

***Fioretti***



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# *Fioretti*

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## **Staff**

**Editors:** Jennifer Miller, Claudia Struewing

**Advisor:** Sr. Stella Gampfer, O.S.F.

### **Collating Editors:**

Karen Walsh

Jennifer Miller

Claudia Struewing

### **Artistic Contributions:**

Claudia Struewing

Noelle Gasco

Deardra Webb

### **Thanks to:**

Larry Steeb

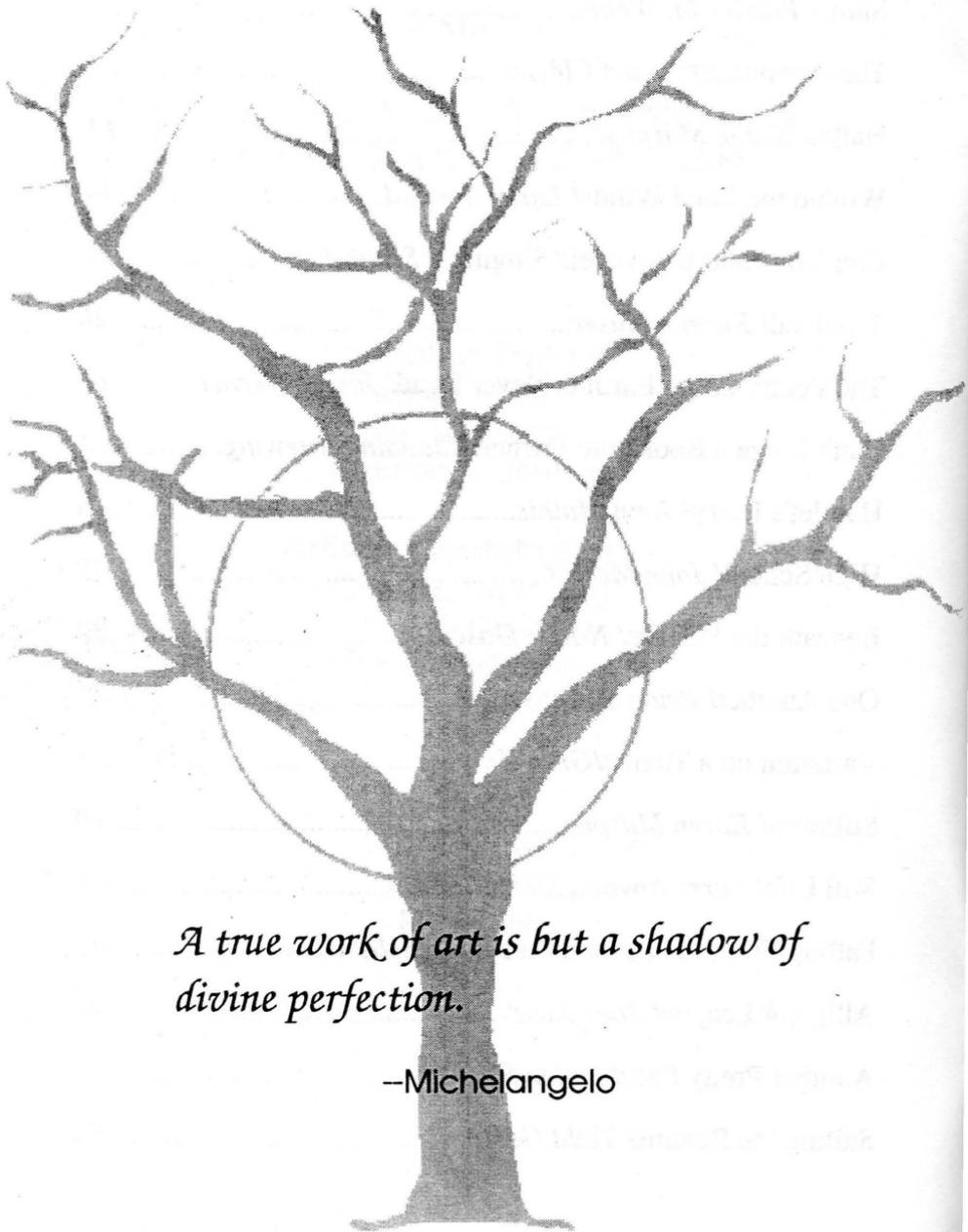
Joe Doyle

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*A true work of art is but a shadow of  
divine perfection.*

—Michelangelo



## Snow

cold inside  
left alone  
questions why  
everyone gone  
scared dog  
with other ones  
but want the people  
why did they leave  
where did they go  
sad dog  
watch people go by  
some stop and look  
none stay  
crying dog  
but then one day  
people stop  
people stay  
come to house  
meet other animals  
meet other people  
warm inside  
Happy Dog.  
Home.

Patrick M. Webb

## **The Announcers**

by Kurt Cleeter

The noise is almost unbearable. The college students are screaming at the top of their lungs. The television announcers, Charlie Smooth and Billy “Know-It-All” Wimp, are trying to stir up the people at home.

Charlie says to Billy, “This is a bell ringer. Almost anything can happen at this point. In my opinion, this is one of the best games that anyone has ever seen. These teams are ready to go.”

Billy replies, “You bet. Metropolitan has some of the most athletic players in the county. All year they have controlled the boards. Most of the time, they have at least fifteen to twenty more rebounds than the opponents, and tonight they are continuing that record. On the other hand, Podunck Village has finesse players. They are smooth—they just glide over the floor, and they have tremendous shooters.”

“You’re right, Billy. If Podunck wasn’t having a cold shooting night, it would even be closer than it is. It may boil down to a chess game between the coaches. Both coaches are top notch, a little volatile, but both are top notch.”

The television camera swiftly scans across the crowd and up to the scoreboard. Score: Metropolitan 87, Podunck 63; time remaining; two minutes and thirteen seconds. Finally the camera focuses on the skimpily clad cheerleaders and remains there while Smooth and Wimp continue their analysis.

“Charlie, it’s a shame that Podunck lost its best scorer, but look who’s replacing him, none other than Ox Butterfingers, mister wide body himself. I don’t know why coach Badtemper kept him out so long. I know he has four fouls, but with a game this important, you have to go with your winners. He might be

the spark that Podunck is needing.”

“You’re right again, Wimp. Let’s see, who does Badtemper have coming in after this timeout? There’s Axle Damit, Joey Pick, Ample Time, Lets “Fowl” Fowler, and of course, Ox Butterfingers. Like I said, this is going to be a chess game. The coach is pulling out all the stops and putting in what might be considered his best lineup against this talented Metropolitan team.”

“You’re right. There is plenty of time to go and anything can happen at this point. Ok, it’s Podunck’s ball—you know, Smooth, it seems like the referees are at it again. As I remember, you were pretty good at that when you were coaching. Here we go, no more time for chit-chat. The game’s on the line now.”

“Here we go folks. Hold your seats. This is a barn burner. Axle Damit takes the ball out-of-bounds and passes it to Joey Pick who passes it to Ample Time. Slowly, he dribbles the ball to center court, looks over the court for an open man, sees Ox Butterfingers and passes it to him. Oh, what a shame at a time like this, he drops it; Metropolitan sends a long pass down court— two more for Metro.”

“You know, Charlie, that wasn’t Butterfingers’ fault. Did you see where that ball was when it got to him? Right at the waist. That’s the worst place in the world for Ox. These guys have been playing together for a long time, and you would think that by now, they would know where their buddies want the ball.”

“You are right, Wimp. Sure hope coach Badtemper doesn’t get too upset with Butterfingers. You know, that is probably one of Badtemper’s worst faults in his coaching. He tries to control his team too much—he ought to give them a little more freedom to make their own decisions on the floor. Look at those poor fellows; they are all looking at Badtemper for his

reaction. Oh, oh, Ample Time held the ball out-of-bounds too long—five second call.”

Metropolitan in-bounds the ball and passes the ball around the top of the key.

“Well, Smooth, it looks as if Metro is going to play a little stall ball.”

“That’s right, Wimp. At this point in the game, they don’t need any more points. They just need to hang onto the ball. Look! Badtemper is yelling instructions to his young players. What’s he saying? Let’s listen.”

“Foul! Foul! Don’t let them run down the clock. Get in there and play defense. Foul!”

Fowl, who is guarding the man with the ball, hears his coach yelling instructions but can’t understand what he’s saying to him. He turns toward the coach and the Metro player dribbles around him and shoots, scoring a basket and is fouled by Time. Three more quick points for Metro.

Ample Time and Lets Fowler run down the floor as fast as they can and as far away from the coach as possible. Joey Pick in- bounds the ball to Axle Damit, who dribbles the ball toward half- court. Coach Badtemper is fuming. He is walking up and down in front of his bench. With each step a curse word flows from his mouth.

“Damn it, damn it—damn it—damn it!”

Axle Damit turns pale as he hears his coach and slowly dribbles the ball over to where his coach is standing. “Yea, coach, you want me?”

Badtemper is so mad that he can barely speak. He raises his fist in the air, takes one step toward Damit and the ball bounces off the coach’s foot. Out-of-bounds, Metropolitan!

“See, that’s what I have been telling you. The coach needs to let the boys play.”

“You are right as always, Wimp. Ok, two more points for

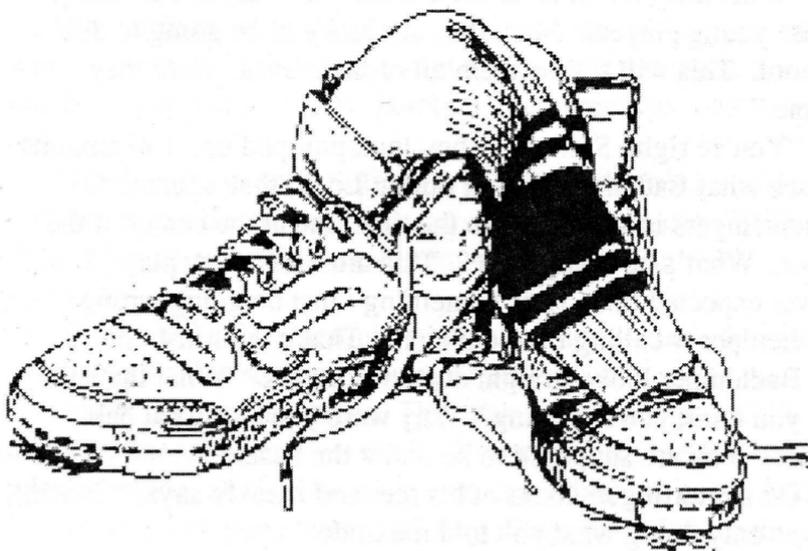
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Metropolitan. Podunck has the ball on their half-court and are weaving the ball around the top of the key. Look at Badtemper yell out instructions to his players. He's the consummate teacher, never lets up. Let's listen to what he is saying."

"Pick, damn it, pick. Don't you hear what I'm saying?" At the same time, Butterfingers passes the ball in their direction, Damit and Pick look at the coach. The ball hits Pick in the



head and bounces to Metropolitan's end of the court—two more for Metro.

None of Badtemper's boys want to spend too much time on his end of the court, so the ball is quickly in-bounded to Ample Time and he starts dribbling up the floor. Badtemper tries to get his attention.

“Time! Time! Can’t you hear me? Time!!”

Damit runs over to the referee. “Time, ref, time-out.”

“I don’t understand that time-out, do you, Smooth? Why did the coach call time-out?”

“Wimp, you know coach Badtemper. He probably saw something that Metro was doing wrong and wants to take advantage of it. He is always thinking. Boy, that’s a coach.”

“All right, you lame brains. I didn’t want a time-out, but while you’re her, I’m going to draw up a play. This time, follow my directions.”

“What did I tell you. Look at him. He is always teaching these young players. Man, they are lucky to be going to this school. This will follow them all of their lives. Here they come.”

“You’re right, Smooth. They look pumped up. I’m anxious to see what Badtemper has in mind. Look, that’s funny, Ox Butterfingers is almost out to the time line at the center of the floor. What’s he doing there? This must be a new play. I never expected this. Hey, something must be going wrong. Badtemper is calling time-out again. That’s their last one.”

Badtemper looks straight at Butterfingers. “What the hell do you think you are doing? Why were you almost at half-court? You are supposed to be under the basket.”

Ox Butterfingers looks at his feet and meekly says, “Coach, I was only doing what you told me to do.”

“I never told you to do that. Show me where I told you to do that!”

Ox picks up the coach’s tablet. “Right here. See, there between the top of the key and mid-court—Ox. That’s where I was.”

“That’s not you dummy. Those are X’s and O’s, those are...forget it. There’s only ten seconds to go. Get in there and run out the clock.”

“Wimp, didn’t I tell you that this game would be a masterpiece? A little more time and Podunck might have pulled it out.”

“You are on the money, Smooth. I don’t know when I have seen a more enjoyable and tension-packed game. We still have a few minutes of air time left. Here comes the Metro coach and his star player, Taul “Tall” Mann. Let’s get a few of their comments on the game. Coach Slicker, what do you think the turning point of the game was?”

“Well, it came during the first quarter when we were only up fifteen points. I called a time-out and really got on my players. I told them to execute, execute. That is the whole basis for our win—execution. When they went back in, they stepped it up a notch or two, and from that point on, the game was ours to win or lose.”

“That’s right coach. Sitting here on the sideline, I could feel the inspiration of your players after that time-out. Well, Taul, what do you think the turning point was?”

“Yeah,.....”

“Wimp, raise the microphone up about ten inches. We can’t hear what Taul is saying. Go on, Taul.”

“Yeah, the coach is right. That was the turning point. He told us what to do, and we did it. You know, uh, yeah, that’s what we done, uh, you know, we executed like the coach said.”

“Well, thank you, coach and Taul, for your insight to this game. We appreciate these little insights from the participants of the game. It lets us armchair jocks feel what it is like to be out there. Congratulations on a game well played. I’m sure that your school must be very proud of you. Smooth, I’m sorry that we won’t be able to have an interview with the Podunck coach and his players, but I heard that they had to rush down to the bus station.”

“What happened, Wimp?”

“You know that tomorrow is a school day, and school is very important to these young men. Their bus leaves at 11:30, and if they miss it, there won’t be another one until tomorrow night. Next year will be different. I understand that the town is joining forces and are taking up a collection to buy the team a bus. Then they will be able to stay around for the interview. They deserve it. The country needs to see what a fine bunch of men they are.”

“This is rather embarrassing, but I am not for sure that I know where Podunck is. Do you know, Wimp?”

“I believe that it is up north; no, I got that wrong, it is down south. Yes, I am sure that it is south. Yes, I am sure that it is south of Metropolitan. The school is small, but well known throughout the state for its academics and sports. I heard that last year two-thirds of the seniors on the basketball team graduated. It is a shame that neither of them went on to the pros, but I understand that they both have good jobs working as sanitary engineers for the town. As I always say, education is the name of the game.”

“I see that our time is up, and we have to go. Well, goodbye for now, friends. Join us again next week for another exciting game. It will have to be something to surpass this one today. This is Charlie Smooth and Billy Wimp wishing you a good week, and we hope to see you next week.”

**Haiku**

A rusted lunchbox  
Leaves still scattered on the lawn  
Silent bus rolls by

Karen Murphy

## **Wound the Loud Winds**

Shedding sycamores litter  
the wind's bright jaws  
as the old man pins  
the news to the park bench.  
Not in the paper again today.  
A good enough sign.  
The world falling around him,  
chitting along the walk like noisome children  
content in their spinwheeling  
freefalling hellishness.  
Time was he would have scooped  
this autumn chill  
like a load  
of choice stoking coal  
into his chest.  
Time was a day of fierce light  
would've seen him sharpening his senses,  
putting an edge to life  
blunted and dulled by busyness.  
The confused, gyreing leaves anointed him  
the black, steady eye of their whirlwind.  
He crouched to rake a crackling derelict  
from his cuff, and straightened,  
disposing to the world's tumult  
a fishbelly white slab  
peeping out salaciously  
between the gatered black sock  
and the trousers that grew shorter  
with each repelled advance.

Larry Atwood

## **Can You Hear the Angels Singing?**

by Sarah Riggs

“Can you hear them?” she asks. “The angels. They’re singing. Can you hear them?”

You listen, straining to hear any sound besides those damn machines whirring and beeping. “No honey, I don’t hear them,” you say. You reach down and brush the hair from her face.

“They sound so beautiful,” she mumbles. You know this is a sign that she is going to sleep again.

As she sleeps, you study the pale, thin face lying on the pillows. It’s not hard to remember the round, tanned face that used to be there. The sound of her laughter is now a memory as well. For the past year, the laughter has been replaced by tears. It was a slow process, but now the laughter is almost gone. The eyes that once sparkled are now filled with pain. The bouncy, shiny hair is now dull and lifeless.

You sit and remember the car accident that seems to be the start almost four years ago. The doctors had to give her blood to replace what she had lost. They said they had saved her life. For what? One year later, when she turned twelve, they said something else. You heard the phrase “tainted blood” for the first time. You watched your dreams for her crumble.

As you sit there, you remember the guilt. Why did she get the bad blood and not you? Both of you were in the car, and both had to be given blood transfusions. Why her and not you?

You look out the window and see the rain clouds roll in. The sky slowly turns black. Black—the color of her eyes as they look at the doctors and nurses who poked and prodded. Black for her moods when she was feeling especially low. That was when her laughter started to leave. Would you ever hear that sound again?

She stirs slightly in her sleep. You check all of the monitors for any sign of a problem. There is none and you relax and remember more.

The pain became a part of her life very slowly. It came first in the form of whispers and stares. People avoided her. They just didn't understand that you couldn't get this disease, this AIDS, from just touching her or being near her. Slowly, most of her "friends" stopped talking to her. Only the true ones stayed. They still visited her often.

The physical pain came just as slowly. It would sneak up on her like a thief in the night at first. Now, not a day goes by without her pain and suffering being so visible on her face that you feel her pain just looking at her.

You look out the window as the rain begins to fall. It seems like only last week the trees were green and the flowers were bright and fragrant. She still only had to go to the hospital for tests, and then she could come home and try to lead a normal life. Then, as the heat of the summer hit, she went to the hospital and stayed. She was too sick to leave and too healthy to die. The disease made her even more of a prisoner than before.

She stirs and you see that she is awake. "I can still hear them," she says. "I even had a dream about them. They want me to come to them. They keep saying that it's time for me to go." What she says shakes you to the core. Does she mean what you think she means? Is she telling you that the end is almost near? You have thought about it so much recently. You can still remember how horrible you felt when the thought of her dying first entered your mind. You can remember thinking how much of a relief it would be to have her suffering over. You were so afraid to tell anyone of your thoughts because they might not understand. They might think you were a horrible person for wishing that you own daughter would die,

but they just didn't understand, or so you thought.

You can remember the discussion you had with your next door neighbor. She was one of the few people who didn't leave you in your time of need. She was always there to pick up one of your other children from school or to listen to your problems. She was telling you how she understood how it felt to watch a disease slowly kill someone you love and not be able to do anything to help. Her father had died of cancer just two years ago. You remember her saying that near the end, she could only think of the relief she would feel when he finally did die. She told you that she only wanted his suffering to be over, and if death was the only way that was going to happen, then she could accept that. You just looked at her for a minute and then started to cry. Someone did understand, and you weren't evil after all.

You look back at the face on the pillows. She has an almost serene look on her face. What should you say to her? Are you ready for the end to come? You smile at her as best you can and push the hair back from her face. "Why do you think they are telling you that?" you ask.

"I'm not sure," she says. "Maybe they want me to get everything in order first. You know, say my good-byes and everything. What do you think?"

You look at her and carefully think of your answer. "I think you need to do whatever you want." She looks at you and you can tell she is considering this remark.

"Are you ready for me to go?" she asks.

What can you say to this? "I'm not sure yet, honey. Do you think the angels will give me some time to think it over?" She ponders this for a moment.

"I don't know, I'll have to ask." You bend over and kiss her cheek. She makes a face at the dry feel of it because of the mask they make you wear when you visit her.

“Visiting hours are almost over, honey. I have to go now. I’ll be back in the morning and we’ll talk more about this then, okay?” She agrees and you gather your things and prepare to leave. You look at her one last time and notice that she is drifting back to sleep. You say your good-byes to the nurses and walk out into the cold, wet night.

All night, you toss and turn thinking about what she has said. Are you ready for her to go? You would like it if all this would go away and you didn’t have to think of things like this. You would like that, but you know it won’t happen.

The next morning, after you see the younger kids off on the school bus, you get ready to leave for the hospital. On your way out to the car, your neighbor stops you and hands you something she thinks might help you. You thank her and promise to call if anything happens. As you get out of your car at the hospital, you look at what she handed you. It is a little card that says, “If you love something, set it free.” How did she know? You sit there and read this one line over and over again. You get out of your car and go into the hospital. You have your answer.

As you enter her room, you can see that she is not doing well. She looks so worn out. You move closer to the bed and take her hand in yours and whisper to her. “I understand now; I think I will okay if you choose to leave. I want your suffering to be over.” She opens her eyes and looks at you for a moment, then smiles. It is the most beautiful smile you have seen in a long time. She closes her eyes again and you sit and hold her hand as she slowly drifts away. The nurse becomes alarmed and calls for the doctor who looks at you and nods his head. He understands. It is time. Nothing can be done to help her anymore. He gives her a pain killer to make her more comfortable and places a hand on your shoulder. You sit and watch the monitors grow quiet. Her breathing slows. Her

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heart beat slows. She is slipping away. All the monitors are quiet. You strain to listen, not quite sure what you are listening for but knowing you need to listen. Then, for a brief moment, you hear something. You hear the angels singing. then it is gone. She is gone. You cry softly as the doctor turns to leave. Now she is an angel.

## **Troubled**

The life of those so seldom seen  
and of voices so scarcely heard,  
bring forth the feelings  
of the ones who care to listen—  
and to see.

As each day passes forth,  
the lives of the lucky few—  
remain unaltered, unchanged.  
But for others, another day brings  
more troubles, more pain.

There's a thing in this world,  
deep inside us all

that would brighten these  
heartwrenching days—  
that one thing, my friend, is love.

Hold this gift not deep within,  
but let go—

let others feel its warmth.

There will always be the selfish few,  
but you could save a life,  
with something so easy, something free.

Can't the whole world see  
what a great gift love can be?

Karen Hauser

## **The Poetry of Earth Is Never Dead**

Northwest winds hiss like  
cymbals, pound then like  
ten drums til dissonance  
is blowing syllables away,  
and words, and sentences.

The poor have always had  
to improvise. So poets  
must revise. And with  
the dead of winter, snow  
that falls in flakes or  
floods I try to change to  
Botticelli, Shelley, and  
Vivaldi, or to me.

Joan Peternel

**CAN'T JUDGE A BOOKSTORE OWNER...**

by Claudia Struewing

Coming home from work Friday afternoon, I thought I'd stop off and pick up a book. My head had been pounding all day due to stress, I'm sure, but now I'll just go home and read till I fall asleep, I thought. That sounded good. I opened the door to the bookstore hoping to see Mr. Quibbly, the owner. He was a very friendly man who always had a cheerful word to say. Yet, when I reached the front counter, there was no one around. I rang the service bell on the counter, and when no one appeared, I rang it again. It wasn't like Mr. Quibbly to keep a customer waiting. He always greeted his customers at the door and offered his assistance. Finally, from behind the counter, a voice called out.

"Hold your horses."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't see you down there. Where's Mr. Quibbly? He's usually here whenever I come in."

"He's not here."

"Oh, he's sick today?"

"No, he doesn't work here anymore. I own the store now."

"Mr. Quibbly sold the store to you?"

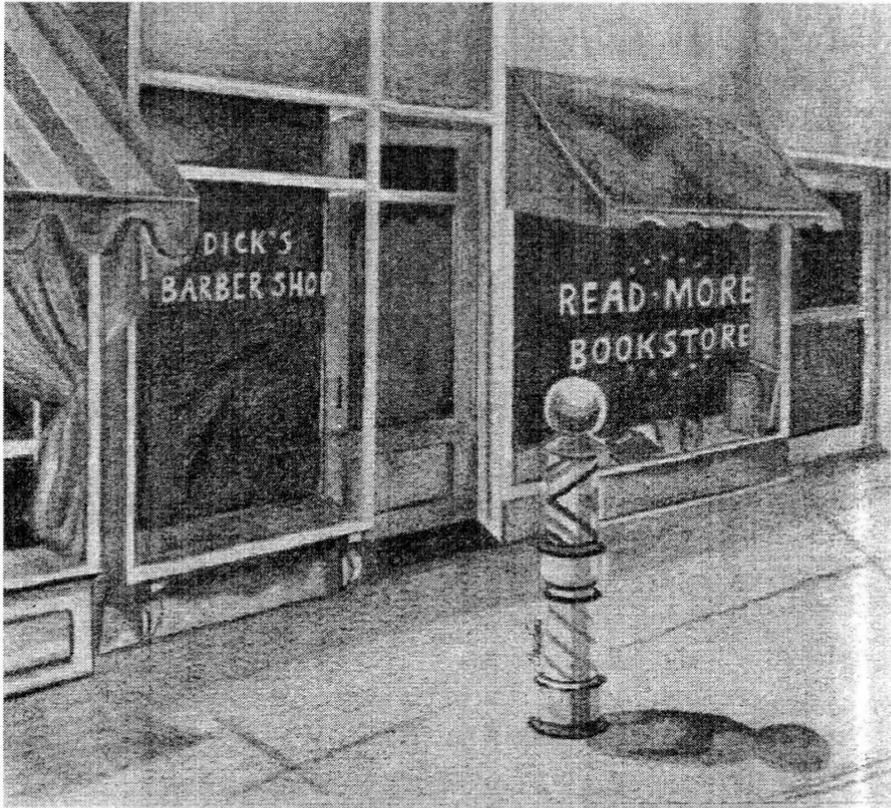
"Uh huh," was all he said.

"Why would he sell the store? He loves this place. It's his baby."

"I haven't the faintest idea, Miss. All I know is that he offered it to me one day, and I said I'd take it. I did give him a fair price for it if that's what you're worried about."

"Oh, I'm sure you did. I just don't understand why he would sell the one thing that means so much to him," I pondered as I moved away from the counter.

I roamed the aisles of books not looking for anything in



particular really. Surely something would grab my attention sooner or later. Yet, as I roamed from one shelf to the next, I saw nothing that sparked my interest. In fact, the shelves didn't seem quite the same anymore, or maybe I was just in the wrong aisle. Where were the paperbacks I always read? I wandered up and down every row and couldn't find any-

thing looking remotely familiar. I guess the new owner must have rearranged everything, I thought to myself. Maybe he could point me in the right direction. No sooner had I thought this than the doorbell rang and in walked a woman with her little boy. Immediately the child began tugging on his mother's sleeve begging her to find him a book.

"I want a book, Mommy. Get me a book. Please, Mommy, please."

"Not today, Billy. Mommy needs to find a fix-it book for Daddy before he destroys our home."

"But why can't I have a book, too? I want to read."

"I said no."

"But why?" he whined.

"Because."

"Because why Mommy?" he asked, wailing even louder.

"Because I said so. Now, quit acting like a spoiled brat or I'll stop right here and give you a spanking. I mean it, Billy," she said sternly when he began to talk back. "If I have to correct you one more time, your father will hear about it."

Her threat seemed to work for the little boy stuck his thumb in his mouth and became silent.

"Oh, criminy," I heard the owner mutter under his breath. Not another obnoxious snotty-nosed kid. Why me, Lord, why?"

"Excuse me, ma'am," he interrupted before Billy could throw another tantrum, "but can't you read? The sign on the door specifically says *No Food, No Smoking, No Bare Feet, and No Children*," he said, pointing to the sign posted on the door. "If you'll tell me what you are looking for, I'll get it so you and the kid can be on your way."

After recovering from the shock of his rude behavior, the woman asked for a book on how to repair a leaky faucet. He informed her that he didn't sell any repair manuals and referred

her to the store down the street.

"You don't sell any repair manuals? Why, that's absurd. Who ever heard of a book store that doesn't carry repair manuals? What kind of place is this anyway? First you insult my little Billy and then you tell me you don't have the book I want. What is your name anyway?"

"Wendell Brooks."

"Well, Mr. Brooks, you are terribly rude, and I don't think I will ever come here again. Let's go, Billy," she commanded as she took his hand, dragging him out the door behind her.

"I don't think I'll be able to stand the loss, lady," he hollered after her before returning to his work.

Now I wasn't sure at all whether to ask Mr. Brooks for assistance or remain puzzled. Finally after mustering all the courage I had, I approached the counter. "Excuse me, Sir."

"Yes? May I help you?" he asked while sucking on a tootsie pop.

"I sure hope so. Could you please help me find a book? The shelves seem to be rearranged, and I can't find what I'm looking for."

"Anything specific?"

"Actually, I'm looking for the latest by Jacqueline Briskin," I decided quickly.

"Bzzz. Wrong answer. Thank you for playing anyway."

"What about Janelle Taylor?"

"Wrong again."

"Victoria Holt?"

"Sorry. You don't happen to know how many licks it takes to get to the center of a tootsie roll tootsie pop do you?" he asked thoughtfully studying the tootsie pop. When he realized that I did not see the humour in his question, he returned to the subject. Oh, I'm sorry. Were you saying something?"

"I was asking you for several books, and you said you didn't

have any of them," I reminded him in an annoyed tone.

"Ah, yes. We don't have any of those here."

"What do you mean?"

"It's very simple. We don't carry that kind of crap here."

"You're kidding me. But that's impossible. What kind of a book store is this if you don't sell Holt, Briskin, or Taylor? They're some of the most famous authors. Mr. Quibbly always stocked his shelves with all the great works of literature."

"Well, Miss, I am not Mr. Quibbly, and never confuse that kind of garbage with real literature."

"Pardon my ignorance," I apologized, thinking this guy must be out of his tree. Obviously he had no clue how to run a business at all. "Are you aware that over half of the literate population reads these classic tales of the heart?"

"Yes, that is one of life's great misfortunes to be sure, but I do not intend to contribute to such an abomination."

"But you'll be losing a lot of business."

"Who really cares about business?"

I could see I wasn't getting anywhere with this character, so I asked, "What exactly do you sell?"

"Ah, I'm so glad you asked. Follow me," he motioned with his hand. I was left with no choice but to follow. He led me down each row explaining how he had organized the hundreds of volumes chronologically, alphabetically, and finally, according to the author's country of birth. It all seemed too complicated to me, but he assured me that any idiot would be able to figure it out although I still had my doubts.

"And this aisle contains works by some of the greatest playwrights like Williams, Wilder, and Ibsen to name a few." He tossed out more names—Keats, Byron, Shelley—all of whom he referred to as people having something to say. I didn't know what they had to say, but they were all names which I successfully managed to avoid throughout my educa-

tional career.

Just as he finished giving me the grand tour, the door opened again. This time it was the mailman carrying a single letter which he presented to Mr. Brooks saying, "Another letter from your publisher, Mr. Brooks. When's the next one coming out? My wife just loves your books especially that one with the triplets."

*"Love in the First Degree."*

"Yep, that's the one. Hope the next one's as good. Well, I gotta go. A mailman's work is never done."

"Okay. Be seeing you, Sam." In the next second he was gone leaving me in total confusion.

"You're a writer?"

"Yep."

Suddenly it dawned on me. I remember that title. I even think I've read it before. That was one of the best pieces of smut ever written. But I don't remember the author being Wendell Brooks. I must be thinking of another one because this one was written by a woman, I'm sure. What was her name, I asked myself. Oh, my God. That's it. "You're Desiree Sinclair?" I asked aloud.

He simply nodded. I couldn't believe it.

"Does that shock you?" he asked with a smirk on his face.

"A little I suppose." A little? How about a lot? "But with all your success, you must be rich. Why on earth are you working in some dinky town instead of living in New York and attending Broadway shows like the rest of the famous people do?"

"Because I enjoy doing what I'm doing." But that still didn't explain why he wrote the exact thing he clearly detested, I thought as I wondered down the street in search of a bookstore with the book I wanted. I don't think I'll ever fully understand people. Maybe I won't even try...

## Hamlet's Diary

'Tis a bleak night for my soul,  
I fear that my heart pumps pitch and bile,  
While any wholesome thought becomes  
inexorably lost in the labyrinth of my head.  
I am lost without my father  
like a five summers lad in the woods.  
Yet it seems that the beastliness of the forest  
has found sanctuary in these hallowed halls  
and sleeps with the hunter's wife.

Zooks! Why do I have to be whole?  
If a heart did not fill my chest,  
Hamlet's passing would here and gone,  
and the shrouds could rid the land  
of this murderous king and adulterous wife,  
and fear not the wrath of God.

Alas, the news is worse than before.  
The guards have noticed a ghost on the walls,  
not speaking but asking all the same.  
Some say that it has the likeness of the King.  
I go to see and bring my strength in youth,  
If it be my father, I'll get the truth.

John Mathis

## High School

The Prison Palace of immature adults  
where learning mixes with education.  
Concrete and steal, glass and meddle,  
passing and flailing to make the grade.  
Sad events, happy daze,  
Primer of life.

John Mathis

**Beneath the Surface: A Tribute to  
D.H. Lawrence (The Horse Dealer's Daughter)**

by Noelle Gasco

The worn leather suitcase was packed and sat anxiously waiting by the door. What was left of their valuables was already neatly packed in boxes which were stacked on the porch. Mabel came down the stairs just as the marble clock on the mantel piece softly chimed seven times. In her hands, she carried a small box, the last left to be removed, that she had retrieved from underneath her bed.

As she approached the mantel to retrieve the clock, Jack, who had been watching her in disbelief from the open door, made his presence known, "Mabel? Why are you doing this?"

She turned to him calmly, slowly, even though he had startled her. "I'm doing what I have to. I want what's best for both of us."

"But, last night, when I asked you..." He reached out to touch her hand still firmly holding the box. The marble clock rested on top the mantel, watching attentively. With each minute, its hands moved ever closer, each waiting for the moment that they would meet. "Mabel, I meant what I said, about marrying you, I mean."

"Oh, Jack, can't you understand?" Mabel's voice demanded although her tears softened her frustration and reflected her fears, "I won't have them talking—not my family, not the town." She stopped herself suddenly, afraid that she'd spoken too much already to a man who should've remained a stranger to her.

But as Jack's eyes met hers, she felt her thoughts escaping an uncomfortable loss, her willpower drawn from her.

"Mabel," Jack whispered soothingly to her, "it doesn't matter

what anyone else would say.” He removed the box from her grasp and set it down beside her.

“I don’t deserve you,” Mabel stated, as if there was no other truth. She couldn’t help but see herself as an object of the empathy that Jack possessed as a doctor. But she didn’t want to be another patient for him. She remembered how he had lifted her from the lake and gave her back the life she had released. But, marriage was an idea that seemed to be an unnatural effect surrounding one accidental incident and not a result of a driving love. It would be a marriage like her brother’s, a marriage that enabled Joe to pull up from the depths of debts that washed over their family. But Mabel had only been saved when Jack lifted her from the lake: she had her debt of despair released from her soul, and she knew that anything she could offer him in return would be insignificant

next to that one omnipotent act he had performed. The best gift she had to offer him would be that of his freedom.

He kissed her. On his lips, although unspoken, she sensed the yet unasked question. It was tender, a freely surrendered and pleading request, “Won’t you believe me, Mabel? Won’t you stay?”

“I love you,” he said softly into her ear. “I truly love you, Mabel.”

For a moment, the clock disappeared and Mabel fell into his embrace.

Jack stood on the porch, watching her leave. An anger flooded his mind, an anger that he should care at all. It flowed throughout his very being, his heart. It blended and mixed into a kaleidoscope of emotions. He felt a sense of loss, a loneliness in the very air around him. He couldn’t wave. But there was no need to, for she herself made no motion but only stared straight ahead. Jack’s hands hung lifeless at his side. These were hands of a doctor, hands that healed, hands that

saved. They were also hands that he discovered were vulnerable to expression and incapable of suppressing his love. But these same hands could not hold her back. All his efforts had failed to overcome her cold determination to set him free. He was forced to accept a gift he did not want. He knew it was love now. He felt it fill his eyes and stream like earthly rivers down his cheeks. He knew it soaked into the earth, without even looking, where it was suppressed and silently absorbed.

He made his rounds that day as if in a dream. He touched, he cured, he prescribed. He smiled and conversed, but he saw nothing. Mabel wandered through his mind, violating and controlling his private thoughts. He felt his vulnerability as he sank below a sea of emotions. He forgot he couldn't swim. He felt Mabel once more as the cold earthly water of the pond surrounded him once more. He remembered reaching, reaching for her, losing his balance and sense of direction, to be dunked below the surface.

He remembered seeing her body floating next to him, lifelessly lost in the pond's pride. She had moved so unnaturally, susceptible to every wave and whim of the water, as he reached out to grab her dress. Together they had resurfaced from the depths that would have otherwise consumed them apart.

"Jack. Oh, Jack," his elderly patient said, pulling him back into reality. "How much do I owe you, dear?"

"Nothing," Jack smiled, patting her gently on the shoulder. "You don't owe me a thing, Mrs. Murphy."

The months went on and the seasons changed. The Pervin house was long since sold. Little children, wrapped head to toe in scarves, skated along the frozen pond. Their slates glided across the rough ungroomed surface of ice. But, under neath, the water was still very much alive, still churning with the taste of Mabel's life it had almost entirely devoured.

Lucy was more than hospitable to her humbled sister. She took Mabel in, knowing she had nowhere else to go. When Mabel arrived, she seemed distant. Lucy sensed the preoccupation surrounding Mabel. In fact, on more than one occasion, Lucy had directly demanded that Mabel reveal what was bothering her, but each time Mabel looked up at her with a strange intense gaze. It wasn't, as far as Lucy could judge, a look of anger, but it seemed more of a startled and somewhat confused look, one that might appear on the face of a lost child who, upon glancing up, discovers that she's holding the wrong mother's hand. But the loneliness of Mabel's eyes which revealed everything, yet, at the same time, nothing at all, disappeared with Mabel's careful and immediate control.

Lucy eventually became accustomed to Mabel's private yet efficient manner. At times, Mabel was more efficient, in fact, than any servant Lucy had employed.

The first letter came about four months after Mabel's arrival. It was from Joe, their brother. Lucy was surprised to hear from Joe. He wasn't, after all, even known to write letters simply for the sake of keeping the lines of communication open. In fact, the last mail Lucy had received from him was his wedding invitation. Lucy read the letter. For a long while, she sat very still at her rolltop desk. Then she read it again, more slowly this time. Joe had run into Dr. Jack Fergusson at a pub. According to Joe, Jack seemed to be drinking quite heavily. They had talked, about Mabel. Jack inquired several times about her, expressing deep concern...

Suddenly, Mabel's silence made sense. Lucy, after reading the letter, knew Jack's proposal and she concluded, from Mabel's obvious reaction, that Mabel, for whatever reason, had rejected his love.

Lucy decided to test her theory one night at the supper table. "By the way," Lucy asked between mouthfuls, carefully

studying Mabel's face, "Who is Jack Fergusson?"

For a moment, Lucy thought that Mabel was going to jump up and run out the door. But, Mabel quickly regained her collected composure as she innocently asked, "Where did you hear about him?" She kept eating casually while waiting for a reply. Lucy pretended not to notice the small ponds of water filling Mabel's eyes.

"Oh, Joe just mentioned him in a letter," Lucy said closing the conversation. The evidence on Mabel's face was all that she needed to confirm her suspicions. It was also the only justification that she needed to protect Mabel from heartache and unhappiness.

That night, Lucy placed Jack's letter addressed to Mabel in her dresser drawer, unopened. As the year progressed, the drawer's collection of unread letters were transferred into the basement, in an old shoe box, in order to obtain the needed drawer space.

It was spring again. The Pervin house was full of life once more. Its tiny inhabitants frolicked to and fro between the house and pond, watering the flowers along the way with their dripping clothes.

Jack stood further up from the pond, watching them. The four of them were all on their knees now, probing and stirring the pond's surface with a stick and looking intently in hopes of finding its hidden secrets. Jack half wondered, and even hoped, that if he were to peer into the water himself, he would see Mabel's reflection rippling gently. He wished she had answered his letter. He wished that he could see her again. The children interrupted his thoughts as their search continued. They waded into the water. They laughed, talked and pointed to the water lapping around their knees. The pond was full of sunken ships and treasures yet to be discovered.

Downstairs, in the basement, Mabel picked up a broom.

She didn't really mind spring cleaning. In fact, she quite enjoyed it. It reminded her of being back home, where spring cleaning was a yearly ritual she performed consistently. So, she had sent Lucy off to her friend's to have tea while Mabel searched the basement for supplies and prepared the house for purification.

The box was full of dust. Mabel started to pull it out from the shelf in order to reach the cleaning supplies. Suddenly, she lost her grip, and the box fell to the floor. As it landed, the lid opened and the letters it had kept hidden secretly for so long were suddenly revealed to Mabel's incomplete world. Mabel knelt down and half-consciously began scooping the contents back into their proper container. Then she saw her name, faded but eloquently flowing across one of the creamy envelopes. She turned them all over, one by one, and she held each one in awe, in disbelief. They were all for her. Each and every letter had been collected and deliberately kept from her. She sat in the basement, alone, and read the letters. Her tears of recognition dropped, gently on each page, marking them as her own, the ink blending with the tears into little blue ponds of reality. She knew it was love now. She ran upstairs, a letter still clutched in her hand, to find her coat.

A candle on the table dripped with the hours. The warm wax reshaped the once smooth candlestick into a unique distorted character. Its flame flickered, leaped and danced before the doctor's unseeing eyes.

The warm night air brought life to a scraggly tree branch outside Jack's window. It scratched and tapped the glass persistently, as if frantically trying to draw Jack's attention back to the world and all its offerings. A breeze seeped through the partially open window to seek out the dancing light before him. The fiery flame protested passionately, stretching and reaching in one last attempt to stay alive. A silver razor

reflected the candle's noble struggle against the darkness. Like fireworks, it flashed, it flashed with every gasp of the dying flame, until the doctor's hand cast its shadow over the brave blade. All at once, darkness overtook the room.

Echoing the tapping tree on the window, came several knocks at the door. They paused. For a moment, even the wind was silent and still. They came again, a crescendo through the night, startling the doctor. He quickly rose from the table assuming it was a patient in distress. He let the blade fall to the floor and into the shadows.

He opened the door and saw Mabel. The light from the entryway illuminated her mystic beauty and flowed into the kitchen where he stood, his hand still grasping the doorknob. At first, he thought he was dreaming. He was afraid to look at her, lest she should disappear. Mabel fell forward to embrace him. He stood momentarily motionless and detached. Then, suddenly his emotions flooded, drowning him, and his body collapsed in her arms.

He fell to his knees like he fell into the pond, his body no longer his own, helplessly separated from his controlled rational mind. She dropped down before him. With shaking hands, she reached into her coat pocket, pulled out the door letter and took his hands in her own. She placed the letter in his open palms and folded his fingers over it, crinkling his endless lines of love within their grip. She firmly squeezed his fists in hers until he looked into her eyes. Then, she motioned to the confirmation of his love secretly hidden within their unified hands. "I never knew..." her voice finally explained, "until now."

She kissed him. He embraced her, the letter still balled up in one of his hands, behind her back. But, she no longer needed to see it to know it existed. For although hidden from sight, she realized it was there all along; words on his lips and

## *Fioretti*

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on paper were always seen first with the heart.

“I love you, Jack,” she whispered and her words were not too late. “I truly love you.”

The light of the entryway shone in on them as they knelt together in the darkness. Outside, the wind carried their whispers to the trees, swaying and entwining them together. In the entryway, a worn leather suitcase rested contently just outside the kitchen door. It patiently waited there, knowing its purpose was finally complete now that it had reached its destiny, now that it had made it home.

### **One Another**

*(Inspired by the film Children of a Lesser God)*

I am in her world now, she is in mine.  
We do not hear, but touch, feel, caress, love.  
I need not hear to be in love with her,  
Her black, silky hair, her beautiful smile.  
We embrace, my body close against hers.  
Separate, yet one, knowing that to love is  
To live, and to live is all there is.  
Yes, we can meet in a place together  
Where there is no silence and there is no sound.  
It is a place of which we are both part.  
Together forever in both our hearts.

Brian Sweany

## **Variation on a Theme**

by Greg Knipe

The singer stands alone on stage, the glow of her spotlight the only disturbance of the theater's dark, womb-like silence. Slowly, haltingly, she begins to sing. At first, her voice is rough and the song fragmentary; soon, however, she begins to gain confidence and her song improves. It gradually becomes sweet and lilting, as she sings of beauty, innocence and wonder. The blushing naivety of her performance is enough to melt even the coldest and most cynical of hearts. Sadly, the effect lasts what seems but a moment and is gone. Her voice matures, becoming more refined and polished, yet there is something missing, something that is understood to be forever lost in her maturity. The song, too, undergoes a change as she now sings of romance, discovery, and commitment. But soon the strain of the song begins to affect her, and she begins to look worn and haggard. Her theme shifts to match her countenance, and she sings of heart-break, of solitude, of innocence lost; no heart, no matter how calloused, could hear her song and come away untouched, unchanged by the experience.

Weighted down by her topic, head bowed in exhaustion, she ends her song, and the spotlight begins to fade. As its glow slowly pales around her, she hangs her head and allows the tears to run gently down her weary face. Would the audience applaud? Cry? Care? She will never know, for no audience may ever attend this theater. Here the song is sung not for others, but for the performer, and for its own sake.

Singers come and go, and seasons pass (slowly or not, as is their wont); but the song remains the same: the immutable, immortal, inscrutable musical score called "Life."

**Stillborn**

A summer bundle of silky skin  
Once a knotted reminder of midnight sin  
Another nightmare to now begin?

Wake up alone to tiny, frail cries  
Trudge through empty halls with half-open eyes  
To endless Gothic lullabies.

The plump little face examines you  
Searching your eyes for the smallest clue  
Something there to hold on to.

But winter has come and done its part  
Blanketing warmth and freezing out hearts  
Another young life doomed from the start.

**Karen Murphy**

**Still Life**

Softly now, in dreams she shares  
with now-forgotten teddy bears  
standing guard in dollhouse chairs,

she slides into a darker world,  
Safety's sought in staying curled  
against the demons last night hurled

into her fevered little head.  
Long day's play in turn has fed  
crouching nightmares round her bed.

Larry Atwood

## **Falling from the Second Story**

by Michelle Gobin

I sat on the step, huddled against the corner, puffing violently on my cigarette, an open notebook under the toe of my scuffed high-top. I had been trying to write the world's-best-most-inspiring-heartfelt poem and had given up when I couldn't find a word to rhyme with "lyric." I then tried to write the great American short story and had abandoned the idea when my writer's block reduced me to beginning it with, "It was a dark and stormy night..." My Marlboros comforted me as I rationalized my habit by fancying myself as a troubled, yet brilliant, writer taken to an untimely demise by the evils of her hedonistic lifestyle. I held my cigarette in my right hand and my pen in the left, every now and again raising the wrong instrument to my mouth. I hunched over my notebook and started doodling an upside down train, symbolic of my train of thought.

"I smoke because I'm orally fixated. Was never breastfed as a child. What's your excuse?"

I jumped at the voice that suddenly appeared several yards above my head. Rejecting the concept that it was the voice of God finally sending me off on my charter bus to hell, I looked up to see the soles of two graffitied Converse sneakers dangling from the second story window above me. I sneezed as a stray ash from his cigarette fell into my nose.

"Sorry, I was aiming for the ashtray. What are you doing outside at one in the morning?" He flipped his cigarette off to the side, grinning evilly. "Don't worry. I threw it down wind of you."

"What are you doing hanging out of a window at one in the morning?" I stopped sneezing long enough to ask.

“Hanging out!” He guffawed and slapped what I assumed to be his knee. His position above the glare of the white street lamp prevented me from distinguishing too many details.

“What’s the matter, leave your sense of humor at home?”

“No. I’m writing a story.”

“Looks like you’re drawing pictures to me.”

I flipped my notebook closed and lit up another Marb.

“I get inspired by drawing.”

“That’s cool. When I get stuck, I sit in my room in the dark with some incense and a bottle of Jack.”

I strained and squinted myself into a position where I could better see my mysterious midnight partner in insomnia and my reflection. He was perched on the ledge, one leg dangling over my former seat, the other bent, resting his elbow on his knee.

“You’re going to fall out of the window.”

“My, aren’t we optimistic this evening?”

“I just think it’s stupid to be sitting on the ledge of a second story window.”

“Oh, so now you’re calling me stupid.”

“I didn’t mean...”

“Yeah, I see how you are.” He laughed and swung himself back into the window, closing it with a bang.

I sat back against the wall and tapped my ashes into the ashtray. I inhaled the last puff, feeling the heat of the ember through my fingers, and flipped the butt into the ashtray alongside its ashes. I turned and glanced upwards, hoping to see some trace of my former companion. A darkened window returned my gaze. I sighed and picked up my pen and notebook once more.

“It was a dark and stormy night? I must say, you are quickly losing credibility as a writer, in my opinion.”

I jumped again. I chided myself on letting his voice surprise me a second time in one night.

“I was hoping to write a really horrendous story in order to inspire myself to write something profound.” I looked my critic- friend in the eye. “Don’t you have any idiosyncrasies?”

“Yeah, but I call them habits, and they don’t result from stealing lines from novels I wouldn’t regularly admit to reading.”

“Paint me green and call me jealous. I can only aspire to your obviously superior talent.” I lit up another cigarette.

“You smoke too much.”

“You poke your nose in where it doesn’t belong.”

“My name is Trevor, it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” He extended his hand and grinned at me.

I took his hand and shook it. I was too surprised to do anything else.

“Do you have a name, or should I call you Agatha Christie?”

“Your sense of humor escapes me. Malinda.”

“I told you my name was Trevor.” He burst into another round of obnoxious laughter. “You really must try to contain your bliss, Agatha. You’re going to hurt yourself if you keep losing control like that.”

I stared at him, trying to fix him with my most intimidating glare. He responded by tickling me under my chin. I responded in the only way I would have imagined a woman of the nineties to react, I racked him. He fell to his knees with a noise that resembled the sound my Aunt Frieda made when she choked on a hard boiled egg at the family picnic last September.

“You certainly know how to make an impression, Agatha.” He crawled over to the wall and pulled himself up, very slowly. “I’m beginning to think you don’t like me very much.”

“Fancy that.”

“I don’t suppose you’d let me help you with your story?”

“What do you know about writing stories?”

“I’ll take that as a no.” He turned and started walking away.

“Wait. How do I know you’re not an axe murderer?”

“I’m not carrying an axe.”

“You are a smart ass.”

“I would rather see myself as an amusing cynic.”

I laughed, in spite of myself.

“Do you have any ideas for a story?”

“What do you want to write about?”

“Something deep, meaningful and worthy of an A from my creative writing teacher.”

“Ah. You’re trying too hard.”

“Are you saying I can’t be deep?”

“No, I’m saying you can’t force yourself to be profound. Unless you’re Faulkner in disguise you’re going to turn out sounding pretentious.”

“What the hell do you know?” I smashed my cigarette into the ashtray and stared him in the eye. He sat down next to me, keeping a noticeable distance, and took my notebook from my hand. He turned to a page where I had written a paragraph about my love life and read out loud.

“I seem to have cornered the market on sludge, slime and general dregs of humanity when it comes to dating. My last boyfriend was a closet transsexual and the one before that is in jail for shoplifting uncut keys from Ace Hardware.’ That’s really funny, Agatha. I think you may be a cynic at heart.”

“I can’t write funny stuff for class. My teacher would think I was an idiot.”

“I hate to break it to you, but if you turn in a story starting with ‘It was a dark and stormy night’”, he’s not going to commend you for your sage-like wisdom.”

“Oh.”

“Don’t get pouty. It doesn’t become you.”

“\*♦\* you. Give me my notebook.”

“Here,” he was laughing again. “I’d hate to come between a muse and her destiny.”

He stood up and offered me a cigarette. I accepted and we smoked in silence.

“Thank you for your help.”

“No problem. See ya.” He took my hand, kissed it and walked down the sidewalk. He turned and waved when he reached the corner of the building. “Agatha? It’s supposed to storm on Friday. Wanna go see a movie?...Oh, nevermind. I don’t like to classify myself under ‘the dregs of humanity.’”

I didn’t yell after him. I told myself it was because serious writers had no room in their twisted lives for romance. Then I started my second story.

## **Alligator League**

I used to play in an alligator league.  
The Vinegar Man would teach me.  
We'd play for hours. He never got tired.  
Reptiles, mammals and me.

I used to hide under make-believe trees,  
Sunburnt in spite of the shade.  
The Vinegar Man always knew where to find me.  
We sold cups of warm lemonade.

I traded my trees for make-believe gardens  
Grown over with black choking weeds.  
Alligators changed to big hulking monsters.  
Gargoyles, tulips and me.

Amethyst trinkets and college tuition  
The Vinegar Man liked to offer.  
Spoiled rancid coffee doesn't taste any better  
When served on a gold plated saucer.

The Vinegar Man took a trip far away  
I wouldn't let him take me.  
All that is left are shadows and trinkets.  
Memories, memories and me.

Zoey Rose

## **Another Pretty Face**

by Dylan Roarhig

In Stephen Jordeci's home there was a new face. This face had no name that Stephen knew. He had met this new face at The Wasteland, a bar that he would frequent on Saturday nights. It was now Sunday morning.

He had seen this face hovering above the bar counter, its lips grasping the tip of a bottle and parting slightly, allowing the fluids within the bottle to pass between them and enter the cavern beyond. The fluid is made by taking the seeds of specific plants, mixing them with water and sugar, then placing them under tremendous heat and pressure. Soon this mixture is transformed into a yellowish liquid that, due to fermentation, contains a metered amount of an intoxicant which is called alcohol. The fluid that contains this alcohol is called beer. Beer, due to its nature, tends to alter the moods of most of those who partake of it. Beer also has the ability to make decisions for people, which is exactly what it was doing to the face that Stephen was then walking towards. The face had drunk several beers long before Stephen had even noticed it floating there above the bar, and it was just waiting for someone to come along and present a situation in which it was required to use judgement. Little did it know, but Stephen was on his way to do just that.

The beer, after passing through the lips of the face, followed a passage into a complex system of organs and tissue. It found that it enjoyed one specific organ the most; this organ is called the stomach. It, the beer, would have liked to have stayed there for quite a while, but, due to the fact that more beers were on their way there, this beer had to vacate, and fast. The urgent need for the beer to exit was made aware to the face by an even

more complex system of tissue called the nervous system. The face, having received this information, asked Stephen, who was then attempting to communicate with it, if it might be excused for a moment. The face then rose, with the assistance of a rather unsteady body. (This is the same body that contains the roller coaster of organs and tissue and nerves mentioned above, the same body that the beer was now wanting to leave).

Stephen was watching as the body walked in its own intoxicated way toward the bathrooms. He smiled, he knew that, with the correct amount of conversation and well chosen words, he knew that the new face would go with him to his house. This is something that usually makes males such as Stephen smile.

But that was Saturday night. When we began it was Sunday morning. What was this new face doing on Sunday morning?

Now this was not just any Sunday morning, it was Sunday morning in Stephen Jordeci's house, and the face was spending this Sunday morning in Stephen Jordeci's house lying, along with the body to which it clung, on Stephen's bed. The sun was out, which should be expected from a Sunday, and the streets were busy due to all of the people who had to go to church. Church is a place where people go on Sundays in order to talk to God. God is a very large being that resides in a place called Heaven, and people go to church with the hope that God will see them there. They want God to see them there so that He will let them into Heaven after they are finished here on Earth. Going to Heaven is very important to people, but nobody is really sure why.

Despite all of the traffic and noise going on outside of Stephen's house, the face showed no intention of moving. It seemed to like it there on Stephen's bed. It apparently enjoyed the way that it could stay there without worrying about going to Heaven. The face was very wise, you see; it knew that it

didn't have to be in church in order to be seen by God. It knew that God saw it right where it was. In fact, at this point in the story, the face knew God very well. It knew God much better than those people in church right then knew Him. The face was, if you haven't already discovered it, the face was dead. Not just the face actually, but the body that went with it, and the organs, the tissues, the nervous system, they were also dead. The beer that had entered the body was not dead, however, it was saturating the sheets of Stephen's bed.

Speaking of Stephen, where is he? Let's leave the face alone for right now (it's not going anywhere) and look for Stephen. There's his bathroom: "Knock, knock?" Nope, he's not in there. Where could he have gone? Wait, I think I hear him in the kitchen- -yes, there he is.

Stephen awoke at 6:30 a.m. He was very happy. He had completed his mission. After coaxing the face from the bar, he brought it back to his house. Once there, he and the face had made love for many hours. This meant very much to Stephen, for this meant that he had "scored;" however, this didn't mean very much to the face anymore.

When Stephen awoke, he saw that the face was still sleeping (please, just humor him for now), so he decided to get some breakfast and read the newspaper. (Newspapers were very special on Sundays...nobody really understands the phenomenon either). After he finished the newspaper from beginning to end, not an easy task with the Sunday paper, he went into his bedroom. He watched the face as it slept (as I said, play along). He smiled because the face was very pretty. That was good; he recalled many Sunday mornings past when he awoke to a face that was not very pretty at all. So, a pretty face was a nice change.

Stephen began to formulate a reason to get the face to leave after he made it breakfast. He decided he would tell it that he

had to go to his sister's house for her birthday. (This, however, was not true. His sister's birthday was in June; this was November). After coming up with this excuse (he really should have saved himself the trouble; the face no longer cared about excuses), he attempted to awaken the face. As you might guess, he was not very successful. He worked and worked to wake the face; alas, that face was being very stubborn. Stephen shook the face's body; he yelled; he jumped up and down; he begged; he pleaded, but the face was quite comfortable where it was--thank you very much. Poor Stephen. He went on like this for about two hours while the face did nothing to provoke, nor to stop, him. When Stephen finally did stop, he went back into his kitchen. By this time he was quite aware of the fact that the face was dead. He felt very uneasy, and he was not sure to what this was due. It may have been the fact that it took him two hours to realize that the face was no longer living. It may have been the fact that he felt guilty about wanting to make the face wake-up in the first place. It might have been that Stephen was feeling mournful for the deceased.

All of those assumptions are fine, but they are also wrong. The real reason Stephen felt uneasy was that he had lost the pretty face to something else besides himself. This was the first time that that had happened to Stephen. He had never lost a face to someone else; a face had never dumped him; no face of his had ever had to leave because of its sister's birthday. Stephen had always been the one to say good-bye, but not this time. This time the face had beat him at his own game. It had left without him having to tell it to do so. It had thrown a monkey wrench into his mission.

Well, what does Stephen do now? It looks like he is going to turn on the television. The television, unlike church, is an item that can be found in most American homes. It creates images, and worlds that Americans generally prefer to their

## *Fioretti*

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natural surroundings. As you can imagine, Stephen was very grateful for a television right then. He was not very pleased with his present surroundings. So, Stephen turned on his television. He was watching it when his telephone began ringing, and he continued to watch it as his phone rang. He was not in the mood to talk to anyone.

The face? Well, the face did what any other face would do on a Sunday morning in Stephen's house while lying dead on Stephen's bed—the face didn't do a damn thing. It just stayed right where it was, being just what it was...a pretty face.

## Sailing the Realms

If it had not been for the candles,  
The chamber, perhaps, would cease to exist.  
A fleet of baby flames whose staggering balance atop  
the wick  
Kept them alive, and threw forth  
Some transparent aura into the room;  
Some touch of candlelight laced with shadow.  
And when a gleam of that light  
Chanced to land on some golden object,  
Or ignored the deepest groove in the face of  
some carved angel,  
There seemed a presence in the room  
Not known in this realm since Pharaoh felt  
The bloody Nile.

See there, at the nearest wall,  
A rack of green glass wine bottles—  
Each one glossed with amber candle glare.  
And there, at the nearest wall,  
Where the candlelight takes leave—  
The dim outline of an obscure wardrobe missing doors,  
And faintest images of hanging robes  
That strain the eye for detail  
Or charm the mischievous imagination.  
For deep in the folds of dimly lit clothes  
Takes place the marriage of Light and Dark  
So that the robes become cruel illusions,  
Hoary images to torment the believer.

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But this room seems not cruel,  
Though somehow sad and pale, as all holy  
places must  
When glazed with mournful candlelight.  
Those narrow candles, their fair aroma,  
Quiet breath and warm reflections had often  
given comfort  
To the man sitting alone in this room.  
But tonight it is not the candles that comfort him,  
It is the wine.

So out of place seems this young man,  
A priest, drunk on wine, alone in the hollow shell  
Of a mighty cathedral. But to Michael  
The dark and the quiet and the wine  
All create a feeble, though welcome opiate.

Fair creature! His face is hushed and hidden  
Save when his head plunges back to drain the  
wineglass.  
Then a single candle casts a wiry beam  
Cross chin and cheekbones.  
How such eyes, rubbed gritty-raw, must ache.

The wine is bitter.  
And swallowed, leaves the mouth tasting green  
and unripe,  
Stings the top of the throat, drains down  
Slow and hot, keeping the gut warm,  
The limbs thawed, and the brain numb.

Numbness penetrating the human foundations  
Where man is deemed man.  
Now look! A vision!

Who has no such compass and  
No such direction as he?

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Michael reaches for another bottle.  
How heavy is his spirit, yet how provoked.  
Patience, Michael, for see—  
the vision, it returns.

Caution, Michael, hold your shield.  
Soon all will be revealed.

When fragrant froth of windfall  
Seems a Realm of beauty,  
Venal specters kindle thoughts  
To twist it into mutiny.

In Realms of stagnant, midnight depth  
Below the plasmic waves  
The Fates wailed in better pain  
And birthed a satyr babe.

Spewed from forth the wicked womb  
The stygian imp arrived.  
He sent his sense throughout the Realm  
And felt the fleet pass by.  
"Let me command the rainbow fleet,"  
Sayeth now this ill-bred demon.  
"Fail me, Michael, and I foresee

Your death upon this night.  
That wine of yours, that blood of Christ.  
What wonders it has worked on you.  
If I should drink, just think, justthink!  
The magic it might do!"

How much terror for poor Michael.  
For what torture withers the soul  
More than fear?  
Should death come tonight,  
What more demonic dreams await him  
In that sleep called 'death' ?  
Man does not direct his dreams,  
He dreams when direction is lost.  
Dreams himself into voluntary exile,  
Groveling blind through sickening weeds  
At the bottom of a sunless sea.

Michael surrenders up the wine,  
Desecrating the divine.

The babe consumed that holy drink  
And like blood it trickled down his chin.  
He laughed and splashed it in his face,  
Absorbed it through his skin.

His eyes burned bright, his beard burned off.  
He swam from the abyss  
Eleventy fathoms through the gloom  
And landed on the ship.

Upon the flagship of the fleet  
Stood that newborn babe of sin  
And as he neared the hero child  
Behold! the two were twin!

There the two did duel with swords  
To run the other through,  
But which was true and which was false  
Not one angel knew.

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Ten hours passed, one babe at last  
Brings the other to his knees,  
Hews his neck, hacks his head  
And hurls it in the sea.

Alone, in the trembling cold,  
On the floor of that unknown see lies Michael,  
Looking up.  
And the sight that fills his eyes  
Brings such tension to his face  
That his lips can only form two words,  
"Tis true" and repeat "Tis true."  
The sun is gone, the earth forsaken,  
Only an ancient ocean remains  
Adorned with a few million vessels  
That bump hulls, and sail circles.

The candles are almost out now.  
as the darkness floods them from all sides  
They become a tiny fleet of brilliant ships.  
Michael sees them not, nor does he rise  
When daylight comes.

The candles give the final sight  
of that vision, on that night:

The victor babe then led the fleet  
To a Realm, a promised land  
That is what we call the Universe  
Which he would create, and then command.

Todd Gavin

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*We live in a cultural continuum in which we are free to move back and forth through the centuries: Books are islands in the oceans of time. They are also oases in the deserts of time.*

-Lawrence Clark Powell

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*FIORETTI*

We are especially pleased with the amount and quality of the contributions for this issue of the Fioretti. Thank you for your submissions.

In our effort to continually improve Marian's literary anthology, we appreciate constructive criticism and also encourage increased student involvement in the Fioretti. For more information contact Sr. Stella Gampfer, O.S.F., Jennifer Miller or Claudia Struewing.

The deadline for Spring 1993 submissions is March 1st. We welcome short stories, poems, drama, pen or ink drawings, and photographs.

*Claudia Struewing and Jennifer Miller, editors*

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