Calliope

Spring 1988

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Calliope
1988
Cover by Mary Alsten Johnson
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Again, many heart-felt thanks...
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GALLANTRY

By: Ginger Brown

The gloom and dreariness of the bitter cold October night and the unseasonably early snow which blanketed Winesburg was felt by no one as fiercely as Emily Johnson. The numbing cold and the tiresome journey from the Johnsons' farm had dulled her senses and depleted her frail body of warmth and energy. The burdening weight of her weather-beaten coat and the anguish of her evening's journey made her desire to lie down on the carpet of glistening whiteness and sleep. But, the shrill whistle of a speeding freight train awakened her senses and mustered the remainder of her energy. With her frayed satchel in hand, she bravely strove onward to her destination — the depot.

Each step was painfully necessary; the propelling force which thrust the petite traveler onward through the freezing darkness was escapement. As she trudged along, Emily pondered her predicament. She knew she had no choice but to run away from home and to seek passage on the morning train. It would deliver her safely from Winesburg and from the clutches of her father's sporadic fits of drunken rage. She had no particular destination in mind and knew not what awaited her. She only knew that she must get away from her Poppa Luke's drinking sprees and his half insane fits of temper. This night, he had struck her badly with his heavy stick.

Her father, Luther Johnson, raised her from infancy to her present age of fifteen. She was his only child, and his only living relative. After Emily's birth, which claimed the life of her mother, her father's grief gradually turned to embitterment. Fate had deprived him of his loving wife and had burdened him with the responsibility of an unwanted child. Therefore, he often turned to the habit of drowning his disillusionments with large quantities of whiskey.

Luther Johnson was a huge man who bore the distinct characteristics of a backwoodsman. He wore a dilapidated buckskin jacket which reminded him of better times and places. Although he farmed the land for a living, his soul yearned to be back hunting and trapping in the forest. It was a hunting accident which had rendered him partially lame and necessitated the use of a heavy walking stick. His interior was just as rough and unpolished as his exterior. No one knew whether it was the pain from his accident, or the pain of his grief, which had permanently twisted his mouth into a snarl.

On rare occasions, only when necessity prompted, Luther and his young daughter came into Winesburg for supplies. The folks in the town avoided conversation with the old farmer, for he was unfriendly to the point of being rude. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Luther preferred the solitude of his farm to that of the noisy city.

However, everyone felt compassion for his dark haired lovely
daughter who sat dutifully at his side on the wagon seat and who walked obligatorily in his shadow through the streets of town. She would glance up at everyone who passed, as if searching for someone or something. Her large dark eyes, which reflected an inner loneliness, sparkled shyly from behind the long fringes of her straggly bangs — much like a prisoner peering at the outside world through the bars of a jail cell.

The hour was getting late; it was past nine o'clock as Emily reached the outskirts of town. She treaded softly over the slushy grooves embedded in the ice-covered dirt road at the intersection of Buckeye and Main streets. After such a long and horrendous hike, Emily was totally numb from the cold and weary to the point of exhaustion. As she passed the office of the Winesburg Eagle, she barely observed the glow of light from the printshop's window which illuminated her path through the street. Nor did she notice the newswriter sitting inside the office, busy at his task of writing a late story for the next edition. She trudged slowly down Main Street toward the depot where she hoped to find shelter and wait out the night. However, as she passed Hern's Grocery, she halted suddenly in her tracks and stood perfectly still — not from the cold, but from fright. Up ahead, she made out a large figure of a lame man moving steadily in her direction. He carried a large stick in one hand and a lantern in the other. "Poppa Luke! Oh God, no," she gasped. She managed a shrill scream which momentarily pierced the quietness of the night, but which was followed by silence again as the traveler fainted and fell to the icy ground.

Deserting his night watchman's duties, Hop Higgins hobbled over and bent down to turn his lantern to reveal the girl's pale face. George Willard ran out of the printshop so quickly that he forgot his overcoat. Shivering from the sudden coldness, George gently lifted the girl up into the curve of his arm. "What in blue thunder is a young girl doing out on a night such as this? Isn't she old Johnson's kid? Why did she scream like that?" Hop Higgins demanded. Ignoring the endless barrage of questions, George told him, "Go get Dr. Reely and tell him to come quickly to the hotel. I'm taking her there now; this girl is quite ill."

Carrying the girl's limp body in his arms, George Willard threw open the front door to the New Willard House. The sleepy-eyed "night clerk," alarmed by the sudden rush, sprang from his chair. George instructed the boy to fetch clean linens and prepare the bed in the now-vacant room which had once belonged to his mother, Elizabeth Willard. George remembered that Aunt Elizabeth Swift had stripped the bed when the room had been closed off after his mother's passing. It was a comfortable room in a quiet corner of the house, and her comfort and recovery was foremost on his mind.

As the early morning sun broke through the gray horizon, the tired
doctor emerged from the sick girl's room. Anxious to learn of the girl's condition, George waited patiently in the hallway. He and Dr. Reefy stood and talked together just outside the room. This time, the prognosis was good. Dr. Reefy told George, "She's awake now but still weak. She's got to stay put for a while. I've given her medication to speed her recovery right along, and Mrs. Swift says he will stay and tend her until her strength returns. You did right in bringing her straight here, George. Much longer out in that weather — well, who knows what her condition might have been. She could have died out there. By the way, George, in case you didn't recognize her, her name is Emily Johnson. She wants to thank you for your kindness."

Later that same day, an exhausted George Willard decided to look in on the patient. He knocked lightly on the door; Aunt Elizabeth Swift greeted him and led him over to where the frail girl sat in a chair by the window. The evening sun cast a pale glow over the motionless figure. A pillow was propped under her head, and her long dark hair draped over the edge. Her delicate hands lay folded in her lap as if in prayer. "We've been watching the snow starting to fall again. Looks like we might be in for a long winter," Aunt Elizabeth said softly. As for Emily, she was unaware of George's visit — she had dozed off into a peaceful sleep.

George stood for a moment and looked out the window. Darkness was descending rapidly upon Winesburg, and off in the distance he heard the faint wailing whistle of the departing evening train. A queer feeling of urgency swept over him as if he needed to take off running through the fresh snow.
A CHILD'S PICTURE

as a mother stands
at the sink
washing dishes

her little
blond haired
girl sits

not
watching tv
but drawing:

a red
dog
standing

beside a brown
tree
with a girl

who has yellow
hair
playing peacefully

under
the setting orange
sun

Maureen Lucey
THOUGHTS ON MARIJUANA

By: Katie Hill

I had my first experience with marijuana at the age of five. The year was 1970, so the Time of Troubles was going full swing, and my brother, Kirk, a high school senior, had invited his friend Bill to visit our family during a short leave from the Army.

Our guest arrived bearing gifts for everyone; mine was a tiny heart of faux pearls suspended from a slender gold chain. Even though Bill had hung around our house for several years before graduating and getting drafted, the necklace really opened my eyes— I had fallen in love before he had even managed to lug his dirty, bulging duffel bag up the stairs to Kirk’s room. From then on, I clung to Bill’s heels like a squishy piece of bubble gum.

That first day, Kirk, Bill, and I worked on cars, ate at Hardee’s with all their old friends, then took in the latest James Bond picture at the drive-in. Bill actually seemed glad to have me along. He let me sit in his lap, insisted on buying my popcorn, and even fixed my pigtail ribbons when they came untied. Best of all, he called me “Hell on Wheels”, which I knew had to be a tremendous compliment because of the way everyone laughed and agreed with him. I had never been so happy in my life, and I imagined that this was how things would be all the time after Bill and I were married.

The next morning, worn out from the previous day’s adventures, I overslept and wound up washing clothes with Mama instead of going to Road Atlanta with Kirk and Bill. I was absolutely desolate about it until my mother announced her intention of washing “every article in that filthy, old duffel bag.” Here was my chance to perform my first act as Bill’s future wife!

Between the two of us, Mama and I were able to tug, shove, and roll the bag containing all Bill’s earthly belongings down the stairs and into the laundry room. I burned my palms trying to pull open the rope ties that bound the end to the duffel bag before finally sitting down on the floor and reaching into the small hole to reverently clutch Bill’s shirts, socks, pants, and T-shirts and hand them carefully, one at a time, to Mama so she could put them in the washing machine. The last thing in the bottom of the bag was a nasty, dirt-encrusted pair of dark blue denim overalls. Mama helped me yank them out and made an awful face as she stuffed the smelly things in the washer. She threw in three tablets of Salvo detergent, half a box of Arm and Hammer, and sprayed in some Lysol, then turned on the warm water and closed the lid. I meant to stay in the laundry room and stand guard, but she coaxed me away with a trip to the grocery store.

We returned home and hour later to find the laundry room, kitchen, and den an inch deep in soapy water. Mama turned off to washing
machine, and we went to work, mopping and sopping up the mess.

When Daddy got home, he checked out the washer and decided the drain had somehow stopped up, forcing all the water to leak out of the machine. He put on some old clothes and prepared to clean out the drain and try to figure out what Mama and I had done to tear up the thing. I sat on the dryer, banging my heels against the sides as I waited to see what had happened, and Mama stood on her toes to peer over Daddy's shoulder.

For a minute, we were all puzzled by the wads of gunk Daddy dumped out of the piece of hose he had disconnected. I thought it looked like wet catnip or maybe used chewing tobacco. Mama said, "That Bill is such a dirty boy! He must have rolled in freshly mown-grass! I'll bet all this stuff came out of those old overalls of his!"

Daddy opened his mouth to say something but was cut off by Kirk's "Je-sus Christ!"

None of us had heard my brother come in through the kitchen door, so intent were we upon the washing machine's revelation. He leaned against the frame of the laundry room door, looking pale, clammy, and nauseous.

Mama turned around and began a sermon about how unsanitary Bill had been to carry all that grass about for days and days. My brother looked sicker and sicker and finally interrupted quietly, "Mama, don't you know you just washed a fortune worth of Columbian?"

"Columbian what?" Mama and I asked in unison.

Daddy, silent until then, spat out the word as if the very letters of it were poison. "Pot."

Mama's face fell, and she walked out of the laundry room without a word, being careful not to touch Kirk as she passed through the door. Daddy sent me to the yard to play, and for once, I didn't mind going. The tension in that room was more than I could stand.

I sat on my trampoline and did some serious thinking. I knew all about marijuana. My best friend's teenaged brother had been hauled off to reform school for repeated drug possession, and none of us kids had been sorry to see him go. I tried to equate cruddy, mean Joey with my kind, handsome Bill but just couldn't make the connection. I realize now that for the first time in my life, someone I loved and trusted had disappointed me. I thought at the time that the feeling I had was as bad as when my pet mouse, Orville, had died. Now I know it was worse.

After what seemed like hours but was probably only 20 or 30 minutes, I heard Daddy's car back down our steep driveway. I went inside, grabbed my dog by the collar, and took him up to my room to snuggle. As I passed Kirk's closed door, I heard low voices, his and Mama's, but felt too tired to eavesdrop. I curled up on my bed and scratched Charlie's ears until we both fell asleep.

The next thing I knew, Kirk was sitting on the edge of my bed, shaking me awake. He told me supper was almost ready, and when I
asked if he and Bill would be eating with us, he said, "Bill's gone. Daddy took him to the bus station and bought him a ticket back to the Army base."

"Will Daddy ever let him come back?" I asked, seeing my wedding plans go down the drain.

"Daddy says he's welcome here as soon as he decides to straighten up."

I was sure my heart was breaking in two, but Kirk didn't seem to notice. He stared out the window for a few minutes, then said, "Katie, the pot wasn't mine, any of it. I suspected Bill had it, but I didn't smoke it. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," I said honestly. Kirk had never lied to me, so it didn't enter my mind to doubt him.

"Thanks. I just hope Mama and Daddy believe me. They say they do, but I'll never know if maybe, just maybe, they're wondering if I lied. Katie, I did try it once, last year. Let's say I tried it once for both of us. Please don't ever feel like you need to. You won't be missing anything."

"Okay," I said quickly, hoping Kirk would leave me alone to wallow in grief over my shattered romance.

He seemed to sense that I wasn't really paying attention and pressed, "Katie, promise?"

That word caught my interest immediately. Promises were serious business. "Yes, I promise," I vowed solemnly.

Kirk hugged me and went downstairs. After I got out of bed and brushed my hair for supper, I unfastened the heart necklace and placed it gently in the bottom of my jewelry box.

I got over Bill within the week and found a cute little boy at kindergarten to marry. But I never got over seeing Mama sweep her skirt aside as she walked past her own son in the laundry room that day. I can't recall having ever been the least bit tempted to break my promise to Kirk.
SONG TO A CHILD

Child, before me, you yearned a counterpoint
Of soaring violins when your ear had yet to reach
The tutelage of tubas and the clasps of mad staccato.

You perked toward the jangling jewelery of crickets,
Mouthed the cicada's kazoo, threshed the golden scales
Of moon-leaves and inched your hand toward stars.

You made a treat the sweet chandeliers of branches,
Hurled plinkers for their boing on the steel of ponds,
And wearing your rosey rapture, thawed with the genius
Of turned logs in the hearth. When the new moon appeared,
You hung your sighs upon its sharpness:
All gone, you said.

Am I the burst of sparks
In his eyes, as once daydreamed,
Or a shadow, unlike his mould,
Which ran from clouds? Stumbling
And bruising, or merely distant,
I embraced him, stroked his hair,
Smoothed his brow as little as I dared.
Yet, warbling trails the clinking spoon as I take coffee.
Fetching the paper off the lawn, my heel-walk on the stiff
And crackling frost tickles you to high-pitched laughter.
Inside, the shivering this hard man shrugs makes you writhe
And weep with pain. My remembering eyes fight me to answer you.

Let our love be now as it should be, not as it was.
Dwell with me, child, and be my flow against the world.
Extend with violins into my fingers, into my words.
Be the light of my whole life, and I shall sing to you
Of dawns and branches spilt from the beak of a golden eagle.

Henry Brandt
CIRCLES

Circles spinning faster than life

Scars left on empty scarecrows

Eyes seeing deeper than death

Unstrung puppets dance

Silence broken by constraint

Dead bones carried to the promised land

Eyes spinning Voices broken Unstrung scarecrows left empty

Steve Ealy
LISA'S DREAM

By: Anonymous

I dismounted my horse and tied the silver mare to a tall slender pine that stretched out toward infinity. Continuing my journey on foot, I followed the worn path to the glen where I hoped to find what I sought. The ground crackled as my tread broke the dead limbs and needles carpeting the forest floor. Stepping into the glen felt like walking into a Roman arena, only I was facing an unknown opponent. Making my way into the center of the glen, I fought back the urge to tip my hat to some unseen presence — my enigmatic opponent and the host of this game.

The wagon stood in the center of the glen; perhaps this was my opponent. The faded maroon top contrasted with the vibrant green of the grass and the backing of the bottle green of the pines. Hesitating at the bottom of the weather-beaten steps, I ran my eyes over the gypsy wagon for a closer look. Plastered against the sides, handpainted signs announced the occupant's profession as fortune telling. While glinting bits of gold in the spokes, the wooden wheels still held the wagon firmly despite their rotting wood.

Gingerly picking my way up the steps, which surprisingly didn't creak, I grasped the cold brass door knob. While hovering for a moment, I summoned enough courage to turn the knob. The splintered door gave way with a groan of protest. When I stepped into the entrance, I met with a spicy exotic aroma reminiscent of sandalwood. Moving into the candlelit center, I studied my surroundings. Blood-red velvet curtains covered all the walls. Under my feet was a magnificent red and black Persian rug. Scattered across the floor, large silk pillows served as the only furniture, except for the low mahogany table which glowed a reddish hue in the candlelight. On the table sat a pile of oversized cards; hopefully what I sought would be found in these.

Emerging from behind the drapes, the gypsy sauntered towards the table. After lowering herself onto a royal purple pillow, she gestured to the emerald pillow opposite her. Her jasmine perfume cut through the sandalwood like a knife. She then spoke to me in a low, heavy voice. I strained my ears to decipher her words, which masked themselves in a Slavic accent. I replied to her question by saying, "I come here to you seeking knowledge of my future." The gypsy's heavily lidded eyes smoldered as she sat and pondered my answer. "The future is not
always pleasant, as I expect you know," she said. "The future should not always be known to those it involves." I nodded but remained adamant in my request.

Languidly, the gypsy reached out her hand and with her carnelian-tipped fingers turned over the first card from the tarot. The first card laid over the King of Swords, my court card, was the tray of wands while the Page of Swords crossed me. The Fool showed my past and the deuce of cups brought forth my future. And thus went the rest of the Keltic layout. I noticed that with each card the gypsy laid out, the fog, which first entered the wagon with the laying out of my court card, grew thicker so as to obscure the wagon leaving only the gypsy visible. By the time she drew the seventh card, the Ace of Pentacles, the only discernible part of the gypsy was her tapered, red-tipped fingers. Anxiously I waited for the turning of the tenth card, the final outcome, but I could no longer see the wagon the gypsy, her hand, or even the cards. With a gust of wind, the fog was lifted up to the pines surrounding the glen. I found myself standing in the center of the glen alone. Since I no longer fought the urge to tip my hat to the opponent, I did. And in doing so, I paid homage to the victor: "Ave Fate morituri te salutant."
ABUSED NO MORE

Tommy sits in a corner
As tears flow from his eyes
The pain and hurt he is feeling
Could never be disguised

He wonders to himself
Could he really be that bad
And why over such simple things
Does his mother get so mad

Yet he knows she must love him
For at times she is so tender and kind
But in a moment she can change
And lash out with a fury that's blind

Tonight was one of those nights
He doesn't remember what he did or said
And although at four he's just begun to live
At times like this he wishes he were dead

He reaches up with bruised fingers
To touch a swollen eye
While nearby his mother cries
For she too wonders why

Thinking back she remembers
She can hear her father yell
Did it begin with him
This living chain of hell

No matter, for now the chain is broken
Little Tommy will cry no more
For God has called him home
As painlessly bruised fingers hit the floor

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Samuel P. DeLoach
HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOM!
LOVE TOMMY
Do you think of the title "Miss 'Possum Queen" as pure fiction, in the
tradition of "The Beverly Hillbillies"' Elly Mae Clampett? So did I, until my
first trip to southeast Alabama.

It all started when Traci Cunningham, a friend from junior college,
asked me to help her move from Macon back home to Headland, Ala-
abama. She wanted me to meet her family, good farm people who she was
sure would greet me like a long-lost cousin, and to attend the International
Peanut Festival, held annually in Dothan and rivalled only by the Mardi
Gras in New Orleans. I thought it all sounded like great fun and couldn't
wait to go, especially after Traci informed me that she herself had once
been second runner-up to Miss Headland in the Peanut Festival Beauty
Pageant, and knew personally all the big-name, local beauty queens.

We drove into Headland on a perfect, crisp autumn afternoon, but
unfortunately, I missed my first sight of the town because I sneezed. No
matter, we didn't have time to sightsee, anyway. We had to get straight
over to the family's farm so Traci's grandparents could extend to me their
own, special brand of genteel Southern hospitality.

After driving for miles down a rural highway surrounded by acres of
peanut and soybean fields, we pulled into a potholed, dirt driveway and
parked next to a ramshackle, outhouse-type structure which turned out to
be the Cunninghams' barn. We stepped through the weeds in the front
yard, dodging a garden of goat droppings and rusted farming implements,
picked our way around the fresh tobacco juice splatters on the shaky,
wooden front steps, and knocked on the torn screen door that hung from
one hinge.

When Grandma Cunningham opened the door to welcome us, I thought
immediately of a TV star — Vicki Lawrence's "Mama" character on "The
Carol Burnett Show." She hugged us both in her hamhock arms, pressing
us into her immense polyester bosom, and apologized for Grandpa
Cunningham's inability to greet us just then. She said he was sleeping,
but as we followed her lumbering figure through the living room into the
kitchen, and I caught a glimpse (and a whiff) of the shriveled, toothless,
and very still body sprawled on the plastic covered couch, I had to resist
an urge to hold my compact in front of Grandpa Cunningham's mouth and
see if the mirror would fog.

In the kitchen, Grandma Cunningham handed us both jelly jars of iced
tea and invited us to seat ourselves at the vinyl and linoleum dinette set.
She proudly showed me the letter she and Grandpa Cunningham had
received on their fiftieth wedding anniversary. It was a form letter from
President and Mrs. Reagan and had been framed and hung on the wall.
under a small American flag. Things were going nicely, especially after Traci told her grandmother that I was an ardent Reagan supporter, but then, during a lull in the conversation, the old lady's sharp glance fastened upon the tiny crucifix around my neck.

"Whut's thet?" she asked Traci suspiciously, narrowing her eyes and poking her chubby, gnarled forefinger in my general direction.

"It's a cross, Grandma," Traci answered nervously.

"Oh no, it ain't!" Grandma Cunningham replied. "She a Cathlik?"

Silence.

Traci looked helplessly at me, and I cleared my throat and spoke up.

"Yes, ma'am."

After glaring accusingly at me as if she had just caught me stealing her chickens, this paragon of Southern Christianity heaved herself up from her chair, emptied her glass into the sink, and declared, "Well, I reckon thar's a place fer you people somewhar in this world. Traci, you be careful drivin' back to town and call us if you need anythin'. Y'all can show yerselves out, cain't you?"

Our hostess continued to face the wall behind the sink, leaving us to depart hastily via the kitchen door and make our way through the squawking chickens that flapped around Traci's car.

During the awkward return trip to Headland, Traci acted as if nothing had happened, and I joined in the masquerade, trying to appear animated as she described the fun we would have the next day at the Peanut Parade in Dothan.

At Traci's garage apartment, rented from the local Baptist minister, I helped her unload and said a silent prayer of thanks that her landlord wasn't home. I did not think I could stand any more Inquisition-style Southern hospitality.

Standing on the main street in Dothan the following morning, I chided myself for having made a snap judgement about Traci's family and friends based on one bad experience. The people who had lined up with us to see the parade were nothing if not friendly and charming. The mothers of Traci's school chums, most of whom were busy getting ready to ride on the floats, clustered around us, welcoming the "sweet little Cunningham girl and her little friend."

The ladies shared the latest news about their darling daughters— which beauty contests they had won, whose sons they were "practically engaged to," and what dresses they had chosen from the Sears catalog for the auspicious occasion of being hauled through the center of town on flower-laden floats behind the leading citizens' pick-up trucks. Traci responded graciously and enthusiastically to all this information, but I could see by the wistful look in her eyes that she would have given anything to have competed tooth and nail against her oldest friends for the title of "Miss Peanut Queen," and for the hard-won attention of the girls' beaux, as well.

A hush fell over the crowd, as the mayor of Dothan led off the parade in
his white Cadillac convertible. Next came the district legislators and prominent businessmen in cars of slightly lesser value. The senior citizens' church groups travelled in custom vans — Baptists first, of course, and the older members of the local black churches brought up the rear in a battered, old school bus. When I inquired of one of the ladies as to why this was so, she haughtily informed me that "the colored people like it this way."

After a brief pause in the festivities, a ripple of anticipation spread through the crowd. Traci's eyes shone as she turned to me and whispered, "Here it comes! Here it comes!"

Try to imagine my excitement when a huge cement mixer rounded the corner at the end of the street and roared through the middle of town, churning and spraying out a shower of peanuts! Children, their parents and grandparents, all dressed in their Sunday clothes, scurried into the street and pounced with greedy delight upon the peanuts, immediately gobbling what they could and shoving the rest into suit pockets and shiny patent-leather handbags. I managed to restrain myself and waited for everyone to calm down and return to the sidewalk so the parade could continue.

The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur of frilly pink taffeta dresses, sugary smiles, and bleached, shellacked hairdos. The townspeople had elected a separate court of royalty to represent each of the region's cash crops, and I watched in utter astonishment as "Miss Peanut Queen," "Young Miss Peanut Queen," "Junior Miss Peanut Queen," and "Little Miss Peanut Queen," and "Tiny Little Miss Peanut Queen" waved to me from the peanut-shaped dais of their float. Seated at the feet of "Miss Peanut Queen," the sole black girl on the platform wore a banner proclaiming her "Miss Mahogany Peanut Queen." I didn't bother to ask why the young lady had competed for a separate title; I felt sure she liked it that way. The soybean, cotton, tobacco, and tomato floats followed, and after them, I lost track. But yes, there was a "Miss 'Possum Queen." He turned out to be a local fertilizer salesman.

Traci and I stayed until the very end of the parade, and as I watched her run across the pavement, gathering in her skirt leftover peanuts that hadn't been squashed by the trucks and floats, I vowed I would never, ever make fun of Macon's Cherry Blossom Festival again.
GRADUATION

Three guys went cruisin’ around
On a hot May Friday night.
Only a few days ‘til graduation,
Their futures were looking bright.

They were driving back from a party,
Held for the graduating class,
To have one last good time together,
To look back on the years gone past.

For his graduation present,
One boy had gotten a new car.
They decided to see how fast it would go,
Well, they didn’t get too far.

They got up to one hundred twenty,
They were really going fast.
How could they know this one quick spin
Was going to be their last?

Rounding a curve they lost control
Hit another car and spun around.
One boy flew through the windshield,
And was dead when he hit the ground.

The other boys were saved
By some strangers no one knew,
Who pulled them from the flaming car
Seconds before it blew.

Minutes after the accident,
Hundreds of kids arrived,
Shocked at what had happened,
Wondering who had survived.

One boy is in a coma now,
Another boy is dead,
The other barely made it out alive,  
Just because no one looked ahead.

The news has spread fast among friends,  
And graduation is almost here.  
They’re just beginning to realize,  
Those boys won’t graduate this year.

Christy Cadle
A person needs a certain amount of skill to angle his way through Gamble Hall at twenty minutes after the hour. No orderly method of walking down the corridor is possible, and those leaving class appear to have the advantage. What exists can only be called chaos.

As I try fighting my way to Room 107, I feel like a swimmer going against the current. Every student leaving class has aligned shoulder-to-shoulder, creating a solid, out-going flow which allows no path for forward motions. After "Excuse me" fails to create an opening, I become the aggressor. I lead with my right shoulder and manage to gain a few steps but, directly in front of me, an immovable twosome leans against the wall. As they discuss their next rendezvous, I quickly shift my weight to my left shoulder and dodge around them without losing momentum.

Another quick shift back to the right and I find myself with a little space to move in. I've made it as far as the Writing Center. At this point, movement becomes quite difficult because the side entrance across the way has more people coming inside. Now the intersecting and merging comes from three directions.

Students coming in through the side entrance can turn right and merge with the people leaving Gamble Hall, or they can somehow cross through the out-going flow and join the few heading against the stronger current. (I've never seen the majority of students going to class; they're always leaving.)

This junction infuriates me. The incoming people have always been the ones forced out of their way, but I've found a way to alter this phenomenon. I have given up my polite aggressiveness and just push through without moving around anybody. I don't look at anyone; I just direct my gaze on 107's door and walk straight ahead. Something in the concentrated stare emits a signal that I'm in control. At times I feel guilty for my rude behavior, but most of the time the need for getting to class overcomes the need for etiquette.
SPRING

Welcome chirping bird.
Ceres' daughter has returned.
Are you rejoicing?

SUMMER

Daughter of Harvest:
Entwine your hair with blossoms,
Dance beneath the Sun.

AUTUMN

Winds begin to blow,
The burnished leaves have fallen.
Proserpine has gone.

WINTER

Back on her cold throne,
The queen of the underworld
Leaves the earth to grieve.

Anonymous
So this is the place.
I volunteered to deliver the Christmas cookies and presents from
the church. Now, I wish I hadn't.
Some call this a mental hospital, some call it a funny farm. The
building itself looks to have a mentality of its own, but it's not funny. It
looks alive. It's just ... an IT.
I'd better get this over with.
A single eye centered in the steel door sees me approaching, and
as I reach the steps a static voice demands my name. I cooperate, and
after a pause IT inhales and the door swings open— am I being sucked
in?
Stepping inside, I smell the mildew growing on IT's bricks.
The air inside looks green, just a reflection from the green walls, I
think. But I can smell the green, too.
An old lady wearing a dingy lab coat sits at a metal reception desk.
Snarling at the packages she must search, she ushers me through
another Cyclops door, and as I hear the steel slam, I sympathize with
Jonah for his stay in the whale's belly.
IT's belly is large and rectangular, about the size of a standard
basketball court. The air and the walls in here are green, too; I still
smell the green. The ceiling is dirty. The floor is bone gray, with a film
of dust lying on top. I think the dust is really that powdery stuff that
institutional wax leaves when the floor isn't buffed. The narrow windows
are like gills, allowing only a touch of light. Three of the five ceiling
lights don't have bulbs.
There isn't much furniture, just a few tired chairs and card tables.
Some shallow boxes on the card tables provide the only color in IT.
Waiting for a white coat to come and tell me what I'm supposed to do, I
walk over to the tables and shuffle through what I now see are jigsaw
puzzle boxes. They're all empty.
The attendant's station is also empty. I see just one patient, a
young man who squats in a corner, hugs his knees, and stares at
nothing. The dusty stuff is all over his pants.
A housekeeper rearranging IT's dust sweeps around the solitary
patient.
A commode gargles, then an attendant emerges from behind a
doors. As he beats on the counter of the attendant's station with a
spoon, patients trickle from little pores in the walls that I hadn't noticed
before. Must be their bedrooms. I wonder, which one is the padded
cell?
The attendant tells me that as soon as my packages are searched, I can leave; he suggests that I mingle with the patients in the meantime. But I'm scared to mingle — what if some new attendant comes on duty and doesn't believe I'm a visitor and makes me stay? The patients don't care that I'm not mingling. They're waiting in line for their turn at the electric cigarette lighter protruding from IT's wall, as if in some sinister group-mating ritual with their captor.

They are quiet, dull. Maybe there's something in this heavy green air that silences them; no, must be the drugs they're fed. But I don't want to talk either; I can't. This kindred muteness — is it contagious?

Still silent, I merely nod when the attendant tells me that the packages are fine and that I can leave if I'm ready. I don't know how long I've been here. Suddenly afraid he'll think I'm crazy and make me stay if I don't say anything, I thank him, but for what I don't know.

As IT exhales and the doors swing open, the captives watch my escape with envy and resentment; IT has opened not for them, but for me.

Outside, I hurry away, afraid that if I stop even for one quick breath of real, living air, IT will have second thoughts and suck me back in.

I feel safer in my car, and pulling onto the highway, I roll the windows down and breathe deeply to purge my lungs of the green air.

Breathing easier now, I feel no more fear of IT or concern for the captives I left behind, just selfish relief at the sight of IT shrinking in my rearview mirror.
DISSERTATION

Curtains drawn,
Study (with dark corners
and cobwebs)
Stands in anticipation

For the Annunciation
(delivered to the steady
beat of man time)
and Birth will occur
Simultaneously

At this desk
(with thin fierce blade of
edison light
the only illumination)
And on that sheet of
now plain typewriter
paper.

Annunciation: hypothesis.
Birth: theory. (or is it vice-
versa? both in any case prelude to system)
Bara: creato ex nihilo.' From
nothing but the calculation of
Thoughtfulness.
Theoria no more: no observers to the mysteries.
No mysteries now: flashlights slice beyond uncertain glow of torches,
Showing all that is matters. (Subject: matter.) Dust, dirt, mud, tested and predicted, we turn to other material.

Geschichte

Light bends, twists, returns to Its source.
We dissect flashlight-holding fingers:
Blinded by our Uninspired probe,
We lay out the straw to dry.

Steve Ealy

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FRANK SHAFER, PRIVATE I

by: Brett A. Thomas

I was being shot at. I'd been a private investigator for three years now, and this was my first shootout. I'm surprised it took as long to occur as it did. That's the story of my life. You see, someone is always throwing something at me. My wife throws pots. My mother threw insults. My school-mates threw rocks. And Joe over there was throwing bullets. I must be some kind of magnet for missiles. If we ever get in a nuclear war I'm sure I'll be at ground zero.

Anyway, back to my story. I said this was my first shootout as a P.I., but I was really kind of stretching things. You see, this one was sort of my fault. I was having a few drinks with Joe over there, and we were joking around. I must have said something to get him mad, because suddenly he was swinging at me. Being the nice guy that I am, I backed off, since I knew he was drunk. Next thing I know, he pulls out a .45 and starts shooting at me! Naturally, I dove for cover and drew my gun. Problem is, Joe and I are drinking buddies, and I didn't really want to kill him, or even hurt him. Thankfully, he was so blasted that the safest place to be was in his sights.

As I peeked around the crate he was hiding behind, I saw Joe take aim carefully this time. His hand shook at the last moment, and the bullet impacted in the side of a wall fifteen feet from my head. Suddenly, Joe came up with a new idea, and got up. Moving unsteadily in my direction, he pointed his pistol towards my hiding place. Of course, no one, not even Joe at his drunkest, could miss me from the range he was about to reach, so I reluctantly pointed my revolver in his general direction. Taking careful aim, I put a round in the ground at his feet, and Joe, who still had a little sense, quickly scampered for cover.

I breathed a little easier when I heard sirens in the distance, and sighed in relief when a police car pulled up. Two officers leaped out, guns drawn, and pointed them at us.

"Throw down your weapons and come out with your hands up, scumbags!" cried one of the cops. I didn't much care for the "scumbag" bit, but then I didn't much care to be blown away, either. I tossed my pistol out into the alley and, hands raised, slowly stood up. Joe, the drunken idiot, yelled with joy, and emptied a clip in my direction. His shots went so wide, though, that the police thought they were being shot at, and emptied their guns in Joe's direction. To be honest, they weren't much better shots than Joe, and so all twelve rounds missed. Thankfully, Joe got the point and emerged from behind his crate. Naturally, both of us were arrested for disturbing the peace, public drunkenness, discharging a firearm within city limits, attempted murder, vandalism, and tresspassing. It was going to be a long evening.

The next morning, my wife came and picked me up after a night in jail. I had been exonerated on all charges, but Joe was going to have a hard time of it. From the look on my wife's face, I was fairly sure that I was too, and
the lecture began as I got in the car.

"What were you doing in that awful part of town, anyway, Frank?" she demanded.

"Well, dear, I was doing some —" I began.

"And with such horrible company! That Joe Astwitch is such a terrible man!"

Actually, Joe isn't that bad a guy; he just can't hold his booze. I was going to point this out, but I never got a chance.

"Shooting! " she screeched. "You're lucky you weren't killed!"

"I was —"

"You have disgraced our name for generations to come!" she wailed.

There was obviously no stopping her, and I was completely unsuccessful in doing so for several hours, until she finally shut up because her voice gave out.

I was thankful for the silence, but it didn't last long. I was sitting there, quietly watching the football game, when the phone rang.

"Hello?" I asked, a shining example of originality.

"Yeah," said a voice on the other end, "Is Dimitia there?"

"Uh..." I fumbled. "What number were you trying to reach?"

"354-5418," came the reply.

"Sorry," I said, "this is 5419."

"Oh," the man said. "Sorry."

"No problem." I hung up the phone.

The receiver hadn't been in the cradle more than a minute when it rang again.

"No," I said, picking up the phone, "Dimitia isn't here."

"Excuse me?" questioned the caller. "Is this Frank Shafer's Detective Agency?"

Ooops. "Uh, yes. May I help you?"

"I would be interested in hiring your services. When may we get together?" Good thing I thought to have the calls from my office forwarded here!

"Well," I said, thinking quickly, "I should be free this afternoon."

"Alright," the beautiful female voice on the other end said, "I'll be there at three." She hung up.

Oh, boy, that one sounded like a fox! Calling out to my wife that I was going to work, I ran out to my '73 Nova and hopped in. Driving quickly, I reached my office at 2:55 and ran to my door. Naturally, it said "Frank Shafer, Private Investigator." I'm too much of a romantic for it to say anything else. Now all I needed was a .45 to replace my Dad's police revolver and a divorce to make me single again, and I'd be something out of a Bogart movie.

I ran behind my desk, got in my chair, leaned back, and put my feet on the table. If only I could say "sweetheart" the right way, I'd be set.

A quick knock came at the door, startling me out of my reverie. My first
client in two years and I was dozing off!

"Come in!" I cried in my best Bogart voice.

The door opened and a woman walked in. Whew! Ugly! She had brown hair hacked off at shoulder length on one side and higher on the other. She must have weighed all of about seventy pounds and had a scrawny face. Horn-rimmed glasses, paisley jeans, and a tasteless handbag rounded out the picture.

"Mr. Shafer," the woman said, "I'm Monda Harbonowitz. I talked to you on the phone."

What a letdown. She had the voice of a dream and the persona of a nightmare.

"Hello." I managed. "What can I help you with?" I sounded like the salesman at Sears.

"I have a little problem, Mr. Shafer."

Through an effort of will I managed not to point out that this was rather obvious.

"You see," she began, "my husband is missing."

Probably ran off. Actually despite my initial physical impression, she seemed to be a fairly nice person.

"That really isn't up my aisle, Mrs. Harbonowitz. Have you tried the police?"

"Yes," she replied, "they made a file and haven't contacted me since."

"How long ago was this?" I asked.

"About twenty years."

"I see."

Things went rapidly downhill from there, and I agreed to take the case. As soon as she left, I took down my trusty copy of Gerribaldi's Handbook of Detecting, 37th Edition and looked under "Missing Persons."

"Missing persons," the text read, "is a job best left to the local police."

Gee, thanks, Gerribaldi. I threw the manual down in disgust and sat down to think.

Well, according to Mrs. Harbonowitz, her husband had worked at a local meat packing plant, which was the last place he was ever seen. That, naturally, would be the logical place to start. So, I hopped in my car and drove on over to Foster's Meats, in search of Mr. Angus Harbonowitz.

Upon arriving, the first person I spoke to was a security guard, who took me to see Aaron Antin, the oldest worker at the plant. "If anyone I remember Mr. Harbonowitz, it'll be Aaron!" he bragged.

"Hello, Mr. Antin," I began.

"Who are you?" demanded the old man.

"I'm Frank Shafer," I said. "A private investigator. I'm here to ask you about an Angus Harbonowitz."

Suddenly, a cruel smile spread over Mr. Antin's face. I was about to ask him what he was smiling about when a freight train hit me in the back of the head.

Actually, it wasn't quite that bad, just close. I woke up several hours later in a freezer, with several human bodies. A quick check showed that they were all dead, and I turned my mind towards getting out of there.
In front of me was obviously the door, but, naturally, there was no handle on this side. I quickly went through my pockets, and discovered to my complete astonishment that I still had my gun. Taking careful aim at where the latch should be, I pulled the trigger. There was a loud report from my pistol, and the door flew open.

Wanting to leave as soon as possible, I ran out of the freezer, into a vacant hall. Using my directional instincts, I headed to the right. My directional instincts were acting at normal efficiency tonight; I soon discovered that this end of the corridor was a dead end. Except that there, just barely in reach, was the sill of a window. After checking carefully to make sure there wasn’t anyone on the other side of it, I climbed up to the window.

Looking through it, I saw what appeared to be an office. Putting my correspondence school training to work, I spent the next fifteen minutes attempting to pick the lock of the window, and ended up breaking the pane in frustration.

Once inside, I saw rows of filing cabinets. Out of curiosity, I went up to the one marked “H” and tried to open it. Surprisingly enough, it was unlocked. Inside I found a file on Mr. Harbonowitz. In the file was his hiring date and employment history. The last entry, dated twenty years ago, read "Put into beef stew."

Looked like I’d found something big. Going over to a nearby desk, I picked up a phone and called the police. Upon their arrival, I was arrested for breaking and entering, discharging a firearm in public, and, as I had been mistaken for an employee, the murders of the 250,000 people in the files. Thankfully, it was straightened out in the end. The owners and managers got a total of over fifty thousand years in prison, and Mrs. Harbonowitz paid me a large fee.

Later that summer, the mayor decided to give me an award for my safeguarding of the common good. Most of the town turned out, and the mayor and I stood on a large platform. As the mayor walked toward me, medal in hand, he tripped. The medal flew out of his hands, and, executing a ninety-degree in-flight turn, made a beeline for my head. Oh, well, I guess that’s just the story of my life...
FRIENDS AGAIN

In the morning I wake up
And turn on the light.
The troubles we've had linger in my mind.
The recent past has brought to light
The real feelings in the
Hemispheres of your mind.
We're just
Friends again.

Sometimes I stay up late at night
Wandering through the vast spaces
Of the world.
I think of all the times
We've been together.
Good and bad.
But after all is said and done,
We're just
Friends again.

During the daytime I wonder
About the future and all
It has in store for me-
And you.
The world is always changing
But one fact will always remain the same.
We're just
Friends again.

Bill Lewis
NO ESCAPE

By: C. Elizabeth Rodgers

"No Escape" is a short story written in the form of James Joyce's book, The Dubliners. Throughout this book, Joyce's stories contain images and symbolism of unending patterns which the characters cannot stop. The theme of The Dubliners is the inability to escape.

Kevin loudly placed the discoloured mugs of Guinness on the rotting brown wooden table, where three ornery men were playing cards. Because of the force the girl used to put down the mugs, the foam overflowed onto their game.
— You half-wit girl, said one of the men, you damn near ruined our game!

But Kevin was beyond caring. In frustration, she decided to go into the kitchen to get away from that stale, smoke-filled room, but the owner followed and pulled her by her hair back into the tavern room.

For five of her eighteen years, she worked in this miserable tavern. Because of his illness, her father was unable to work nine months of the year. Clayton Stickle felt his daughter was robust and capable of paying for her keep. He remembered that at age eleven he had to work in the fields twelve hours a day so that there would be enough food on the table for his eight brothers and sisters. Clayton's father had the croup and was unable to work, so his mother earned their keep by selling cockles and mussels.

Kevin walked along the foggy ominous waterfront of the River Liffey. The violet sky was filled with a bright full moon and thousands of stars. One night, she jumped over the railing along the river, but her smock caught on a nail, and she instead was suspended along the balustrade and ripped her gray threadbare dress.

At first, Kevin tried to work cheerfully in the dark dismal tavern. To help her survive there, she began to fantasize a world in which she would want to exist. In the tavern, she heard stories about the beautiful dancers and singers and their feathery red and gold shimmering costumes. The men always talked of the famous Colleen O'Kelley, the rage of Europe. Kevin imagined touring with Colleen O'Kelley and performing for the handsome Prince Martin of Wales. She longed to hear the cheers from the multitudes of fans who would follow her.
Kevin’s work in the tavern was not difficult, but she had to tolerate the men groping for her. The owner, Griffin Fitzgerald, threatened to fire her if she upset the customers. When she arrived at the tavern at five in the afternoon, Kevin was able to eat some lamb stew leftover from lunch, then had to work continuously until midnight.

In the first month of working at the tavern, Kevin had a customer who had travelled to the Far East. This customer, Miles Clements, had golden blonde hair, a near-white moustache, and a rosy glow about his face. Miles told her stories of the customs and lifestyles of these beautiful exotic places. Kevin learned of the majestic green mountains, the jewelled palaces and the golden statues. For a week, Miles Clements patronized the tavern to talk with Kevin. She was fascinated by his stories, and at night could not sleep for she was busy dreaming of living in a ruby-inlaid palace and travelling to many countries.

The time came for Miles to leave Dublin. Kevin begged him to take her, for she longed to flee Dublin, the tavern, and her father. Without Miles Clements’ consent, she packed her few possessions for the journey and hid them in the tavern’s back room. At midnight, she approached Miles Clements. He offered her a chair and some stout and soda bread. Kevin excitedly told him of how she had always thought of leaving this gloomy tavern. Miles sat in a dimly lit corner and listenend quietly.

— Miles, I got my things gathered to go away wi’ya, said Kevin.

Miles half smiled at Kevin, flashing his white teeth, saying

— Poor miss, you can’t come with me. I’ve a bride in Crosshaven and I shan’t leave her. She’s a weak spirit and shan’t exist without me.

— You bloody...buzzard! Get out of my sight!

After this experience, Kevin no longer trusted any man. Sometimes she did accept their propositions, but only when she was in need of money. Each night, the poor girl would detach herself from reality, and sing to herself while working. Because Kevin’s mother died in childbirth, her father had to raise her. This was their first child, so Kevin had no brothers or sisters. Clayton Stickle wanted a son to name after his father, and named his daughter Kevin.

When Kevin was old enough, she regularly went to mass and confession each week religiously. Her attendance at mass dwindled, until she rarely went. Kevin began to lose all faith in God because, though she knew it was wrong, she prayed for her father’s demise. She had always blamed her father for her miserable existence and often dreamed of the day she would leave Dublin when he died. After her incident with Miles Clements, something in her would not let her leave until then.

As a child, Kevin put in many hours keeping their ramshackle cottage so clean that it, in its own decrepit way, shined. During the late winter and spring, her father was always in the fields, farming potatoes. Along with two other men, Clayton worked on the many acres of Donald
Cronin, a wealthy landowner from Limerick who also taught at Trinity College. Year after year, the men allowed the potatoes to remain in a warm dark area to sprout eyes. When there were plenty of eyes, they quartered and planted the potatoes. Clayton and the men carefully tended the dark green stalks with the little white flowers in the dark-coloured earth. For the three months that it took to nurture these white treasures, Clayton was quite meticulous about matters at home and in the fields. After the harvest, he consistently was nurtured by a flask of Jameson.

Over the years, Clayton increasingly was more often drunk than sober. When he drank too much, Clayton would have a short bout of violence, then would retreat into his dark room and sleep off his drunkenness. Many times when Kevin came in late at night, in the darkness she could see the broken brown whiskey jugs from the light that streamed in from the sides of the window shade. She quickly cleared away the shattered glass for fear that in the morning her father would blame her for the house's disarray. One night, Kevin had gotten in from work shortly before dawn, and did nothing to straighten the house. When Clayton awoke the next day, he woke Kevin up with fury in his wide black eyes. He threw her off her pallet and shook her until she could no longer stand. Kevin often remembered this and never would forgive her father for it.

Clayton Stickle's liver ailment worsened and he became incapable of leaving the house. His day consisted of drinking, eating, and intermittently sleeping off his drunkenness. The worse Clayton got, the more hope Kevin had. She felt this was her only escape. Out of her unperceivable loyalty, she remained with her withering father and in her unbearable confinement with him. There were several instances when she thought he certainly would die. Kevin could never do anything to induce his death, for she felt it had to be God's will to let her have her freedom. She knew that if she did something to cause his death, God would make her pay more penance. Clayton always said to her — If it weren't for you, your ma would still be living today to take care o'me.

Whenever Kevin wanted to run away, she would remind herself of her father's words.

In late September, when Kevin left Mulligan's to walk home, gray circling clouds hung low over the River Liffey. She was afraid to cross the O'Connell Bridge for fear of being struck by a bolt of lightning. After building up her courage, she made up her mind to traverse the bridge to reach the east side. As she tried to make her way across, the winds kept pushing her back towards the West. Kevin had to struggle violently to cross, though she was tossed about by the violent wind force. When she finally crossed the bridge, a great crash of thunder sounded behind her. Kevin knew the open waterfront was not safe, so she frantically ran home after falling several times in dark alleys between the houses. The
large raindrops violently spattered down on her raincoat and she shook from a chill going through to her bones.

Lightning flashed ahead of her. It appeared to strike Nelson’s Pillar, but the lightning had no effect upon it. Kevin was petrified of lightning. When at last she reached her dimly-lit house, Kevin felt a premonitory chill as she walked into it.

Gingerly, Kevin walked into her father’s small cubicle of a room. Her father was lying in bed, wearing his dark church suit with a dilapidated Bible opened to the Book of Psalms resting in his right hand. His placid face was illuminated by the light seeping in from the window. He looked younger than Kevin had ever seen him look. She felt helpless and fell to her knees crying.

She always thought she could leave Dublin and start a new life away from her past. When her father died after many years of her drudgery, she thought this was her chance of escape. But a few days after his death, she realized that she was in the family way by one of the paying customers.
THE WESTERN FRONT

Soldiers in World War I reported how horses torn by gunfire would live for hours and days, stumbling about in their own intestines.

Day

Screaming horses shake the air
All a sun's day
Shrill tremolos the frantic
Falling
Toward the quarter moon
Rising their dark eyes are so
Round grains of their dying dust spread
Upon the hills in sodden
Prance rapt entangled by the gloss
Of glue-slick insides glistening silver
Day's light roped in slow spilling
Flesh they fall round and round circling
Staring down haunched upon thick mucous
Cushions of their emptying
The last scream implacable
In final moon dark
Rising
Night

Starshafts tunnel    each thick shriek
Continuum of grisly grace    each
Last fire of noisome flesh
Coiling
Thru ribs of night    gutteral ooze
Ascending unseen    spills
Upon the hills    the hideously serene
slide
And rush of silence
    Darkly    the horses
Fall    pinned sure by starlight    softly
Steaming    spongey flesh    beneath them
Mounds    the glut and suck
Into the last light
Falling

Robert Strozier
Mmmm. I'm thirsty. Andy and Fergie were getting married. Must've dozed off. Damn, I wanted to see her dress.

So cold. Mama always turns the air on full blast. Wait, I did see her dress. Made Di's look like a prom gown. The wedding was yesterday. Hurts so bad...that's right, I had surgery this morning. Must be over. Feels different from the other times. Always happened so fast before. Feels like I've been asleep forever this time. I can't move. Wanna open my eyes. Somebody get this mask off my face. I told the O.R. nurse please don't put a mask on my face, I'm claustrophobic or something. I told her. God, I can't talk. I can't see. Can't breathe. I don't think I'm breathing. Must be in the morgue. I hear people mumbling. I must be dead. God, I can't be dead, it'll kill Mama if I'm dead. They're mumbling louder now..."notified the family...milligrams of morphine...of valium...tachycardia...units blood...oh shit! she's wakin' up-- you said she'd stay under 'til Thursday...I told her mother, you tell the patient...when's the blood comin'? Can't wait 'til tomorrow, let me call 'em".

"Stacy, wake up, c'mon, wake up. How are you feeling?"

It's the doctor, the one who never wears socks. Guess they don't come in scrub green. He's opening my eyes with his thumbs. Hope he can't tell I'm laughing at him. Can't help it — he looks like Dr. Seuss. He hates it when I call him that.

I'm glad nobody can hear me thinking.

"Stacy, you're awake now; squeeze my hand. We had a little bit of bleeding, so we're going to ICU for a little while."

We? What'd he do, pick up the wrong end of a scalpel? This is interesting. It's hysterical.

So this is ICU. They're all scurrying around like a bunch of green mice. Even the nurse. But I like her. She's huge. Related to the Jolly Green Giant by any chance? She's nice, though. She belongs here, sort of an omniscient green mass. I think she's on my side. She's so quiet, like she isn't supposed to talk. Guess most of her patients don't have much to say. Where's my gown?

Well, hello big sister. Mama made you come.

I look terrible? I'm so pale? What have they done to my face? How is it, Donna, that you always know exactly what not to say but you say it anyway? Who is that? I don't believe it. I can't believe you brought your fellow managers from Burger King to see me. I don't even know them. They think I'm some kind of spectacle. They smell like french fries. Greasy. I'm going to throw up. They don't belong here.
It hurts again. I need to sit up. What's this on my neck? Where are these tubes coming from— me? I can't breathe. Nurse, I'm so glad you're here. Hope you make them leave.

Better, thank you. How'd you know, is my brain on a monitor, too? Thanks for getting rid of Burger Queen and her charbroiled court. She never could act like a sister, but it's funny when she tries. Am I really that pale?

So you're here, Mama. Donna sneaked in when you went to the bathroom. She said you told the doctor you weren't leaving the hospital without me. That's funny. Did you really think they saved my life just to get rid of you? Probably. I wish you'd stop faking. I know it's killing you. And get rid of the cake-icing smile. If you want me to rest, why don't you stop talking? I feel sorry for you, out there with the charbroiled court— did they bring you a Whopper? You'll have to leave soon; it'll be somebody else's turn. You think I look good? Somebody's lying.

Hello again, nurse. I knew you'd make her leave. I'm glad. She wasn't funny and that scared me. Make her get some rest, will you?

So the preacher's here.

Do you always wear a suit? You probably sleep in one. Wonder what you would look like in jeans and a three-day beard? Did you think you had to come for God? He's already here, but thanks for coming anyway. I wonder, what do you see?

What are you doing back so soon, nurse? Thought you just left. Coming to see me or the preacher? Strange combination, you two. There you are, looking at each other and thinking that if you just had a little of the other's resources, you could pull me through. A nurse who could work miracles with her medicine. A pastor kneeling at my bed, praying for the medicine to work and the blood to get here soon.

Why are you taking the preacher outside the room to murmur and shake your head at him?

That was quick, nurse. Why won't you smile? Do you really like this job?

Well, well, it's Dr. Seuss. You still aren't wearing socks. Nurse can't run you out, can she?

Oh please. Don't call me sweetheart. I'm sick enough already. How do I feel? Do I need anything? You've been very worried about me?

Go ahead, ask me questions, but I'm not talking. You don't want me to worry about anything? If there's nothing to worry about, then why am I in ICU?

You don't think I know what happened. Don't listen to him nurse — we don't need a little something for
pain in here, and we don’t need something to make us rest.

I guess he’s got to talk to somebody; he’s talking to me now. Says they almost lost me in there. He tells me to rest, and for me please not to die.

So you messed up, did you? Bet the chief of surgery really laid into you.

I’m pinching the IV tubing shut so the wonder drugs won’t hit me just yet. It’s fun, lying here and watching you grovel.

Oh, let go of my hand, you idiot; that’s the one pinching the IV. You never even noticed it wasn’t dripping.

You can keep the second dose for now, nurse. I won’t be needi....

Dr. Corse. I’m glad to see you. Thought you’d never make it. Wish you could have been my surgeon instead of just my doctor. This never would have happened. Don’t much blame you, though. Diabetes and hemorrhoids are more predictable. You’re almost a friend. This’ll be the first intelligent visitor I’ve had since I woke up.

You don’t have to say anything. You’re doing a bad job of looking cheerful — give your face a rest.

Oh, good. He’s going to see what they’ve done to my belly. I’m kinda curious myself.

You’re peeling the sheet away like a wet diaper.

Here comes the nurse. Not more morphine, I hope. She must’ve been born with a syringe in her chubby little fist.

Wait, nurse, I want him to tell me what it looks like.

Must look bad. He has that look on his face that all doctors have when they think they’re hiding what they feel but they aren’t — their eyes and mouth fuse to their faces like cheese on a pizza.

I can always tell when you’re tired, Dr. Corse; your eyes get red and glassy. God, look at them. You must be exhausted. Funny, they didn’t look like that when you came in. Look at me. Wait a minute on the shot, nurse, he hasn’t told me anything yet. Wait. I thought you were on my side, nurse, why wouldn’t you wait? Don’t look so doctory, Dr. Corse. This is all a big fiasco, don’t you know that? Don’t leave yet, you haven’t told what it looks....

So it’s over. I’m in a private room now. Wish that big green nurse was here. The one that came in this morning got the IV tubing tangled in the IVAC cord. Yanked it out. Bled so much I thought I was in for another pint. Had to put the new one in my thumb, nowhere else left. They won’t yell at her, though. Even a bad nurse is hard to find these days.

They’re back. Donna came in and woke me up to tell me she was going to use my phone. Thank God it was in the middle of lunch rush — the charbroiled court couldn’t come. Mama was here, making sure I knew what she’d been through and how much worse it was on her
health than it was on mine. Preacher came by, saying everyone'd be praying for me. Dr. Seuss came by, said I'd picked up a little infection — translated, that means staph — I heard him talking to the nurse in the hall. Dr. Corse came by to thank me for the tomatoes I brought him from my garden the day I was admitted.

Nobody said much. I guess dying people aren't interesting when they aren't dying anymore. They came the first time out of curiosity and, I think, also out of fear and relief — fear at the knowledge that what happened to me could well have happened to them, and relief that it didn't. Today, they came out of a sense of obligation. It's ridiculous. In they came, single file, not to comfort, but to look. They're still uneasy when they look at me now. And I'm still laughing at them.
SUDDEN FROST

One night the weather changes.

The disarming warmth
Of winter's late arrival vanishes,
Chilling the blood at last.
Dawn appears a dream-like sight
Of frozen shapes,
Like helpless creatures caught in
ghostly amber,
Shocked at their new state.

Thin, brittle fingers of ice
Fringe the leaves;
Each oak becomes a whitened
frieze,
Laced with rime embroidery.
Tipped with countless icy tears,
Silent, resigned,
The mournful pines bow down.

The sunless air cuts quickly through
my clothes,
Like a careless touch
Against a frigid pane.
This sudden frost has a familiar feel,
As when a warm-thought heart
Turned cold.

I know that this strange arctic trance
Will pass — in time, redeeming
warmth
All captive forms returns
To some resemblance of the past.

Beyond each winter, Spring.

David Kelley
BELL HILL REVISITED

By: Patricia R. King

The announcement in the newspaper was on a middle page and I almost missed it. If it hadn't been for the picture of the church beside it, I might have. But I did see it, and stopped to read:

The annual service at the Bell Hill Meeting House will be held on the last Sunday of July. The choir of the Harrison United Methodist Church will offer musical selections and the Rev. Samuel Birdseye from the Congregational Church in Bridgton will deliver the sermon. The public is cordially invited to attend this yearly event in this historical landmark church.

Bell Hill Meeting House, Otisfield, Maine. I was propelled immediately back to the time when I was a child and we had acquired the farmhouse across the road from that church. But what would the hilltop look like now? It had been many years since I had visited that spot — in fact, not since Mother had sold the house after Dad's death. I was almost afraid to think of how it might look. I had carried that whole area around in my mind, used it in the creative writing of articles and poetry, and recently had begun work on a historical novel based upon my memories of that place. Would Thomas Wolfe's book title of You Can't Go Home Again apply? I wanted to find out.

So, on that year's last Sunday in July, I drove from Portland through Raymond, Casco, Spurr's Corner, and up the steep road to the top of Bell Hill. The church still thrust its spire into the sky, and the house was there looking almost the same. The one-room red brick schoolhouse obviously had been restored as a companion to the church. I parked beside a blueberry patch, noting the cemetery huddling in its familiar place across the way. But there were intrusions: other houses had been built, and the forest had climbed up the meadows so that the Presidential Range in New Hampshire could no longer be seen from that vantage point. As I turned to join others filing into the church I felt almost schizophrenic. The adult in the here and now, I was at the same time the child, gazing familiarly at the organ and the Duncan Phyfe table near the altar. I don't remember much
about that service, but afterwards a tall, shy, red-haired man approached me and asked if I was whom he thought I was. Upon my affirmation he told me he was Mark. And there right behind him were Betty and Richard. No other kind of reunion could ever compare to what my childhood friends and I shared that day. But after the excitement died down, I stayed behind as the others straggled away. I needed time alone. I needed to be that child again, just for a little while.

It is 1932. After much searching Dad finds the summer home he’s been looking for: a white clapboard house with an ell connecting it to a barn. Built in the late 1700’s, it anchors itself to the rocky soil and spreads down to an adjoining field. Three oak trees stand sentinel on the front lawn guarding the house as if it were a palace. Indeed, it feels like one to this small person, for inside are rooms full of yesterdays including Ben Franklin stoves, ladderback chairs, spool beds, and a schoolmaster’s stand-up desk. There are to be fourteen summers here, and during that first one I am Columbus as I explore its nooks and crannies. Old trunks groaning as they are pried open hold wispy lace dresses, stiff petticoats, and shawls. There are books to read by the light of kerosene lamps, and one closet is filled with old magazines. Here is a treasure trove waiting for me.

But the church beckons me. I feel like a trespasser as I turn the key in the huge white door, so I tiptoe. I listen for sounds that aren’t there. How big the pews are, and they have doors on them that squeak when you open them. Sunlight is a trespasser, too, as it filters through the multi-panes of six huge windows. There is an organ, but I am too young to try it out. I go out and sit on the large slabs of granite hewn for the steps of the church. Dad comes but doesn’t scold me for being there. Instead, he offers me a trip to the tower of the church. It is a trip made precariously because we must climb ladders. But even as young as I am I am aware that what I am seeing is unusual. Dad points out the White Mountains of New Hampshire on one side, a chain of lakes like a necklace of sparkling crystals worn by the earth in honor of summer on another, and finally he points to where three villages dot the landscape, precise in their boundaries.

I want to visit the cemetery, so together we part tall grass ripe for mowing and pry up the hook of its gate. There we find gravestones bearing names like Hepzibah and Hannah leaning toward those marked Benjamin and Amos. Squirrels scamper across the stone wall fences. The leaves of elm and oak trees whisper in the wind. I squeal when a field mouse darts across my shoes and I reach for Daddy’s hand.

He walks me down to the schoolhouse and leaves me there. This is the final stop on this first exploration. It is Saturday and even though the school is still in use on weekdays, it now is locked and empty. But if I stand on a piece of wood I can peer inside the windows to find wooden desks lined up like soldiers standing at attention. Over against a far wall is a blackboard, and beyond it is a large iron stove. I will visit the school
when it is in session and I will use it in a poem written after it had fallen into the disrepair which would later be corrected.

THE SCHOOL
The years have torn the one-room school apart; under a gaping hole which sucks the wind a chipmunk skips across the slanted slate that upright felt the squeaks and pulls of chalk which children made exploring truth. Now as the mist at daybreak steps inside where chairs lie rotting on the floor, the pages of a reader rip away and scatter through tall grass upon the hill, to spread forgotten sentences against the sun.

So, while we were living there on Bell Hill, the child turns into an adult who uses this reservoir of memories in ways unimagined at the time, unaware that all of this was a gift I would be unwrapping for the rest of my life. Here is a setting that can never be changed by physical alterations, for it is safely tucked away inside inner realms where one can always go home again. In this world characters leap to life. In this circumferential domain they go in and out of the house, attend that church, send their children to the school, and bury their dead. I think of words by Carson McCullers in one of her novels: “The sense of the past grew in him. Memories built themselves with almost architectural order.” And Edith Wharton wrote about “the low, rich murmur of the past.” In the past and present found at Bell Hill, child and adult mingle. They stir themselves into prose and poetry whenever they are summoned, eager to provide the stimulus for my creative future.
THERE IT STANDS

There it stands,
Its knarled fingers reaching into
the vast black sky.
Grasping and entrapping the stars
and the moon.
Hideously disfigured
Eerily whistling a song
composed by nature.
There it stands,
Alone and drooping
Hunched over with melancholy,
as though stricken with grief.
Foreboding and haunting
Carved and shaped and sculpted
by the elements of time.
There it stands,
The lone oak tree in the corner
of the courtyard.

Shirley Annette Harrison
GRANDFATHER

Ancient porch swing, lawn green, creaking on chains
Brittle with Chicago rust, it bears his
Grave weight, his eighty years, his mumbled song.
Sinking into his ash-smeared lap, rooting
Into his barreled chest, I smell cigars
And clean sweat, then press my ear to Sweden
Rumbling strangely beneath his gray sweater.

Rich Raymond
A NURSE'S "WAR"

By: Kim Grier

My friend Joe, a Vietnam veteran, told me once about the method that he and the other seasoned recruits used to determine the warworthiness of the FNG’s. Each incoming recruit was invited to accompany the soldiers on a mission which was anticipated to be only mildly dangerous — they might catch a little bit of fire and perhaps take a few hits, but they would not have their backs against the wall. Under these conditions, the new man’s reaction was analyzed — if he wet his pants or climbed over the man next to him in an attempt to flee, he was relegated to the motor pool. However, if he possessed that certain quality which caused his brain to click onto automatic, thereby allowing him to shoot people, he had passed what they called the ultimate test. He was accepted into the ranks of those qualified to march on the killing fields.

I work in a war zone, too: the Emergency Room at Memorial Medical Center. I would like to say that I am a miniature Florence Nightingale, gliding gracefully, cool and poised, from one life and death battle to the next (winning them all, of course), with my presence making the difference between total recovery or permanent damage, but the truth is that I am just an aide, and besides, most of the events that take place in the Emergency Room are not true emergencies anyhow. We spend a lot of time fighting children who are bound and determined to kick our eyes out while the doctor is stitching up thier lacerations, or losing the battle to keep all the trauma rooms clean with sheets on every stretcher, or calming disoriented drunks. Our weapons are ourselves — our personalities, what we say to our patients, and how we treat them.

Most of the time, the limits of our excitement are the person with a cut mimicking a red Niagra Falls, or the attempted suicide, unconscious and issuing prodigious amounts of charcoal stools for us to clean (we use charcoal to neutralize whatever substance the person has ingested). The treatment for suicide is enough to deter me from ever trying it; the taste of the charcoal preparation is so revolting that I have seen patients who, rather than drink the charcoal, opt to have a tube that looks like a clear garden hose inserted through their noses followed by a suctioning that is enough to turn one’s stomach inside out.

Every now and then, though, we are confronted with a true emergency, and then a priorly- prepared battle plan kicks into action. As soon as we receive the call that a protocol is on the way, doctors and nurses double-time from all corners of the Emergency Room to assemble in tight formation at the appointed trauma room. There we stand at tense attention, wondering how bad it will be. How hard will we have to fight to win this one? Will we win it? My job, for the most part, is to stand in the corner and stay out of the way, hoping and praying that, at a crucial moment, a doctor does not mistake me for a nurse and rely on me to perform a procedure which I
cannot do. Once the patient arrives, the trauma room explodes like the opening volleys in a battle — doctors shout orders, nurses scurry to assault with IV's and drugs, and Foley catheters invade the bladder. I may make a phone call here and there to summon the support troops, lab and respiratory, but the bulk of my job occurs after the protocol, when I attack the debris left littering the battlefield, wading through pools of blood and reassigning stained sheets to the laundry bag and mountains of paper, used bandages, and opened suture trays to the garbage.

A couple of weeks ago, we received word that Medstar was about to present us with one of these lovely protocols, and elderly lady bleeding from every possible orifice. I was busy administering an enema in another area of the E.R., so I missed being a participant in the opening wave of this lady's battle. When I entered the trauma room, she was lying naked on blood-soaked sheets in Trendelenburg's position (stretcher tilted so that her head was way below her feet) while medical personnel darted and buzzed above her like fighter jets, performing every life-saving procedure possible. I wondered how her ancient body could withstand such an attack, much less the ailment which originally brought her to us. Her skin was so fragile that she bled wherever anyone had touched her just a little too forcefully. She would be black and blue tomorrow, I decided — if she made it. What really caught my attention, though, was the fact that she seemed very aware of everything that was happening to her — she was neither senile nor so dopy from loss of blood that the experience could be a merciful blur to her. She was awake, terrified, and calling on Jesus to help her. Still her voice was quiet and maintained.

I stepped out for a moment to go get a wheelchair for a patient stuck on the outside deck of the E.R. He was a middle-aged man who was perfectly able to get from his car to the wheelchair but mysteriously unable to walk ten feet to the triage nurse. Once there, he refused to wait in line; he kept insisting that he was short of breath and had to see a doctor right away. I found it remarkable that he had enough breath to talk but not enough to breathe. He was also unable to comprehend that there were other battles more urgent than his alleged fight for air. I shoved him back into his place in line and told him that he had to see the triage nurse before he could see a doctor; everybody does (except protocols) and the sooner he settled down, the sooner he could be seen. I felt like giving his wheelchair a firm kick in the direction of the deck and watching him catapult into the parking lot.

On my way back to the trauma room, I contrasted the man I had just seen and my patient who, although lying under the warming lights, was nevertheless growing colder and colder. Comparing their reactions to illness, I began to devise other strategies to get rid of that jerk out there wasting perfectly good oxygen on his worthless, no-good body. Recalling the oxygen mask on my patient's face, I asked the nurse how she was doing. Before re-entering the trauma room, she just shook her head and said, "The worst part is that she knows she's dying."

I followed her. The intensity of the battle had diminished, but when I applied the bio-psycho-social approach to patient care that I had learned in
nursing school, I realized that on the psycho-social battle front, there were no troops. The doctors and nurses were so busy on the biological front that none of them had stopped to give her any more than token reassurance. No one was holding her hand or talking to her. For a minute I was tempted to hang back and act like one of the cool professionals. After all, this would be highly irregular — to break rank as if I knew what I was doing, and act independently. I would be out on a limb. I vacillated, leaning against the smooth, cold security of the medicine counter, now littered with empty bottles and bloody gauze sponges. Finally I gave in — thinking of how I would feel if I were her age and dying, I worked up the courage to go stand by her.

Her eyes sought mine. "Help me!"

I stroked her face and said, "They're working on you right now. We're taking care of you. Try to relax if you can. I know you must be hurting bad."

I thought I sounded pretty stupid but her expression seemed to change slightly. She said, "Don't leave me."

I assured her that I would not, and so it continued — she pleading and me reassuring — until she could no longer ask for help because she had vomited what looked like all the remaining blood in her body, and being in Trendelenburg's position, she was unable to get it out of her mouth and clean her airway. Now this was something way out of my league, and by then I was the only other person in the room. Terror infused me as I turned her head to the side and instinctively jammed the Younkers suction handle into her mouth. What if she suffocated and it was my fault? Blood rattled the suction tube on its way to the vacuum container as an eternity passed before she could speak again. Then it was the same old thing: "Don't leave me," and I did not.

I stayed late that night, accompanying Miss Maude to Med-Surg Trauma, a section of the ICU. I had promised her that I would not leave her, and I aimed to keep my word, so I stayed until she started to nod off. I touched her shoulder and said, "Miss Maude, you're starting to fall asleep. Do you mind if I go now?"

At first she said what she had been saying all evening long. Then she looked at me one last time and said, "You're so young — you probably have children waiting for you. Go on home and get some rest."

That is my final memory of her, for the next time I was working, I heard that she died later that night, as we knew she would. Upon reflecting on her and my short but intense interaction with her I was rather surprised to find that I felt not grief but a sense of peace and satisfaction. I did not know her well enough to miss her, but she had played a very important part in my life — by allowing me to be with her during her death, she had provided me with the opportunity to pass one of my ultimate tests.