



THE APOGEE
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The Apogee

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From the Editor. . .

This year's APOGEE took some time coming into form, but it finally turned out to be something worth printing. I want to thank everyone who submitted their creative works in hopes of having them appear in these pages, and I only wish I had room to fit something from everyone in the APOGEE. As it turned out, the publication is a healthy mix of students and faculty, which I was glad to see.

I would like to extend a warm thanks to Dr. John Moehlmann for serving as my advisor and helping me get started with all the little details. Also, while I did not have an official assistant this year, I would like to offer my appreciation to a very special person, Ms. Amy Andrews, who did her best to help me all she could. Finally, I am extremely thankful to have been able to work with Robin Owens of Pioneer Printing Company, who knew everything I needed to know about printing. Once again, Pioneer Printing Company did a perfect job.

Good luck to everybody,

Christopher V. Davis

Christopher V. Davis



Cliche City

It was a dark and stormy night, oh okay maybe it wasn't dark or stormy and it was nine a.m. The door opened and the redhead that I had picked up in the bar that weekend walked in. She is two feet taller than me but that night I hadn't noticed. Two bottles of Jack Daniels will do that to you.

Cases were low and I welcomed the distraction. The Amazon had other plans. She came incognito to warn me that her equally gorilla brute husband was on his. . .The pushy dame was cut short as a crowbar ripped through her chest and she staggered to regain her composure.

The Amazon tumbled as her widowed primate pushed her aside. The Neanderthal squeezed into my cubicle knocking over designer vinyl chairs and my plywood/saw-horse desk. It lifted me up the liquor stained wall and smashed my head through the aged plaster ceiling.

"Pardon me," the oversized stuffed shirt inquired in a heavy British voice, "what is this I hear about you and my wife?" Through the cloud of powdered plaster, the stench of dead decaying animals wafted up inside the ceiling and my response was choked.

"I'd never seen her before today," I said as I relit my broken cigarette.

"Oh, sorry, Excuse me. I must have misunderstood." The walrus lowers me and slinks from my office. It retrieves the crowbar and pardons itself about the mess and quietly closes the door.

That was the way that the day began and I must tell you, things only got worse. The pool of blood engulfed the corpse which quickly drowned and all evidence of the murder was reduced to a vermilion stain on the thread bare carpet. The stain was in the shape of the letter Z which leads me to believe the redhead had not died immediately. A shot of Black Label and the incident with the ape and Amazon are far from my mind.

No sooner had I righted the plywood plank and opened the blind so I could gaze out over my city of crime and cliché than a mistress of misfortune enters carrying with her the Ides of the avant garde. She was a flowing blonde of three and half feet and her dilemma was that of an ice cream truck that didn't ring its bell loud enough and subsequently ran over her pet dog Fluffy. I told her to pull herself together kid and report this to the police. But she'd just graduated sandbox and was the most ardent four-year-old I'd encountered. She reminded me much of myself and this dame from England who I'd had several one-night stands. Simultaneously with this thought, a taller version of her walked through the door, or what was left of it after the ape. Andrea? How could she be here and with a kid. . .No wait. . .

"Mine?" I quipped.

"Unfortunately," this phantasm of my past answered.

As we walked down the plastic and newsprint littered alleyways, the strawberry blonde with a perfumed body that when set in motion could rouse the dead, and her miniature twin pitched their case. Monologuing briefly, in a colorful slur of words about myself and our rodent infested surroundings, she came to her point. This dame whom I'd once called home could talk a mile a minute and had even been known to jump start airplanes by talking to the propellers. She needed my help in solving the case of the popsicle puppy dog killer and the disappearance of the man she'd married. Again describing me in lewd colorful remarks.

First and foremost was to find the Popsicle Puppy Dog Killer. Not an easy case to crack. Suspect: everybody. Motive: Anything. As I pondered these questions over a double Bourbon one possibility struck a resounding chord. It was a hit job. Someone fixed our local ice cream peddler with candy, bread, dough, money. But why? I asked as I downed my second.

The bar at which I sat was located in a dim, smoke choked room where thugs of every description sat nursing their umpteenth grain alcohol. A pool table stood in one corner surrounded by grotesque figures with tattoos as clothing, betting on who would win and who would die. Chairs were stuck to the floor in a combination of spilled beer, broken glass and blood. There were no regulars just those that stayed and the new comers who never left. A notice at the door read "Leave contraband on person — you're safer that way."

The mirror behind the bar hung like jagged knives, having never been replaced from the time the barman threw a non-paying customer into it. The low hanging lights over the tables gleamed off weapons of great array. The game of poker was interrupted briefly as one member accused another member of cheating and shot him dead. The game continued on in silence.

Like I've always said, in order to understand a criminal, you have to know what they drink. I turned to Joey the barman and inquired about his knowledge on my subject. He pleaded ignorant but then again he was human. A flash of a twenty and he would spill the beans on his own mother. In seconds I had names, places, dollar amounts and what they ordered to drink that day.

The brilliance of the ten a.m. sun shone up from the melting pavement as I stepped out the "Celler Club" door. I knew the killer had had to inform the dame. I had told her to wait in the office but they rarely ever do. Listen; that is.

As I was walking down the deserted streets at mid-morning bullets bounced from the pavement around me. I dashed behind a blue Dodge and took notice of the hole in my new coat. I was pissed. I went for my .44 caliber revolver and noticed to my dismay that I had no bullets. The office entrance was in the alleyway just behind me.

I dashed and felt the bullets rip through my right shoulder and through my chest. Flesh wounds I assured myself and kept running. I reached the office but the dame was nowhere in sight. A note on the desk said "If you are still alive consider yourself lucky, Love, the Dame that set you up." I lean back in my designer vinyl chair and sip booze from the bottle as if it was Cognac. Like I said, that day started bad and things only got worse.

Maryanne E. Olson

Grandpa's Shade-Tree Squirrel

Grandpa never missed a day outdoors during that last summer he lived with us. Mornings offered him the Wheel of Fortune and Brady Bunch re-runs on television, but by afternoon Grandpa had taken his spot beneath the towering, lazy, shade tree, resting in his favorite chair. I was only eleven that summer.

The backyard of my house was a magical place. It was a rather large yard with plenty of room for the usual pick-up activities such as football, baseball, and my favorite, basketball. The grass was a smooth green and it cooled my feet on hot days. Trees surrounded the yard on three sides, with the fourth lined by the back of the garage and Grandpa's shade tree.

The fourth side of the yard was my haven. I spent the majority of my afternoons facing the back of the garage, tirelessly shooting foul shots on the attached rusty hoop. Of course, Grandpa was there, too, and I did everything under his watchful eye. He helped me greatly improve my foul shot technique and taught me to calculate my free throw percentage.

No matter what Grandpa was doing in the backyard that summer, he always had a keen sense for the squirrel. It was a distinct little creature because it had an unusually dark strip of fur down its back to the tip of its tail. The squirrel came and went as he pleased, and it pleased Grandpa when it came and went. He knew Grandpa wasn't afraid, often coming within several feet of him, but never anywhere near me. This fact made me jealous, but it tickled Grandpa.

I enjoyed spending time with Grandpa because he was different and more exciting than regular adults. He acted more my age than some of my friends, and I related better to him than I did to anyone else. Stevie Carter who lived down the street kept telling me that I was weird for spending so much time with an old guy, but I think he was just jealous because his grandfather was stuffed in a pine box six feet under Kalamazoo, Michigan. I didn't care how old Grandpa was, I only knew that it wasn't of importance to me.

One Saturday afternoon in the backyard Grandpa taught me a lesson I would never forget. I was chasing a butterfly around trying to catch it in a glass jar, but I was having little success. From his chair beneath the shade tree Grandpa called, "Hey, Sonny, what'cha tryin' to do?"

"Trying to catch this pretty little butterfly," I answered as I made another futile attempt.

"Havin' any luck?"

"No, she's too fast for me," I said as I gave up and tried to at least catch my breath. Grandpa sat still for a moment and then spoke up.

"Say, Sonny, did'ya ever think it might be the other way around, and you're just too fast for her?"

"How d'ya figure, Grandpa?" I was puzzled.

"Well, think about it for a second. What d'ya usually see them pretty butterflies a settin' on?"

"The grass, in bushes, and in trees, I guess," I offered.

"How fast d'ya suppose those places are moving?"

"Except for when the wind blows, they're not, Grandpa," I replied, feeling smart because I thought I had dodged a trick question.

"That's right. Y'see, Sonny, it's a butterfly's nature to want to explore places. But she wants

them places to be safe, and if you want to catch that butterfly, you have to be a safe place, too. You don't want to go in to a dark, scary cave, do you?"

"No, but. . ."

"But what?" he interrupted. I finally saw his point.

"How long d'ya think it'll take?" I asked Grandpa as I sat down cross-legged in the middle of the yard.

"Give it ten minutes," he said as assuredly as if he had some premonition from the gods. Several minutes later I saw the butterfly again. She was resting in the grass about twenty feet away. I sat so still, like when my father used to bet me a dollar I couldn't go five minutes without moving. The butterfly worked her way over to me and landed softly on my bare toe. I began to reach for the jar, but the butterfly fluttered slightly and it tickled, forcing me to jerk my toe and scare it away. Grandpa laughed and it made me pout a little.

"Say, Sonny, what were you plannin' to do with the butterfly if you caught it?" Grandpa asked.

"Put in on the shelf in my room, of course," I replied.

"I see," he said disapprovingly.

"Why? What's wrong with that?" I protested.

"Sonny, you've got to learn that some things can go on your shelf, and there's others you just can't pack away like that. It's just like the squirrel. He belongs outside, where he can be free, not in some stuffy jar or cage. Do you see what I mean?"

I think so," I said, feeling ashamed. I loved Grandpa so much at that moment. Everything he said rang of experience, and I absorbed it all like a sponge.

The following Monday I began to notice something peculiar was happening to Grandpa. He wasn't beneath his tree as usual. I hunted him down and found him in the garage, mumbling something about the squirrel. "Grandpa, what're you doin' in here?"

"Searchin'," he said gruffly.

"Searchin' for what?" I inquired.

"That damn squirrel. He said he wanted to talk to me in the garage, but I think he's hidin' from me."

I thought Grandpa was having some fun with me, so I played along. We attentively looked for the squirrel for about twenty minutes, until I finally got bored. "Grandpa, can we quit this game now and go out back and count my free throw percentage?" By now I was fairly adept at foul shots and I was eager to impress him. He stopped instantly, standing there with a bicycle tire in his hand, and stared at me. His eyes were cold and vacant, and I'd never seen that before. He'd always been warm and understanding with me, and now he was a stranger. I was uncomfortable with Grandpa for the first time in my life, and I suddenly felt our age difference. He was old, and I'd never noticed. All the time we'd spent together and I'd never fully comprehended what it meant to be old.

"Don't just stand there, Sonny. Go get me a piece of bread so this damned animal will come out and talk to me!" Grandpa was yelling and it scared me, so I did as I was told. I got the bread from the kitchen and put it on the floor of the garage and left without saying a word. I went to the backyard and practiced my foul shots. After about twenty shots I took a rest. "You're not

following through enough. You can't just use your arms, you've got to use your whole body." I directed my head toward the tree and there was Grandpa, in his chair like nothing had happened. "Try it again, and this time use your legs, too," he instructed. I corrected my technique and made my next five shots. I didn't ask him if the squirrel came out, much less if he talked to it.

Over the next several weeks I noticed a steady decline in Grandpa's condition. He would forget what day it was, and even forget why he would go in to the next room. One evening after Grandpa had already gone to bed I brought the subject up with Mom and Dad. "Mom, what's wrong with Grandpa? He's beginning to scare me, and I don't know what to do when he acts like he does," I said.

"He's a very old man, dear, and we have to be ourselves around him to keep him from worrying," she replied.

"But, Mom, I don't know what to say to him."

Dad interrupted, "Just act normal, son. We aren't the important ones here, Grandpa is. This is a time of adjustment for him as well as us, and we have to give him all our support." Dad looked worried, and he wasn't doing a very good job of convincing me not to be, either. "Listen, son, just do the best you can. Watch out for him. Let us know if he does anything completely out of the ordinary, okay?" Dad asked.

"Okay, I will," I promised.

It didn't take long. The next day we were in the backyard and I was shooting free throws and Grandpa was counting them. "How about that game on TV last night, Grandpa? The Lakers could have won if they'd made their foul shots in the fourth quarter." He didn't answer. "Grandpa? Hey, Grandpa? You okay, Grandpa?" He just sat there beneath the shade tree and looked lost. The count had stopped at seventeen.

"What am I doing here?" he asked me sternly. "Who are you?" he said, raising his voice considerably.

"I'm your grandson," I answered feebly.

"Go away. Leave me be!" Grandpa shouted. I was so scared I couldn't move. "Well, GO!" he boomed. I ran, sobbing, from the new-found monster, and hid in my room.

I told my mother in the morning. She and Grandpa went into the living room and shut the door. Because of this, I knew I wasn't allowed to listen. They stayed in there for several hours and by the time they came out I had fallen asleep in the den. When I awoke, Mom was in the kitchen making lunch. "Mom, what's going to happen to Grandpa?" I asked her.

"We'll see, honey. We will know more this afternoon," she replied.

"We will? We will? How can you say we will when I don't know anything at all?" I was getting impatient. "Mom, tell me!"

"Don't raise your voice at me, young man! I'll let you know when I know something. Now drop it!" I knew she was avoiding the subject on purpose, so I kept quiet. "Go out and get Grandpa for lunch," Mom ordered.

Grandpa was alone in the backyard beneath the shade tree. I approached him slowly, making sure he had enough time to recognize me, and stopped in front of him. He looked me over in a way that made me feel uneasy. I wasn't sure which Grandpa I was standing before, the one I knew, or the one I didn't. Finally he spoke. "Keep practicing them foul shots, Sonny, they win

ball games for ya'. Last count I had your percentage at seventy-three. Need to get it up a little, though. Keep workin' on it."

"Okay, Grandpa. Just for you," I said, delighted to see that it was my Grandpa I was talking to. "Mom said it's time to come in for lunch."

"All right, let's go eat, Sonny," he said with a tired wink of his eye.

We sat through lunch without any heavy conversation, maybe an occasional pass the salt. I could sense the tension between Mom and Grandpa. The clink of silverware and the smack of lips seemed exceptionally loud, and it turned out to be the last meal I'd ever eat with Grandpa at my house.

After lunch my dad showed up. He took the afternoon off from work to deal with Grandpa. I was pulled aside in to the living room. "Son, listen. Grandpa is going away. We aren't able to take good enough care of him anymore, so he is going to a special place for old people whose minds are going bad like Grandpa's."

"But why does he have to leave, can't people come here and take care of him?" I asked. I knew it was out of my hands.

"Son, this is the best thing for Grandpa, and he knows it. It's just the best thing for everyone." My eyes were swollen by now, and a tear trickled down my young cheek, pausing on my chin before dropping and making a splotch on my shorts. I had given up.

The next morning he was gone. Dad took him to town to see a doctor and to take him to his new home. Mother and I stayed behind to straighten up his things, and we would follow after lunch. She packed away all his valuables and stacked his clothes in cardboard boxes. She sorted out his personal items, separating what he needed from what he didn't need. "He's only allowed certain things," she said as she tossed his calculator in to the non-essential box. It was the same calculator we'd used to figure my free throw percentage when it got too high to do in our heads. Not essential? How did she know what he needed. She hadn't even mentioned his favorite chair in the backyard. What would happen to it? Mom couldn't come up with a box large enough for the things Grandpa needed. I couldn't either, but I didn't need one. As Grandpa taught me, some things should never be caught and packed away.

The backyard was empty. I surveyed it carefully, just as Grandpa would have, one eye on me, the other looking for the squirrel. It held so many fond memories for us. I wanted to remember every tree, every corner, and each blade of grass, exactly as they were. I bit my lip to fight back the tears and sat in his chair beneath the shade tree. I was getting too old to cry, he would have told me. Then, magically, while sitting in his chair, I saw the squirrel. He bounded down from his tree and sat frozen at my feet. I leaned over and listened closely, and I thought I heard him speak to me. "I'm free. I'm free," it said. The squirrel was so real, I could almost touch him. So was my Grandpa.

Christopher V. Davis

The Day After the Flood

for Bill

don't you remember the river
that day
that wild day after the flood?

remember the river
muddy ragged rapid

how it got cooler
along the path we slid down
cautiously
touching trees for balance?

remember we sat on the toppled tulip poplar
kicked off our sneakers
scooped handfuls of that smoky liquor
drank like frontiersmen?

savage brothers

remember how deep
that river was
how long?

we said it would take us
to the sea
our whale front porch

remember we dived in
and fish swam around us singing hymns
we with short swords in our teeth?

remember we're still in that flood
and dead faces, like leaves, spin by us?

Marion Hodge

Debbie

I remember Debbie. I remember the way her merry little grin lit up the long days of winter, the way she took her lumps without tears, the way she loved to hear snow crunching beneath her winter boots. I will always remember Debbie.

We first met when she was seven, and I became her stepmother. I was prepared to be resented and to try and win her affection. But, to my astonishment, the moment we met, she stood on tiptoe and kissed me. Then she said, "I'm so glad to have a new mother at last!" And off she tripped to race her little dog to the bottom of the garden. This is the Debbie I remember.

She was like a singing butterfly, flitting here and there in random pattern; she was in constant motion, singing about the six little ducks and McDonald's farm, songs she learned in school. During that first summer, Debbie and her dog were inseparable. Sparky even slept in Debbie's bed, burrowing into the small of her back, sighing contentedly whenever Debbie reached back to stroke him with a gentle hand. They were the perfect pair, Debbie with her dark hair, and the cocker spaniel with his silky, sandy coat.

Debbie loved to pretend she was tending the garden, and became quite proficient with a hoe. Silver Queen corn was her favorite garden vegetable, and at supper time she would dash among the stalks, snatching a pail full of ears, shucking them as she scampered back to the big, old house.

She kept a watchful eye on the neighborhood, reporting any unusual comings and goings. She kept a special watch on the large, old house across the street, where two spinster sisters lived, both well into their 80s. Debbie visited with them on occasion, primly taking tea in their parlor, and then regaling them with anecdotes from school until the three of them dissolved into undignified giggles.

Most of all, I remember Debbie in the strawberry patch, where we went as a family to pick and pay. Debbie would begin plucking the juicy berries in a frenzy of excitement until she ran out of steam. Then, she would lie on her stomach between the rows, chin cupped in her hands, with strawberry juice staining her mouth and chin. And she would grin. Debbie in her red dress and bare feet, rolling in the strawberry patch, the sun high in the sky, bees humming, the sky like blue crystal.

When school started that fall, Debbie could hardly wait to tell her teachers that she had a new mother, and the news spread rapidly down the school halls. She was never an especially good student, but liked the special projects, particularly those dealing with nature. She would tramp through the woods for hours, looking for the perfect specimen for a nature class.

Debbie was an attractive child, well-proportioned, with shining green eyes and dark brown hair, very glossy, very thick. We could not know that, within a few months, her hair would be dull and dry from medication. There was a puzzling red rash across her cheeks, which the country doctor treated intermittently, but which never faded. Oddly, it did not detract from her looks; it merely gave her the appearance of having very rosy cheeks.

Debbie was never clumsy, and was able to learn bicycle riding with only a few bruises. Her balance on ice skates was excellent. For this reason, it was perplexing the day she came home from school with a large lump on her haed. She had fallen off a curb, she said, and had banged

her forehead. This was the first indication that something was out of sync, out of the ordinary.

The next incident occurred a couple of weeks later when Debbie was about to go outside. As she reached for the door knob, she seemed to freeze. I called to her, but there as no response. A few seconds later, Debbie relaxed, turned the knob and started out the door. When asked about it, she said she had just been playing.

When that sudden rigidity occurred again, I stepped in front of her, and reached for her hand. It was stiff. Debbie was staring straight ahead, eyes wide, pupils dilated and fixed. She recovered before I did. That night was a sleepless one. Whenever sleep crept near, Debbie's face was before me, swirling round and round, with her wide, staring eyes.

A visit to a specialist confirmed that Debbie had a rare disorder and that the facial rash and scarred tissue along her lower back were forerunners of the symptoms. The scars had been there since birth, they told me. No one could have imagined then that this laughing, happy child would be struck down by a serious illness that had lain dormant all her life.

The occasional stiffness would continue, grow worse, as it gradually and relentlessly developed into full-blown grand mal seizures. The phenobarbital prescribed by the doctor was not always effective, but at first the seizures were controlled well enough for Debbie to return to her joyful way of life, and to her beloved school.

Her greatest accomplishment at school was being selected to sing in the chorus. For those occasions, she wore a long-sleeved white blouse, black jumper, high white socks with black shoes, topped off by a white hair band to hold down her unruly hair. And what sweet, breathy singing the children did make, with their songs about animals, and the seasonal melodies. Soon, Debbie was again outside, her favorite place, feet skipping in the wind, chasing pretty leaves, cavorting with Sparky.

After church on Sundays, as regular as clockwork, Debbie would forget to put the hymnal back into its slot and would bring it home. The pile of hymn books on our piano grew steadily until there were seven or eight of them. At that point it would become necessary to sneak into the church during the week, and smuggle them back again. It would have been difficult to explain this action if confronted, but it became a bi-monthly ritual. Debbie would hoot with pleasure.

Then, as Debbie's illness tightened its hold, the specialist told us the rest. This rare horror would change and shorten her life. It was genetic, he said, and, therefore, Debbie must never marry and have children. Because of the seizures, she could never drive. Death would most likely occur by the time she reached young adulthood.

We were dumbfounded, shocked. Then the questions began. Had there been a connection between this genetic flaw and the premature death of Debbie's mother? Had she been a carrier? Would anyone else in the family develop the disease? There were no answers.

I remember Debbie, in her scarlet dress, twirling in the autumn winds, dancing and swooping, catching at the tumbling leaves. Debbie scampering to the frozen pond, hair flying, with ice skates swinging over her shoulder. Debbie, stomping in the snow to hear it crunch. Debbie and Sparky, resplendent in his dark blue dog sweater, barreling down a steep hill on a flying saucer, spinning, hanging on for dear life. Sparky, with eyes bright, and ears straight back, loving it.

Years later, Debbie's voice awoke me from a sound sleep, jolting me bolt upright. It was impossible, of course, but to this day I swear I hear her voice softly echoing through the years that night, calling me. . .calling. . .“Mom?”

Oh yes, I remember Debbie.

Martha Caldwell

View from My Window at Westminster College

Its name is MAEGHER, 20th century son of Grendel,
Sexless, souless, ravenous beast,
Its prey not man, but earth.
First day, came gliding the walker in darkness
To devour with steely jaws the earth's flesh,
Tearing the tender sod.
Driven by evil desire, swollen with rage,
It tore the earth open.
Unsatisfied, its awful teeth dripping with green gore,
It seized a sleeping tree, tore at it hungrily,
Bit into its root-locks, drank the sap from its veins,
The beast of progress.
Men in circles watched, urged it on, smiled voyeuristic smiles,
Savoring the thing's mechanical lust.
Satisfied, the monster crept with grinding feet
Back to its barren metal cave.
I don't know if it has a mother there.
Second day, the foul ravager crawled back,
This time its victim rock,
The weapon not teeth, but rod, penetrating the stony maidenhead,
Possessing the earth beneath.
The shrieks were terrible.
Again the men came, watched, enjoyed the beast of progress,
Whose name is MAEGHER.
Third day, I shut my curtain, huddled on my bed,
And waited for Beowulf.
He did not come.

Martha Gleaton

Untitled

On my way home, I tried to decide what I was going to say to Momma. Clearly, she would be the most difficult one to crack. I knew that Momma was stubborn, hard, and sometimes demanding, however, I also knew that she was my mother. And as my mother she had a natural tendency to be loving, caring, and, most of all, forgiving. That was why I just could not understand why Momma was so adamant about Angie not coming back home. When I got home, Momma was busy in the kitchen finishing up Sunday dinner. I peeped inside the kitchen and told Momma that I was running down the road to borrow a house dress from Jackie. With that lie, I dashed outside of the house, before Momma could say, "I have one you can wear!" I needed some excuse to get out of the house to get over to Ms. Lucille's house, without having to answer too many questions. I was never a good liar, and a quick exit from the house would cover up for that.

I walked to Ms. Lucille's house with a hurried pace. I figured that the quick pace would alleviate some of my nervousness. But it didn't. My heart was beating even faster when I arrived to Ms. Lucille's steps because of both nervousness and fatigue. I slowly stepped up the creaky, wood steps to the old broken down house. When I knocked on the screen door, the weather beaten door almost fell apart under pressure. "Hello! Is anyone home?" I politely whispered, so as not to disturb anyone. Suddenly, Ms. Lucille appeared on the other side of the screen door. A rough woman, with a thick chest, and a voice to match, rudely replied, "Who you lookin' for?" She was everything I had envisioned: mean, ugly, big, fat, and toothless. "Well who you lookin for? You deaf?" she hollered at me again. "I'm looking for Angela, Ms. Lucille. Have you seen her?" I politely asked. With bloodshot eyes and an intense stare, she peered at me through her glasses and boomed, "I ain't seen no Angela!" And with that, Ms. Lucille slammed the door in my face. I stood on her old ragged porch for a few minutes, feeling stunned and naively wondering how someone could be so rude.

I slowly turned around, feeling rejected and bruised, as if every ounce of my ego had been washed down the drain never again to be regained. I sat on Ms. Lucille's old rotten steps and started to cry. And then I felt real stupid because I didn't cry quietly and politely like I had seen the young ladies in the movies cry, I cried out loud, like a hungry baby without a bottle. I heard the door slowly open, and I quickly wiped my tears away, ready to face Ms. Lucille and her apology (another one of my brilliant, naive thoughts). I knew that people weren't really that rude.

"Crybaby, Crybaby-Sittin on the Steps!" I heard someone sing sadly with a slow, depressed tone. As I quickly turned around, I repeated the second half of the childhood rhyme with excitement, "You must have fell and bumped your head!" My excitement to see my big sister totally drowned out the little boy standing behind her, clutching on her leg.

"I'm sorry about Ms. Lucille," she stammered. "When I saw you walking up, I told her to be mean to you so that you would go away."

"What do you mean you told her to be mean to me so that I would go away?" I asked Angie with confusion in my voice. I stared at Angie long and hard and for the first time, I saw a beautiful young woman who had been beaten by hard times. Angie's face was no longer soft and brown, it was long and hard and there was so much sadness in her eyes. "Girl, you know that you ain't

supposed to be on this side of town, and if Momma found out, you'd be sittin' on those steps with a real reason to cry!" "Oh I took care of that," I explained to Angie. When I finally saw the little boy standing behind Angie, I asked her whose little boy was she babysitting.

With a sudden burst of energy and pride, Angie introduced me to my nephew, Charles "Chuck" Johnson, Jr. And just as fast as the pride appeared, it disappeared, making me feel confused, hurt and betrayed. And suddenly the pieces to the puzzle started fitting together. I finally figured out why Momma and Angie were so pigheaded towards one another. I knew why Angie left home in such a hurry and all sorts of thoughts were running through my mind while I stood on the steps peering at Angie through the screen door.

"I know you're wondering what happened" she softly said. Angie went on to tearfully explain what happened on the night she left home to go to New York. She said that when she told Momma that she was pregnant, momma wanted her to stay at Aunt Sylvia's house in New Orleans and give the baby up for adoption when born. Angie said that all Momma was worried about was what the townsfolk would think. And when she disagreed, Momma told her to choose between a baby and her home. And with that choice, she left to find a better life in New York.

While Angie was talking, all I could do was think, "Is this the horrible secret that Angie and Momma had bitterly harbored between themselves for the past two years?" "Was this it?" I became even angrier when I thought about the two years our family suffered as a broken up unit, because Angie was about to go through something that was just as natural as the rising and the setting of the sun: childbirth.

I felt anger and disappointment towards everyone. I was disappointed with my best friend and sister because she did not tell me, and I was angry with Momma because of her "bull head" manners. Angie invited me inside for some soda pop and cookies, but I sadly declined. I opened the door and gave Angie and little Chuckie a kiss and hug. As I left Ms. Lucille's torn down shack, I turned around one last time to see my big sister Angie holding her baby son. "I Love You!" I hollered. "I know," she whispered. That day I left Ms. Lucille's house feeling like my heart had been torn into two pieces.

When I returned home, Momma had a big Sunday dinner waiting for me. She said she cooked it in my honor of being home for break, but I didn't feel much like eating. I went to bed leaving Momma in the kitchen with a worried look on her face, and I cried myself to sleep that night.

The next day felt very weird and eerie. It was cloudy and dark, but it never rained. All I could do was think about Angie and Chuckie Jr. I decided to go over Ms. Lucille's house that afternoon to talk to Angie and convince her to come home and talk to Momma. While I was getting dressed, I heard someone running up to the house hollering, "Tekie, Buck, Ms. Williams, come quick!" I quickly put on my clothes and ran outside to find Mr. Woodrow, the old man who worked at the local bus station, sitting on the steps, out of breath. "What is it Mr. Woodrow?" Buck cried. Mr. Woodrow tried to catch his breath, but he was too upset, "The bus that your oldest girl was on. . ." "Caught fire. . .Everybody Dead!"

I could not believe it. I took off to run to Ms. Lucille's house to see if Angie had left to go out of town. When I got there, apparently Ms. Lucille had already found out. The same harsh woman of yesterday, had a fresh look of hurt and pain on her face today. When I saw Ms. Lucille,

I hollered, "Say it ain't so, Ms. Lucille! Say Angie wasn't on that bus!" Ms. Lucille ran to my arms and we cried together. She tried to calm down and told me in between breaths that Angie had left her a note saying that she would be grateful to her if she could keep Chuckie for a few weeks until she went to New York to find a job and get settled.

I could not even cry because I was so stunned. All I could do was think about Rev. David's sermon in church yesterday and how hypocritical Momma was because for someone who was a God-fearing, Bible-toting, Knee-praying woman, she sure did head a house that was totally out of order. And the sad thing about it was that no one knew how much pain we were all in. Everyone thought that Angie was in New York studying dance in Harlem. And all I could do was think of how Angie suffered because of my mother's worries and thoughts about what everybody else would think. I came to the conclusion that there was no order to our house, society, people or anything else about life. In my opinion there was no such thing as order.

Wendy D. Holmes

Blurs

The Gulf War
lashed abysses of living
rooms.

One man,
well-oiled,
suspected of spending
his mother's Social Security,
already obese
on disability checks,
grew large with glee,
swayed in his easy
chair with missiles guided
through ducts.

He stretched
to see explosions, but —
mere blurs as warplanes
pulled out
of their dives,
stretched hard,
but death mere blue.

Carolina hills don't
fall at warplanes'
fall — instead,
minds bloat
with conquest
nigh to love's

CHARGE:

huzza-huzza,
hip, hip. . . .

Marion Hodge

Life Goes On

On Friday, it would be the newspaper photographer's idea to prop Barth before fallen archways and paneless windows, amid piles of shattered wood pilings and displaced roofing shingles. *We've lost everything to Hugo* Saturday's caption revealed beneath Barth's picture. Rumpled Polo shirt, Calvin Klein jeans, barefooted. Blunt cut, wedged hair streaked blonde by the beach sun, blown with the hurricane's dying forces, and glazed with sea spray.

The Sunday night dinner party would be Maggie's idea. Pick up the pieces, his wife said. Only hours before the hurricane's eye had scrambled buildings, boats, and trees, Barth and Maggie had left their condo and fled inland. Settling temporarily in the smelly pulpwood town of Astor, they rented a two-room efficiency in the converted Confederate hospital.

Life goes on would cliché the theme of the get-together. Sure, buildings had crumbled, their four-piece sectional lay afloat in the raging sea, and pieces of their prized Queen Anne bedroom suite had landed god-only-knows where. Not to mention the Ralph Lauren king spread and decorator pillows tangled like paisley pretzels among fallen utility wires. Shattered Lennox wine glasses lay smashed against crushed Wedgewood figurines while packages containing special-order filet mignons and cartons of Haagen-Dazs spoiled in the remains of a warm freezer chest.

Eight displaced friends would accept Maggie's invitation for seven o'clock. Borrowed furniture slumped like orphans in their rented rooms. Maggie's self-allotment for groceries purchased "price cut" veggies from Winn-Dixie. The dip she made from cottage cheese, milk with about-to-expire dates, and a package of herb dressing from Big Lots. A blackened pot of pintos simmered on the crusty electric eye; an iron skillet cradled fried potatoes while a pone of cornbread baked behind the glassless oven door propped closed with a red broom handle. On the plywood kitchen cabinet, a jug of Gallo chilled in a galvanized tub beside a chipped yellow mixing bowl containing mounds of coleslaw.

"They'll be here soon," Maggie said, staring out the kitchen window and down the cracked sidewalk where grass sprouted from cement scars. "I'm glad the gang's safe," she offered, "aren't you, Barth?"

Barth stuffed his sweaty palms deep in the pockets of the tattered Alexander Julian khakis he had worn during the earlier evacuation and exodus inland. His eyes begged for the former life Hugo had thrown to the sea. He opened his mouth to speak, but could only nod.

Alice E. Sink

Steel Town

That building
stands where trees
stood a thousand years.
It was part of the progress.
I see the progress
in the angry smoke
from the stack
in the cupelo,
in the burnt red clouds
hanging over a dingy town.
I smell it
in the iron ore,
in the hot steam
off the slag.
It mirrors itself
in the dirty face
and grimy fingernails
of the foreman.
Rooms of lit machines
chattering and whining out
the pipe.
The foreman's wife smiles
when he touches her.
This is the progress.
No dirty nails
on strong fingers
just changing the shift
at the plant.

W. Troy Anders

Hired Help

The woman stares into the empty house through a frost covered window, and a pleasant childhood memory flickers in her mind. She remembers a time when tall, olive skinned, black haired men surrounded her. The muscles in their glistening backs and arms rippled as they moved heavy stones from one place to another. They were mostly young men, very poor, although that did not matter to her because they made her laugh. The men had loud, deep voices and often spoke rapidly in a foreign language which she did not understand. Each day they would display white teeth and compliment her on her pretty dresses. To them, she was a little lady. To her, they were princes.

She was a tall child for her age, with pale skin and freckles and brown-red hair. She drank milk constantly and the men nicknamed her "Irish" although Irish was nowhere to be found in her bloodline. She was twelve then, and how she wished she had been older. They had built this place, the dark men, but they were nowhere to be found now. She was alone. Now, a more bitter memory enters her mind.

She was fifteen. The spring air was warm. He asked her once if she knew what it meant that he was "hired help." She said "yes," but a child still, she did not truly understand. He was seventeen and very frightened of the mustached man who lived in the large house.

She remembers the night that the blood stained the bricks in the fireplace. Her father's or her love's, she had never been sure. There they lay, one with a bullet in his gut, the other with an accidentally broken back. Both — both reaching for her, choking her name. She went to her father, twisted man, and left her lover on the hardwood to die alone.

She remembers walking away from her father's grave, led by her mother, and looking back. . .she watched as the men effortlessly shoveled dirt on to her father's casket, and she would have given anything to be dark skinned like them.

Michele Brown

Clever

He thought he was being
clever
when he handed me his pen.
His red pen
with his name written in gold.
He thought I'd write something stupid
and make a fool of myself.
But I didn't.
Instead
I wrote something
clever.
Just as clever
as he thought he was.
So clever
That they gave me his job.

Michele Brown

Change Of Perspective

This is definitely not a good day, thought Linda as she groped in her shoulder bag for her car keys and hurried towards the front door. Not feeling anything, she moved her hand to the pocket of the London Fog that she had hastily thrown around her shoulder. She felt them lying deep in the pocket corner and gave a sign of relief. Pulling the door shut with a slam, she tried to lock it quickly, knowing that this new deadbolt lock had to be handled gingerly for it to work correctly. Finally her fumbling produced the hard click needed to secure the door, but just as she was pulling the key out, there came the unmistakable ringing of the kitchen phone. "Damn!" she swore out loud as she slowly reversed the lock process and burst back into the house.

"Jim?" she asked into the receiver.

There was a slight pause before the familiar voice of her husband answered, "Linda, he didn't get it."

"Oh, no," was all the reply she was able to provide. Now all the energy that she'd been able to muster on this sleepy morning seemed to drain from her, and she sagged against the wall for support.

"He knew you'd be upset and made me promise to tell you that he only missed a couple of questions. The examiner assured him that he'll be ready to take it again in a few days after a little more study." He paused. "Bill took it really well, Linda. I dropped him at school, and he's planning to get a ride up to the club after his last class. He wants you to pick him up there about five-thirty." Then because he knew her so well he added, "Try not to worry."

"Okay, She said weakly. "Bye."

Hot tears that had been burning her eyes since hearing the news could no longer be contained and fell rapidly down her cheeks. For a minute she gave herself completely over to misery. "Why?" she sobbed. "Why?"

Then as the overwhelming rush of sorrow subsided, she straightened and remembered that she needed to be at work early this morning to meet the delivery truck and sign for the plant order. Grabbing a handful of tissues, she blew her nose and wiped her eyes as she retraced her steps out the door. This time the lock worked on the first try.

Linda enjoyed the ten mile drive to the garden shop because it gave her a chance to catch her breath after the hectic early morning rush at home, trying to get everyone out to school and work on time. Sixteen-year-old Mary was so unpredictable these days — one minute chattering and giggling incessantly and the next, moping around as if the world were coming to an end. One never could tell when she and Britt, her younger brother would be into one of their violent arguments. Just this morning after Jim and Bill had left for the driver's license office and Linda had been hastily giving the kitchen a once over, Britt had come tearing down the steps in a flood of tears yelling, "Mary is so mean! I hate her! Look what she did to me!" He pointed to a long scratch on his neck that was beginning to bleed. Linda knew that Mary had gotten to him with her fingernails again, and she also knew that she had probably been provoked by Britt. She knew that it was useless to try to get to the bottom of these fights, so she had put her arms around him until the sobbing stopped and he stormed out muttering, "I'm going to get her!"

Linda had stood listening for renewed arguing for a moment, then hearing nothing, she had resumed loading the dishwasher. As she turned it on, Mary had come rushing down the stairs and darted past on the way to the laundry room with an unironed shirt.

“Mary, do you have time for that?” she had asked, looking at her watch.

“Yes, Mom,” Mary had snapped.

Later from the laundry room Mary called in a much sweeter tone, “Oh, Mom, I need twenty-five dollars for my yearbook, and I have to have it today.”

After that there was silence because Mary knew how it irritated Linda to be asked for money at the last minute, and she was expecting a reprimand. This morning Linda had let it pass, however, preferring to write the check without saying anything instead of setting off one more hassle. Sometimes she just couldn't put up a fight.

“Thanks, Mom,” Mary had shouted over her shoulder as she ran out the door to catch her ride a few minutes later.

Driving along the beltway, Linda was enjoying the lovely peace and stillness that being alone in early morning brought her. It had rained overnight, and there was a clean freshness in the cool autumn air. The rain had intensified the golds and scarlets of the sugar maples that edged the stretch of woods that she was passing, and against the dark green of the tall evergreens, they were brilliant. An ominous black cloud still overhung the sky to her left, and she expected to see raindrops at any minute.

Her mind wandered to thoughts of Bill. Precious Bill, her oldest child. It seemed so unfair that he should fail to pass the driver's test after all that he had been through this past year. She visualized the wreck again — the dark and winding stretch of road. Bill driving his beloved 280Z, the four high school friends laughing and talking and listening to music as they returned home after their last night out together before returning to college for their sophomore year. Suddenly a golden retriever appeared in front of them, and Bill had slammed on brakes and swerved to avoid hitting him. The car was off the road and sliding, then bumping and crashing through the underbrush before hitting the tree.

Thank God the clerk at the nearby Fast Fare had heard the crash and called the police. A little farther along that road was very desolate, and nothing would have been heard.

Linda and Jim had been hosting a farewell party that night for their friends, the Wyatts, who were moving to California. She had been surprised when the phone rang and knew it had to be something extraordinary since practically everyone they knew in town was at the party. Even before Jim said seriously, “Be right there,” she was hurrying to his side.

“What is it?”

“It's Bill.”

“Is he all right?”

“A wreck.”

In the confusion that followed, Mary's dear friend Suzanne had taken charge and guided her out to the waiting car. “Don't worry about a thing here — Michael and I will handle everything.” Suzanne said gently as she closed the car door for her.

At the hospital she and Jim had dashed hand in hand through the automatic doors into the glaring white emergency room. A police officer rose to meet them.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hammett?”

“Yes — where is Bill? Is he . . . all right?” Linda was almost hysterical now.

“He is in very serious condition,” came the solemn reply.

“Will he live?” Jim’s voice sounded strange and pinched.

“Yes, he will live.”

Bill had lived. He had lain in a coma for two months and five days before opening his eyes and gazing at them in welcome as if he had just returned from a long journey. How happy they were to have him back — but how unprepared they were for the giant tasks that lay ahead of him.

Bill was like a baby: unable to talk, walk, feed himself or use the bathroom alone. Linda watched patient, skilled hands guide him in relearning these basic tasks. The confidence of those who worked with Bill encouraged Linda, but her greatest admiration went to Bill himself for his remarkable determination and persistence.

Many months later the day finally arrived when Linda and Jim were able to take Bill home. He still walked with a crutch and his left arm, which had been broken in two places, still hung at a somewhat awkward angle at his side. Weeks of outpatient therapy had followed until, at long last, he had been totally released.

Now Bill was enrolled in a remedial program at the local community college to help him concentrate on academics again, in hopes of returning to the University in the future.

Linda’s gloomy mood persisted until late in the morning when she and Suzanne were alone together in the greenhouse repotting ferns. At last she confided her disappointment to her friend. Suzanne quietly, as she always did, then spoke reassuring words that Linda needed to hear. “This thing is just going to take time, Linda. He will get his driver’s license, and he will go back to the University one day, but it can’t be rushed. A year ago no one believed he would ever walk again — and look at what he has done in spite of all he had against him. Just keep believing in him. The rest is going to come.”

“Thanks, Suzanne. I just needed a little pep talk. Once in a while it gets scary dealing with so many unknowns and not knowing if we are doing the right things.”

At that moment the doorbells jangled and a shrill voice could be heard calling from the front of the shop. “Good morning, ladies,” came the unmistakable voice of Donna Foxcroft. Giving Suzanne a knowing look, Linda whispered, “I’ll handle her this time,” and rose to return to the shop.

“Oh, hi Linda,” Donna’s whiney voice greeted her as she came through the door. “Did Suzanne tell you that I called yesterday?”

“Yes, I believe she told me that this time you are redoing your foyer and front powder room?” she forced a smile.

“That’s right, and my decorator suggested that I needed some greenery to add to the ambiance. Her suggestions were all plants that I have had such dreadful luck with, so I thought you could help me find something more suitable.”

“I’m sure I can, Donna,” Linda said lightly, proud of her casual tone. “Let’s go look in the greenhouse.”

As they passed through the breezeway to the greenhouse, Linda noticed that the sun was peeking through the clouds.

“What do you think about this Donna?” she asked, pointing to a weeping fig tree in the far corner.

“Now that’s a possibility!” Donna gushed.

Fortunately, Linda had suggested a plant that Donna had not yet killed, and she decided to take two of them as well as three of the new Dallas ferns that do not shed so badly in winter.

As she handed over her credit card, Donna inquired, as she always did, “These plants are guaranteed to live and thrive, aren’t they?” She tried to make this sound cute, like a joke, but Linda knew from past experiences with her that Donna fully believed that this could be done.

“Donna, you know we have the policy of replacing any of our plants that die within a month.” Linda tried to sound pleasant because Donna was an important customer whose poor gardening skills produced many sales for them. She rang up the sale and was feeling relieved that this encounter was almost over.

Donna was turning to leave when, as an afterthought, she said over her shoulder, “Oh, I saw Bill yesterday. He wasn’t able to go back to the University this fall, was he?”

The question hung in midair as did the pitying expression in Donna’s eyes. Linda felt her heartbeat quicken and her hands begin to shake. She knew her face was growing red as she took a deep breath in order to control her voice. “No not yet, but he is doing very well. We have been pleased with his recovery so far.” How she managed a sort of smile she didn’t know.

With that Donna was gone, and Linda was left alone to recuperate from her anger. She knew Donna had meant no harm and tried to overlook her narrowmindedness. Perhaps she herself had been like that before the accident — only seeing the bad side of things and not looking for the good. Now, since she had chosen to concentrate on the positive aspects of Bill’s situation rather than the negative, it was hard to understand why some people thought otherwise. She wanted to shout at them, “Can’t you see how wonderfully our son is progressing? We came so close to losing him and now look what he is able to do! This is not a pitiful situation — it is a triumph!” Yet she knew that some people would never be convinced of this and probably believed her to be crazy for thinking as she did. Thank God for people like Suzanne! One person like her made up for ten Donna Foxcrofts.

Linda left work just after five and headed for the Wildwood Tennis Club to pick up Bill. The bright sun had been out since about noon, and the day was now dry and crisp with a clear blue sky. As she pulled into the long drive that led to the courts, she saw Samantha Jones in the exit lane. Samantha was frantically waving and rolling down her window, eager to speak to her. Linda laughed when she saw her comical antics and greeted her warmly. “What’s up, Sam?” she asked.

“I’m so pleased that Bill is doing this! I think he’s marvelous! Gotta run now! I’m late for picking up Fran.” Samantha chimed in a rush, and then she was gone.

Linda continued up the drive in puzzlement. What was she talking about? Bill had been coming out here a few times a week since late summer when Ted, the pro, had called and asked him to drop by. They were old friends because Bill had spent most of his free time here for the past ten years, either practicing or playing in tournaments. With Ted’s help, Bill had won the

city youth championship for three consecutive years. Now that he was unable to play, Linda had no idea what he did here, but she imagined he helped in the shop or did errands for Ted. She also wondered how he must feel being out here with all those memories, but if it bothered him, he never showed it.

Stepping out of the car, Linda looked around for Bill, but he wasn't in sight. At the far court was a class of teen-agers huddled around the instructor at midcourt, and in front of her were a foursome of senior citizens. She headed for the pro shop.

"Hi, Ted. I'm looking for Bill," she said as the screen door slammed behind her.

"He's out there," Ted grinned as he pointed to the far court.

"He is?" Linda asked in disbelief.

"Didn't he tell you that he's helping with our junior team?" he replied.

"No!" Linda answered with delight as she turned and hastened out of the shop. Just before she reached Bill's range of vision, she stopped and watched him for a minute. He was standing close behind a young blond teen-age boy helping him with his forehand position. There was conversation between the two, interspersed with laughter. The boy sat down and Bill motioned to a stocky girl with a curly ponytail and she hopped up and went forward to meet him. He helped her grip the racket properly, then picked up his racket to demonstrate the correct position for meeting a volley with a backhand stroke. He had her try it, saw her mistake, corrected her and had her try again. Then moving to the opposite court, he began tossing balls to her backhand, encouraging her with nods and words of praise whenever she hit a good shot.

"How patient Bill has become," thought Linda who was now filled with wonder and pride. She remembered what an impulsive and headstrong teen-ager he had been before the accident. Was it possible that this mature young man who had come to take his place was just as lovable?

Then Linda caught Bill's eye, and they both began to laugh from pure joy. She raised her clinched fist high over her head in a victory sign and she knew the answer to her question was yes.

Ann Hammer

I Am The Heart

I am the rose.
You are the foot that tramples it.

I am a silk tapestry.
You are the knife that slashes it.

I am the deer.
You are the hunter that stalks it.

I am the eye.
You are the light that blinds it.

I am the face.
You are the hand that slaps it.

I am the bird.
You are the gun that shoots it.

I am the beast.
You are the whip that beats it.

I am the heart.
You are the love that breaks it.

I am the poison.
You are the fool who drinks it.

Michele Brown

Dirty Laundry

She sat staring forlornly into her coffee cup and watched as the cream she poured in it swirled around to make the coffee a light beige. It was a gray day outside, not raining, just gray. She looked outside and watched as the clothes on the clothes line flapped in the breeze.

The phone rang and brought her out of her trance. She looked up at the clock and panicked momentarily, dinner was late and he was going to be home in twenty minutes. Then she remembered why all the the clothes were still on the clothes line.

No, she didn't have to get up to make dinner today, or any day really, not anymore.

The phone gave another shrill ring and she heard the machine as the fourth ring echoed through the empty house.

"Mary-Ellen, Mary-Ellen I know you're home, now answer this phone. Come on Mary-Ellen, we've all been so worried about you, all you ever do is bleach those damn clothes. Mary-Ellen blood like that doesn't come o-u-t. I give up, he's not coming back and when you want to start living again you call me, ya' hear?"

The phone clicked and the answering machine beeped twice and then went off again. Mary-Ellen stared outside at the clothes flapping in the breeze. Maybe if she bleached his clothes one more time. Maybe then she could forget. All she wanted was for the clothes to be clean.

She looked down into her coffee and started swirling more cream into it until it was almost white.

Tracy E. Fitzpatrick

To Be Free

On the third day after they moved to Mr. Simmons' place, the slave woman and her teen-age son began straightening their little hut as they were anticipating the company of another slave family nearby.

Celie and her son Joshua were sold to Mr. Simmons a week ago after her husband Sal was caught attempting to escape from their last master in Maryland. Sal was always such an ambitious man and vowed that he and his family would never die as slaves. So one night about two weeks ago, Celie packed his supplies and watched him disappear into the woods promising to return with freedom.

Celie prayed as each day passed that Sal was getting closer to the north. She kept silent and hoped each night that she wouldn't hear a knock on the door indicating that Sal had been caught. But on that fifth day since he had run away, one of Celie's friends ran up to her as she was picking her last bale of cotton screaming, "Dey dun caught him Celie, dey dun caught him!" Celie didn't answer her friend. She couldn't. She just gathered her cotton and walked back to her hut in silence.

It had not dawned on her that her husband had been caught until she got word that night that the master wanted her and Joshua to come to his home immediately. Once there, they were sent straight into a drawing room where Sal was tied up. The sight of seeing him tied made Celie tremble with fear. She looked over at Joshua, but his face was unreadable. She looked at Sal from head to toe. His eyes still held the same look of determination that they always had. He never looked at Celie or Joshua. He continued to stare straight ahead. His face was covered with sweat and grime as if he had been dragged face down on gravel. The blood dripped from his bruised nose seemed to flow as steadily as a young river. It settled in a little puddle just below his neck. The rest of his body seemed okay which frightened Celie because she knew that what they had not done to him now, they would make up for it later.

"Celie," the master called as he and his men entered the room. "We figured you and Joshua wouldn't want to miss this for anything."

"Miss what massa?" Celie asked nervously.

"Hush," one of the men cut in before the master could answer. "I can't chop clean enough if that nigger's gonna be talkin'."

"Chop what?" Celie exclaimed, "Chop what massa?"

"Celie", the master said as he put an arm on her shoulder. "Since old Sal fancies runnin so much and we can't seem to control his little urges, we're just gonna have to cut his feet off."

"No!" Celie screamed.

"Now, Celie, you know the rules. You be a good nigger and master won't bother a hair on your wooly little head. But you run, and master will make sure you'll never run again."

"Massa please, I'll do anything. Don't bother Sal," Celie pleaded.

"Men, take off his shoes," the master ordered as he ignored Celie's pleas.

The men took off Sal's shoes and proceeded with three wacks of an ax on each foot. Celie nearly fainted as she watched her husband's eyes wall back in pain. But Joshua was at her side

immediately, holding her fast. She looked down to find two bloody stumps where her husband's feet used to be.

The master ordered Sal a new hut to live in. Now that he was an invalid, he would be bound to the land and dependent on his master forever. Celie and Joshua were forbidden to see him and a week later, they were sold to Mr. Simmons in Virginia.

Since then, Joshua had become very rebellious disrespecting Celie and other elderly slaves near their hut. She just hoped that he never got crazy enough to talk to the white folks in that manner.

"Joshua, I want you to clean yourself up and change clothes, you hear?"

"For what?" Joshua snapped. "Ain't no need tryin' to impress them. Theys niggas just like we is."

"You hush up," Celie exclaimed. "Now I ain't puttin up with yo smart mouth tonight, boy. We's gon be good host for our new friends, you hear?"

"Yes 'um I hear", Joshua answered. "I still don't understand-

"Now I says you ain't gon start no trouble for us out here Joshua. You see what happent' to yo papa-"

"Don't you talk 'bout papa," Joshua burst out. "He was the bravest man in the world! I'm gon try to run away just like him. But it be different for me, cos' I'll make it to freedom!"

Before Celie knew it, her hand connected with the side of her son's face. "Don't you ever talk like 'dat, you hear? Do you want to get yo' self kilt?" Joshua just stared at her and walked out of the hut.

That night at dinner, Celie was the only host and although she enjoyed the company, she worried about Joshua who had not returned since their earlier argument. She didn't hear him come in until almost sun up the next morning.

"Joshua," she got out of bed when she heard him come in, "where have you been?"

"Out," was all he answered.

"You knows if Massa Simmons hear tell you goin' off and coming back at all time o' night-"

"Who cares, ma?" he cut in. "I am sick and tired of you, Massa Simmons, Everybody, tellin me what to do! I'm a man!"

"You, Joshua are a man whos goin get hung if you don' watch yo'self. Now, I know you miss papa but-"

"Yeah I miss him, and if it wasn't for the white man, we all would be together. papa taught me to be a man and if being a man means to die, then so be it!"

Celie looked at her son with tears in her eyes, shook her head at him and went back to bed.

The next morning as Celie was plowing out in the field, Harriett, a slave who lived in the hut next to her and Joshua came up to her. "Celie, where that sassy boy o' yours at? I hear he been hangin' round with Massa Simmons' daughter."

"What?" Celie replied in disbelief. "Now I know that's not true. My boy got better sense than that."

"Well," Harriett said, "Why don't yo jus' askem. My sister said she saw 'um last night over there messing around in the woods."

Celie smacked her lips together and went on about her work, refusing to believe Harriett. But later that evening at dinner, she asked Joshua about it.

“What if I am? We jus’ friends. That ol Massa Simmons ain’t gon find out.”

“Boy you talkin foolish! You know sooner or later he gon find out, then you be dead! How can you be so crazy, messing ’round with the massa’s girl? An’ what she want with you anyway? You a nigger, a slave,” Celie emphasized the two words. “Mark my words Joshua, you be sorry you ever laid eyes on her.”

But in spite of Celie’s warning, Joshua continued to see the girl. They were never together in the day, only at night. Joshua would leave home right after supper and run to the woods near their hut to meet her.

One night, Joshua came in early running in the house as if bloodhounds were chasing him. He shut the door and propped a chair against it breathing heavily. Celie heard him and got up to ask what was wrong. She noticed that his face was covered with sweat and he looked terrified.

“Ain’t nothin wrong ma,” he told her. But Celie knew that he was lying.

“I said ain’t nothin wrong” he snapped and went to his room.

Ten minutes later, there was a knock at the door, Celie opened the door to find the sheriff and Master Simmons. She just stood there for a moment as she viewed in horror her master’s angry face. It was so red and strained that it looked like a balloon about to burst. They brushed past her and went straight into the hut, searching all of the little rooms.

“What’s wrong massa?” Celie asked, terrified.

“Where’s Joshua?” the two men demanded.

“In his room, but-”

“Joshua get in here, boy” Master Simmons called. He came out slowly, trembling.

“Yes suh?” Joshua answered.

“Two of my night workers said they saw you and my Melony out in the woods carrying on. Now, I didn’t believe it, but I asked Melony anyway. You know what she told me. boy?” Master Simmons asked, moving towards Joshua.

“No suh, I don’t,” Joshua replied in a voice that shook.

“She said you forced yourself on her. Is that true, boy?”

“No suh, it ain’t.

“Are you calling my Melony a liar and a whore? ’Cause that’s what it sounds like-” With that, the master struck Joshua so hard, he fell to the floor. Celie screamed.

“Get up nigger!” Mr. Simmons yelled with the sheriff just standing there watching.

“You want me to take him in?” the sheriff asked.

“Yeah, get him outta my sight before I kill ’em. I’ll decide what to do with him tomorrow.”

“No, please massa don’t take him. He can explain, can’t you explain Joshua?”

“It’s too late for explaining. It got too late when that boy put his hands on my daughter!” With that, the sheriff collected Joshua off of the floor and followed Mr. Simmons out the door.

Celie did not know what to do. She just lost her husband and now because of Joshua’s foolishness, she knew that she was going to lose him, too. Her child was being dragged off by angry white men and there was nothing she could do about it. She was angry. Angry for losing

her husband, angry at Joshua for being so careless, angry at Master Simmons' daughter for lying on Joshua. . . Oh, how she tried to warn him of the white girls who fooled around with black men and then yelled rape when they got caught. But he was just like his father. He did what he wanted to. Celie sat down at the kitchen table and cried for what seemed like hours until she fell asleep.

She woke up the next morning with a start as the memories of last night came flooding back to her. She got dressed and ran up to Mr. Simmons' house to find out what was going to happen to Joshua.

"Celie, Joshua must pay for what he's done." Mr. Simmons said.

"I know massa, I know he was wrong. But please don't let 'um kill my boy, her voice shook with emotion.

"Sorry Celie, the decision is not solely up to me. I meet with several slaveholders and we usually get together and vote. The majority wins. But I'll tell you now that you ought to know what my vote will be." He paused then hissed: "I hope they hang him 'till his neck stretches as long as the rope that kills him and you mighty lucky I don't have you kilt, too."

Celie felt the tears running down her face. She kept silent and rose slowly from where she sat, got up and left. Once outside, she ran blindly. She ran all the way to her hut and once inside, knocked over and broke every piece of furniture in the little hut while screaming, "No! No! No!"

Two days later, Celie got up at the crack of dawn to get dressed. The slaveholders had made their decision to hang Joshua. They promised her five minutes alone with him before it happened. She walked to the sheriff's office wondering all the way, what in the world would she say to her son who was getting ready to die.

"Hey ma," Joshua said smiling as he caught sight of Celie. He was sitting on a wooden floor in an isolated room in the back of the sheriff's office.

Celie's heart winced in pain. "Joshua," she stopped as she felt tears starting.

Joshua laughed "Them white folks, can't get nothin pass 'em can you?"

"Why, Joshua, why you do it?" she asked.

"Mama, I didn't rape her. You believe me don't you?"

"Of course I do, son. I raised you better 'n that" she told him.

"She liked me first, ma. She started with me. For once, I felt like a man, not a slave. For once I did what I felt like doing, not what "massa" wanted me to do. You know ma, most slaves go through life never once doing somethin' they feel like doing. But I did and it felt good, even if I must die for it, I can say I did it. I will die a man, just like papa taught me." Celie looked at him long and hard. She rubbed her hand down his cheek, then left.

There was a crowd outside of the sheriff's office waiting to see the hanging. The crowd included slaves and many slaveowners. Some she knew but many she did not recognize. She looked up at the big oak tree where Joshua was to be hanged. She walked all the way up front, directly in front of the tree and stood there waiting for them to bring him out. As she stood there looking at all of the slave families, it saddened her as she realized that now she was all alone. She felt the tears well up again but hastily forced them back. She was determined to be strong and put a smile on her face. . . for Joshua.

by Paula V. Bowie

“Sleep”

Uninhibited they romp
 in the playground park,
Bounding from swing to swing,
Pretending a fireman's chase
 atop rusted relics,
Patronizing the miniature train.
Monkey bars and ducks
 and daffodils,
Punctuated greetings
 to another's child.
Tireless, or almost!
Home, Chili-Wienies —
 and a final fall to innocence.
 “Now I lay me down. . .
Fatherhood sealed with a kiss,
 “I love you. . .
Shh! Shh! They sleep.

Undisturbed she lies
 beside him in the dark,
Occupying sacred tryst and time,
Escaping the rhythmic racing
 of his mind,
Sensing still the warmth.
Soft perfume and dreams
 and faithfulness,
Contentment without precedent
 in either's experience.
Companion to the soul!
Bed, midnight and beyond —
 is this the place to think
 of work?
Delight disguised by a whisper,
 “My dear, dear. . .
Shh! Shh! She sleeps.

Undaunted he stands
 at the exit mark,
Tasting the nectar of heaven,
Bowing reluctantly
 before nature's altered earth,

Reaching for truth with a smile.
Strangely shy and wrinkled
and gentle,
Wisdom faintly viewed
that came not easy.
Toughened by the wind!
Green pastures, quiet —
a brief retrospective glance.
Well done.
Life framed with integrity,
“Tell us, tell us. . .
Shh! Shh! He sleeps.

Vance Davis

Cutting Cables

June 1963

The moment I opened the door to her room, Ann said, "Don't get comfortable, Grendel, we're gone."

"Grendel?" I said. "Monster of fens and darkness?"

She slung the strap of her purse over her shoulder, took me by the arm, whirled me around, said, "Well, it's dark, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it's almost eleven. Where we going?"

She pulled me out the door. "To the fens!"

Saturday night. The dorm was nearly vacant even though exams started Monday. Greeks were sponsoring end-of-semester parties they were calling study sessions.

Ann had already told me not to expect to see her until she had taken all her exams. Suited me, I was cramming, too, sequestered in my room. So I was surprised that she had called, telling me, quoting *Beowulf*, to be "quickly ready, savage and cruel."

"What fens?" I asked.

"Oh, my Grendel, Grendel," Ann said, patting my arm maternally, "out there, beyond their battlements, beyond the edge of the clearing. Where we can think straight. Plan revenge."

I was used to Ann's literary-hip silliness. It was part of her pleasing cuteness. Too, she fooled around with writing stories about modern life that were modeled on ancient stories like *Beowulf*, so I'd always thought her allusions were ways of thinking through her stories, sort of acting them out. But this seemed different, harder, sharper. Revenge. Made me a little nervous.

"The moon is full," I said as we stepped outside.

She didn't even look up. "Reflected light," she said.

The university was on a construction jag. As we drove twisting through campus, the headlights illuminated a forest of steel-girder skeletons.

"See?" Ann said. "They are made of steel. We'll have to fashion heroic weapons."

She was really beginning to get to me, but I still kept quiet. If she had something specific in mind (which was hard for me to imagine) there would be time for me to talk her out of it.

We went for a few blocks before she said anything else.

"Angela used to tell me about her father's restaurant out here someplace. Help me look for it. Moo Song's. I could use a cup of coffee. How 'bout you?"

"Suits me, if it's still open," I said. "How is Angela these days?"

Ann exhaled a deep breath. "At this point in time, I'd say that Angela is fully at peace with the world."

"That's nice," I said. "Equanimity is greatly to be desired right before exams."

I'd never said much to Ann about my real opinions of Angela. She bothered me a little. Seemed "funny" to me, kind of pushy, maybe a little arrogant. It worried me a little that Ann had chosen her as a friend.

Moo Song's was still open.

In a case in the entranceway were many testaments to Angela's intellectual and athletic

prowess: trophies, certificates, championship-team photographs, first-place ribbons from high school science fairs.

"I didn't know she had done all this," I said.

"Apple of her father's eye," Ann said flatly, without emotion.

We ordered coffee, and Ann got down to business.

"Grendel, I asked you to come out here with me because, as strong as I am now, I need a fellow conspirator, a strong warrior-husband and spear-bearer. The Stablisth Men are Beowulf and Hrothgar and the band of brothers, trying to make a circle of power-light in the forest of life. Without women. Without wives. You and I can forge a new coalition."

"My goodness, Ann," I said, "what are you going on so about? Women would be complications in that story. It's just a method for clarifying the line between humanity and monster, between good and evil."

That hacked her off real good.

"Ah, now we're getting down to it. Which is good, which evil?"

"Come on, Ann. King and warrior — human beings — are good. Grendel and his dam are evil. Monsters. And besides, the Stablisth Men have all the power. We stay at arm's length, out of trouble, till we graduate, then we really start living life. I thought that was the plan. You'll have your husband soon."

"Will I have a warrior? My plan has changed. We'll never be safe until we show that we have some fight in us. Come on, be Morgan le Fay's Bercilak, my boy. Marry my soul. Help me heap vengeance on the bachelor brotherhood."

"First Grendel, now the shape-shifting Green Knight. Ancient enemies of civilized man. Can't we be the knights, Ann? This reversal of symbols seems perverse to me."

"Perverse!" She yelled it, and the outburst snapped my head back and jerked the few Moo Song's patrons' heads around. Ann didn't notice. "We've lived with perversion so long we think nature perverse. We've lived with power concentrated in five hands for so long that we think it perverse to spread it among five million. The knights try to extinguish the dark with their meadhall backslapping and their bachelor brotherhood lance-rattling. No wonder Guinevere ran away. Grendel is agent of deep, dark woman-soul. Bachelor Grendel must kill him and then kill his dam so he can live happily everafter drinking mead with the boys. The young knight Gawain could have every sort of wonderful magic with the enchantress, but he denies her and rides back to Arthur ruling from the throne of cold light above the assembled bachelor throng."

She was beating a tattoo on the tabletop with her knife handle.

The waitress brought the coffee. The beverage of conviviality was turning to dark poison.

"Ann," I said, "settle down. I don't know what's bothering you so much. You're talking in riddles I can't solve. Don't you think we should go back now and get some sleep? We've got to do well on our exams, we can't gamble with our future."

She pointed the knife blade at me. "You're not my Grendel."

"Ann. . . ."

"Morgan the Witch."

She stood up and, as if it were some kind of ritual gesture, poured out both cups of coffee on the table. "Pay the tab, won't you?"

By the time I'd overcome my astonishment, paid the bill, made apologies for the mess, and got outside, she had driven away.

Roomie woke me up by shaking and yelling: "Steve! Steve! Spider the F wants your carcass. Right now!"

"The Spider?" I was mumbling.

Spider the Functionary. I never knew why he was called Spider. Maybe because he was so skinny, all arms and legs. Some people said he lay in wait to spin webs around students.

I'd about got my eyes open. "You know what he wants?"

My eyes finally focused. Roomie's mustache and goatee were too close. He was a Peter, Paul and Mary fan. He backed off a little.

"No. No scoop. Friends don't work Sabbaths." Evasive?

"What time is it?"

"Ten-thirty."

"Sunday morning."

"Yeah. Bad trip."

"Am I in the deep stuff, you think?"

"Possible. Sorry. The F was adamant. *Immediately* was the word."

I moaned some indecency.

Roomie was hovering solicitously as I started rolling out of bed.

"Know something I don't? About Ann?"

Roomie shrugged. "No, nothing about Ann. That Angela. . . ." Shaking his head now like people do when they feel sorrow.

"Yeah?"

"Dead — by her own hand."

"Huh!"

"True fact."

"When? What time?"

"I think yesterday about suppertime. Friends saw the ambulance and all."

"That's why Ann was so crazy last night. Why didn't she tell me? Anybody know why?"

Roomie shrugged again: "Friends say Stablisth Men took her in, manacled to a police wolf, fixed her in the middle of their five-sided table, pinned her eyelids back, and had at her. Charge: Acting Like A Man. Short hair, trousers, aggressive, and analytical. Doom was done. They shaved her head and shoved her out into the Quadrangle. Exiled the 'gook'."

I couldn't think, just moan.

There was no one else there. I walked right into the Spider's office.

He sat behind his desk. He was wearing a suit and tie that looked just like the ones my father wore. He didn't stand or offer to shake hands.

"Have a seat, Mr. Malloy."

"Yes, sir."

The Spider looked at me from beneath black eyebrows that joined at the bridge of his sharp nose. I felt kind of sick, like I felt when I had to face my father with a crumpled fender.

“Mr. Malloy, your academic record is indicative of responsible maturity and a manifestation of appropriate discipline and self-control, not to mention a reputable attention to propriety and dutiful restraint. Mr. Malloy, I have only a few moments ago consulted with your advisor and he assures me without fear of repudiation that no student demonstrates a greater regard for moral obligation. You are described by your advisor as extraordinarily decorous, conscientious, and decent. Furthermore, it is self-evident that your sense of accountability would prevent any activity on your part which might jeopardize your father’s professional reputation in the community and your mother’s maternal pride in her son’s accomplishments. Nor, I am certain, would you want to damage — irreparably — your own ability to attain and maintain gainful professional employment with an illustrious multi-national corporation.

“Mr. Malloy, a young woman reputed to be of your intimate acquaintance has been remanded over to the local law enforcement authorities for serious acts of insubordination. Having damaged personal property held in legal ownership by the King, the Czar, the Monarch, the Potentate, and the Boss, and having maliciously defaced the residential environs of said superiors, the young woman in question was incarcerated overnight and has been suspended for a period of time to be determined by the superiors. Reinstatement of said young woman will be solely at the discretion and pleasure of said superiors. Mr. Malloy, I would most strongly urge you to divest yourself of any further relationship with said young woman.

“Mr. Malloy, the insidiousness and destructive nature of revolt against the generous benefactors of a stable, economically viable society makes all the more important its vigorous opposition by upstanding young citizens such as yourself. My sincere advice — and I am confident this would surely be supportive of your own conscience — is for you to reject forthrightly the insecure restlessness of misinformed malcontents. The upwardly mobile cannot afford to anchor himself with the confused or intransigent. Keep your eye on the goal, my boy, on the brass ring on the top rung of the ladder, and allow all those who cannot keep up fall by the wayside.

“Mr Malloy, the attempt last fall of Russian Communists to infiltrate our hemisphere with weapons of nuclear terror makes imperative our constant corporate and cultural guardianship. President Kennedy’s courage in facing down the Cuban revolutionaries demonstrated once again the historical truth that the nation’s freedom depends upon the continued efforts of such serious young men as yourself to conserve and defend our traditional values. God bless you. Go forth to your commencement. Dismissed.”

Roomie’s friends later found out Ann had cut the distributor cables of the Stablisth Men’s cars and then had rolled their yards.

On the Fourth of July she called to say “Independence.” I could hear a party in the background.

“Yeah,” she said, “the whole Smith clan is here. We’re going to the fireworks display in a little while.”

We made small talk. My job search was going well. Esso and Universal Plastics had already made offers. She was doing all right. She had a job at Parks-Belk selling women’s shoes. Her

mom and dad were fine. Mine were fine, too, except that my dad had developed a heart problem. Ann said she was sorry about that. She was going to the pool whenever she could. Her sister Mary who had just graduated from high school was saying she didn't really want to go to college. I said maybe I could talk to her about the importance of preparing for a vocation. The weather was beautiful there. They'd had a backyard cookout. The weather is nice here, too, I said. I asked her how her stories were going. She said she didn't think stories were much good anymore, that she was thinking about going out to California, maybe Berkeley. I said I'd never heard of Berkeley. She said everybody was yelling at her to come on and get in the car. She had to run.

"Bombs bursting in air, you know," she said.

"Yeah," I said, "I know. Take care of yourself. Maybe I can get over there sometime soon."

"That would be great," she said. "I look forward to it. Gotta go. Bye."

"Bye, Ann."

I felt all alone, and I still felt all alone later when I walked out under the moon, still fascinated by it, reflected light though it is. I still think it's beautiful. It's very difficult for me to deny what I've been told for so long.

I thought about the stories Ann referred to that night, but for the life of me I can't turn them around like she did. I still pull for Beowulf and the Knights of the Round Table.

I don't know.

I thought of those cut cables on five BMW's. I thought of Aunt Carrie on the farm castrating a hog. Squeezing the hog's testicles away from its body and clipping them off just like that.

It's July. Summer. I've graduated, ready for life. It's 1963. We kicked the Red missiles out of our part of the world. But this thing. . . .

But this thing with Ann. . . .

I don't know. . . .

It's like I feel there's a lot more trouble ahead.

Marion Hodge

The Egg

I walked around the green
and saw a flight of blackbirds
swarming the branches
bending them
beneath their weight,
some falling in confusion
to the ground and eaten.
I saw feathers
on the ground
signs of a struggle.
What ate the birds?
I heard it creeping
in the bush
tending its young.
I thought of the unlaid
eggs and unbred
tyrants and how
hopeless the struggle
would be, and I
hated the birds
for falling.

W. Troy Anders







