

genesis

Contents: one literary magazine



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**Volume 19
Number 2**

Fall 1991

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Special thanks to

Phyllis Newton

for her continued support.

Copyright 1991 by the trustees of Indiana University, genesis is published in the spring and fall of each year by the genesis editorial board. Publication of genesis is made possible through a grant from the School of Liberal Arts and the Student Activities Fund, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. Content is devoted to imaginative writing in the areas of fiction, essay and poetry, as well as artwork fulfilling the dimensions requirements listed in the Invitation page. Correspondence pertaining to business or editorial matters should be addressed to: genesis, Student Activities Office, University Library, 815 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

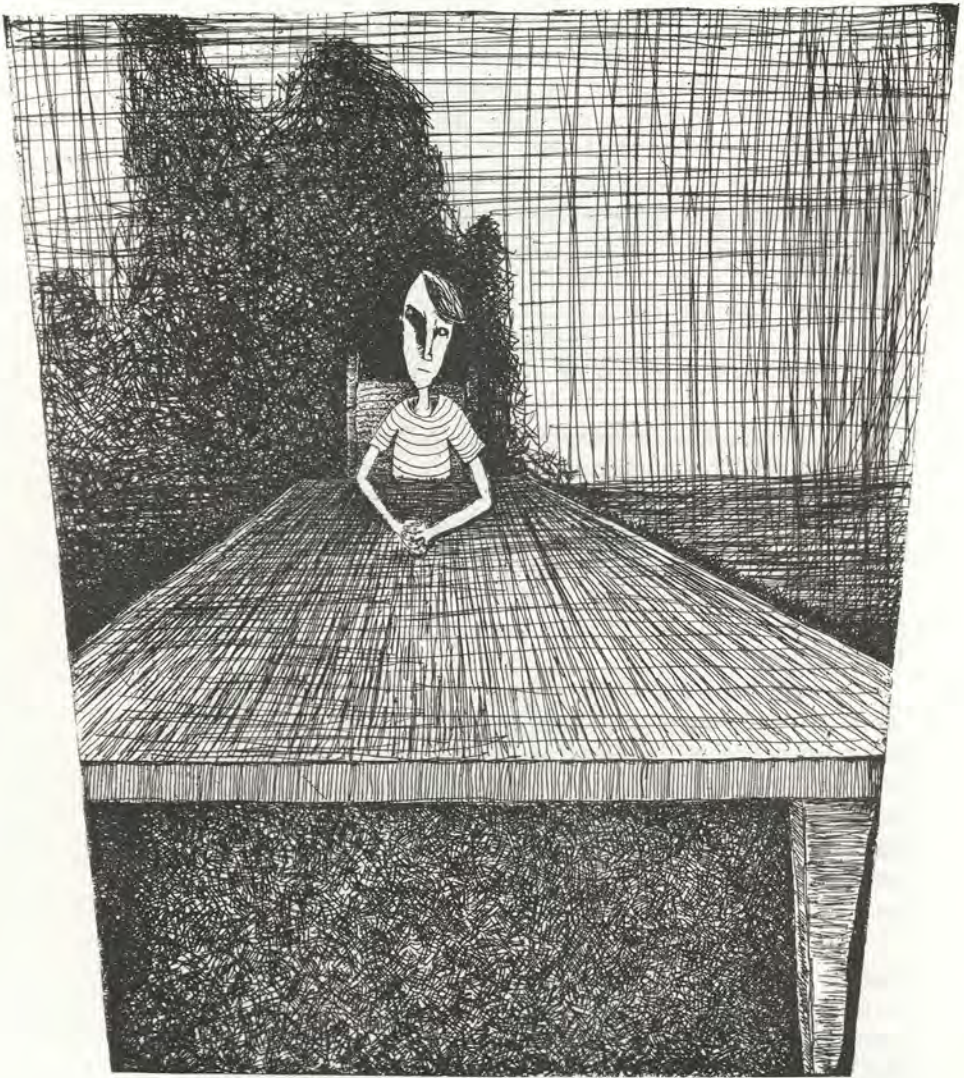
Invitation to Artists and Authors

Artwork is invited from all persons who have been students at IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Any type of artwork may be submitted. All artwork will be reproduced in black and white. Artists are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue; artwork should not exceed 26 inches by 32 inches. Please identify each piece on the back with its title and your name, address, phone number, title(s) of your artwork and a 25-50 word bio. Submissions not accompanied by a bio will not be considered. Artists will be notified as to acceptance prior to publication; they will also be instructed as to how artwork will be returned. Submit work to GENESIS, Student Activities Office, University Library, 815 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

Manuscripts are invited from all persons who have been students at IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Manuscripts of essays, fiction, non-fiction or poetry, on any topic, may be submitted at any time to GENESIS, Student Activities Office, University Library, 815 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202. All manuscripts are considered by a student editorial board. Authorship is not revealed to the board until a manuscript has been accepted.

Manuscripts must be typed and submitted in duplicate; prose pieces should be double-spaced on a sixty-space line. Please classify prose pieces as either fiction or non-fiction. Poets are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue. All submissions must be accompanied by a separate title sheet containing the author's name, address, telephone number and a 25-50 word bio. Names, addresses, and social security numbers should be on the title sheet only, and not on the manuscript.

Authors whose material has been accepted will be notified prior to publication date, and all authors who wish their manuscripts to be returned must include a self-addressed stamped envelope with their submissions. Any manuscript submitted too late for the current deadline will be considered for the next issue. Honorary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the editors for the outstanding entry in each of the categories of art, essay, fiction and poetry. Members of the Editorial Board are ineligible to receive prizes.



**Did Simon tell you what
happened in school today?**

Brenda Hale

Splitting Image

by Linda Bredensteiner

Yeah, my dad is the great Teddy James. That's why you can call me Theo. You know, the name Theodore James is not a complete bummer, it's the Jr. nailed to your butt that's hard to live with. Take my folks for example, they called me "Little Teddy" until my sixteenth birthday. I told them I'd like to be called Theo and they acted like it was no big deal, but you know how parents make you feel guilty . . . They made me feel like I was betraying my father's name or something. But it wasn't like that at all. I mean, "Little Teddy" may have been cute when I was five years old, but next year I'll be eighteen—old enough to vote, old enough to die for my country and all that bull.

Personally, I can't see a guy who's over forty wanting to be called the same thing as his kid's stuffed animal—especially when he's running for Lt. Governor.

But all of this is nothing compared with being stuck next door babysitting your fat bratty sisters and your neighbors' retarded kid on a Saturday night while the dudes are hanging out, and your parents are throwing a mondo bash with booze that may as well be on the moon.

The Harcourt's place is nice, but they have a lot of far out furniture. Mr. Harcourt is some kind of art critic, and so he's got all this, you know, weird stuff in his house. His den is done up kind of African I guess, but it's got a bitchin' big screen TV with a VCR. The girls are playing dolls while I watch TV, but nothing's on, and the Harcourts have a bunch of funky tapes.

Sandy's thirteen, and Maria is seven, and they have Ken and Barbie going on a date. Ann, who's four, keeps getting in their way with Ida Fanny.

"Ann, if you're going to play with your Cabbage Patch Kid, go play with Erica," says Sandy.

"Yeah, go play big dolls with Erica," says Maria.

Erica, the neighbor's kid, is busy taking all the clothes off her Cabbage Patch doll. She looks up and smiles when she hears her name. Sometimes it's hard to believe she's ten years old, but it's always hard to forget she's retarded.

Ann takes one look at Erica, and goes back to bugging her sisters. "I wanna play Barbies with you guys," says Ann.

Out the window, I can see that people are milling around in our back yard by the pool. Most of them have drinks in their hands. I can see Mr. Harcourt talking to some of Dad's political friends. He's such a snob, he's

probably telling them my Dad has crappy taste in art.

"MINE!" I look in time to see Maria throwing Ida Fanny across the room.

Mom calls just to make sure I get the girls in bed—I can tell she feels sorry for me, because she says I can stay up as late as I want. Sandy is pretty cool. She helps Erica get ready for bed. Maria, being the bratty tub-o-lard she always is, thinks it's a big game and wants me to chase her around the house. Ann starts running around too. I figure if I don't chase Maria, she'll give up, so I grab Ann.

"No! No!" Ann screams like I'm going to kill her or something.

"Geeze, mello out," I say as I put her down.

Then the dreaded shriek peals out through the night. "*I want my blankie!*"

After we figure out Ann left her blankie at home on her bed, we tell her we'll have to go get it in the morning, and she starts to panic.

"I'll go get it," says Maria.

"I want my blankie!"

"We're not supposed to go over there."

"I want my blankie!"

"We can if it's an emergency."

"I want my blankie!"

"Unfortunately Mom and Dad won't think this is an emergency," I say, though if this isn't an emergency, I don't know what is.

"I want my blankie!"

"Maybe Erica has a blanket you can borrow," I say as Sandy and Erica come out of the bathroom in their pajamas.

"I want MY blankie!"

It's hot out, but it's not uncomfortable since the sun isn't beating down on you, like this afternoon. The backyard and pool are all lit up like a circus act, so I'm hiding behind the hedges like I'm trying to sneak in without paying or something. My folks are pretty strict about when we're supposed to be seen, when we're supposed to be heard, and when we're supposed to keep the hell away. The pool smells particularly strong since my folks had it cleaned this afternoon for the party. The light reflections give everything and everybody a dancing blue glow. I can't see my parents, so I decide to sneak in through the sliding doors. I'll be seen by a few people, but as long as my folks don't see me, I'll be okay. I try to sneak past the guests, but I run right into my dad's running-mate, Thom Stockwell.

"Little Teddy!" he shouts. "Big Teddy letting you stay at parties now?" He gives me 'the plastic handshake.' Most politicians have plastic handshakes because they shake hands so often they don't have to think about

them. Meanwhile, I'm looking at our hands, worrying about how sweaty my palms are.

"Hello, Sir," I say trying not to look around for my parents, and silently cussing him out for telling the world I was here.

Mr. Harcourt comes up behind him quickly, frowning. "Theo? Is everything alright?"

"Oh, yeah, my sister just wants her blanket. Sandy is reading everybody a story. I'd better hurry."

I go inside. I act real cool and walk by the caterers in the kitchen like I belong there, and peek around the corner to see if either Mom or Dad are in the dining room. No, but I can hear Mom playing the piano. Cool, she'll be there all night. I hurry through the dining room to the front hall and up the stairs without really being noticed, and then I'm safe because nobody's upstairs. I go straight to the nursery and grab the blanket on Ann's bed. There's her stuffed rabbit, Bunnynip. It probably wouldn't hurt to bring it, too. So here I am with a blankie and a bunny, and I have to go back through all these prominent Republicans. I fold Bunnynip up in the blanket, and tuck them under my arm.

As I leave Ann's room, I notice that down the hall, my door is cracked and the light is on. I think I at least closed my door. I go over to see what's up, and I hear my Dad.

"Ellen, I've been under a lot of stress, what with the election and all," he says.

Ellen? Ellen Harcourt? I can't help it, I peek through the crack in the door.

"And my wife does her best, but she's got a lot on her mind, too." They're a few feet away from the door.

"I've been watching you and I know you've noticed." He steps forward to put his hand on her arm. I can't believe my eyes.

"I know. It's fairly obvious. But I'm afraid—"

"Afraid? Afraid of approaching me?"

"I'm afraid that you should stop. If Andrew should notice—" She pulls herself away from him, but he pursues her around the bed.

"Andrew would hardly notice, my dear, he doesn't even notice that half of the art he loves is crap."

I stifle a laugh. I can't believe my dad is punking on this guy while he's hitting on his wife. Dad switches his drink to his other hand. "Ellen, what are you really afraid of?" he says as he bends down to kiss her. As he kisses her, he starts feeling her up with one hand and tries to set down his glass with the other, only his hand is about a foot away from my dresser and he waves his drink in the air, spilling a little on the floor. My heart starts to hurt. What's my father doing? I want to yell at him to stop, and almost do,

but I can hear the piano from downstairs, and lots of people talking and having fun.

“Teddy, what if someone sees us up here?” she pushes him away too hard, and the glass falls on the floor at their feet. The carpet is soft enough to keep the glass from breaking, but the wine spills everywhere. I take this opportunity to get the hell out of there.

Meals at our house in general are tough for me, because conversation is always strained in my family. At the table, my dad always starts off by telling us our position on a particular issue that’s been on his mind lately, then my mom complains about something, and then finally all speech is reduced to Sandy and Maria arguing about something stupid like who’s got the biggest mouth, and my dad adding insults from time to time. Sunday morning at breakfast doesn’t even compare. The quiet is solid. I know if I look at Dad, he’ll know I’ve done something wrong, and if I look at Mom, she’ll know something is upsetting me, so I watch my Frosted Flakes. Finally Mom starts in like my dad had already done his part.

“I can’t believe how terrible those caterers were last night. . .”

Slowly I peek to make sure no one is studying me, but all I can think about is Dad and Ellen Harcourt. I remember one time when I was younger when Mom thought Dad was having an affair. It’s all kind of vague, but I remember playing with stuffed animals on my folks’ bed with my mom, and it was real late at night—way past my bedtime. Dad hadn’t come home yet, and all of a sudden Mom started crying. The only other thing I remember about that night is my dad woke me up when he picked me up to carry me to bed. I remember pretending I was asleep while he carried me down the hall. At the time, I didn’t understand what was going on, but I’ve overheard about it in arguments since then.

“Did everything go alright at the Harcourts’ last night?” my mom asks back at the breakfast table.

“No problemo,” I mutter, immediately locking eyes with Tony the Tiger.

“Well, I appreciate your babysitting. I hate it when people cancel an hour before they’re supposed to show up. It’s hard to get a baby-sitter at the last minute. I’m going shopping today; would you like me to get you something special for your trouble?”

“I want to go!” says Sandy.

“Me too, me too!” say Maria and Ann.

“Everybody can go,” says Mom. “I know, Teddy, we can all eat out for lunch.”

“Not me,” says my dad.

“Why not?” My mom’s voice is pitched high and strained. “Are you

going to sit around all day in your robe?"

"Yes, I think I will."

"The Harcourts gave me some money," I say quickly before my mom can blow up. "Maybe you guys can let me borrow the car tonight. I really don't feel like eating out."

Both of my parents look straight at me. Do they know something's wrong?

Mom gets up and starts clearing the table. "Well, it was just an idea. I still have to go shopping. Whoever wants to go can come along."

After Mom and the girls leave, Dad vegetates in the TV room by the kitchen. Here's my chance to ask him about last night. I stand in the kitchen wondering what to do. I want him to explain, but how do you bring up a subject like that? And if I do ask him, will he let me use the car? Well, I could always wash it. . . I start filling up a bucket of water in the kitchen sink, but Mom took her car to the mall. I could always wash the caddie. . .

I carry the bucket out to the driveway, but the caddie is in the garage. The late morning sun is starting to get hot. Not hot enough to make you sweat, but enough to make you smother in your jeans. I set the bucket down and go back inside. Upstairs in my room, I change into some old gym shorts and a tee shirt. I notice the stains in the carpet in front of my dresser. I stop by my folks' room to get the keys to the caddie.

As I'm sudsing down the car, I start thinking about how I'm going to approach my dad. "Father," I could say, "What do you think you were doing with Ellen Harcourt last night?" No, that wouldn't work, I never call him Father. The sun is almost directly overhead. It's going to be another scorcher. "Dad, are you having an affair?" I start scrubbing off some bird crap, sweating under the sun. "Why? Wha'cha thinking?" I need an answer. Not only is he risking the election, but he's cheating on Mom—the whole family! He's making me mad. I get the hose and let the car have it.

I don't even clean up. I march right into the house. My tee shirt is all wet, and when I get inside, I suddenly shiver in the air conditioning. Hardly fazed I head for the TV room, but my dad is in the kitchen looking for something to eat.

"You're all wet," he says.

"I have to talk with you."

"What have you been doing? Washing the car?"

Here's what I see: this middle aged man is standing in front of an open cabinet, his stomach is starting to bulge over his shorts, but at the same time I see my dad towering over me, seeing right through me like he can see right through my tee shirt.

“Yeah,” I say, shivering. This couldn’t be the same man I saw last night. He was just drunk— Maybe it was someone else—

He stands there in mid search—waiting. “Did you need to ask me something?”

“No, sir,” I say, but he won’t buy that. “I mean, could I have an advance on my allowance?”

After a strained supper, I go upstairs and crank up my stereo. Sitting on my bed, I stare at the stains on the carpet. Why were Dad and Ellen Harcourt in here? Was it because my room is farthest from the steps and around the corner? Dad probably brought Ellen in here on purpose. What should I do? I should probably tell Mom, shouldn’t I? If I go in to talk to her, she’ll force it out of me. Telling her won’t be half as hard as telling Dad. I get up and turn off the stereo, but the second I do, I can hear the arguing.

“Don’t give me that, you know what I’m talking about,” screams my mom.

My dad responds, but he’s not yelling as loud.

“Bull shit!” Mom yells. Dad starts talking, but I can’t understand him. I walk to my door and open it slowly. My folks must be in their room, the hall is empty. I can hear Ann crying.

“. . . jumping to conclusions, and you’re not making sense,” says Dad.

“Oh, I’m making perfect sense—this has happened before.”

I can’t listen anymore. While Dad yells, I walk down the hall to Sandy and Maria’s room and go in. Ann is on Sandy’s lap, chewing on her blankie. Maria is biting her fingernails.

“Come on,” I say as I pick up Ann. “Let’s go downstairs. We can all play a game.”

Sandy and Maria follow Ann and I downstairs while Mom yells “Is that what you two were doing up here last night?” We end up in the TV room, the farthest place in the house.

“What are we going to play,” asks Sandy.

I try to think of something noisy. The Nintendo? Would my mom want a divorce? What should I do? “I’ve got the car,” I say. “Let’s go somewhere.”

“Theo!” my dad yells down the stairs. “Theo, come here a minute.”

As I put Ann in her lap, Sandy looks straight into my eyes as if to say “It’s up to you, Theo.” I take my time climbing the stairs. My dad is standing at the top, and puts his hand on my shoulder as I climb the last step. It occurs to me that I’m as tall as he is. His face is serious and stern, but his grip on my shoulder is a friendly encouragement.

Dad ushers me into my folks’ room like a hangman, but Mom asks all

the questions. She looks up at me with tired eyes from where she is sitting on the bed. She's calmed down a little, but her voice is still strained.

"Mr Harcourt said he saw you at the party last night. Is this true?"

"Yes." Here it comes, I think.

"What were you doing here? And why did you leave the girls alone?"

Feeling like I'm on trial, I try to explain the blanket.

"Did you see your father?"

"Yes." My mind races. Embarrassment and guilt and a mixture of hate and fear confuse me.

"What was he doing?" she asked.

I remember my dad and Ellen Harcourt kissing. I remember his hands touching. . . I remember the spilled drink. "He was helping Mrs. Harcourt wash a spilled drink out of her dress," I say.

Mom starts crying. "Thank you, Theo," she says. "I'm sorry, Teddy." She runs into their bathroom. I stare at the bathroom door, ashamed of my lie. I can feel my father's eyes burning holes into my neck, but I can't look at him. I try to leave, but my father catches my arm. I spin around and look him in the eyes. I yank my arm away and go to my room. I don't want anyone to see me cry.

That Friday, "payday," my father comes into my room when he gets home to give me my allowance.

"You already gave me my allowance, remember?" I say.

My father says "I know. This is a bonus."

"Bonus?" Suddenly all my bodily organs switch jobs. My heart starts breathing, and my stomach starts pumping blood. The stereo is on, and at first I think I'd heard him wrong. I'm lying on my back, looking up—not at the middle aged man I talked to in the kitchen, but the slime-ball feeling up Ellen Harcourt.

"Sure. You know. I can see that we speak the same language." He hands me the folded bill. I can't believe what he's thinking. My brains must have given my intestines the day off. At first my arms feel paralyzed, but then my right arm reaches up all by itself and my hand takes the money.

"You'd better start getting ready to go."

"Go where?" I ask.

"I've got to have my speech for the League of Women Voters written by tomorrow."

My father always kicks us all out of the house when he writes speeches. We usually go out to dinner, and then to a movie. But I don't want to see a movie, let alone eat. I can't figure out which organ has taken over my stomach's job.

"It's alright, Son," my father sits down on the edge of my bed. "It

won't last that long, and then everything will be back to normal."

Normal? I want to scream. Normal? I can't talk. I can't think. Theodore "Teddy" James gets up and leaves. The minute the door closes, I throw my pillow at it.

Even though it takes me a few minutes to snap out of it, nobody is ready to go when I get downstairs. Sandy and Maria are leaning on the dining-room table looking at the movie section of the newspaper, my father is making a snack for himself in the kitchen, and my mom is kneeling in front of the couch in the front room tying Ann's shoes. I go outside to wait on the porch to get away from everybody. It's just starting to cool down for the evening, but it's stuffy out. I sit on the ledge and try not to think. My body starts acting normal again.

Mr. Harcourt and Erica come out of their house all dressed up. Erica waves at me, so I wave back. I wonder where they're going. They get into their car in the driveway, and Mr. Harcourt backs out. They're long gone before it hits me that Mrs. Harcourt isn't with them. My stomach and heart switch places again. Mom and the girls come out of the house in a line like ducks. Mom first, sorting through her keys; Ann comes next and says "Come on Theo." Then come Maria and Sandy arguing. Maria wants to go to Red Lobster, and Sandy wants to go to Chi-Chi's.

I follow them, as out of place as the ugly duckling. I don't even fight to sit in the front seat. Maria and Sandy do.

Mom turns around and snaps "If you two don't quit bickering, I'm going to shoot you both."

I turn around and look at our house with Dad home all alone, and Ellen Harcourt all alone next door, and can't help but think they've planned this. I think Mom's suspicious, but she'd know for sure if she had seen Mr. Harcourt and Erica leave.

I have never been as uncomfortable at a table as I am tonight at Red Lobster. "I'm not hungry, Mom, I think I'm sick," I say when it's time for me to order, trying to imagine my heart digesting shrimp.

She can't help it, she reaches over and puts her hand on my forehead. "You should try to eat something, Sweetheart."

"Can't we just go home?"

"No, Mom, No." say the girls.

"Sweetheart, just drink your water, and you can nibble on mine." When the waiter leaves, she offers me a sip of her wine. I just shake my head.

"Mom, since Maria got to pick where we're eating, I get to pick what movie we get to see, right?"

My stomach twitches. My father sure planned this well. We might not get home until after midnight. What excuse could I give to go home? Maybe if we walked in on them—but what about the girls? Maybe they

shouldn't see that.

"No! Sandy wants to see 'Land Before Time.'" says Maria. "Don't you want to see 'Roger Rabbit?'"

"I want to see the one with the dinosaurs" says Ann.

"No, Ann, don't you want to see 'Roger Rabbit?'" Maria tries to do a Roger Rabbit impression.

"Girls!" says Mom. "I swear if you don't stop it. . ."

The food comes. Mom slumps in her chair. She'll get mad at me for lying if I tell her what I know.

The girls start eating, but my Mom just stares at me.

I don't want the family to split up.

She knows I'm upset. She knows I'm lying.

My father is bribing me to help him have an affair.

Mom and I pick at her meal. We're probably both at home. She's probably in her room, a fly on the wall, but I'm definitely in my room, a stain on the carpet. We're on the same side. My father is cheating on her. He's cheating me—the whole family.

"Mom," I say, and then I'm committed. I have to say something now. "You don't look well, maybe you should go home." The girls all look up to see if Mom really looks sick.

"I'm feeling a lot better," I say, taking a big bite of fish to prove it. "You can drop us off at the mall to see the movie, and then I think you should go home. Something might be wrong."

Mom looks at me and nods.

We wait at the mall entrance for Mom to come pick us up. Maria paces back and forth on her heels. Ann starts to follow her and they make up a game about it. We're the last ones in the mall. The security guard comes over to make sure we're alright. I tell him our mom's on her way. Sandy leans against the doors and looks at me. I try to smile, but I feel like I'm going to burst into tears at any moment. I wonder if I should tell them anything.

"Mom and Dad are going through a tough time," I say. "We're going to have to be very good." Sandy nods.

Mom finally comes, but she just pulls up to the mall entrance and stares ahead like a robot. Her makeup is all smeared, and running down her face, and her knuckles are white from her grip on the steering wheel, but she's not crying anymore. The girls are real quiet as they get into the back of the car. For once, they leave me the front seat. I get in, but look down at my lap. Mom starts driving, but we aren't headed home. "Where are we going?" I ask.

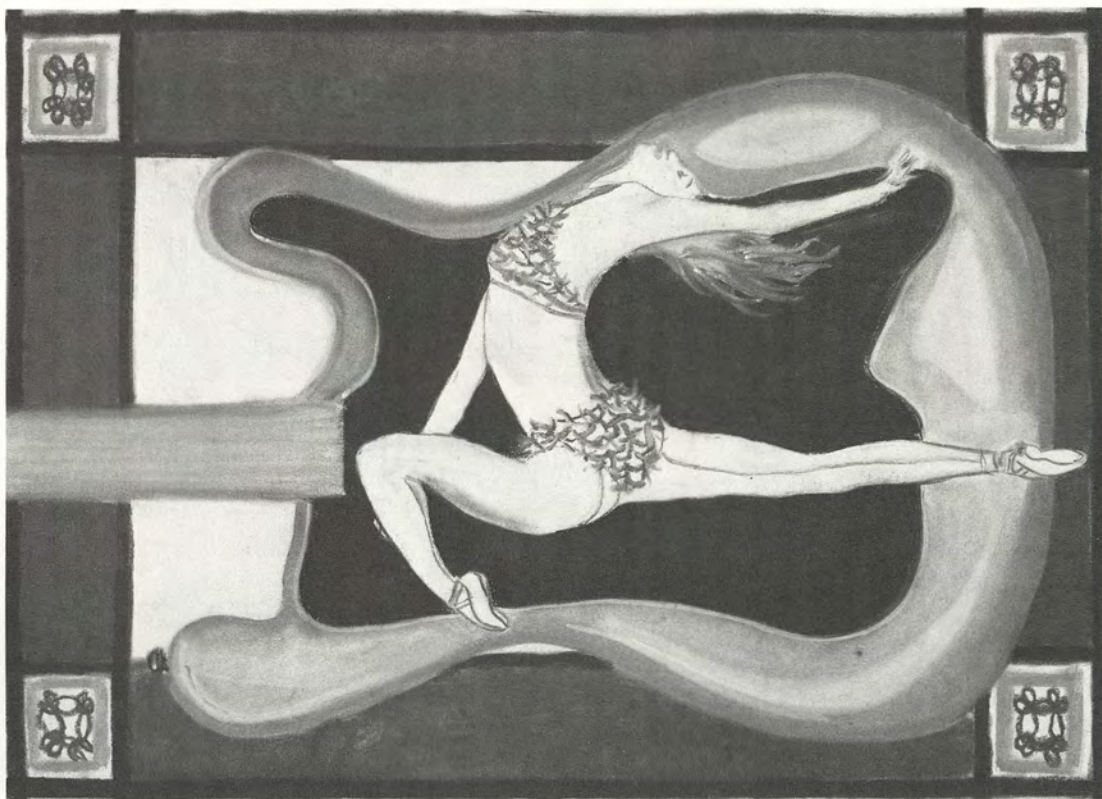
"We're staying at Grandma's tonight," says my mom.

It's ironic. In my Grandma's yard, there's a sign that says:

**STOCKWELL / JAMES
GOVERNOR / LT.GOV.**

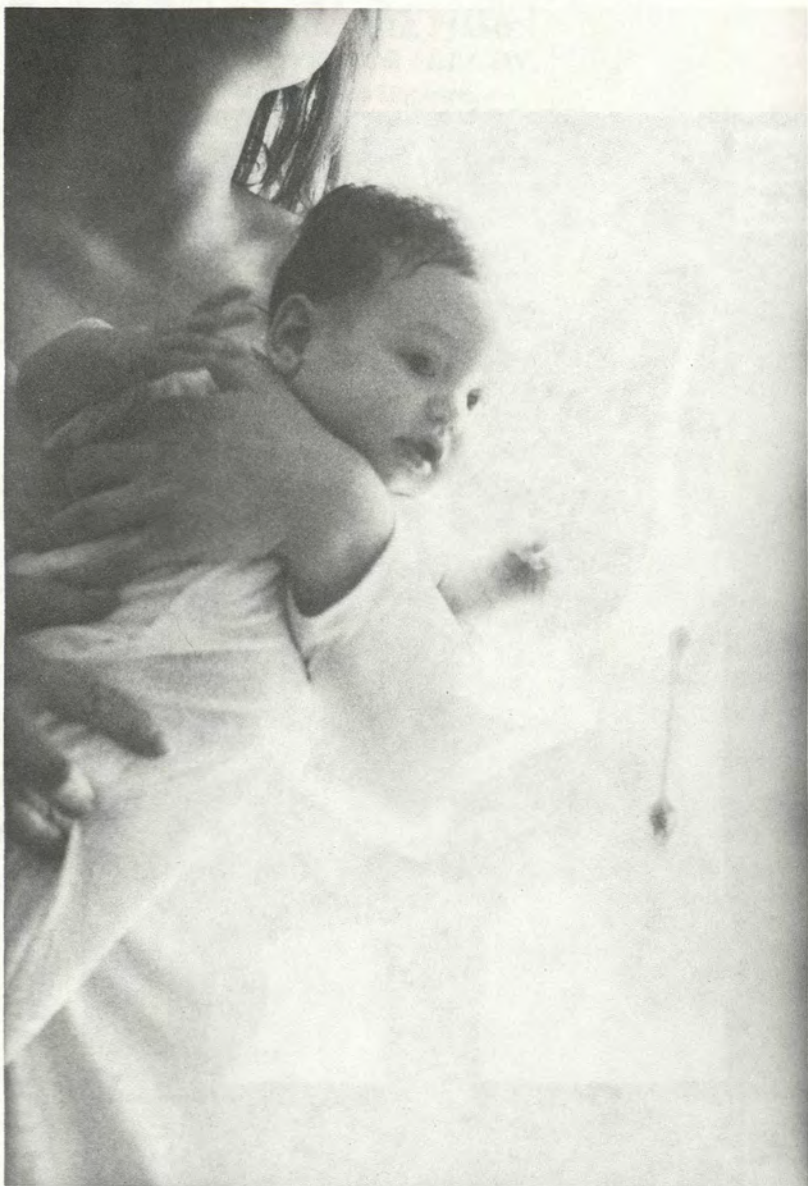
I start to pull it up, but my mom stops me.

Linda Bredensteiner: (Alias: Ann Pound) When I grow up, I want to be like Walt Disney was: rich, famous, creative, a dreamer who wishes upon stars.



Untitled (or Altered Ego)

Beki Brindle



The Gift
Lesly Deschler

White Mom

by Kirk Lanzone Terry

Atop a hill, far below the clouds
With a panoramic view of cul-de-sacs
white moms in yellow aprons
bags of white bread in their hands
twirling them
faster and faster
smiling like angels they are
toss these bags skyward
where they become babies
somersaulting genes
dot the hazy blue afternoon
still.

Kirk Lanzone Terry: formerly of Bloomington, has been a student at IUPUI since the Summer of 1989. Currently a senior undergraduate majoring in English Literature, Mr. Terry plans to attend graduate school at the University of Iowa.

CPA Stereo

By William J. Meiners

Certain to sport spectacles.
Shaven clean; not rough but smooth.
Suit, shirt, and silky tie,
Shiny slacks and wing-tipped shoes.
He surveys financial statements.

Systematically searching,
scanning sheets with great detail.
Statistics seem mind boggling;
A scribe sentenced to Hell.
He logs assets, liabilities, and equities.

Certiably and publicly scorned
by his brainy boring image.
Stereotyped as an accounting worm
satisfied only when a job is finished.
He posts transactions in a ledger.

Constantly crunching numbers
both at work and in his sleep.
Facts and figures as he slumbers,
Addition and subtraction throughout the week.
He uses double-entry bookkeeping.

A Certified Public Accountant,
the story sounded through the wires.
His error-bomb ruined a thousand business men.
The squashed sky scraper left no survivors.
His liabilities outweighed his assets.

William J. Meiners: I'm a junior or senior in journalism; still perplexed about the AP style. I prefer tucking the facts into fiction, which can be seen as the opposite of journalism. I've worked and gone to school sporadically, and have been horribly lazy in between. In the end, even the wasted times have passed quickly.



Mental Mind Fuck

Katherine E. Johnson



Seeing Black and White

Brenda Hale

Joe

by James W. Kirk

Joe watched the mouse come out of the crack in the wall. The mouse was old, its fur whitish-gray. It was skinny, malnourished, hungry. "You're wasting your time, here," he said to the mouse. "I don't have much food and I'm hungry too." The sound of his voice startled the mouse; it ran back into its crack in the wall and disappeared. The sound of plaster crumbling and falling within the wall from the movement of the mouse was loud.

Joe returned his attention to the world outside his window. He watched the trucks that swept the streets clean, the women sweeping the walkways clean, followed by men with small shovels and baskets. He reached out, tapped his window. The black dust was gathering on the concrete ledge below his window, but the night's wind would take care of that and the sweepers would return when the morning sun warmed and lulled the night wind to sleep.

The people covered their heads with turbans to keep the sun from burning through to their minds, to keep the dirty black dust off their bodies; their faces were veiled against the harsh sun, and gauze covered their eyes and mouth to keep out the dirt.

Clean Bodies, Clean Minds, Clean People, Clean Planet; Joe thought about what it all meant.

It was noon.

He stood, undressed, then went and lay down on his bed. He fell asleep and dreamed of his wife.

He stood just inside the door of their home in Indiana, watching her return from the mailbox. The dress she wore, his favorite for her, had patterns of butterflies sown in delicate detail. He sensed her excitement from the way she walked. She held a letter. She carried herself proudly.

But at the same time, he was sure, her eyes were sad. "Joe, they're going to gather my poems into a book."

"I'm not surprised," he said, "you're a wonderful poet." He had his back to her. His shoulders were tight.

She put the letter down, went to him. She slid her arms through his, lay her face against his back, held him. She sighed, deeply; "Joe, you used to write. Will you again, soon? I want to know what you have to say."

He turned, embraced her. She was the most beautiful woman in the world to him. "Let's go into the bedroom. I want to make love to you."

When he awoke, his face was wet.

He noticed he had an erection.

He held it in the palm of his hand. He considered it. His mind was alert. *It's been so long.*

His heart was full with the memory of his wife.

He made love to her again.

In the shower he made himself wet, then turned off the water. He took the soap, rubbed it through his hair; some got in his eyes and he turned the water on briefly to rinse it out. Then he washed his face; his white whiskers brushed the soap into a thick lather, and he used it to clean his neck and chest, continuing until his thin body was covered with soap. He rinsed.

Today was his fiftieth wedding anniversary. His wife had died twenty years ago, in the riots. They had married at age twenty.

Joe stepped out of the shower and dressed.

He went to his chair by the window. He tapped the dust from his window. He had been awake for one hour.

I am an old man, he thought, but I am not dead. I remember when life was like a cold glass of water on a hot day; I would drink my fill of life quickly, even if sometimes it hurt. I am thirsty again.

He left his apartment, walked down the hall, knocked on Mrs. People's door; he wondered about his action. He could feel Mrs. People's eye on him through the peephole. It was too late to turn back.

"Yes, Mr. Smith? What is it you want?" He could barely make out her words through the closed door.

"I just wanted to talk. If it's a problem, I'll leave."

"It would just be the two of us."

True, he thought; a crime, perhaps. "We are both very old, Mrs. People." She didn't answer, so he turned back toward his apartment.

"Mr. Smith." He turned back. Mrs. People's door was open just a bit. "I suppose if we leave the door open, things would be mostly proper."

"All things clean and pure, Mrs. People."

"All things clean and pure."

Mrs. People's apartment was just like Joe's; the furniture, the reproductions of paintings of mountain waterfalls or prairie rivers, the smell of disinfectants.

Mrs. People was two years younger than Joe. She was thin, but not unattractive. This observation surprised him. He had seen his neighbor in the building's lobby before, but never really looked at her. Her face was pretty; dignified, in a way. Her hair was silver rather than gray. Her breasts were full; he could see this in spite of the layers of clothing she wore.

She offered him a chair, brought him a glass of water. "The water has been very good lately. Things must be getting better."

"The Church works hard for us," Joe answered, because it was

expected of him. He wondered what he could do to see if she was alive or dead. She had let him into her apartment. "The dirt from the sky seems to be heavier."

"It's always darkest just before dawn, Mr. Smith. Will you be going to Church tomorrow?"

"I haven't been feeling well just lately, Mrs. People." I think she is dead. "Do you ever think about Mr. People?" Mr. People had been a cigarette smoker.

"No. He was a filthy man with a filthy habit. It is just as well he is dead. He was a lustful man, a dirty man. He would have been a hindrance to the cleansing of our planet and of the people. It is just as well that he is dead." Her words were spoken without much emotion. "Look, Mr. Smith. The News with Reverend Haggarty is coming on."

Joe shifted his attention to the television, but he didn't watch. He was certain the dirt was getting worse. It didn't matter, anyway. The Earth was filthy, polluted, and in parts radioactive. But he did believe the Church was doing everything possible to halt and reverse the decay of the planet. He remembered 1999 when thirty-five million people in the United States alone died of AIDS. Very few children were born between 2000 and 2001; people were afraid.

In 2010 the Church promised change, a reversal, and finally a cure for what ailed the planet, if only the people would follow the Church's directives. The people had promised, and they had meant it.

Joe wondered why he resented the Church.

Mrs. People stared intently at the television screen. Joe watched her. "Do you think about the past, Mrs. People?"

"The past is dead, Mr. Smith."

"Do you think about the future?"

"The future is for the young, Mr. Smith, as it should be. We are the ones that ruined the earth with our immoral ways. Our only hope lies within morality. We are immoral because we are old."

I am immoral because I am old, Joe thought. The idea that he was immoral seemed to please him. "What about the present, Mrs. People? Are you lonely?"

The question startled her. "Mr. Smith, I—perhaps you should leave."

At the door, Joe stopped and looked back at Mrs. People. "Goodbye, Mrs. People."

"Mr. Smith, the penalty is severe for disobeying the laws of the Church. Please do be careful. Please do not come and see me again."

Joe closed the door and returned to his apartment.

He went to the kitchen and took an old pencil from a drawer. In the living room he took his photo album from a table. He carefully removed

photographs of his wife, brother, sisters, and parents. The paper was yellow and fragile with age. He carried the paper to the window and sat down. He watched the street, the people, for a while. Then he wrote a poem.

If You Ask Me

You can see me
In the flicker
of old movies.
If you look.

You can hear me
In the dead space
between songs.
If you listen.

You can feel me
In the dark air
between orgasm
and sleep.
If you reach out
your hand.

I would come out
of the quiet darkness,
be with you.
If you ask me.

That night Joe filled the pages of his photo album. His ideas and memories were slow to come at first. But he kept writing and the night changed into morning. When the sun rose and began to heat the concrete streets below him, he stopped writing. He considered how he'd spent the night.

Memories of how life was in his youth contrasted with life in his old age merged on the paper and made his heart ache. In his youth, he thought he'd lost his individualism, freedom, so he withdrew from society. But with the harsh sun burning his eyes he realized his mistake. Freedom hadn't been taken; he'd given it away.

And now that it was gone, he truly missed it. And he wanted it back.

He considered himself in his mind. An old man with dirty, corrupt ways. At least that's what the Church said. Perhaps the Church was right. His ways had led to the near destruction of the earth. The earth had become

filthy, the rivers flowing sewers, the oceans nearly dead. Every day the sky poured black dust on humans and their creations; the air they breathed was tainted. And the Church was changing that. Clean Bodies, Clean Minds, Clean People, Clean Planet; the solution seemed simple enough.

The Cause was right.

The Solution was wrong. Or was it?

Doubt crept into Joe's thoughts, spinning a web.

He was an old man. What right did he have? The world is for the young. If they didn't like it, let them change it. Besides, what could he do, an old man?

What if the youth were unhappy, but did not know how to change the world? After a while, people die; the children learn the new way; the past is forgotten; the past dies.

But the old remember.

I am old, and I remember.

Joe decided he would change the world.

The planet, the earth can be made whole again. The world can be clean. But men and women are not perfect. To try and make them so is as much a crime as pouring chemicals in rivers or burning coal to keep the air cool. But what can I do? All I know is to write. And it's been so long. What good would it do, an old man. It is too much for one man.

He remembered Mrs. People. She was nearly dead, but would live for years yet. All she has is her apartment, her television.

But he would rather be dead than alive and dead.

He decided to sleep for awhile. Then he would go out and buy another photo album. He would write fliers. Post them in the night; then people would read them in the morning as they passed through the world.

He would study the youth. He would see if they were . . . alive.

* * *

Joe opened the door and went down the steps to the street. It had been dark for about an hour. The night wind was beginning to gain strength, whipping Joe's long coat against his calves. His breath was warm inside the gauze wrapped around his face and eyes

He turned to his right and walked. There was a Church shop around the next corner and then another two blocks further down. The products were inferior, but less expensive than the highly regulated merchandise of the independent manufacturers.

He was surprised to see so many other people out in the night. He

wondered what they were doing. He tried to make eye contact with those who walked by, but either the face wrappings stopped them from seeing, or they preferred not to see.

When he turned the corner to the side street leading to the shop, he saw an arrest being made. Two Church officials dressed in white were crowding someone against the side of a building. Joe slowed his walk. He would have to pass them, or cross the street. He chose to pass them, to try and see their faces if he could.

As he approached, he studied. The white uniforms of the Church officials had become more dirtied as the time they'd spent outdoors increased. The person being arrested was small in stature, almost petite; it was impossible to tell the gender because of the clothing.

Joe's breath was quickening from the excitement. He knew there was nothing he could do for the man or woman. Yet he wanted to see that person's face, to study the eyes. Perhaps he would find a clue into the person's crime.

But then Joe felt fear. He was almost even with the three, but out closer to the curb. He was going to pass without looking, but then he looked. He looked at the person being arrested. He saw a black face; the eyes were wide open; the man was terrified. Joe sensed more than saw the steel hand cuffs close around the man's wrists. But he did hear the man make a sound; the sound reminded Joe of a beaten dog's whimper, the dog hurt but hurt as much for having *been* beaten.

Joe's heart went out to the black man. Yet there was nothing he could do. He was not physically capable of helping the man. There was nothing he could say.

So he simply walked on by. There was nothing he could do.

He felt his breath catch. He hadn't been able to see into the shadows, but a man had been standing there. He was dressed totally in black. The man's face was covered with a black plastic mask. A small red light moved across where the eyes would be. Joe heard a whirling and clicking sound. He moved his eyes away and quickened his pace. In a moment he reached the side street where he turned to reach the small Church warehouse. He hurriedly opened the door and walked inside. The man dressed in black had frightened him.

The lights were bright in the store. The floors were white tile and spotlessly clean. The silvery shelves were full with merchandise. Behind the counter stood a Church disciple, his head shaved. He wore a bright white jumpsuit. Gold colored buttons closed the garment all the way up the neck. The disciple was about twenty years old. He smiled at Joe; his teeth were white and sharp looking. Joe nodded at the young man, then went to the back of the store to catch his breath.

He stood there, shaking; his stomach hurt. He rubbed his brow and wondered if it was worth it.

If nothing else, he felt alive.

The years he'd spent alone in his apartment seemed to belong in a long night's dream. He had done nothing but exist for so long. But now he felt as if he were living again. He hadn't felt so good since—. He paused for a minute. He hadn't felt so alive since he put the "Question Authority" and "Drug Testing Pisses Me Off" bumper stickers on the old Chevette he'd driven in college. When he'd still been writing.

Joe located the photo albums quickly enough, choosing a thick one with large sheets with plenty of open space. He paused in the Bible section, picked up one of the free Bibles, Church Doctrine included, feeling like a secret agent, then went to the checkout counter.

"Good evening," he said to the disciple.

The young man looked at Joe with raised eyebrows. "It's unusual to see the old out after dark. Are you on Church business?"

"Oh, yes," Joe said. My hobby is taking pictures of the Ministers. I love those guys."

"I love them too. They do take care of us and the planet. I don't know where the world would be without them." He ran the album over the scanner so that the price would show on the register.

"I especially love Reverend Haggarty; never miss his show, you know."

The disciple nodded in agreement. "It's nice to see you old people doing something constructive." His face tightened. "It is your fault the world is the way it is."

"I'm sorry." Asshole, he thought; but he's right. I hope it's our fault when things change. The first law I propose is "no shaved heads," except for assholes, of course.

"That'll be five dollars."

Joe gave him his money card.

The disciple returned the card and handed Joe his package. "God and the Church will be with you."

"That's a comforting thought," Joe said. He turned and left the store. He hurried home.

At the front door of the building, he turned back toward the street. The man dressed in black was there, watching him. Joe allowed his shoulders to scrunch in so that his posture was stooped and old. He hobbled through the door and up the steps to his apartment. Once inside he walked quickly to the window and carefully pulled the blind back. The man in black was gone.

He looked around his apartment. Nothing seemed to be disturbed. His

photo album was under the sink exactly as he'd left it. He brought it to the green chair beside his window, then sat down and picked up the pictures of his past. He stopped at a picture of himself his wife had taken. They had been at the graduation ceremony. Joe was standing and grinning, holding his diploma from the University. She had been so proud of him. He was certain she would be proud of him now.

He picked up the empty photo album and wrote a short story about a young man of twenty-five who met a young woman of twenty. They fell in love, without first testing for disease or to see if their chromosomes would make healthy babies or asking for permission. Then they were married.

He wrote a slogan: "What is Clean to the Church is Dirty for Me: We Can Clean the Planet and still be Free."

He was growing tired. Pen, pencil, penis, he thought; I will write and I will have orgasms.

He picked up a picture of his wife. He missed her again, the sound of her voice, the taste of her warm skin. She was beautiful, her dark honey-colored hair flowing down and caressing her shoulders, her warm brown eyes full of love for him. She was smiling, her mouth slightly open and not hiding anything.

Joe heard himself sigh. It brought a smile to his face. He stood and stretched, deciding he would sleep for awhile. Then perhaps he would hang the slogan somewhere, if he could find the courage.

Someone knocked on his door.

Fear returned to him. He thought of the man dressed in black that he'd seen on the street earlier. He glanced at his books, thought about hiding them. He decided they would be found anyway, that there was no reason to try and conceal them. He went to the door and opened it.

Mrs. People was there. "Hello, Mr. Smith." She was holding two glasses of water.

"Hello, Mrs. People. This is a surprise." He stepped aside and allowed her in. He left the door open a bit.

Mrs. People put the water down on the wood table beside the bed. She walked over and closed the door, then went to the chair by the window. She picked up the photograph of Joe's wife. "Was this your wife, Mr. Smith? She's very beautiful."

Joe went and stood next to her. He took the photo, looked at it, put it down. "She's been dead a long time, and I love her very much." He turned so that he faced Mrs. People. They stood very close to each other.

Mrs. People looked up into Joe's eyes. "I've been thinking about our conversation. You asked me if I ever think about Mr. People. I do. I loved him." She sat down in Joe's green chair. "I remember when he would come home from work. He was a roofer. The sun burned his skin brown.

He would come home all sweaty and dirty and kiss me. He smelled so good, he was so alive. He was not an easy man to live with." She stood again and met his eyes. "You ask me if I ever think about the future. I haven't for a long time. You asked me if I ever think about the present, if I'm lonely. Yes, Mr. Smith. I am lonely. I am ready to consider the moment, the present. Perhaps then, after a little while, I will want to think about the future."

Joe took her hand, led her over beside the bed. He picked up the glasses of water, handing one to Mrs. Peoples. They drank together.

Later, Mrs. People returned to her apartment.

Joe awakened just before dawn. When he opened his eyes, his gaze was met by the man dressed in black. There were two others with him, one male and one female, in white robes.

He didn't know what to say.

"Get dressed. Your nakedness offends me." The woman's face was expressionless, her voice venomous with contempt.

Joe stood and dressed. The woman handed him a plastic vial with a clear liquid inside. She told him to drink it.

The man in the white robe was collecting Joe's photo albums. He put them in a white plastic bag. He was wearing gloves.

The man in black stood silent, watching. Joe looked at the man's chest, but there was no rise or fall of breathing.

Joe drank the fluid. He wondered if it was Hemlock.

"Why are you smiling? Never mind. Shut up, do not speak. I will not be dirtied by your thoughts."

His smile stayed with him as he drifted off to sleep.

When he awoke, he was in a small cell. There were no furnishings, no sink, no toilet. The floor, walls, and ceiling were covered with gray padding. There were three other people in the cell with him; two middle-aged men and a young woman. The woman lay on the floor, her back pushed against the wall, in a fetal position. She wept softly, to herself; she wore a pink jumpsuit. The men sat side-by-side, holding hands. It seemed to Joe they loved each other. After a while, they were taken away. The woman continued to cry, as if she were alone and no one could hear her.

Joe sat with his back to the wall, knees drawn up under his chin, hands clasped around his legs, wondering what the penalty might be for writing objectionable material.

The woman's weeping slowed, stopped. She sat up and looked at Joe. Her auburn hair was tangled and sweaty, wrapped around the contour of her face. Her eyes hinted at wildness. Her mouth was a little too full, her chin strong, her body firm under a blanket of softness. Joe could picture her in his mind's eye, walking proud like she would step aside for no one. Yet

now she seemed broken. Her eyes and cheeks were wet.

“Daddy?” she said. She looked at Joe, saw a frail, old man with white hair and a tired face covered with sparse gray whiskers. She dried her face with the back of her hands. “Of course you’re not Daddy. Daddy’s dead.” She took in a long breath, held it, let it go. “What’s your name?”

“Joe. What’s yours?”

“Sara.” She lowered her eyes to her lap, drawing away from him; but he didn’t want to be alone.

“Sara?” Then he chuckled; he thought it must have sounded like a cackle to her. He was going to ask her why she’d been arrested, but then remembered etiquette denied such a question. At least it did in the movies he’d watched a long time ago. He wondered what she could have done to be put in here with him. She seemed so innocent.

“Why did you laugh?” she asked.

“Why are you in here?” He perceived the suspicion that flashed in her eyes. “Sara, I’m going to talk for awhile. You can listen, if you want. I’ll try not to look at you, so you can ignore me if you want. What I’ll say is as much a benefit for me as for you.” He settled down, making himself as comfortable as he could.

“I am an old man. Until a few days ago I had no desire to go on living. My days were filled with nothing. I was not allowed to work. I cannot bear the television. I was bored. Perhaps I wanted to die; before, I had no desire to live. Inertia carried me from day to day.

“I began to write again.

“It was to write again, or surrender my life. There were no other choices.

“Sara, once you could read a book even if the majority of the people didn’t like what it said or what it was about. You were even allowed to write them. I wrote short stories when I was your age and in college. Most folks didn’t like them, and I didn’t give a shit either. After a while I did begin to care, though. So I wrote a short story that couldn’t offend anyone. It was a huge success. I sold it to one of the most prestigious magazines of the time. It won awards. And do you know what? I didn’t write again for forty-seven years. Until a short while ago. I wrote, I spoke, against the Church.

“Yes, I speak of my crimes with no remorse. I am an old man. What can be done? I do not fear death. I was born before the age of morality. Anything I do, say, or think is dirty. Society wants nothing from me, does not want to hear what I have to say. Piss on society.”

Something in his words must have convinced Sara of his sincerity. She went and sat down beside him, took his hand. “Joe, I want to know what you have to say.” She looked him in the eyes and smiled, rested her head in

the crook of his arm.

“We are not alone, Sara. There must be others like us.”

He could feel her breath on his skin through his shirt; it reminded him of a warm draft from a furnace on a cold night. He thought, it is small things like this that makes life worth living.

“Joe, I’m not a virgin anymore.” It was then that he knew her crime.

“Sara, I’ll listen to your story if you want. But you don’t have to speak if you don’t want to.” He wanted to tell her that he might love her, but was silent. He didn’t know why.

“No, I want to,” she said. “I think I have to.” She took in a long breath; it caught in her throat, the way breath does sometimes in children after a cry. She began her story.

“I saw a man in the park, one day. It was mercilessly hot, but he just stood there on the cement walkway, under the glaring sun; heat shimmered up around him. He had sweat on his lip and brow; I ached to go to him, to dry him clean. I don’t understand, I still don’t. I wanted to kiss him and touch him. I wanted to love him. I wanted him to touch me, love me; but I turned away and went home.”

Sara hugged herself closer to Joe.

“That night I touched myself. Down there. Then I fell asleep so simply, and I dreamed I could fly.” She was silent for a moment, lost in her dream. “I went back to the park the next day. The man was there again, in the same place, like he’d never left. I walked up to him and he took my hand. We went down a sharp decline, behind some trees. A creek flowed through the park. The water was dirty, but the sound of it flowing over moss-covered rocks muted sounds from the world above us. It hurt at first, but then I just felt nothing. If only he had said something, but he just stood and walked away. Joe, I don’t think he felt anything either because he was crying as he walked away. I’ll never forget the sound of his crying. It sounded of despair, like he was searching for something and was growing certain he would never find it.

“After a little while I went home. I bathed, then curled up on the sofa to sleep for a while. I was awakened by a knocking at the door. It was a man. He had come to collect me, to bring me here.”

Joe felt her body tense against his, tighten and grow cold like she might solidify and become a statue. He held her close, rubbed her back and arms, afraid she might never be warm again.

“Joe, you’ve helped me. I know now that I’m not the only one in the world. The only one who wants to be loved. The only one who knows that I *can* love and be loved. Joe, I love you. Do you love me?”

Joe held the curves of her face in his palms, looked into her eyes.

“Yes, I love you.”

The door of the cell opened. Sara was taken away.

He was alone for awhile, with his thoughts. He wondered about how the Church had come to find him out. Was it Mrs. People? Did she set him up? He immediately dismissed the notion. Their time together had been real; if there had been anything false about it, he was sure of himself enough to believe he would have sensed it. He remembered the man dressed in black. Had that man seen something in my eyes, in my walk, as I passed him by? Could that man have been so well trained as to be able to detect illicit behavior in how a person conducts oneself? It seems improbable, but can the possibility be easily dismissed? Writers would be a group of people the Church would want to keep an eye on, but he hadn't written anything in so many years. Could their diligence cover so much time, so many written words?

Depression settled over Joe like the dirt that fell from the sky everyday. He felt dirty. What did it matter how he was discovered? The fact was, he had been and now he would be punished. He didn't care anymore. He was ready to die.

In a short while, the door opened and two children were brought in, a boy and a girl, about thirteen years old. At that time Joe was asked to come out of the cell. He could feel the compartments of his mind shutting down. It reflected in his walk; he shuffled his feet, and he walked as if they were shackled. A woman dressed in white escorted him to the next doorway down the hall. She opened the door for him, and he walked in. The room was bare except for a chair sitting in front of a desk and another chair, exactly the same as the first chair, behind the desk. A man sat in that chair. He was forty-ish, balding, with a potbelly. He wore a white robe and silver framed eye glasses. He smiled at Joe. He said, "Come in, Mr. Smith. Take a seat." Within arm's reach was a silver decanter; beside the decanter was a crystal water glass.

Joe walked to the chair and sat down. His eyes were on the floor, and he saw some long brown hairs on the gray tiled floors. He heard the keyboard clicking and looked back up at the man. The man was reading the computer screen, the tip of his tongue sticking out between his teeth. Classical music played softly in the background from hidden speakers.

Joe thought, if I were quick enough I could hit him with an uppercut. That would probably cause him to bite the tip of his tongue off. But there would just be another to take his place. I don't want to hear what he has to say.

"You may call me Reverend Justice." His voice was soft, wispy. "Mr. Smith, this is the first time you have ever been in trouble; this is the first time you have ever committed a crime against the Church." Reverend Justice took a deep breath and settled more comfortably in his chair. It was

obvious to Joe that the man was preparing to speak for a while; furthermore, it was obvious he was used to not being interrupted.

"I have to go to use the restroom," Joe said.

"You will wait, Mr. Smith. This will not take long." He made a steeple with his fingers, rested his elbows on the desk and put his thumbs under his chin, and gave Joe a stern look. Then he made himself comfortable again. "Mr. Smith, why do you write?"

How can I explain, Joe thought. How can I make him understand? The music gave him an idea. "Do you hear that music? When I was a young man, I wrote with a computer. When I pushed the keys on the keyboard, it was like playing a musical instrument. A pianist makes music with a piano keyboard. My music is words. My mind composes the melody. My hands count the beat, the rhythm within me made solid and ethereal. Can you understand that? Everyone needs music."

Reverend Justice filled the water glass from the silver decanter. He held the glass out. "Drink this, Mr. Smith."

"Why must I be unconscious?"

"You must have faith in the Church, Mr. Smith. To surrender yourself to the Church, to have faith, is all we ask."

Joe took the glass of water and drank, finishing it. He was very thirsty. In only a few minutes he slipped from his chair onto the floor, unconscious. He urinated.

When he awoke, he was in the hospital. He wondered what he was doing in the hospital.

Then he noticed his hands were gone.

The bandages covering the stumps were white and clean. He raised his arms, turning them. He put his arms down at his sides. He flexed the muscles in his arms that would have moved his fingers, would have opened and closed his hands. He thought, the bastards took my hands, but they didn't cut out my heart. My mind is still alive. They should have killed me. They made a mistake. I will keep those muscles exercised.

He went to sleep again.

The next day the male nurse told him he'd been sleeping for eight days. It was more merciful, the nurse said. The pain would be gone by the time consciousness returned. Joe considered it; they were right, the pain was gone.

Two days later he was sent home.

He thought about cleaning his apartment. Dirt and dust had collected in depth while he had been away. But instead, he went to his green chair and sat down. He fell asleep in his chair. When he awoke, the sun had gone down, and the night wind was blowing the dirt off the ledge outside his window. He stood, went into the small kitchen. There, he took some bread

from his pantry. He saw that the pantry had been stocked. He drew some water from the tap, then returned to his chair and ate his meal. He cleaned his apartment. He scrubbed everywhere, moving furniture, changing light bulbs. The ends of his arms were sore when he finished, but he didn't care. The pain told him he was still alive, very much alive. Then he turned the light off and went to the bed and lay down.

In his sleep, in his dream, he felt the weight of his wife's body next to him. He dreamed he snuggled closer, whispering, "You're so warm, and I'm so cold."

"I love you, Joe Smith."

Joe heard the words; they were real. He opened his eyes. Mrs. People was lying next to him, closely; he could feel her breath on his cheek. "I love you, too, Mrs. People."

"I think it's okay if you call me Yolanda. We seem to know each other pretty well." She smiled at him in the dark.

Joe cried.

When he stopped crying, he told her of what had happened.

"Joe, I want to be your hands. I have memories too."

She held him tightly. They made love. Joe fell asleep again; he was so tired. When he awoke, Yolanda was gone. He felt secure with believing she would return.

He thought about what it would be like to be married again. He decided he wanted that very much.

Joe went to Church occasionally. He felt he had to. But he did claim illness most of the time. After all, he *was* an old man.

Joe was sitting in front of his window one Sunday about three months after their marriage. He heard the door open. "Hello, Yolanda. I'm glad you're home," he said, watching the people on the street intently and not looking over his shoulder at her.

"Joe, I brought someone home with me. I met her at church today."

Joe felt his heart quicken. Who could they trust to bring into their home? He turned.

"Hello, Joe." It was Sara. She was dressed in a yellow jumpsuit.

"Sara?"

"They took my sight, Joe. But they made a mistake. They didn't kill me."

Joe stood and went to her.

Sara sensed him standing there. She stepped closer, and they hugged.

Joe thought his heart would break. Her eyes were so beautiful, and now they couldn't see.

Sara still held him tightly, feeling his body tense. "I'm angry, too. They . . . pissed me off. Joe you were right. There are people like us.

There's this boy I want you to meet. Joe, he's only sixteen, but he's going to make a fine man. He has friends. But they don't know what to do. Can you tell them what to do? Teach them to write? Can you?"

Joe looked at Yolanda. She smiled at him.

He remembered about another old man and that man's battle with the sea. That old man had said, "*But man is not made for defeat, a man can be destroyed but not defeated.*"

"I can do that," Joe said.

James W. Kirk: As I age, I find myself becoming more political. Please keep a compassionate and respectful opinion of our fellow Americans, no matter what their beliefs are or how different they may be from your own.



Inside-Out, Series 2

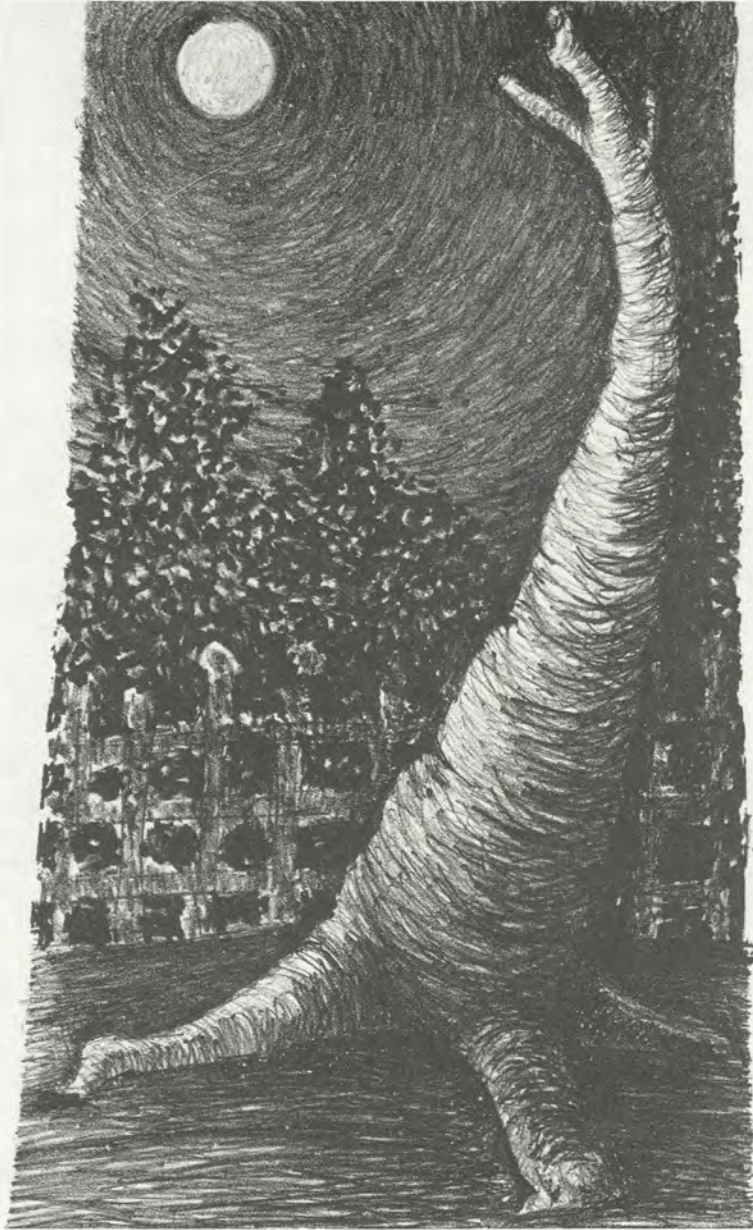
Brenda Hale

Terminal Fear

By Gary M. Kendall

The cold touch of nurses,
comes from feeling the dead.
I wake from a nightmare
of laughter and someone down the hall
forever calling
nurse, nurse.
I sleep to finish the paintings
I never started.
Wake again
exposed
like a turtle.

Gary M. Kendall: Indianapolis, currently attends Herron School of Fine Arts in the evening. Has published poetry in the Indiannual and artwork in Genesis. Two-time merit winner of the Arts Indiana postcard contest. Enjoys traveling; most recent adventure was to Hong Kong.



Moon and Tree
Brenda Hale

Art

by Lisa Ehret

A white sheet
Stretched taut on all four corners
Held by invisible hands,
Suspended in the air.

Open space above.
Open space below.

I stand high, high above this cotton cloth.
My body is black ooze
That suddenly begins to elongate and drip
Down

 Down
These viscous droplets that are me
May collect upon this whiteness
Slowly hardening and building,
One upon the other
Until my form is whole again,
Stronger than it was before.

Instead

Each black drop
 Hits,
 Sizzles
And like acid,
Sears through this white tautness,
Disembodies
and quickly dissipates into infinity

below.

Lisa Ehret: "After being in and out of college for 10 years, I will finally graduate in May. I hope the slowness in which I've progressed through school is not an indication of what the rest of my life will be like!"

The Inner Circle Resumes Meeting at Feeney's

by Eric Barker

Rawley was the one who suggested it, and in a way that made a quirky sort of sense. Even though he was a member of the Inner Circle before me, he had never seemed as much a part of the group as the rest of us. Rawley's timing was always off; he could never get together exactly when we could. Maybe it was him, then, because he didn't have as much to lose by stirring it all up so soon. None of the rest of us had the stomach for it until he called.

I was at work, talking on the phone with a client who was having second thoughts about his purchase from Waterbeds-Plus. I was eager to put the poor slob on hold, even if it was Rawley awaiting me on the other line.

"Rawley, 'zat you, you dog, how are ya' doin'?"

"Hi, Blaine! Great! Great!" As always with Rawley, too much enthusiasm. "Couldn't be better. Very busy over here, very busy. It's that time of year, you know."

For Rawley, yes, it was always that time of year. "I know what you mean, Rawls. Listen, what's up, buddy? I've got a customer on hold."

"I'm sorry, I don't wanna disturb you . . ."

"Forget it. What can I do for you?"

"I just thought it'd be nice, you know, if we got together tonight. At Feeney's."

My immediate instinct was to say no, and I should've. I did not want to go, I didn't have any reason to.

Rawley pressed, sensing my hesitation. "You know, just for a round or two. I can't stay long myself, but I thought it'd be nice. Don't you think? Jeff and Lisa are going."

"Just like old times, huh?"

"Yeah! Yeah! Exactly."

Rawley *would* think it was just like old times. I was within a breath of turning him down, and then I didn't.

I said, "I don't see why not."

"Great! Same time as always, okay? Take it easy, gotta go, see ya' there."

I hung up and immediately regretted my decision. The phone line with the holding customer blinked urgently, and I was paralyzed. I didn't think I

could face the voice on the phone again, with its veiled intimation of betrayal. I remembered selling him the waterbed, pushing him into a price range he could not handle, and now he wanted out. I had to decide whether or not to smooth-talk him into sticking with his commitment, or relenting and giving him the cheaper bed.

If Brantley had been there, I could have turned it over to him. He would have taken the call himself, or picked up another phone, listened in, and coached me through it. If Brantley had been there, I could've kept my sale. If Brantley had never been a part of my life, I would not have been in this situation at all.

I punched the line and gave the customer what he wanted, acting as if I had been looking into its availability. It was a Brantley Pierce-style retreat.

I spent the rest of my workday trying to focus on the present, failing with frustrating regularity, and cursing Rawley and his sentimental proposition for interfering with the program. I had just reached a point, just within the last two or three days, where my awareness wasn't crowded by the ghost of Brantley Pierce every goddamn minute of my goddamn life. It was a profound achievement, to get through twelve hours of sell-sell-sell without being reminded of him at some point.

Brantley had taught me everything I did, every psychological trick there was to manipulating weak-minded customers into buying more than they needed. Sometimes he did it through direct example: "Here, Blaine. C'mere. Watch this," he would say, sliding on over to an uncertain couple circling an expensive suite at the front of the showroom, and I would amble after, playing the assistant, watching and listening to the maestro composing his sales variation, his latest improvisational twist. Other times the example was indirect: he would be unaware I was nearby, selling a lone female customer on a suite that was, somehow, just right for her needs, and also, perhaps, on dinner at a little known Italian place he knew, delicious antipasto salads, very unique, quite unlike what we're used to in the Midwest . . .

I have no doubt that some of the fondest memories I will cherish in my old age will be of double-teaming the uninitiated with Brantley, once I had found my own variations and could take up this slack. We were a beautiful thing together, a gentle, lulling symphony . . . well, duet, anyway . . . of suggestion and sympathy. Brantley was the featured player and I was his back-up. Only the angriest, most resistant customer was immune to our act.

Brantley was a consummate hustler, a floor manager's dream, and I owed any success I'd had in the business to him. Of course, I would never make money at it on the scale he achieved. Brantley was a one-of-a-kind negotiator. He belonged in politics, maybe, or law, something big anyway, and we all thought for sure he would make it there sooner or later. He had a

way of making people feel they could trust him implicitly, that he would lead them down the best course for them. Even if they suspected that it was really the best course for Brantley, not for them, he was able to obscure their doubt by playing upon their desire for an object, a big, prestigious, comfortable, durable, scientifically-designed object that would lengthen their natural life.

Brantley wheedled his way into my nervous system, as he had with many people, made me love him even though I didn't often care for his ethics, if that's what you could call them. I frequently thought he was bringing out the worst in me, showing me an alternate world for the taking if I wanted it, a world where we could ignore a lot of the small rules that restrict happiness and freedom in daily life, rules like--tell the truth as much as you can and say what you mean, mean what you say. Nearly every new acquaintance I saw Brantley interacting with was approached, dealt with, and dismissed as a mark, a sucker to be exploited.

That's why I could never quite understand why he took to me so, why he set a goal of being my friend, deliberately putting aside his predatory *modus operandi* and helping me learn the ropes at Waterbeds-Plus. On the surface level, I should have been just one more minnow to his shark, tender and easily consumed. When we first met I was fresh out of training classes, totally uncertain of myself as a salesman (not that I've changed much), embarking on my fourth job in two years, my fourth job since my divorce. I had, in fact, by this time, completely given up on ever being happy again. It seemed that everything I touched turned to shit, much like my marriage had. Emotionally, I was dead in the water, no longer entertaining any expectations of even moderate success at anything I tried, resolved to merely plugging away, staying afloat.

Brantley and I were nothing alike. He was separated from his wife, still in negotiations with her on the question of divorce, neither quite decided yet, and in the meantime he was making the most of life as it came to him. I admired that. He started taking me under his personal tutelage, about ten years my senior, a confident, shrewd, elder advisor who could sell anything to anyone. He sold me on the concept that I was a likeable guy, even a valuable member of society, at a point in my life when that idea had become foreign to me. He made me think I could be anything I wanted to be, that I deserved to have whatever I wanted, and the more impractical, the better. Finally, without my asking, he bestowed upon me the highest honor for an employee in the Waterbeds-Plus chain: he introduced me to the Inner Circle.

The Inner Circle was always changing but it consisted of a core group that remained permanent and immutable: Lisa, quite slim and still very attractive at forty-five, the owner of Waterbeds-Plus, its absolute and only

dictator; Jeff, a sort of Essex to her Elizabeth, a fortyish ex-hippy whose conversational style retained certain key sixties phrases and words like “far-out” and “man” on the end of every sentence, the district manager over all the stores; and Brantley, thirty-seven, the undisputed king of waterbed sales in the Indianapolis area, the man who generated more income for the company than any other three salespeople.

If a person became close to one of those three, then inclusion in the Circle could be had. It meant, simply, meeting at Feeney’s on the Northeast side about five-thirty for cocktails, and the privilege of small talking with Lisa, basking in her easily-withdrawn approval.

I always felt strange in their company, but I had no place else in particular to go, so I joined. I laughed at Lisa’s jokes, I bought a drink for her occasionally (a gesture she never reciprocated), I met salespeople from other stores, some of whom came and went with startling rapidity, all of whom, I soon discovered, were envious of my position as Brantley’s sidekick.

Because it was Brantley, not Lisa, who was the true ring-leader of the Circle, its founder and god, its reason for being. Over the course of the first month or so, I found out, as we drank and drank and drank, and talked about selling waterbeds, and about who was sleeping with whom, or who was no longer sleeping with whom, that I was untouchable sheerly by virtue of Brantley befriending me. He decided what direction the night’s events would take, who we would talk to, what we would make fun of, where we would go after Feeney’s closed, if anywhere. Lisa, our employer, was only there because she, perhaps more than any of us, wanted to be with the star of the show.

I never discovered whether or not Lisa and Brantley actually had an affair at one time; the rumors were rampant that it was true. Her eyes certainly did not stray far from wherever he was in Feeney’s large, open room. She glowed when he spent time next to her; she watched with obvious interest when he moved from female to female at the bar, buying drinks, hustling for extracurricular company. If he found what he was seeking and left early, she grew quiet and sullen, and would cheer up only if she could say something snide about someone.

If Brantley left early, so did I, because the scene was never as much fun after he was gone. I wondered what the hell I was doing at Feeney’s (not to mention Waterbeds-Plus) many, many times, whether Brantley stayed or not. Even after I learned the fine art of taking people for everything I could, and became proficient enough to make a very good living at it, I never felt right about doing it, I never enjoyed myself. There would always be another sale to make; I would always take pity on the customer who just wanted to look without being hassled. I began to acquire *things*, drive a

better car, buy CD's, a word processor, and I soaked up a certain amount of newfound dignity from these acquisitions, these things, but always at the back of my mind lay guilt about my means of obtaining them.

If I drank enough, I might comment wryly at some point during a Feeney's evening on the irony of my position, an old-fashioned guy who believed in earning one's way through life, cajoling the middle-class and the sometimes not-quite-so-middle-class into buying things they didn't need so I could turn around and do the same thing. Lisa would scowl; Jeff would say, "Right on, Blaine, keep the faith, man. How's those support payment's comin'" Brantley would tell me I was a typical Puritan hypocrite and a slob.

Everyone would laugh because slob was a funny word to the Inner Circle. We used it all the time to get a response from each other, but it had to be spoken the way Brantley said it, drawing the last consonant out into a second syllable: *Slobbuh*. It was an in-joke, characteristic of Brantley's entire sales routine. He would blend native intelligence and homespun philosophy with the verbal rhythms of a stand-up comic. Long before I joined Waterbeds-Plus, *slobbuh* had entered the Inner Circle's specialized lexicon. I'd heard it as early as my second training seminar.

Brantley quit Waterbeds-Plus last spring, after working there for almost ten years. His wife had finally decided she wanted a divorce and so the financial pressures were about to increase. He had acquired a new job downtown selling something far more lucrative than water beds, only the gambling stakes would rise for him as well—Brantley Pierce was going to be a commodities broker.

The Circle continued to meet at Feeney's about twice a week and Brantley, now in a Brooks Brothers suit, would drop in on us every now and then to see if we were still *slobbuh*s. He was still a great raconteur, still free and easy with his money, only now he was making more in his new job than any of us could ever hope to, except Lisa, or course. The night always went well after his arrival, the Circle brightening in his presence.

Something nagged at me about him, though. He didn't seem like our Brantley anymore, and it wasn't the suit, it wasn't his treatment of us, it wasn't anything I could peg at first. But he was getting drunk, I finally noticed, I mean really drunk. In the old days Brantley could drink everyone under the table and not slur a word. The new Brantley drank faster and grew surly, quiet, off balance. When he did laugh, someone other than him had generated the humor. His heart was gone.

He told me he was disappointed his wife divorced him. That's exactly how he put it: "disappointed." He growled and complained that he was making twice the money and it was all going toward his debts, his divorce

settlement, and an increased interest in gambling. He'd been losing a lot recently.

"Jesus, Brantley," I asked one night, "how much do you owe?"

He chuckled. "I don't know. Shit. Thousands. Want a beer? Yours is empty."

He never would answer any of my questions directly. He liked to drop little hints that something wasn't right instead. A remarkable analyst of other people's woes and psychological defects, he refused to discuss his own. It made me angry, that he would not let me help him as he'd helped me. The closest I ever came was driving him home one night when, in a very un-Brantley-like stupor, he fell forward off his bar stool onto the floor without waking up. Stone cold, passed-out drunk.

The bartender, a friend of Brantley's before me, helped with the chore of making him stand up so we could walk him to his car. He'd bought an '87 Mercedes in mint condition. Beautiful machine. I gave the bartender my keys and he followed us to Brantley's apartment. Brantley slept soundlessly the whole way, mouth hanging open, head gently lolling against the passenger window.

My friend had developed a major drinking problem. Having been through a divorce myself, I reasoned that part of this was natural. The recently divorced, if they drink alcohol, drink too much in order to numb the pain of a life in shambles. I read it somewhere; it's a statistical fact. Brantley Pierce, good-time guy, former waterbed salesman extraordinaire, was experiencing a great deal of pain that he wasn't showing, except through the smokescreen of drunkenness. It takes a lot of Scotch to anesthetize that brand of discomfort.

I explored the possibility of helping him out, but I was too late, as things eventually happened. I didn't know it was too late at the time. I put out feelers in the Circle, mentioning Brantley's recently-developed alcohol problem to the core group.

"For Christ's sake, Blaine," Lisa said, "he's going through a divorce," as if I had suggested Brantley was something even worse than an alcoholic, say, a serial murderer (Excuse me, has anyone else noticed lately? Brantley is strangling more victims than usual).

I knew Lisa did not like me; I had always received loud and clear signals from her. She was always so busy pointing out the obvious to me, she never registered the truly obvious right under her nose. I knew she despised me and didn't care.

"I'm aware he's going through a divorce," I said, keeping my anger admirably in check. "He's also going through a drinking problem."

"Well, you oughtta try living through it sometime," she snapped at me. "See what it does to you." She left our company in a huff.

Jeff said, "Give her a break, Blaine. She knows Brantley a lot better than you do."

"Then she should help him." I said, and I, too, left in a huff. I went looking for Brantley, cruising a few downtown bars where I knew he had become a regular, but I didn't find him. We probably just missed each other, perhaps more than once. I decided I would have to catch him some other way.

I never did though. He wasn't home, and he wasn't home again, and he didn't come around Feeney's, and then on Sunday of that week, unbeknownst to the Circle, or anyone, Brantley ran a hose from the exhaust pipe of his Mercedes to the window, and sealed the open areas around the end of the tube with towels, drank enough whiskey straight to dull the discomfort of asphyxiation, and started the engine. I have no idea if he succeeded in making it painless or not.

He left a note to his wife. She has not divulged its contents to anyone in the Inner Circle.

I heard about it from Rawley on the Tuesday after it happened.

"Did you see the paper this morning?"

"No, I don't read it."

"Brantley killed himself Sunday night."

Such news brings on the weirdest sensations. I gasped involuntarily; my body reacted with a generalized, universal alarm. But I was, at the same moment, totally unsurprised. It was a logical development, for all of its sudden tragedy, and so I was also mentally very calm and clear. An odd mixture of immediate understanding and primitive fear of my own death.

The next couple of weeks were chaos lived in a haze, one part recollection, one part obsessive conjecture. I kept trying to imagine what was going through Brantley's mind, not only as he went through the physical preparations for taking his own life, but as he had been talking to me the last few times we saw each other. And sure, I wondered if there had been something I could have done, but not seriously, not at length. Brantley had closed himself off from all other options but suicide. I heard, again from Rawley, that Brantley had called both Lisa and Jeff a day or so before, "just to talk." He did not let on, did not even drop a little hint.

We of the Inner Circle saw each other at the funeral, a heartrending affair that I left as soon as I could. Lisa was in terrible shape and should not have been there; Jeff was holding her by the shoulders to keep her from dropping to the ground. Rawley, in sunglasses, hunted me up, his face a blank, muttering vague insights that were barely audible.

It was the only time I've ever seen the former Mrs. Brantley Pierce. She, too, had a completely deadpan expression, as if all the feeling had left her body. I could see she was every bit as pretty as Brantley used to say she

was. They were high school sweethearts. A man I did not know was at her side and I assumed he was her new husband. I saw the kids, too, for the first and only time: the girl, sixteen, had a wide-eyed, fearful expression more open than her mother's, the boy, two years younger, cried with brave dignity the entire time.

But there is nothing like the funeral of a friend to let a person know just how peripheral they are in someone's life. I knew the surviving campadres of the Inner Circle and the bartender from Feeney's. That was all. There was close to two hundred people there at the funeral home, and not one of them saw this coming, not one realized Brantley would go this far. It was easy to slip away unnoticed.

I took that day off and consumed a lot of alcohol and cigarettes without any of it seeming to affect me. I tried to sell waterbeds the next day, business as usual, but it was too soon. Brantley's ghost haunted the showroom, telling jokes, screwing customers, critiquing my sales pitch. I left at noon, rented five comedies at the video store and watched them all, one after the other.

It still took a long time before I could negotiate a full work day without considering Brantley's final decision in relation to me. I was still a lonely schmuck, still a mediocre salesman wishing I was doing something else, still Brantley Pierce's friend even though, for reasons having nothing to do with me, he had pulled the plug without warning me. He had taken a stab at warning others but it turned out his communication skills were hopelessly deficient. He never actually told anyone what he was thinking. They would have tried to talk him out of it if he had.

Feeney's was an upscale, brass and leather and wood pub in a strip mall on the northeast side, not far from the original Waterbeds-Plus showroom where all the new sales people trained. The name implied that it was somehow an Irish pub, but it was strictly designed for yuppies: expensive drinks, expensive food, with a few specials to draw the unwary through the doors. Mostly, the regulars were business professionals who stopped in to avoid the rush hour, have a drink, and go home to their families. It seemed everyone cleared out by nine at the latest, en route for somewhere else. If not home, then to a bar with louder music and younger people. And cheaper beverages.

I was the first of the Inner Circle to arrive at Feeney's, on the day Rawley called me at work, and it was a strange feeling to even be there after only a month of not going. Feeney's was a dark place even before the sun went down, the lights kept low and the windows shaded, I guess, to create atmosphere. Since becoming a regular though, I'd noticed the decorum, not

to mention the thirtyish customers, looked better without a spotlight. In avoiding Feeney's I had managed to forget, temporarily, everything about it, so that walking into its cave-like coolness, smelling its smoky air, hearing its upscale laughter and canned pop music made me feel shaky. I sat at the south end of the bar, the traditional spot for the Inner Circle, leaving bar stools on either side of me for the others.

They left me an uncomfortable chunk of time to readjust. I sat there nursing a beer and watching the place fill up around me for close to forty-five minutes before Jeff finally come through the doors.

The staff of Feeney's knew us all by name, and knew what we had been through recently. Some of them had mourned our friend's passing. They treated Jeff and I as if we had never stopped coming in, as if nothing at all had changed. It was a great relief. The bartender set Jeff's usual drink, a gin and tonic, on the bar without his having to ask. Then he inquired matter-of-factly into Jeff's business problems and moved on quickly.

Jeff and I did not talk about Brantley. We talked about anything to avoid discussing the empty place in our hearts, the vacancy that seemed to follow us lately, like a shadow. We would not have even known each other had we not been touched by Brantley.

Lisa came in next and took up her traditional place on the other side of Jeff from me. Jeff always stood between me and her, knowing what she said about me when I was not around. One drunken night in a different bar, after Lisa had left us for the evening to be with a husband about whom she felt complete indifference, Jeff had confided what I already knew: that Lisa despised me because Brantley liked me so much and she couldn't figure out why. She said I was beneath his dignity, considering he could have any friend he wanted.

I've never been able to decide if such confidences are a good idea in groups like the Inner Circle. Brantley, our hub, our focus, left so much undone everywhere he went.

Lisa was civil to me, even pleasant, asking how I was, and we repeated a facsimile of the exchange between Jeff and I.

Rawley was predictably the last arrival, out of breath as if he'd been hurrying, trying to lift our spirits with his uniquely insincere enthusiasm. After half an hour, maybe less, he fell into our rhythm of conversational starts and stops, our frequent silences leaving space for Brantley to join in.

I began to feel extraordinarily uncomfortable and then I saw us, the Inner Circle, in the mirror behind the bar: Jeff, then Lisa staring into their drinks on my right, and Rawley, poor bastard, even more out of place than I, standing with his foot propped on the empty stool to my left, creating a space for one in the tableau.

I waited, at first hoping someone would notice, then gradually fearing it

would sink in.

"Rawley," I said, "Sit down, will ya'? You're making me nervous."
He looked hurt, then he sat down and closed the space.

The conversation never improved. I sat there having imaginary spats with Lisa (Jeff intervening), while I sipped a second and final beer. I would tell her, smugly, "You never know another person. Not really. Even if you've been with them for years. Even if—especially if—you've been intimate with them. Intimacy is just more camouflage."

She would defend Brantley's choice by giving me his reasons, like I was not capable of figuring out for myself what they were. I would become emotional and say something spiteful to stem the flow of rationalizations, something like, "Yeah, better to just skip out altogether, huh? Run permanently away. Leave everyone who ever cared about you in the lurch wondering what the hell they did, or failed to do, why you cared so little for them in return."

Nothing of the sort was said, however. Rawley made a couple more attempts at dialogue, still observing the No-Reference-To-Brantley rule and then I was the first to excuse himself.

Lisa said, "Are you okay?"

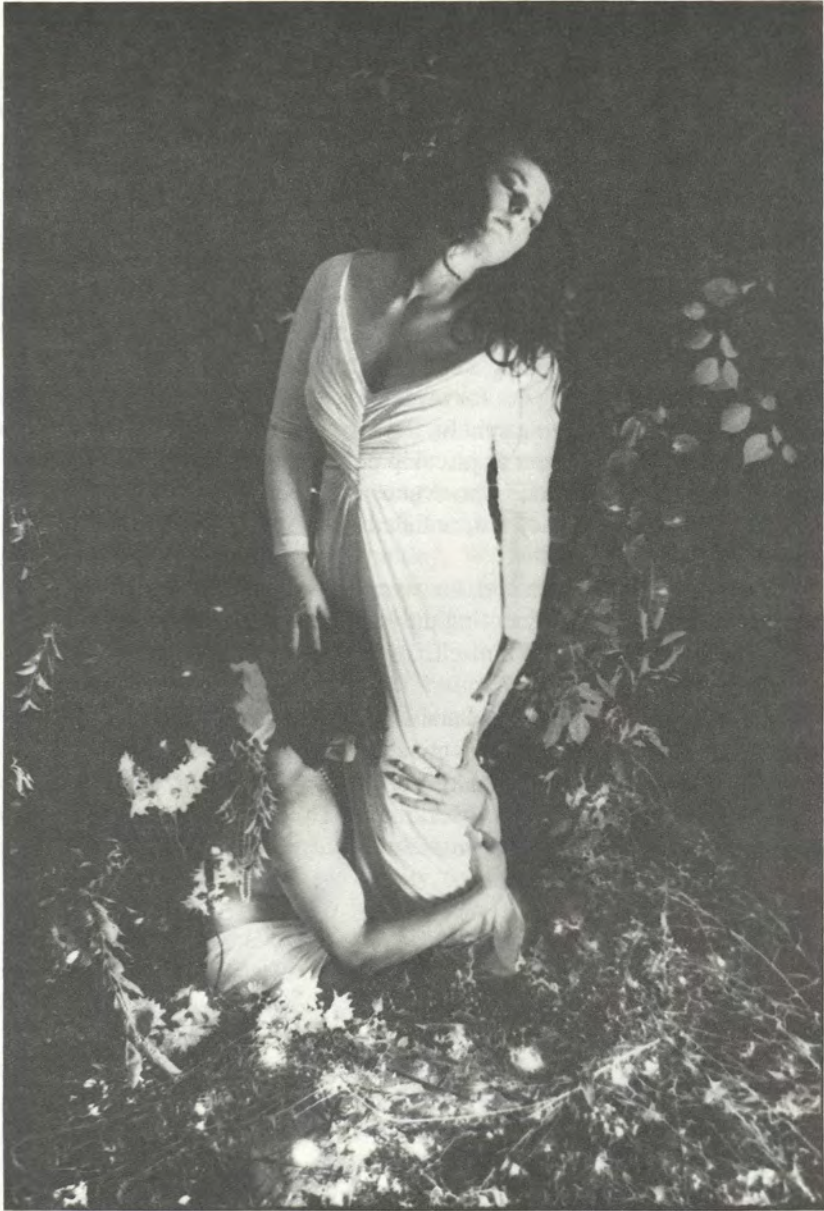
She was genuinely interested and I was momentarily caught off-guard.

I said, "Yeah. I'm okay. I've got a long day tomorrow. Gotta-sell-sell-sell." I saw her smile. "You kids be good."

In the parking lot, as I was unlocking my car door, I remembered where I'd picked up that verbal tick, *gotta-sell-sell-sell*. Ol' Brantley boy, the slob.

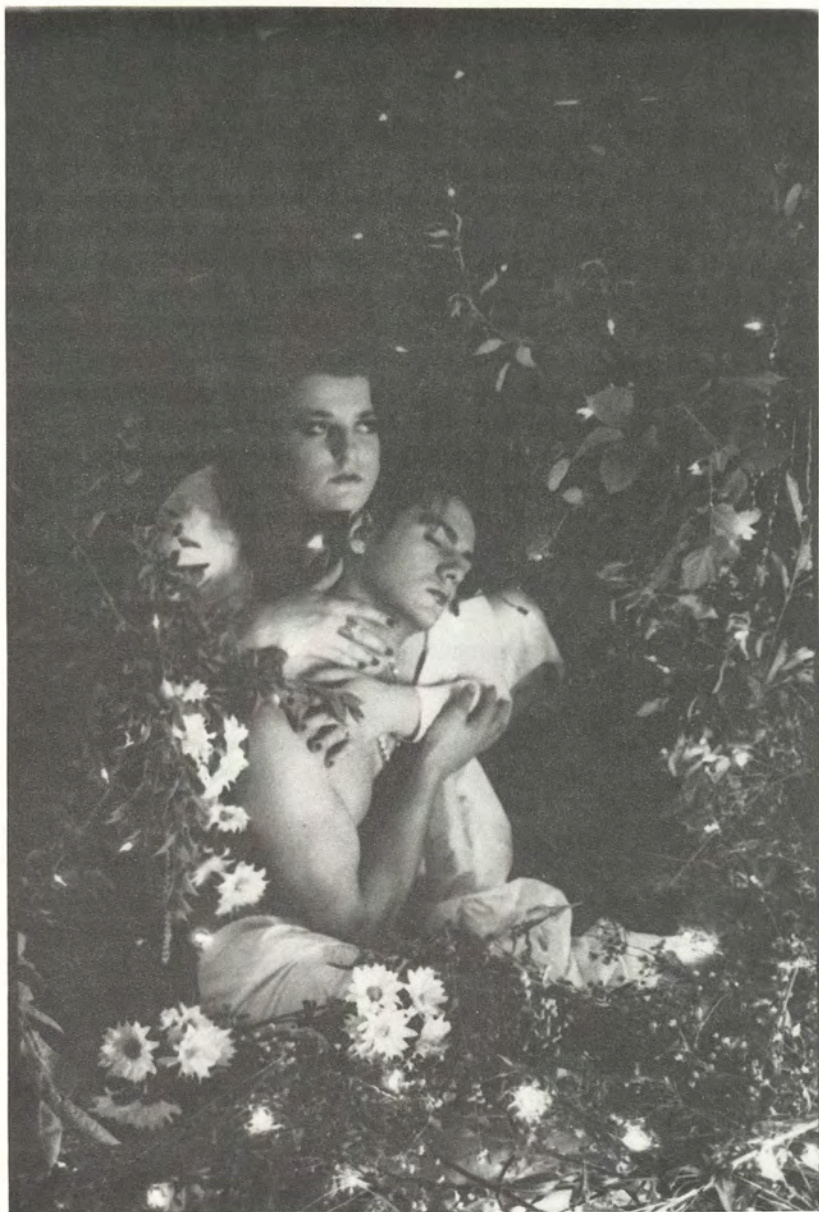
It was nice of Lisa to notice.

Eric Barker wrote his first story, "Tommy Miller Meets Frankenstein," at the age of nine. His cultural heroes include: Melville, Kubrick, and John Casey.



**And From Gabrielle,
Chamellea Was Born.**

Lesly Deschler



Gabrielle and Chamellea

Lesly Deschler

U.

By Barry J. McCabe

U.
you're not as big as you think you are

U.
I won't be here forever

U.
we're only thirsty,
and you are the only water
we can find

overhyped by myth

All I gain from your presence is maturity
That I accomplish for survival
All you give is poverty
and strict orders
to conform

U.
you crush
with your mighty teeth
Youth, ideas, dreams,
and leftover creativity

I won't be here forever
in fact not much longer
The world exists around you
not in you

U.
many know you
one's that don't are subtly ridiculed
but their life
is just as much life
as the one's you produce.

U. (continued)

U.
you're not my life
in fact you're my war
 my day-to-day struggle
every day I gain a little more
 victory

You are a four-year problem
 in a lifetime of dreams
But you are the dream killer

You're not a city
 just pretending
closer to a commune
 with entrance admission

There is no center of anything
just us
clamoring to climb the ladder,
 and into the stewpot.

Barry J. McCabe: I'm a student at Herron art school, but was formerly an engineering student at Purdue (it's a long story). Majoring in art, but searching for me, because I can't find him. "If you think your life is weird, you're probably on the right track." - me

Blood Waterfall

By Monica Downey Kirk

Blood Waterfall
cutting silent air.
Slaps on my dawn-colored face.

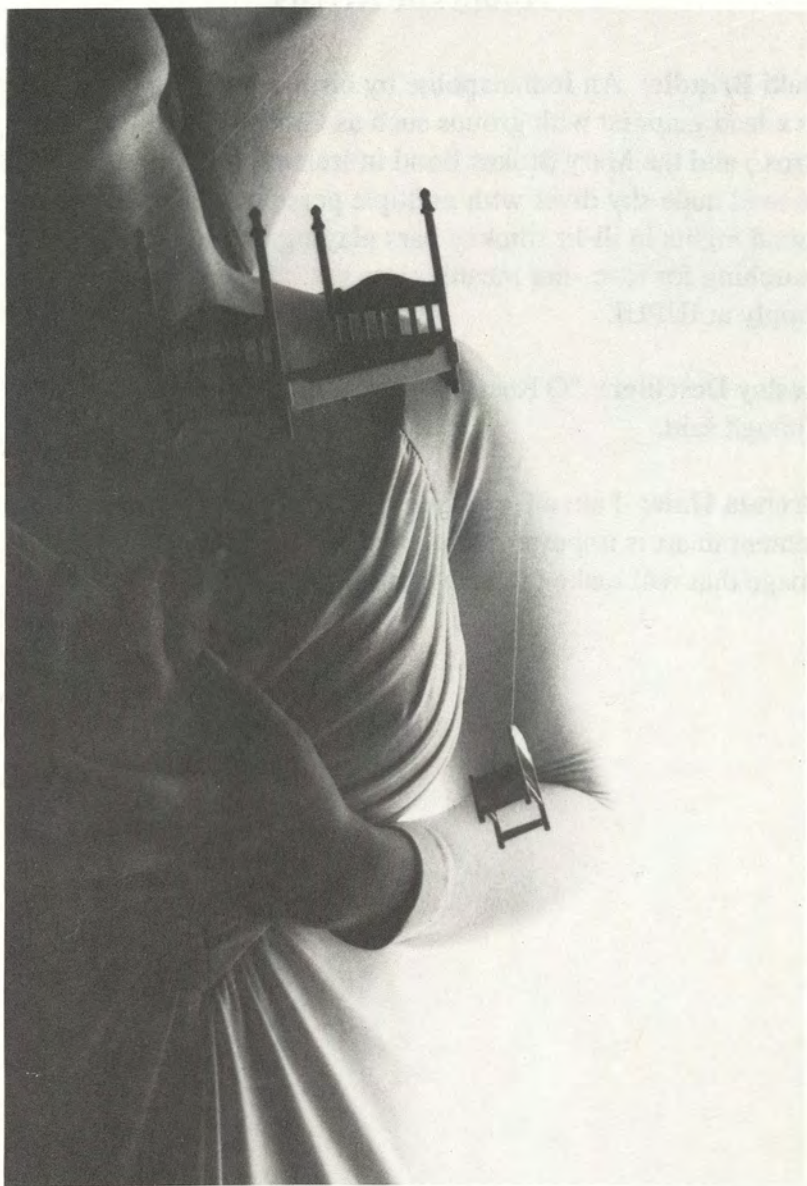
Sixteen.
Marriage bars.
Crippling partnership of isolation,
sentence of silence collapsing
the walls of my growing womb.

Bruises encouraging the subtle movement.
Pillow creases on my newly-awakened mask.
Seized by the glare of prison bars.

Fists of my master.
Slavery shackles.
Cringing at the Gold Band.
Womb creature thrives.

Shackles shining.
Gold Band of slavery.
Marriage at sixteen.
Sobs of the newborn human echo through
the girl imprisoned by the fist.

Monica Downey Kirk: The mother of two, set her course in strangeness from an early age. Unfortunately, she cannot get a degree in it, nor does the General Studies program accept it as life experience.



From: The Gift
Lesly Deschler

About the Artists

Beki Brindle: An Indianapolisite by birth, traversing the world as a lead guitarist with groups such as Grace Pool (on Warner Bros.) and the Mary Stokes Band in Ireland, Beki reports she is an avid nude sky diver with multiple personalities. She can be found nights in ill-lit smokey bars playing blues guitar and searching for love--not meaningless sex. That is in ample supply at IUPUI.

Lesley Deschler: "O'Keeffe, Nin, Gabrielle and Chamellea." Enough said.

Brenda Hale: I am a fourth year Herron student. Emotional content in art is important to me. In my work, I try to create an image that will make the viewer curious . . .

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