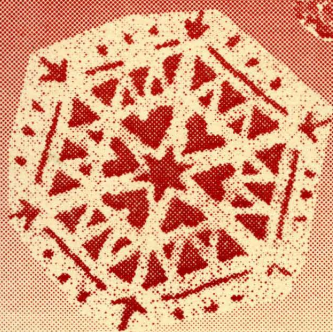
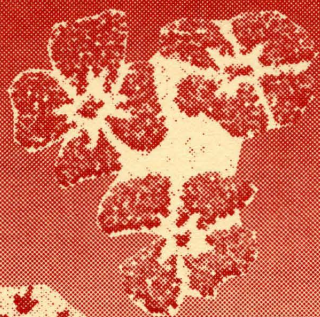
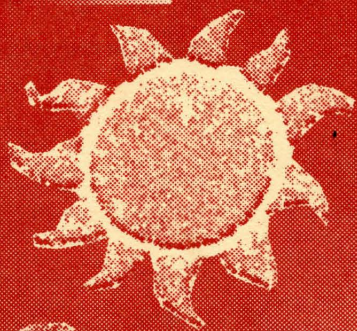


Fioretti



1996

Fioretti

A Literary Anthology

**Volume 54
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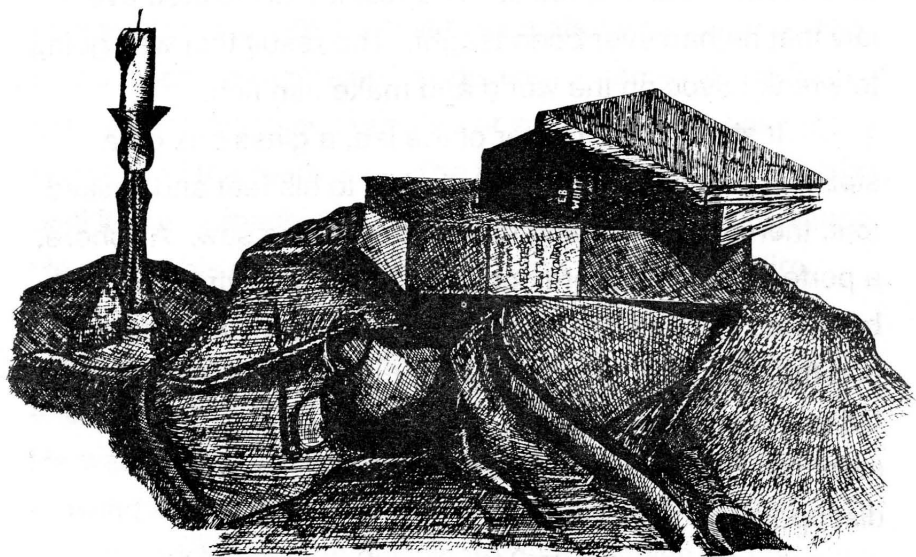
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the growing process

by Stacey Clevenger

jane & dick
see, look, play
letter by letter;
add apples,
subtract oranges;
delight in story time
in the library;
sack lunches
and pulled pigtail;
evolution with vocabulary
and dissections;
best friends and boyfriends,
projects for papers
typed rather than written;
arbitrary number scores
for applications;
the move from home
hours, credits, requirements
mentors and...
tormentors;
the love of knowledge
when curiosity runs
your mind
grasping at ideas
and ideals;
application to the "real world"
striving to learn
needing to internalize.
what is in store
with the next step
of a professional day?
hopefully more knowledge
and the love of intelligence.



Disappearing Act

by Brenda Meinhardt

It was done. And he regretted it. The lab was in shambles, broke glass was everywhere. All that remained intact was the box. All of his research was gone, only the result remained. His result. The result that violated every law that he had ever been taught. The result that was going to wreak havoc on the world and make him rich.

It stood in the center of the lab, a glass box on a stainless steel stand. He got shakily to his feet and walked to it, then around it trying to fathom what he saw. A sphere, a perfectly black sphere occupied the space where his mini brick wall once stood. All four glass windows were shattered and the glass crunched under his feet as he paced in circles. Off one of the lab tables he grabbed a test tube stand, carefully, oh so slowly he tossed it at the sphere. It disappeared. "Oh, God. . ."

" . . .be careful! That gun's been in the works for years, you drop it there'll be hell to pay!"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, set it on that lab table. . .Gently! Didn't you hear what I said? Alright people, I know how this thing's supposed to work, but this is the first firing test so get behind the shield and I'll take it from here." His assistants gratefully disappeared behind the safety shield in the back of the lab. He put on his gloves and set about lining up the Orison accelerator in front of his wall. Having done that, he uncoiled

the control panel's wires and walked them back to a mini shield set up behind the accelerator.

His palms were sweating in the gloves, so he took them off and laid them on the floor next to him. Setting the panel on his knees, he took a deep breath and pressed the button that coded for warm up. A low humming filled the room as the Orisate particles started to move through the accelerator. He took his first breath after what seemed like hours when no explosion or odd noises came from in front of him. After waiting five minutes or so till the hum was steady he pressed the ready key. The humming grew higher pitched until it was screeching at the high point of his hearing range. He closed his eyes, steadied his hand and pressed fire.

He watched as a magenta beam shot from the accelerator and hit the bricks. He watched as the bricks exploded and shattered the three inch thick glass of the box. He watched as the whole process stopped and reversed drawing everything back towards the center of the box. Not only the bricks, but the glassware on the tables six feet away. The chairs behind the tables, even rocking the tables themselves. The pull knocked the shield on the top of the accelerator and took him with it. Hitting his head on the boards, he blacked out and didn't see the lab walls warp and then snap back into place as the pull climaxed then terminated, leaving the black sphere in the center of the box.

"Oh, God. There's nothing there. It is a void, filled with nothing, it can hold anything but it itself is nothing! How did this happen? The Orisate particles were to disintegrate

the bricks into their separate elemental forms, not create oblivion! This is not right. This is not good.

I can't let anyone know about this." His assistants started to come out from behind the shield, their faces alight with curiosity. He motioned for them to stay back, they did so reluctantly.

"Sir, did it work?"

His mind whirled with indecision, tell the truth; they had created a weapon far more dangerous than a disintegration gun. Or lie and keep everything secret and start all over?

"No. It didn't work properly. Back to square one folks. Why don't we call it a day and we'll clean up the lab tomorrow?" He stood motionless as everyone filed out of the lab. When they were gone he walked to his accelerator and picked it up from underneath his shield. As he walked towards the sphere his mind tried to tell him that this wasn't the right thing to do, but his conscience silenced his brain. The accelerator disappeared into the sphere. Then his notebooks and drawings, the precious bottle of Orisate procured by the lab at great expense, all disappeared within the sphere.

Then he turned his back and left the lab. Not caring what they would think of the black sphere that they wouldn't be able to move or touch. It was time to start over. It was his turn to disappear, within the void of humanity.

Earthen Girl

by John Miller

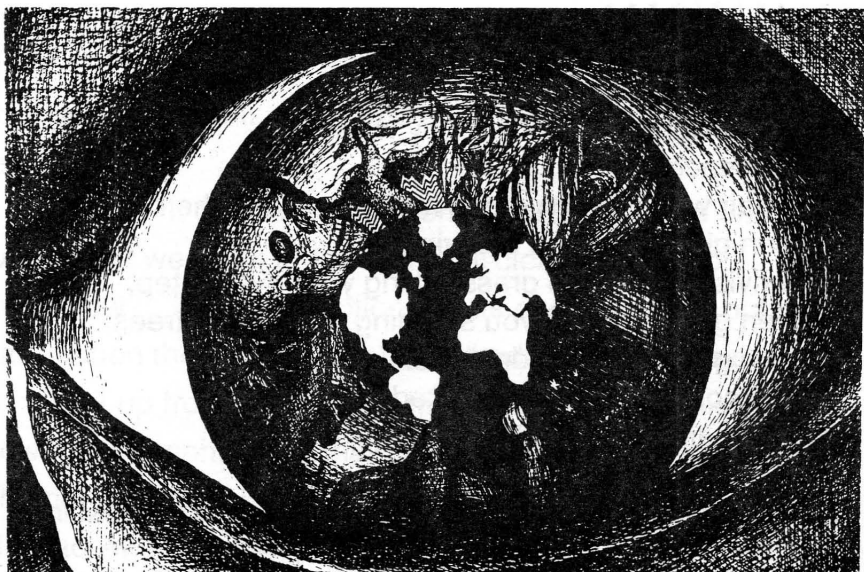
Do you remember the things that were pure?
And do you remember the last time-...
You remember you?
Remember you?

* * * * *

Earthen girl made of spirit.
She's a childhood friend, happy walking.
Found peace?
Long hair would reach out to make love with the breeze.
Earthen girl dances on the wind.
I stil envision you; the grass licking your every step.
Earthen girl, I still see you standing among the trees.
Earthen girl plays with dragons.
I can almost feel your arm linked in mine.
Free to roam, one with the land.
Earthen girl, too much is fantasy.
Beauty, though dazzling and radiant, is sometimes lost in a
land of wanting to believe.
The soul twists and turns knowing...but still... wanting to
believe.

* * * * *

Something pure.
Earthen girl, you will always be.
Dancing in the wind.
Making the wind follow.

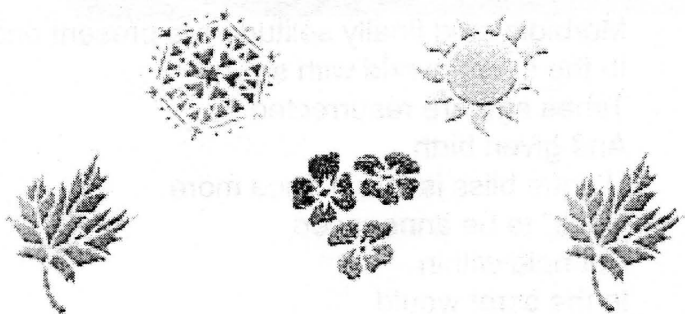


The Smile Cracks

by Stacey Clevenger

Locked in my secret world
Brought up only in dreams
This notion created in a past time
Will not be ceased
And not dispelled until
It is forced
But the secret world
Lives in the unconscious
Because of a lack of effort
A lack of reason
Huge Happiness is found
And taken from times ago.
Beautiful and unforgotten hands clasp
Enormous arms tighten
Unimaginable legs move
The smile cracks
The brow ponders
Deep meaning and dark wonderings
The head touches unfathomable concepts
And enlightens others
Morbidity and finally solitude are present and real
In the secret world with smiles
Times ago are resurrected
And given birth
Unique bliss is found once more
Never to be announced
But held within
In the secret world
Contrary to normality
Walls are nonexistent
And nothing is retained

Thoughts transfer without
Spoken words
Or restraints
And are felt as well as
Comprehended
Others outside the secret world
Are discussed and analyzed
Talk exists as the common medium
Thoughts flow
Touches brush
Pieces of the heart are revived
The state of being rattles
As the secret world is pulled out of
And reflection occurs.



Toothbrush

by Tim Vollmer

Cindy.

The small girl sat motionless against the dirty white wall, tiny knees hugged to her chest, watery brown eyes staring past the sergeant into the dark void beyond.

The police sergeant sighed, and paused to brush back the long brown hair which covered her face.

"Cindy," he began again, "I know you're in shock, but please, please, tell me; did you see anything? I've got to know."

Cindy didn't even look at him. But she heard his words.

See, what did she see? She saw her green toothbrush, taped against the wall in the bathroom of her mobile home because the rack had fallen off the night before.

But that was all.

Cindy she had heard her mother yell from the decaying couch in the TV room, Cindy, go brush your teeth this minute before I have to come and beat you.

And so she did, because she knew her mother might.

With deliberate modesty she closed the bathroom door, then clambered onto the high-backed chair which rested before the sink so that she could reach it. For a moment she stared at the brush, wondering if she could lie to her mother and get away with it.

But then the front door slammed open, and rough voices reverberated through the plaster walls.

She heard very little as she stared at that little green toothbrush, gripping the edge of the sink until her knuckles turned a ghastly white.

A scream from her mother, high-pitched, piercing. A

scuffle. Men's voices, deep and heavy. One of them laughed as a table over-turned, shattering the cheap carnival vase. Another scream.

And then...gunshots.

One...two...three...

Another scream, and then...then...

Silence. A silence so pervasive Cindy could hear her own thumping heart beat, and the heavy breathing of men in the TV room.

A slow shuffle, shoes scraping against linoleum, a screen door pushed open and banging shut; these sounds faintly reached Cindy's ears as she stared with wide eyes at the dull green toothbrush hanging on the wall.

A low moan tore open the air, but Cindy was oblivious. The toothbrush had become her reality.

When the police arrived two hours later, she was still staring at it.



What is Love?

by LeAnn Evans

Love looking through your eyes sees where you began
love can see all of your struggles and can tell where you
will land.

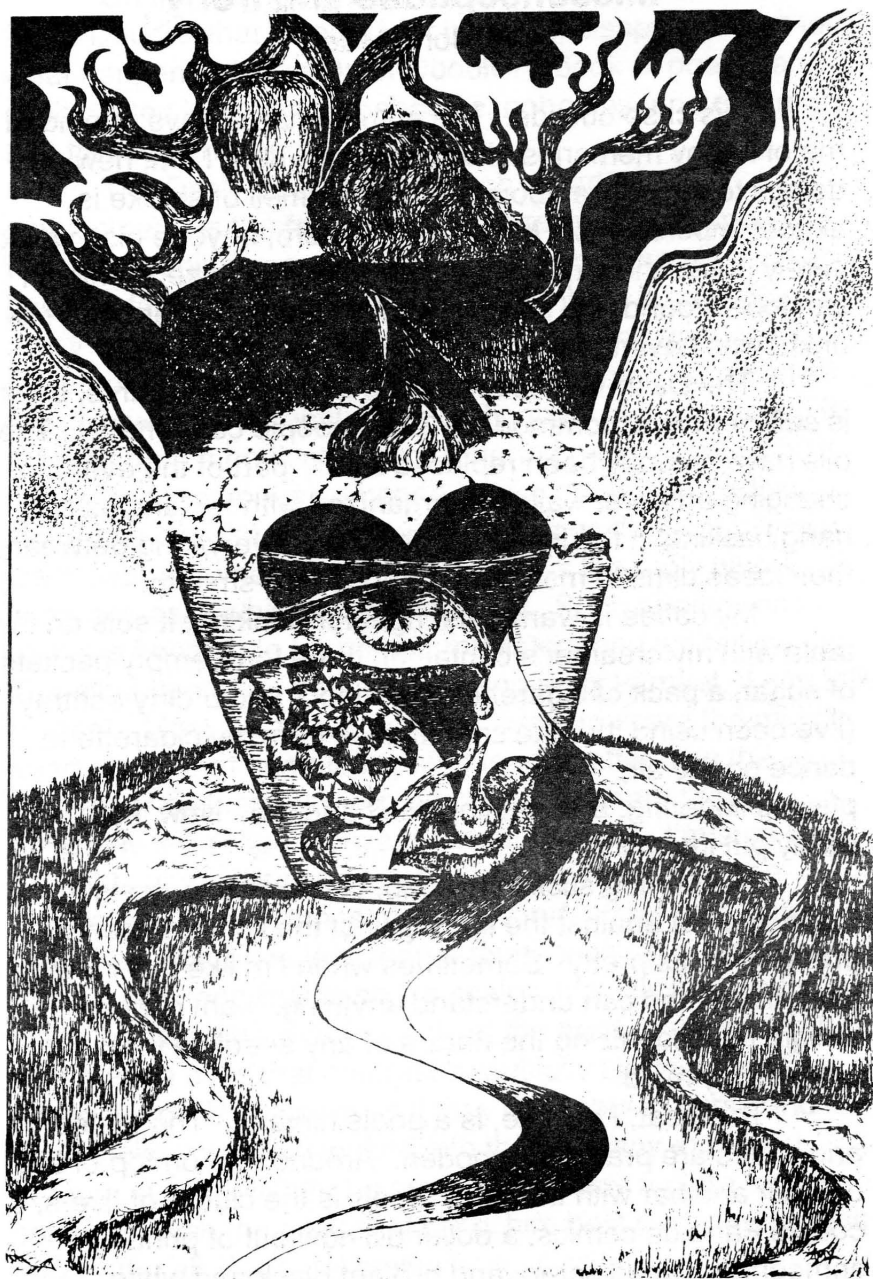
Love holds your hand in fear and walks with you into the fire
love knows our every thought and your every wanting desire.
Love is the rain when your fields are dry and the water that
cools from a stream

love is a rose that grows in the snow and the eternal flame
of your dream.

Love is the courage to keep on trying even when the road
looks
grim

love is the wisdom that spills from your lips and the tear
that falls from your eyes

love is the spirit of those before us and the power of a friend
at your side.



Misconceptions and Irony

By John Miller

It is crisp outside. The autumn has always reminded me of happy memories. I am content where I am, new doings to reminisce about later. The smell of smoke is almost imperceivable by the people here, anyone else would surely notice the smell before they saw the haze. Tonight I can look around and say that I know everyone here; the few unknowns haven't shown up.

The Dash-In isn't one of the largest restaurants, but it is sufficient to accommodate 35-40 people comfortably. The oils have recently been replaced again, part of the ever changing art here; walls are organized with rectangles that hang basking in the light they deserve. Everything between their ideas dims to match the atmosphere-smooth.

My coffee is warm, just right for drinking; it sets on the table with my creamer's container, three torn, empty packets of sugar, a pack of cigarettes, my zippo, and a dirty ashtray (I've been using it). The smoke rises from my cigarette to dance on the air, playing lingering, entertaining itself and me. Now, I am easily put into play.

The stirring stick in my cup, thin and long, rests from the inside out against the lip. Against the lip, that sounds pretty. It looks pretty. Sometimes when I'm like this I feel everything, and can understand anything. I am content tonight philosophizing the nature of any seedling that crosses my mind.

This seat, I believe, is a poets nirvana. The tables and chairs are practical, wooden. Around and on top of the counter and bar with the taller stools is the clutter of flyers, a couple Far-side comics, a dollar bill now out of print, someone's signed scrap, and brilliant black and white photographs under the glass that protects the bar top.

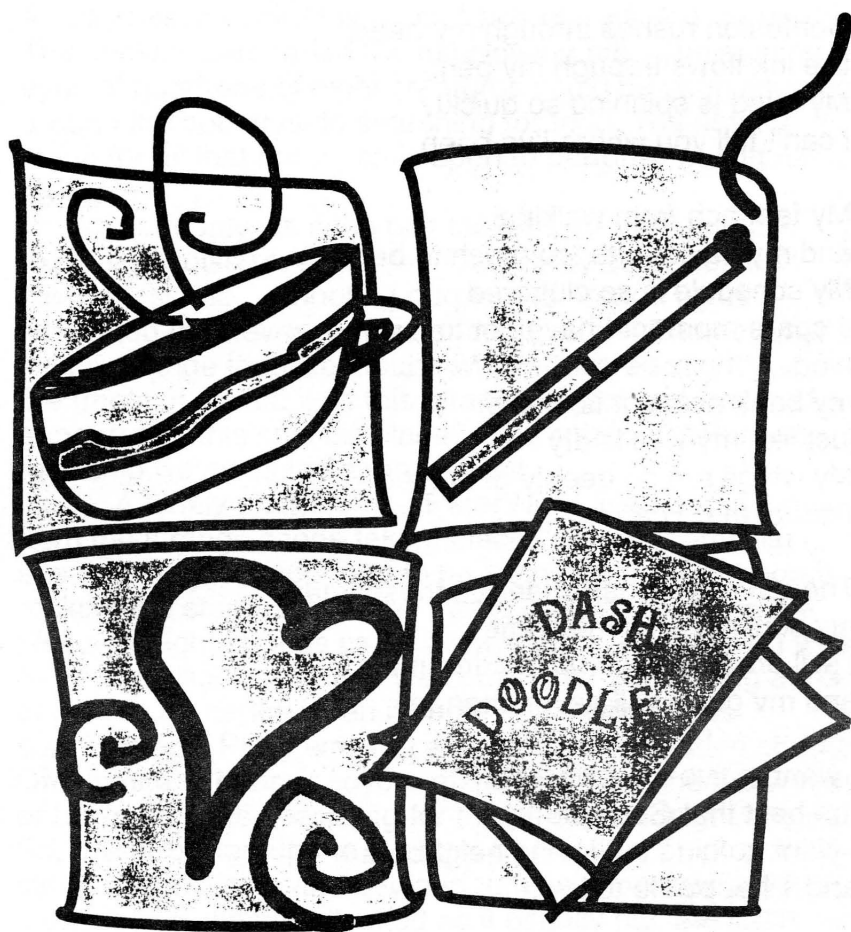
On the far corner table I can make out the current Dash-Doodle, that wonderful, changing, disappearing, "Hey, what happened to the Dash-Doodle?" book of poems and such written in by the somebodies, nobodies, and dreamers that frequent this home.

The Dash-Doodle is as much a part of this environment as the front door. No one I've found knows where its beginnings are rooted. It is here, and always has been as far back as anyone can remember. It has taken many shapes-spiral notebook, perforated and torn; one I remember was no larger than my open hand. The doodles are always easily identified; folded paper unevenly eating its way out from a booklet prison, roughed pages stained with coffee and memories someone left for others to ponder. Unfortunately, like its unknown beginnings they sometimes disappear. "Someone stole it" is always the reply when someone asks what's happened to it. Soon another one appears begging to be ripped, mutilated, and written in. The inhabitants are very friendly and easy to meet, if you talk to them. Most are teenagers that seem to scare the middle aged adults that sometimes stop in after attending the theater, or on their way home from somewhere they obviously felt obliged to wear formal clothing. I'm sure that it's not their ideal setting to walk in from the chill to see people like Sam. Sam is mulatto, short, about 5'8", has black hair shaved to less than a fourth inch save the three thin six inch long braids on his scalp which click when he walks because he wears beads at the ends of them. He has green-aqua eyes that contrast beautifully against his olive complexion. They seem as if they'd be able to curse and overwhelm you if you looked into them for any extended amount of time. When he smiles and holds a glare he can convince even the ones that know him best that maybe he is crazy after all. He's not crazy, radical views, but very pleasant. Quiet.

Sometimes Mike will make his entrance wearing a dress, lipstick, and eyeliner. His dull white ceramic complexion looks as if to radiate around his face peeking out from behind black-mopped hair. Combined with his thick black plastic glass frames he looks like something out of a bad 80's music video. Tall and thin, slanky, as if you were to touch him the wrong way his brittle body would snap in two like a dead twig under foot. Mike is very outgoing and funny. I think he's scared inside.

I've always felt enlivened here, electric, ever since I first entered this province. Here is where the thoughts of demons rise, the experiences only these few, still becoming a majority culminate into one physical being of idealism. Only these few will ever understand. To have one's perception altered into a million light flashes, to know the only importance in life is the insanity living within each of us, the virtual world becomes reality. Each person sitting, running, jumping, socializing, from one table realm to the next all connected in mid flight by concurring ideals of how the planet rests in an unevenly weighted vacuum; we all have our own solutions, which often makes for wonderful exchanges of insight. This is the land in which any question is welcome; there are no taboos, no judging authority; this is the knoll my mask fell onto when the wall came down. This was my birthing place into existence.

Before I found this world I felt isolated as if in a freezer that crystallized my thoughts as they left my head, made them heavy and hurtled them to shatter against the backdrop of some alien landscape. In this new land I am free to learn new perspectives to the ideas locked in my head; now they are made free to bounce off the walls, grow and multiply.



Untitled

By Leann Evans

Confusion rushes through my head
like ink flows through my pen.
My mind is spinning so quickly
I can't tell you where I've been

My feet ach from walking
and my back hurts too much to bend
My schedule is so cluttered
a spare moment I have not to lend

my bank account is empty,
just like my well is dry
My wings are so deeply damaged
I doubt that I can fly.

Though my life has changed these years
my soul remains the same
I still dream the same big dreams
and my goals will never change.

I want to live the fullest life
the best that God can give
I want nothing but loving neighbors
and a happy life to live.

If you know a place
Where I can go and rest;
I'll give you everything I own
and buy you more of the best

All I need is one quick moment
in the place I want to be
A place where my body is comfortable
and I am comfortable with me.

It Came from the Sky

Heather Ireland

A hazy mist covered the black fields of Pumpkin township. The crickets serenaded the full glowing orb. The shining eyes of hundreds of night creatures could be seen scurrying around the countryside searching for food. The night, a stage for all that nature calls upon to perform, was in full swing.

Suddenly, as if the plot took a fatal turn, an ear-exploding noise reverberated from every corner of the pleasant scene. Shooting purple and orange lights expanded from every corner of the horizon. Their source was a strange iridescent cube which hovered slightly above the treetops. What was this strange object and why had it appeared at this specific place? The citizens of Pumpkin township would all too soon find out.

A lonely man, named Peter Neila lived about 2 miles from the strange scene taking place. On this particular evening, he just happened to be sitting on this front porch rocking the stardust minutes away. He was enjoying the pleasant night sounds as he always did every evening when all of his twilight serenade was cut short. Now being a man of great experience when it came to his wilderness surroundings, Peter was not alarmed by his sudden change. Oftentimes, a bear or coyote might prowl around the woods or his trash cans searching for the perfect midnight snack. So, Peter picked up the shotgun by his side, flipped on his string of floodlights and decided to take a look around his premises. Everything looked as it usually did, the trash can lids were still intact, the area was clear, and there were no visible tracks anywhere. Now even though Peter's outdoor knowledge was extensive, he also had a developed sense of gut instinct. It was gut instinct that had helped him survive in Vietnam and it was also that gut feeling that had made him such a successful FBI agent. However, in all the three years that he had spent traveling around the world achieving the impossible, he had never experienced a danger with which he was about to come face to face.

Meanwhile, back in the middle of town, strange things were taking place. Although the temperature of the night was pleasant seventy degrees fahrenheit, the fountain in the middle of town had frozen solid. The dogs in the local kennel were all going nuts, barking and scratching ag the screens that enclosed them. However, even though the dog's jaws were opening and closing, no noise was coming out. At the local ice cream shop, the tubs of ice cream all melted suddenly as if put under an invisible heat lamp. The spoons began to float in mid air and circulate around the room. Cars, although in "drive" would only travel in "reverse". Frost appeared on the windows of the shops of main street and it began to rain frogs and lizards. Utter chaos broke out. People ran across the street blindly causing several accidents as did people in cars who crashed dangerously into other cars and objects in their attempts to rapidly flee. Five minutes after the wave of strange phenomena, the middle of town looked like a battle scene form an old war movie. If it weren't for one fateful call, the whole town would have perished.

That one call was from the one competent man in Pumpkin township whose name wasn't Peter Niela, the town sheriff. The town sheriff was an ex- New York beat cop who had after 25 years on the force decided that he's had enough. He'd returned home to the welcome arms of his hometown with the hopes of retirement, only to be recruited the same year for sheriff by the local townspeople. It was a cushy job. Nothing ever really happened here excluding the occasional drunken squabble or the crackdown on a local poacher. Mrs. Bradberry always brought him apple pie every Wednesday and on the 25th of August the town had a parade in his honor. That's why the whole thing had left a bad taste in his mouth. He was scared for the first time in years and he knew that something was going down. Since something was going down, he needed some help and some reliable help at that. So, if help was needed, the person he'd definetly want on his side would be the man whom he wished would answer his phone.

Peter heard the loud ringing on his telephone inside. "Just let the answering machine pick it up," he thought to himself. However, that famous gut feeling urge him to run to the phone.

"Hello," he nervously answered.

"Yes, Peter, it's John. I don't know quite how to explain this."

"Explain what?"

"Well, these strange things have been happening."

"What kind of strange things?"

"Let me start at the beginning...."

After packing his truck with guns, grenades and ammunition, Peter drove like a bat out of hell. However, he felt as if he should be slamming on his brakes. It took all of fifteen minutes to arrive to the center of town and when he did arrive, he wished that he hadn't. The place was in shambles. It looked as if a bomb had dropped on the city. There were car accidents everywhere, buildings had collapsed, people were screaming from underneath rubble and as they ran frantically down the street. Fires would spring up out of nowhere and then douse themselves. Strange things were happening as they had before. All in all, it was a complete mess.

"Better to travel by foot," Peter thought to himself.

Back in the Sheriff's office, anxiety was building in John's stomach. How could he help his simple citizens who at the moment were being tormented and tortured, His mind would have burst had he not heard the knock on the door.

"Let men in. It's Peter."

John rushed to the door.

"Come on, we have not time to lose. I've got some heavy artillery in my truck. We've got to blast those suckers back where they came from."

So, John and Peter ran out to Peter's truck and loaded their weapons. Then Peter ran out, among all the chaos, and yelled up at the glowing cube.

"Come out an face someone your own size why don't ya?"

Then, it was as if World War III began. Lasers started shooting from the cube directed towards Peter's truck. Peter and John opened fire also. This went on until Peter and John realized that their plan had suddenly gone sour. For, Peter and John, from using all their ammunition were out of weaponry.

Somehow, the beings who inhabited the strange orb sensed John and Peter's fear and confusion and the glowing cube began to rapidly approach John and Peter as if to obliterate them. Peter, not one to ever give up a fight, did all he knew to survive. He went to his last resort. He reached for the only thing in the bed of his truck besides empty cartridges, a 24-pack of Coca-Cola. He hurled each can at the throttling space cube disintegrated. Frantically, Peter and John threw the cans until the cube had been demolished. As soon as it had occurred, all of the damage and horror was erased as if it had occurred, all of the damage and horror was erased as if it had never existed.

John and Peter blinked in amazement, each wondering to himself if he were crazy. Finally, John spoke.

"Did you see what I just saw?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I did."

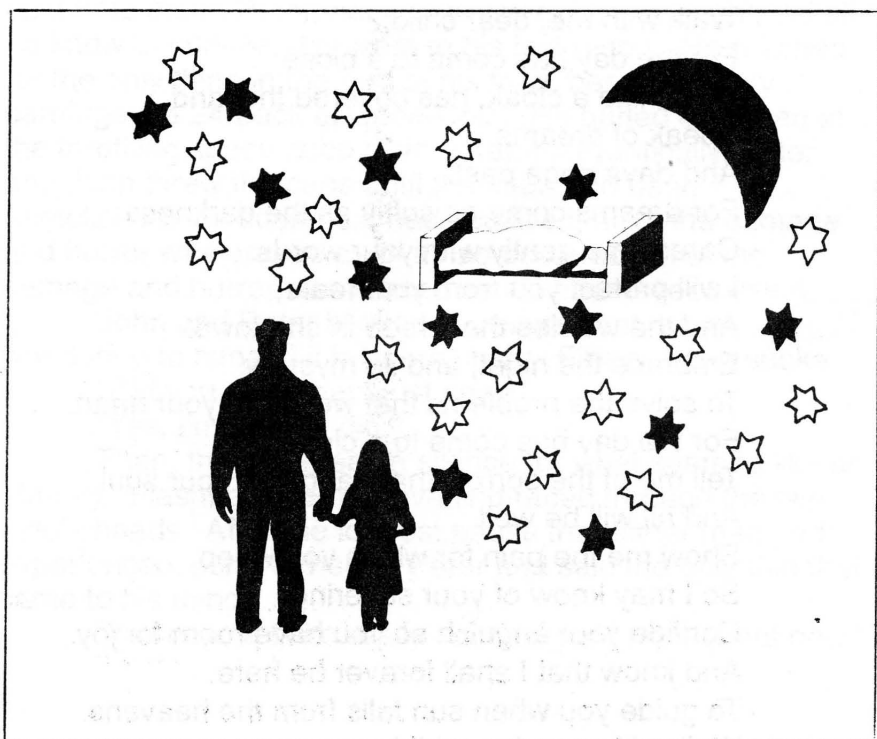
Then, they both sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity. Flashbacks of the evening raced through the two men's heads. After the longest pause that either man had experienced, John turned to Peter and said the only thin that came to his mind.

"Ya know, a coke really sounds good right about now."

Walk With Me

by Joshua Paul Gerding

Walk with me, dear child,
For the day has come to a close.
Night, like a cloak, has covered the land.
Speak of dreams
And days gone past.
For dreams come as softly as the darkness.
Caress me gently with your words.
I will protect you from your fears,
And the worries that creep in shadows.
Embrace the night, and its mystery,
To solve the problems that weigh on your heart.
For the day has come to a close.
Tell me of the sorrow that hangs on your soul.
And all will be well.
Show me the pain for which you weep.
So I may know of your suffering.
Confide your anguish so you have room for joy.
And know that I shall forever be here.
To guide you when sun falls from the heavens.
Walk with me, dear child.



"Walk with me"

Sillye Kolbert

Mother

by Crystal G. Mudgett

As the river flows,
Birds sing at the joy
Of the sun's glow
A Mother yells for her only boy.

A yell which is never heard
But not forgotten
Not even the birds
Could spot him.

This yell lives forever
And ever, in the mind of the mother,
Nothing could sever
This memory from her.

This yell lived till the end of time
To haunt her,
She could not shake it or this rhyme,
She the mother.



"mother" Diana Hausman

Lodestone

by Emily Persic

Into the west

I go looking for Michael Furey, sleeping
beneath his shroud of coarse grass, heather
and words.

He waits, as I wait for the truth
that Mad Ireland in her madness has hidden
beneath her shroud of laughter and drinking
of music and poetry.

A nation of poets is always at war.

Yeats and Maud Gonne battle eternally through poetry
of a Troy burned and anger remembered.

To Dublin

I go looking to a country I have never seen,
With its pipes and drums, beating
beating out the path chosen
the tracks of tears, widow's laments
a war of hundred's of years, reborn every year.

The hollowmusic, the holloweyed men,
that Easter morning's birth could not quell the deaths
not end the anger, not touch the fight.

To Mayo

A green place, fairer than heaven, prouder than hell.

Letter to American cousins

telling, praying

(Holy mother of God Jesus and Mary be with those in this
house)

sending across the oceans dreams of home, pleas for
money

Only sons, beautiful daughters

an American Wake to speed them along

to a new world, far from famine, far from poverty,
far from home.

Into the north
the curbstones painted
green and gold and orange
blue and red and white
division lines to throw stones over.
House against house,
Irish against Irish.
Every mother waiting for her son.

Into the west
where to beware of the wee folk, and dare not walk
down the road where a black dog was seen last week.
To where the tales are told with a great deal of the drink and
the drums are playin' and pipes
and tinwhistle blowin'
round and round the girls feet go and the dresses
swirling, dancing
as to keep at bay
the voices calling across the years
and Michael Furey
sleeping beneath the snow.

Cabaret Revisited

by Timothy Vollmer

The stage is empty now. All props have been cleared away, the wooden doors and walls, the fruit shop stand, the train car. Even the *Cabaret* sign which had swung like an epitaph overhead, black-bordered letters etched in wood, light bulbs and silver glitter behind, had been disassembled. I had removed the screws, and torn away the silver lining.

Not by choice, certainly, had I carried those slabs of wood down into bowels of the auditorium where water pipes vented their stick heat, to arrange them in awkward skeleton piles of doors, walls, and panes of glass. I would have left them standing on stage, erect eternally, a tribute to the glory that for three nights and a day had been our heritage and our triumph.

But the show is over. The actors have lives to reenter; the directors, families to see again after their month-long labors. Interminable other shows (I will not say better) await the birthing pains of creation. Life is dynamic. It should stagnate.

Oh, but to relive those moments, onstage and off, when body and mind are galvanized by the exuberance of an audience, flawless execution of a scene, the performance of your peers as they sing, hauntingly, of pineapples and Meeskites and chilling Nazi fanaticism. My spirit still sings the opening song "Willkommen, " and dances with its ethereal chorus, step-step-stomp, step-step-stomp. The heat of the spotlight still sears my eyes as I glance over the audience, laughing and clapping and then, somber, as Nazi salutes are thrown not by stoic SS soldiers, but by the decadent sailors and chorus girls who had enticed not an hour before with their youthful frivolity in the midst of a nation smoldering with ruin and despondency.

My God, how the audience clapped, every song,

every bow; the present silence is awful and heavy, humbling and dim, static in the wash of time until actors and audience assemble once more, different in compositions yet unswerving in the purpose which has persisted since stories were first acted around campfires and an observer thought, *how beautiful*.

I am no actor. The thought repeats itself as it had so many times before, a mantra, a shield, against the bitterness that rears when my voice cuts off before the song is finished, when a line or dance step is bungled, when I feel ill and out of place and desirous of being where I sit now, an anonymous non-entity smug in my obfuscation. Through three weeks of rehearsals I had chanted it with every stumble and cough. Looking at my companion sailor, seduced as I was, promised walk-in parts by charismatic women who blithely failed to mention the exit, we'd shake hands solemnly over the tiny red table before the music of our halting dance struck its first note. And we'd agree aloud, simultaneously, that we should not be here, but since we were here we'd do the best damn job the limits of bodies and voices of non-actors permitted,

Two painful weeks taught us that resolve was rarely enough, discouragement is contagious, muscles are easily strained, and even accomplished actors despair. Weary and overcome three of us, two sailors and a customs officer, would occasionally huddle in the seats of the auditorium during breaks in rehearsal and compare notes. The way they backstage each other, its pathetic, quoted one, and we would nod in sympathetic agreement. The women especially, awful. I am reminded of what a friend said at the cast party, sitting against the wall, after the alcohol had overflowed our restraints and all the subtle conflicts we picked up on in the theater erupted in hot words and tears too salty to be touched. He said, how sad, how very, very sad. And I replied, life is sad, as if that explained all the

bitterness and rage of the world.

There was beauty, though, transient as a shared smile between scenes as we passed, hurrying to our places. Two days before opening night, when the dance we had practiced so painfully and diligently finally looked like a cohesive dance and not the awkward dribblings of an elementary school drama, we erupted in such exultation that for several short minutes we were finally actors, aloof and assured and content in our talents. After the Cabaret sign lowered at the end of the first performance and the Nazi flag peered ominously from behind; after we had skipped onto stage for our bows and reveled in the roar of hoots and clapping; after singing in finale,

Life is a Cabaret, old chum, Only a Cabaret, old chum, and I love a Cabaret...;

every passing brought its own euphoria, a nirvana and closeness that the hugging which followed could not fully express. A connection had been established, a bond of spirits warring and hating and reveling in the end, and still it has not died, three weeks after the final performance on a warm Sunday, February afternoon when our voices one last time carried in blissful unison.

The quiet is oppressive, and fearful, in its emptiness. I never knew how heavy the air was, until I in breathing was alone. My wish has been fulfilled; I was no actor, and again, I am no actor. Maddeningly, still, I would have it otherwise. I would bring the *Cabaret* back, the makeup, sweat, doubt, and fear, all the turmoil and heartbreak, the rush to finish homework assignments 2:00 in the morning, just for one last moment on that stage. It is an addiction, invigorating and debilitating. And now, empty, desolate, I cannot tear myself away from the stage, but listen to the voices still calling from the shadows: