

ODYSSEY • 1991



— *Michael DeHoog*



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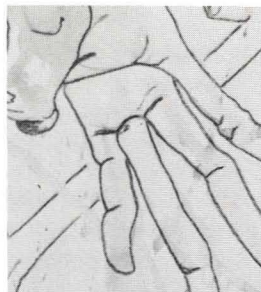
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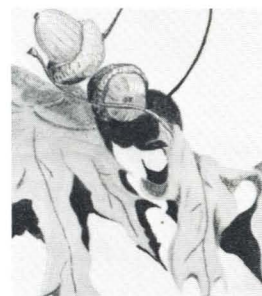
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"It's daft, if you ask me, wanting a room to use only one day a week. Why doesn't she go to the cinema or something on her day off?" Julie rolled over on to her stomach, enjoying the sensuous comfort of her mother's feather mattress. When she got married she would have a bed like this.

Her mother stopped folding laundry. "Not so daft if you live and work at the same place, as Aunt Dora does. I know she can be difficult, but she's been in service since she was fifteen, and never had the chance of a decent life. Now get off my bed and go and get ready for school."

Julie rolled off the bed. "I still can't see why it has to be my room," she grumbled as she left to do her mother's bidding.

She did feel sorry for Aunt Dora,

sandwich.

Her mother continued. "It'll be a bit tight, but we'll manage somehow to make you comfortable."

Aunt Dora put her cup in the saucer, reached into her handbag for a handkerchief, and began to cry. "Oh", she blubbered, "the Lord has answered my prayers. He will reward you in Heaven."

Julie, furious, could think of no response to this, but during the following weeks used every argument she could think of to change her mother's mind. Nothing worked.

The dreaded day arrived. Julie ran all the way home from school, praying that something disastrous had happened to delay the arrival of Aunt Dora's things. She tore up the stairs and into her old bedroom.

AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME

Julie's father had many times talked about the plight of women after World War I. So many men had been killed in the war, he said, that millions of women had been condemned to a life of servitude in other people's houses.

Aunt Dora was her mother's older sister, but quite unlike her mother, who was pretty with soft curled hair and a shy smile. Aunt Dora was plain and tight lipped, and had glistening whiskers on her chin.

She had strong opinions on everything, particularly raising children, and made Julie do things like go to Sunday school, and do embroidery to give as Christmas gifts, which her mother would not have insisted upon.

The thing about the room came up one day when Aunt Dora came to tea. Aunt Dora, sitting bolt upright in her chair at the tea table was saying, "All we want is a room we can use on our day off, where we can have our own furniture and books and be ordinary people once a week." She lifted her cup to her lips and took a sip of tea. "As long as we're there we're always at their beck and call."

There was a pause while Julie's mother looked at the ceiling. Then she said slowly, "Well, I suppose you could have Julie's room."

Julie choked on her cucumber

The small room was overflowing with a couch and two armchairs arranged around the fire, an organ in the alcove, and a table laid with china cups and saucers. A huge bible had pride of place on the mantles shelf.

The front door slammed and Aunt Dora slowly climbed the stairs, tired from the long walk and bus ride from her place of employment. Her plain face lit up when she saw the room. "Oh this is fine, just fine," she said, as she sat down on the couch with a sigh of contentment.

Every Wednesday thereafter, Aunt Dora, and Aunt May who was also in service, arrived about three o'clock. They had tea, read the bible to each other and sang hymns. They left about seven.

One Wednesday, Aunt Dora and Aunt May arrived as usual. Julie let them in and became the recipient of their greetings, and a spray of spittle from Aunt May's bay window teeth. They climbed the stairs carrying small parcels, which, Julie knew from experience, contained pastries for tea.

All was quiet for a while then came the sound of angry voices.

Julie's eyes sparkled. The aunts were having a row. She took off her shoes and scooted up to her room, which she referred to as a "midget's closet."

Aunt Dora's voice was loud. "You should be ashamed of yourself, throwing

yourself at him at your age."

"What do you mean, at my age? You're no spring chicken yourself." Aunt May's voice was shrill with indignation. "He and I have an understanding, so I don't see why you think I'm throwing myself at him."

"Why on earth would he have an understanding with you?" Aunt Dora said nastily.

Julie, in her room, was sniggering. Fancy the two old crows fighting over a man. She wondered if her mother were listening.

"You're jealous because he doesn't care for you," Aunt May said triumphantly, "you'd give anything to be in my shoes."

Aunt Dora's voice again. "I don't want to embarrass you, but I think you'll find he cares nothing for you at all. It so hap-

pens that I am in a position to know." Her voice dropped. "The Lord knows I don't want you to be hurt, and so I am telling you that the gentleman is already committed."

"You're a liar," Aunt May was hysterical. "How could you say such a cruel thing. You — posing as a Christian woman — may God forgive you."

There was a brief pause, then Julie heard a loud slapping noise, a shriek, and sounds of a scuffle.

Julie was frightened now. Crumbs, they were actually fighting. What should she do?

Her mother pounded up the stairs and flew into Aunt Dora's room. "Dora, May, what are you doing? Two grown women fighting. I never saw such a thing. What's gotten into you?"

Julie sauntered into the hallway and peered into the battleground. The aunts were sheepishly getting up off the floor. Aunt Dora's bun had come apart and was hanging down over her left ear, and her glasses were lying on the floor with one earpiece missing. Aunt May's straight bobbed hair was mussed, and her dress was above her knees.

Julie tried to assume a concerned look, but failed. It was just too funny.

Her mother said, "Julie, go downstairs and make some tea, and don't come

back up." Julie left, knowing better than to argue when her mother spoke like that.

A half an hour later her mother came downstairs and sank into a chair. "Pour me some tea Julie dear, and please don't ask any questions." They ate in silence.

After the tea things were cleared away, Julie sat down to do her embroidery, scowling as she stuck her fingers. There was a faint tap and Aunt Dora's head came round the door. She looked embarrassed.

"Tell you mother we're leaving now. We'll be back next Wednesday as usual." Julie thought she was going to say more, but obviously thought better of it and closed the door.

A few days later a letter came from Aunt Dora. It apologized for their uncharacteristic unladylike behaviour, and hoped that they would forgive and forget. It would never happen again.

Her mother read the letter twice,



and Julie saw her chest heave. She knelt down on the floor beside her mother.

"Mum, are you all right?"

Her mother lifted her head and Julie saw she was laughing.

"Oh Julie," she gasped, "it was so sad,

and yet funny at the same time. The man wasn't worth beans, and normally a decent woman wouldn't even look at him, let alone fight over him. But you know, as ridiculous as it was, your aunts were more human and likable than I've ever seen them before."

Julie and her mother looked at each other and collapsed hysterically on the floor.

Edna Jucha

Art — Lori Kittleson

It all started with a phone call. How I managed to become deranged enough to have even called Jane and then to have set up a luncheon engagement escapes the reasonable mind. I hesitate to even admit to the deed.

Blame my mental lapse on yesterday afternoon, the gloom nurtured my inane actions, as the rain drizzled in grays on the windows making life perfect for an afternoon of phone calling. Nesting down in my favorite chair, portable phone in hand, I posed ready for action with my Ranch-Style Doritos and diet Coke. I dialed Beth and to my horror, twenty rings, no answer. No problem, Anne

would certainly be home. Reassuring myself I reached again for the chips and settled back in my cushy chair. My fingers did the walking and then the fate worse than all fates, Anne's answering machine picked up. Thirty minutes later, fingers blue as a black eye, I sat dejected, lost and in deep despair. Searching through the television guide I found not one reasonable possibility for an afternoon's enjoyment. Then I did it. Worse than facing mud wrestling, football or reruns of Andy Griffith, I dialed 657-8451 and at the sound of hello I knew

I had reached the voice of void.

The next thing I knew forty minutes passed filled with listening and interjecting polite replies; "I agree!" Is that right? "She did!" "... no, no, no, you were right", and somehow I entangled myself into lunch this afternoon with Jane.

Arriving on time, as is my nature, I reflect that I have probably driven by this restaurant a million times but never stopped. I've heard people speak highly of the cuisine and service and actually looked forward to the meal. Arno's caters to the elite and I must admit many places exist where suffering would be harder to endure. This place already rates six

forks in my book; Jane picks only the best. She'd never consider anyplace where people wore less than designer clothes or used, forgive the morbid thought, paper napkins. Entering, I note the palm trees, two story waterfall, and the plush red rugs creating a rich background for everything Jane represents. Personally, I drink in the atmosphere and admit to myself that life appears rather lavish, easy and simple in a setting such as this. The word budget ceased to exist for Jane long ago and I'm much too proud to suggest a lesser place. After all, a girl deserves something nice occasionally.

The large carved walnut doors of Amos open

somehow as if someone special loomed in their wake, instinct told me it was Jane. I guess it must be in her timing. Jane always enters to the delight of herself. Always acting as though she owns the ground she stands on, she motions to the maitre de with her long finely manicured fingers and suddenly becomes aware of another's minor presence, namely mine.

"Diane," her voice filling the room with manners, "How are you? Why you look simply marvelous..." her arms outreach to me for the customary hug that goes with the salutation. "I am so glad you invited me to dine with you this marvelous afternoon.

Invited her? Somehow our versions differ.

"Hi, how are you doing," I grope for appropriate chatter, "I'm really glad you suggested Arno's. It really is lovely." I reach out for the hug and carefully time the turning of my cheek to catch the perfunctory kiss. Why, why am I here? My inner voice calls out in the proverbial wilderness, you dummy, you fool.

Sometimes I wonder why this strong aversion to Jane. Perhaps the time she fixed me up in high school with the ugliest guy in Milwaukee nurtured this resentment in me, I don't think I'll ever forgive her for that. Maybe the long hours of dialogue etched in my brain while I maintained

silence under self imposed duress puts this foul taste in my mouth, or just possibly though I hate to admit it, the dislike relates to the fact that she will always exist in a skinner, prettier form, imperious to any imperfection she might possess.

Jane and I go back many years. She, four other girls and myself labored through and shared our growing years. The other girls in our group now avoid Jane like the plague. I rationalize that I am more patient and accepting than them but a little voice deep inside tells me that I just can't handle being alone no matter at what cost to find company.

"Diane, Diane, our

table is ready."

I follow Jane and the waiter weaving between the tables till we position ourselves comfortably among two palms and receive the leather menus.

"Jane, that dress is new isn't it? Why it's lovely." Smiling, I try to do my part in sociability.

"Why how kind of you to notice. I found it at Saks yesterday and just couldn't pass it by. Why it just reached out and grabbed me. I mean it was one hundred dollars off the regular price and I just haven't had a new dress in ages ..."

Here we go again. Comprehending that people don't always buy

dresses that are one hundred dollars off does not compute in Jane's world. Doesn't she realize that people are starving in parts of the world that I can't pronounce? More importantly affording a new dress in the last eon or ion or whatever has escaped my lifestyle. Hers seems such an easy way of life. I think how lucky to exist at a level where there lives only you and nothing disturbs or aggravates the placenta. Facades are fragile, I console myself all the while envious, yet not wanting to walk in her shoes.

The waiter returns, the towel draped precisely over his arm, takes our drink orders, and promises to

return shortly. I wait for Jane's next soliloquy.

"Why, Diane, I think I'll just order this Lobster." She looks around the room, adjust her cloth napkin, takes note of who to impress and continues, "Sounds yummy. What are you going to order?"

"I think I'll have the Chicken in Orange Sauce."

"Why, you know I think I'll have the same thing."

I look up at the waiter as he returns and give him my order. I hear my order duplicated and thank him, returning my half-focused attention back to Jane.

"So, how is John doing?" I ask.

"Why, I swear, Diane,

I don't think you've heard a word I've said. John is history, he wanted too much. That doesn't mean I haven't been busy. Tom, called the other night and well, he's just so difficult, he wants me to cancel my trip and spend the week-end with him. Well, he can just wait because I'm not being inconvenienced by anyone, Especially a man. Lord knows there's enough of them out there ... Now, you take Bob, why he ..."

The food arrives, adorned with carrot curls and an artistic flair, the first bite scintillating the taste buds. I enjoy the food, my eardrums however remained on numb. Jane talks. I think. All this time squandered because I

lacked the strength to stay home in the quiet. Waste hours of listening to that which means nothing by someone whose values are so different than mine? I drift in and then out.

I feel an arm tap mine and tune back in to the verbiage of the table.

"Diane, did I tell you what my vet offered me for my Beemer. I just might take his offer. After all, the offer is more than reasonable, don't you think? Why, I already have the Mercedes and really don't need the Beemer and it is two years old, I just don't know what to do. Problems, problems." The hands wave in the air and her face shows mock despair. "Why, I just don't know what to do."

Trisha Economidis

It was as if the circus had come to town; farmers dressed in "Sunday" overalls, mothers carrying babies with shiny-clean faces, the newspaper man with his pad and pen, the eyes and ears of the curious come to see unbelievable sights. They paced the small town courtroom and spilled into the stairways. Their greetings and laughter rang out across the marble halls.

Near the front of the room were two wooden tables, scratched and marred from years of pens drummed on the surface and sweating palms pressed to their coolness. At the table on the left the girl, white-faced and drawn, sat between juvenile officers and a court-appointed lawyer. At the opposing table sat the parents; a mother looking frail and shaken, a father with a grim line where a mouth should have been and clinched fists at his side.

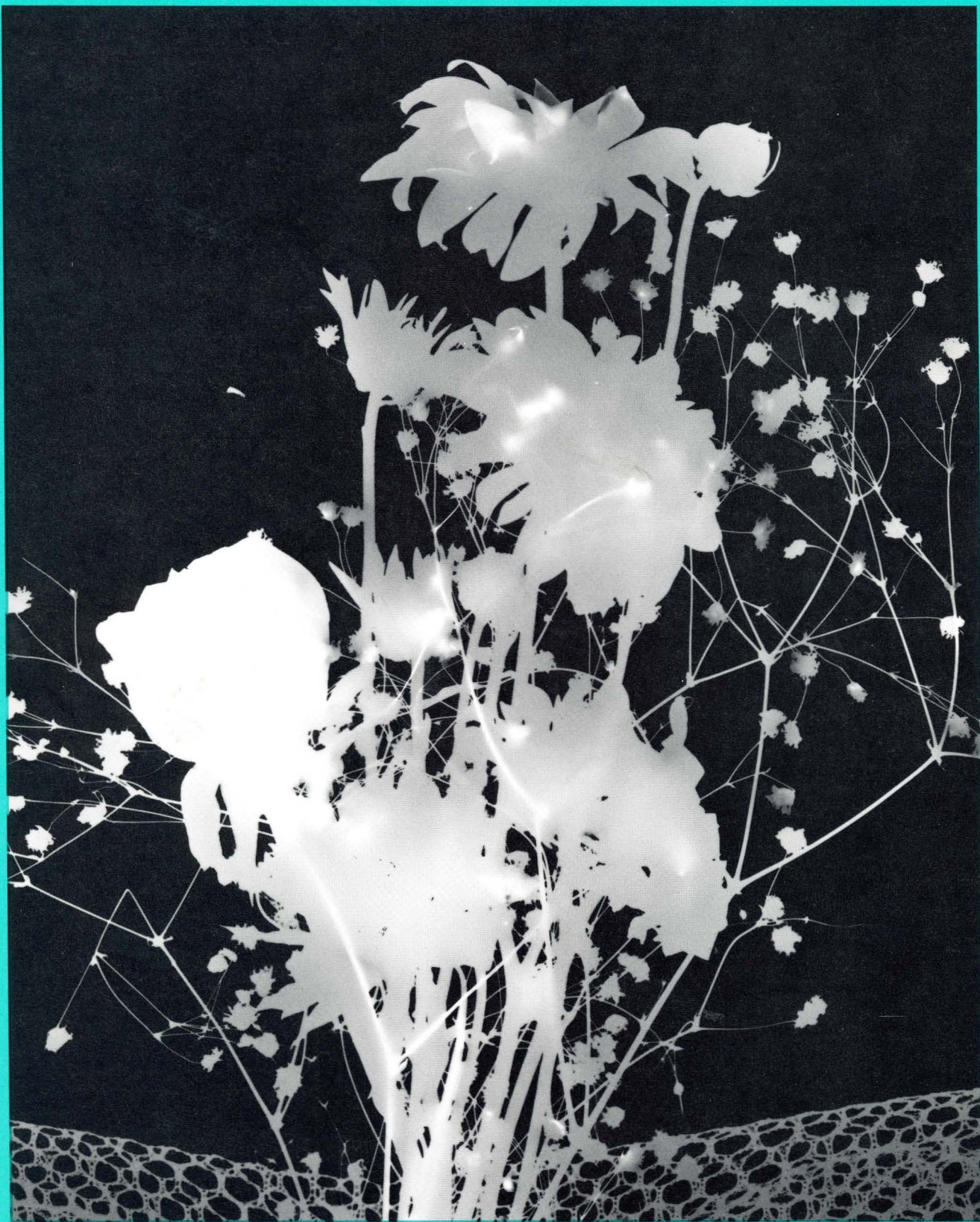
The girl wondered if the day was a dream. She watched herself walk to the witness stand and heard the quiet voice she knew to be her own. At first the words came haltingly, and then suddenly they began to tumble over one another, cascading out of the box into the room. She felt the stories being ripped from her soul, the pain laid fresh once again, a black sea of despair washing over her.

Somehow it was over and she felt the table's coolness beneath her fingers again. Faces and voices swirled around her like an underwater ballet as she struggled to maintain a link with reality.

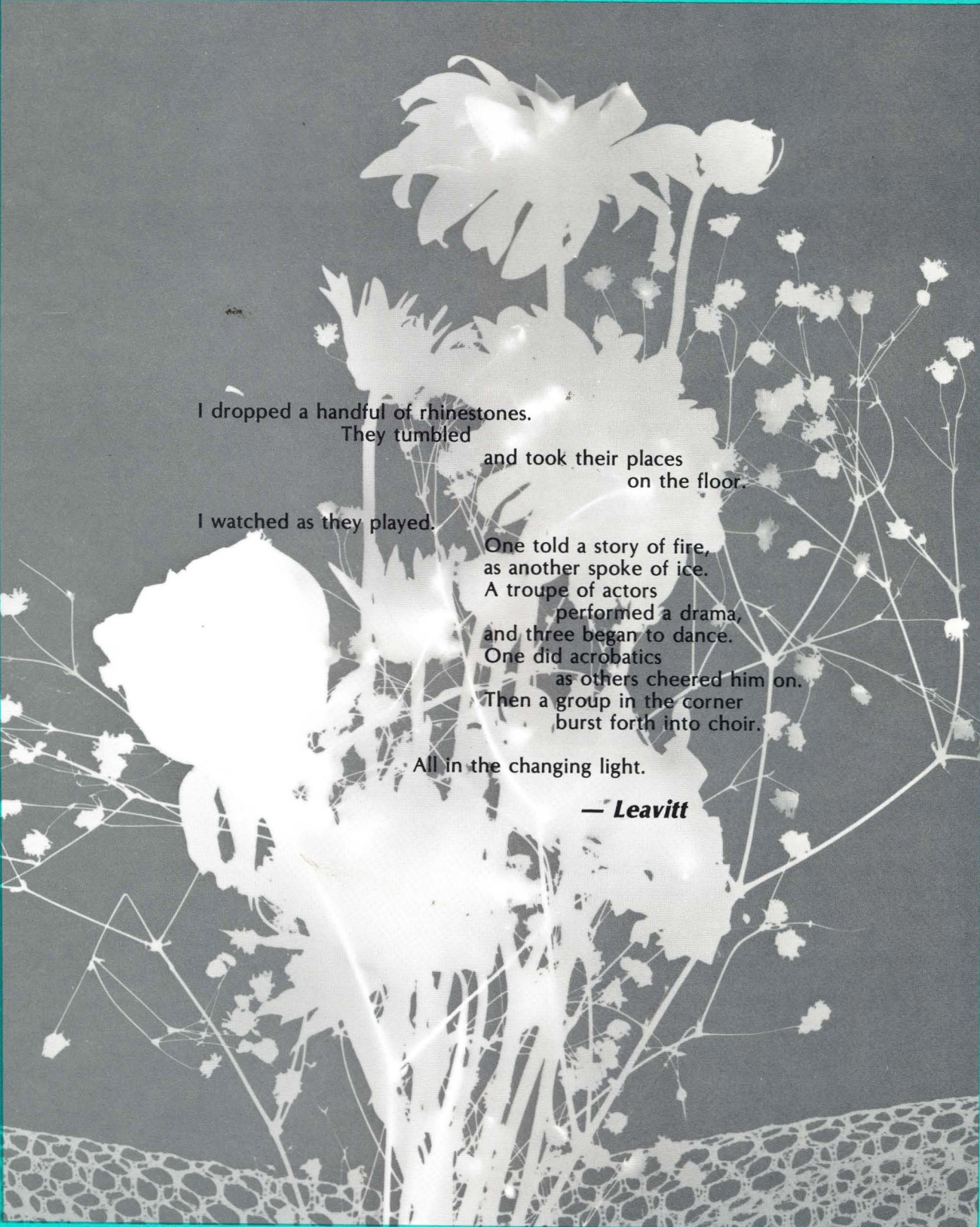
The tone of his voice began as soft and sad, but gradually became angry and harsh. She heard the words: "guilty of child abuse" and felt a wave move through the crowd, first of shock, then mob-like anger as bodies began to press around the tables. The banging of the gavel was lost in the roar as hands reached out to touch her arms and voices pleaded to "tell the truth." Truth, she learned that day, is not always the gatekeeper of freedom. A ring of policemen led her from the room; the victim having become the accused.

The day's excitement spent, the farmers turned toward their farms and thoughts of tomorrow's labor. Mothers rushed home to quiet hungry babies. The newspaper man hurried to make his deadline, knowing this would be a front page by-line. It was as if the circus had been to town





— Anne Branch



I dropped a handful of rhinestones.
They tumbled

and took their places
on the floor.

I watched as they played.

One told a story of fire,
as another spoke of ice.
A troupe of actors
performed a drama,
and three began to dance.
One did acrobatics
as others cheered him on.
Then a group in the corner
burst forth into choir.

All in the changing light.

— *Leavitt*

Tree Climbing

I stand next to a tree;
My clumsy feet wishing to conquer her,
My hands itching to grasp every limb unmercifully.
Yet, I stand without movement
Next to her, admiring her beauty.

Oh, but if I could embrace her for just a moment,
She would be mine for eternity;
Allowing no other to reach her fine extremities.
Yet, I stand without movement,
Just keeping her company for awhile.

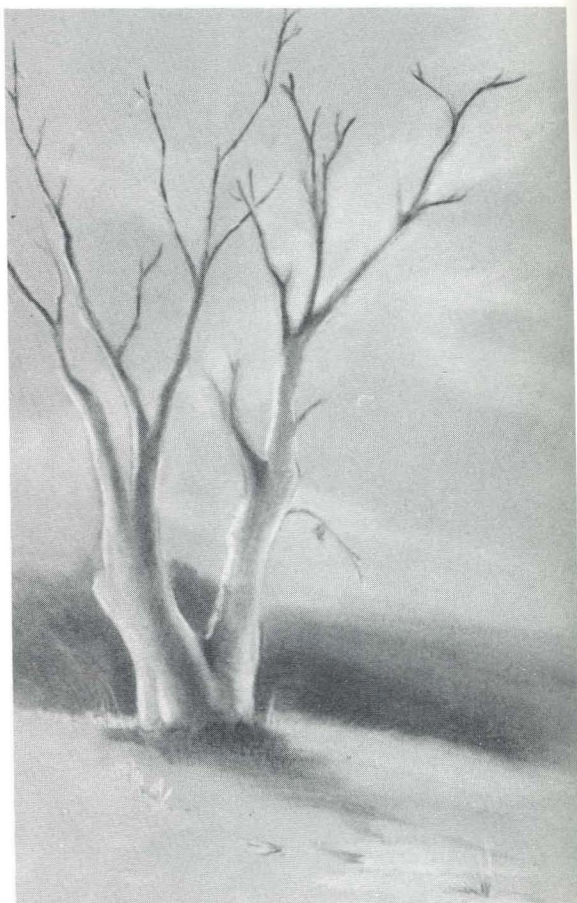
They say there are many trees in the forests of the earth.
I see only one, she stands alone,
With this lonely soul for an admirer.
Yet, I stand without movement,
Watching the restless wind move her all about.

I can stand no longer, my feet in the dirt.
For a fool waits on life,
When a wise man makes it happen.
Thus, I take my first embrace.
Her challenge is the adrenaline of my soul.

I climb higher into her thickness.
I see the world around, many others I have forsaken for this
journey.
I look down to catch a glimpse of where I used to be,
And I wish to go back to neither of these.
My only escape is to fall from her, a painful exit from this
bliss.

No, I have seen her from afar and from within.
I have experienced her every complexity,
Yet, a simple mind is mine.
And I stand without movement;
Remaining here until ...

— *Tim Collier*



— *Lori Kittleson*



— *Parsons*



Penny Cash —



Dianne Cash —

Ice and Plastic

I thought to turn my back on life;
I slammed the door and locked it tight
Against all pain and sacrifice.
Then cool and calm inside I stayed
This crystal prison I had made.
With smug aloofness
I observed the fools without
That unreserved gave their love
And sighs and tears
And shared their joys and conquered fears.

I silently compared my life
My cold and barren paradise.
Perhaps I could just share again
A little of the joy and pain
That comes with life and gives it meaning.
Perhaps just a small
Warm feeling
Would reopen my heart's door,
And I could feel again
The breathless soar and plunge of hope
And sorrow in my breast
Where so long has been a frigid nothingness.

Could I still feel the summer breeze,
And shed warm tears
Or sadly grieve for loves ones gone
Or promises broken?
Yes, this is my choice;
This question spoken:
Do I withdraw to an icy everest
Till only a plastic image is left,
Or trade my soul for a novocaine
That insures I will never feel again
The softness of a child's small hand —
The warmth and joy of being a friend?
No,
That price, I think, is much too high
For ice

And plastic

And living a lie.

Ann Williams —

Luci

"Luci, your grandmother, was a very strong willed woman." The elderly man swiped off the top of a weed with his stick. "Guess she had to be, coming clear across from eastern Europe with two kids in tow and little more than their fare in her pocket."

He stopped with his stick in mid-air and said slowly, "Story was, she sold a daughter to raise the money to come."

His companion, a woman about thirty, turned. "Oh Dad, I can't believe that. Nobody would do that — would they?"

The man shrugged. "Like I said, mother was very strong willed, and if that was what it took to emigrate — well. Of course nobody ever asked her, they wouldn't dare."

They walked on

in silence.

"Say daughter, did I ever tell you about mother and the butcher's shop?"

The woman shook her head.

The man smiled, took a large handkerchief out of his pocket and carefully arranged it on the ground. He motioned for the woman to sit, remarking, "About time you found out what rotten genes you've inherited." He settled down on the grass beside his daughter, picked a blade of grass and began to chew on it. After a pause he said, "I guess I was about five at the time — or maybe five and a half. Five in those days was not like today you know, particularly on a dairy farm. I mean I had serious chores to do

like gathering the eggs from the henhouse and running messages, and I had better do them right and on time or I would know about it. Anyway, I was not surprised when mother told me to go to the butcher's shop for two pounds of plate boil for dinner."

"What's plate boil, Dad?"

"It's stewing beef. Comes from around the ribs somewhere I believe. Anyway, I set off at a good run because our farm was about two miles from town and mother knew to a minute how long it took, and lingering wasn't allowed."

"Decker's Meat Market, where I was headed, sold meat and canned goods. The meat counter on the right ran the whole length of the shop, and at the back was a great big stainless steel door. That was the door to the freezer, and I remember I used to think awful things happened in there. Next to the freezer was a plain wooden door."

"When I got to Decker's, Big John, a huge man who boasted he stood 6'4" in his socks, stood behind the counter. He said he was

so big because he ate lots of meat, and in my youth I tried to emulate him. I never got taller than 5'8" or heavier than 165 lbs., though.

"I gave Big John my order and he picked up a piece of meat, weighed and wrapped it and handed it to me. I scuttled out of the shop and ran all the way home, arriving in record time and out of breath. I handed the package to mother, who folded back the paper, studied the contents, and then slowly lifted the package to her nose.

"Who serve you, boy?"

"Big John," I said, trembling, wondering what I'd done wrong.

"She stared at the meat, nodded to herself, rewrapped the package and stuffed it under her arm. She grabbed hold of my arm and set off at a good pace, dragging me along with her, my little legs doing three steps to her one. We didn't stop until we got inside Decker's where Big John was still behind the counter. He came forward with a smile.

"Is there a prob-

lem, Mrs. Raczkowski?"

"Did you serve my boy here with this?" she said, throwing the package of meat onto the counter.

"Big John looked down at the package and then at the tiny woman — my, mother was only 4'10" — and said, "Something wrong with it?"

"Mother didn't answer and for a while did not move. Then her hand shot out and she grabbed a large jar of picked herring from the counter and aimed it just above and slightly to the right of Big John. His head jerked as the jar crashed against the wall and splattered its contents over his enormous head.

"If I hadn't been so mortified I'd have laughed at the shocked and surprised look on his face. He opened his mouth to

protest, but mother hadn't finished with him by a jar of beets, another of horseradish, and one of olives. Mother accompanied this activity with a string of epithets, in Polish, which a drunken sailor would have blushed to hear. Mother never conquered the English language, but she had a fine Polish vocabulary and everyone in that neighbourhood understood Polish.

"Big John had by now, albeit slowly, come to the conclusion that this little woman was not suddenly going to become a pussycat, and so he was beating a hasty retreat to the back of the shop and the safety of the freezer. He reached the door and grabbed the handle, but mother, who up to now was just toying with him, picked up a large smoked ham

Edna Jucha

continued on 18



— *Joey Ricketson*

Freedom Danced

Sitting, watching,
Mesmerized,
The disciplined form enacts every
Fluctuation of the fugue.
My blood races,
Muscles

Contract, pushing the dancer

Into the air.

Steps
Unprohibited,

Movements

Spontaneous,
Blue eyes ablaze with freedom.
My body, a spectator, but
My spirit soars with the artist and is

Lifted into the air

By strong arms

And waits to be caught

By gentle hands.

Overwhelmed by a dancer's creation,
Tears wet my face.

The final note
Brings the dancer
And my spirit
To the ground.

Reality slaps my face.

— *Sandra Matlack*



— *Dana Church*

MASAI (God Chosen) WARRIOR

In the bright sunlight he stands,
Magnificent and haughty — nature's finest.
A proud pedestrian, with flat belly and spare flesh.
Nurtured with a diet of blood and milk,
And little else. Braving the heat and cold unclothed.

This black Apollo rejects our civilized eccentricities,
Our cars, our clothes, our tampered food,
Our shoes, soft beds and fluffy towels,
Our exercise machines to punish flaccid flesh,
Are all anathema to him.

And yet we all are brothers in our vanity.
Ours in scrubbed clean bodies,
Coiffured hair, and softened skin,
Fluorided teeth and polished nails,
Our natural odors overwhelmed with scent and soap.

But in this other world wherein our hero blooms,
His sweat is sweet. The scent he craves,
Is cattle dung and urine mixed with earth,
On unwashed bodies adorned with beads and bones,
All crowned with hair ashine with rancid grease.

Truly, beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
Our culture sways us whichever way.
But he, in all his human glory,
Would be God's chosen anywhere.

— *Edna Jucha*

and with an arm swing that would have done credit to a world series baseball pitcher, aimed the ham at the poor beleaguered fellow's right ear, and felled him to the floor.

"Everything went quiet for a few seconds, then the door next to the freezer opened and the owner, Mr. Decker, who must have been cowering behind the door, came out. Completely ignoring both the chaotic state of his shop and Big John who was on his hands and knees in a daze, he came over to mother, put his arm around her shoulders and quietly started to talk.

"Why is a nice lady like you using such language in public?" he said. "I'm sure there is nothing so serious we can't put it right. Whatever the problem is I will take care of it. You are a very good customer and I want your business, and I don't want you to be

upset about anything. Now let's be very calm and you tell me what the problem is."

"Soothed by Mr. Decker's treatment, Mother muttered that Big John was a crook, selling rotten meat to a little boy, and that he ought to be horse-whipped."

"Mr. Decker, still talking very gently, went to the back of the store and climbed over Big John to get behind the counter. He cut a huge piece of meat, wrapped it, handed it to mother and then steered her out of the shop. I came out from my hiding place in the corner, which was as far from the ruckus as I could get, and dashed out behind her.

The elderly narrator rolled over onto his knees and got up slowly. He rubbed his back and said wryly, "Old bones don't like damp grass." He looked down at his

daughter sprawled out on the grass. "You know, mother was not a bit embarrassed. She walked home with her head held high — quite pleased with herself in fact."

The woman sat up. "How did she get away with doing stuff like that?" she said. "I mean, if she did it today she'd be arrested, or at least be thrown out of the store."

"Well," the man said, "people were very poor in those days, so being served bad meat was considered criminal. Some of the townspeople thought that mother's actions were a bit extreme, but the consensus was that she was justified in acting the way she did. And I tell you what. From then on when any of our family went into Decker's, only Mr. Decker was allowed to wait on us, and we always got the very best cuts of meat."



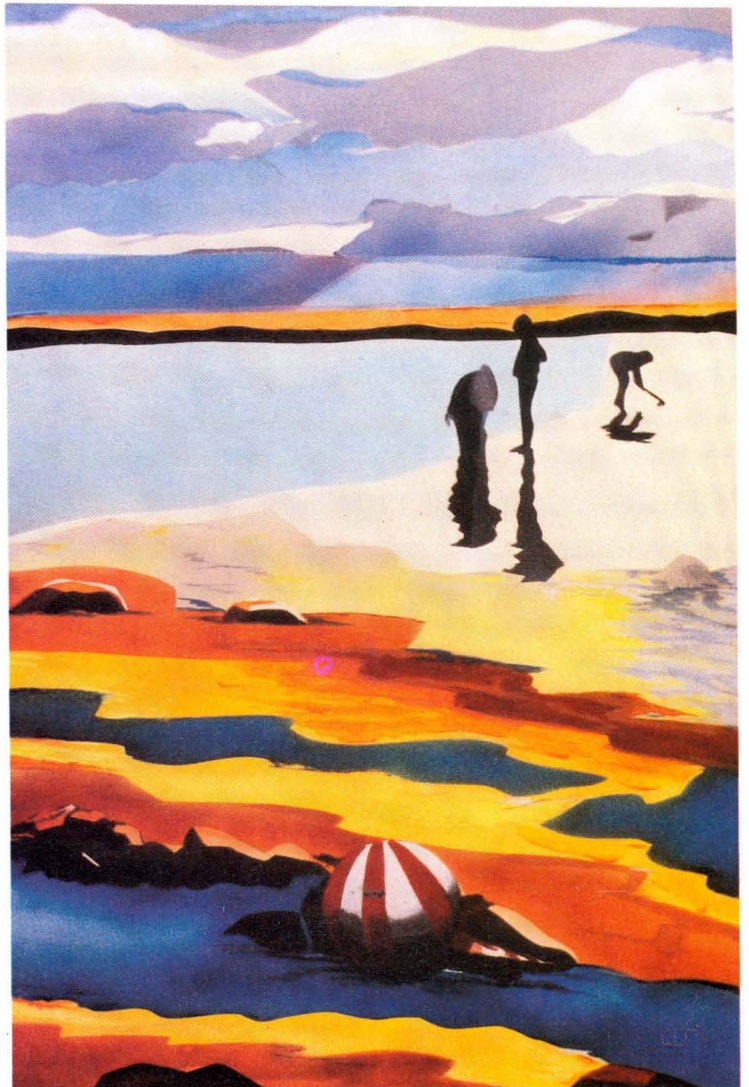
— *Jillann Denslow*

Morning fog

I move softly
In my quiet space
Opening windows
Turning on no lights
Inviting the lingering morning fog
inside.

An orphan, an Alice
I become.
An observer
In a silent minuet,
In a matrix of mist
That teases my ears
With its empty nearness
And drags its feet toward noon
Until a rumbled summons overhead
Restarts time.

— *Ann Williams*



— *J. Rickert*

Oh gentle breeze come and fill me,
and lift my soul toward heaven.
Oh night creatures come sing your songs of sorrow,
for I am weary and heavy laden.

My joy is no more and death's at the door,
I've been trampled and lain out to die.
All hope is lost with love the cost,
My body lies limp and I cry.

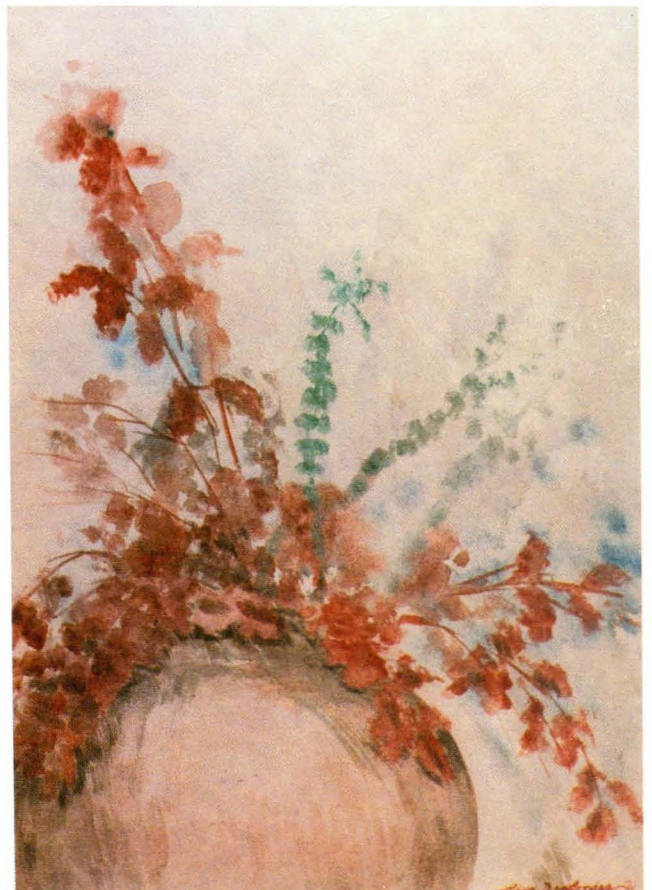
Come tear me away from the pain and the sorrow.
Come fill my darkness with light.
Come whisper the answer to the riddle of life,
and focus my mind on what's right.

Come free me from the chains and shackles,
that bind me body and soul,
come turn the key to release my freedom
I've paid the devil his toll.

— **Elizabeth Spell**



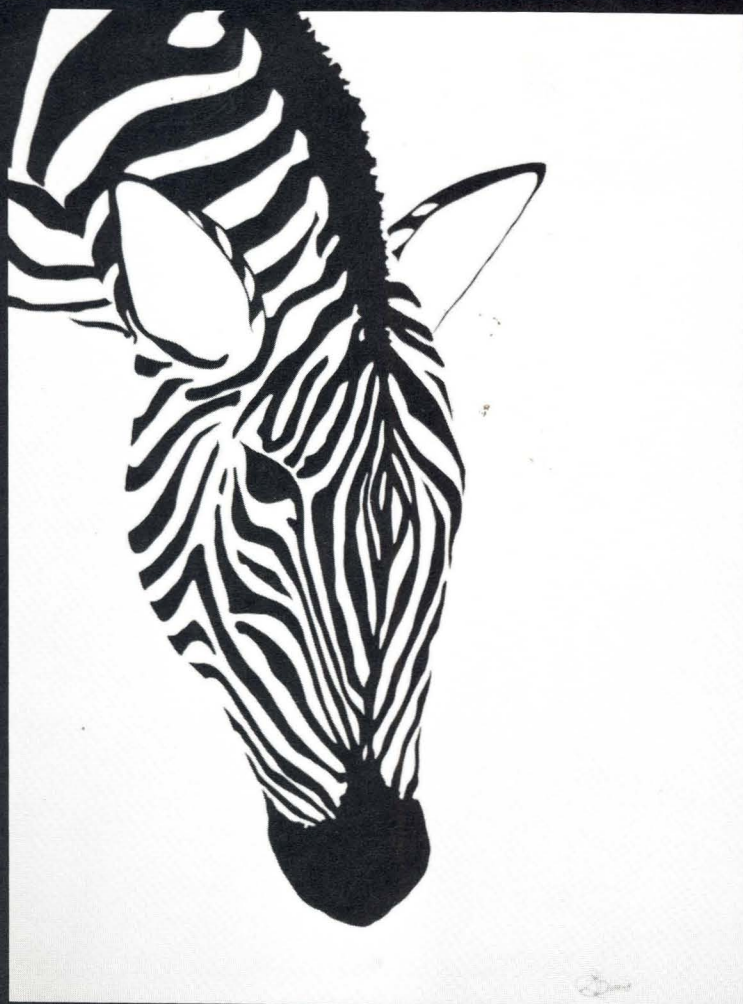
— **Lee Sullivan**



— **Lisa DesLondes**



— *Tommy Letourneau*

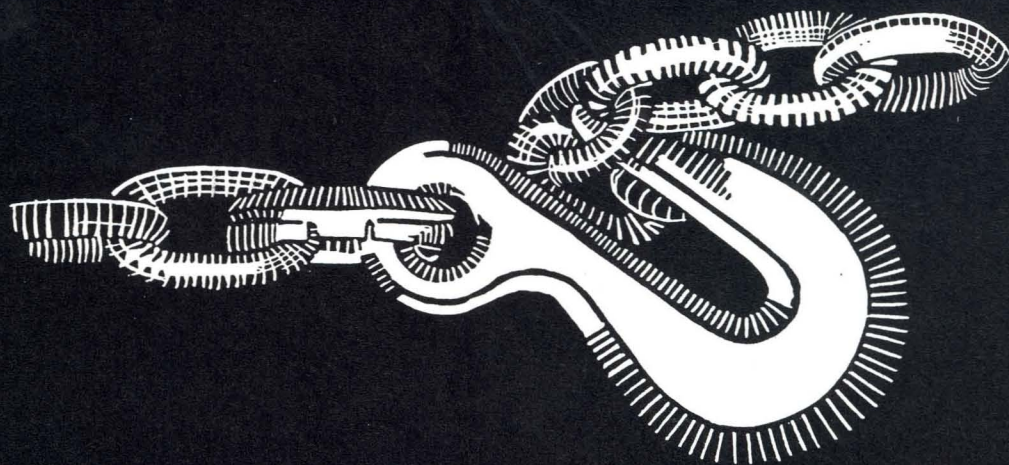


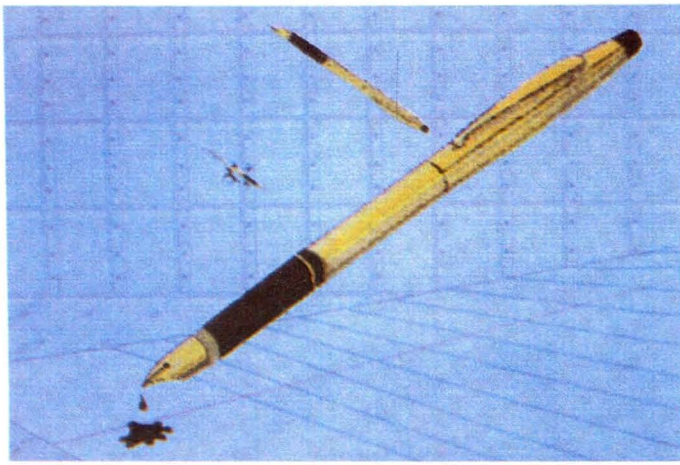
— *Sherry Moore*

— Micheal DeHoog



— Tommy Letourneau

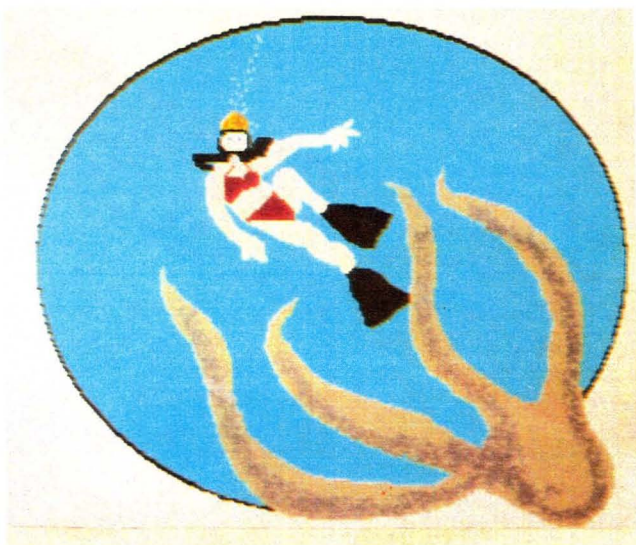




Bill Carlisle —



Sherry Moore —



Beth Volzone —



J. Rickert —



Penny Cash —



Lori Kittleson —



— *Jillann Denslow*

Victims of the Clock

Time is as a serpent in the grass —
Camouflaged.
When eyes are upon the snake,
He moves slowly; caution is his only friend.
A moments glance elsewhere — he is gone.

His patience is enduring.
Casually passing back and forth —
He waits.

The setting sun whispers to him
His purpose; the plan that he lives for.
Movements are quick now, yet precise.
Slender body hidden in the weeds —
Venom pulsating in his fangs —
As the clock strikes midnight,
The serpent strikes his prey.

— *Tim Collier*

Deep Inside

I am another person
Way down deep inside.
An entity for none to see,
The one I try to hide.

The person on the outside
Was molded by her peers.
The one I try to keep inside
Was formed by unshed tears.

And all the times I did not cry,
I hid a tattered heart,
The outside me got stronger,
Inside I fell apart.

Look at me now, closely
And should you see me laugh,
Remember that you can not see
All of me, but half.

— **Nena Ortiz**



— **Matt Schillig**

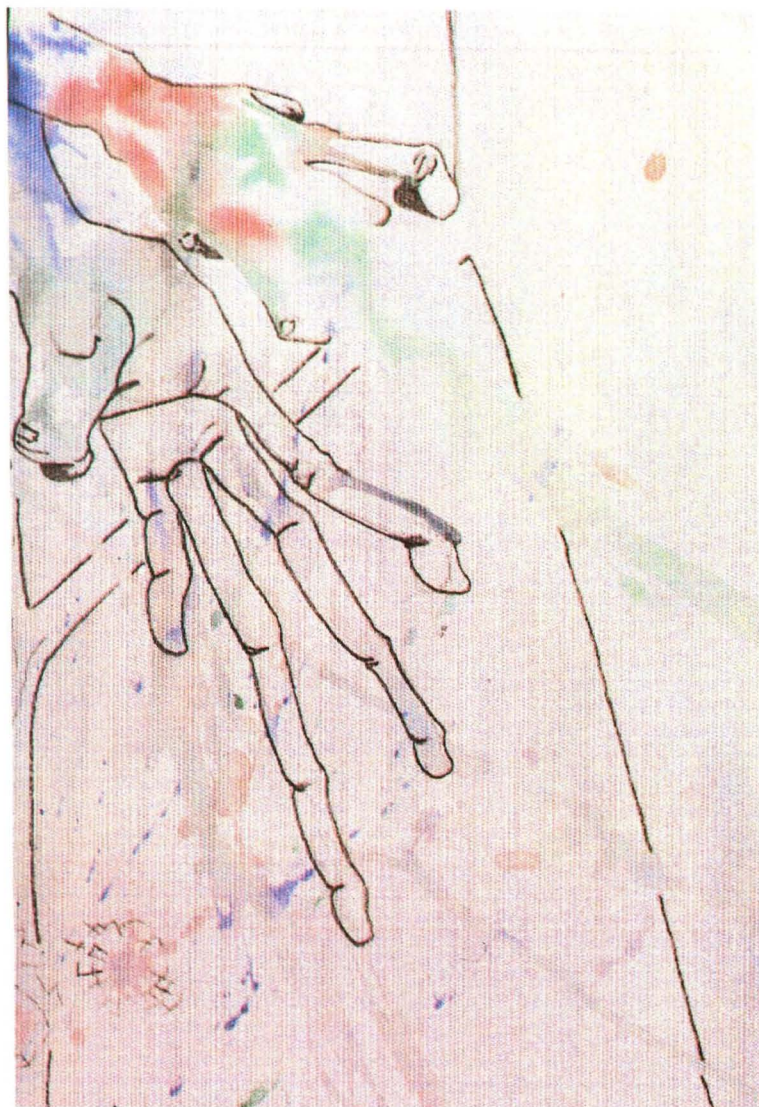
I used to take frequent walks through the forest near our farm in Vermont. I no longer do. While my feet would carry me aimlessly down faint animal trails, my mind would pound furiously through the maze of reason, in search of a solution. So concentrated on this journey in my head would I

become, that often I would find myself deep in the forest with no recollection of how I had gotten there or how long it had taken.

On an overcast day several months ago, I set out on one of my excursions with the intent of trying to figure out why the world of man was so cruel and unfair. The wilderness seemed to be a

perfect backdrop for the trial of such a time. I had recently suffered a car accident for which I was not at fault. While I escaped all injury, (and for that I was grateful), the driver of the car that hit mine was dead. His child had gone crashing through the windshield and was also dead. The driver left behind a young widow

IT WAS NO ACCIDENT



and an infant. Although I had not caused the accident, I had tremendous guilt. I felt badly that I had not been killed or even injured. The eyes of this woman and child seemed to scream "murderer" to me, and I felt responsible. It seemed unfair that they be dead and I be unscathed.

I set out on this walk to understand why it had happened to me. What had I done? Every eye that peered into mine was a jury. I wished to escape the maelstrom of guilt and experience the tranquility of nature. The hills were so graceful and alive, wise in their age, unfolding before me, beckoning me on toward the trees and mountains. I paused momentarily at a clear, lively stream in order to quench my thirst. This was to be my last rest before I entered the woods and began my climb. I noticed that the clouds were becoming darker, but decided to continue my walk. The forest was dark

— Joey Ricketson

and damp but this was all that I noticed for my surroundings were void of detail as my mind scrambled for reason.

I stopped when the rain began to pelt the leaves above my head. I knew that soon a torrent would be pounding down on the forest and myself too if I did not find shelter. The

A.J. ROHE

trail that I found myself upon appeared to be a stream, for the rocks I was climbing over were barren, except for some moss. As the rain came faster, a slight trickle began to flow beneath my feet. I noticed a large crevice between two boulders off to the side and decided to take shelter there. When I sat down, I noticed that my feet were extremely sore, and that my stomach was aching for food. I must have been climbing for quite some time. I was no longer on the trail through the forest, but somewhere on the side of a mountain. When the trail had shifted to a vertical I did not know, nor did I remember exactly what it was that I had been considering. I leaned against the boulder and closed my weary eyes, hoping that the storm would be brief.

I had a dream in which the widow came to me. She was carrying her infant and they were both clad in white robes. I could

feel her happiness and hear the joyful coos of her child. She was cradling the infant in her arms and singing to it. She seemed to float as she danced before me. Her smiling face was mouthing the words "thank-you" over and over. My dream then flashed to the gory face of the dead driver and the body of his child. The bodies rose up and began to chase the woman and infant. They were soon caught and beaten. Now it was the woman and children who were injured and sad. The man turned, tipped a bottle, drained it into his throat, then smashed it over the woman's back. She collapsed into a heap at his feet, the child still in her arms. The man laughed and climbed into a car — the car that had hit mine. I felt myself running from it, searching for escape, but all I could see was the sneer on his face as the car bore down on me. I was helpless to move. Just before I would surely have been crushed, I awoke.

There was the woman and child, they were smiling and healthy again. They seemed to be at peace. A tear was running down the woman's cheek as she gazed upon me. She brushed it away and smiled, extending her hand in my direction. I'm so sorry," were the only words that I could muster.

She nodded in response and whispered those same two words "Thank-you."

I reached for her, and as we touched, I felt an overwhelming sense of joy, strength, and life. Again the words were whispered gently into my ear, "Thank-you."

When I came to my senses the rain had stopped. It was dark out. I knew that I had to try to get home for it would be a very long and cold night, especially with no fire and no dry clothing. As I made my way back down the rocks, I pondered the dream. The guilt seemed to lift from off of my shoulders, and I hastened to make it home. As I bounded down the trail and over wet rocks, I lost my footing, and crumpled to my knees. My ankle was either broken or badly sprained. I spent the rest of that night in agony, pulling myself along the wet forest floor, freezing, hungry. My pleasant walk in the woods had turned out to be hell, but I had seen things from a new angle.

As soon as I got home I called on the widow.

"I'm sorry," I said.

She gave me a long deep look and replied "Thank-you."

The feeling I had experienced in my dream came flooding back.

So, you see, I no longer take walks: my ankle still bothers me, the forest reminds me of that awful return trip, and I am now married to that young and beautiful widow. She is ever so happy, and much more enjoyable than my walks.

It's What The Music's For

Lori would have rather listened to heavy metal than listen to the elevator music that drifted softly out of the single speaker. What was it for, anyway? As if elevator music was going to ease the tension that the rest of the world so kindly handed her. The music reminded her of an old friend she'd had in high school. Dean was his name. And no matter how stressed out she and everyone else would get, Dean would always have a smile to offer, whether you wanted it or not. Just like the music. Whether you wanted it or not, it was there. She envied his hippie beliefs, but knew that her key to happiness was not through the mind but through the wallet. She was a working woman, and if the stress of her job was too much, then there were plenty of other ladies willing to take her job at half the salary she made.

The elevator stopped on the fifth floor. A janitor and two other men dressed in business suits got off, leaving Lori alone for the rest of the ride. Even though she didn't like the music, she couldn't deny the soothing effect it had on her. Four more floors and it would be over. Too bad. She would be stepping back out into

the pit of hell they called life. With that thought, she wished the ride was over. The only thing worse than stress, she thought, is thinking about stress. It was always easier to face it head on and get it over with than take it apart and analyze it and see it for what it really was, unfair. Which was what she was doing now, and why she was thankful to hear the ring of the bell that signaled her arrival to the ninth floor.

To her surprise, the ninth floor was a lot quieter than usual. As a matter of fact, there wasn't a person in sight. It looks like it's going to be a nice day today.

Before she could finish the thought, the reality of it struck her. On a normal day, there would be people running around screaming like chickens in a slaughterhouse. And this was a normal day. There was nothing special happening today, either somebody was playing an amusing joke on her, or something was very wrong.

She turned around to acknowledge the fact that she was on the right floor. The sign beside the elevator doors told her that she was. If it had not been for the weirdness of the situation, she would have

been the happiest woman alive. There was obviously no work today, but something told her that work was what she wanted. This was like the Twilight Zone stuff, and she never did like that show. Creepy things had no part in her life. She had to find out what was going on.

The fifth floor, she thought. There had to be people on the fifth floor because she saw them get off the elevator. She got back on the elevator and pushed the bottom for the fifth floor. The doors shut, and the elevator slowly began its downward journey, she would find the janitor and ask him if he knew what had happened. Somebody had to know. A whole floor of employees couldn't just disappear from the face of the Earth. There was a logical explanation for this, and she couldn't wait to hear it.

The bell rang, and the number "five" above the doors was lit. She stepped out onto the fifth floor, feeling the same thing she had felt four floors up, emptiness. She began walking around desks and chairs looking for any sign of life. None was to be found. It was probably what the place seemed like on Christmas Day; the only day

Eric K. Willey

of the year it was closed.

Fire! The thought hit her out of nowhere. The building's probably on fire and everybody evacuated except me because I was in the elevator and didn't hear the announcement. She went to the window to see the fire trucks and confirm what she thought. She was wrong, and the sight that she now witnessed told her that she couldn't be further from the truth. Not only were there no fire trucks, but there was no form of life at all in the fifty square mile of city that was spread out before her. Not a single car moving. Not a bird flying. No people on the street. Nothing.

In the distance she could hear the elevator music, and it once again reminded her of Dean. The idea of sitting down for awhile to relax and enjoy the peace hit her, and she burst out in a fit of hysterical laughter. Oh yeah, another hectic day at work. What an exciting turn of events.

No. She had to find out what was going on. There was always a logical explanation for weird stuff like this. She would just have to go and find out what it was.

She got back into the elevator and pressed

the button for the lobby. It began to descend, and once again the music relaxed her, making her feel like a feather floating on an endless breeze. What a peaceful sound it was. Despite the fact that there was nobody in the building, and apparently nobody outside, she couldn't help the feeling of happiness that washed over her. No people meant stress. Which meant the two things in life that she hated the most were gone.

The bell snapped her out of it. She had been so in depth in her thoughts that she had forgotten where she was, and what she was doing. As she stepped out into the lobby, the memory of the elevator ride she had just taken seemed more like a dream. She decided to make a quick trip around the lobby, just in case, before she went out into the city.

The noise she heard made her almost choke on her own saliva. It was a clicking sound. Click...click...click...click. Like a typewriter. She turned around to see a figure sitting about twenty feet away, typing on what appeared to be a very old typewriter. As she approached him, she could clearly make out his features. He had long, straight white hair that cascaded over his shoulders and down to his waist. His deep blue eyes had an intense stare as he punched away at the keys on his typewriter. He seemed oblivious to Lori's presence. Before she could say anything, he stopped

typing and looked up at her. His voice was smooth; neither masculine nor feminine.

"It's what the music's for, you know." The statement was made as if they had been holding a conversation for the past ten minutes. Lori was really confused, and the expression on her face showed it. She tried to contemplate what he had said, but the gears in her brain were jammed. His stare remained on her as he awaited her reply. After a minute she did.

"Pardon?"

"The music," he repeated. "The world so kindly hands you stress and I so kindly hand you the music. The music has a message that you don't even hear." He lowered his head and began punching keys on his typewriter. Before she could ask him what he was doing, music filled her ears and head. It seemed to be coming out of everything, the walls, tables, chairs, even the ceiling.

It was so soft and gentle that she couldn't help closing her eyes just for a little bit. She could feel her mind drifting away, and she was no longer conscious of where she was. She had no body, just spirit. And hers was soaring through the sky like a bird over a great sea. Love and happiness were the prominent feelings here. Stress seemed alien to her now. Her whole life seemed alien to her now. It was as if she had always been soaring through the sky and always would be. That was

good. Yes. There was nothing to worry about here. The sky was blue, and blue was nice. It rela-

"See what I mean."

Her eyes came open, and her first thought was that she was late for work. When she saw who was sitting in front of her, she remembered where she was, and what had happened.

Before anything else weird happened, she had to ask, "Who are you, and what's going on?"

He said, "I am The Writer. Everyone has a story, and I'm the one who creates that story. Each person, from beginning to end. Each thing, from beginning to end. I create and destroy. You refer to me as God, and in a way I am, but I am also the Devil. I just write. Good or bad. Whatever suits my fancy. Everything that happens is because I make it happen. Comprehend?"

She was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. The whole world was gone, this man sitting in front of her was claiming to be God and the Devil. But not really because he was just a simple writer that created and destroyed everything. It was all insane. She wanted to be in her office with people standing around screaming their heads off. That was something she could deal with. Not this. This was too far out for her to handle. Since this guy obviously had some idea as to what was going on, she figured she'd go along with the story for her curiosity's sake.

"So, I guess you can tell me where everybody is then, right?" Please say something normal, she thought. Please.

"Well, right now their bodies don't exist, and their minds are in a state of remission. I got rid of them all just so you and I could have this little chance to chat. Now, wasn't that sweet of me?" His eyes seemed sincere, but there was no way that he could have been serious.

"What do you mean, their bodies don't exist? How can their bodies not exist? Where are they?"

"They're gone. All it takes is the push of a few buttons and bye-bye. Looks like it's just you and me, kid." His sense of humor was about as odd as his appearance.

"People can't just disappear into thin air. You had to put them somewhere."

"I didn't put them anywhere. They're just gone. Is it really that hard for you to understand?"

It was obvious where this conversation was going. She was about to turn around and walk out when he turned his attention to his typewriter and quickly began punching keys. God, he's weird, she thought.

What she witnessed next she would not have believed in a million years, if it wasn't for the fact that she had seen it with her own two eyes.

In the time took to blink, there were hundreds of people all over the lobby. People she recognized and saw everyday. It looked to

be a typical day at work. But nobody saw her, and nobody saw who was still sitting in front of her. She tried grabbing people, but it was as if they had no substance. She could feel their warmth, though, so that meant that they had to be there. They couldn't hear her either when she stood right in front of them and screamed her throat raw. Tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She wanted to be out of this nightmare.

"Stop it! Please stop this!" She could feel her sanity slipping.

"Keep watching."

He said it without looking up from his typing.

Her bottom jaw dropped when she saw the front door of the building open and the person that came in. It was herself. She was wearing the same clothes that she wore now. She watched as the person that appeared to be her hastily weaved in and out of people, making her way to the elevator behind her.

She realized what was happening. It was like a rerun of what happened earlier. The elevator door began to shut, then everything stopped. People were completely motionless. Mouths were opened in mid-sentence. Nothing moved except for the man sitting at the typewriter who looked up at Lori.

"Well. Are you going to follow yourself?" He gestured to the half-opened elevator door.

She went to the elevator and slipped through the opening be-

tween the two doors. They closed the rest of the way, and time was rolling again. The elevator began rising. Her face, the face that she was now looking at, looked like the face of a woman whose hands were slipping off the last string of sanity in her grasp. This woman was over the edge. I couldn't look that bad, she thought. But deep down inside, she knew that it was only a matter of time before she drove headfirst into the bottomless pit of insanity. She hadn't even realized how bad it had become. Her teeth were clenched together so tight that she was surprised that they didn't shatter.

The elevator stopped, and the three men got off. Lori stepped as far away from her body as possible. Being that close to someone with a face like that, even if it was her, wasn't a very comfortable position to be in. The doors closed, and the elevator began to rise again.

Lori jumped when she heard the woman beside her scream and bang on the walls of the elevator in a fit of hysteria.

"STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!!" She screamed it over and over again.

The elevator stopped rising, and Lori realized that they were on the ninth floor. As the doors came open, Lori jumped out with a screaming and wailing Lori right behind her. She felt the warmth of entity go through her and watched as she ran down the hall, blaring out her

insane plea.

"STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!!"

All the workers on the ninth floor stood mesmerized as they watched the exhibition before them. Lori could see the pity in their eyes, but she could also see the fear in them too. They all feared ending up like this.

Their trance was broken when their psychotic co-worker picked up an empty chair and brought it down hard on the head of Elliot Dimpsey, knocking him unconscious. His body hit the floor like a falling brick. As she held the chair up again to deliver another blow, she was tackled from behind by three people. They held her down and she screamed: "STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!! STOP THE MUSIC!!!"

As Lori watched the ridiculous display, the reality of the whole situation hit her. This was what it was like to go insane. She remembered, at one point in time, wondering what it would be like, but she never would have even dreamed that it would be like this. It was like a separation of body and soul. The woman struggling underneath the three men was nothing but a mindless frame of flesh and bones. Maybe she kept repeating that phrase because it was her last rational thought before she slipped over the edge.

"Good guess. Now why don't you come back down so we can finish our little chat."

She looked all

around but couldn't see him. "Well, if you can make anything happen, then why don't you just write me on down there?"

And that's exactly what he did. In the next second, she was standing right in front of him, just like she was earlier. The lobby was empty again. What happened on the ninth floor was still burning in her mind.

She was now ready to believe that this guy was what he claimed to be. What else was there for her to believe? It was obvious that he had the power to do whatever he pleased.

He looked up to her and said, "It was either that or a high-dive off the top floor, and believe me, they're a lot more painful than people give them credit for."

"So what are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying that your life was going nowhere, and I was going to end it for you anyway. Even if you hadn't freaked out, I still would have ended it. Deep down inside, it's what you wanted, and I gave it to you. What more could a person ask for?" He smiled.

"How about just a simple life with nothing to have to worry about." She felt it was a good answer.

He laughed.

"Because it's my world, and nobody has a simple life in my world. Unless, of course, I want them to. Simple's no fun. Simple doesn't get you anywhere."

This answered everything for her. Her life was never meant to be enjoyed.

Continued on 36

do."

I order dessert, Jane orders coffee and I sense the lunch at Arnos coming to an end. I reflect on Jane and suddenly come to the realization that this lunch is not about Jane but about me. I sit here, judging her world instead of dealing with my own. She's not the problem.

"Diane your portion of the check comes to Twenty-eight ninety-five, now that doesn't include

your gratuity, dear and mine comes to twenty-two forty-three. You know you really shouldn't have eaten that dessert. Men don't like fat women you know!" She pauses and then has the courtesy to say, "Now, do tell me what's been happening to you lately!"

A glimmer of light penetrates my brain as we walk to the big wooden doors of Amos. Jane turns, or should I say pirouettes, before taking her exit, holds

her hand and says;

"We really should do this again, real soon, darling. Must go. Call me soon!"

Her exit equals her entrance, the double doors swallowing her. I stand there reflecting and realize with a faint smile upon my lips that I have choices. I don't need Jane. I have been just filling a void with a void and coming out with nada.

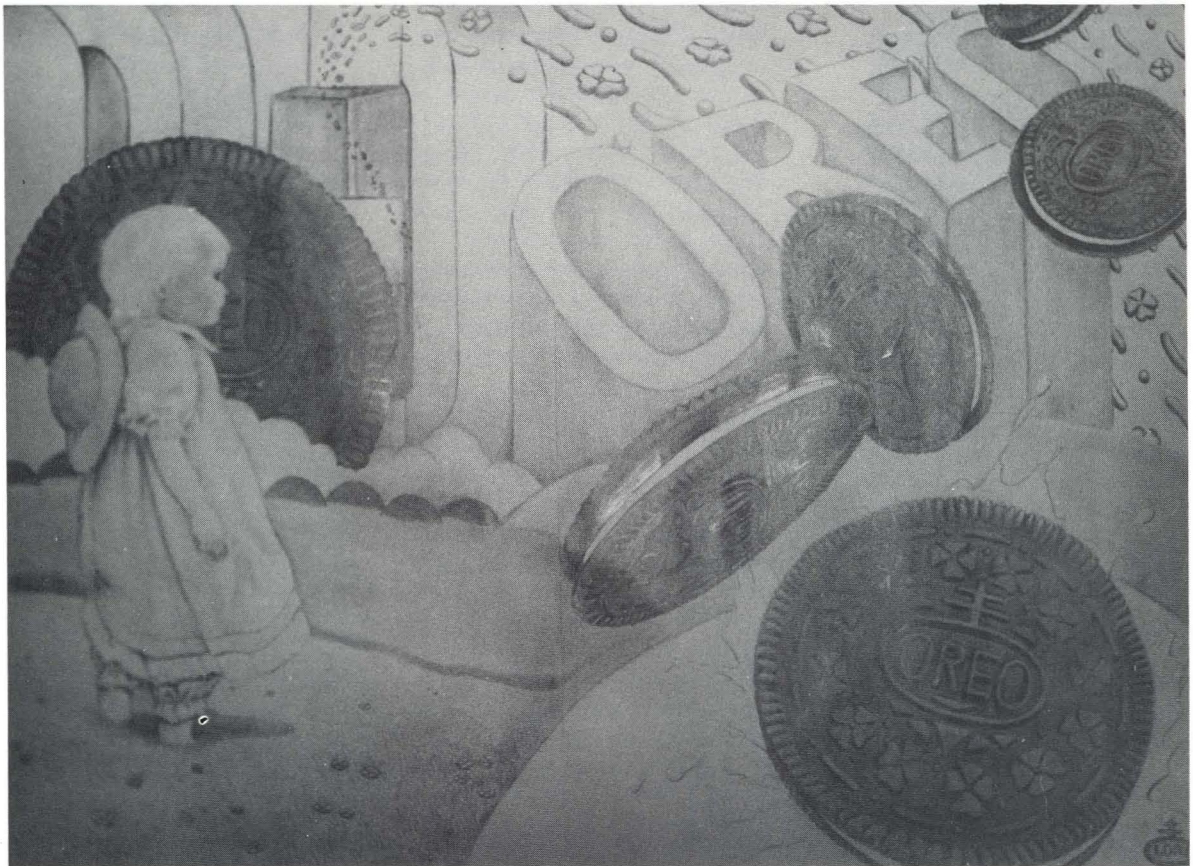
(That was the last time I saw Jane.)



— Jean Colletti



— Mary Barber



— Lori Kittleson

Everyday of her life was meant to be lived as it had been. Nothing ever to look forward to, and nothing to look back to. She could have died a hundred years from now and she still would have had a miserable life. A tear ran down her cheek. Where's the music? She wanted to hear it. She needed to hear it. The music was the only thing that would comfort her. Like a new-found lover. Where was it?

And then it came. It flowed through her hair and down her body as it gently lifted her and took her away to that world where everything was good. Her soul was soaring through the skies, and a smile crossed her lips. Life wasn't so bad; of death of insanity; or whatever. As long as she had her music, she was all right. Besides, maybe she should be glad that her old life was over. There was no sense in denying how bad it was. But she would deal with that later. Right now, she felt too good.

She opened her eyes and found herself standing at the bottom of a great stairway. It gradually ascended into the sky, appearing to go on forever in a continuous spiral. Like a giant slinky. Each step was about twenty feet wide, fifteen feet long, and about knee high. The structure was enormous. It dwarfed any creation she had ever seen by man.

The sky was beautiful. It was an orange color, like the orange of a sky when the sun is setting. But there was no sun, and there

were no clouds. There was, however, a light mist that hung in the air, making it a mere pleasure to breathe.

She began to climb the steps of the stairway, not knowing where she was going, but not really caring either. The point was that she finally felt good, and she also found all this to be rather amusing.

As she rounded the fifth curve of the spiral, she stopped. To her left, just sitting on the step was a blue box tied with a red ribbon, about the size of a Rubik's Cube. She picked up the package and examined it closely. To her surprise, the box weighed a lot more than she had anticipated. Untying the ribbon and letting it fall to the step, she hesitantly removed the lid from the box. She was confused more than ever, as she stared at the contents of the box. Dirt. The package that she held in her hands was filled to the top with dirt. She was about to turn the box upside-down, spilling the dirt out, when she felt it vibrate in her hand like an electric saw turned on high. The vibrating stopped and then began again, making Lori drop the package down to the step. She retreated a few steps and watched as the box shook violently, spilling small amounts of dirt over its edges.

What she saw next made her almost fall off the edge of the step, which was well over three hundred feet in height.

A human arm, except about half the size, emerged out of the top of

the dirt, stretching its fingers toward the sky. She would have thought it to be a baby's arm, if it wasn't for the head of the arm's owner coming out after it. The head, which was apparently a male's judging by the mustache, was about the size of a baseball. The body of the tiny man slowly emerged, revealing his other arm, which was hanging down by his side. Now half of him was out of the dirt. He appeared to be dressed in a clown suit, and by the time his legs and feet were free, Lori was certain. He wore a big, baggy shirt with red, green and orange stripes running vertically. His pants, a visage of bright pink polka dots on a light purple background, looked as if he could fit his whole body into one leg. When Lori saw his feet, she couldn't hold back the laugh that had been boiling in her. He wore yellow and blue high-heeled combat boots. She screamed with laughter.

He looked up to her and jumped around while he spoke, "Call me the Jockey yeah! yeah! . . . Call me the Jockey. That's what they call me."

She laughed more, and harder.

His voice reminded her of a stupid buzzard that she used to watch on the old Bugs Bunny Show. Tears began to run down her cheeks, she was laughing so hard. What a hilarious sight. A man, three feet tall, dressed in a psychedelic clown suit, by the name of Jockey.

In a couple of

minutes, her laughter subsided, and she could breathe again.

"Well...Jockel..." she had to hold back the laughter again, "What do you want?"

Jockel gracefully leaped up onto his hands and began walking with his feet suspended in the air. He looked like he probably walked on his hands more than he walked on his feet. He moved around to where his front was facing her, then looked at her. The whole time he was as sturdy as a horse.

"Jockel like the music. You like the music? Jockel loves the music. Music makes the pain go away. That's right. Jockel doesn't like pain, and pain doesn't like the music. You like music? You gotta like music. Jockel knows where the music comes from. That's right. You wanna know where the music comes from? Jockel will tell ya. Cuz if you know where it's at, then you can have it whenever you want. And, I know you wa-

Jockel began tipping over backwards, and Lori noticed that he was at the edge of the step. His legs began kicking in an attempt to right himself, but he was already past the point of no return. A scream escaped his mouth as he tumbled over the side of the great stairway and out of sight. As his scream faded, Lori went to the edge of the stair and thrust her head out to see what had happened to Jockel.

For the first time, she realized how high up she

actually was, but where was Jockel? She was up pretty high, but she still would have been able to see him if he was there. And there wasn't a person in sight. What happened next took place in the space of a few seconds.

"It's right down there!"

The hysterical scream came from behind her, and as she began to turn around she felt a push against her feet. Her body slid across the top of the step, and the next thing she knew, she was falling, weightless like a sack of potatoes thrown off the side of a building. Before the wind monopolized all the other sounds, she thought she heard a faint whisper that said, "Nothing good last forever, Lori. Nothing." And then she was falling.

Panic gripped her like the hand of a butcher grips a knife. But she couldn't scream. Her eyes were about to pop out of her head, and her mouth was frozen open in the shape of an O. But she couldn't scream. Her head felt like a balloon on the verge of blowing up. But she couldn't scream.

The group approached. 50 feet... 40 feet... 30 feet... 20 feet... And then she screamed. She screamed with a force strong enough to power New York. If she would have been sane at that moment, she would have been driven mad by the sound of her own wretched howl. 10 feet... Lights were going out. 0 feet...

Lori slowly opened her eyes. White light. White. Lots of white. Nose itches. Scratch. Can't scratch.

The gears in her mind were reluctantly beginning to move again. Her nose was itching really bad, but she couldn't seem to scratch it. Everything was white. She looked down and saw that even her clothes were white, and she also saw why she couldn't scratch her nose. The straight-jacket that she now wore kept her arms nice and snug. She rubbed her face side-to-side to soothe the itch.

The door to Lori's padded room was opened, and Dr. Showalter came in, shutting the door behind him.

"Good morning, Lori! And how are we feeling today?"

She tried to speak, but the drug they had given her was still wearing off.

"Now don't worry. The drug will wear off in a couple of minutes. In the meantime, I'd like to talk to about what happened at work. I think it would be in your best interest, and the interest of others, if you stayed with us for awhile. We've got a brilliant new method to treat illnesses that are very similar to yours. You're gonna love this, Lori." He gave her an uncanny smile, and then left.

After the door closed behind Dr. Showalter, two sounds filled Lori's room. The first sound was music. The second was Lori's scream.



“still . . . ?”



— *Christy
Koss*

Lake Sumter Community College