



ANGEL'S FLIGHT



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Retirement Saga

by Don A. Hoyt

Children crowd the old man's knees
to hear tales before memory
and ambition softened like his sex.

He catches stray dogs now,
 a poignant hobby,
hauling them from gutter rummage
to his table scraps.

He holds his bleeding in,
stopped in tissue like red gravy
 in his bread,
and repairs his tranquil walls
turning powdery like his skin.

Like night devouring yesterday
spilling silver crumbs across the sky,
he harvests nuts in brittle hands
and spills them on his dresser.

TWO POEMS

by Karen Carlson

The Queen of Wands

Fishflesh.

Paper blown against a fence.

Dull ants and sparrow down.

Fistful of earth thrown into sky

that is how the quail fly.

I've always admired the butterfly

who'll have for breakfast a mouse's eye

like cantaloupe. And so you see

I'm not sunlight but sunlight

on the wings of the bee.

The Princess

All of summer is golding
and yet it feels as if the season could blow back
across the wild oats
She sits in the creekbed
turns an oakleaf but it is dry
in the hollow where leaves sometimes catch water.
She smells of eucalyptus and ocean.
Her darkness makes the horses twitch.
Her darkness makes the dove rustle.
Her darkness makes you nail your storm windows
And her darkness makes you stare.

TWO POEMS

Adapted from Li Shang-lin
by Gary Routh

Chang-O

The candles' deep shadows dance
on the mother-of-pearl screen.
Into the river of the Milky Way
The morning star falls,
Sinks slowly. Chang-O, are you sorry
You stole that immortal drink, only to
Possess the pale heart you now suffer —
Night after night, above the green sea,
In the blue sky?

from *Inlaid Lute*

Along the sounding board
 inlaid with jewels, blue and smooth,
 beckons a many-colored light,
 come colors aureate. -Fifty strings
 loom and lace the light, -with shadows interweave
 a dark advice

The fantastic lute
 begins to play -without cause, one string
 stirring the many -years rise
 and fall away -like flowers.
 Changtzu becomes a butterfly,
 Wang Ti flies as a bird
 in the sky of spring. From a vast sea
 a moon rises as a pearl
 scattering its tears among the waves.
 Over a blue field a sun beams warmly;
 smoke rises in a blue-green column.
 Figures of imagination, vague stirrings
 of the heart, these
 move as merest shadows move —
 all is swiftly lost in this,
 the mind's dark mist, memory's eclipse.

Hacker's Complaint to Blind Hugh of Onan

by Terry Phillips

I am the crippled boy.
I have the lagging foot and the jerking knee.
You have fixed your teeth in my lame heart
and your lips never touch the meat.
Your smile cut from Cosmo with a razor,
betrays no one,
offends no one,
pleases no one;
it is inert
as the polished enamel of your incisors.

I play with deep subjects
cached in my pockets.
In the cloister of my bedroom
I have hidden my marbles behind the socket facing.
They are inert
as the lead scales that skin your heart.
You, daughter of the bunny hutch and society's page,
come to me,
come in the waking day
and I will know you.
No vow need rob us of love, nor tender caress
wake us from our viscous dreaming, nor genuine embrace
hold us from our fond-handed good-night, sweet lady.

First Comes the Fair

by Isabel Nagy

The fair was in one of the valleys, and all the winding roads in the area were loaded with the approaching buses, trucks, and cars. A dome of impenetrable brown haze weighed on the sky and pressed into the distant hills. The long lines of vehicles dragged hypnotically around the curves, and a sluggish heat almost sucked sweat from the unyielding grey fenders.

Crystal wished she was home. She heaved her bulky body forward and unglued the brown skirt from her wet thighs. Then she slumped back into the seat. They were about to pass another turn-off, but Mr. Bailey would never think to turn around and go back.

He lit a cigarette. The smoke thickened the white cloud that already sagged on the front seat. Harold had his head out the window, but there was no wind. He seemed like such a nice boy with his head out like that, and she couldn't understand why it bothered her when he talked to her. Why had she accepted his invitation? The idea had seemed so exciting at school. But Mr. Bailey was a moron.

"That was in '64," he puffed. "Harold was five, I guess, and his mother and me--well, we wasn't exactly what you'd call rich. We decided that it being his fifth birthday and all--or whatever it was--we'd take him to the county fair. That was the first time. "Remember that, Harold?"

"Huh?" He pulled his head back into the car.

"Remember that time we took you to the fair that first time?"

"Dad, do you have to smoke? It's getting right in Crystal's eyes."

"Didn't think you'd remember." He chuckled. "Don't weasel out of it. What'll your little girlfriend think?" He winked at Crystal.

"I was just trying to make her more comfortable. I guess you can't understand that." He put his head back out the window.

"Little lady's okay or she would have said something. You tell sourpuss over there you can talk for yourself, young lady."

"Well, he was just trying to help, Mr. Bailey. But you didn't say what happened then. How did you get your job?"

The fair had become more and more of a habit with Mr. Bailey until he had finally decided to get a job that would keep him there permanently. He drove one of the heavy sweepers that cruised the fairgrounds. Now he got free passes for his son, but Harold didn't come nearly as often as Mr. Bailey thought he would.

They left Mr. Bailey at the entrance with an agreement to meet him there at 5:00. Long lines surrounded all the rides, and after

enduring several, all Crystal wanted to do was sit down. She found a dark indoor garden and they sat on a metal railing inside. But Harold didn't want them to spend the whole day here and miss the fair.

"Want something to eat?" he asked.

"Oh, thank you. That's very nice of you."

"Anything special?"

"Oh, anything you want will be fine."

"Okay. Be right back."

Long drapes of heavy ivy covered the wall ahead. A long waterfall to the left rained into a pool crossed by a Japanese bridge. The potted plants that hung at various heights across the walk were the notes of a song, she imagined. She followed them over and over and tried to hum the melody they suggested. This became boring.

She looked restlessly to the left. A dark bare-chested man sat on the railing at the waterfall. He had a long mane of black hair and his stiff blue jeans were his only clothing. He propped one leg on the lower metal railing. She looked away before he could notice her. Then she looked back. He must have committed some hideous crime. He laughed in the face of police. He might meet her eyes at any moment. Then he would sense that she too was an outlaw. He would approach her because her beauty was irresistible. He would overpower her in his arms.

People swarmed in at the entrance on the right. Pot bellies and tight pants passed. The dark man had gotten up and walked against the current, but not in her direction. He joined a limp blonde and another man. The girl laughed and cringed under his terrible magnetism. She was an old girlfriend he had exhausted with passion. But now she clung to him for a morsel of affection. They were bound by savage kisses near a van in a dark forest, but he cruelly forgot her just as easily as he loved. Their backs disappeared at the entrance.

She sucked in her fat stomach, and adjusted the skirt to better cover her thighs. The sound of the waterfall vigorously splashing the pool refreshed her. The limbs continued to pass. She spotted a pair of low-waisted pants and a pink crop top. Why was the tawny belly exposed? She wished she could melt into such tight little pants.

Harold approached with an armload of brown bags. She balanced a chili dog on her lap, and held a soda with vanilla ice cream. There were still apple turnovers and peanuts in the bags.

"But I'm really not hungry. Could you eat it?"

"You said you were hungry, or I wouldn't have gotten it." He kicked his foot repeatedly into the gravel.

She took a few bites of the chili dog. "Oh, well. I can eat a little bit." Then she spooned all the ice cream into her mouth.

"I feel like I'm going to gain five pounds."

"What are you on a diet, or something?"

"Oh, no, but..." She sucked up the last of the soda with a straw. "Well, I try to watch what I eat."

"Why didn't you tell me. I could have got something else."

"Oh, it's alright now." She swallowed the last bites of chili and bread. "Never mind. Could you go get a ticket for the ferris wheel. I'll just stay here."

When he was safely away, she devoured both apple turnovers and ripped open a bag of peanuts. She hated anyone to watch her eat. She hoped he would not come back before these peanuts were gone, even though he was nice.

They exhausted one ride after the other. By four o'clock, Harold had only a dollar and a nickel left, enough for one ride, or maybe two. He and Crystal slowly made their way through the struggling crowds. They were in an aisle pinched between two rows of booths that could scarcely be seen for all the heads. Someone's full weight came down on Crystal's foot. Before she could react, Harold stopped.

"You want me to try the one with the darts? They've got those big stuffed animals. I could win one for you."

Damn crowds, she thought. The booth Harold was talking about was thick with the crowd. They couldn't push through to get a turn. She didn't even like stuffed animals.

Harold didn't wait for an answer though, and he led her through. They waited at least twenty minutes while ten other people paid their quarters. Then Harold let his five little darts fly. He burst only one balloon and stuck the consolation prize, a grey plastic soldier, into his shirt pocket. It was the same prize you got when you didn't hit anything.

"I've got to try again. You don't mind, do you? I'll still have money for one more ride."

The three remaining quarters would evaporate into the game, and then they would have to leave. Crystal was used to failure.

"Sure. I don't mind."

All five of Harold's tries missed the board.

"You want this?" He handed her the second grey soldier.

"Sure. It's cute. Where's yours? He needs a buddy."

She took one in each hand and rhythmically banged their heads together.

"You dirty rat," the right one said, and bayoneted lefty's stomach with his head three times.

"I'll get you for that, bastard," lefty retorted as he clobbered his friend several times.

"Why--you're a no--good--." Righty slowly mounted far above lefty's head. Crystal met Harold's interested look, and the up-raised arm dropped to her side.

"Naughty little men," she scolded them, and stuffed them into the front pocket of her skirt.

Harold drew a breath, and sighed. He looked to the other side

of the aisle, and then all the way from one end to the other where it dead-ended.

"I guess my dad'll be ready in a few minutes. We could go over there now and have a coke."

"Let's just go see what that is," she said, suddenly anxious to do something now that it was almost too late.

There were almost no people in the dead-end. They faced the huge glass front of the Alice in Wonderland House. This was the land of dreams. Grey metal bars supported the structure from the outside, and were topped by a grey balcony on the second floor. The people on the balcony ran behind the windows. You could not hear them laugh or scream with delight, but must imagine that this was what they were doing.

"It's like one of those big old mazes you hear about," Harold said.

Yellow characters smiled feebly from the banners that drooped from the railing.

"Yeah, look at those kids up there. I think they've got some of those fun house mirrors, it looks like."

"I've still got that fifty cents, if you want to."

"Oh, your last fifty cents. I don't know, Maybe you better save it."

"My dad can get us cokes. Come on. It's the last ride."

"I don't know."

Three girls chased one another on the balcony. One of them raced away and down the spiralling yellow slide into the glass maze.

"Oh, well, it'll be alright."

He disappeared into the maze when she was only mid-way up the red ramp with ticket in hand. Glass after white glass revealed no Harold. Her own obese image was reflected in the glass straight ahead. She turned left to avoid it. But there she was again. The trick was to find the empty space between the reflections. She went to the right and it seemed to open into a long corridor. Her steps quickened. Her fingertips slid along the glass, as she veered first one way and then the other. But something was wrong. This was the entrance again. She set out again and retraced her steps. She came to the turn that led back to the entrance and waited. If only she could catch sight of Harold to find her direction. The innumerable white walls in every direction looked equally unpromising. So she turned left this time. A blue body flashed about ten feet ahead and to the left. It was Harold.

She rushed to the spot and found herself in a dead-end. Harold appeared on the other side of her enclosure. She pointed to the three glass walls, and he shook his head gravely. He made a slow, exaggerated shrug and took a few steps away. She panicked and banged silently on the glass wall. He looked back, she raised her hand to her forehead in a theatrical grimace of anguish. He laughed and rocked from side to side, silently chanting 'Nanny, nanny, nanny goat'

because he was safe. The only way out was from behind. She turned away from him, and returned the way she had come.

He followed and waved his arms furiously. She found a door and stopped. She put her hands on her hips with a smile.

"Shucks ma'am. I didn't know it was you behind all that glass."

"Where'd you go?"

"Come on. You want to see this place I found. It's way in the back."

She followed him. A narrow opening led to a pitch black staircase. She took a few steps up, but then the light from the doorway was blocked by his body. She couldn't see the next step.

"There's no going back now," his low, deliberate voice warned from down behind. A low chuckle floated up. A feeling pitted in her stomach.

"Harold, quit it. Come on up here."

Two arms swung around her waist. He pulled her against his chest.

"There's no escape now, my beauty." His wet teeth touched her neck. "Ah, the blood of a young virgin. More, more."

She twisted away. Neither of them spoke for a moment.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that." His warm hands fell from her waist. "The balcony's up there. You were right about the fun house mirrors."

A gust of bright light and warm air erupted on opening the door to the platform. A light blue floor gleamed from the end to where she stood. Harold swayed in front of one of the undulated mirrors on the wall.

"Look, I'm a palm tree."

She ran up behind him and made waves of her arms. They flowed out of his right side and then the left.

"Aloha-hoi, aloha-hoi," she sang.

He sidled down a few feet and waddled in circles.

"I'm a pygmy. I'm a pygmy."

She ran past him to the next mirror. "Harold! Harold! Look at my stomach. It's going to fall off. Oh no. It's a baby."

She pushed the giant stomach out, and then pulled it in--out--in--out--in--out.

His sandy hair blew back as the blue boy on a bicycle glided up the driveway. Blue tennis shoes ran up to the front door.

"Is Crystal ready?"

"Oh, was she expecting you?" the woman asked. "I'm sorry. She's gone for the week. Her grandmother called this morning and invited her up for the vacation. It was such short notice. She probably didn't have time to call you."

"For a whole week? But she told me to be here at nine o'clock. We were supposed to go to the park."

"Well, I'm sorry, but her grandmother--"

"Did she leave a message? My name's Harold. Harold Bailey."

"Harold...? No, she didn't say anything."

"But she couldn't have forgot. We made a date. We said the time and everything. I mean, she knew I was coming. Oh God, she must have--she must have--"

"She's so young. You understand? Please don't cry. I'm sure she didn't mean anything."

"You just tell her I'll be back next week. Okay?"

Hough School

by R. Charles Conklin

Hough School, a tired brick warehouse
(Wooden floors oiled to keep the dust down)
Squatted next to East 90th Street;
Wrinkled wrought iron fence
Surrounded crabgrass lawn.
Two playgrounds, one with swings;
One with asphalt surface only.
Why can't we play in the other playground?
That one's for girls.
"Girls are perpetrators," his ears said
"Boys are defenders."
Swings spill girls to shed tears;
Asphalt pounds boys' faces.

When he left high school he put his helmet on
To spend his idle hours in donut shops.

TWO POEMS

by Kathy Heller

Eclipse

Through the window, Jazzman bleats.
Sax tones roll past women in slips.
On the boulevard music squeezes between car horns,
Black hands move steering wheels
Around corners, past the clubs.
The man with the music is on his chair,
Cars drive through it.
The room is dark and warm.
Through the windshield, through the fence posts
The city beats through in slices.
Brown hands move cars between the music.
Jazzman holds his cold horn,
Pushes out the sounds that ease the street,
Sings "I ain't got a nickel and
I ain't got a lousy dime,"
Sings to pretty women upstairs with
Their Johns. Heels hung on his wooden chair
Cheeks like eclipses he
Cools the street.

The Hunt

The horns hush.
Gently as spiders the dogs
Nose after their prey.
The brush launches a round bird
Above yelps and stamping.
In short hop flight it falls
Toward the noises of its captors.
The thud of its death is drowned
By movement. My hands
Holding the force beneath me,
Its tugging and brown
Muscles strain away
Moving first sideways then back
My hands and the straps
The huge smoothness of his neck
are small against his sounds.
Digging with one hoof
The soil is scattered.
My heel is in his side.
I am allowing him this,
His legs pounding past themselves,
Past the dogs and shattered bush.
Holding him with my legs
Past the lead horse
Gravel cutting my face
His flanks pulsing
Away from the death noise.
Head sideways to the wind.
The dog's point calls are
Twisted by speed behind us.
He smells pursuit. I want him
To cut at the hillside.
The horn blasts falling away
His huge nostrils wet,
Surrounding the high air.
Away from the gloves and guns
Away from me.

Sonavax

by Errol Miller

Sweet chariot
gusting in the wind
with empty seats
thin rows of patrons
dangling naked feet
into the Nile
but this is Kansas City
stoned on maiden mucus
New England maple sap
guns of unknown warriors
pressed against white thighs
so many valentines
strewn like tickets
across the earth
too much drifting
the blues singer from Memphis
disintegrating out back
play on & never stop
until your fever dies
sweep clean oyster beds
wooden-floored cafes
out on the edge of life
vultures in gull costumes
hold out their hands
for crumbs of bread
their meaty eyes rotating
beady as if they were
illegitimate humans
I've known.

Morteintrepid

by Bryan Story

Closing the door behind him, the old man left the weak drizzle, entering a black dorm. He stumbled to a bed, and sat down in the unlit corridor, leaving on his soggy overcoat. Very soon he would need to switch the lights on, but he sat inert. The rain saturated his reverie with a droning patter.

Always the rain. It itched, had always itched. Had always rained. Only lately did he need to scratch. He was not so brisk anymore. He was growing old, and feeling the damp. Had never felt damp when he was brisk. It always rained, but he had been quick before. Hadn't been damp when he did his work. He had been dry, but now he hated it. Perhaps he felt so soaked lately because of the heat inside him. All along he might as well have poured water in buckets from the rooftop. Now his discipline faded, once so brisk. Inside he was black humor, and it was wet outside because the bile burned his throat. Out the window was rain.

It seemed as wet inside as out, with that slow drizzle-so old, depleting the air of any life. Being more comfortable with the lights out, the old man walked to the door, compromising authority with impotence. He was tired, but duty called. Opening the door, he turned on the overhead lamps. A spartan light did little to brighten the tidy hall. The old man crossed the room to the heating element as the children filed in. They sat on their bunks; he sat on the one chair, facing them.

--You know the importance of this?

--Yes, Mr. Trummer.

Every child answered, looking directly at him. The old man forgot himself.

--Each of you knows what to do.

--Yes, Mr. Trummer.

They looked intently at him. He met each face, but avoided the eyes. As the rain was still falling down, the room was damp. He pulled off his overcoat. The children were dry and content, but the old man had been out in the rain. He itched, and the bile was in his cheeks. He looked over to the heating element, it seemed obscene that there was no hearth, or fire. He itched. They didn't, wouldn't. He pitied them.

--You know what this is for.

--Yes, Mr. Trummer.

Irked by their willingness, the old man rebutted.

--Well what then!

--For Our...

--I'll tell you what.

He stood up.

--Let me tell you a story. Do you know what a lemming is?

--No, Mr. Trummer.

--I thought not.

He began to frown. A knock followed by a head appeared at the door.

--Almost done, Tod

--Soon.

The old man turned from the closing door to the children. Standing they turned from the door back to him.

--Sit down.

He sat down also. He spit the bile in precise speech.

--Lemmings are rodents. Lemmings do not integrate with their environment. They consume it. They delete it. Lemmings are animals of reflex, not wisdom-like Man is, as you've been taught. Lemmings do not harmonize with their world. You know what they do?

--No...

--Be silent.

The old man stared at them. They looked back, confused but stoic. The dampness directed his glare to the heating element.

Without a hearth to sit on, and him telling old tales, how could they help it? But he was telling an old tale, the old man thought, the only one there was. He hated them. He hated the heating element. He itched, and the bile came faster.

--It's too damned cold.

--Yes, Mr. . . .

--SHUT UP!

He kicked the heating element. From this unprecedented breach of authority they cowered like mice.

The old man stood before them.

--Lemmings dominate their world...lemmings breed too much... lemmings overrun everything!

His arms reinforced the delivery, his eyes the theme.

--Lemmings overrun their world and ruin it and grow ravid—they threaten it all...and to keep from disaster...you know what they do?

They didn't answer.

--Lemmings...all of them...rush to a cliff...and they go over the edge...all of them, all sacrificed, all these lives...their instinct depletes the land of any life.

He stopped, sneered at them, became bitter, controlled.

--Except a few. There are always those that stop. You see they can't all die. Some must live, so the...meaning of it remains.

Most all die, and are done with it. They can forget it. But there is always that special one, and he stays back.

The old man galled.

--He stays behind, and has the privilege of watching all the others die!

The old man stared at his knee, afraid to face them.

--And he has to live knowing.

He smashed his fist into his knee.

--Understand, little brats?

His attitude and his silence indicated he was finished. Every child was astonished, yet somehow they answered as one.

--Yes, Mr. Trummer.

The old man smiled. No one moved. Soon a crisp rustling came from outside. The children looked to the old man. He avoided their eyes, and looked at the heating element. Without a hearth, how could they help it? The idea of hanging a stocking on the heating element brought his eyes back to the children—moist.

--Please stay here, I'll tell...

There came a distant bleeping. The children rose, and filed to the door.

--No! Please! I'm sorry!

He rushed to the door, turned and ran around them, touching their shoulders.

--Give yourselves a chance!

The door opened. This time a whole body appeared.

--Tod, you're late.

The old man froze.

--Take them. I don't want them.

When the door closed, the rain became louder. The old man walked to the door, opened it.

He stood at the edge, while the rain slanted in. The old man backed away, closed the door—firmly. He sat on a bunk.

The face scanning the room had resolved it's compromise: it was impotent. No youth remained in the face. It was lined and cracked. All the youth left was in the eyes, which heard the galloping.

The rain droned, and the room sagged. He killed the light, and lay in the same bunk as before. It was better than the chair. The hall was better now that he had closed his eyes.

The rain droned, and the old man sagged. Dampness made him itch. He got up and patted the mattress in place. Straightening the chair, he looked at the heating element, then at the door. He carefully picked the chair up and smashed it over the heating element.

The old man tried to rub the rain off. It still itched.

He opened the door and stood on the edge. The rain drizzled on him. Smiling back at the broken heating element, the old man adjusted his tie, and stepped out the door.

The hall was dim and damp, with only the old man's jaunty whistling to cheer it.

by David Trinidad

Vice Versa

Damp shadow of
Crevices broaching,
Sprout of stars,
Brocade of constellations
Converging

To twin comets;
Up front, straight away,
Unwinding
Like light years to a stretch of eyes,
Resulting

In wet silver.
Pink tail daring
Indolent
Skies to break away into
Expansion

Of night and ice
Melting crater of
Thighs; agile
Half-shapes and crescent rose tongue,
Eclipsing itself.

Forest Dream

Night. A forest pitch-black except for
Some white lines of moonlight filtering

Between the trees. Owls hoot like children
Imitating trains; in the bushes,

Like wrapping paper, animals stir.
Swiftly, smoothly, a white ball of yarn

Rolls across the forest floor, over
Pine needles and decomposing leaves,

Continuing off into darkness,
Under bushes, beyond the trees. Next,

I enter the picture, gathering
The thin trail of yarn that the ball has

Unravelling, winding it round and round
My hands. It's what I want. I need it.

I am afraid of it vanishing.
It is what holds my life together--

This fine white delicate thread leading
Me from dream to dream. "But I'm tired,"

I say to myself, "I have done this
For so long." Still following the ball.

Disappearing deeper and deeper
Into the forest. Never resting.

Constantly chasing the white line of
Unreality between the trees.

Night Daze

by Royce Kaplan

I.

Numb flesh
 The shelled meat
 The backdrop in Pollack blues with sizzling segments
 I threw one on another
 As I wrestled my shadow in the dark
 And I became her
 The stage set
 I walk walls at night
 A man cried once on the other side of my bed's window
 His heaving sobs disrupted my walking
 I pulled the glass
 And dragged my shadow on

II.

Waiting for the
 Train
 I waited to grow-up
 For my mother to notice underarmhair
 Closet dolls in cardboard caskets
 Her sleeping baby whispering The Human Body to "Maja
 Nude"
 Under a white canopy
 I waited for my mother to talk to me, and when she
 Came
 I laughed
 And I wait to find whole people
 In L. A., I met a man with a hole where his crotch
 should be
 "The Vietnamese women...", he said

III.

Daze change
 As I within a minute will
 I know it's Rima this time
 Shall I chirp out a tune until you find me
 Hidden in the mossy denseness of my animated mind
 Character transition:

fade out

cut

print

Medea

Her stagnant mouth utters gibberish
 Hostility flares

IV.

Doing love
 The moon moaned and beckoned
 Naive seduction
 A naked man and moon danced
 I watched them mate
 The cloudy veil
 The textured sky
 The shadows
 The walls

V.

But my nights are constant
 I walk
 Walls

Empty Mall

by Vernon T. Boes

The night watchman goes
Window shopping by flashlight.
People gathered behind glass
Have seen him before
Scanning each aisle
For someone he knows is not there.
The models pose
Armless some headless
Others smiling all the time.
The coffee and cigarettes, life savers,
A brown bag late night salami sandwich.
In this non-living world
He keeps vigil,
If someone is near
He will feel the presence.

On Knocking on the Wrong Door, Three a.m.

by Stuart Welch

People were continuously bumping him on the street. His piano was once again out of tune and the hamburger had turned a dark, unedible brown. She darned his socks, but since she had lost the use of her hands in the explosion of her neighbor's lawnmower, his socks remained holey.

A picture of two boys staring into a glass of obviously purified water had hung in the darkest corner of his living room. He recently replaced it with a tiny crucifix he found the last time he woke up lost (and hungover) in the park. The picture of the two boys bothered him for no reason but enough he thought to affect his digestion. They stood there blankly staring into the glass of water. Behind them was also a picture, but not of them.

Today he had hoped to find a new place to hide or hang the crucifix since the space it occupied on the wall was less, considerably less, than the picture of the two boys. But he had nothing to replace the crucifix with so he decided to leave it in this undesirable place until something else turned up that would adequately cover the space left by the picture of the two boys. Searching for something to replace the crucifix also gave him indigestion and he vowed not to look too hard.

On the wall opposite the crucifix that had replaced the picture of the two boys staring blankly into a glass of obviously purified water, hung a ripped portion of a map. It was a foreign map with street names he did not recognize. Before she lost her hands she had thought it was a map of Zurich. But he did not know Zurich any better than the town where he was presently living or for that matter any town that he had lived in. She was trying to impress him. The map had been ripped in such a way that he could not tell what way it was supposed to be read. Several times in the past he had changed the position, but never knew which way he was moving the ripped map. A map is hard to read and a ripped map without a legend was even harder. He was glad that the two boys staring blankly into a glass of water were standing and not in a position that would be hard to determine which way the picture was to be hung. His deteriorating indigestion found solace with that picture which gave him no trouble.

She, since the accident, was too embarrassed to visit him in the evenings anymore. It became a bothersome chore to manipulate coins into the coinbox on the bus. The bus she took to visit him was 154 North. While she was still in the hospital, he reassured her that the bus driver, if he was Christian, would reach

into her purse for the coins she needed for the ride. She had tried to convince the driver that she was unable to manipulate the tiny coins and that it was necessary if she were to ride the bus for him to retrieve the coins which she kept conveniently in a clear plastic pouch. The bus driver usually became enraged and told her to sit. It was always embarrassing. She no longer came at night.

Many of their nights had been spent with puzzles. They laughed late into the night, keeping many of their neighbors awake, while they assembled the complicated jigsaw puzzles. The puzzles pictured snowy scenes in the country or foreign cities with strange buildings. They preferred puzzles of foreign cities and would laugh nervously as they neared the completion of a puzzle. After the puzzle was finished, they would lift themselves from the table and stand back admiring their accomplishment. Sometimes tears would run down his cheeks. He was upset that one more puzzle had been completed and all of its once individual and separated pieces no longer offered a challenge. She would comfort him and promise to find a new even harder puzzle the very next day. But there were no new puzzles for him to construct since she no longer came to visit in the evening. He spent more time in the evenings now rearranging the pictures and articles he had hung on the walls of his apartment.

His room now offered the challenge of the puzzle. By rearranging the items hanging on his walls, the room was somewhat different, and all he would have to do was sit in a different chair and see a new scene. But the crucifix bothered him, even though it was hung in the darkest spot in the room. No matter where he sat in the room it always stood out. A tiny tormented dying mannequin, stretched out on a cross, its hands painfully trying to pull away from the nails that bound it. This was probably the greatest upset to his indigestion.

Once while deciding where to hang a brass horn that had been given to him by a former friend, his phone rang. She was on the phone and carefully explained how she had talked her sister into dialing a number for her. He did not like her sister. Her sister rarely assisted her since the accident and frequently flew into rages because of this handicap. Had she left her flowered scarf there? It was no longer in her closet and she was concerned. It had been the last present given to her by her aunt before she had passed away. Yes, the scarf was there. It was safely hanging on the wall by the door. Its flowery colours had considerably brightened the space on the wall by the door. At one time he had considered draping the naked tortured body on the crucifix with the flowered scarf. But that would only hide the body and he would then always try to remember what it looked like. Anyway, it looked nice by the door. Hold on, someone is at the door. Yes? Yes; who is it? Who could it be. No one had knocked on his door since her accident. No this is apartment #38g. The numbers to his door had been down for some time. He had hung them near the window because he liked their shiny brassy look. You should try upstairs. I'm not really sure. He was very excited that not only had someone called him on the phone, but on the same day, someone had knocked on his door. He was so excited that he forgot about the phone. When he returned to the phone all he heard

in response to his explanation of who had been at the door was a dull drone. He thought she was like the drone. She did not have a name either. After hanging up the droning phone, he decided that the very next day he would go to the music shop on the corner and buy a piano stool, so he could always look at different parts of the room without having to change chairs.

As I turned and walked away from the apartment, I heard its inhabitant mumbling to himself. It had not been my intention to disturb him but the numbers from the door were missing. When I had originally approached the numberless door, I had heard talking but as I neared the stairs to try another apartment, I thought I heard a man crying softly against the door. I never had known about the man or his room or the crucifix he had wanted to hide or the picture of the two boys staring blankly into a glass of purified water, all I heard or knew, was that someone, someone on the other side of the door cried softly as I walked away. I may have awakened him.

Love Note #3

by Kathleen M. McKee

We speak of potassiumed bananas
and rice sped with niacin
while relating to the Cosmos
and the powers negative and positive.
We wonder if we are crazy on an equal basis
and I know that you are helping me balance
myself
How? I do not know.
I only know that every time you pat me
I develop into a firmer shape of sand.

Ant Farming in the Puzzle Boxes

by Steven Engle

The Master knelt in the garden, sorrowfully resplendent in his golden-brown beard and white robes. His twelve, groggy disciples lay sprawled about him and they suffered the befuddled fear of their beloved rabbi's betrayal into Roman hands. They knew he was in danger yet a strange stupor prevented them from acting in his defense. It was the effect of dope which Jesus had administered to them at the Last Supper. The disciples were necessary as witnesses but their resistance to the Roman police was to be minimized for efficiency's sake.

During the Agony in the Garden, Jesus telepathically communicated with old Confucius, the pseudo-Chinese coordinator of the "Betrayal Sequence". As he fed the last coordinates to Agent Judas and his Roman flunkies, Confucius played with the puzzle-box games that he had bought during his last stretch on Earth. The little Chinese puzzles were devilishly complex and Confucius often lost himself in the intricacies of the toys at the expense of efficient coordinating. With his mind in other realms, Confucius was sometimes a little slow on the draw and information relays took longer than necessary. The Agony in the Garden lasted many hours because Confucius became involved with the snapping together of a box and forgot to tell Judas where to bring the soliders. Consequently, Jesus had to wait two extra hours trying to keep his dopey disciples awake. Anybody would be sweating blood after that.

When Confucius finally accomplished his tasks, Jesus couldn't resist the temptation of needling him with the remark that Ivan the Terrible, who was a computer technician at the time, had made against the Earthling Chinese. Ivan didn't like the Chinese at all, and he could hardly wait until his field assignment in the Russian Middle Ages when he would fight the Chinese Tartars. But that was a thousand years away, and Ivan was obliged to do data processing at Mission Control. During a dull decade in which Ivan was programming a computer under Confucius' control, he came up with his derisive riddle against Confucius' Earthling "ant farm"; ant farming being the colloquial expression for the evolutionary behavior-modification of Earth.

The riddle was: "Where is Rice Canyon?" When Jesus offered to send the puzzle-boxes to Rice Canyon, Confucius became infuriated and broke one of his toys.

The answer was: "Rice Canyon is six inches up a Chinaman's ass."

Judas, a dark and intensive little man in his human form arrived with the Romans and they took Jesus away, according to plan. Marched along to the Roman prison, Agent Jesus endured the insults and anti-Jewish jokes (many of which he had composed himself) as best he could, but the spears jabbing in his back were distinctly annoy-

ing him. As he flew into his jail cell at the end of a Roman boot, he vowed revenge. Five seconds later, he completed his vow: the dead guards lay scattered in little pieces and Jesus stood in the center of the room, smiling with a peace past human understanding. It was a singularly un-Christian thing to do.

Judas materialized in the cell and he brought the replacement android along to be crucified in Jesus' place. He saw the remains of the unscheduled massacre and exhaled with some irritation. "Aw, Jesus! When you gonna lay off this shit? You're supposed to go quietly, ya asshole! This is almost as bad as that fuck-up at the Temple. You're a pacifist, remember?"

"Whatta ya mean, 'fuck-up at the Temple?' I did everything according to plan. Drove the money-changers out of the place and laid the rap about 'making my father's house into a den o'thieves' on 'em, didn't I?"

"According to plan? You killed seventeen people and a couple of-sheep! And that ain't no righteous wrath trip, ya know, Buddha and Leonard da Vinci broke their balls trying to reassemble all them dudes in the sub-atomic scrambler, and Moses and Dostoyevsky and Mohammed stayed up for twentytwohours cookin' up propaganda to say that nobody got hurt but you better not screw around with Jesus Christ!"

"Yeah, I know, brother. . . . I got carried away again, but, shit, I really don't dig this detail, man. Earthlings just ain't worth the effort were goin' to for 'em." Judas game him 'what-the-hell-orders-are-orders' shrug and his companion let the matter drop. "But," Jesus continued, "what are we gonna do about this shit?" He was referring to the bloody ruins of the Roman escort.

"Them? Oh, well. . .guess I'll use the ol' blaster." Judas pulled a scroll-like cylinder from his belt and disposed of the corpses in a flash of blue-green light.

Providentially, the Mission Control Center had refrained from issuing a ray gun to Jesus. Actually, he was a very charismatic sort and served the Committee very well. His major flaw was a bad temper, but it generally coincided with the primitive Earthling idea of God. Besides, one could be forgiven a few faults of character when one was so many light-years away from home.

"Now look," Judas said, "I can arrange with Ivan to beam a couple of legionnaires from North Africa or someplace to cover for the guards you wasted and Cromwell can program them to think that they took you in. But that's as far as I can cover for you. You gotta promise me that you're gonna carry off the Resurrection and the Ascension without any hassles."

"Don't worry, Judas, I'll stay straight. I swear to God I will."

"Okay, solid. Let's fizz-out." The two aliens dissolved in a buzzing beam of blue light and only the Jesus android remained in the jail cell.

* * * * *

Cromwell and Ivan the Terrible gave winks to Judas as they passed each other in the antiseptically white hall. "How's the Messiah?" they asked in unison.

"Resting comfortably, I guess. Sure am glad he's off-duty for a few days so that you boys can get some rest. Did you have a lotta trouble replacing the guards?"

"No sweat, took about an hour to swing it but the new boys think they've been soliders of Pontius Pilate all their lives."

Ivan changed the subject. "How long you got 'til the fleet picks you up, Judas?...Wish I was goin' with you. I could dig a four century furlough right about now. Haven't seen my old lady in two thousand years."

The ship should be here in about a half-hour," Judas replied. "I hear this solar system's been clear of cosmic ray storms for thirty years now. It'll be clear sailing for them if they ever get their ass in gear and get here."

"Can't be too hard on 'em ya know," Ivan said. "They gotta make those checks. Can't afford the hassle they went through the last time."

The agents were discussing the Second Division Fleet Disaster that occurred thirty-three years ago. As the ship approached Earth with supplies and replacements, a sudden cosmic ray storm annihilated part of the fleet and lit up the night-time sky with an ultra-atomic explosion. Coincidentally, Master Planners Ghengis Khan, Vincent Van Gogh and Shakespeare were introducing the new behavior modification device of Christianity. Game troopers that they were, the Planners called this the "Star of Bethlehem Effect" and gave the infant program a splendid christening.

Nevertheless, nobody wanted to do this again. It was bad for morale.

* * * * *

The fleet was on scanner now and Judas was waiting in the teleporting station, bidding farewell to his friends.

Confucius sat nearby and absentmindedly clicked his boxes together.

Watching him inspired a new thought in Judas' mind. "You guys ever wonder just what the fuck we're doing here? The Committee's got something up its sleeve but I'm damned if I know what it is."

"So who ask questions?" Cromwell replied. "The pay is good, and besides, we're advancing the Earthlings according to plan, and a hell of a lot faster than those schmucks would have done on their own."

"But don't you see? We're really screwing the Earthlings around and it just don't seem right, you know. I mean, it's like we're playing God or something."

While Cromwell and Judas debated the morality of their mission, Ivan watched old Confucius intently assemble his little toys. Just as the old man was about the click the last piece into place, Ivan tossed a marking pen on the box and startled Confucius into drop-

ping his puzzle on the floor, smashing it. "You russkie sonofabitch!" Confucius screamed, "you 're gonna pay for this! You're all gonna pay for this! Judas is right to wonder about this whole deal. I gave up on it a long time ago. The Earthlings are good people. We don't have the right to manipulate them the way we do and we'll be stopped someday. I can bet on it."

"Yeah, we know all about your Will of Heaven bullshit", Ivan sneered. "That's why Mission Control shipped your ass back to Data Coordination. You got too much into human-centered morality instead of continuing with our standard Divine Dogma Programming and the controlled socio-religious persecution sequences."

The argument was interrupted by a communication from the approaching space fleet: "Third Division Fleet requesting co--" A large burst of static cut off the speaker for ten seconds. Then, everyone at the center watched the fleet veer off, barely clear of a sudden cosmic storm. A wave of energy caught the communications ship and destroyed it in a brilliant flash of blue-white light. The ship's last communication, a second before its destruction, was: "Oh, shit!"

The resulting cosmic click caused earthquakes, a solar eclipse, and the destruction of part of the Temple of Jerusalem. As the Jesus android expired upon its cross and half of Mission Control went dark, Judas was heard to say, "I don't think somebody up there likes us."

And the Universe stood smiling, in the midst of it all, filled with a peace past human understanding. It was the un-Christian thing to do.

Tangier

by Charles Holley

Sipping Moroccan mint tea at a sidewalk cafe

(after exchanging known of Dollars
for unknown wad of Dirhams)

some bees with geesUS painful stingers

insisted on sharing with me

my tea

So- I was burning the local kief on the Rue de la Plage

as a mauve boy rolled -with a length of twisted wire-

an old tricycle wheel

past me

Peter befriended me

we smoked rainbow hashish on the white plaster roofs

we stared at the ceilings and tiled walls of the pensions

gazed stoned across the Mediterranean to Málaga

In the streets Berbers, Hippies, Moslems-guiding their burro carts,

sellers of the holy water and American tour groups (herds) tread,

while cafe customers sit cross-legged drinking beer or espresso

say zsa-zsa to the natives of Tangier

let the barbar shave you with his straight-edge razor

legs, chin or what have you

let him get you high like an angel

Madness

by Nat J. Heidorn

Today I sat
looking
at the inside
creases
of my fingers -
the digital joints(how ghastly)

Stared at me
and I Knew
the Secret of life ...

Anemic Highway lines
Running into pits
That smirk
With fiendish delight,
Welcoming
my mind
to the Vulva of their
hearts.

Lifeboat Twenty-four

by Jana Di Maggio

Seven washer-loads of starched white cotton jackets hung on the receiving line at the Cuore D'Italia's gangplank, stuffed with freshly shaven and combed creamy young Italian faces. I followed Mandy, imitating the jaunty self-confidence in her step as she passed them, but I didn't do very well. Ernie said he sent me on this cruise in payment for taking care of him and the girls nonstop for eighteen years. He said he thought it did Mandy a world of good last year and I should learn from her. I admired Mandy's adventurousness. I was glad we were roommates. If it hadn't been for her, I never would've had the nerve to call the cabin steward.

"You paid for it, dummy. What do you think these guys are here for?" When the steward arrived, I realized they were for something besides replenishing the toilet paper. He and Mandy circled each other melodramatically. I hadn't seen a mating ritual like that since Hedy Lamarr and Victor Mature. When they were done, he decided it was my turn. Before his stare got very lurid I pushed a quarter in his hand, closing the door on him.

"My God." I leaned against the door, jelly kneed.

"You're kidding me, Phyl. I can't believe you didn't expect that."

"You mean that was run-of-the-mill?"

"Absolutely standard."

Any remaining belief I had that ocean voyages were for Lionel Barrymore and young men with heart murmurs was laid to rest at dinner our first night out. Here again was the cavalcade of white waiter's jackets and spotless gloves twirling large round dinner trays and compact little bottoms twitching throughout the huge dining room. I couldn't tell these waiters apart. They never bothered the women with men. Why should they? There were plenty of solo women around, and most of them played coy little games with anyone who chortled "Che bella," as he pass her, even the old lady of about eighty-five across the large round table, though she obviously didn't realize what was going on.

I ate a lot that night, not so much because I was hungry, but my mouth kept falling open and I filled it to hide my embarrassment. I have always considered myself passably attractive, in a Midwestern sort of way. But I had never felt like a piece of merchandise. Perhaps I took it too seriously. But how could I be the only one around me who was not flattered by the waiters' compliments when they said the same words to everyone? I suspected they climbed into "Che bella" along with their jackets.

Mandy winked, squeezing my hand. "Relax, Phyl. Enjoy it. That's what we're here for."

I pulled my hand away. "That's what you're here for."

"Come on now. What happened to that game little college freshman you used to be? Don't make me sorry I brought you." She drained her third daiquiri. "Join the race; for Chrissake."

I went on deck alone. The breeze comforted me, a welcome to Mexico. The night sky sparkled energetically. I picked one star to talk to telepathically until it blinked and said, "Che bella." This was going to be some tranquil voyage. I even got upset reading in bed. I'd been waiting ages to read Fear of Flying, and now I wasn't moved by it. I didn't need to buy into anybody's sexual fantasies at the moment. I punched my pillow and gritted my teeth, determined to sleep.

Mandy swept breathlessly into the cabin. "Wow. These guys are even riper than last year's crop." She turned on the bright light.

"How can you tell?" I squinted at her.

"Every string inside me is zinging. I have dates with three waiters lined up already."

"My God, Mandy. Three."

"Last year I tried for quality and missed a lot of action. This time I'm settling for quantity."

"But what will you tell Peter?"

"That I had a good time. That's all." She looked in the mirror, blithely running her tongue over her upper teeth.

"Amanda, you have no scruples!"

"Jesus. You really are naive. If I had no scruples, I wouldn't bother with a cruise."

"I don't see the logic."

"Would you think it more upright of me to choose Peter's friends?"

"Well of course not! It's not an either/or situation. I don't see how you can justify it under any circumstances."

"Simple. Nobody gets hurt. Argue with that one."

"It's no use. Obviously you have all the answers." I think I fell asleep with my eyebrows raised, because I noticed a couple of new wrinkles above them in the morning.

Breakfast was a replay of dinner. I escaped to my deck chair. The morning sun warmed my face. A deck steward sauntered past, letting fly at me a good old "Che bella." The only thing to do was become a recluse for the duration of the voyage. With any luck I could get seasick. When I got to my cabin, a "Do Not Disturb" sign dangled from the latch. I knocked anyway. "Mandy?"

"Go play shuffleboard, Phyllis."

I couldn't even get into my own cabin. I was trapped on a floating bordello. I brooded in the Cuore D'Italia's library. I don't know how long I stared at the title. Girl of the Limerlost. I remembered it fondly from girlhood. I needed a good wholesome

story. And a new hairdo. I spent a pleasant morning with the book under a hair dryer. By lunch I had recovered my customary good humor, and the classic elegance of my new French Twist emboldened me. I actually requested our waiter to substitute cooked carrots for the Eggplant Parmegiana on the menu.

"Phyllis, I think you're catching on. You look marvelous."

I bit my tongue to keep from saying, "I hope at least you used your own bed." Instead I hissed, "I hope you had a nice morning, Amanda."

"Not bad. I'd give him a six on a scale of ten. You really should try it sometime."

I looked down my dilated nostril at her. "I'd have to make reservations."

"Is that shuffleboard, girls?" old Mrs. Purvis across the table intruded amiably.

"No dear, the gymnasium," Mandy winked at me.

"Funny," I droned, resenting her winks.

"Grow up, Phyllis. For six days we're in another life. Anything goes. Let loose, why don't you."

I had to admit that self-righteousness threatened to ruin my trip. I wanted to relax. So I chuckled when I heard "Che bella." I cheerfully changed my plans when I found a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the cabin door. Evening movies, hours in the gymnasium, swimming, walking on deck made me enjoy being alone. I learned to look past everybody like they were chairs. Soon my air of aloofness wasn't pretense any more. I was a self-contained unit, serene and confident, not merely Mrs. Ernest Brewster of Omaha.

On my way ashore at Mazatlan I sank into a club chair to make my shopping list. A voice from the bar distracted me. "A Tequila Sunrise? Or perhaps a Bloody Mary?" The slippery come-on got him nowhere with me.

Poring over my list, I said, "No. It's far too early."

"It is never too early for a thing you want to do. Or too late." With barely a glimpse of his obscene smile, I left the ship.

After an hour of crowded shopping in Mazatlan, I realized the same handsome face showed up everywhere I went. Each time I saw him, his eyes were on me. He never approached me. I glanced over my shoulder on the narrow cobblestone streets without seeing him, but he turned up at the next shop I entered. He was dark and could have been Mexican, but despite his huaraches and unbleached muslin clothing, he had a distinctly European air, like Rossano Brazzi in "South Pacific." Maybe it was the gray temples. Then I recognized him from the ship. He was an employee, though I couldn't remember if he wore a white waiter's or a gray steward's jacket. I had seen him watch me before, but the faces all ran together on the ship. This time he caught me looking at him. He made a slight genteel bow, smiled, and went on browsing. His teeth dazzled, like Tony Curtis in "The Great Race." This couldn't be real. I nearly collapsed a wobbly display table of shawls, my knees went so weak. I

thought I was ambling casually to the shoe department to sit down, until I found my fingernails in my scalp. I searched for the Deborah Kerr in me, but all I turned up with was Judy Canova. I tried on sandals. I wasn't interested in until my wits recovered from the adrenalin, and took the earliest launch to the ship. Just as I got to our cabin Mandy and one of her cherubs came out.

"We're going ashore. Want to come?" Mandy's expression contradicted her words.

"I just got back." I went gratefully into the cabin, intending to have a nap. But the room was small and their recently used bed still unmade. The smell of their mingled bodies lingered. I ran away.

The open library door invited me, a comfortable hint of book mildew subdued me, an old soft leather chair cradled me. I dreamed I went to a bullfight with Mandy. There was spectacle and color, but I don't remember any sound except the trumpets. No crowd noises. The bull came into the ring, and he was magnificent, shiny and black. He snorted and stamped his authority. The matador glistened, but his lustre was false. They performed their dance of power for a short time. And then the bull skewered the matador on his horn. He suspended him high for a moment, then tossed him contemptuously and walked away. Horrified, I asked Mandy to leave with me, but she loved it. She wore a dreadful bloodthirsty leer. I sat up and realized I was in the library when my Rossano Brazzi walked by in the passageway wearing a gray steward's jacket. He looked in and I just knew I was wild-eyed again. Every time he saw me I was on the brink.

"Mi scusi, I startled you?"

I sputtered and blushed, turning away.

"May I help the signora?"

"What?"

"May I bring you something?"

"No. Nothing thank you." I felt like such a fool. I should be able to handle this simple situation, but my new serenity vanished in the presence of this man, leaving me with only adolescent embarrassment. He didn't help me out of it, either. He just stood looking at me.

"You are different from the others." His words oozed from him, rich as mocha butter cream.

"I am?" My ears grew hot.

"Si. You are not here for the, como se dice, the sport."

I twirled my wedding band intently. "No."

"Is it heavy, the ring?"

Was I so transparent? "I don't know what you mean." I drowned in his dark eyes.

"I think you know." He knelt at my feet, weighing my finged hand in his own. Seconds lumbered past.

"Yes," I unintentionally whispered. We kissed. It just happened. I don't know who started it. But I knew how being radioactive feels. I pushed him away, finally. "Please," I gasped.

"Anything for you, bellissima." At least he didn't say 'Che bella'. "I finish work at 9:30. Meet me at lifeboat twenty-four on this deck."

"I don't know." I knew very little right then. How could I possibly meet him? It was absurd, I didn't even know his name. I couldn't get started. I wouldn't. Dismissing the whole idea, I spent the rest of the afternoon in my no longer musty cabin, writing a six page letter to Ernie.

I relaxed without Mandy at dinner. Occasionally old Mrs. Purvis smiled and nodded gaily as though I were talking to her. Poor thing was completely out of touch. I ate freshly caught shrimp. Ernie would like this cruise, if I could get him on the ship, but that wasn't likely. He had an idea he would be unmasculine to enjoy something like this. He was sweet to let me come without him. He had always treated me unselfishly. I missed him.

The night salt air invigorated me. I valued my evening stroll. Ernie liked walks. We used to walk after dinner often, before the girls were born. Funny how you forget to begin again the things being a mother wouldn't let you do for so long. I resolved not to forget any more.

"Buona sera, Signora."

My God, it was him. The wall clock said 9:40 and I was approaching lifeboat twenty-four. My throat went dry. "Good evening."

"I was not certain to see you."

"As a matter of fact," I couldn't say I was only passing by, even to think it sounded lame, "Neither was I."

He had traded his tie and gray jacket for a fringed vest over his rolled up shirtsleeves and a narrow silver scarf around his neck, tied at a rakish angle like Ricardo Montalban. The top of his shirt was unbuttoned. My heart fluttered at his well developed hairy chest and the iridescent moonlight on the water didn't help. This was all frighteningly romantic. His hands gripped the railing on either side of me. I hesitate to call what happened next a kiss. What we did needs an eighteen letter word.

He towed me into the deserted library. We sat on the davenport, all four hands jumbled like a pile of worms, both of us listening to my heart beat. I needed to say something to him, but the words were dammed up behind a lump in my throat. I was afraid if I pushed them out, the lump would dissolve into tears. We kissed again and Mrs. Purvis interrupted us.

"Good evening, dear. Lois, wasn't it?"

"Phyllis."

"Yes. That's what I said. I have to put this book back," she held out Winnie the Pooh, "and get another."

"Who is it for?" I tried to sound as casual as she did.

"For me. I read myself to sleep every night. My eyes are perfect." She took Lady Chatterly's Lover from the shelf. "One fantasy's as good as the next when you're my age." She laughed and hobbled out. I gaped after her.

"Phyllis, a good name. I am Massimo." Great. Not only did I know his name, leaving me without an excuse, but it melted me. Massimo, my God. "Where is your cabin, Cara Mia Phyllis?"

"I won't tell you." I knew a last chance when I saw one.

"Of course, I am sorry. It is only that you make a fire in my heart."

As we walked in the wind my breathing became more regular. I could handle this. As long as we stayed out of my cabin, everything was fine. Mandy had told me that any employee found with a passenger in his room was heavily fined, so I was in the clear.

"Come, I want to show you something." He led me down a narrow passageway I never saw before. I had the feeling we were in the stomach of the huge ship and would be digested forever. Massimo unlocked a small door into a storeroom. All the fixtures for celebration rested here, flower baskets, music stands, candelabra, props for stage shows. I followed him through a tight maze of aisles to a secluded corner. A small mattress covered with a new Mexican blanket was against the corner, and the other two walls were formed by a pub mirror and a fake brick fireplace bearing a coat of arms. Old gray velvet theater curtains covered the entrance. I wanted to ask who else knew about this place and how often he brought women here, but he kissed me and I forgot about everything but his body. I pushed myself against him anywhere I could make contact. We nearly fell. We sat on the bed. We lay on the bed. We probed each other's clothing for openings, never separating mouths. I knew I was hyperventilating when my fingers and toes fell asleep. My mind was next, unless I controlled my breathing. The idea of being naked with a man other than Ernie overwhelmed me, and it was happening! Massimo got up to hang our clothes on the sword handles over the mantle. He stared at himself in the mirror. He was beautiful, his dark olive skin interrupted by a swimming trunk stripe, accentuating firm round buttocks and a magnificent erection. He had so much dark body hair he felt furry rubbing against me. Anywhere I touched him he was firm, the polar opposite of Ernie. My every pore opened to him. He neglected none of them. We rolled around in sweat and increasing intensity until we collapsed in a puddle, smiling. It was the best missionary position I ever experienced. No wonder, he was so big. Ernie would never bottom out like that. But then, he didn't need to with the deep electric spasmodic orgasm he gave me. Maybe Ernie wasn't so romantic after all these years, but he knew where all my buttons were and when to push them. Still, Massimo was sensational.

As soon as I had strength enough, I crept to my cabin, pantyhose wadded in my hand. It had seemed too much trouble

to put them on just for the trip, but I was wrong. They were the only underthings I had been wearing, and I had a hell of a time keeping my full length skirt from sticking to my thighs or between my buttocks.

Mandy was asleep alone when I snuck in. I took a long shower. Massimo had invited me to meet him again. When I said I would, I wanted to. Now I wasn't so sure. I lay in bed awake, crotch tingling. The guilt spread from there throughout my body, spilling out into a gray cloud over me. I stayed under the cloud and off Massimo's deck for the rest of the voyage, picking at my food, standing naked in front of the cabin mirror, wondering how I could have allowed this to happen. Unlike Mandy, Fidelity wasn't just the name of an insurance company to me.

The day before our arrival in San Pedro, Mandy called me from the pool. "Look down there." She pointed out a retreating Massimo on the lower deck. "See that steward?" I nodded. "He's the most beautiful man on this ship. But boy does he know it. He's so snooty he won't give me a glance. I chased him last year. What a waste of time. I hear he only makes it with gorgeous women he has to conquer. Hell, he conquered me just walking by." I caught myself feeling smug.

As Mandy led the way ashore, we passed not one but this time two rows of uniforms. A great many stewards had congregated in a line on the opposite side of the exit from the waiters. I was panicked Massimo would be there. I aimed my eyes at the carpet, aware only of black pants and shoes.

Once on shore, Mandy looked wistfully back to the Cuore D'Italia. "Well, the game is over."

"Yes!" I heaved.

"Till next year."

Wake Up Call

by Mark H. Bartow

Drama in the morning
Under sunrise
Up from Munich
To elevate the buildings
To warm the ocean's dawn,
With no attempt at eulogy
But rather celebration
The bending rays fuel everything
That dozed at the setting,
Theatre uncompromised
Reporatory hustling
The inner city melts
Ain't no dew on the pavement,
A cat slips by
A siren heeds a graveyard
A main street delusion
Works its way to exile,
Los Angeles, like Chile
Burns like Philadelphia
Somewhat less noble
But still close to Tijuana,
Police in the vicinity
Cats become the tenants
Forecast for tomorrow
Looks to more of the same.

Autumn in His Bones

by Matt Walker

That old migratory message was
flapping her wings again. Walking
barefoot down the center of the

deserted street, Bartholomew wished
his heart could sail, for an hour or so,
on the moonlit wind. Feeling the unseen

brought out the leaf within him.
Gliding on air currents,
riding the crest of the wind waves,

he'd more than once longed to be
that crackly old elm bud
on its solo autumnal flight. Gently,

without a tear of remorse, the brown leaf
is lowered onto the bermuda lawn, and
held up to the elements by the blades,

like the stiff Sioux perched on his
burial cradle. But first, let Bartholomew
be granted his final request:

"to once more sit, as in autumns past,
in the masthead perch atop the
avocado tree in Grandma's half-acre.

Sure, there were elms there,
and a sturdy carob too, but the ocean sway
in that leafy crowsnest, with the

halloween wind in my face was piracy."
Now, take a moonlit street
stirred with a gusty Santa Ana

and who wouldn't swear to walk
from there in the purple
clear to the yellow

TWO POEMS

by Lou Di Giacomo

Lichen 1

for P.S.

1

Mosses fell the rock
mill their dead: We
know only their fur

2

Doves, as they luff, fail
and turn in their decision
(a bird's stall is not like yours)

3

(Will you sit here now?)
A glide of green lichen spooks you

Lichen 2

1

These questions about the kelp
does it float or reach?
will not tell you that it strains

2

Starfish hold to rocks
washed over/they sulk
(they do not spin when they walk)

3

We'll scrape this lichen
off the boards when we paint

