

PULSE



PULSE

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AWARDS

Eleanor Poetry Award

"Solitary Prints" by Patrick A. Wright

PULSE Poetry Award

"At First Glance, All Is Clear" by Don Hamerly

Professor's Poetry Award

"The Seasons Always Change" by Kathy Portie

PULSE Fiction Award

"A Song for Natalie" by Kathleen Haskins

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JUDGES

Poetry:

Dr. Chris Ellery
Dr. Marianne Loyd
Dr. Norman German

Fiction:

Dr. R. C. Reynolds
Dr. R. B. Thomas
Dr. David Kuhne

Essay:

Dr. Christopher P. Baker



(Outward Appearances)

Last night I read,
"There is more magic
in the infinitesimal
than in the grandiose."

Today, on the prow at the Big K,
I bought new tennies—
a pair made of some unidentifiable manmade material
dyed a presumptuous tin foil silver
that promised me daily remembrances
of past Christmases' gaudy glittery tinsel
and shiny shiny packages reflecting methodically
blue, red, green, blue, red, green...

Hypnotized
I slipped them on
and fancied I saw far-off fairyland's
sparkling of tiny jewel-hued lights
that twinkled to the wind chime sounds
of tinkling child laughs.
I felt bewitched and giddy,
knowing my life was about to be
mysteriously and overwhelmingly

Transformed.

How, then, could I break the spell
by removing these enchanted slippers
for my impotent Hush Puppies?
I wore them from the bazaar,
to my carriage, into my castle
where I sat naive and expectant in my easy throne,
waiting...waiting...waiting...
for IT to happen.

But instead reality chimed through my body,
stunning me with its sobering reverberations,
and I dully removed the tennies,
trying frantically to wipe away the smudges with a Kleenex
before placing them gently in their soon-to-be-dust-covered box.
And in the stillness made as the lid gratefully smothered
the faint, mocking, crystalline voices,
I mumbled, "They were probably too grandiose."

by Annette Martinez

Lost Innocence

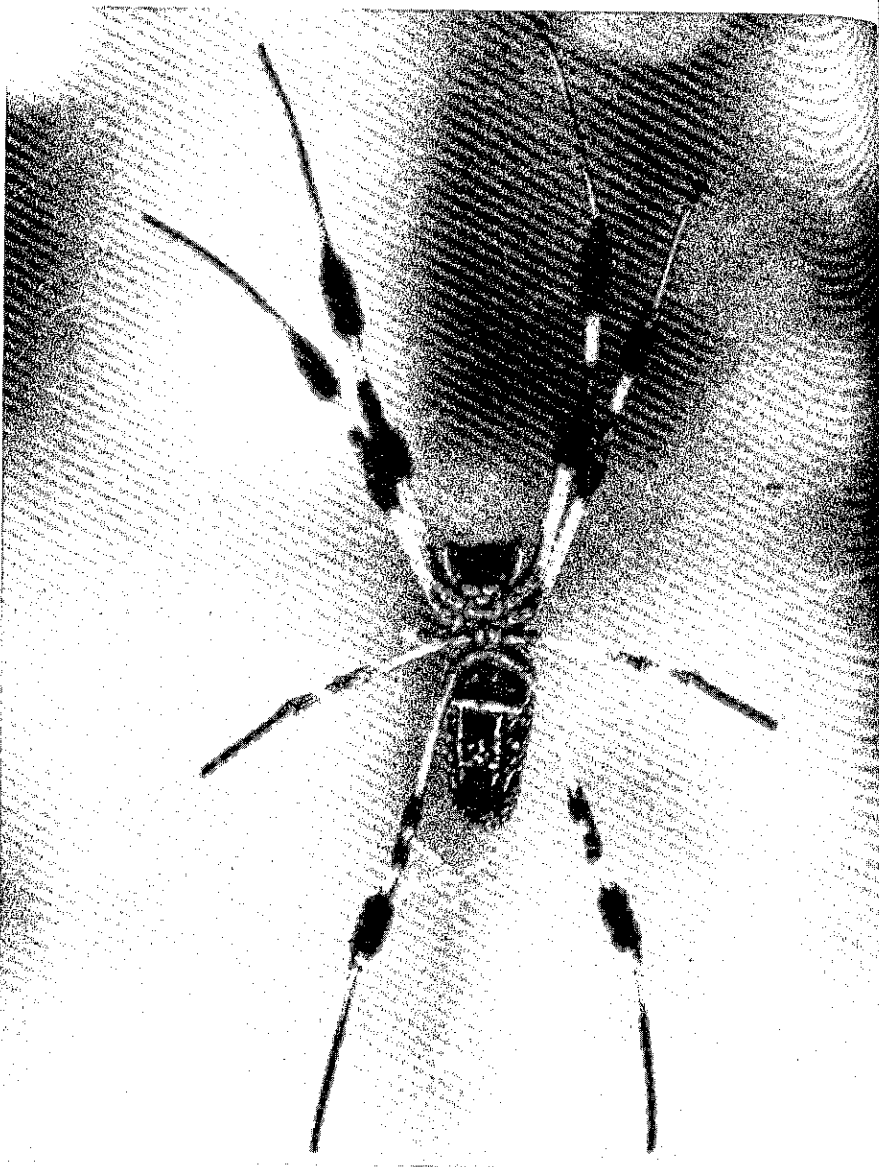
Wistful eyes admiring the
spectrum of colors dancing on the ground
Longing to be closer, to hold
such a lovely, glittering matter
Reaching fingers gleefully grasp
the idolized object...
then cry in pain as the
jagged glass
falls to the ground.

by Nancy Price

Disillusionment

Throwing the clay on to the wheel
shaping, molding
Pounding every inch to soften,
make more manageable
Forming the perfect figure to
embody her own talent
Coating the figure with a glaze
of gold, then flinging away
With disgust her created child
after spotting a chip in the
glaze.

by Nancy L. Price



Regainings

I)

I thought I saw, at the last alley, a
shadow with the whitest of eyes,
brightest of eyes, burning with no pupils
but I was not surprised;

I have seen them before
Through my upstairs window
the streetlamp casts a
cross upon my wall
and through the pane
I see the eyes

I'm not surprised
I draw the curtains open
They are there, burning
almonds set in shadow
"Are you Death?" Ha.
He would be more lovely
and more welcome still.

II)

Six nights beneath their zinc and
molten stare clouds my
sleep no more obsidian now
eye of tiger, sleep deep sunk black
fathoms beneath the low night Scottish sky

deep in a highland loch
laced with silt and
burning legend and
through the silt the eyes

I recognize the glow
the reptile eyes;
I have seen them before,
eyes of snake and

I remember you
yours were the eyes I sought when first told I was
ugly, fallen, you who first fell from beauty
I have met your eyes when in my blackest rage,
burned them through, flashed them as even now they
burn in shadow, glowing of themselves

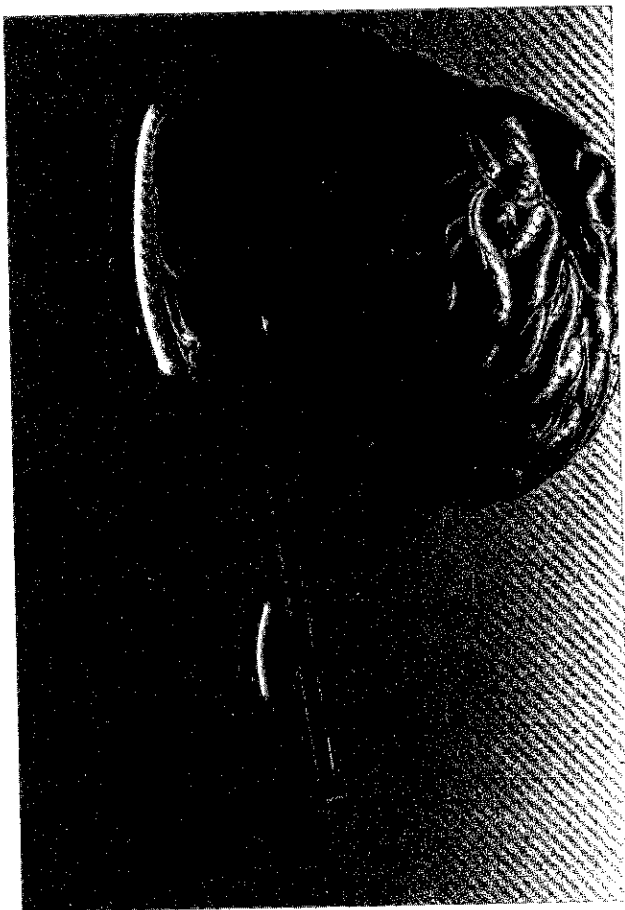
When first I begged you love me,
love me you like I a thing repulsive you
laughed, you laughed I felt you, saw you,
burned you through until you covered your
face your eyes as from a leper,
you know no hared,
you who revel in
Hell, you know no need to
kiss a shoulder, soft a neck or bury your
face in the soft
stomach, feel yourself
held, you who walk by
choice the black floors of Scottish lochs,
the dark alleys,
And I will burn you through
and down again.

by Andrew Preslar

Wistful Thinking

Your words hung between us in the air
Like clumps of wisteria on a fence in early springtime.
I can still smell their sweet and slightly acid fragrance.
There were no green leaves to soften their almost painful
Purple silhouettes against a pale blue sky.
But, they were never meant to last.
They were only fancy, passing fancy.
Even as I stood there, one gently broke apart
And slowly sifted to the earth
To join its fellows on a pink and purple carpet there.

by Sue L. Wright



Song for Natalie

When I opened my eyes that morning I greeted a perfectly ordinary Tuesday. I smoothed my flowered bedspread up over the pillow and looked at the family portraits over my bed just as I do every morning. I took my teeth out of their covered porcelain dish and brushed them before combing my hair up into its usual bun and walked over to the window. It was the same view I've seen every day for the last ten years the perfectly trimmed lawns and hedges, iron benches, bright umbrellas over the picnic tables, criss-crossed walkways leading out past the colonial looking sign that read "Appletree Manor Nursing Home".

Some things have changed since Natalie is gone. I used to remark every time they repainted the sign that there hadn't been an apple tree within miles since the days of the pilgrims. Natalie always asked what the heck they ought to call it? Fred and Lucille's Old Folks Home? And I would resign myself once again to the sad fact that I'd never make a sweet little gray-haired lady out of Natalie.

I had spent a lifetime trying to reform Natalie. Ever since we'd become friends at Emily Thornton's School for Young Ladies, I'd been fighting this losing battle. I had looked like I'd stepped out of an etiquette manual for proper women of 1924. Natalie could not bear the fashions or restrictions of society, even her red hair resisted all attempts to keep it in line. She usually looked like a cross between a refugee and an actress. I went to college to fulfill my dream of becoming a teacher; Natalie changed her field of study from Liberal Arts to Political Science and back. She dated fellows who gave me lectures about socialism and the "far cars" who ran our fallen government. Natalie's beautiful, bell-like laughter would eventually save me from these revolutionaries' sermons. "Alan, dear, please leave poor Helene alone. She does enjoy being proper." She would always light a cigarette before they left me sitting on the couch trying to recoup before my law student date was to arrive.

I had already been married two years before Natalie, at the ripe old age of 24, found her husband. My sweet husband, Frank, had given up on me with, "Darling, quit arranging for Natalie to meet available men. When she is ready, she'll marry." Sure enough, I had run out of dinner partners when Natalie brought Edgar to meet us.

We did have wonderful husbands, although, like us, they were different. My marriage was conventional and lasted more than fifty years with three wonderful sons. Natalie had a rather strange relationship with Edgar and, after eight years of marriage, I did help her pull quietly through a painful affair. I was shocked and disgusted at the time but seeing Natalie so destroyed, I couldn't say anything except to offer support. She and Edgar seemed stronger in spite of it and they were married until he died twelve years ago. She went to live with her daughter until my Frank died ten years ago and we found Appletree Manor.

Since we were both perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves, we

wanted a place where we could feel safe, be busy but still on our own. So we got apartments here. There are no white uniforms in the halls here and the only way you can tell it's a nursing home, as Nat used to point out, is the occasional wheelchair and tapping of canes.

Even here, where we should have been settled, Natalie didn't fit the mold. After a few weeks of Scrabble and classes in crochet and raising violas, Nat started getting restless. She arranged for a scuba diving class (an amazing group of people turned out) and lectures about the effect of senior citizens on politics. A tall, silver-haired man named William Barry helped her with these plans. Mr. Barry was just like Natalie and preferred mountaineering to playing pinocle. I found him intelligent and delightful. Nat used to raise her eyebrows and said it was a shame he hadn't come along earlier in her life, but would always admit seriously that they were only good friends. In fact, she would remark with a sly grin, he seemed to spend more time with her just to be near me. Though I would blush furiously and feel a bit foolish, it somehow felt good.

Natalie went on "raising our consciousness" until she died a little over a year ago. Not only did I no longer have Nat to "rattle my cage" (as she called it) or to keep me on my toes, I lost my closest friend. I became acutely aware of how much I relied on her to help me understand this world. At times I find myself trying to see things as she would. She used to sit in her favorite chair under that wild Navajo rug on her wall, shaking her finger at me and say, "Jummy crickets, Helene, this world is not going to change a hair just because one old broad doesn't approve! And it isn't going to stop and let you get off." She would be busy planning lectures or scheming about classes in spelunking. "Just accept the changes and quit worrying yourself over them...you might get prematurely gray." As she bent back over the paperwork, she would be laughing.

Six months ago, Natalie's only granddaughter called and asked me to lunch. The restaurant played rock music which I have never liked (Nat would say, "How can you dislike something that you've never paid attention to?"). The waitresses were costumed like Old English bar maids which I believed left too little to the imagination (Nat would surely ask if I thought they'd be more comfortable dressed like we had to dress at their age.) I looked over the menu and realized I had no idea there were so many ways to fix a hamburger.

Looking across the small table, I realized how much Denise looked like her grandmother. There were little wisps of auburn hair sneaking out from around the green ribbon in her curly hair. She was an unusual but pretty girl. When she was ordering her lunch, I realized I had been listening to a song. I could even hear the individual words and they were lovely.

"Helene, I've got a problem with the family - you know Mom has always resented the fact that I am like Granny." A waitress set our salads down in front of us and when she was gone, Denise started again. "In fact, when I told them what I had decided to do, they really hit the roof. Mom said it sounded exactly like something Natalie would do. Don't worry about what other people think, always resist doing the right thing! Be unconventional. She said it was immoral - Natalie might as

well be here pushing me along." Denise lowered her eyes and I realized she had started to cry.

I reached down and opened my purse to get the girl a handkerchief. As I glanced at the white linen square with the tiny embroidered violets in the corner, I remembered Natalie often saying it made more sense to carry tissues - "Only little old ladies carry hankies, for crying out loud" she'd say, laughing at her pun.

Taking a deep breath, I said slowly, "Denise, your grandmother was a warm and wonderful woman. She was kind and loving. I cannot understand how anyone could say she was immoral or say she didn't do the right thing. Natalie never hurt anyone, she simply didn't believe in the restrictions placed on people by society because of sex or age." I paused and said in the calmest voice I could manage, "Now, go ahead and tell me what you have done that your family is upset about."

The waitress dropped a fork on the floor as she cleared away the bowls and Denise looked up at me. She said she had fallen in love with a young man who was married. "His wife will not give him a divorce, Helene. This is not a clandestine affair, his wife moved to another state long before I met him. We date openly, I have visited his family and he's spent time with mine. We love each other and we want to be together."

I knew then what she wanted to hear me say. I tried to collect the many thoughts that were battling in my head. I had to try to remember to be fair to Denise, she was talking to me as Natalie's best friend. She wanted an answer from her grandmother - not me.

"I am almost twenty-five and mother had given up hope of having a suitable son-in-law. Don was perfect until she found out we couldn't be married, now his name is verboten in our house." Then, with her head held high, she asked, "Don't you think I have a right to my own life?"

I folded and unfolded the napkin in my lap while I spoke. I heard glasses clinking behind me at the bar. "You are a grown woman, Denise. You are neither blind or dumb and are entering this relationship fully aware of its problems. Fifty years ago I would have been mortified and you would have been labeled with something short of a scarlet letter. But I remember how it felt to be madly in love; I know things have changed and people rarely wait for the technicality of marriage to... well, to love each other. If you love him, go with him, share your lives. Perhaps someday you will be able to marry. Things with your parents will work themselves out."

I surprised myself with that little speech. Later, when Denise left me at the Manor, I wondered how I ever got all those words straight. I wondered if Natalie would have been pleased. Unfortunately, I knew her son and his wife would not be.

So that brings us up to date. Two weeks ago I greeted my seemingly ordinary Tuesday morning. At breakfast, William Barry asked if I'd like to ride over to the park after the morning's needlepoint class. I confided that I honestly had no desire to sit through that silly class, so we finished breakfast and got our bicycles ready.

The park is lovely and near the manor. In the center of it is a small duck pond, on one side of the pond is a small playground surrounded by picnic tables and small barbecue grills. Directly across from that is a foot

bridge and a few benches. We came here often and watched the children playing. Sitting on "our bench" we talked about the weather, movies, the goings-on at the manor, and, finally, Natalie.

Looking at William, I thought again how handsome he was. Though his hair was a silvery gray, his moustache was stark white. His voice was so strong and clear "Helene, Natalie has been dead a year. She was a brilliant woman and has been missed, but she's gone. Did I ever tell you what she said about you once?" He looked away from me to watch a little boy chase a ball across the bridge. "She said after she was gone she thought you'd sit down in a rocking chair and knit yourself into senility..." Here he chuckled before he went on. "He handed me the job of preventing that. She said I should prod you into NOT acting your age." He took my hand in his and looked down at me.

A station wagon pulled up near the picnic area, the doors shot open and a family, complete with a dog, poured out. William said, simply, "I love you, Helene, I want you to be my wife."

I was stunned. No matter how friendly we were, to have a man declare his love for you and propose when both of you are well past eighty is quite a shock. I wasn't speechless for too long, though. I did manage to say yes somewhere between the amazement and the joy.

My daughters-in-law were shocked, too. Remarks about senility and words like "absurd" crossed the table at our family gathering. One son asked if I had considered the possibility that William wanted my money. Finally, one daughter-in-law blurted out, "Good God, Mother, what will people say? It isn't as if you are able to do anything!"

I gave a silent note of thanks that William hadn't come with me. I stayed quite calm and as I rose to leave, I said, "I must say I am so pleased to see so much support from my family. I want you to know that I love William. He certainly does not want or need my money, believe it or not he simply wants me." And with my eyes on my daughter-in-law, I said, "As to what people will say about us: Who cares? I should hope they'd say we were certainly a happy couple, a lucky couple. And, my dear, I intend to do anything and everything that any young couple does when they marry." She drew in a quick breath and I finished with: "We are old, dear, we aren't dead."

Six rather shocked pairs of eyes followed me as I left that house. I could feel them behind me until I was back at the manor and safe with William. We were married the next day. That was a week ago, our honeymoon was spent in the Bahamas. William is a wonderful, loving husband and I have not felt so happy in years.

Yesterday, I went into my small, almost vacant room to collect the last of the boxes and take them to our new apartment on the third floor. I reached into a small box full of photographs and pulled out a snapshot of Natalie and I on the beach on our last vacation. She has a bathing suit on and is laughing at something, looking happy and healthy. I stand beside her - somber and obviously not happy at being photographed - with a huge straw hat shading my face and dark glasses, completely covered in a beach robe. I always said it protected my skin. Natalie poked a finger at me and said, "Kiddo, at our age, why bother to protect OLD skin? You can't attract sun, much less men, in a get-up like that." I probably shook my head and took up my post under a beach umbrella.

On our honeymoon, William bought me a beautiful swimsuit. I have a gorgeous tan (even if it is on old skin) and one of my sons said, when we returned home, that he had never seen me look so healthy. I won't exactly be posing for Playboy soon, but I've given my beach catman to a real old lady down the hall.

One evening we sat on a Bahama beach and watched the sun set over the palm trees. Just above the tree tops was a layer of rose pink which blended gradually upward to a burnt orange. The top layer looked as if God had laid a slice of pure, cream butter on the sunset and we were watching it melt evenly out to the edges of the horizon. I dug my toes into the sand and felt William's hands on my shoulders. "A penny for your thoughts," he said.

"Know what the nicest part of all this is?" I asked it not really expecting an answer and not getting one. "Natalie always wanted to quit being a sock-knitting, chair-rocking, hankie-carrying little old lady. I imagine. No, I know...I know she should be glad things have gone the way they have. But she's not here..."

As the sun dropped away, William squeezed my shoulder, "She knows, Helene, she knows."

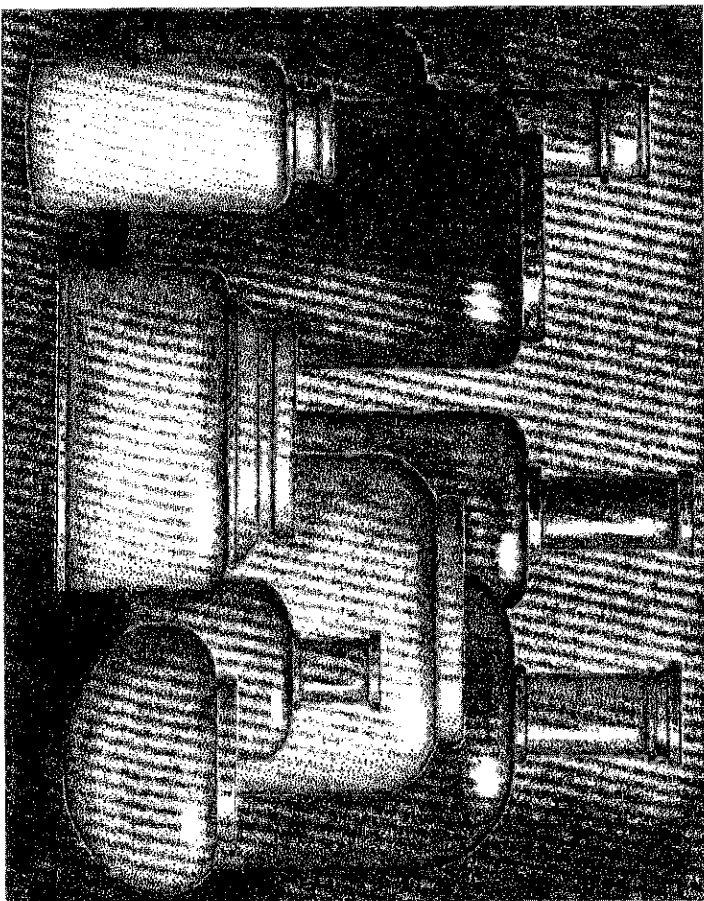
And, of course, he is right. This is exactly what Natalie would have planned for me. Maybe somewhere between taking parachuting lessons (I declined) and her Gray Panther meetings, Nat had planned our wedding. I know what she would say if she were here now. She would lean over toward me and smile conspiratorily. "Helene, you've made your decision. You have made your bed, now lie in it." Then she would wink and say, "And, kiddo, if you have forgotten any details, tell William to give me a call. I'm old, but I'm not dead."

by Kathleen Haskins

In His Image

The ugly roses didn't mind
that he passed without a glance.
Inhaling the sweet smell of sweat
they whispered to each other
and marveled at this one called man.

by Regina Bartley



Coal Black and the Seven Basketball Players (For Holly)

Once upon a time in a city very like you or I might live in, there lived a man and his wife. Now these two loved each other very much, and, eventually, as most people do who forget to go to the drugstore, they had a child - a little girl. This little girl was beautiful: she had her mother's big, brown eyes, and she had her father's deep, dark skin. She was so beautiful and dark that her parents named her Coal Black and called her Coalie for short. (And you thought Kunta Kinte was a strange name!). Anyway, Coalie lived happily with her parents. One day, however, when she was about sixteen years old, Coalie came home to find her father sitting and singing the blues on the steps in front of their house. Coalie said, "Oh poppa dear, why are you singing the blues?" Coalie's father looked up and said, "Your mamma ran off with a marimba band."

At this, Coalie sat down, put her arms around her father and said, "Oh poppa dear, never fear. We'll get by." So from that day forth, Coalie and her father lived together in their house taking care of each other. One day, however, Coalie came in from school to find her father in their living room with an Avon lady. Coalie's father was gazing deeply into the woman's eyes as she talked about the benefits of soap-on-a-rope. From the expression on her father's face, Coalie knew she would soon have a stepmother, and she was right. Three weeks later, the Avon lady, who name was Evalina, had moved lock, stock, and perfume into the house with Coalie and her father.

Now, neither Coalie nor her father knew that Evalina was heavily into voodoo. Evalina was also very vain, and she was very jealous of Coalie. One day when Evalina was frying chicken, she leaned over the melting grease in the frying pan and said in a sing-songy voice:

"Crisco, crisco on my fire
Who's the lady all men desire?"

The greased hissed and popped for a few minutes and then answered.

"Youth and beauty you sadly lack
compared to the one they call Coal Black."

With this, Evalina was furious. She turned off the fire and let the chicken soak in the grease for an hour just for spite, while she tried to think of some way to get rid of Coal Black. Finally, she hit upon a plan. When Coal Black came in from school, Evalina crammed a dollar into Coalie's hand and said, "Child, run to the store and get me some rice, a bell pepper, and some pecans, and don't forget to bring back my change!" (Evalina was cheap, too). Coalie, being the sweet girl she was, said "Yes, stepmother dear," and skipped (yes, skipped) out the door and down the street. Now, the only store that Coalie's family shopped at was a little dump called Tyrone's Shop and Grab. Evalina knew that if Coalie let Tyrone ring up a bunch of food without having the money to pay for it, Tyrone would probably strangle her.

At Least A Hundred Years

Our spirits knew each other
For at least a hundred years
They laughed together in bliss
And shed common lonely tears
They talked of songs and poems
And learned each other's fears
They danced as one to music
That only the dreamer hears
They threw away conventions
And dismissed the rules of peers
They laughed and talked and danced
For at least a hundred years

by Regina Bartley

Seven Year Ties

She tried to brush away
The old gray shadows,
but they clung
like sticky cobwebs.
Sleep wouldn't come
for the suffocation
but then it never did.
How to cast aside
the heaviness of years.
How to slip out of
rope-thick ties
that time had fashioned so well.

by Regina Bartley

Coalie skipped into the store and picked up the rice, bell pepper, and pecans and let Tyrone ring them up.

"That'll be three-fifty," said Tyrone, who happened to be a former weight lifter.

"Oh, kind sir," answered Coalie, "I have only one dollar."

Just as Tyrone was about to reach across the counter for Coalie, a sneaky little voice beside Coalie said, "Here's the extra two-fifty and ring up this Gatorade." Coalie looked down into the face of the shortest man she had ever seen. He was wearing shorts and had a basketball under one arm. "Oh, thank you," gasped Coalie, "You saved my life!"

"No problem," said the little man. He took Coalie by the hem of her skirt and pulled her outside to the stoop. "Sit down here," he said, "and tell me how you got to be so stupid." Coalie talked to the little man for an hour, telling him about her stepmother and her plot to kill her. As soon as she was finished, the little man woke up, took Coalie by the hand and said sleepily, "You better come home with me." With that, he pulled Coalie down the street. They came to a small house in the less run down part of town. On the porch, there were six other little men, all dressed in shorts. The little man who had rescued Coalie said, "This is Coal Black. She's gonna live with us for a while until she gets back on her feet." He then turned to Coalie and said, "We're the Twenty-second Street Slamdunkers. That's Doc, Slappy, Nappy, Creepy, Sniffy, and Breezy. I'm Roscoe. Come on in and cook dinner."

"You mean I get to cook dinner?" gasped Coalie with joy.

"You bet," said Roscoe. "I don't save lives for nothing." So from then on, Coalie lived with the basketball players, cooking for them and cleaning the house and having fun with them when they weren't playing basketball. She grew to love them, and they loved her in spite of the fact that she talked like she had just walked out of a Grimm's fairy tale.

Now, across town, Evalina was still living and selling perfume and thinking she was the loveliest lady in town. (She explained Coalie's absence to Coalie's father by saying that Coalie had run off with a marimba band). One day, Evalina decided to fry chicken again. She threw some grease into her frying pan, and then, because she wanted a cheap thrill, she leaned over the grease and chanted:

"Crisco, crisco on my fire

Who's the lady all men desire?"

The grease hissed and answered, "Sorry, Toots. Even Mary Kay can't help you with Coal Black around."

Evalina was furious, not only for finding out that Coal Black was still alive but also because the grease didn't rhyme. She forced the grease to tell her where Coal Black was and then (for spite), put the chicken in the oven. She then proceeded to think of another way to kill Coal Black. "I know," she started evilly, "I'll dress up like an old woman, and I'll get Coal Black to eat... eat what?" Evalina flew to the refrigerator to find something she could use to poison Coal Black. "Last night's meatloaf? No. Last week's gumbo? No. Last month's whatever-it-is? No." Just then, her eyes fell on a big plate of pralines she had made that very morning. "That's it," she grinned wickedly. Evalina grabbed the pralines out of the refrigerator. She then went to a shelf and took down a

box of Momma Mojo's Instant Poison for Innocent Young Girls Who Make You Sick. Evalina took the biggest piece of pralines and sprinkled the poison on it, mumbling a few voodoo words over it (she had seen an actress do this in the movie "Bad Jungle Voodoo Momma"). She then dressed in her tackiest clothes (an old Calvin Klein shirt and an old Gloria Vanderbilt skirt-she had bought them two weeks before) and put an old Bill Blass scarf on her head. She then grabbed up the pralines and headed to the house of the seven basketball players.

Coal Black was home all alone on this evil day: the Slamdunkers had a game with the Midnight Kneecrushers. She was busy cleaning the house and making dinner when there came a knock on the door. "I wonder whoever that can be?" she said, and she opened the door.

"Avon call- I mean, pralines for sale, child," said Evalina as she crouched in the doorway.

"Pralines! Oh yummy!" said Coalie. Then she looked hard at Evalina. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" (You see, the basketball players were trying to teach Coalie to use her brain).

"Oh child, I sued to babysit you a few years ago. Don't you remember?" lied Evalina.

Coalie thought for a minute. "Oh yes, that's right." (The basketball players still had a lot of work to do). Coalie then picked up the praline on the top of the stack and said, "I'll buy this one," and she bit into it. Immediately she fell to the floor in a deep swoon (yes, a swoon-she fainted, if you don't have a dictionary). Evalina smiled with satisfaction. "Well, that takes care of Einstein. Now it's back to my Crisco!" With that, she let loose a fiendish laugh of pleasure and slammed the door behind her.

Meanwhile, the seven basketball players were trooping home with a case of Gatorade because they had beaten the Kneecrushers. They saw the figure of an old woman slink away from their porch, but they thought nothing of it. They entered the house noisily.

"Hey Charcoal baby, we won the game!" yelled Doc. He stopped in the middle of his next yell, however, when he and the rest of the Slamdunkers saw Coal Black lying on the floor.

"What happened?" screamed Slappy.

Nappy picked up the piece of praline by Coal Black's hand. He sniffed it. "She's been poisoned!" he shouted.

"Better take her to the free clinic," said Creepy, peering through one eye.

"No man-the line is too long," said Sniffy, who went there a lot for cough syrup.

"Well, like, why don't we take her to Doctor Charming on the corner. His office is the max, I mean it's totally awesome," said Breezy. (Breezy was from California).

The seven basketball players lifted Coalie and carried her down the street to Doctor Charming's office. They burst into the reception room, and Roscoe said, "We want to see the doctor!"

The starchy nurse at the desk said, "Do you have an appointment?"

"No," said Roscoe, "this is an emergency. She's been poisoned!"

"What! Did I hear emergency?" called a voice inside the office, and

out burst handsome young Doctor Charming. He looked down at Coalie lying on the floor where the basketball players had dumped her and gasped "Why, she's beautiful!" and he kissed her. Nothing happened.

"I think you better pump her stomach, Doctor," said Roscoe.

So that's what the doctor did. About an hour later, Coalie opened her eyes. "What happened?" she asked.

"You were poisoned and like, Doctor Charming did a max job of saving your life," said Breezy (who else).

"Oh doctor, how can I ever thank you?" said Coalie, batting her long lashes at the doctor.

Doctor Charming gazed deeply into Coalie's eyes. "You can pay your bill on the way out."

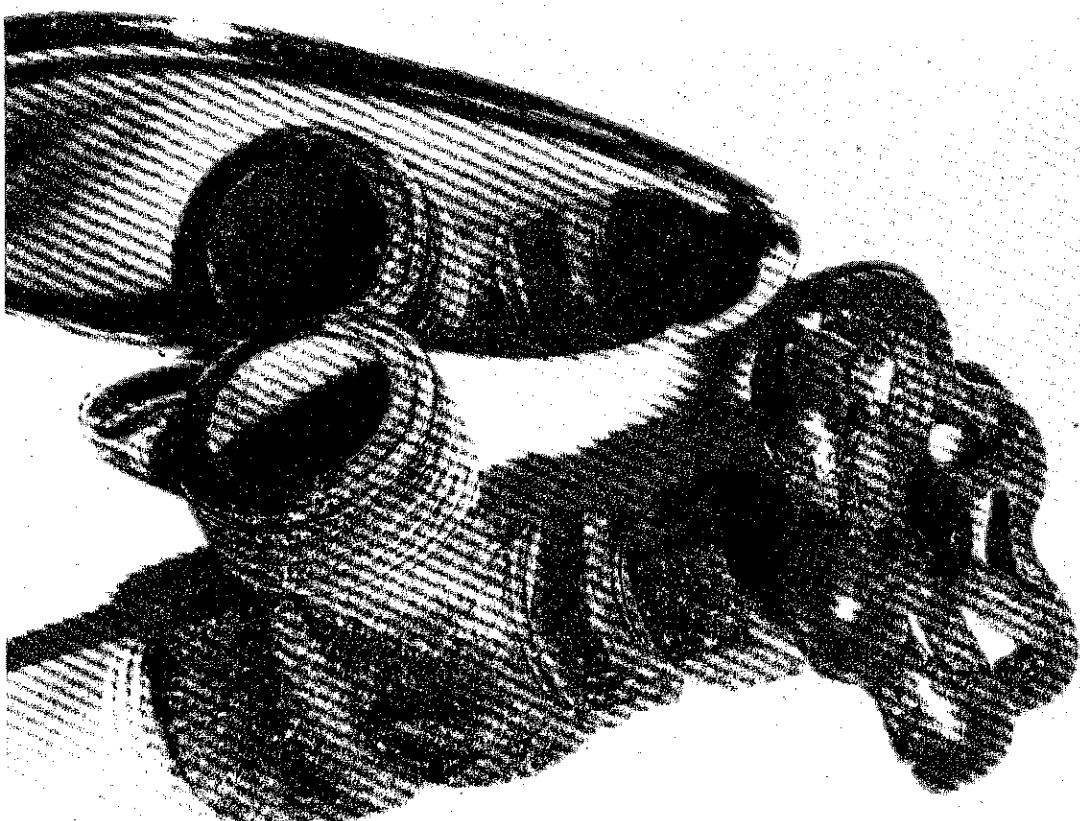
At that, Coalie went back home with the basketball players. She eventually married Roscoe, who won a contract for three million dollars with the NBA (Coalie had finally begun to use her brain). Coalie's stepmother Evalina, after finding out that Coalie was still alive (she was flying chicken again), switched to broiling all her foods, and she eventually ended up with an exercise and cooking program on cable television. After this, everybody lived happily ever after.

by Janice Edwards

CY

Cyclops felt the
Crescent moon wrench
Thru haze and trees.
On bended knees
It prayed that its days
Were soon to cease,
For its ways
Could not please
Mrs. Clops.

by Keith Roshno



James Baldwin[†]

The writings of blacks have enhanced the literature of America. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin have captured in words the beauty and the pain of being black Americans. James Baldwin is especially adept at portraying black life in America: his ability to show the inequality of the black man's and white man's roles in society and to show the black man with his faults and beauty has made Baldwin one of the most noteworthy writers of the twentieth century.

Baldwin was born in 1924; he was reared in the infamous section of New York known as Harlem. Baldwin's earliest years were spent in Harlem's Renaissance, the period that blacks began to find a heritage for themselves in the United States; during Baldwin's teenage years, depression settled upon the country. Around him, Baldwin could see the effects of despair upon his people. The despair was not wholly economic; it arose from the knowledge that blacks had little or no chance of making anything worthwhile of themselves. In his essay, "Down at the Cross" from *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin writes of the helplessness of a people who knew they were destined to be little more than busboys and maids. Blacks were lowly, inferior to whites and seldom ready to challenge the idea that they could not better themselves. In the same essay, Baldwin writes of the fear and anger of blacks; the fear was of the white man and the seemingly never-ending grip he had on the black man. Baldwin and his friends succumbed to this fear and wound up either on street corners, gaining courage from battles, or in "the church"—that ever-protective, often-times stifling sanctuary of the black race. To speak of the black man's anger, Baldwin himself was choking on this anger—anger at the white world for telling him he had a "place"—anger at the black world for telling him to stay in that place.

Baldwin knew that there was more to life than living in fear of whites; even in his fiction, his main characters, such as John in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, strive to look beyond their lowliness. John is an outcast; he does not fit into the turbulent ghetto life around him, nor can he accept the sanctuary of the church. In spite of this, John seeks a life better than his own, dreaming of the love and acceptance that is not his reality. This is a part of Baldwin's literary legacy to whites, and blacks both—that blacks are people also with desires and dreams.

Another feature of Baldwin's writings is the "mirror" which he has given blacks to look into; through his work, Baldwin shows blacks their strengths and weaknesses. One of the characteristics of Baldwin's writings is his use of the black church as a nucleus which many of his characters revolve around. In the play, *The Amen Corner*, and the novel *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Baldwin shows the emotional attachments his characters have for the church, while at the same time showing the hypocrisy of the church. Baldwin's characters seem to be of two minds about the church—either they are "deep into the faith" and ignore any hypocrisy on their own or the church's part, or they struggle to be free of

the church and its limitations so they can find true faith and love. In *Beale Street*, for example, Mrs. Hunt is determined to save her husband Frank's soul to the point of sacrificing her body to his lustful purposes; however, one is quick to see that Mrs. Hunt desires sexual contact with her husband. By pronouncing him a sinner and herself a martyr, Mrs. Hunt purges herself of the guilt that so many blacks have—that sexuality is a sin. In the same work, Baldwin gives us Fanny and Tish, whose honesty about their sexuality gives them a love more true than Mrs. Hunt's will ever be. In these two examples, Baldwin shows us the desire of many of the "saints" like Mrs. Hunt; their desire to be perfect and holy. In their quest for this "ideal" state, the people like Mrs. Hunt forget one essential thing—that they are human and are prone to human error. By denying their humanity through the very basic area of sexuality, the Mrs. Hunts of the world never really know themselves and instead of seeking the love and faith they desire through the painful but necessary route of human honesty, they choose the self righteous path of hypocrisy.

I admit Baldwin's writings have had an effect on my thinking. I see in his works his desire to show ordinary people struggling with life the best way they know how. I also see Baldwin's desire to show us the black religious world—that place where one cannot always have honesty and salvation. I think that Baldwin is telling us to open up our eyes and look at ourselves. Only when we can look at ourselves with honesty and reach out to others in honesty can we cease to be "colors" or hypocrites and start to be people. In his ability to make us look at ourselves, I believe James Baldwin has benefited all races.

by Janice Edwards

Once In Those Quiet Times

Once in those quiet times when
alone and watching from my
hidden perspective
a most completely silent
portion of my world,
I could find nothing to do,
nothing but hear
the omission of sound,
and it was not at once
that the stillness
of sight and sound
became unbearable,
and my forbidden observatory
became unobliging,
and a grave fear
emerged from the tidal rush
that no noise brought
to my head.
Two little girls clanked providentially past,
four drink cans stomped firmly about their shoes,
and with them rang
a simple song:
salvation.

by Don Hamerly

At First Glance, All is Clear

At first glance, all is clear,
Most like a spring-fed pool
that lets rest on its bottom
Time-polished pebbles.
The water, though, is cold,
And the sun's light tricks us,
Making the rocks seem so close
When they are so deep.

by Don Hamerly

This I would say to all the empty hearts--
Those hearts that take no chance but take the pain,
Enduring lonely portions of time, the sane,
The plain paper bags--you read your parts
The way you hear them said. Our lives are short,
And just because your days are long, you gain
No time but spend it tracing familiar lanes.
Lost on common ground, love never starts.
That I would say to all the thirsty souls,
But somehow spoken words turn into lies.
I will continue to pour their shots of gin
And listen to them and watch them grow so old.
They wonder why I smile amidst the cries;
I know the pain of having to leave again.

by Don Hamerly

White Walls

I see that all around the walls are white;
The dimmest ray can shade the walls with gray,
But shadows only serve to stress my plight.

I clutter the walls with color to hide the sight,
But masking does not make it go away--
I see that all around the walls are white.

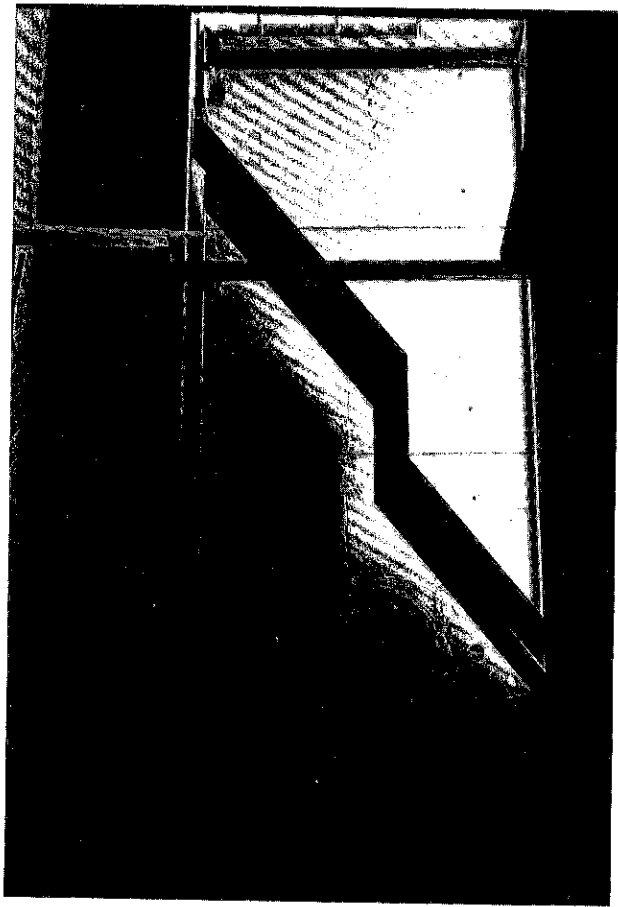
The ceiling, too, is pure but not too bright,
Displaying patterns, surely, but today
The shadows only serve to stress my plight.

Away from here nature's hues excite,
Delight the soul. In here, though, I should say
I see that all around the walls are white.

Albunem nourish your son, relieve his fright,
And keep from me that matter gray,
For shadows only serve to stress my plight.

No comfort comes from shutting out the light.
It is in the shadow I do not want to stay.
I see that all around the walls are white,
And shadows only serve to stress my plight.

by Don Hamerly



Golden Martyrs

Sonnet 73

*That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by-and-by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.*

—William Shakespeare

It didn't even matter that she wasn't blond. Marc wouldn't see through the haze of the drug they gave him two hours ago. Benzel something--to ease the pain of his breathing. And the nurse wouldn't care when she came in to wake Marc for some other drug that would make him sleep. That was the sort of vicious cycle these hospital people played. The respirator would still hiss and groan and sound as though it were dying instead of giving life; and respirators didn't notice things anyway.

She listened to it suck in air and push it back out for along time. It was one of the few consistent things in her life right now. It had the rhythm of waves breaking on rocks far away. Once they had gone to the beach in winter. It had been one of their first dates, almost fifty years ago. A walk to feel the wind and watch the gulls. Marc spent most of it looking for driftwood while she leaned up against the hood of their Plymouth.

"Hey, look at this one!" he yelled.

"Any barnacles?"

"No--it looks pretty clean. It'll go great up next to the Britannicas, huh?"

Marc collected driftwood, mainly small pieces. There were probably forty of them scattered over his den and they seemed to prosper thanks to cactus and small straw flowers. The room was homey, cozy, and lent the strength of the sea. How much water there is, he remarked. Enough to reach eternity. She told him that it ran off at the corner and someday space would be a swimming pool and the Earth would be called Columbus' beach. Marc laughed and splashed her with water. She got mad, saying the salt would stain her coat. So he went to her and helped to get the water off. The reflection of the sun off the water framed her

with a halo and scattered sprinkles amid her dark hair. He saw her sheepishly smile and stretched to touch her face. Following her brow he read the porcelain features of her face down to her long neck and became aware of her pulse. He always did seem to understand her, even in silence.

Not now though. The beach was some 500 miles away and not nearly as pretty since the oil companies set up offshore. He had once liked those walks. These days it was much too cold or impractical.

She stood and stretched her arms way up over her head. With a sigh, she walked over to the window and looked out. At least at work her mind could turn to other, less strenuous thoughts. She was a city manager. At her fingers every bus drove by, and by her fingers thousands of dollars were spent. The city was buoyant and policies were flexible. A professional, she was called. Nine to five, sometimes later, sometimes earlier, just depending on what governmental official was in or what governmental strategy needed a backer's support. She was successful and so was her city. And it didn't even matter...

He had been an architect. An artist with ideas and mathematics and actual visual perception. He built cathedrals--and was well known for it. "Religion is merely a game," he would say, and mentally make note to go to confessional tomorrow for having said it. But it kept him controversial enough to keep his name in the papers, and on the minds of the builders. Though to him, it wasn't that. A feeling, a security, while at the same time frightening. So much unknown to know. A feeling of warmth and wellbeing that started within that mystical soul and stretched beyond to the new school he built abroad, somewhere in Asia, with his successful profits, and no one knew. Perhaps it was a game.

They met one day over coffee. An argument over land. A laugh. He wanted the city's zenith property to build a new cathedral. She was fighting the council to turn it into a park and a paid admission swimming pool. In the twenty-four hour diner they argued. "Ease off," she said. But he would not. "Let go," he asked. But she would not. The futility was laughable and they did. She noticed that he had not lost that sense of right and hope and even a romantic sense of living. It was present when he talked of his church. "Cathedral," he pointed out. Yes, only the highest would he strive for. So she lost her mission for a small child. Perhaps it was won in his. And it didn't even matter...

He built his cathedral as he said he would. It was magnificent to behold. An ancient gothic feeling with such stained glass of dying martyrs. Joan of Arc seemed alive as the late afternoon dregs of sun invaded the church and hunted out all those who hid within for a day of security. The night which would follow allowed all the underlings to escape home still in the safety of God's creation--the dark, but never void night. Marc loved night. He told her night brought hope to the Earth. She thought he was wrong. "What can you see in the dark?" Perhaps he was too catholic to know. "God swallows everything and the moon is the reflection of ourselves on his breast. Sometimes we're good and full and sometimes we only give half or none at all. The dew which refreshes in His tear..." Sounded rather omniscient to her. Above and beyond her logic and business manners. Literally. She did not care for

the dark. It brought cold and gloom and fear. She much preferred her bright office with its stately chrome shelves of business law and real estate journals and loose files. Her upholstery was befitting of her position of city manager. It was expensive and efficient. It matched the modern type chrome and metal of her selves. One entire wall was composed of windows so she could see her city. Her pet peeve was that they had to be perfectly clean—extraordinarily clean. Nothing was to come between her and her city. The lights were bright fluorescent and gave a slightly yellow tinge to the room. All in all, it was very worthy of her.

Nothing was ever out of place, except for one small item. It was rarely noticed for only she and the night janitor aided its purpose. It was the only thing of any living present. Brought from days when pennies were scarce and everything was dear, a reminder of memories, was a simple garbage can. It was about a foot high and oval in shape. It was handmade of wicker and had small straw flowers sewn to its front. It was green and blue and alive with color. She hid it inside the cubbyhole of her desk and no one ever saw the beauty. Save the janitor.

It was the rattle of the evening nurse's keys that brought her back to the present. Glancing at her watch she saw Marc had been asleep for about three hours. Now dusk was quickly approaching. The nurse had brought for Marc a rusty colored liquid, but some of it escaped the left side of his mouth and stained his hospital gown. It looked like the dark clam sauce he would always get on his tie at Antoine's. It must have been thirty years or more since he first took her to hear the violinist minstrels. He had been so young.

"Tell me about yourself," Marc questioned.

"There's really not much to tell," she answered. "You know it all."

He shelled a large clam and sandwiched it inside the heel from their loaf of bread. "Nonsense. Well, I know you are this city's infamous backbone. The working wonder, I believe *The Herald* called you. And I know you like this kind of white wine," he added, picking up his glass and toasting her, "But as we say in Iowa, where do you hail from? Who are you?"

The players came over to their table about then and she was saved by the Italian's rich baritone. The strains of music wafted through the restaurant as lustily as did the smell of garlic and oregano. Marc stood up and joined the singers on some number—he was here so frequently he knew the men and songs by name.

When the performance was over his strength seemed sapped. "My parents used to bring me here, on vacation when we visited the city. I can remember pizza dough flying through the air earlier in my memories that I can anything else. Except maybe the tooth fairy," He refilled his glass again. "Mom's still back home. Loves the country. Besides, she's got her church group and ladies' club and I don't think she could ever leave Dad's grave. Every Sunday she goes to visit him. Do you want some spumoni?"

It was the evening nurse that once again brought her back to reality. With the jolt of turned on overhead lights, Marc didn't seem quite the same. She wished that all the people here would just leave Marc alone so

he could get some sleep. At least he could rest at home. Home. It seemed so empty and so far away. In the nearly fifty years they had been married they never separated for more than a day or two at a time. Even when she was offered that new job up on the East Coast Marc did what was necessary. He took a job with a house builder designing homes for the nouveau riche who moved to the west end of town. It was more reliable, more consistent work. Consistency was important so she could manage their household budgets. His school abroad was still financed. It was no longer holy player behind closed doors but a charitable tax write-off which looked good on her serviceable deed resume. When they moved she got a new office. It still had the windows. This one had more glass and chrome furniture. But it had no trash can. The janitor had that.

Several years later he learned his cathedral had become the object of a vandal's attack. All the stained glass windows had been broken. The arches were spray painted with slogans of a day he didn't want to know. And the sacristy had been burned. The oddity was he couldn't really remember what the sacristy looked like.

She did not plan parks for children anymore. She told him that she did not want children either. The world's populated enough now and she would not have even one. Her features had become chalky as the years passed, and her eyes got more piercing. He thought it strange how her hair stayed the same color, almost seemingly got darker while his grayed. He tried to remember a time when walks on the beach saw gulls and how nights showed God. He had not even been in a cathedral since that day. He became quiet and rarely spoke out for the underdog issue. Especially if it was right. His boss had started charging outrageous prices for his blueprints of late. They were not nearly as good, yet they were always in demand and sold quickly. In later years he had gotten famous designing homes with raised kitchens and sunken dens with fireplaces. By most, they were doing very well.

These hospital bills would pose no problems. But all their money put together couldn't stop what was happening. Near dawn, Marc began fading in and out of consciousness. He talked aloud to people who had long since preceded him in death. She did not pay attention to his ramblings. She was too busy summarizing her own. No one to sneak off to lake side picnics or argue over what is reality and what is concept. All the years gone by since they went to eat spaghetti and hear him sing with violins. Please wake up, she thought. I need to hear you. He had said that small, childlike angels would come for him with gold dust sprinkled in their hair. He had said he wasn't scared. "I miss you," he told her and went to sleep. This remembering was too much. If only he would wake up. She felt her insides heave forward and try to tell this man...that it did matter. But the nurse from the morning shift came in and ushered her out—some exam or something. She left a message that she would be at her office. It was unavoidable, she told them, but the council wants to increase federal revenue acceptance. She remembered all the days of him, and taking a deep breath turned, and stode down the corridor to her meeting.

Solitary Prints

These solitary prints in the sand,
imprints of a complementary set,
tread the froth upon the shore
and find the gifts of last ebb tide.

An organic debris is collected here,
beached upon these gulf sands
by these gulf waves and winds;

an accumulated hodge-podge
from off these shoals and past,
on beyond that long unbroken line.

a barnacled board lies in a stench
among a mass of washed up sargasso.

This purple man-o-war lies silver
in the sun beside a white mullet.

These prints turn to retrace steps,
placing a new left upon an old right.

Farther they retrace until no longer
can prints be found among the waves
breaking in this slow, soothing froth.

The warm gulf waters are moving
onshore, once more flowing, washing,
giving to this old print a new shape
indiscernible from ancient particles.

by Patrick A. Wright

Returning From the Wreck

From the unknown gulf of sunken treasure
lying still beneath the growing reef,
I emerge carrying my empty sack.

I shed my shark-skin suit and deeply breathe
as the onshore winds dry my private hair.
I laugh and I roll as sand clings to me.

Facing the noon-high sun, I recall that scene:
I find the wreck lying broken and still.
Red sea fans wave green water back and forth.

I circle the wreck and boldly dive in
among the haunted ribs, knife held tightly.
Shadows move and I lash out at nothing.

I move aft to find a broken rudder
amid a coil of crusted chain. I move
forward and find the anchor's empty hold.

The anchor's chain, still solid in the ring,
is coiled neatly beneath the empty flukes.
Sessile growth about the crown confounds all

my efforts to pry and release the shank.
I work at the stock and then at the throat
until my lungs are burning. Out of air,

I reach rather coolly, turn my reserve
and drop my tool into the coral reef.

by Patrick A. Wright

Poetry in Winter

Keep your hand
in your pocket
on cold, blue days

when the birds
get up late,
staying in the nest,

until
the warm sun shines
over the treetops,

warning the morning,
making the cold
not so cold.

Bundle up according
to the attitude
of the weather outside

gauging the coolness
or warmth by
the window pane.

by Patrick A. Wright

A Modern Poem

I want to write a modern poem
of hissing valves on spewing pipes.
It needs to show polluted ponds
with floating jars in rainbow slime.
It must be filled by stagnant flows
of frothy waste from far upstream.

Its breath will blow sulfurous gas
from night-blind leaks of local plants.
Its touch will shrink from clammy skin
of morning joggers in the smog.
Its tongue will taste an empty bite
of cigarettes and coffee stains.

All in all, the poem will hold
man's nature high enough to view.

by Patrick A. Wright

The Onshore Breeze

The onshore breeze
blows all day.
Fine sand clings to us.

A redwing blackbird
perches upon
a piece of driftwood.

A fiddler crab
tosses sand
into the breeze.

Sea gulls in a flock
fly about, scanning
along the beach.

Two marsh ducks
dart by low,
on a westward course.

Surging waves rework
the mud, the sand,
the broken shells.

by Patrick A. Wright

I Sit on the Stile Instead

I sit on the stile instead
of going over the fence
at the back of the pasture.

I watch the heifers.

Chewing, they watch me.
A squirrel does not care

that I sit here thinking
on wooden steps.

He is busy flickering
from limb to tree.

I lose his company.
A mockingbird comes

and fusses at me.
She flies off disgusted,
not getting an argument.

The ants march singularly
across the path, going out
for winter storage.

A heifer swishes a fly.
A purple martin swoops.
A bumble bee buzzes by.

The wooden steps press
creases into me.

by Patrick A. Wright

Raisin Muffins

At the kitchen table
I mix an egg with milk,
and stir this liquid into
my bowl of complements.

I slowly spoon the batter
into six, well-buttered cups.
I appraise each apportion of
my raisins, spoon to cup.

I slide the muffin tin into
the oven. Then I watch.
The centers slowly rise and
turn into a golden crust.

Back at the kitchen table,
beside a glass of milk,
I butter raisin muffins, and
I watch the butter melt.

by Patrick A. Wright

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