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MARIAN COLLEGE

Indianapolis, Indiana

LITERARY ANTHOLOGY

VOLUME 42

NO. 1

1983 - 84

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p. 27/ Jeanne Byrnes

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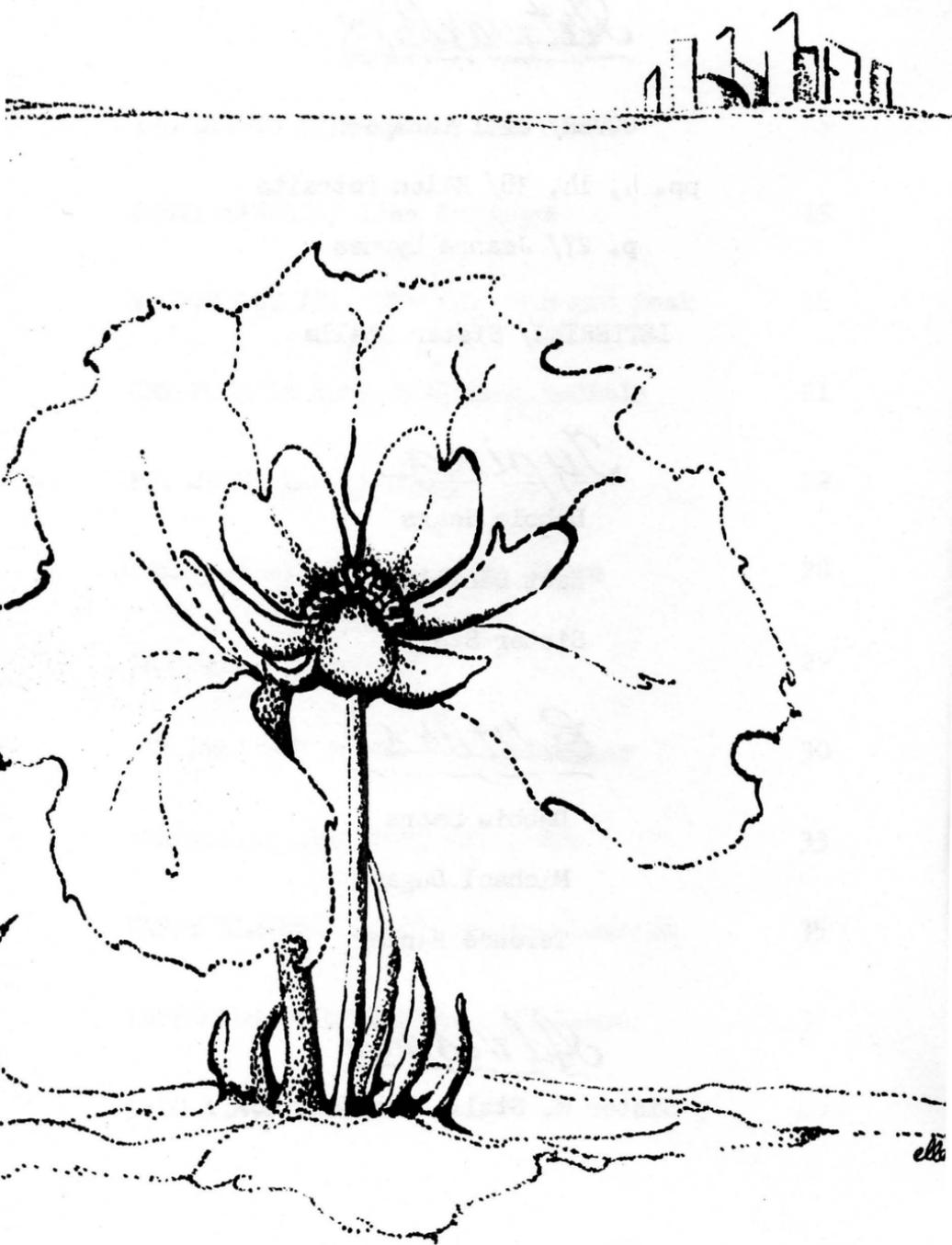
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The Lights of Godsend by Deb Sears

central plains
edge of a city: Godsend
anno Domini 2375...

She stood before the threshold stone, trembling with cold and fatigue. Dry grass and dead cornstalks rustled in the garden behind her; a spring breeze pressed against tarpaper and shrunken boards. Slowly, out of little more than habit, she touched the stone in homage and greeting, and crossed it.

Finally she was home again.

But as she paused and scanned the sunlit room, she felt uncomfortable. The washbasin and cot had both been recently used. The rough-hewn table had been moved to the room's center. On it, a handful of flowers drank from a glass of water. A new morning fire burned on the small hearth. Someone else was living here.

She coughed, turned and climbed the narrow staircase which led to an open loft. After several months of vacancy, a house could be claimed by any transient or pauper; that was the custom of Godsend, and she would not contest it. With her mission finished, she had no reason to try to stay. But she would see the lab--or whatever remained of it.

Little remained. The electronic equipment, the glassware, and the testing reagents lay smashed and scattered in tumbled heaps across the loft floor; and as she looked at the ashes of her notes, watching fragments of paper quiver in the cold draft, she felt a thin stirring in her soul. Notebooks, watchglasses, eyedroppers, and reagent stocks--these had been her sacred relics, parts

of her soul. The inland people of Godsend had their stone altars, holy writ, and songprayers. But for the strength and comfort of her soul, she had had her tools, a mission, and her friend. Now she had nothing, only fragments and memories.

With the toe of her boot, she pushed aside a pile of colored glass and stepped toward the loft window. Her own reflection moved in those panes--a small woman clothed in dark jeans and a soft rabbitpelt jacket. The loose sleeves were barely long enough to conceal her new scars; beneath her hood, new strands of grey hid among the brown curls.

She grasped the window ledge, trying to see herself more clearly, but the reflection slid away. On the ground below her, she instead saw a tall woman walking rapidly from the garden toward the house. The woman's identity and the memories of her became instantly, painfully clear...

They are standing together in the shed, she and the tall inlander, surrounded by a metric ton of chemicals, a shipment brought with caution and secrecy from the Coast up the river to Godsend. If the people of Godsend knew of the arrival, they would call the organometallic compounds an anarchist's poison. Centuries of ignorance and toxic waste have poisoned their minds against any help from the Coast. Yet, this one inlander--a clerk in the city's hierarchy--has been a helper and guide, a good and faithful friend through all the months of research and preparation.

But you didn't tell me about this, Annora, the inlander says, bending down to inspect a bag. She pulls away the soft cloth tie-ropes, rolls back the burlap, finds strong metal consisters. Why so well sealed?

It's a vesicant, she explains reluctantly, uneasily. Dangerous to the skin. And a potent

sensitizer: a single over-exposure would be bad; a second one could be fatal.

The inlander hastily pulls back the cloth and stands. And, she says quietly, you're going to break open the storage drums at the site.

Don't worry, she answers. There'll be no mistake. This compound--she gestures to the reagent bags--these, in the presence of light, will form the new bonds which will draw the toxicants out of the earth. The seeping wastes will cease to poison your people, and mine.

She nods and tugs at a strand of blond hair. Will eye-light be enough? she asks after a moment.

Eye-light? Again, she is startled by the inlander's wealth of misinformation and medieval notions.

Yes, the light of our eyes. At night, when you pour these chemicals over the open barrels, will eye-light be enough? Or must we wait for the dawn?

Yes, the dawn, she answers. It's a reaction which requires the presence of light. Daylight.

The inlander shakes her head. A secret shipment of poisons. Breaking up the storage site. And you didn't tell me--

Yes, but for a purpose. Trust me, Lucia. I know what I'm doing. And Godsend's authorities must not know. They'll try to prevent me from completing what I've begun. No one else must know.

The inlander gazes steadily at her and nods. I know. I know...

Annora pushed herself away from the window--away from Godsend and its people and their self-imposed medieval ignorance--and hurried down the stairs, seeking to avoid a confrontation. But when she reached the bottom step, the doorway was already blocked: the tall woman had crossed the yard and was bowing in reverence to the threshold stone. The inlander

could not be avoided, nor anymore forgotten.

They met.

"You," Lucia whispered. She, the friend and traitor, stood in the doorway motionless and pale, her brown eyes wide and staring.

Annora looked away and said nothing.

"What do you want from me?"

"Want?" Annora asked. "What could I possibly want of you?"

"You're here. You didn't come back for nothing." Lucia's voice became steely, harsh, defensive. "If you've come to punish me--"

"No." She glanced up to Lucia, gathered together more words, and turned away again. Her gaze settled on the things of the house--the table, the fireplace, the windows; and a cold, hollow, helpless feeling sank into her soul. "This was my home once."

A long, uncomfortable silence came between them before Lucia spoke again, this time softly, without undertones of suspicion or fear.

"This house holds many memories for you," she agreed. "I moved in after the deacons told me you had escaped. I knew that the house would call you back to it." She went to the center table, pulled a chair around, but didn't sit. "What brought you back, Annora?"

"The lab."

"And what else?"

Annora shook her head. Since her escape from Godsend, she had felt little but a gnawing need to return. Other than that, she had only excuses--the same she had given her doctors at the Coast hospital.

"I... thought I had left something unfinished. I wanted to inspect the site--"

"You've been there?" Lucia asked sharply.

"This morning, yes."

"Then," Lucia said quietly, "you already know the good news." She reached across the table and raised a single white flower from the glass. "Bloodroot. These flowers were growing at the site, on the land my people called 'condemned.'

Your mission brought new life to dead land, Annora. You were right."

"Forget it," Annora said harshly, trying to avert the words which she could already hear in Lucia's throat.

"I should have trusted you. Instead--" The flower fell from Lucia's fist--a hand shaped by condemnation and self-hatred.

"Lucia, don't." Annora coughed and reached for the chair. "Let's just forget." But the memory had already begun to fill Annora's mind, light through a shattered pane--

The orange rays of morning. The towers of Godsend gleam, silvery bridges shimmer with the river's reflection. Sunlight penetrates the boarded fence and spread across the toxic waste storage site.

Standing at a safe distance, she removes her gloves and mask, and draws her breath in exhaustion and excitement: success! The old and seeping drums lie open now, spilling their poisons freely to the light. The festering sore in the earth is lanced and draining; the sunlight and coastal compounds are absorbing the black pus. Now groundwater from this site will cease to slowly poison the river which flows to the Coast.

But a hundred other sites remain, all carefully protected by the laws and customs of Godsend.

She watches for a few more moments, then returns to her horse-drawn wagon and begins tying down its canvas cover. The empty canisters, the bags and ropes--some of them contaminated by contact with the vesicant--and all the tools have been loaded. Beneath the cover they will be hidden; the wagons will be inconspicuous among the trucks, carts and tolleys of Godsend's streets.

A city frozen in time. It has been hard

for her to understand this place where technology has not changed in centuries, and is not allowed to change. In the people too, there is a stubborn changelessness which has annoyed and baffled her. They are content with their small and limited knowledge, asking nothing of the world, exploring nothing beyond their borders. Only with Lucia has she sensed any real courage, enough to base a friendship on. Only with Lucia has she felt safe.

As she ties the last strap, the horses suddenly raise their heads. They nicker softly. She follows their gaze, sees nothing, tries to dismiss their behavior, can not, and looks up again.

She is surrounded by police.

They say nothing, and for a while no one moves. Their guns are steadily aimed, and though they often glance uneasily toward the site, they are alert and inescapable. Then the deacons arrive with grim, dark faces and a crowd of councilmen. One flings off the canvas cover and, finding the evidence he wants, passes a silent judgement. He picks up a rope conveniently near, and hands it to a guard, nodding toward the surrounded Coastlander.

At first she is defiant and ready to struggle. But she sees a woman standing in the crowd-- Lucia; shamefaced, regretful, unprotesting. Lucia knew Annora's plan, the where and when; and now she is standing with the captors. Lucia has lead them here.

Annora's bravery crumbles into shock. She lets herself be bound with ropes and pushed through the crowd toward a waiting truck. She can feel Lucia's gaze upon her, but she does not look up, does not turn to look at her again. The treachery burns within her mind...

Lucia pushed a cup across the table toward her. "Sassafras," she said, gazing curiously at

Annora. "I dug the roots myself. Drink, it'll help you feel better."

Annora stared at the warm misty vapors of the cup, steadying herself against the memories and weariness. She shook her head and tugged at the sleeves of her jacket.

"I'm not staying," she murmured.

"I hope not," Lucia said. "I know your mission is important. But right now it's simply too dangerous. Even seeing the good that you've done, my people would still arrest you, any Coastlander. Maybe in a few more months, after the next election, they'll calm down. Then you can start again."

"It's over," Annora answered.

"The mission? Finished?"

She nodded.

"But what about the other sites? The other poisons? There still is work to do here."

"I can't do it. I'm sensitized now." Annora looked up and saw Lucia's reaction--a pallor which settled over the worry lines already present. "Other missionaries will be sent," Annora added.

"Sensitized! But how--" Lucia's protest faded into silence, as her gaze fell upon Annora's arms. Slowly, she reached toward the sleeves, and after glancing to Annora, she folded them back. She saw the pale and twisted scars.

"The ropes," Lucia whispered. "They must have been coated with chemicals. And now another over-exposure..."

"That's why the Godsend mission is over for me. I can't work with the necessary compounds anymore." Annora took the cup in her hands and tried to smile. "Don't think about it, Lucia. The sores were properly treated when I reached the Coast. My people took good care of me."

"My people hate traitors. And they censured

me for not betraying you sooner than I did."

"After all those months...why did you do it?"

Lucia shivered slightly. "You told me that you wanted to make the storage sites safe. Then, when you told me that you were going to destroy the storage drums, I began to wonder and doubt--"

"But I explained that to you several times. The barrels were already damaged; they had to be opened up, just like an infected wound. And there had to be light for the reaction."

"That's what you said. But you underestimate the power of our customs in Godsend. You never could quite understand. We're afraid of the storage sites. They are like idols, ancient demons we can't master; our fear is our worship. And the laws to protect them--really, to protect ourselves from them--the laws aren't superficial. Fear is engrained. In our religion, government, dialect, minds... I wanted to help you end the fear, and make the idols fall. But then you began to say and do things I didn't understand. I too became afraid." She looked toward Annora's scars. "And my fear caused this."

"A contaminated rope caused this," Annora answered uneasily.

"If only I had trusted."

"I didn't suffer," she insisted, though she could vividly remember the gnawing pain, the desperate journey, the weeks of bitter sickness.

"Stop denying the past, Annora. Every moment that you were away from me you suffered."

Annora looked away, through the doorway toward the heart of Godsend. Hardy dandelions nestled in the dead weeds. Sparrows chattered on brown tree branches. In the distance, Godsend's towers rose slim and tall.

Deny the past? She meant only to deny an unnecessary apology. All the bitterness which had sickened her soul, all the brooding hatred

and blame, all the anger was gone now, carefully counselled away by her doctors on the Coast. She wanted no apology and no remembrance.

But Lucia went on.

"Your soul suffered. I betrayed you. I sinned against friendship and against you. Now I ask for pardon, though I know you think I'm unforgivable."

Annora felt a sudden pain; the congestion in her lungs was suddenly tighter than before: she'd tried to breathe too deeply and too sharply, reacting to Lucia's words.

"I never condemned you," Annora said, still unwilling to meet Lucia's gaze.

"No, I know your judgement."

"What judgement?" Disconcerted now, off-balance, and sensing failure, Annora paused. She searched her memories and frustration hardened in her mind. "When? I said nothing to you that day."

"When you were being led away you did," Lucia answered. "I was there, trying to see you. I knew that if you looked at me--if you really looked--you'd see and understand that I was sorry. That I regretted what I'd done; that I had tried, but couldn't stop the arrest. That I hated myself for it. I knew I'd see something in your eye-light, maybe mercy... But you turned away from me." Lucia's voice was cool now, toneless, like a prayer without meaning. "Your gesture spoke a judgement. It's speaking now."

Annora closed her eyes and her soul surged and trembled, filled at last with memories--how she'd felt after those first moments of shock; and the feelings of bitterness and anger came alive again, echoes, ghost images. The flesh wounds had healed, but the self-inflicted inner wounds remained.

And there, trapped in her own darkness, she couldn't escape what she saw: a treachery

worse than that of Lucia. It was not Lucia's apology she'd sought to deny; it was her own. For she had withheld mercy, and still could not forgive.

"I don't deserve mercy," Lucia said.

"You do."

"Then why don't you look at me now?"

Annora stared at the blackness. "I looked away. I wanted to hurt you, wanted hate." She slipped into a silence of guilt, helpless, lost.

Lucia too was silent for a while. Then she grasped Annora's hand. "You'll have to face me eventually." Her voice was new and powerful. "You can't stay in Godsend, and you're far too tired and ill to travel alone. I know it's a long journey and that I'll be a foreigner among your people, but Annora, I'm going to take you home. To your home."

Startled, Annora glanced to Lucia; and before she could turn away again, Lucia's gaze caught her. Faintly, like muffled lightening on the horizon, imperfect, a reflection; then like stark and brilliant flashes, forgiveness and mercy passed between them. And wordlessly remained.

"Now I think you ought to rest," Lucia said, smiling, her brown eyes part of an expression full of compassion and concern.

A cool spring breeze slipped through the doorway, bringing odors of earth and flowers. Sunlight fell from the room's high windows. With Lucia's help, Annora went to the cot and in the Godsend light, she rested.



You've Got It! Use It!

by Richard Peak

I was a senior at John Brown High School when David Johnson moved into our school district. I really didn't know how to act toward him since I had never met anyone like him. I still remember the first time I met David. He was tall--approximately six-foot-four and very lanky, but he was also the first black kid ever enrolled in our small private high school.

David was also a senior, so I knew sooner or later I would meet him. Mrs. Adams, the homeroom teacher, introduced him to all of us. The entire time that she spoke of him, he never once looked up. I wondered if he was feeling bad about being here or about being different. Did he think we'd look down on him or call him names? What could be going through his head? What did he think of us because we were white? My questions were erased, and I was brought back to consciousness by one word--basketball! Mrs. Adams spoke of David's many achievements in basketball. From that point on I knew that David and I would somehow become friends. Basketball--that was all I ever thought about since the accident.

It was lunch time and I had built up my nerve to sit and talk with David. As I walked into the lounge, I looked around for him. Where was he, I wondered. There in a back corner all by himself, he was sitting. Slowly I maneuvered myself toward him.

"Is there someone else sitting here?" I asked. He shook his head. "Then do you mind if I sit here?" He looked up at me then and motioned for me to sit down. Once I was seated, I tried to encourage a conversation, but it was

one sided--all me. Finally, David got up, picked up his garbage, and proceeded to walk out of the lounge. I noticed that he was very shy; he very seldom even looked up. I knew I'd just have to keep trying until he opened up.

Each day for about three weeks straight, I'd sit and talk to him at lunch. Slowly he opened up and began joking with me. I began looking forward to a long and lasting friendship. I always talked about basketball, and he knew everything about the game. It was amazing! I told him that he would be super for our team, that he was just what we needed. He just smiled and then laughed.

One day after school, David and I were walking home. Just to start a conversation, I asked him why he had transferred to John Brown. He gave me a strange, serious look and began to tell me of his ordeal at the last school he had attended--an inner-city public school. When he finished he asked me how I got my limp. I told him how my leg was crushed in a car accident. I told him that I was lucky but that my mom hadn't been so lucky. He looked at me with sympathy and expressed his apologies. We walked in silence for what seemed a long time; then I finally broke the ice. "Yeah, my dad, he took it pretty hard, but he survived. We've even got a maid now."

I asked David if he wanted to come over for dinner. He said he couldn't today, but he'd ask his parents if he could tomorrow.

"That would be great," I answered.

We finally reached the split in our trail. We paused then separated, heading home. He lived about a mile from my house.

As months passed, David and I became very close. We'd often stay at each other's house. His little brothers were a "crack," always wrestling with each other. His mom had a hard time keeping up with them, but I could tell she loved

every minute of it. David's dad worked as a janitor at the power plant. He'd always spend a little time with us, shooting basketball or just bull. This was something I missed because my father either had to work late or was too tired to do anything else. David's family was almost an ideal family; they were very close. I'd often think of my mother when I'd see Mrs. Johnson. I knew that if she had lived she would love me as David's mom loved her family.

Basketball season opened in November, and David was quickly the team's star. I was certain that he was good enough to be elected on the All-State team, but he would always laugh and say how crazy I was. During the course of the season, David had several thirty-point games, an average of ten rebounds a game, and some fantastic slam dunks. He was a superstar in every aspect of the game. When the season was over, he was elected "Mr. Basketball," and he was also chosen first team All-American. He began practicing with the All-State team every day after school, so I very rarely saw him.

One day while we were in class, an announcement came over the intercom, telling of an explosion at the power plant. I remember seeing David jump up and run out the door. The teacher motioned to him, but he didn't even see her. I explained to her that David's father was a janitor at the plant. She looked at me with understanding and thanked me.

That school day seemed to last forever. I was so anxious to hear some news of David's father that I couldn't concentrate on what was going on in class. When the bell announcing the end of the school day finally rang, I made a dead sprint down the hallway, weaving in and out, trying to avoid knocking anyone down. I reached the exit and burst out onto the open road. My short leg was aching as I tried to keep up my exhausting

pace. Block after block I passed until I stood before David's house. I paused wondering if I should knock, but I soon put aside this moment of insecurity. David answered the door, but he just stood there. His brown eyes were full of tears, and his normally thin face looked thick and puffy. I didn't know what to do or say as I could hear sounds of sobbing from inside the house.

"David, I--I'm sorry. If there's anything I can do, please call me." He thanked me and moved back into the house and shut the door. I knew what David was going through, and I also knew that his life at home would never be the same.

Two days had passed after the funeral, and I hadn't seen or heard anything from David. On my way home from school, I decided to drop by his house. I knocked several times before Mrs. Johnson answered.

"Hello, Tim," she said in her usual pleasant tone. "If you're looking for David, He's not here. I don't know where he is; he just gets up and leaves. He seldom speaks, never answers any of my questions. Tim, I'm afraid he's gonna quit school."

"What?" I screamed. "Not if I have anything to do with it." I hurried away, remembering one place that David would probably go. It was an old, beat up basketball court, located at the end of a dead end street. As I approached, I heard a basketball bouncing.

"Hey, David," I yelled. He did not answer. Again I yelled, "David." He looked at me and then turned toward the goal and shot a thirty footer--nothing but nets.

"David, why haven't you been going to school?" I asked.

"I quit!"

"You can't quit. What about basketball,

the All-Star game?"

His tone changed from uninterested to disturbed. "To hell with it, to hell with all of it. I can't play basketball. I've got to get a job and help my mom."

"What do you mean 'get a job'? There's your job right there in your hands--basketball. That will be your paycheck. David, I've watched you play. I've watched every game I could possibly watch on TV and live, both college and professional, and you're just as good or even better."

"C'mon, Tim, give it to me straight. I'm not that good," he responded.

I screamed, "David, you are! You have the moves, the quickness, the height, and everything to go with it. Did you know that there will be college and professional scouts at that All-Star game? David, it's right in the palm of your hand; don't let it slip away." He looked at me in amazement. I was getting through to him.

"David, do you know how much the pros make? That was your father's dream; he wanted you to be the best basketball player in the world. He wanted you to be a pro."

With a determined look, he screamed, "Tim, you're right. I can do it, I can!"

The horn sounded, and I was brought back to reality. Halftime was over, and my story had lasted the entire thirty minutes. I looked at Bill. He was asleep. I guess I must have bored him with my story. The Nuggets were back on the court. There was David. He already had twenty points, and I was sure he would get twenty more. There's the tip. "C'mon, David, let's go!"



The Poem in Room 206

I see their pens have all gone home,
no need to find the fence undone.
Down rows and walls the faces roam;
their search for rhythm has begun.

A white-thin bleakness covers me
and fills the cracks the pages see.
Lone, standing thought in lines mis-
spent;
first tastes of freedom find dissent.

Through quiet hallways windows stare.
They know the voice remembering
impressions dark as trees are bare.
Cold windows pressed in timeless
scene.

Tomorrow may reach newer heights
Across the desk of emptied lights.
Though words yet framed, mere sound
has taught,
A gentle stir - that shore unsought.

Mr. John

by Lauren Ernst

"Well, they've finally reinstated the draft. Mandatory for all boys age 18 and up," the man declared loudly to his friend in the neighborhood drugstore. Glancing at the paper's headlines, his friend agreed.

"Good thing, too. It's high time those kids showed some bravery and respect for their country. They'll learn."

I opened my mouth, about to disagree with these strangers, then shut it again. Maybe these men just hadn't been lucky enough to see the other side of the coin.

I paid for my purchase, and as I walked to the car, I thought back to high school years, and to Mr. John. Though he had never intentionally taught me anything, I had learned so much from him.

Mr. John -- the old janitor at my high school -- I can still remember, from the first time I met him ...

I had been helping other band members fix up the music room at school. Some were painting, others filing music, and I was cleaning out the dingy instrument lockers. Glancing at one locker, empty except for a crinkled piece of sheet music, I realized I would have to find a screwdriver to fix a loose hinge. So off I went to find Mr. John. I hunted the halls, checked his small office at the far end of the building, and finally found him in the broiler room located in the basement. After knocking, then yelling, I prodded across the dusty yet organized room to where he was standing.

"Why do they have an old geezer like this

working here? Probably was here when the school opened," I thought to myself.

He glanced up at me like a professor interrupted in his studies.

"I did knock," I defended myself mentally, feeling like an intruder.

"What?" Mr. John asked, looking more than slightly perturbed.

Explaining my mission, I glanced at his two hands. Aged and wrinkled, they still looked as though they could be firm and disciplining. Now, though, they gently repaired a broken chair. Mr. John mumbled something about being disturbed and young kids borrowing things and never returning them, but he walked directly to his work area. It was neat and in order, with every imaginable size nail, screw, and bolt labeled in jars. Towards one end of the table there stood a small picture frame, old yet sturdy, containing a photo of a young man in an army uniform. From the style of the man's uniform, I guessed it had been taken around World War II.

Glancing back at Mr. John, I thought of my grandfather, clad in old cotton pants and a striped shirt. Only my grandfather wouldn't have looked disapprovingly at my faded jeans and T-shirt.

"He probably thinks girls should wear dresses and leave the 'hard work' to guys," I thought.

This was confirmed when he handed me the screwdriver and asked if I needed help.

"No, but thanks," I mumbled quickly to the grey-haired figure. Then feeling him staring at me, I turned and hurried out the door.

That was when I realized that although everyone around school knew Mr. John, no one knew anything about his family, friends, or home. And who was that man in the picture? Later, I found out it was Mr. John himself.

"Oh well," I dismissed him from my mind. I had to get that locker fixed and return that screwdriver.

After that I did get to know Mr. John better. Because it was my junior year, I decided to get a job to earn money for college. And, coincidence or not, I was hired as a part-time assistant under Mr. John. I really don't think he took to having a girl working under him at all. At first, in fact, he would only speak to me when necessary. I had begun to wonder if he even knew my name. And I didn't speak much in return.

We worked together for about a year, but we kept our thoughts to ourselves. Then one day the silence was broken. Mr. John and I were fixing some damaged desks. It was a quiet afternoon when I heard a small, grunted "Ouch." I looked up to see the elderly man holding his finger; somehow he had cut it.

"Here, let me see!" I exclaimed.

After I gave my unwanted help to Mr. John and bandaged his finger, I offered to get us cokes. Surprisingly, he agreed. When I returned fifteen minutes later, after fighting with a malfunctioning coke machine, I caught him gazing at the photo on his work desk. I had a feeling he was miles away.

Figuring this was as good a time as any, I questioned him about the photograph. He told me he had been in World War II when that picture was taken. I learned that he had sent the picture to his girlfriend for Christmas one year. After the war he had married Elizabeth, that girl. They had raised a

family of two girls and one boy. He told me about the girls, how they were married now and had families of their own. He looked a little alone as he told his story, yet when he spoke of his grandchildren, a light came back into his eye. Now his wife was dead, and he lived with his dog, Toby. During the whole conversation I noticed he never mentioned his son. Though I received an I-don't-want-to-talk-about-it look, I asked about him anyway. Glancing back at his photo, Mr. John stated he no longer knew his son, Michael. Since my name is Michelle, I couldn't help adding a comment that our names were alike. The glare I received shut me up.

After that, we became friends. We would talk as we worked and would often end up in heated discussions when our views on sports, politics, and ways to fix things seemed to disagree. Although I often gave in, Mr. John would never actually admit to being wrong. But in our conversation, I learned not to mention Michael, for if I did, my friend would stop talking and leave to do work elsewhere. And I really had learned to like Mr. John and enjoy his company, although I find that hard to admit.

I learned about Michael from Helen, Mr. John's youngest daughter. Stopping to talk to Helen one day, I learned that Michael was not dead, as I was beginning to think. There had been a family fight during the Vietnam War. Michael had felt it was wrong to fight and had gone to Canada. His dad had never forgiven Michael for being a "deserter" and told him never to come back. Helen suspected her father had felt that Michael was disgracing him for not being brave and following his father's example in World War II.

Spring came. I graduated yet continued to work the summer with Mr. John. Then came

July 4th. It was the Bicentennial year, so patriotism and pride in the country ran high among people. 1976! — Our country was 200 years old! But I don't remember Independence Day that year as much as I remember July 1st.

I was walking home one Saturday and saw a lonely figure standing on Mr. John's lawn. For some strange reason, I quickened my pace. As I walked up to Mr. John, I noticed him staring at a crumpled white envelope in one hand. I can still remember a return address from Chicago, Illinois, written clearly in one corner and a cancelled Bicentennial 13¢ stamp in the other. Among the small pile of junk mail and bills, that letter had stood out, and I knew it was the reason for my friend's confused expression.

Mr. John walked to the front steps and I followed quietly.

"That's from Michael, isn't it?" I asked, not needing an answer.

He started to look angrily at me, but I continued on before he could speak.

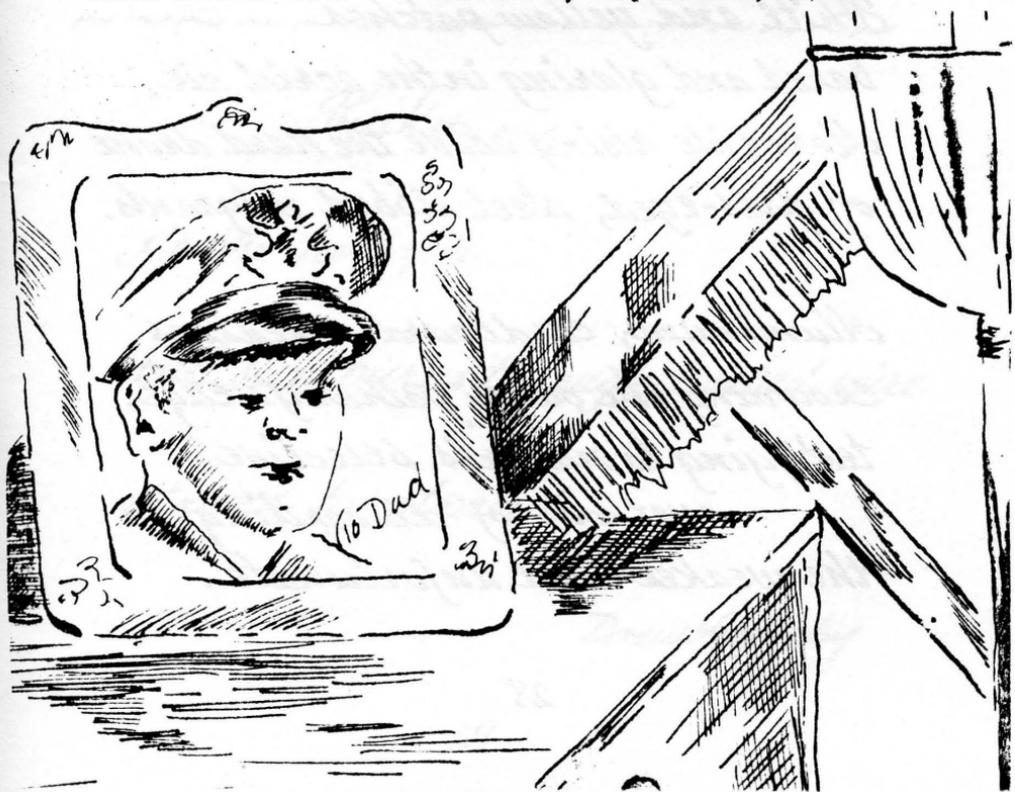
"Just wait. Don't get mad at me. I'm not going to run away and hide. So hear me out. I know about Michael. Why don't you write him? You know, if you're lonely from now on, it's your own fault. He's forgiven you and tried to start anew. Even though he doesn't agree with your ideas and views, he still accepts you. And who says his ideas are so bad anyway?" I continued. "Maybe, just maybe, Michael's code of bravery -- leaving friends and losing a family -- was harder than going to war to fight."

I looked at Mr. John and saw the wondering look still on his face. Getting up to leave him alone, I felt a hand clasp mine, just for a moment. Then I walked away slowly, wondering if I had lost a friend or if, maybe,

Michael had regained a father.

Mr. John had died later that year. Although I worked with him the rest of that summer, we had never talked about that day. I never knew the results of that conversation in July until I came home from college that winter for Mr. John's funeral. It was a dreary, cold day.

After the funeral Mass, I went back to the high school to recall some memories. Finding the back door unlocked (probably for afternoon sports or some event, which Mr. John always came to watch), I headed towards the basement. Suddenly, I had to get something. Opening the boiler room door, I headed to Mr. John's work area. Things were exactly where they used to be. But as I picked up the photo of my dear friend, I noticed another photograph lying beside it. On the front there was a picture of a man with a beard and on the back just one name and a date -- "Michael, September, 1976."



Stark concrete desert
littered with black treaded snakes
basking aside from the racing,
passing buffalo heads.

Million vulcanized hooves
stirring the gray cement dust
and tracing the dark soiled stains
that stretch the bovine trails.

White and yellow patches
baked and glaring in the acid air,
Monoxide rising above the hard drone
of glass-eyed, steel-ribbed migrants.

Aluminum, cardboard carcasses
crowding the outer pathway's edge,
testifying to nature's selective
methods of discarding
the weaker and unfortunate.

One That Got Away

by Terence Hanley

Twelve-year-old Jackie woke up early and dressed quickly and quietly. He put on his boots, light trousers, a white cotton shirt, and a baseball cap. He dropped a two-day-old newspaper and LEAVES OF GRASS into a cloth bag and listened at his door for a moment. There wasn't a sound in the house. He opened the door and stole through the house, pausing only to listen at the doorway that led into the room in which the two slept. In the kitchen he sliced sections of meat and cheese and bread, and wrapped each in waxed paper. He filled an old wine bottle with water and picked out two apples. He dropped these things into the bag and turned toward the door. Just then he heard a noise down the hall. He didn't turn to see what it was. He bolted out the back door, letting it slam, and ran across the yard, jumped the fence, and ran through a fallow field, disappearing in a stand of trees. He must have run for a mile before stopping to rest. He sat down under a tree and read the box scores and standings for the fifth time. Then he was up and walking again.

It was a warm morning. It was only seven o'clock, but it was already warm. As Jackie walked, the gradual slope of the ground became steeper until it dropped off into the hollow. At the bottom of the hollow lay the pond. A breeze blew across the face of the pond and into the trees, dying there in the thick growth. It was dark and still in the hollow. Jackie could smell the fishy, muddy, organic decay along the banks of the pond, and he knew he was near it though he couldn't see it. He hurried his step and ran the last few yards to the edge of the pond. He quickly shed his clothes and dived into the water. Its coolness was a re-

refreshing shock. He stayed under for half a minute, letting the water as he imagined it seep through his pores, and cleanse his skin and veins and organs of the foulness he felt in him and on him. It was the house that caused it, the house and the two. Being there was enough to befoul him, though some times were worse than others. The previous night was one of those times, one of those violent times. There was violence in the drinking and the shouting and the cursing and even in the silence. After that was over, there was the disgustingly sweet time of understanding and reconciliation and loving, and even in the loving there was something impure and violent. Just thinking of it made the blood pound in his head and the fury pound in his heart. He just wanted to get away. He had run away before. He had been brought back every time, or worse yet, he had come back of his own accord, which first made him hate himself as much as he hated the two. He didn't want to think of himself in that way, so he just swam.

After a time he crawled onto shore and let the sun dry him out. He put on his clothes and ate an apple. He read a poem, but after reading it, he couldn't remember what it was about, so he read it again. He put the book back into the bag and slung the bag over his shoulder. He walked along the edge of the pond and was half way round when he saw a man fishing. For a moment he felt threatened. He felt like running, but he didn't.

"Hello there," the man said.

"Catch anything?"

"Yep. Got one on a stringer. Got him just before the sun broke out. No sooner cast my line than he grabbed it. It's a largemouth. Caught him with a worm. I cast and it seemed like he struck as soon as it hit the water. Haven't got nothin' else."

"I know where there's a good place to look."

"Yeah, where?"

"You know where those stone buildings are?"

"Stone buildings?"

"Yeah, right down the way a bit. Follow me."

Jackie led the way and the man followed. He was a little man but old. He had close-cropped hair and a round, wrinkled face. He hadn't shaved in a day or two. He wore loose, neat clothes.

"I've watched the fish there," Jackie said as they walked. "You even see them moving around in the grass out there, looking for food or something."

"Wonder what those buildings were for?"

"I don't know. Looks like they've been there for a long time," the boy said. "You can cast right from here out into that grass."

"I'd sure like to catch a big one. I'd throw that other one back if I could get a big one like those I've seen rollin' on top of the water out there. They're too far out though. If I had a boat, I could get a good one. I know I could. If I had a boat, I'd get one for sure. I'd go out there and let him bite and run. He'd think he was a tough and wiley one. He'd think he could get away and I'd let him run. But right when he'd start to think he was free and loose, I'd give him a good jerk. He'd sure fight, but I'd get him. I'd bring him in and he wouldn't know what happened to him." The old man smiled at the thought of bringing in a big fish.

Jackie just squinted his eyes and ground his teeth. "Why don't you shut up," he said quietly.

"What, boy?"

"I said, why don't you shut up, old man."

"What's eatin' at you, boy?"

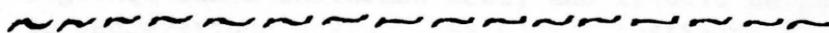
"Why should you go out there in a boat and bring in a fish who's perfectly happy bein' out there? What makes you think he needs you for anything? Fish don't need anything--just a place to swim around and be free. They don't need anybody."

"Boy, are you screwy or somethin'? Fish are just dumb animals. You're doin' 'em a favor when

you catch 'em."

Jackie didn't say anything; he just turned and ran up the hill. He got to the top and stopped. He yelled down to the man. "Nobody's goin' to catch me, old man. I'm a smary fish and I don't need anybody." Then he turned and ran and just kept running.

The old man spat and scratched his head and said, "That boy must be screwy or somethin'." Then he cast his line and started to whistle.



Arrival at Granny's House

*Blacktop crumbles into gravel.
Car gears softly into silence and shifts
to katydids
And hounddogs bay beneath the moon.*

*We stir and reach for shoes,
feeling elbows, pillows, windows,
corners of suitcases.
Where are my sneakers?
There - kicked off in sleep.*

*Then doors swing open.
Hounds come in,*

warm wet tongues and beating tails
Meeting children who climb out.

He stand within a pale circle
beneath the bats, iis, cecropias
drawn to her mercury lamp.

Am I dreaming them?
The wings of lunas fall like feather gems.

The mountain roads make stomachs knot.
No city lights our father land, a
wildness by night,
A black vault of heaven overhead.

Here we sleepy children hear
that aluminum doot-slam
echoes up the hill, and
the husky comfort
of Granny's voice carrying us in.

Deb Sears

Happy Birthday - 2003

by Audrey Pearson

I press the "finish" bar on the phone terminal and smile contentedly. So! With Kim's plans in place to come, the whole family will be here for Dad's ninetieth birthday party. We haven't been together since Christmas 2001, and it will be good to see everyone again. Let's see: that adds four more meals over the weekend, and I'll need to have Clara make up the guest room.

I go to the computer terminal and turn it on. I identify myself by passing the tip of my right index finger across a small beam of light. The micro-chip just beneath the epidermis of my finger is one of the glorious freedoms of modern life. I love it! It means no more credit cards to clutter up my wallet. In fact, no more wallet: the micro-chip even takes the place of cash! What freedom not to have to carry a purse everywhere I go! This little chip in my finger contains my personal identification code, my date of birth, address, phone number, physical description, bank account number, allergies, medical problems, and next-of-kin. What a wonder! In our new car with its computerized starter, it even eliminates my need for a car key!

The computer comes instantly to life. "Good morning, Audrey. Today is Thursday, April 21, 2003. How may I help you?"

"Good morning, Master 3. I need to order groceries. Please show me the Kroger specials for this week." The items on sale appear on the screen, and I scan over them. Nothing worthwhile catches my eye. "Thank you, Master 3. I'll just type in my order, since it's a rather long one. But first, please show me my grocery list as it presently reads."

"Certainly, Audrey. Searching...searching... found." The list I've entered one item at a time

during the week appears on the screen: Tang, cat food, laundry detergent, tissues, flour. To the list I add the items I need for the upcoming weekend. When I'm finished, I add the delivery information: "Deliver on Friday, April 22, 2003, at 10 a.m." Then I punch in the Kroger code and hit "send." There. The grocery shopping is out of the way.

Next I go upstairs to the hall closet and open the door. Clara is standing at the ready. I program the computer on her mid-section for "guest bedroom," and stand back. Clara doesn't talk, as Master 3 does, and I almost like the silence better, I think. Of course, the newer robots do talk, so I may have to get used to it on my next model. Clara hums out of the closet, makes a 90-degree turn to her left, and heads into the guest room. I follow her to the door and watch in awe as she begins to change the bed. As often as I've seen her, I still am amazed at the capabilities of this cleaning wonder. The room will be as neat as if I'd done it myself in 30 minutes. She even puts herself back in the closet and turns herself off! But, of course, she doesn't do windows. That chore is still mine.

The phone rings, and I step to a wall-mounted box and press the "start" bar. "Hello?" I say to the room-at-large.

"Mrs. Pearson?"

"Yes?"

"This is Henry at Long's Bakery. The birthday cake you ordered is ready. Do you want to take a look at it before we send it out?"

"Oh, yes, please! I'm on my way to my terminal now." I connect the computer to the phone-receive circuit, and the image of a huge cake appears on the screen. It consists of three tiers: the frosting is white, with red frosting garlands festooning each tier, groups of red sugar roses with green sugar leaves arranged artistically here and there, and crowned with a

beautiful, shimmering, red numeral 90. "Oh, Henry! It's lovely! I think it will be just right in the center of the table on Saturday afternoon. But I really don't have anywhere to hide it here. Can you deliver it Saturday morning around eleven?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Pearson. We'll have it there without any trouble."

"Great! Thanks for calling. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

I've just pressed the "finish" bar when the phone rings again. I take the call at the terminal. "Hello?" I say, as my husband's image appears on the screen.

"Hi! Did you hear from Kim?"

"Yes. They're coming. They'll be here for dinner tomorrow night."

"Good! Would you like to go out to eat tonight for a little tranquility before the big weekend begins?"

"Sure! I'd love to! Where do you want to go?"

"Let's go someplace old-fashioned. How about Bob Evans?"

"That sounds good. I have everything taken care of except the present. I'll finish monogramming the weights for Dad at craft class this afternoon. Can you come by on your way home and pick them up? I don't want to risk sending this gift through regular delivery channels. Anyway, the paint may not be dry by the time I leave."

"Sure! I'll pick them up. And I'll see you at home after school. Gotta run now. My next class is ready to start. Bye."

"Bye."

As I change to go to craft class, I think about how surprised Dad is going to be when he sees his new weight set. I didn't cast them myself: the instructor took care of that. But I did design them! Having the bust of a different family member on the ends of each barbell in the set was an inspiration! And the monogramming

makes them so personal! Even though Dad says he isn't going to lift in competition anymore, he'll still enjoy working out with these. And to think that he didn't even start to lift weights until he was 75! He's done very well.

As I start downstairs, I notice that Clara has finished in the guest room and put herself back in the hall closet. I close the door on her and head for the kitchen. I'm short on time, so I grab a Nutra-wafer from the container on the counter. I'll eat it in the car on my way to class.

At the back door, I pass my right index finger-tip across the beam of light in the computerized door lock to let myself out, then close the door and lock it, using the same method. I unplug the car from the outlet in the garage and put the power-booster unit on the shelf. I get in, slide under the wheel, and pass my micro-chipped finger across the starter beam. The batteries whir to life.

As I start down the drive way, my thoughts turn to the afternoon ahead of me. Gold paint, I think, for the accent color on the monograms. I smile contentedly to myself. It's going to be a terrific weekend.



Professor of Chemistry

Black butterfly of morning,
fragile-armed, she creeps
not flutters - not yet - to the door.

Shy-eyed, opens up reagent bottles:
soft sifted sands

oxide ocher

chromate orange

blue copper green

against her stark black-white

of habit.

She stoppers flasks, finds All
in equilibrium.

Her watch glass ready,
her ground-glass joints
notwithstanding stain are set;
reagents chosen deep in love are
ready to dissolve...

Triumphant banners hang with Hails
here

where faith and science meet the Dawn.

Deb Sears

5:00 A.M.

It's 5:00 A.M. and you try to rouse
your loving spouse.

But he sleeps on, unheeding
your gentle pleading.

From their room the twins start
to cry.

Very carefully you open one eye.
Your vision is glazed.

All you can see is an indistinct
haze.

It's the first cock crowing
and you would rather be dozing.

Over the twins' squealing
you are heard to holler:

"Please wait just one more hour!"

Thomas O'Brien

