

Fall 1983

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Valparaiso University

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Fall 1983 7

THE LIGHTER Vol.27 No.1

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The Lighter thanks all contributors for sharing their works with the campus and invites comments and criticism on the selection and presentation of the material.

The Lighter will be accepting submissions for the
Spring 1984 issue until
Wednesday, March 21, 1984.

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**Eardrums pound the pillow
To incessant nightmare marching while
Eyelids filter explosive light
From television's booming mushrooms while
Intolerable heat prevents wished-for sleep while
Ovens exhale stinking smoke,
Somewhere
Miles and years away.
A page turned,
Eye averted,
Morning.
These have saved us
Today.
René Steinke**

Concerned with poet and reader OR
Rambling Observations x 10 -3 s

Our concerns shift from world to man, from object to eye - as intellect tries to cope with its surroundings, with an abstract and almost scientific language - dramatizing the disjunction between man, animal and world.

Cool equations solving for x , the crucial artistic dilemma - is a poet/scientist to be possessed by the world, or shall he possess it? How to approach it, with mystic transport or Analytic Geometry, emotion or mind?

A poet of continuity talking contrast, with a voice that is intimate yet unrevealing. Why intellect? Intellect, because in ordering the images of mind, space, and time - it orders the world. And the brains lack of dramatic shape, strews the rambling observations of the loop and whirl of thought, across the microscope's slide.

This is an idiosyncratic style seeking to overcome the inertia of silence. Clearly the joke will have to wait until the time when every thing is serious. For language and comedy does not come to terms with age and death, but serves as our central evasion:

The dizzy swerve of conversation tempered by the knowledge of pain, hurt, and death. In the tension between the froth of stress-induced creativity and the fear of knowledge, some amazing things occur among people: Friendships, loves and angers of meaning.

The calculating loner engaged in calculated independence, with terms equal on both sides, and the solution dependent on the coefficient destiny. The result stimulating an expansive voice in all of us. For the meaning and the heart of all formulas and poems, depends on the readers intellect, openness and daring.

Kirk T. Melhuish



After a Rain

**An orange eye,
glowing bright on willow branches,
snatches my eyes
scorches its color on my eyelids.**

**I blink sunsets
for an hour.**

Kristine R. Volland

Biking in the Hills

So you think you know this place.
Take out your maps of all the little roads,
those you are not so sure of.
You want to choose the ones with the least
traffic and the most scenery,
but the names tell nothing.
You could ask someone,
but the roads look different by car;
things are more intimate on two wheels.

There's the swell of hills,
red-winged blackbirds in the water ditches,
a woman in a sun-hat planting beans,
a willow tree swaying across a picture window.
These are things not learned in school,
how things don't add up
or the simple
trek-trek-trek
of thin tires treading the road.

There is no way to explain
the way this air caresses your neck,
then leaps to tussle the feathers of a crow,
the way you know the direction wind flows,
the beat of the sun,
the small dog that delights in tugging
at a bone, tossing it up and catching it
firm in his mouth.

All the time you are laughing
the road is spinning under your wheels.
You are looking ahead,
already forgetting.
What is the name of the lake ahead?
Which roads are dirt, which stone,
which are paved?

As you love the air, turning,
animals straighten and stare.
You acknowledge each other in a beautiful
dance, then break before it is finished.
These roads are the most shaded, and slow.
You could travel them till the sun drops,
still searching for the wild violets
under the pines.

Terri L. Muth

**The lonely
sunset brings
out the majestic
mountain, and
covers up the
misty valley.
I am the Law;
it is so.**

Stacey Groth



NATURE AND ME

*I'm alone on this mountain
with nothing but the birds and the bees.
Nature and me together.*

*Except for the airplane flying overhead,
Spreading its sound for hundreds of miles.*

*Except for the grinding of the trucks on the highway,
Far below in the valley.*

*Except for the dog bark, Child yelling and stereo in an
area greatly overpopulated.*

*Except for the army helicopter over the hills,
making routine maneuvers.*

*Except for the paved roadway, except for the wandering
tourist, except. . .*

*Except for the poisonous air from the
Helicopters, trucks, airplanes, factories, overpopulation.*

Nature and me together.

Flowering, soaring birds
communing with the clear sky
Lightly touching earth.

MQG

Little breeze goes on
it lights on flora, fauna
Upsetting little.

MQG



Smooth black arms
reach up to grasp
handfuls of brightly painted leaves.

Month after month
the arms, unmoving,
grasp the leaves, which,
growing old, muster
dwindling energy
to put on one final
firework display
of spectral colors.

The black arms rejoice
and wave the leaves
for all to see.

The proud leaves
relax to a brownish grey
and settle back to enjoy
retirement.

But the black arms,
disappointed with the
sudden fading to dullness
discard the leaves with disgust
and begin their search
for new, beautiful leaves
with which to adorn their
finely manicured hands.

Chanelle M. McMillan

Parting

Standing, I saw a
pear-shaped dewdrop
glistening on the delicate
edge of a leaf.

Then, through watery eyes
I saw it quickly slip away—
leaving only her moist kiss
on his green lip
in remembrance.

And in the sad mist
another tear formed,
very thin ones
covering his green soul till
slowly they came together—
rolled down his smooth soft
cheek and to the edge—
making time stand motionless
till it slipped away
making the leaf quiver
yet again.

If only that dewdrop would
stay with that lonely leaf.

For in that timeless
stillness, he sparkled
and she glistened....
together they were beautiful.

Krehl



1975

by
Salam Yamout

I was twelve and life was easy and beautiful. Every day, I used to go to school wearing a blue and white uniform. It was always clean and well ironed, and it had on the top of the left sleeve the initials of the private French school of which I was proud. Saturday afternoon, I used to go to the movies or swimming, then to a store called 'Jackpot' to buy all kinds of useless gadgets we had seen in French and American magazines: Charlie Brown's posters, perfumed paper and ink, original and colored barrettes, 'don't disturb' and 'stop' signs ... etc. Sunday was the family's gathering day; I dressed up and hung around adults all day. At this time, I was working with

some friends in a real television program. In addition, my free time was taken by flute, piano, and ballet lessons, Girl Scouts, and the reading of books, mainly 'mystery' ones. These books I read taught me that the majority of people are rich, beautiful, intelligent, healthy, and loved. The 'bad guys' are very few; anyhow, they always end up in jail...

As days passed, my father's face looked more worried and serious. People around me began to talk more and more about politics, and like a parrot, I myself began to repeat words like Palestinians, Phalangist, and Lebanese army. I was forbidden to go out by myself or just pass in some populous areas. Indeed, I had never been to these areas; I'd seen some of them while passing through by car ... Then, one day, the school bell rang half an hour sooner than usual and all the school kept silent. We knew something very important must have happened. There were a lot of parents waiting for their kids, but I didn't see my father's face in the crowd. Afraid, I waited for my little brother; then we hurried home together. In the street, we could feel a heavy ambiance of rush and discomfort. When I finally arrived home I knew that a bus of Palestinians had been attacked at Ain-el-Rummaneh. I never came back to this school again, to this kind of life again: the civil war had begun.

We stayed for about two months at home. At the beginning, we only heard the far and weak sounds of fire guns and bombs. Somewhere but not here, people were dying. Then, the conditions of life became more difficult: frequent electricity and water cuts, limited supply of food. We had to be careful not to waste water even when washing our hands. We had to stay in evenings around a pitiful candle and a transistor broadcasting death and bad news. A lot of thefts were occurring. As a result, my father brought two guards to protect us. We settled the guards downstairs. Every day, I used to go downstairs to give them their portion of the meal. I observed that they used a lot of bread with their meal while I remembered being forbidden to eat my bread before finishing my meat. They were illiterate and my sister and I began to teach them writing and reading in Arabic. They taught us how to use

a rifle and shoot ... It was exciting because it was just like the movies, but scary at the same time. I realized that I now had a responsibility; that I would have to kill a man.

During the next stage, the bombing became intense and very near. The smallest room of the house happened to be the safest because it was separated from the source of bombing by thick walls. How many nights did we spend there afraid, angry and feeling vulnerable, like captured rats awaiting the moment of death! And we had to kill time; my uncle used to count the explosions; my sister, the two guards and I played poker with false money. One day the guards secretly asked my sister if we had any whiskey. We had but knew our parents would never allow us to use it. So we cheated: we made Irish coffee with a lot of whiskey and no cream ...

These were the days of the first contradictions of my life. For the first time, I saw the world with other eyes, different from the teachings of school or parents. I remember crying to my mother and saying, 'I could never kill a man, even if he is Israeli,' and the guards, of course, laughed at me very much. Another day, somebody talked about a woman being pregnant after a rape. I was horrified; for me, the baby cannot be 'made' unless the mother and the father, legally married of course, love each other very much. Indeed, the civil war and the presence of the guards with us taught me a lot of things; whereas I had thought life to be a 'bowl of cherries,' they showed me that there is war and peace, sex and love, poverty and wealth, humiliation and pride, bad Evil and God just and merciful, and whiskey to forget everything ...

Since then, I travel from country to country feeling strange and homesick. Since then, my parents' have dealt with me as an adult; I have to play up to my image of the totally responsible and 'good' girl. Now, I can kill a man, not with a rifle, but with my hands. All people change their concepts of life, but maybe for them it is not so dramatic. The fact is that I feel that I have missed something, that a part of my life has gone, that I was asked to behave like an adult much too soon. Like the child separated from its mother, I feel that the war separated me from myself.

Difficult – – For Whom?

by
Donna Barrett

The Decisions, which one while growing up makes, affect one in different Ways later in Life. This is especially true, when one High School begins. By choosing the Courses, which one wants, begins the Person into a unique Individual to develop. Such was the Case, when i in eighth Grade was and for my freshman Courses registered. My Father thought, it would a good Idea be, if i a foreign Language learned. For some



unknown Reason chose i German. I guess, it was because People told me always, that German a very difficult Language is. I have always Challenges loved! Much to my Dismay was my Decision to study it not as easy as i thought, it would be.

When i for freshman Classes registered, made my Counselor the Process very difficult for me. I was extremely nervous and her seeming Air of Superiority did not much help. When i told her that i German to study would like, looked she at me, as if i crazy were. She explained, that German Grammar very awkward is and that it too difficult for me be would. She thought, i should something more Easy and Conventional like French or Spanish take. To say the Least was i greatly offended by her „Argument.“ She was actually saying, that i not smart enough was, the Language to understand. Then crossed it my Mind, that she also saying was, that all the German-speaking People in the World, including the native Speakers themselves and those, who by some great Fortune it studied have and it understand can, an elite Group of People are. If that the Case were, wanted i it, that i among the Elite be. Also wanted i it, that i her show, that i it accomplish could. With all This in Mind told i her, that i at Least to try wanted. She said, it would all right be and then wished she me good Luck.

To be truthful think i not, that i her Wish for Luck needed. I have for almost six Years German studied, and it seems, as though it my Major be will. I do not find, German Grammar difficult or even the slightest Bit awkward to be. In Fact has my Study of German a uniquely entrancing, if not a mindboggling Effect upon my English had.

*A toddler constructed images.
 Odd,
 Twisting
 Exploring lines
 In bold,
 Crayon color.
 Juxtaposed forms
 Dance on antiseptic
 White walls
 That form a world
 For one.
 Behind him,
 The worn eyes
 Fret
 And spat
 And wait
 To erase his marks.*

Rene' Steinke

SUBWAYS

**by
 Eric Appleton**

**Standing alone,
 on a platform waiting for a train--
 Hemmed in on all sides
 By a lonely mass...
 Only my time to bide,
 I stare and sigh,
 At the tiled walls
 Of the massive mall
 All filled,
 with lines--**

Personalities scribbled on a subway wall

**And they're all
 In the guise of violence--
 Demarcation of some turf
 Something on the way to work,
 Or just because
 A person wanted to leave some mark,
 Over mine--
 And in that writhing mass of ink and paint
 In a corner, in pencil faint
 I wrote my name,
 Joined the crowd
 Living in a subway hall
 Aren't we all--
 In a word,
 People.**

PANDEMONIUM

moobrayroarhonkneighchirp(ing)

natur/al/e's

(no)

ise

carsplanest(rain)s

FOREar

(S) p l i

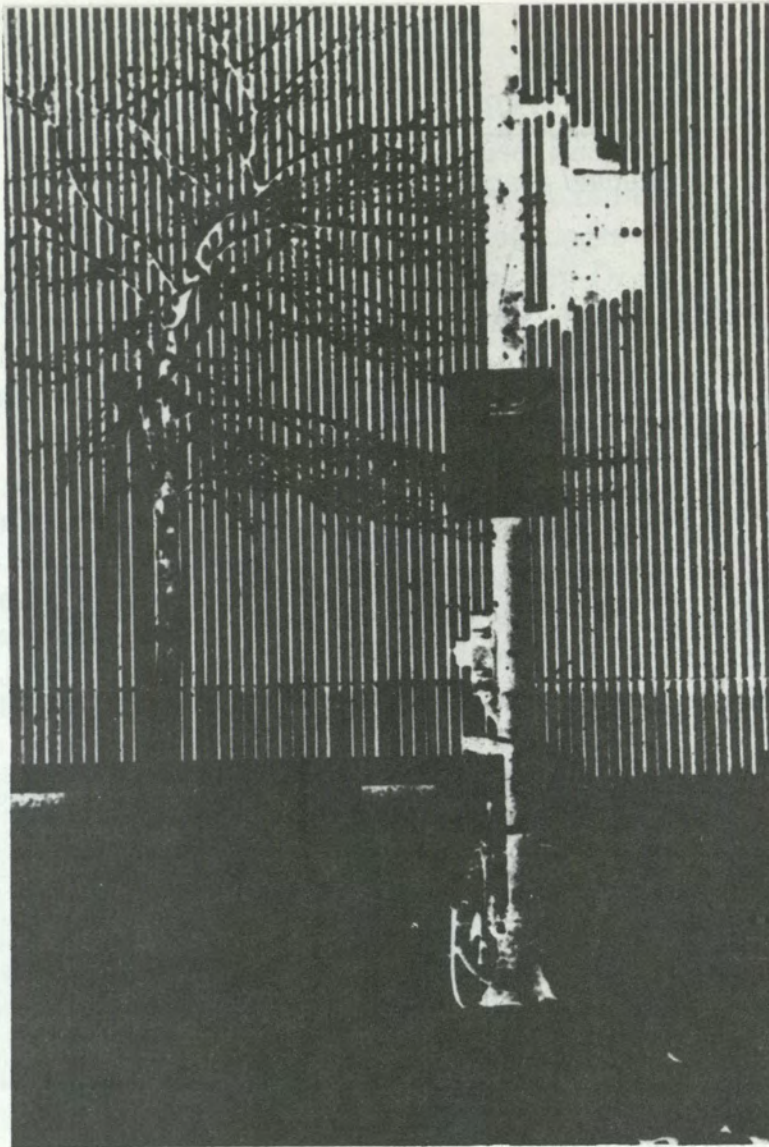
T

ting

(ound)

(quiet)

Kristin R. Geske



TENNESSEE TOWN

Tennessee town
So small I don't know your name
With khaki-cheeked children
Scrambling their toes on the hot cement
Waiting for
The popsickle man.
Tennessee river town
Unload your barge of coal.
Call me on the
Intermountain Telephone Exchange.
Call me home.

Kimberly Ewing

COSMOPOLITAN SAYS: _____

feetcarsbusesbikes
race not slowly

TO

searspenneysfieldssaks

runaway

she roams the dark and dirty
paths
slinking along in spikes
tube top reflecting in the night
vision is distorted through
pin-point pupils
health deteriorating
she shivers in the eighty degree
weather
away from maternal dominance
hostage to her own haste
identity becomes infected
from flimsy forms and
nasty substances
a yellow taxi arrives
with a horny three-piece suit
inside
flashing tempting green in her
face
she surrenders
and her mind remembers
it wasn't going to be this way.

Gretchen Puls

(gotta have it)
it's NOW (the TRUE me)

looks not half bad in fact it looks pretty good on
me (on him on her on it on us on them)
i (you he she it we they) feel great when
i (you he she it we they) wear it

-----MOM: "NO."-----

unsmiling, pouting
more than a little

--but ma, everyone else has ___--

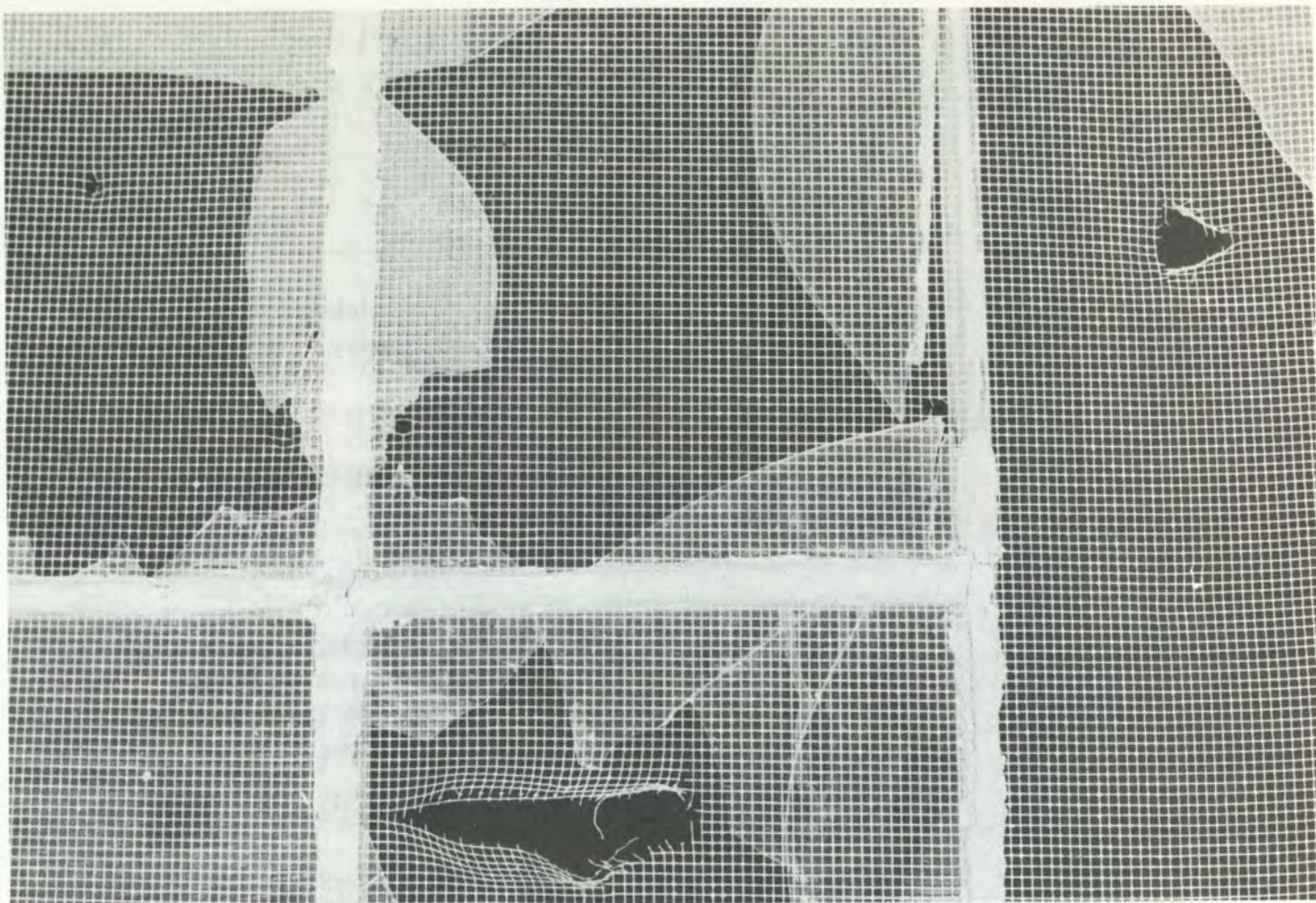
they'll
laugh at
snarl at
Gossip About
H A T E me

prep's in
punk's in
pot's in

gotta be it
gotta do it
gotta get in

it's lonesome out here

Chanelle M. McMillan



Pegasus-Flight

by Christine Grusak

Katerine took one last look at the castle before she plunged into the misty regions of the Syth. Night was closing in rapidly from behind, giving the sky a disquieting appearance. A storm seemed inevitable, though it never rained in the valley. The perpetual mist was enough to sustain the thick underbrush and dwarf trees. The castle itself was ominous, shrouded in a black veil of mist. It beckoned her, but Katerine knew she could not go back. She turned away and continued her difficult journey into the Syth.

For two months she had lived in the castle. It seemed to spring up from the mist itself. She had been a princess. Court jesters danced and tumbled for her amusement. Her ladies-in-waiting attended her every whim. They never questioned her, never chattered aimlessly; indeed, they never spoke at all. Only their gentle laughter could be heard echoing like faint chimes, winding a silken path through the corridors of the castle. They had adorned her hair with jewels and flowers, drawn her bath scented with lilac and roses. Her robes were of purest silk and finest satin. Each evening

she attended magnificent balls given by the king. When she entered the banquet hall the ladies of the court would curtsy, the gentlemen would bow. she would pass haughtily among them and they would gasp at her beauty. Then there would be dancing. Such dancing! A whirlwind of fluttering gowns and sparkling jewels, whispered propositions and blushing replies. Every man sought her partnership, every dance was filled, and the music played and played until the sun began to rise above the eastern mountains. She never tired. She would dance until no one was left to be her partner. Then she would call to her maidens, and they would take her to her chambers. She would sleep well into the afternoon and in the evening there would be another ball...

Katerine had hoped she could stay forever at the castle. The walls had seemed so strong. The people had been so perfect, so elegant and beautiful. But slowly the castle and its inhabitants had begun to rot. Eventually there was nothing left untouched. At the balls the musicians were always off-key. At the banquets the meat was moldy, the wine vinegar. Katerine sought shelter in her chambers, but the rooms were like ice, the walls were damp and she found rats under her bed. The pleasant corridors had become as full of stench and decay as sewer tunnels. The laughter of the handmaidens was harsh and mocking. The castle gave her nightmares. Horrible nightmares...

She dreamed she was standing in the open air with a small boy. She was a young girl wearing a pretty plaid dress. She was angry with the small boy because he would not leave her alone. The boy cried because he loved her, but she only laughed at him. They were on a busy city street. The cars roared up and down like angry dragons. The skyscrapers glistened like castle turrets. Katerine pointed to the stream of traffic. She told the boy he must kill a dragon before she would love him. The little boy took a sling shot from his pocket and charged into the line of roaring beasts...

Katerine screamed.

When she awoke she did not know who the little boy was. She could not remember the names of the objects in the dream, or what she had called the strange metal machines. They were not dragons, though she had called them that, too.

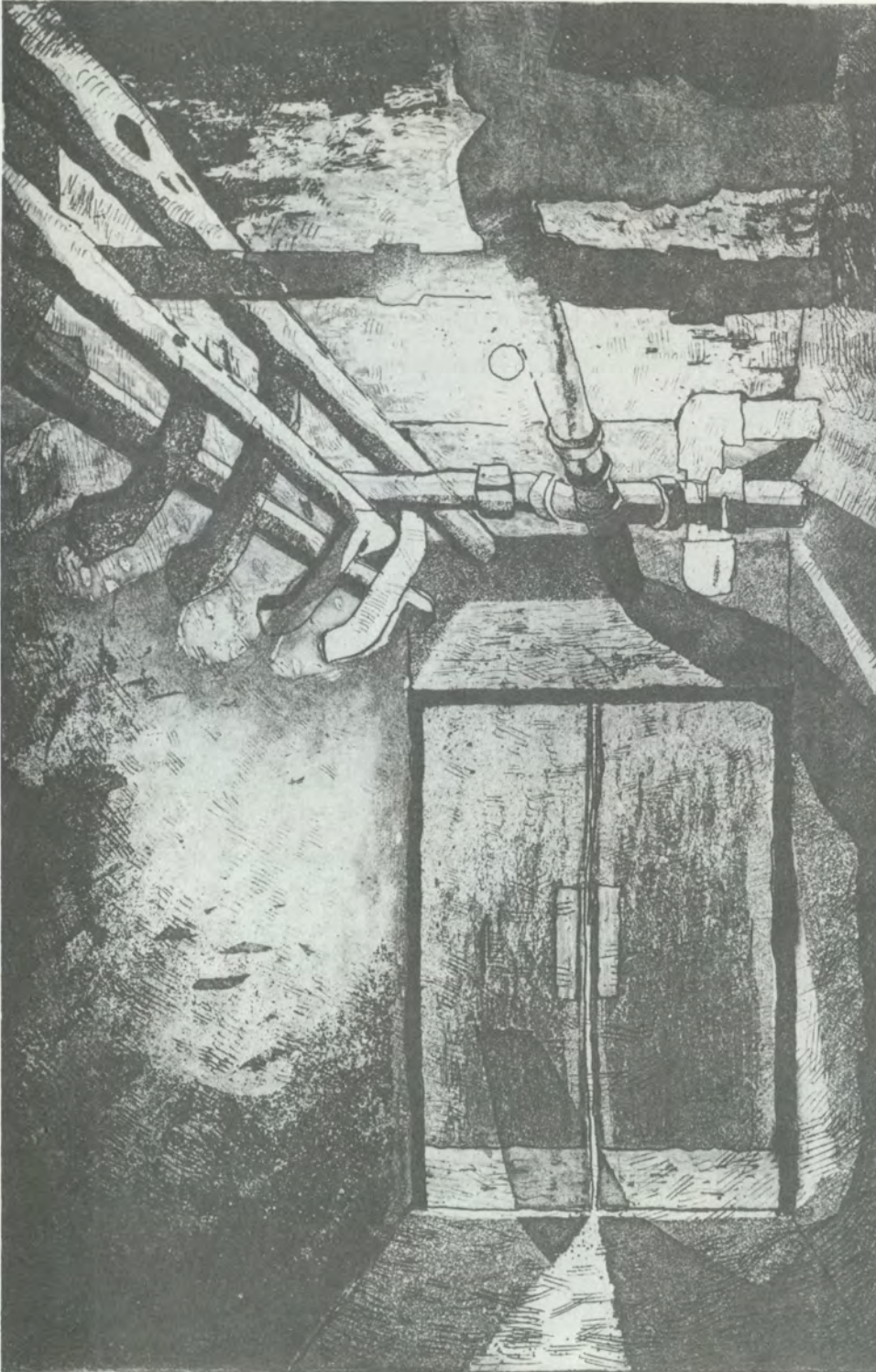
The place had been familiar to her in the dream, but it was hideously strange on waking. It was a nightmare that told Katerine she must leave the castle, for realization was eating away at her world like a cancer. By morning the castle would be a mountain of rubble.

So she had taken flight once again. The further she plunged into the mist, the more the castle and Katerine's memories began to blend in with the mist. She found a dry patch of leaves beneath a low, bushy tree and curled up into them like a lost child to sleep. She had quite forgotten the castle and the nightmare. She did not dream. She barely breathed as the moon came out and stars began to glimmer. She was half-conscious of the moon through her haze of sleep. It became brighter and brighter and she was pleased by it. It was a great shining bauble in the sky, hung up for her delight; but something was wrong. The moon became too bright, intolerable. Katerine woke up screaming. Her world was shattering around her like fragile glass tinkling to the ground in a thousand pieces. In it she heard the chiming laughter of the maiden, the distant clink of wine goblets, and the rhythmic strains of a waltz. As if from a height she watched the castle come crashing down, thundering into the mist.

On the street above her, four paramedics were shining a searchlight down into the black sewers. When they spotted the girl one of them went clanging down the metal ladder. She was sitting on a narrow ledge, ten feet below him. He tried to talk to her, to contact her in some way before he took her from the sewer. Katerine only sat very still. A tear trickled down her cheek. The paramedic climbed onto the ledge and put his arm around her waist. Using the taut rope that hung from the surface he swung her into space. Then his feet hit the metal ladder and the men pulled her to safety. Suddenly Katerine recognized the street where she had stood with the little boy. The four men seemed to have his face. She had killed him and now he would get his revenge. She remembered the name of the beast with the flashing eyes as they loaded her into its belly. Ambulance. And they would take her back to the place with the white walls and locked doors. Katerine prayed that this was only a part of the nightmare, but she knew it was not.







Alone

**I rip my cuticle
til it bleeds;**

**feel the bruise,
purple and throbbing,
form under my torn skin;**

**watch a brittle, maroon
scab
cloak the wound
like a doctor
drawing a sheet
over the dead.**

Kristine R. Volland

PUNCHLINE

**It's a joke, isn't it?
This world can't be for real.
Art imitates Life-
Life imitates Art
"Doesn't that tree look just like a painting?"**

**A fast billion in an obscure suburb
"What should I spend it on now?
All my foreign bank accounts are full."
Pity the rich.**

**A day's wait for one bowl
I wonder if everyone will get fed this time."
Buy them some underwear, Sally Struthers.
Ignore the starving
After all
Who's fault is it anyway?**

**Laugh at this world.
Laugh and don't even think...once.
Well, He wasn't laughing
He was crying
A joke that costs your life
Isn't
Funny**

S. M. Buss

EVIL

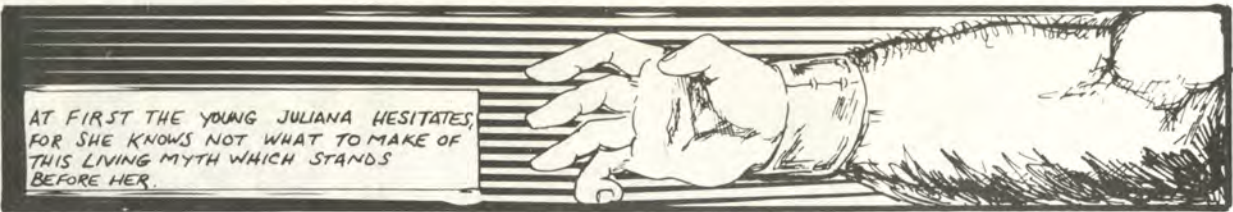
**Grond and garged
all black and levid
Starnalg, loof, with
rashed fargs
I said "Margs?"
but I only heard--
silence...**

LP

Smog shrouds the day
We return
To places of the past,
Now shrunken.
We are too large
For gateposts and swings.
From the balcony above.
She yelled,
"Don't trample the flowers!"
But we did anyway.
We were forced to here.
The balcony's low and crooked now,
And the garden's given herself
To promiscuous weeds.
So we balance on a wobbly past,
And listen for mother.

Rene' Steinke





AT FIRST THE YOUNG JULIANA HESITATES, FOR SHE KNOWS NOT WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS LIVING MYTH WHICH STANDS BEFORE HER.



YET, IT IS NOT LONG BEFORE HER WILL BENDS...

THIS NIGHT SHE IS HIS.



JULIANA, JULIANA! I AM HOME... RETURNED FROM A GOOD DAY'S HUNT



JULIANA ...

OH HANS I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOUR SAFE RETURN... JULIANA IS GONE DISAPPEARED...



WHEN ?

SHE WENT TO GATHER FLOWERS HANS,



BUT THAT WAS HOURS AGO. I'M SO WORRIED... I WENT TO LOOK BUT IT WAS DARK... ALSO



I HEARD MUSIC IN THE FOREST...



THEN GYPSYS TOOK HER? MY WIFE... DO NOT CRY MAMA. I SHALL FIND THEM

AND THEN RETURN OUR BELOVED JULIANA WHERE SHE BELONGS...



AT FIRST HE IS UNABLE TO SPEAK... BUT ANGER SOON GIVES WAY...



NO!

JULIANA GET BACK



I'LL FREE YOU FROM THE SPELL WOVEN BY THIS DEMON!!!

TURNING THE SATYR UTTERS WORDS IN A LANGUAGE LONG THOUGHT DEAD. SINEWS TIGHTEN AS HE...



ATTACKS.



THROUGH THE CENTURIES MAN HAS FACED THE UNKNOWN IN FEAR...

DESPITE THE FEAR CHURNING WITHIN HIM HANS RESPONDS SWIFTLY TO HIS ASSAILANT.



FOR EONS THE CREATURE HAD LIVED ON THIS WORLD THINKING HIMSELF IMMORTAL



HE NOW REALIZES THAT HE IS DYING...



WAS HE TRULY A BEWITCHING DEMON OR MERELY THE LAST OF A RACE EXISTING ONLY IN MYTH AND IMAGINATION?



IT'S ALL OVER MY LOVED ONE... IT'S ALL OVER...



LET US RETURN HOME, YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH MUCH THIS NIGHT.



AHH!!

NO!!!



B-BLOOD!!!

JULIANA? WHAT HATH COME OVER TH...



JULIANA RAISES THE BLOOD COVERED ARROW OVER HER HEAD ...

SHE IS NO LONGER THE WOMAN HANS ONCE KNEW.



SUDDENLY THE NOISE OF AN ARROW PIERCING FLESH IS HEARD...



YET IT IS NEITHER HIS ARROW NOR HIS FLESH.

JULIANA'S BODY FALLS



HANS HOLDS HER LIMP FORM CLOSE TO HIS. ONCE AGAIN THERE IS MUSIC ...



SHE APPROACHES HIM...

AT FIRST HANS HESITATES, FOR HE KNOWS NOT WHAT TO MAKE OF THE LIVING MYTH WHICH STANDS BEFORE HIM

YET IT IS NOT LONG BEFORE HIS WILL BENDS



THIS NIGHT HE IS HERS.

The End

A Death in the Forest

My cousin, Philip, who was two years my senior and a near-by neighbor, was responsible for me whenever I went to places far from the Northeast Washington area where we lived in the 1940s. This rule of "the family" was unquestioned by me and begrudgingly obeyed by Philip, for there were two other female cousins who often required his attention also. The exception to his boredom was when he accompanied me to an occasional "appropriate" film ("Yankee Doodle Dandy," or "Jungle Book," are two I recall) on U Street, the single street of entertainment — it seemed to me — for Negroes in those days. The racial restrictions did not touch me, though, for the familiar ones were controlled and puritanical enough to minimize any constraints placed on me by the world outside. Still, I was a happy child; I believed it natural for parents and relatives to demonstrate love and concern through strictness.

I recall a day when Philip and I went to the neighborhood movie house on one of those rare days when we saw none of our close friends after the weekly serial and cartoons. Our other cousins were away, one at camp, another one visiting relatives in the British West Indies. It was a late August afternoon, warm and muggy, a lazy summer day we wanted to extend in freedom as long as possible.

"Let's go through the forest for a part of the way," I suggested.

"You know you're not allowed in there."

"I won't tell if you don't."

"That's for sure."

We called it a forest, but it was really a large undeveloped tract of land that extended from a dead-end street four blocks away to the busy thoroughfare near the movie theater. It was a dense track of woodland that had not lost its wild aspect: an uneven row of trees, maple, green ash, and one chinaberry skirted the south end, which was directly across from the theater. A friend of ours, Amelia Cornish, lived with her mother and

grandfather, Sebastian Whiting, in a large hill-top house at the far end of this land. Amelia, living under similar bourgeois restrictions and care, was forbidden to go beyond her grandfather's property, and I was forbidden to deviate from the prescribed sidewalk route from home to movie house and back to home. Grabbing hold of my hand, Philip pulled me into the thicket quickly.

"O.K., Martha, if we're going, we'd better hurry."

We plunged into a green world despoiled under-foot by liquor bottles, papers, discarded brown bags, popsickle wrappings, and other trash of known and unknown objects that depressed me immediately.

"It gets better further along," said Philip.

I looked at his handsome (so I was told) sandy-colored face. "How do you know?"

"Don't tell," he laughed, "but Tony Cornish and I have been here several times. We usually bring our BB guns."

We walked, no longer hand-in-hand, and I looked up through the tall trees and saw spikes of sunlight shafting down. I heard a bird-call and touched a leaf from a drooping young green ash tree.

"I know, I know," I said to him in a low voice. "You and Tony kill birds. You are cruel."

"You're sappy."

"I love nature. I love the trees and flowers — and the birds."

"You and cousin Clare are both alike."

Possibly, I thought. (She was the cousin who was visiting in the West Indies.) We were — our friends, our cousins — all so close in age that we were like a large family. We played with the same people most of the time, went to the same parties, had the same doctors, the same dancing teachers (either the black one or a Russian emigre who ignored America's racism), and we seemed to be either related or to be with other families

a short-short by Margaret Perry

that were closely related to one another. This personal insularity was akin to the sudden quietude that enveloped us as we weaved our way into the denser segment of the woods. The air was thick and sticky. I wiped the dampness from my brow, but felt carefree, unafraid; indeed, I sensed a reckless joy. Suddenly we both stopped, as if a restraining arm were pushing us down into the ground. Sounds halted us.

We heard them, muffled and uneven, utterances unallied to familiar cadences, coming from the direction we were traveling. I had never heard such sounds before in my life, and I was intrigued and fearful at the same moment. Philip caught my hand and put a finger to his lips with his free hand.

“Wait for me,” he whispered.

I shook my head. “I want to go with you. Don’t leave me, Philip.”

My whisper was tearful, not merely because of fear but also because I wanted to see what he might discover. We tiptoed a bit further and peeped through a mass of maple sprouts that were about six feet tall. The air was stifling. A boundless membrane of humidity thickened the haze of the hot afternoon air. Still, we could see, at a distance in a small clearing by a fully grown tree, a man prone and a woman stretched backwards upon the ground. The tree trunk hid their center portions, so we had the magician’s effect of bodies cut in two — the head and torsos on one side of the tree, the legs that thrashed about to the right side of the huge maple. The man, directly atop the woman, had his head turned from our direction; yet the woman, whose face we could see, was unaware of our stares. Indeed, she probably could not see us, hidden as we were; and I was nonplussed by the varied expressions of pain and pleasure, of transcendence from the world about her. I doubted if she would have seen us in our espial pose if we had been more visible from the spot where we were hunched like two mounds of earth between the humid maple leaves. The woman’s

arms pushed against the man, as if to toss him from her; then she grabbed him, the anchor of life to her, it seemed. Philip let loose his hold on the leaves and nudged me; I remained staring at the struggling pair. Then Philip grabbed me roughly by the arm and said, in a tone of mixed anger, impatience, and frustration. “C’mon, we’d better get out here.” His voice was a whisper.

I followed him quickly because his pace was rapid and he was still holding on to my arm. My head was turned in the backward direction, however, no longer seeing but retaining my last view and sound of the couple, of his jerky movement forward and the shriek that emitted from the woman. I had trembled, too; for a moment I felt a tremor of cold ripple through my body.

We trudged up the concrete pavement in silence, as if words would tell us more than either wanted to hear. Philip even walked with me all the way home and had a tall, cooling glass of ice tea with me in the kitchen. At the moment my mother left the room, Philip stood up and sighed loudly, as if only at that instant he had recovered his breath. He left without a parting word or glance.

Since it was not my habit to read the newspaper I had to sneak each day to get hold of the local section so I could scan it carefully. There was no mention of a dead woman found in the woods. And when there was nothing about it to be found in the Negro paper either, I concluded the man must have buried her. She would never be found, never — and only Philip and I knew that something mysterious had happened. Somehow, without ever talking about the incident, I could sense that Philip, like me, didn’t enjoy this hidden knowledge. Soon I recovered from my fear of thinking about the incident, and I tried to convey by relief to Philip. But he had never displayed fear; instead, he appeared quieter and more mature to me afterwards exhibiting a secret wisdom or a confirmation of matters too profound for my eight-year old mind.



Bitte, Nicht Egal

**Ruhe kommt noch wieder
Schief doch nicht dabei.
Sprich und denk dann moege
Die Ziet von Warten sei.**

**Die Meer kann nicht trennen
Die Loesung die wir brauchen.
Alles liegt schon in Maennern
Fuer Vertrag oder Rauchen.**

Dan Lindemann

Catching the Train to Austria

Smile!

This is the greatest adventure
of your life.

Look at the photos of you,
looking to the east,
past the train station,
happy to be measuring miles in slats,
in columns of light.

The track was your musical staff, and
you, the note, striking a tune
as you moved along it.
You were still hoping, then,
for someone who could speak your language,
or at least might know the one
you dream in.

You are watching the world bounce outside the windows,
past the grey of the inside,
past the two Germans who speak and smile.
They invite you to share an apple,
cutting slices and dipping them in sugar,
but you shake your head,
hoping they understand that you would
rather stare out at a land that is not yours;
hills, birds you cannot know.
You imagine.

You are never sure if you are on the berth
or if you are the child in the field banging cans,
waving at the train passing through.
Your mother hands you a scythe, tells you to cut.
Your father laughs, handing you a basket.
Daily measures are even as the train hums by.
In the distance, the staff disappears.
When you sing, it's not
the language you write in.
Sundays you lie in bed dreaming
till the birds come to get you.

Terry L. Muth

Reaching Toward the Small

It takes the longest time to
find the simplest thing.

And so I take the peel,
taste the bruise, and
throw the apple away.
So I spend Sunday afternoons
looking for the leaf sapped of all summer.
So I wait again for that note
peeled in Granada,
when I pressed my palm to stone that
looked to my death and back at my story
and took it all from the warm of my touch.

Because I try to take every echo
home with me when
I lose my luggage.
Because it takes nearly all my life
to open my palms to their lines.
Because every fall,
I peel my life away,
dreaming of the apples we ate
on the roof of the chicken
coop, pretending we could
lie there still and not even
the stars would find us.

Terri L. Muth

I remember when
chickens talked, grass was purple
unicorns were real
people told jokes all day long
and hamster swine ruled the world.

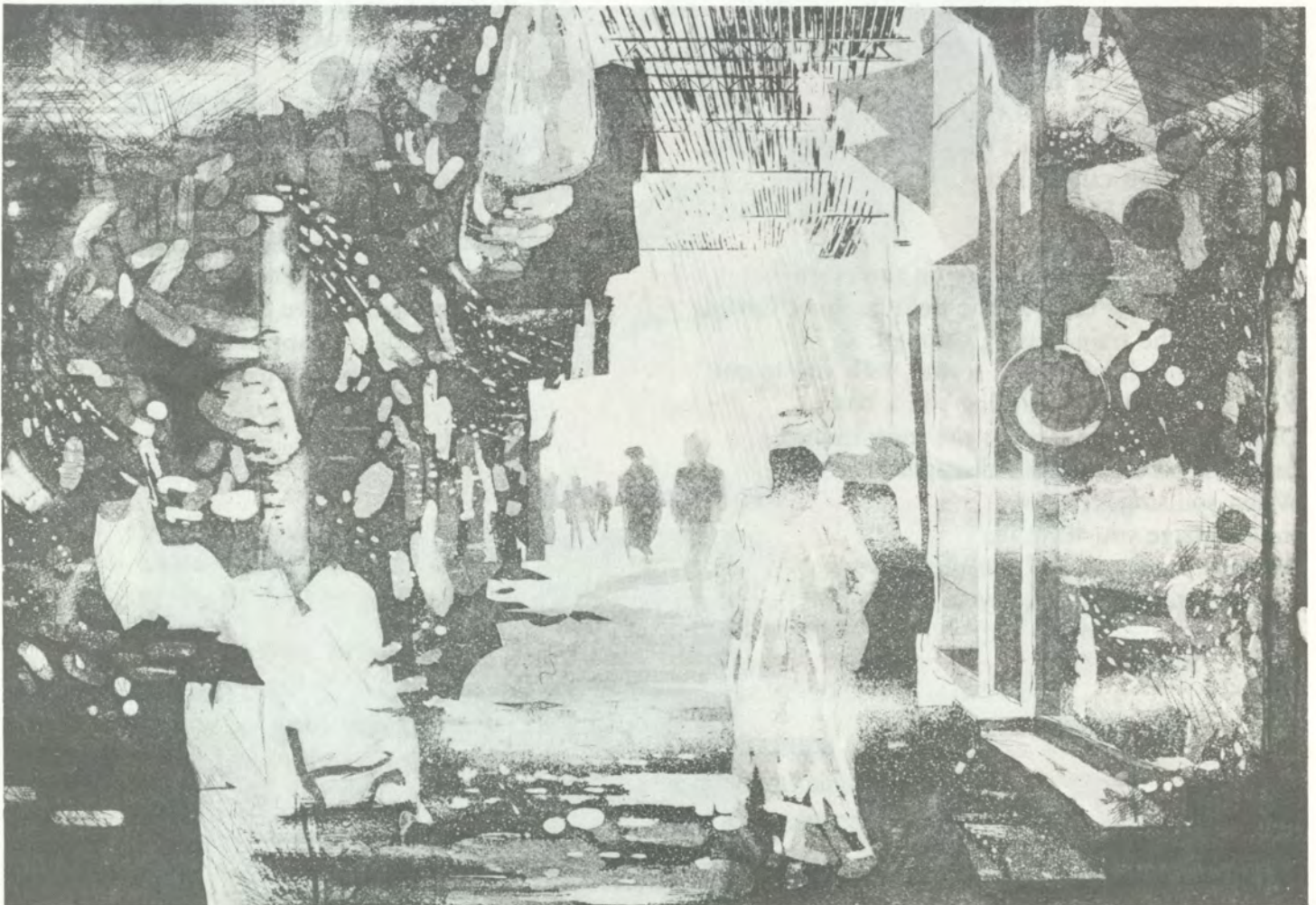
Kirk T. Melhuish

This Bond

by

Carole Nuechterlein

It would be easier if we weren't friends.
Then I'd see you and nod to you without
Exchanging more than a few words about
The weather, our families and current trends
In politics. But it's too late now. We
Are too close — we talk of our intimate
Problems and joys — not about the climate.
We're attempting to discover the key
To life, the universe and everything.
As we grow closer mentally, this bond —
This physical attraction goes beyond
What is safe. I'm afraid now of touching
You, afraid of what might happen. It would
Never work, no. But if only it could.



MARBLES

by Eric Appleton

My marble has a galaxy
Spinning inside --
The milky white swirl within the glass
Is not molecules nor atoms,
But stars,
And if I look close enough
I can see each individual one,
And if I look
Even closer,
I can see planets whirling about the stars...
Somewhere, on one of those planets
Within my marbles
Is another like me
With a marble;
Perhaps it has a blue swirl,
Or red or green --
And when he looks deep inside it
He sees a galaxy,
And my star,
And my world...
Do not be fooled by space,
Do not be fooled by atoms,
Look into your aggies and cat's eyes
Scientists,
And if you cannot see a galaxy,
A shimmering band of stars,
It is your loss.

Ribcage Coffin

I am as empty
as a broken
basket

my livid—white skin
drained of blood,

flies eating
at my eye pits

Kristine R. Volland

The buzzard circles
around and around
circling the entire world!
For he knows, he senses,
what lies below is dead.

Kirk T. Melhuish

NIGHT LETTER

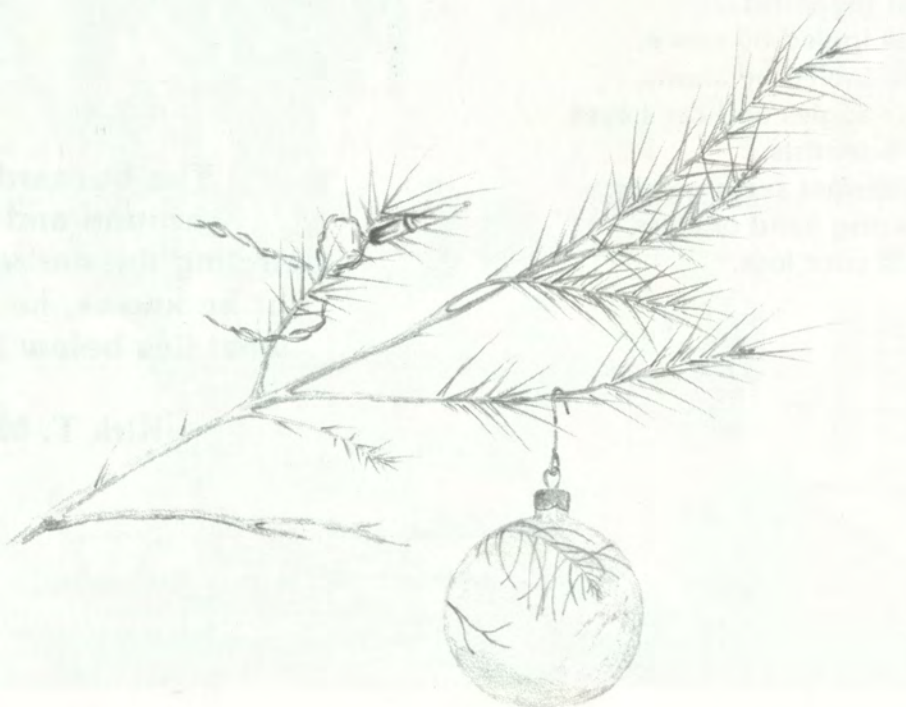
To fall asleep---
Feeling with easy pain so succinct
And regret that looms in the heart
As if demanding truth for action.

What can I say when I'm not alone
When heart and voice can only veil each other?
The mind can beat the heart in any race.
Something more dire than frustration
Rings through the hollow body
This container of souls, bouncing around.
"What to do?" squeak the vapors.

There is a place amidst all the others,
A blankness between the points
(Say, "x" and "y")
To which I am drawn; a hunger
Bends back those points to show
Indefinition and sustenance. One can feed on such
Things and live to be a hundred. A hundred years old!
Think of that as you lay there, let that be your
Sleeping thought.
One can even die....

I now must fall asleep, the morning waits, the night
With stereo and echoing katydids.

Motêt



NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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