I approach it early, gingerly-
still, paint sticks on
my fingertips
smudges into my cuticles
and can't be solved
from my tainted hands.

My pen cannot borrow
Your colors or smells
of crayon and piano,
as I could borrow
a pencil,
or word
neither of which
you ever seem to lack.

My pen prods my thought
in the kind of
technically lacking
blackandwhite
that mottles into
dappled gray
found on:

Screens of old and basement T.V.'s.

The dull bluntness of fist
Pounding cinderblock door.

Ungood lukewarmth
of lead gray
skyleless rain days.

Mushroom hulls under
manmade ducts.

Mothwebb, concrete, dustslumber.

I can only softly scrawl
Crudities, moodiness
in chalk on walls
and wait. Walk.
Breathe your texturesweet
spectrumfeeling
on my gray
forge a livid
thought.

Award for Literary Excellence in Poetry

Woodcut

By James Flaherty



2-2

James Flaherty

Thanksgiving

AB Billings

The aroma enters each room timidly,
hauntingly. Finding a brother-in-law or
a father it shifts into second for more
power and torque and leaves skid marks
in the invisible air racing to tempt
an unknowing nose.

We sit and reminisce now that
we are old and can enjoy a football game
on TV; we are too old now to play our
own game out in the sea of leaves,
fantasizing about the sea of
faceless fans watching, screaming, and
fantasizing their own dreams of stardom,
physical prowess, and, of course, money.

We reminisce about the skid marks
we did not see in the air and the
black on blacktop rubber burns we
left when we were sixteen on Main
Street, racing our parent's cars or
our first set of piece-of-shit wheels
against people our own age who we
didn't even know, couldn't even see
through 80% tinted windows.
What stupid wasted-time reverie.

We were cool, bad, hot, tough, out of sight,
and all those other slang terms
already out of style even though
it's only been five years.

We smoked cigarettes and pot and drank Wild Turkey
and T.J. and Bud
as if we'd die for lack of it,
as if our very adolescent, under-sexed
lives depended on it. And, of course,
they did. Without a bottle in one hand and
a cigarette in the other, you just
couldn't get a girl and find out
what life was really about -- at least,

for a sixteen-year-old. And, godforbid
if you forgot to get a couple
Arouse rubbers at a quarter a shot
in the bathroom at Wilco.
I graduated with so many moms and dads
you might have thought I was
getting a graduate degree or something.

We talk among ourselves of these things
while standing outside in the circle
of generations smoking cigarettes or
pipes or chewing tobacco, I beside my
dad beside his dad beside my uncle
beside my brother-in-law beside me.

Then, just as the broken conversation
begins to mend and get good and we
are talking about the stupidly
hilarious shenanigans my father
and uncles got into when they were
my age (everybody's been my goddam
age, but me, I think) Mom pokes
her head out of the bent-screen door
with giant holes torn in it from
pushing on the screen instead of
the metal frame and announces that dinner is ready.

Cigarettes are crushed to a smoldering
red death and tobacco is spit complete
in shiny wet brownish red black wads
out to melt into the earth as we
migrate in to give thanks for growing
old and leaving behind, but not forgetting
what even I call my youth.

A Snode for Snifties

John Moehlmann

What is snifty?

A snifty is a covetous, avaricious person, one who would probably hang out with a snivelard.

What is a snivelard?

A snivelard is a whiner who snoaches.

What is snoaches?

When you breathe or speak through your nose, you snoach. Such breathing could lead to a snick-up.

What is a snick-up?

When you sneeze you snick-up, which could be caused by sneesh.

What is sneesh?

Sneesh is a pinch of snuff. Some people would snitchel a sneesh on the nose.

What is snitchel?

Snitchel is a snap or light blow made by pressing a fingertip against the thumb and suddenly releasing it. Often it results in a snirtle.

What is a snirtle?

A snirtle is sniggering in a quiet, suppressed manner. It's something a snidge would do?

What is a snidge?

A snidge is a greedy or miserly person who might snirtle and snoach and serve snivilards and snifties a snode.

A fragment of reality

John Savas

Only a fragment: rough, hard.
A piece of granite. Just another
common river rock.

How long have you been here? When
did you break away from the awesome
megaliths, those solemn sentinels standing
shoulder to shoulder -- gargantuan, perpetual
guardians of this sacred, mystic place?

Petrified, were you? Petrified then
as you are now, yet you found your way
down and made your bed, eventually,
by these quiet waters.

You made your bed here, in the moss,
beside the bending tree; the tree leaning
low to touch the face of the waters, shielding
in a protective embrace of the gentle, rhythmic
undulation beneath: a lover hiding the beauty
of his beloved from the leers of the cruel,
the hurtful, the jealous. There, in the moss,
you made your bed. And I picked you up, unthinkingly,
as I gazed into fathomlessness, mesmerized
by a sparkling eternal moment.

You listened as she sang to me in soft, low
tones songs of love, songs of forever. And
you watched as I held her. A breeze slipped
between the trees behind us, touched us briefly,
then leaped across the way to the forest beyond.

Night fell, and the dawn came.
You are here, but she -- is gone.

Only a fragment: rough, hard.
A piece of granite. Just another
common river rock.



"Reflections"

MEDIUM

Seema Qubein

My fingers fill these gloves.
I write;
the taut clear rubber
becomes my hands.

Surgeons have worn them
to transplant arteries;
gardners
have cradled marigolds
with these gloves on,
and window-cleaners
have wrung lathered rags in them, dripping.

The backs of my hands as I type out
my life
gleam red,
green, yellow,

with the stains of Kristie's finger-paint.
She tried to paint
with these gloves on backwards
when she was a three-year-old.

I have baked today's chicken
and washed the car again.
My pencil relaxes;
in the bathroom
I ease off
these gloves.

My hands
look distant
and small.

They're very tired.

COAXING

Seema Qubein

Your youth amazes me. I crouch here on the landing,
knees jutting into the railing, and look down at
your smudged face.

My mind flips and falls down the shadowed flights
of carpeted steps
to where you stand,
my self, grown so young again.

You have no arms, though they seem
to reach up
waving sightlessly for pinatas.

Your youth amazes. My mind surveys
the steps that I must lead you up
before we can even begin to look for a kitchen.

Can I bribe you? Think of cinnamon, eggs,
a bowl of sky-blue apples. . .
Come, you remember. We have eaten together
before.

LAVENDER

Seema Qubein

At home
the evenings were lavender,
the color of the sunset sky
that seeped in through the windows.

Lavender
wrapped
Mom and warm laundry,
smiled
round Dad's silver flute.
It carpeted our world,
dyeing the background
with contentment.



Regret

Susan Huff

I can't say you're not in my thoughts
that would be lying.
It's hard to get you out of my mind
although I'm still trying.
It's been a long time
we've both really changed
We both felt the same way
yet nothing was arranged.
Separated by a decision
we decided to keep,
Into my thoughts you enter
As I lay me down to sleep.
I talk to your picture
and I look into your eyes.
All the times I told you I cared,
Those were never lies.

Of the World

AMM

A tendency
to fall
when the weight
becomes too much
to care
anymore.

Chocolate Colored

How long does it take
to build
a dream.
Every second
of every minute
of every hour
of every day
of every week
of every month
of every year.
Until -
by some quick turn
of indecent fate
the dream shatters
and falls.
How long does it take
to rebuild a dream?
Too long.

Depth

AMM

There is no hope in Hell.
Holding on quick
masturbation
Rends a lonely
poem,
Under the breath.
Drawing and
Hurting.
Trying to love
for tomorrow -
another day alone.
There is no hope in Hell.

Sitting

AMM

Cold air
Blowing in my face
is the only
thing that keeps me
awake.
The Air Conditioner.
8:00 classes are
Hell.

“A Dream”

Colleen Perry

She gazed out her window at the rain.
Each drop that rolled down the glass seemed to carry
each dream she'd once called her own.
Each possibility an innocent child considers a given.
Now it was over.
She'd fallen for the last time.
Her chances of reviving those precious dreams were few.
“At one time” she thought, “I was going to be the best.”
This world was once an easy place to live in.
Some time ago she thought of herself as something special,
unique in a wonderful way.
What were her chances now?
Of creating a new world, with new dreams, new hopes,
new roads to travel.
She thought for sure that this enormous world of hers
was inevitably going to crush and smother her
in all its hatred, conceit, stubbornness,
selfishness, loneliness, contempt and vastness.
Quietly the rain finally paused
and a glimmer of sunlight formed a most glorious
rainbow,
A six banded road of colorful dreams!

Plumbing

AB Billings

Dad and I were there to fix a leaky
dripping water-wasting faucet
which could keep you up for hours
upon hours, even your worst
Wild Turkey drunk building skyscrapers
in your head complete with
steel I-beams and concrete would be better.
I was there to help Dad as always
and as always never did.
He could never find anything
that I really needed to do but
always wanted me there "just
in case." But he always did
everything himself as if he
always had to because until
now I couldn't help him with
anything really. I never knew
much about what he was doing
until I took the course on
electronics in high school.

That course seemed to bring
it all together for me. It
made my fact-filled,
World Book Encyclopedia-bred
mind associate all those things
I'd read, all those articles on
nuclear physics and photon
warping with the real
world of faucet-leaking plumbing
problems and flat damn tire
changing. That 28-volume
set taught me the inner
workings of the inter-planetary
geo-physiology with no regard
to the practical implantation of
application. Or, as my dad
said as often as this
help-me-please occasion came up,

“It taught you a helluva lot
about things you’d never see or
touch, but it didn’t
teach you a damngod thing
about what to do with it.
Books are like that.”

As he fixed the faucet with a
half-smoked Pall Mall in his
mouth and the other half
lying shattered and powdered
in the sink, I walked
around my grandparents empty-of-them house.
I entered an unused except
as storage bedroom
and glanced unknowingly at
a non-mirror hanging at an
80-degree crooked angle on the
wall across from me. There, reflected
but not reflected on the other side
of the glass hung myself, my
own image on yellow brown coarse
paper embedded or chemically embossed

If anyone had been watching me
on the other side of reality
through the eternally ethereal
haze, because there certainly
was no one else on this side,
they would have seen through
the haze a perfect rendition
of the old Spanky double-take.
I could almost feel my brain
shuddering beyond violent control
from side to side slamming furiously
into either side of my bone-plated
skull.

There on the wall, staring at me
through lead-scraped eyes, was myself.
Staring open-mouthed through this
make-shift, jerry-rigged time
portal, I saw myself ten years
older with a moustache and shorter

hair wearing the clothes of
some fifty years past. From the
shoulders up he stared, that
self-same slouch and inward droop
of the shoulders told me that
I was not just lazy and the
victim of bad posture.

The high, thin cheekbones held
the same cynical sharpness
and "Mr. Asshole" wit as I had
seen countless upon countless
times in my own bathroom some
five miles from this place.

The hair, though maybe three inches
shorter, curled and waved -- there!
In the same place, right over
both temples the same
cow licked him in the same damn place
to the left near the top of the
skull.

The thinline eyes stared blankly
yet purposefully into my soul
and screamed as if straining
to be heard through two generations,
"I am you!"

A mere pinch could not
awaken me from any such
dream of time and space and
family. No, I had to turn
around, face another place, another
time, tear myself away if possible,
race through time and space
to return to the world my concious
mind knew, believed in, could
justify as easily as I could shit.

I walked dazed into the bathroom
where I saw the haze that must
have separated our worlds
issuing from my father's
second cigarette.
I coughed and hacked as if
I would die from smoke

inhalation, as if I'd never smoked a cigarette in my life, never smoked a pack a day, though only half Dad's consumption.

Yes, I was awake and in one of the probably many real worlds.

As if my body was filled with iron filings and the empty room an all-powerful magnet of the soul, I couldn't keep myself away from it. It called, screamed; he begged me to come back and look more closely, inspect his image even more, as if I might find more resembling mirror-image features.

All I could do was stare into those eyes, my eyes, from an unfathomable past. Suddenly, I was there, farming, building houses, barns, whatever people needed of a carpenter in Guilford County, N.C., living less than a mile, actually no more than a couple hundred yards from where my physical body was standing in the present.

Could it be possible?

"Who is that, Dad?" I asked before we left.

"That's my grandfather, your great-grandfather," he said.

"What did he do?"

"He was a carpenter."

Missing

J. Michael Gowen

We marched in single file. It was a march without enthusiasm, almost lifeless. It reminded me of the soldiers in boot camp returning to the base after a twenty mile hike in the rain with fifty pounds on their backs. Only a few more minutes and the weekly family shopping expedition would once more be brought to a close. My wife Terry led our procession through Leggetts Department Store, stopping only to investigate those rare pieces of merchandise that by chance missed her during the day. I followed close behind, cursing under my breath every time she paused to look at something. I managed to keep a glazed expression of satisfaction along with a half-hearted smile on my face in order to keep my wife from catching on to what I was thinking. Somehow, I think she knew anyway.

Our two daughters Brooke and Katie, ages five and four respectively, marched behind so as not to break our near perfect single file. It had been a long day and I felt comfort in the fact that the mall was closing in fifteen minutes. We had parked near a side entrance of Leggetts and I knew that soon we would be on our way home. Never breaking stride, I glanced behind me to make a quick spot check on the girls. Returning my attention to my wife ahead of me, I must have walked ten feet or so before it dawned on me that Katie was no longer behind her older sister. Shaking my head in aggravation, I allowed Brooke to proceed behind her mother while I stopped to find Katie.

I wasn't concerned at this point as Katie would often stop to look at something that had caught her attention. I suppose she got that honest, from her mother. Besides, I made my spot checks so frequently I knew she had to be close by. Calling her name, I peered first down one aisle and then another. I was beginning to feel angered that she was delaying our departure and called her again, this time with a more harsh tone that I was sure would bring her running. Nothing, but silence.

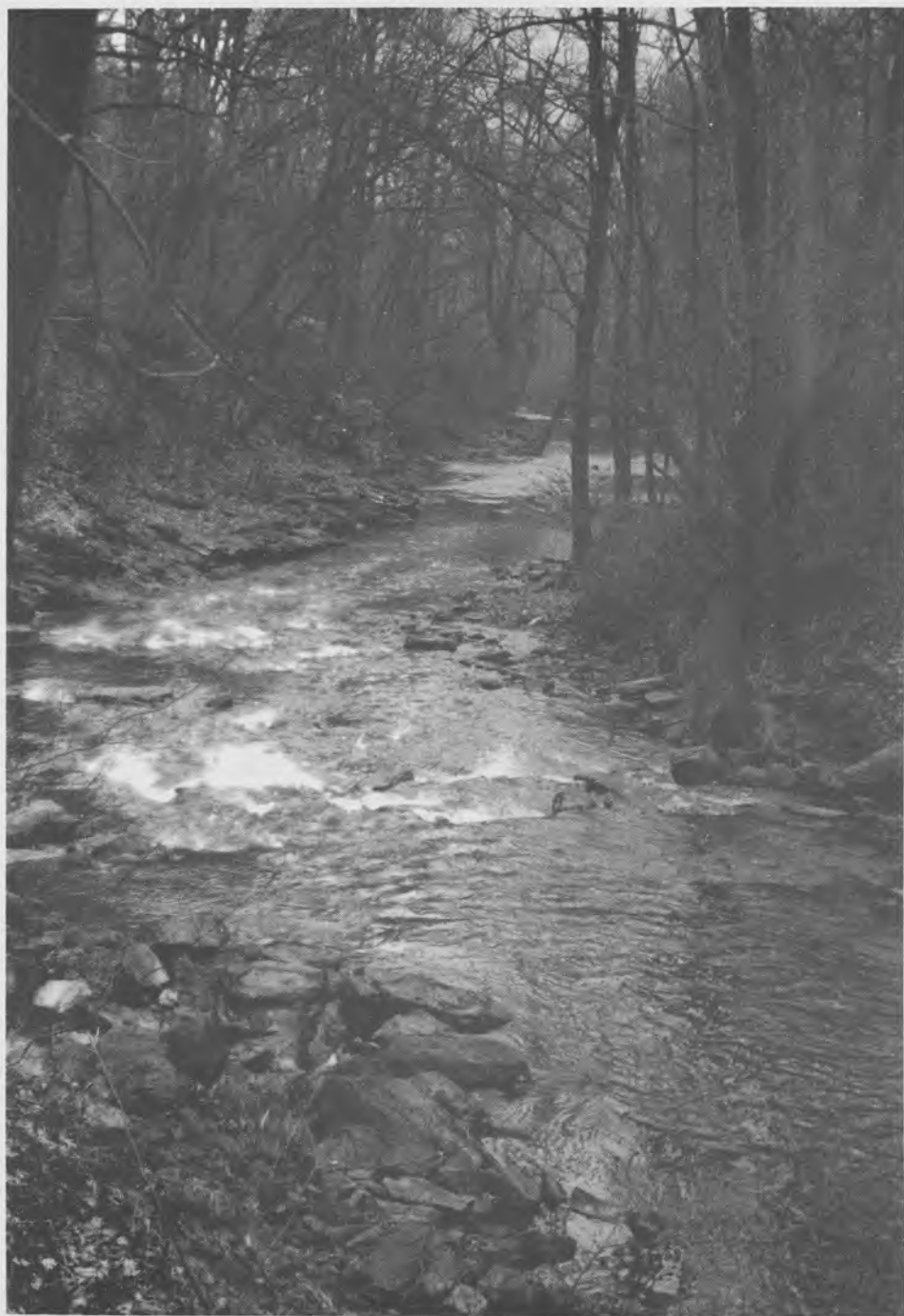
A parent is probably more sensitive to the sounds of their children than any other. The sound of a baby's cry in the middle of the night. A child crying having just scraped a knee, or children laughing playing a game. Then, there is the silence. Nothing is more frightening for a parent because at that point they lose control; no longer do they know what is happening to their child. Five minutes had now passed since I nonchalantly stopped to find Katie. As quickly as I had felt my aggravation turn into anger, I now felt my anger sink into fear. I couldn't for the life of me figure out how she could have completely disappeared in a ten-second time frame. My once half-hearted movements were now brisk as I moved in and out of the maze of

displays and clothing racks calling her name. I returned to the main aisle trying to keep control on the fear that now wrenched my heart in a vise-like grip. I nearly ran head on into my wife, who had returned with Brooke to see what the big holdup was. As she looked into my eyes, I knew words were not necessary. Instinctively, she took Brooke in a separate direction that I had come calling Katie's name.

A store clerk, sensing a problem, came over to ask me what was wrong. I described Katie to him and he began calling other departments to set up a watch for her. It now hit me that something was very wrong. This had gone far beyond any prank that Katie was capable of. Ten minutes had now passed and my wife was becoming hysterical. I tried in vain to keep my mind clear and my thoughts rational. It has been only a week or so since my wife and I had watched the movie "Adam," the story of a little boy who was abducted and brutally murdered. Every horrifying possibility from kidnapping to child rape raced through my mind in bold unmerciful detail. I began to blame myself for her disappearance and wondered why we marched in single file earlier. If I had walked behind the children this would not have happened, I thought.

I bit my lower lip to hold back the onslaught of emotion. It was now closing time and many store employees had joined in the search. Fighting back the tears, I helplessly wrapped my arms around my wife. Brooke looked on in confusion, not really understanding what was happening. Hoping to find something that would lead me to my child, I led my now incomplete family to the place where Katie had originally disappeared. She was a daddy's girl through and through and I wanted so much now to tell her how much I loved her.

Exhausted, we sat for a moment on the base of a display rack. I felt defeated, and started to give in to the tears that had begun to trickle down my pale cheeks. Just as I had failed to notice Katie missing at first, I now missed the small snakelike frame that was slithering from under a display rack before me. Katie was out and standing before we realized what was happening. She had managed to wedge into a space inhumanly accessible by anyone larger than herself. Emotions broke loose and through tears of happiness and relief we rushed toward her. I was terrified to imagine what frightening force could have struck such terror as to make our innocent little girl seek refuge in such a hideous place. With perfect timing and a wide eyed grin, Katie stopped our momentum cold as she enthusiastically exclaimed, "Gotcha!!"





Blue Moon

Seema Qubein

Until The Blue Moon opened on their street, Harriss and Marge had had turkey salad on rye every Sunday for lunch since they'd moved to Spratville. It was because Mo's, the only restaurant on their street at the time, specialized in sandwiches, and Marge's mother always said turkey with celery was the **only** prevention for colds, and Harriss had a tendency to bronchitis.

When The Blue Moon opened on their street, however, it was the fifth new restaurant in the neighborhood that year, and Marge said, "Why don't we go over on Tate Street for fish this Sunday?"

"Why not!" said Harriss.

Orville's, the fish place, was wallpapered in orange, and turned out to be cheery and breadcrumb-smelling.

That was why this Sunday they couldn't decide where to go.

Marge sat limply in a kitchen chair in her gray Sunday coat, her straight sandy hair loosely pulled in a bun. She stared despondently out the new glass wall of the kitchen.

"The place opposite Orville's," she said. "I think that's the roast beef place. Extra is the one on the corner. Extra's only a bakery."

"You know, we could even get doughnuts for lunch," said Harriss. "For Sunday lunch. Cinnamon buns and doughnuts from Extra's."

"Even," said Marge, "we could even drive downtown. For lunch." She looked at Harriss suddenly. "Way downtown somewhere."

"We could," said Harriss. He leaned in the kitchen entrance sliding one shoe back and forth along the line between two tiles. "Marvin knows a good bar down there. We could go there afterwards."

"We could go to lunch at Orville's and stop at the bar downtown afterwards," said Marge.

"We could go to lunch somewhere and then stop at Extra and get doughnuts for dessert."

Harriss stopped sliding his foot along the tile and looked out the window. "We could go to the Blue Moon," he said. Marge looked at him. He looked at her coat. "It's newest," he said.

At The Blue Moon Marge had prawns and creamed noodles and tomato salad and French meringues. She ordered coffee too because the angle of the lamps was making her feel sick. Harriss ate chili. On the menu chili was listed beside turkey salad, which was good for bronchitis. Then he ordered peach cobbler but he didn't feel like any dessert so Marge ate it for him. They stopped afterwards at Extra's which turned out to be a very expensive bakery. Harriss bought a strawberry trifle.

"It wasn't really so wonderful a place as Lucie said, that Blue Moon." Marge stood in the kitchen slowly taking off her coat.

Harriss came in. "Not bad. Chili. Not bad; not too good. I feel like a brandy now."

Marge walked over to the glass wall. "What shall we do today?"

"Scrabble."

"Scrabble."

Harriss sniffed. "Scrabble," he said, wiggling the cork in the brandy bottle. "What did you have in mind?"

"What was that new game Jiminy brought Linda last Wednesday?"

"Or fishing," said Harriss. "Have we any Bristol Milk?"

"Work tomorrow." Marge turned absently. "Why do I teach ten-year-olds chemistry?"

"To train them in discipline of thought and ground them in science," replied Harriss. He set down his brandy and went to the liquor closet. "You always said."

"Yes."

"It works. You always said." He rummaged for a sherry. "You know, if I didn't have a tendency for bronchitis, I suppose I could have coq au vin for lunch every Sunday."

"Blue Moon," said Marge suddenly. "Once every two or three lifetimes."

"What?"

"They don't learn. I've always wanted to teach chemistry. I wish I knew. Is it working?"

Harriss rummaged. "Wasn't bad though," he continued from the closet. "The chili."





Untitled by Andy Miller

The cat turned to look at me in that lazy way that cats do, and gave me one of those really trying looks that seem to say "I'm smarter than you are." Then he proceeded to say:

"I'm smarter than you are."

I was naturally startled, and dropped the cup of coffee I was holding all over my new cashmere rug. The cat had never said **that** to me before.

"Oh, yeah?" I replied.

Then I realized that the cat had never said anything to me before.

"Which one of us is talking to a cat?"

He yawned and stretched as I thought about this last comment. Then I put it to him.

"How long have you been able to talk?"

"Don't know," he quickly replied, "never tried before."

Well, I had no answer for that reply, so I kept quiet while I cleaned up the rug (coffee stains never come out do they?). After I had done that, I turned to him again. He was gone.

"Hey, Ripper, where are you?" I called.

I only had a one-room dorm and there were only so many places he could hide. I started searching, a little pissed that he didn't just answer; I mean, he **could** talk.

I finally found him under the bed on the cardboard box he likes to sleep on. He was just starting to doze off, but I grabbed him and dragged him out.

"I'm smarter than you are," he said again as I plopped him down on the bed.

"How so?" I asked.

"Who changes the kitty litter?"

He had me on that one.

"Ok, ok." I replied. "But back to the original question, or at least a more appropriate one: How did you learn to talk?"

"How should I know," he said with a yawn, "why don't you do what any smart cat would do and call a vet and ask. He'd probably know."

I **had** already thought of that, of course, but I decided to let the cat have his moment of glory (y'know, thinking he'd had an original idea). I called up some guy named Marcus Illbee or something like that.

"Hello, Doc?" I said when he finally got to the phone.

"Yes, this is Doctor Illbee (or whatever), what can I do for you?" He had one of those creaky voices that kept changing octaves on you with no warning.

"Uh, Doc, I got a cat here that says he's smarter than me."

There was silence over the line for about 20 seconds.

"Well, is he?" Illbee (or whatever) finally said.

That one kind of threw me.

"Doc, I don't think that's the point. What I'd like to know is why my cat

is all of the sudden talking?"

There was another long bout with silence.

"Doc?"

"Yes, I'm still here. Could you bring the cat down to my office Mr. .?"

"Tookum, Henry Tookum."

"Yes, Mr. Tookum. Could you bring your cat by the office? I think I can solve your little problem."

I said ok and hung up. Meanwhile, Ripper has gotten into my bookshelves and pulled out William Faulkner's **Light in August**.

"Wow, what symbolism; what style. I'm gonna borrow this from you, ok?" His eyes never left the page.

"Sure," I replied, "I never really liked it much myself - too depressing."

He looked up at me with those big grey-green eyes and kind of groaned.

"I can't believe you just said that. Faulkner is one of that and most relevant writers of our time, and you don't like his book 'cause it depresses you. Grief, what do you read - **Stephen King**?"

"As a matter of fact, I **do** like Stephen King. He's a great writer - why, I'd like to be able to write like him someday."

Ripper was still flipping through the pages of that dumb Faulkner book so I went over and pulled my boots on.

"Where are you going. . . a Star Trek convention?" he asked, never looking up from the book.

"Star Trek happens to be a very relevant and important part of our society too, y'know." I guess that would show him that I'm no dummy.

"Just because you know every episode, and episode number by heart does not make it socially relevant. Like Shatner once said, 'Get a real life.'"

"Listen, those conventions are very important - to Shatner and everybody who's anybody - and he only did that as a joke. Besides, that's not where we're going. I'm going to take you out to get some fresh air."

"You're lying," he stated.

"What!?!!" I was really losing my temper now.

"A cat knows these things - besides, you just talked to Illbee (or whatever) and I'm sure he'd at least like to see a cat that can talk."

I pulled his box out from under the bed. When he saw it, he lit for the bed, but I was faster and managed to get the scruff of fur behind his neck and shove him in the box. As a kind of an afterthought, I put **Light in August** in to keep him quiet.

The ride to the vet's was terrible. First, he insisted on getting out of the box so he could see. Then, he never did like riding in cars going more than ten miles an hour; he started complaining about my driving.

"Watch out for that cop. Not so close to the curve. Use your turn signal. Don't hit that old lady."

I hadn't even been very close to the old lady - missed her by at least a foot.

"Would you calm down please!" I finally screamed.

"Just trying to help," he replied. "Don't hit that telephone pole."

We finally got to the vet's office; a one story deal made of brick and some other unidentifiable parts.

"Smells like dead cats."

"Shut up!" I calmly replied. "And don't say anything in the reception room."

We were very lucky, there was no one in the reception area. Ripper looked through an old copy of **Psychology Today** while I thumbed over an issue of **Superman**. Doctor Illbee (or whatever) didn't keep us waiting long.

He ushered us into a sterile, white room with one long lone table and told us to sit on it. Then he asked Ripper a few questions about philosophy and math and stuff. I had wished I'd brought the comic book with me and was just about to go and fetch it when Illbee (or whatever) turned to me.

"I know what the problem is Mr. . . ?"

"Tookum, Henry Tookum."

"Yes, Mr. Tookum. The problem we have here is that Ripper here didn't receive his Phorticane shots when he was born. These shots, which are given to all animals, including dogs, cats, birds, rodents, and horses, inhibits the growth of the intellect in such animals. Without it, they gain the intelligence of Ripper here, who incidently, has an IQ of approximately 460 or so. Greater, in fact than the average man."

"Wow," was all I could reply. I was having a tough time taking most of that in, I'm no genius you know. Eventually I decided to just ignore most of it.

"So he is smarter than me?"

"Yes, Mr. Tookum. . . much smarter, I'm afraid. And capable of learning much more - perhaps up to ten times that amount. More than any human of this day and age."

"Well, will this phorno-stuff work on him - make him into a normal cat?"

"If we inject it now, it would. . ." Illbee (or whatever) replied. "But I am hesitant to."

"What?!" I raised my voice on that one.

"What he's saying, in layman's terms," Ripper turned to me, "is that I could be an enormous asset to humanity, and the animal kingdom as well, with such great intelligence."

"I have never before encountered any animal with such a potential," Illbee (or whatever) muttered.

"Now wait just a minute! Are you saying that you're not going to give MY CAT the shot. And make him normal!" I was really yelling by now. "Well then, I'll just take him to some other vet, without such high morals, and get that Phorno-stuff put in him."

I went to grab Ripper off the table and he hissed and tried to scratch and bite me, but I'd handled him in worse moods. I had him in a neck hold before Illbee (or whatever) spoke up again.

“Wait, Mr. Tuttle-”

“Tookum!”

“Mr. Tookum! If you feel this strongly about the whole matter, I’ll give him the shot.” With that, he pulled a hypodermic needle out of his pocket. “If you’ll just hold the little begger for me.”

I didn’t really notice the wink exchanged between the doctor and Ripper, but I did notice the needle when Illbee (or whatever) shoved it into my arm.

Ripper will be finishing college in just a few months and they allowed him to keep me. Nowadays I sleep all day, and eating’s lots of fun too. Playing with the ball with the little bell in it is the best though.





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