Staff...

The MITRE is 92 years old this year, and although it has seen various facelifts and shifts in editorial policy, it remains an independent literary venture of which Bishop's University students and faculty may be proud of. It is with great pleasure, and honour, that the staff has put together the 1985 version of the MITRE.

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Dorothy Carson-Hobbs

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Is this the shape of things to come, or am I so square, I am unable to comprehend Per-sig’s values?

I can’t fix the damned bike, or the leaky faucet, but I can try.
untitled poem

spin the circle slowly roll the bones
sepia toned bodies walking backwards on their heels

dog dance

bear dance

dance of the river child

sepia toned bodies walking backwards to the drum
spin the circle slowly roll the bones
midnight preparations for fratricidical rights

— Penny Henderson-Nutbrown

Misplaced Cog in a Square Machine

I orbit you
as the moon circles the Earth
while you are trapped in
a path
I cannot affect.

Slowly, I come closer
until...
I am forced back
once again

Debris floats between us
memories of your attempts
to cross the void.
Their impact
scars me

You, in your path
I, in mine;
I orbit you
Getting no closer,
go no further,
No change occurs.

We are trapped by a force
Science cannot explain

— Charles Campbell
The Smell of Warm Grass

I was in desperate need of a job. The field-marshal, otherwise known as Mom, had just sliced my allowance in half. She gave me some crap about inflation and the high cost of living and how I should learn the value of a dollar. So there I was, summer vacation just begun and no money. I hear grown-ups saying that the job market’s tight, believe me it’s a lot tighter when you’re only fourteen. I was about to give up the search and try to kiss a few more pennies out of the field-marshal, when I saw an ad in the newspaper:

Wanted teenage boy for very special job.
Good pay and reasonable hours.
Call Maggie Tobias at 875-4971

When I called, there was no one at home except the housekeeper, who spoke only French. My own French doesn’t go much past “parlez-vous”, so I didn’t really understand the job description. I managed to figure out that I should stop by the house that evening to meet “Madame” Tobias if I were really interested in the job.

The address was a way to hell and gone out on MacDonald Road. MacDonald Road is a dusty, winding stretch of continual bumps, lined on both sides by tangled fields and droopy farmhouses. There used to be real farms out there, but the Research Center had bought up most of the backland to grow experimental, pink alfalfa or something. Still, the MacDonald Road is a nice place if you’re into trees and nature and stuff. I’m not.

The Tobias house looked pretty much like the other houses on the Road, except maybe the flowers in the front yard were a little healthier. I was met at the door by Attila the Housekeeper. She was one of those jumbo-sized, trench Canadian memeres in rolled down stockings and canvas sneakers. Hard as yesterday’s burnt toast and just as appetizing. She sniffed me over thoroughly and then led me down an alley-like hallway to the kitchen.

Maggie Tobias sat at the table, half hidden behind books and folders. She stood up when we came in. She was one of those mouse-colored women who usually turn out to be either teachers or social workers.

“Madame Tobias, le petit pour le job. Wrandy chose,” the walking mountain said, shrugging in my direction.

“Randy Maxfield,” I said. I was not a “chose.”

“Hi, Randy, I’m Maggie Tobias.” She smiled a lot and when she shook my hand her grip was like a guy’s. “So you’re interested in the job?”

“I was dizzy. “What would be?”

“Keeping Toby company while I’m at work, of course.”

What? Keep him, that weird kid, company all summer. No way, Jose! Not me. Cripes, what would the guys say?

Maggie Tobias was off and running again. Of course, I wouldn’t really be responsible for Toby. Mrs. Boulanger would always be there. All I’d have to do was keep him company; read to him, listen to music, whatever boys did. Nine to three, Monday to Thursday, two dollars an hour. Did I want the job? She seemed eager, even a little desperate.

Like I said, I was desperate too. Besides, the money was good. It wasn’t hard work and somebody else was there to handle the tough stuff. Toby didn’t seem to do much anyway.

The first week was awful. Actually, it would have had to improve a whole lot to have been only awful. Jelly-Belly Boulanger was out to get me as of day one. There was no t.v. and the only records were either classical or the 60’s folk stuff. The books were great though, by cripe: “Introduction to American Archaeology,” “The Confederation Poets,” “Special Children An Integrative Approach,” and the ever popular “Mother Goose.” As for Toby, all he wanted to do was sit in a corner somewhere. Jumpin’ frogs on Friday, what was a guy to do anyway?

Thursday afternoon was the worst of all. Was it hot! Up around the house there wasn’t a breath of air. Of course, Boulanger would pick that day to bake bread, and in the wood cook-stove no less. The little yellow flowers on...
the kitchen wallpaper looked wilted. I sat on the front porch with Toby, who was being especially weird. He kept rocking back and forth like a mechanical bird or something. Back and forth, back and forth. The sun shone down like there was no tomorrow and mosquitoes swarmed around my face by the hundreds.

"Cut that out Toby, it's stupid."
He kept on rocking.
"Toby, I said stop it." Things were starting to get to me.
Toby rocked faster, more frantically.
"I'm gettin' mad, boy."
Toby began knocking his head against the wall of the house.
Rock, bang. Rock, bang.
"Toby, Toby, stop it." I was yelling and had jumped to my feet.
Bang, bang, bang.
I was really scared now. "Boy, when she gets home this afternoon, Maggie Tobias is going to get an ear full. I quit. I've had enough of this crazy job. Toby, stop it!"
Then I think that I flipped out a little. I grabbed Toby and pulled him bodily off the porch. It was the first time that I'd touched him.
"We're going for a walk!"

In the field away from the house it was cooler. My strangle hold on Toby's wrist relaxed and, much to my surprise, I found that I was holding his hand. A flock of birds flew by overhead and Toby watched them until they disappeared into the distance. He stared for a long time afterwards at the empty sky, and I wondered what he was thinking about. The smell of warm grass filled the air. Toby turned to me and for a moment we just stood there and looked at each other. Then he turned his gaze back to the sky. He was smiling.

When Maggie Tobias got home at three, I didn't tell her what she could do with her job the way that I'd said I would. She wished me a nice weekend and I mumbled something similar. Toby was sitting cross-legged on the porch, cradling a dirty, white cat. He didn't look up when I stepped out of the house. I felt all uncomfortable.

Walking along I couldn't figure out why I felt so badly. I mean, I'd done what I'd been paid to do, right? I hadn't quit. I hadn't left her in the lurch. Why did I have this two-ton rock in my gut, anyway?

I thought that I heard someone behind me and I looked over my shoulder to see who it was. It was Toby. He must have followed me. He looked at me expectantly. For a moment everything just hung there so still and quiet. I guessed that he wasn't satisfied with my good-bye, and come to think of it, neither was I. I reached out and took his hand. We walked back together.
untitled poem

Mother of God,
that’s me!
They try to
tell me different,
but I know
what’s going on
It’s my son, you see,
I’ve become a burden
to him,
so he and the wife
(Virgin Mary my ass.
I told him not to
get mixed up with her!) I have dumped me here
so they don’t have
to listen to me
But I’ve fixed them
When they come
to visit,— —
I don’t talk
to them at all

Ah Geneviève

Spring sprouts struggled through last fall’s browned weeds
As the sun melted into her wintered palms.
It had been a long cold season.
She smiled as the sun warmed her crevassed face

Marvin was too old to come out
Hard winters of his youth had made stiff his bones
He lay bundled in his bed
Waiting for the day the neighbour lad
Would come and take the plastic off the windows

She tottered back into the house
—an old childhood rhyme flowering in her mind
She fixed him a cup of tea from the tin that held
the real loose leaves
— took his favourite plate and heaped it with
sweets their daughter had sent from the big town.

Their dimming eyes glittered
— while the wind played with the plastic
They sat—nodding their heads

A few weeks later she observed buds on the trees
and rediscovered the crocus patch
—the cookies had all been eaten but she made
one last pot of tea from the special tin.

They sit, friends of time
waiting for the blossoms on the apple tree

Mary Welsh

—Andrea Schwenke
untitled poem

My friend claims
there are ghosts in her attic.
She is afraid to climb the stairs.

There are ghosts in the basement.
She is afraid to descend.

There are ghosts on the back porch
in the dining room
the bedroom
bathroom.

I search
perform an exorcism before her watchful eyes.
Still

she wraps herself in blankets of terror
closes her eyes against apparitions.

Her fear is more real
than the ghosts could ever be.

Wendi Hadd

“Smoke”

Grant Siméon
untitled poem

hah
The hair fell out in spirals from the middle
The forehead conquered and claimed
territory greedily.
White hairs settled in his beard
and sprung in curly masses out of his nose
and ears
But he just laughed at his body's peevish
attempts at decay.
he laughed and laughed toning his belly muscles
improving his respiratory system
he'd grown far too wise
to be dismayed by nature's well worn tricks.
It is my goal it is my wish
to creak and bellow
to be gnarled and yellow
but that takes time
a long long time
especially for a spry young fellow
so I'll not listen to your tales
of calcifying brains and
unfit marrow
it is a mere nasty fiction
in your head that impedes
your thought and will to grow
beyond the realm of youth
and sorrow.
Hah I say and hah again,
it is a privilege and a pleasure
and I will taunt this school of thought
until the day I wish
to sit and make the sounds
old people make in armchairs to
see how ridiculously they can be treated.
First Corinthians 15:14

Mike doesn’t believe in religion. He believes if people have faith in themselves they’ll find there’s no need for God to show them what’s right and wrong.

Mike lives in a big old house with his girlfriend. He didn’t tell me that, someone else did. She works somewhere. He doesn’t. He comes to my house and I make him strong coffee. We talk while he drinks. We never talk about his girlfriend. Maybe she doesn’t exist. When he’s finished his coffee, we go to bed.

Mike plays guitar. He plays electric, wild and well. I go to see him play in bars. He forgets me for the music. I talk to people who can make me laugh. When I look up, he’s watching me.

Mike used to be a drug addict. He stopped for awhile but now I think he’s starting again. It worries me. I can’t say anything though. If I do, he gets defensive, and nasty about my problems. I guess I shouldn’t worry, we’ll both survive.

Mike dropped out of college. He said it was because of the lies. The “system” is based on lies. Now he says he’s going back. I don’t know if the lies turned to truths. Or if at twenty-four, he’s learned to ignore them because they can’t be changed. We’ve both learned to turn a blind eye.

Mike goes on binges. He can drink sixteen hours straight. I find him at the end of it. I take him home and put him in my bed. He sleeps it off while I write papers on religious philosophy. When he wakes up, he proof reads them for me.

Mike isn’t sure if some of the things he does are right. He doesn’t want to hurt people. But we can’t talk of things that may not exist. I catch him looking into himself with disbelief. Maybe I should take him to church.

Invisible String

To keep her from leaving he ties her with fishing line secretly

He tells her she’s free to go
She tries
but the line digs into her flesh
Seeing nothing to bind her it must be feelings for him gnawing at her heart
she stays, puzzled.

In the darkness she lies awake while he dreams of fishing and consuming his catch

Wendi Hadd
This pen is green. That has nothing to do with the fact that the ink it contains is also green. It is a mere coincidence that the pen and the ink it contains are about the same colour. The point that I'm trying to make is that the exterior (and presumably, the interior,) of the pen with which I am writing is green. As a matter of fact, I'm no longer writing "the pen with which I am writing," but, rather, about it. Must I write something to write about that something? To write about the pen with which I am writing I must write "the pen with which I am writing." Maybe I should write "the pen with which this was written." However, "the pen with which this was written" was written with the pen with which this was written. It's all very confusing. Not the pen, that is. The pen is quite clear—well, actually, its green. What I mean to say is that the pen itself does not confuse me at all. Writing about the pen is quite another thing, though I only get confused when I write about the pen. How can the pen be so simple while the writing which concerns the pen is so confusing? Maybe the pen isn't as simple as I thought. Maybe this is actually a very complex pen; an extremely intricate device which, though of human origin, is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Could it really be that this little pen is beyond my understanding? A cosmic pen! A pen about which nothing can really be known... except that it is green... and that it contains green ink... and that it has gold writing on the side and a white top and a silver claps and... Hey! I know quite a bit about this pen. Well, if I know so much then why did I get so confused when writing about the pen. Wow! Now I'm writing about writing about the pen! I must be a lot more advanced than I thought.

So I'm writing with a green pen. I just wrote "I just wrote..." I'm writing with a green pen." Writing about the pen with which one is writing is kind of like writing about what one had just written with the pen with which one had written it, except that when one is writing about the pen with which one is writing one is not sure when the writing will end.
Tell Me

The splintering
of the looking-glass
sets off a fearsome resonance.
In that mirror I foresaw
the happily-ever-after,
in it we were
reflected
in a frozen moment
of split-faced grin
and hope for the future.

Now we are surrounded by the shards,
whose jagged edges
wound,
and if we travel back
through one fragment—
attempting reclamation—
who says
our upside-wrong lives
will correspond?

Dorothy Carson-Hobbs

L'insupportable

Voilà le quelque chose,
dont tu cherchais.
le-voilà,
ce qui faisait trembler les paralytiques
cesse cesse
de te replier, en deux
en huit
en neuf
que veux-tu découvrir?
un souffle étouffant?
un tic à gratter?
un vivant à arracher?
le vide à ressentir
Voilà le don,
preserve en verre
suspendu en goutte.
Enfin, attendais-tu le tonnerre?

Peneloppi Gramatikopoulos
A Great and Crucial Conflict

A Few Days Before a Rendezvous

He pulls a napkin out from under a pile
Scribbles: How Deep in Love am I
and strikes a match
Setting fire to the napkin
Burns his thumb
Rejoices in the pain
in the love
At the threshold of his woodshed
He buries his thumb in snow
Snow kills the pain

Evening

Thin yellow candles are lit
she telephones
She will be late
His voice hollows
masking judgement
He blows out the candles for a while

Arrival

Upon her arrival
he is entranced
by studied movement
as she reaches into the closet
drapes a blue coat on a hanger.
He sees her in a dress for the first time

Nothing Happens

She is never boring
He never f**ks her
They shall not commit adultery
After a while
She feels sick
He: "I am so tired"
She: "What we say and do here
lovers in Ovid's Afternoon Diversions lived too"
They move about like wires
on the bed
she between sitting and lying down
keeping her heavenly legs out of reach
The ritual of
firecracker, wire, ice

Denouement

They leave dessert
most of the wine
The air is warm
electric, lethargic
A glass of wine is overturned
Neither knows about salt for a wine-stained rug
He. "You're the diplomat's wife-to-be"
She: "Am I going to have to know the right thing to do
for every occasion?
Will I become a kewpie doll?"
"Marry me instead," he whispers.
They return to the bed
Light cigarettes
I am held together with scotch tape

I make no sudden moves and it holds.
I do not expose myself to extremes of sun and rain and it holds.
I keep myself from others who pick at frayed ends and it holds.

Yet still I am afraid
I hold my breath as the pieces break away.
Apsaroke warriors wore their hair long,
flowing like black water down around their feet.
It gave them comfort.
They were considered the most handsome of all
the North American Indians.
“Born on a horse,” said a general of the U.S. Cavalry.
Sometimes I can see them in my head,
Riding through deep prairie grass,
encircled by the graying sky,
long hair flying in the hard wind
NaKoma where are you now?
Where are all the beautiful Apsaroke warriors now?

Penny Henderson Nutbrown
Nuance

The current flowed strong
boiled the mud
scattered the pebbles
she stood suspended
above the crevice
fragile flowers limp
dangling off her fingers
A blank gaze
carpeted her face.
Eyes sunk deep
in the trembling sockets
plus beanbags
that gave way
forever
falling back
into another constellation
where the fibers of her soul
shuddered in harmony.
Reality lacked consistency
it was a gluey pulp
of mellowed oranges and grey
The traveller made his way
stepping lightly on the springy stones
dib dib doom
shukka shukka
oooooommm
the silent lands of
introspection
were clustered with makeshift
dwellings
of silly putty
Meanwhile the balloon man
swayed in the incensed
gusts of wind
exhaled
slowly and with great concentration

Continued on next page
Will you Please...

...just leave!!

closing doors
I listen, eager
for one last sigh
some kind of proof
that we once loved
other than this
pain in parting

all night diner coffee poems
cannot revive
the truth of
arms, and lips, and thighs —

good-bye
for lon chaney

naked fear clasps its inconsiderate mitts everywhere
on yr throat lon invisible man
im not sure where ive been lon
the desolate landscape of the ballpark
has permanently altered my perception of the universe

i wish you were on tv tonight lon
let genius be lizard like tonight lon
it was sd that you were lizard like by smone
& that you hated weakness & did yr own makeup
those gruesome teeth you flashed in phantom

i wish you were on tv tonight lon
yr genius wd inspire into a better songwriter

invisible man im not sure where ive been lon
& i want the tv to make you alive

David McGimpsey

untitled poem

He's busy filing his mind
sorting, folding & editing
(it's his answer to valium).

He has separate drawers
for each category
subdivided into
thoughts, feelings & miscellaneous.

Mary Welsh
Dishes tend to piles
piles tend to heap
precariously
paper, clothes, books
dust, junk
and eventually, surrounded
you part them hoping
to create a path
a way out
a narrow lane between
the tiny clearing in which you
barely
have room to squat and
the door

As you plan your escape
from the jungle of cozy
comforting treacherous junk
a strange suspicion forms
and grows cunning and nagging
in the hopeless caves and grottos
of your mind, somewhere there
in the undefined regions of
scattered images and unprocessed thought
you are slowly awakened to the fact
that underneath
those piles
something, surely, is growing
something awful that will knot your tummy
something that will have to be disposed of...
but, fortunately(?), you've got commitments
so, for the time being

you step nimbly
between the mountainous heaps
and flee through the door
that barely opens
and close the link
to the subterranean
maze of your mind

...and with it the
consciousness of the
wicked festival that will
level your beloved niche
and spread...

But no matter
it's a fine day
already you grin
as the cold clamps its
icy ivory
and pierces your flesh
with joie d'être alive
until the sun sets
and you fit yourself back
inside
somehow

and find everything
exactly as you left it
sometime that night
fast asleep
the knowledge seeps
out again
your subconscious reigns
you turn your head the other way
lug your dusty blanket tighter.

Andrea Schwenke