

# THE MITRE

1993-1994



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BISHOP'S  
UNIVERSITY



Illustration by Kay Kinsman

# THE MITRE

1993-1994

CENTENNIAL ISSUE

EDITORS:

WILLIAM D. DUNCAN

KUNO G. TUCKER

# BISHOP'S UNIVERSITY



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## INTRODUCTION:

When we first set out, in the Fall of 1993, to be editors of *The Mitre*, we thought that we would make this a special edition. This is, after all, the centennial anniversary of *The Mitre* and the Sesquicentennial anniversary of Bishop's University.

We tried to get Bishop's alumni/ae to submit literary and art work, but we received very little. At the beginning we were even wondering if we would receive sufficient submissions from this year's students and faculty at Bishop's University. We should have expected the typical last minute deluge of work sent in by students, faculty, and even other members of the Bishop's community. We are grateful for those submissions, and we thank those who finally surrendered their work.

We then tried to capture a theme for this year's edition. After looking through the accepted works we finally settled on the theme of rebirth: This is the age of renaissance for both *The Mitre* - returning to its old format - and for Bishop's University - who only recently reappropriated and refurbished McGreer Hall (at a more handsome cost than *The Mitre*!).

We would like to think that perhaps the book that you are now holding before you will mean something for you as it does for us - and perhaps as it should mean for every member of the Bishop's community. We are all part of something greater than ourselves, in many ways. We are part of a living, growing tradition that surrounds and envelopes this university, and anyone who has ever been a part of it. Each year *The Mitre* has emerged renewed and reborn, and we hope that it will continue to do so for ages to come.

As it has been in the past, and as it shall be in the future, *The Mitre* would not have been accomplished without the help of others: Here we should acknowledge the support of Kerry Shuttleworth, The Students' Representative Council, Diane Blanchette for the use of her printer, and numerous others, especially those who not only submitted work, but also encouraged friends to submit work.

We would now like to direct the gentle reader's attention to the dedication.

## DEDICATION

While we type this dedication, millions of South Africans are at the polling stations in their country. They are participating in the rebirth of their nation in a new era of politics. Their new government will, constitutionally, work for *all* the people and by *all* the people - regardless of race or ancestry.

This new political foundation arrives at the cost of the lives of numerous unsung South African heroes; they knew the life-threatening risks they were taking when they decided to work against the entrenched racist mentality. They never faltered.

We would like to dedicate this, the hundredth anniversary issue of The Mitre, to the memory of Patford Shuma, a recent graduate of Bishop's University who was assassinated for trying to bring about change in his country. Without people like Patford Shuma, with his determination and goodwill, there would be little chance for a rebirth or regeneration. He died for the one thing we all cherish - freedom. May the world be peopled with more generous souls like Patford Shuma.

## WITH MORE TO COME

Gavin Fearon

graffiti on walls  
provides the backdrop  
as the latenight news  
anchor  
straightens  
his  
tie  
to tell us  
(notice the primitive  
chants in the background)  
about the vicious  
beating of a man  
guilty only by colour  
by (too) many radicals.  
scores of ghetto prisoners  
loot and level  
the neighborhood  
which holds symbols of  
centuries-long oppression.  
it's not the Bastille  
so as Rodney pleads for  
immediate peace the  
potential for  
empty  
campaign  
promises  
continues and grows.  
i start to wonder what  
Martin would think but  
i realize that no King  
nor any number of horses  
can put the System  
back together again

## "MY GENERATION"

Phil Bilodeau



## LEGACY

Kuno G. Tucker

Generation X  
Should consider why  
So little means so much.

We're indolent and ignorant,  
We can't read or write;  
But just who fostered  
This inarticulate plight?

## MEANING

Kuno G. Tucker

What does man not mean?  
Why does he not mean?  
How can he not mean?  
Why is Derrida so mean?

## WAR CABINET NOTES

Bryan R. Dollack

Just as the snow melts  
In the heat of the midday sun,  
My patience wanes,  
dissipates and is gone  
With the irrationality  
That defines what we have become;  
Constantly striving to get ahead.  
Funny how it forces us  
To undertake our own deaths  
Simply to feel alive.

Your mask does not hide  
As much of your true face  
As you might have hoped.  
An open book,  
Whose contents disgust those  
True of heart, true of soul.

There will come a time,  
Of this I am sure,  
When the structures  
That ensure your prosperity  
Will bite your feet off  
At the ankles  
Leaving you to hobble around  
On your bloodied stumps.

## ELYSIUM

J. P.

Take me where the horses graze upon the breeze  
And children sit upon my knees  
Where poison colors swim with sky  
Where lions roar and ravens fly  
Between the trees and hills full grown  
Far from the darkest night, alone.  
Where golden pollen rains on the hordes  
And lilacs grow between the boards  
Where warblers flitter in pools of gold  
And ocean's stories are being told  
Where zepherous winds browse o'er my face  
And my footprints never leave a trace  
O how I hope I find this place...

"OVER THE HILL FROM THE MARSH"

Kerri Breadner



AFRICAN MASK SCULPTURE

S.A.

IF IT WASN'T FOR THE BETRAYAL I WOULDN'T HAVE TO LOOK AT THE MASK  
THAT

IS DANGLING ON THE WALL

IF IT HAPPENED TO STARE AT ME I WOULD START TO TELL THE TALES OF THE  
TRIBES

THROUGH THE RITUALS THE FIRE  
THROUGH THE KISSES A TASTE OF THRILL  
ANOTHER 30 MILLION YEARS

A RATTLESNAKE WAS FOUND A SOUVENIR KEPT AND THE SECRETS WERE  
UNCOVERED ONCE AGAIN

THE FESTIVITIES STARTED LATE SOME HUNTERS DID NOT RETURN FOR  
ANOTHER

30 MILLION YEARS

PAGES OF DESIRE

REASON WITH TRUTH

RESPECT FOR THE DEAD

PEOPLE OF A TRIBE

TAUGHT TO SURVIVE

TRAVEL TO HIDE

THE THIN DREAD OF TIME

DRUMS BEAT AGAIN

THE BEAUTY OF LOVE

ONE OF A KIND

NEVER TO BE SEEN

SISTERS OF A CRIME

### THE WORST THING

Irena Irving

11 21 93

The worst thing  
Is not knowing  
You wonder and fear  
And you don't know how it's going.  
Your hands sweat  
Your heart beats fast  
Ice balls in your stomach  
Like you've been kicked in the ass.  
At least if you knew  
You could move on  
Now you're a broken record  
Playing a song.  
The song - it continues  
Over and over it skips and plays  
You ought to stop it  
Fix it or throw it away.  
Because if the record is broken  
And your song is demolished  
At least you know  
And your fear is abolished

### PASSING

Tony Hosein

Our toils, our labors, our troubles.  
We build our lives,  
monuments in time.

Extravagant,  
this castle of action and accomplishment.  
Each brick a grain of sand  
a breath.

This thing,  
aged to ripeness by the passing day,  
and cradled to rest by the lapping wave

## PRAIRIE RED

Mike Booth

I was sitting in front of the t.v., watching the news when I realized that I really wanted to move to Saskatchewan. You know those sensations you get? One day something is so far out of your mind you can't even tell your dog about it. The next day, it's so real that not only are you packing amber suitcases and renting a station wagon but you're on your way to the best and most underrated province in the country. No location, nothing. I just got in the fucking car, man, and I drove. Through those rocks, through all of that. A big orange sign in the windshield saying, "Saskatchewan, man, fucking Saskatchewan." I just wanted to break through it all. I hear this shit about that province. It isn't true and I knew it. This was a holy crusade. I was going to Saskatchewan and I was dragging Canada with me. When I got to Saskatchewan, it was not only going to live up to its potential as the utopia on earth, it was going to become the most ridiculously overpopulated section of land on the earth. Manitoba and Alberta were going to get jealous and change their names to Phil East and Phil West, hoping to attract some of those people being pushed up against the borders. The United States was going to destroy itself in a fiery mass suicide, finally realizing its insignificance and trivial existence. As glorious as all that sounds, it's all still up for the future. There's an obstacle out there that was too big for me but hopefully my warning can shrink it to a size that can be surmountable for you. Halfway through Manitoba I pulled over to get some gas. The locals gave my car a look over. "Where ya headin'?" the clean cut student asked. I just motioned to my sign and smiled, prouder than rotting buffaloes. There was about fourteen people hanging out at that Esso and they all jumped back in shock. The attendant was a little braver than the rest. He composed himself and asked "Ya packing heat?" I nodded. In the corner of my rear view mirror I saw people fighting their way to the phone, people writing down my license number and drawing pictures of me from every angle. The attendant nodded back. "The only way out is to blast out." I didn't want to give him the impression that I had no idea what he just said so I answered "Fucking right, man, fucking fucking right!" With a hideous smile smoother than margarine, I finished my transaction and was on my way. Traveling like nothing more than an innocent, semi law obeying Canadian, I instantly became public enemy number one and the target of martyrdom. I don't want to give the impression that I think I'm a messiah or that I have some special psychic ability that makes me special. I'm just saying that I stumbled on a revelation. I wasn't the first to know it

but I was the first one not supposed to know who knew. I'm sworn to secrecy but I've leaked a bit and it just isn't fair for me to leave you off there. Even with my warning at Esso, I had no idea that stuff like this was even possible but soon I found out about the police force put together for the sole reason of stopping people like me with my vision. What Saskatchewan is now, is what those people want it to be, forever. I'm not blaming the United States. I'm not blaming Alberta or Manitoba. I'm saying it's all three. They're too powerful and they're not going to let it happen. But empires fall. I'm just telling you people who grab this ten thousand years from now that it's Saskatchewan, friends, fucking Saskatchewan. I was chased for over 200 hundred km., after the Prairie cops saw my sign. The full force after me, flying across Canada at over 150 clicks an hour like ducks after a yellow leaf. They cornered me in the suburbs of Winnipeg between an independent convenience store and a Subway. I reached deep into my soul because I knew this was the moment of judgment. I loaded my piece and screamed at them "You can't stop the movement, you bastards. My blood will colour the Saskatchewan flag of the new Empire. Top of the dustball, ma! Top of the fucking dustball!" Then I fired. I got one. Four bullets to one knee, killed him instantly. That pissed him off. Could see it in their eyes. They wanted my spleen. Seconds later they opened fire. The dumpsters tore to shreds. My innards mixed with plastic bags and rotten bread. I made the news, "Doped up teenager shot by Police. Gun Control Review Possible." My pain and effort was scrapped by a corrupt media, but I know my message is alive. Stand up and move to Saskatchewan! They can't catch us all!

**HAIKU**

Laurie Hannan

After the storm had ended,  
one last drop fell to the ground;  
as she blinked her eyes.

A beautiful gem.  
Sparkling, rare, precious; worth a million.  
My one, everlasting love.

**"WOMAN BATHING"**(woodcut)  
W. Andy Knight



## INDIA

Elizabeth J. Wallace

There she is again.

Last time she was young with a smooth face and straight hair. Today her frame is bent and her hair is thin and grey. And God knows who she will be tomorrow, or where she will find me. She seems to follow me, you know. It's like she knows I can't go

Her face tonight is flushed pink, like the snow under the lights outside the window

Snow and India.

She is India reflected in a frosted window. And what am I?

She is India, and elephants, sandalled feet walking dustily towards a dusty shade. She is the sickness she has known, and the people she has touched. She has in her Gañdhi and handwoven cloth. This knowledge is hers. It sings from her every movement.

It sings to me.

She knows she is small. But, God! So big. Her horizons, let me reach them once, please — feel the sting of the sand and the heat of the sun, wash the dust away again, and again and again. Let me try. Please, let me try.

I tire of being your porcelain doll.

## METEOROLOGY

Nick Zacharias

The first snowflakes of Fall  
swirl and swarm,  
confused.

Winter's mosquitoes  
fall and rise again  
as if afraid of the ground...  
you never see one touch it.

Credit thermodynamics if you must:  
residual heat, thermal updrafts, whatever -

But I know  
they are like me,  
and can't decide if they are ready  
to take on new ground  
still nostalgically warm from youthful summer.

### MY BLIZZARD

Kimberly O'Shea

The twig tickles the clouds.  
The grey thickens the air,  
which I feel upon my pores.  
Barren and bleak,  
but my own fault.  
Rain collides and connects  
with the snow to form ice.  
Blockage, hard to surmount.  
Shivers caught and circling,  
trapped in my vertebrae.  
Shocking and electrifying.  
DISTURBING.  
Beyond my back,  
the wave joins the clouds.

### WHY I'M NOT A MUSICIAN

Stephen Schillinger

I wish I could play an instrument.  
I wish, well, I wish I could play the harp.  
And if I did I'd lean my shoulder into the  
big brass frame and passionately move my fingers  
so naturally it would be like a dance at the end of my wrists.

And so I got that feeling,  
(you know the one) I could  
just strike my pose on any street corner  
and throw my hat down for all passing by.

I'd go unrecognized by most.  
In fact, almost everyone would just wonder  
why the city can't do anything about people like me.  
Of course, none of this would matter,  
I would be the architect of poetic  
paintings in sound, mixing my musical metaphors  
with each new note if i pleased. I would be  
a rebel to convention, almost, you could say,  
a Van Gogh with strings.

And I would do all this, too, you see, but  
there is one small problem, I mean, the whole  
Van Gogh with a harp thing is fine,  
I'm sure I'd remain unacknowledged long after my death,  
it's just, well, I don't have a brother who will support me,  
and I can't play the harp.

(illustration)

Kay Kinsman



**DECEMBER 9, 1994**

Tony Hosein

A kiss is the single most  
intimate innocence  
that two people share.

There is some sort of sweet  
tension somewhere there.

It's like the brush  
of snow on the cheek,  
the sky's cold tear.

The sharing of aloneness,  
of secrecy.

**THIRTEEN YEARS**  
*A REFLECTION ON FATHER'S DAY*  
Martin Tunney  
11 03 91

Sitting by a river on a hillside,  
waiting for a visit.  
The trees are always green,  
the trickle or roar of water,  
thirteen years in-between,  
a walk up to manhood's dream.  
Over there not alone they find the name on the stone,  
It is obvious, a peaceful rush,  
Tears or the river, which flows faster.  
Should the walk here have been alone?  
No, no, not alone.  
Bent over squeezing tight,  
talk for a while then there is light.  
Not a boy, maybe not a man,  
in the heart all three hold hands. The two leave a while later.  
Feeling redemption, if he has lost the fear,  
than why no returns?  
In his heart the question burns.  
Maybe they will return,  
only one year later, less than thirteen,  
he no longer questions about his dreams.  
One remembers the other just visions, the three were there.

**"ORFORD ART CENTRE"**  
Kerri Breadner



[you, Narcissus]

Lisa Guenther

you, Narcissus:

if I echoed  
you back gave you  
back your own words disappeared  
into stone, into flower  
to speech that goes back  
like a venom, a gift  
gave you back your own  
image  
two mirrors opposed  
face to face, back to back  
as if beauty  
unravelling my body, your tongue  
as if beauty  
could make us dissolve

## KNOWLEDGE - DEF(N): TO KNOW OF THE LEDGE

Max Crowther

I once knew a man with a venereal disease beyond the conception of science. The disease eventually came to claim his organ completely. It developed an intelligence all its own and soon became smarter than the man. Over time, this man lost control and was sick and tired of being lectured to by his penis. he cut it off. From what I hear, it's alive and well and living in peru. It sends a postcard to the man from time to time.

I once knew a woman who developed a taste for men. This is typically the case. men, usually born ridiculously stupid, all know instinctively well that we have no decision power in relationships. We may like this girl or that girl, but in the end it is they who choose us. Excluding vile acts of hatred like date rape, men are never hunters. Those that appear like predators are really just prey not trying overly hard to get away. But as for this woman, she adored men to an extreme I have never seen. She occasionally consumes them, as it is truly the closest any two people can be with each other.

I once knew a cat that sold its limbs, one by one, to insects in the third world for drug money. A complex sentence, let me break it down. Insects are in charge of all under-developed or over-exploited nations. They arose out of the ashes of napalmed Indo-China. They grew from the infertile soil of wasted cash crops in Africa. They seeped from the veins of the politically tortured in South America. These insects accept anatomical parts for cash. It's a lucrative business, with a full body, twelve hours old, fetching you 50 thousand dollars easy. As for this cat, he was a junkie. he had been in a scrap with an owl and had his leg ripped off. (You should have seen the owl.) The veterinarians got him hooked on morphine and demerol, and gave him a peg leg. The last I heard, the cat's just a spinal cord and an arm no. His girlfriend applies the junk, and she told me the story. His vertebrae are next, so she says.

I once knew a car that was homosexual. It was a Camaro, and so had to fall out of the closet sooner or later. One night, four rednecks on unicycles smashed the windows in and slashed the tires. The car gave up it's will to live, but not before it's owner abandoned it, and it's lover was recycled into swastika lunch tins by the KKK. Rumour has it, the Camaro went into neutral off a cliff, somewhere near Chrysler plant. The media suppressed the whole story, totally.

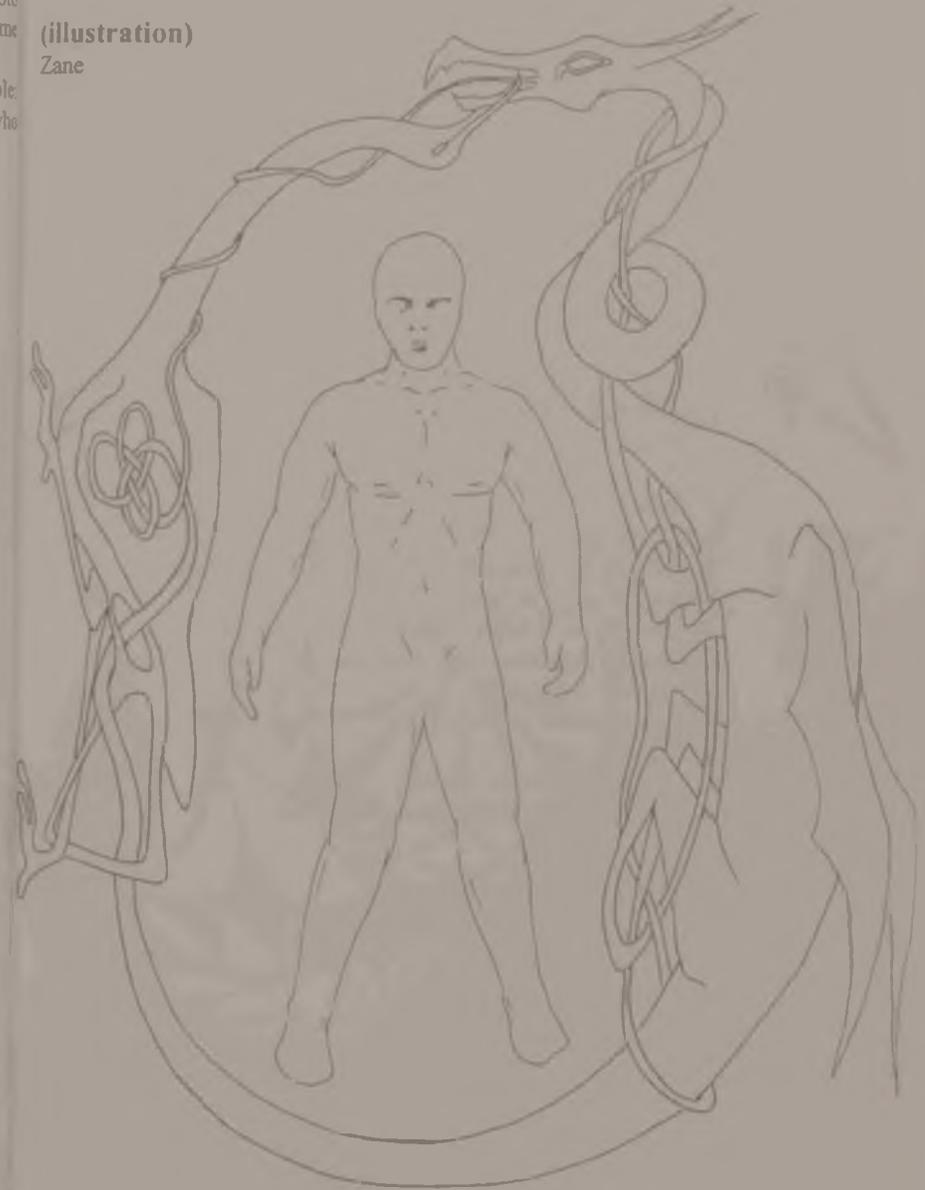
I once knew a portrait of Malcolm X that fell in love with a commemorative plate of Scarlet O'Hara. The two spent so much time together, they soon became an

old tattered polaroid that everyone skips over when going through the family photo albums. Some radical who had lost all his mind turned it into a mural on some subway wall somewhere, guaranteeing that it'll never be heard from again

In once knew a lot of things. in time, my words will overcome the Bible; book chapter, and verse. Just as soon as they let me out of here, whoever it is who has the key.

(illustration)

Zane



## ODE TO AN OWL

Simon Walker

Hello wooden owl,  
Carved in such fine detail  
Perched on your steeple step.  
When will you fly away,  
And escape the bondage, and insult  
Of pigeon's feet upon your head?  
So majestic a bird  
You stand proud but for the white stains of dung,  
Why do you stay?  
It is but a short hop to freedom  
And the warm smells of sweet summer air.

(illustration)

Anna M Grant



**EDUCATION**

Martin Tunney

04 04 93

Ask me anything,  
No whole answers though,  
Close estimates, educated guesses,  
Half truths, with half knowledge,  
"Have another cocktail,"  
"Again, go ahead,"  
"What did I learn at University?"  
"Well, did you hear about the crisis in the middle east?"

**1:21 AM**

Tony Hosein

Time Seduces,  
Caresses with fingers of decay,  
Entices to sleep,  
And Kisses all

Good night.

**MY SHOES**  
**(TO WRITE POEMS)**  
Stephen Schillinger

I see now I have reached  
eleven o'clock and cannot  
find words to shelter  
or contain me within  
this trail.

Walking through these  
streets in my  
fathers shoes I do not  
see anything new at all.  
I can hear something in  
the rain, but there is  
nothing to touch or hold,  
to place in some little pail  
of noise to splash  
all over my page.

In my steps I hear the  
fresh meeting of pavement  
on the hard, old sole  
of worn brown loafers.  
Somehow this is familiar, but  
under my foot I begin to believe  
it is different. I know  
the music of my steps  
in this rain.

**"PUELLA"**  
Kuno G. Tucker



## DREAM SEQUENCE #2 FROM *HONOURABLE MENSCHEN*

H.E. Wells

She found herself in a misty place; all she could do see around her were trees it was her Forest Place and she was glad to be back. She reached out as though to touch the feeling it instilled in her. But this time she sensed something that did not belong. there on the floor of her forest was a milk carton. Now it was all she could see, and her obsessing on this milk carton. Someone had dirtied her forest - someone had invaded her green, her calm. And for all she knew, he could still be here, in this forest.

"Hello? Hello! Look. I know you're around...why don't you just get out of here?!?"

A little fly came buzzing, the sound getting louder and softer as he moved around her head.

She swatted at it quite ineffectually.

Words became distinct: "No, I don't think I'll leave. Can't get rid of me-er Tee hee hee!"

The silly giggle grated on her nerves. At once she recognized the bug "You?!! I haven't seen you for ages - kind of liked it that way. So could you please go away again?"

He repeated, "No, I'm not leaving. A ha ha!"

She began to swat again, and winged him. the tinny voice whined "Stop that Haven't you put me through enough pain?"

He seemed absurd. She said, "Hey Mr. Fly, you came here... this is my space my turf. Shape up or ship out, buggy."

But now he was a wasp, and it made her kind of uneasy. He looked mean somehow, not like the harmless insect he was earlier. Don't forget, you hurt me" he taunted, as she tried to dodge his barb. "Never forget."

At once he was an elephant. "I never forget."

"Stop that! And hush up!" she exclaimed, "I just dumped you. Deal with it eh."

With his big elephantine snout he trumpeted: Fuck yooooooooo!" She swore he was grinning.

The effect of that was odd, for it made her feel old. She had to sit and contemplate that first bit of believable emotion she had ever seen from him. He seemed less two dimensional, less cartoonish, and even less harmless.

He changed again, this time into a priest, and said "Talk to me." It was gently compelling. Then "You can trust me," in a more demanding sort of tone. She was very confused and only wanted him to be quiet. But he persisted, his voice rising in insistence, "You must trust me, and tell me everything. You never told me anything," Then the Priest/Man leaned close to her face and hissed "You never once trusted me."

She finally found a voice, but it was bravado. "Did you ever give me a reason?" She demanded of the priest, but he had already disappeared.

At that, everything stood still. The scenery had changed from her forest to a ripped up "cut section". There was a last stand, but the machine stood ready. She was unsure of how to continue. To move meant restarting the scene, the complete destruction of her world, but to stand still only intensified the horror she felt rising within her. This time, she tried to act.

She turned to him to explain what she felt. But she couldn't speak, her mouth novacained. She was struck by an immobilizing apathy that surprised even her. Strangely, it was easier. She could see the jaws slowly coming from behind. She kind of giggled, Ah maybe you should do something," but he refused to listen to common sense.

She looked up at his face and watched it turn into a sneer, a very ugly, threatening grin. It frightened her a little. He spoke. "You're a bitch. What do you know? You slut. You're an emotional prostitute," He began to grow taller. "You sell out to the highest bidder offering a safe haven, a place, and then you break away when the need is greatest." He towered over her now. "You get your kicks from hurting people, don't you? You cunt! I loved you!"

She collected herself and called up. "Hey. Victim. We both knew it was going nowhere. I just tried..." A hissing sound began to fill the air, getting gradually louder. "I said, I tried to save us BOTH pain. So it didn't work out. You think I should let you smother me?" She was shouting now. "I hardly have strength for me sometimes! Why should I carry you?"

The noise forced to stop speaking and she had to cover her ears. Soon he had shrunk to actual size, so she softened her voice a little.

"Okay, maybe I did hurt you, but you don't have to use it as an excuse to be such a weak fool!" She was glad to say it; she started to laugh. She knew she had lost, but that no longer mattered since his triumph condemned him.

So all she said was "If you care, save a tree!!" And had she any feeling left, she might have acted. Maybe.

Her words were no sooner out than he was a fine tree, perfect for MacBlo. Slowly she was drawn back and reveled in his apathy. He was the last log and she would/could do nothing as a machine advanced on him, he had taught her that. Jaws

on trunk, uprooted: that's all she wrote. Again, she no longer cared.

She woke up about then, not a little confused, and there was a buzz about her head that didn't help. She couldn't really remember what had happened, and just as she began to contemplate it, a mosquito landed on her arm. She brought her hand down and thought "Ah ha! Finally got you..." - but she really didn't know what she meant.

"EVE"

W. Andy Knight



[AS IF SHE HAD GIVEN ME A HAIR TO SWALLOW]

Lisa Guenther

As if she had given me a hair to swallow

But a long one, As if

she were pulling it backwards

back up my throat, words

scraping like hooks

shingles lifting like tiny

hooks, just

one single hair

long

and her pulling

me inside

out.

[DRAIN THE POISON]

Elinor Crosby

03 15 94

*(inspired in partpartly by "Calvin and Hobbes" by Bill Watterson)*

Drain the poison

Lance the boil

Leech out my brain

that insidious tumor

that unwanted mush

No canopic jars for that mess

Just pull it out through the nose

with a nifty little hook

After my grey matter

on a platter

to the AC/DC god

who recreated the world

in living color

pater of the airwaves

electric messiah

deus ex machina

I worship at the altar

to feel the orgiastic tingle

the thirty-second coming of the neon jesus

the omnipotent rerun

catch him as he comes around again

in endless syndication

don't miss the season finale

My ears ring with the sacred song

of the emergency broadcast signal

Oh save me lord from fire and flood

from war and nuclear holocaust

with the glory of your inescapable hymn

stay tuned for further updates

Headlines at eleven

(DRUG (REACTION)ARY GROUPS)

Lisa Lenethen

Stripped of my clothes.  
given a blue gown to wear;  
I clutched

the rail of the metal bedpost  
to keep from sinking.  
to hold on to

myself  
as the revolution  
grew and spread;

weak monarch, my brain  
looked down from a tower --  
none would obey.

In the mirror I saw:  
pale faced girl  
dark bird's nest hair

which she pulled in tufts  
(demented)  
to keep her head

on the right way  
while white robed godlings  
stood away

and talked about her.  
Metal mosquito -- pierced my hand;  
turned me around

and bit again,  
injecting to the dissidents  
a religion, a drug

for the powers to gain back  
control lost  
when new ideas

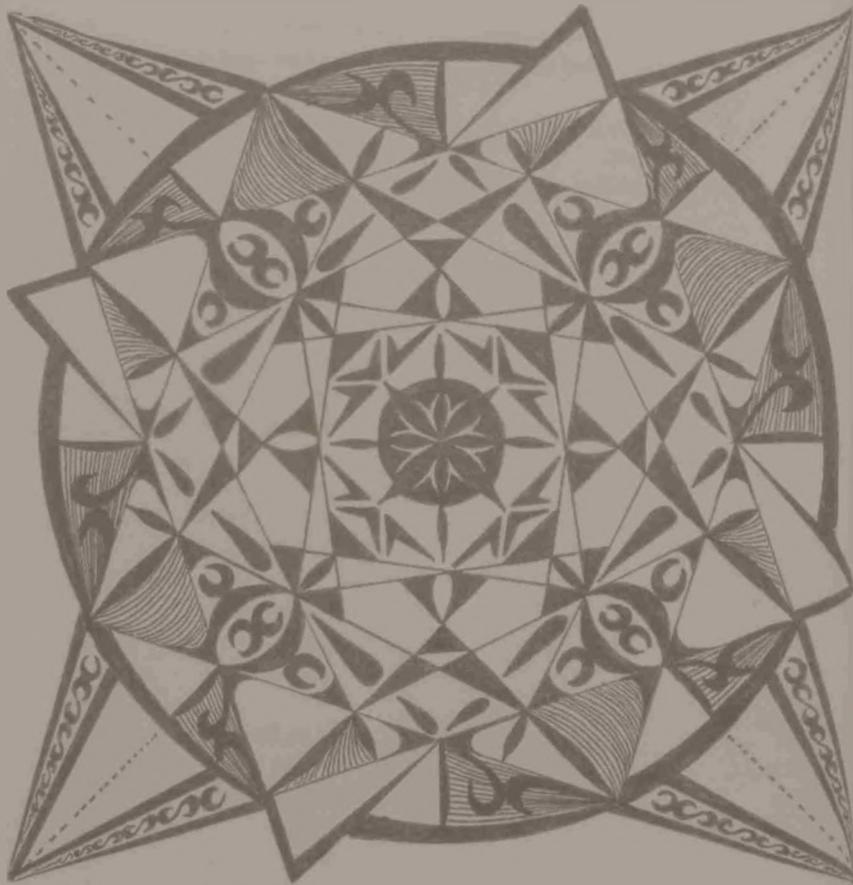
were first swallowed  
and the old and the new clashed  
and the body went rogue.

The masses calm,  
the causes burned,  
they send me home -- say:

these just don't mix  
don't  
take them together again.

(illustration)

Ann M. Grant



### ESTELLE

Bryan R. Dollack

Poised lightly over intense flames,  
A drop of moisture  
Vaporizing in the heat.  
Writhing like a snake.  
Up like smoke,  
You crash down like ashes.  
No one else in sight,  
My dear...*Ma belle*.  
Tear it off and lie on the floor.  
Speak obscure french words  
Into my oblivious ears.  
Sweat.  
*En Français*, my dear.  
*En Français*.

[THE MOON IS A JEWEL IN THE NAVEL OF THE SKY]

Elinor Crosby

12 20 93

The moon is a jewel in the navel of the sky  
undulating seductively over the earth  
loins girded about with stars  
pasties and a g-string

The moon is an egg in the nest of my mind  
an idea I raise as my own  
fostered like the cuckoo's child

(illustration)

Zane



## FOREST THOUGHTS

Erica Naish

04 92

I walk alone  
In silence  
I walk through fields,  
    past streams,  
To the place of the trees.  
As expected,  
This place, my place  
Is shadowy  
    serene  
    and silent.  
I feel welcome here  
Even though  
I am a dwarf among giants.  
I sit down  
On a moss-covered throne  
And close my eyes.  
Instantly  
I am a queen,  
    a pirate  
    a hummingbird,  
I am all the colours of the rainbow  
And  
All the fish in the sea.  
Sadly  
I cannot stay in this place, my place  
The place of the trees.  
I slowly open my eyes,  
Trying to hold on  
To the picture in my mind,  
Rise from my throne,  
And  
Make my way back...  
To the place of the people

## "NIAGARA ON THE LAKE"

Kerri Breadner



LOVE APPLES 'N LAWN MOWERS

Sheila Thomas

03 10 94

**Elliot Hill:** Sixty years old. Sun burned. Sun wrinkled. From the 'old' school.

**Meg Hill:** Elliot's daughter. Twenty-two years old. Frost bitten. From the 'new' school.

*Play opens with Harry Connick Jr. singing Let's Call the Whole Thing Off. We are in Elliot Hill's prized garden in Qualicum Beach, B.C. This is a retirement community on Vancouver Island built along the ocean front. It is early summer and already there is a fresh water shortage. It is mudday and it is very hot outside. Meg is watering the garden with a hose. Her back is to the audience, so as the play begins, the audience may assume she is male and is urinating. Meg's 'head in the clouds' as she quotes Sebastian from "Twelfth Night" Elliot ignores her as he is laboriously staking his tomato plants.*

**Meg:** *(Turning so that she is now in profile of the audience, she over dramatically quotes Shakespeare in a deep male voice:)* A lady, sir, though it was said she much resembled me, was yet of many accounted beautiful. But though I could not with such estimable wonder over-far believe that, yet thus far I will boldly publish her: she bore a mind that envy could not but call fair. She is drowned already with salt water, though I seem to drown her remembrance again with more. *(With one hand on her heart and the other holding the hose, she does not see when yonder water flows and she gets Elliot wet.)*

**Elliot:** Hey! Watch what you're doing!

**Meg:** Oops, sorry Dad.

**Elliot:** Are you just about done there?

**Meg:** *(Embarrassed)* Yeah.

**Elliot:** Turn the hose off, then. Don't want VanderMaden calling the cops.

**Meg:** Oh yeah. *(Coming back from her fantasy)* Yeah.

**Elliot:** Geez Louise! Do you gotta be so over dramatic all the time? Fetch me the compost bucket.

**Meg:** *(She wanders over to the bucket, still talking to herself)* Over-kill eh? Damn. No matter how I tackle it, I just can't do Sebastian, convincingly. *(She quotes again*

*kindness, and I am yet so near the manners (Tears) of my mother that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me. (She passes the compost bucket to Elliot. She looks melancholy, with one hand over her brow and her back arched).*

**Elliot:** I'da fetch it myself, if I knew it woulda caused you so much grief.

**Meg:** Dad, it's from "Twelfth Night".

**Elliot:** *(Dismissingly)* What you will. *(Gestures)* Pass me the spade, Meg.

**Meg:** You mean this little shovel, here?

**Elliot:** Yeah. It ain't a shovel. Call a spade a spade. To think I put you through university.

**Meg:** Who put me through university?

**Elliot:** Pass me the rake. *(She passes him a large rake).* No. *(Points)* That one. The small hand rake. Pass it over. Well, your mother an' me saw that you graduated from high school, that was a chore enough. Always had yur head in the clouds.

**Meg:** I was bored to death!

**Elliot:** *(In jest)* Why couldn't ya be more like Robert Parker's kid.

**Meg:** Which one? Mary-Jane?

**Elliot:** Is that the one you went to high school with?

**Meg:** Yeah. Major suckhole.

**Elliot:** She asked about you.

**Meg:** Really?

**Elliot:** Wanted to know what you were gonna do after graduation.

**Meg:** Well I hope you told her I was made the director of the National Theatre School.

**Elliot:** You mean lie?

**Meg:** Yeah.

**Elliot:** She said some school in the States is giving her a pile of money to go further in biology.

**Meg:** Ivy League?

**Elliot:** No, biology.

**Meg:** *(Grunts)* Well, all the best to her.

**Elliot:** That's what the old man said too. Can't wait to get her out of his hair.

That kid alone cost him his fortune.

**Meg:** *(Sarcasm)* Yeah right! I bet he still plays golf four times a week.

**Elliot:** His ol' lady does extra sewing in the home now.

**Meg:** To support her husband's golf addiction, no doubt.

**Elliot:** Old man Parker flipped the entire bill for that kid's schoolin'—tuition, rent, even the phone bill to the boyfriend. She snagged herself a heart surgeon. Did I

mention that? *(Meg growls)* Anyway, now that she's all educated she refuses to call her own father--'Dad'. Doesn't even call him Robert. Calls him 'Rob'. She don't want him abusin' his patr-ee-arckeeel power of somethin'. *(Gestures to Meg to pass the hoe)* Need that hoe.

Meg: This hoe--Elliot?

Elliot: Now, don't you start!

Meg: I paid my own way

Elliot: Well you insisted on going to some fancy spancy school half way across the country. That religious school. What'd they call it?

Meg: Bishop's. It's not religious. Well, not anymore. It's--

Elliot:--Why the hell you have to go way out there? Coulda' gone to that feminst school with Parker's kid. You coulda studied in Victoria that- silly-acting thing. Bu Holy Dina, you had to up and leave your mother--

Meg:--These daisies are sprouting real nice, Dad.

Elliot: That's a tomato plant.

Meg: Oh, yeah.

Elliot: Can you tell a clover from a radish plant?

Meg: Yeah

Elliot: Start pulling.

Meg:*(She begins to weed. There is a long pause as they toil.)* Hot day.

Elliot: Yeah. Water shortage in effect, already. A high of 30 today. Small crab warning too. CBC says there's a chance for a sea breeze this afternoon.

Meg: I'm sweating like a hot tamale! No time to climatize. Record breaking cold in Quebec this winter. Lots of snow too.

Elliot:*(On his hands and knees gardening)* Uh huh

Meg: Forty below the entire month of January. Even the Massawippi River froze up!

Elliot: Hmpf!

Meg: Some elderly folk up in the Gas Bay died from the cold. Hearts just gave out. Froze. From one extreme to the other. *(Stands to find a hankie in her pocket. She wipes the sweat off of her brow)* Sheesh Ka Bob!

Elliot: You forgot what real work was, that's all.

Meg: You might want to wear a hat Dad. *(An attempt at humor)* You're bound to turn into a tomato, out here. With skin cancer being--

Elliot:*(Turns to his young plants ready to be transplanted in the soil)* Meggie, you wanna pass me that tray of seedlings. *(She does)* Careful now. They're brittle little gaffers. Just came out the hot house. It's their first day out in the real world. *(Educating Meg)* See these little guys?

Meg: Yeah.

Elliot: These are yellow cherry tomatoes, got some yellow plum over there, and my spring time marglobes have been on the dinner table for a week now.

Meg: What are these funny lookin' ones?

Elliot: They aren't funny lookin'! That's an Italian variety. Pear-shaped tomatas. Come in yellow and red.

Meg: Uh Huh.

Elliot: Love apples

Meg: Love apples?

Elliot: Sometimes they're called a poor man's orange. I like 'Love apples'. They're very fruity.

Meg: Fruity??

Elliot: Tomatoes are fruits--not vegetables.

Meg: I doubt it.

Elliot: Big university girl can't take her father's word for it no more, is that it?

Meg: No, it's not that. It's just that if tomatoes were really fruit--or fruity-- then why doesn't Dairy Queen invent an ice cream flavor. Tomato swirl, or Chocolate fudge tomato, or something.

Elliot: Know why they're called 'Love apples'?

Meg: No.

Elliot: What did they learn ya at church school?

Meg: Bishop's, Dad. It's not religious. And I didn't take horticulture!

Elliot: A tomato is a fruit. The forbidden fruit. You musta heard that. It's the one Eve ate.

Meg:*(Quickly)* and Adam!

Elliot: Eve ate it first.

Meg: Eve was a deceived apple eater; Adam ate in full knowledge.

Elliot: They did teach you somethin' at that school.

Meg: No. Mom told me that.

Elliot:*(Pause)* Don't need a diploma to grow tomatoes. Just a little elbow grease and a will to out last the sun.

Meg: So what are you going to do with your tomato harvest, Dad?

Elliot: Canning 'em. *(Looks over at Meg's weeding)* Hey! Those ain't weeds! Meg!! You're pullin' my radishes out! Ahhhhh! Uhhhh!

Meg: Sorry! Sorry. I wasn't paying attention.

Elliot: Head in the clouds. Always got your head in the clouds!

Meg: Uh Maybe I should get out of the heat and fix us some lunch, now.

Elliot: The sun's getting to ya?

**Meg:** Uh. Yeah.

**Elliot:** There's some sliced meat in the fridge and we got some leaf lettuce ready for pickin'. Of course there's those premature radishes ya just picked. *(He sees a worm on his tomato).* Wait! Meg! Get back! Grab the insecticide! Hurry! Give'er a good pumpin' *(She pumps the insecticide container)* Over here. SHOOT! Shoot! Get 'em! Get those horn worms. Green little bastards! That's it! Over here! *(She shoots the insects)* Here too!

**Meg:** *(Overlapping)* Where? Got um! Ewww! Take that! And that!

**Elliot:** *(Together they triumph:)* GET 'UM?

**Meg:** GOT UM!

**Elliot and Meg:** GOOD!

**Meg:** Hasta la vista baby!

**Elliot:** You're a great shot, Meggie-Pie!! *(Corrects his slip)* Uh, Meg.

**Meg:** I don't mind Meggie-pie, so much, not anymore, anyway.

**Elliot:** *(Referring to her bug killing)* You've always had great aim, Meg.

**Meg:** *(Smiles)* Thanks.

**Elliot:** *(Not letting a compliment linger too long adds:)* Wish I could say the same about your twin.

**Meg:** You can. Lawrence has great ambition.

**Elliot:** Lawrence? Who the hell is Lawrence? Do you mean Larry? He goes by Larry now. And me? I only answer to Mr. Hill. At least that's what he and that fancy spancy lawyer calls me. *(Under his breath)* But what the hell would you know about all that? You've been away. Doin' your acting-thing off at that fancy spancy school of yours--

**Meg:** *(Turns to exit)* Lunch sounds good right about now.

**Elliot:** I need some fertilizer.

**Meg:** It's not on the menu.

**Elliot:** Take the wheel barrow, Meg, and shovel me up some compost, would you?

**Meg:** But Dad--I hate the smelly shi--stuff. *(Takes the wheel barrow and heads offstage)*

**Elliot:** Don't forget the shovel. Unless you want to use your hands. *(As soon as she is out of sight, Elliot takes the opportunity to relax. He wipes the sweat off of his brow and lies down with his hands tucked behind his head. then he shouts offstage)* I need lots, Meg. Lots. Gotta have lots!

**Meg:** *(From offstage)* It's times like this I miss my brother. Gawd! What have you got rotting in here, Dad? Oh Gross! Gross me right out! Smells like--

**Elliot:** *(Shouts)* --It takes a lot of shit to make things grow. *(He relaxes until he hears the wheel barrow coming. He quickly returns to his tomato plants as if he*

*been slaving away).*

**Meg:** *(Grunts as she rolls the full wheel barrow back onto the stage)* How very existential, of you. *(She sighs and collapses to the ground in Elliot's previous position)*

**Elliot:** Egg-sis-ten-shal? *(pause)* Are you complaining?

**Meg:** No.

**Elliot:** Oh. We're going to have a lot of canning ahead of us this fall, Meg. These stone's produce faster than any other veggie in my--

**Meg:** *(Sitting up)*--Veggie? Vegetable?

**Elliot:** Fruit! Did I say vegetable?

**Meg:** A Freudian slip.

**Elliot:** What's that?

**Meg:** I said, that's a Freudian slip. It means that deep down in your unconsciousness you know that a tomato can't possibly be a fruit. So you consciously deny it.

**Elliot:** I didn't need an explanation. I just didn't hear what you said. Geeez. 'Sides the only way I eat' tomatas is canned and with sugar! That's proof enough, I reckon.

**Meg:** You should explore something new, Dad. Make salsa, green tomato mincemeat, or anti pasta?

**Elliot:** What's that? Anti Pest-a. Sounds like some new kind of insecticide.

**Meg:** You should try something a little new. Get out of that same old rut. I bet you've been eating canned tomatoes with sugar long before the apple was invented.

**Elliot:** It was our contribution to the war.

**Meg:** Eating tomatoes for dessert contributed to the war effort? Come on.

**Elliot:** It's true. Everytime I ate a tomato, there was an extra orange to ship to the boys overseas, see? So they wouldn't get scurvy. Ahh, what do kids know about sacrifice, these days. It's all handed to ya on a silver platter. You want an education--you don't have to sweat for it. No, you just get the tax payer to pay for it. Get yourself a big government student loan and live high off the hog at some fancy spancy--

**Meg:** If you have to know, I rationed my tomatoes at university, Dad.

**Elliot:** Looks like you had too many canned tomatoes with sugar, too many crackers with your anti pest-a? Mincemeat pies? Taco chips with your salsa?

**Meg:** *(Embarrassed)* O.K. I'll admit I may have gained a pound or two.

**Elliot:** That's big of you.

**Meg:** *(Quickly)* But it was a cold winter and I couldn't get out much-- And I still managed to get the romantic lead in 'Twelfth Night'

**Elliot:** You mean that thing you were mumbling on about? That was a romance?

**Meg:** In fact, I played both Viola and Sebastian--just like Jessica Tandy did in

1909. I loved Viola. Sebastian was a pain in the--ass--bottom. But Viola--she was a scream! See was like this cross-dresser of sorts--

Elliot:(*Appalled*) What kinda perverted crap are they teaching you out there?

Meg: Dad, it's Shakespeare

Elliot: Oh.(*Quickly*) Old man VanderMaden is allergic to grass. See, he's growing Rhododendrons in gravel. Wants me to mow only when I have to. Once every two weeks, or so. Mowin' plugs him up. Asthma. He's puttin' in a Japanese Garden. 'Cause there ain't no grass in Japanese Gardens. You remember the summer the family went to Lethbridge to see those Japanese Gardens?

Meg: Sort of. That was a long time ago!

Elliot: That was something, wasn't it? Them Japanese Gardens.

Meg: Lethbridge? Was that the place we were asked to take our shoes off before going in?

Elliot: Yeah. Outta respect, or something. A Jap thing.

Meg: Yeah, I remember. Mom took Lawrence and I to get dilly bars at the D.Q.

Elliot: Margaret was always blackmailing you twins. Paid you off with ice cream just so you wouldn't trample on things.

Meg: Come on Dad! Most kids spend summer vacation at the PNE, or the Calgary Stampede, or the even the Zoo! What did we do every summer?

Elliot: Not every summer.

Meg: Every summer!

Elliot: Well It was a learning experience. And look, you still can't tell a clover from a radish!

Meg: We must have seen every cotton pickin' garden in Western Canada. Last time we toured Butchard Gardens, you had us weeding for heavens' sake!

Elliot: Their rose bushes were being neglected.

Meg: Admit it Dad, a dilly bar was a small reward for what we were dragged through!

Elliot: The lawn needs a cuttin' Meg. Bring the mower around and --

Meg: But it's just been cut--

Elliot:(*Firmly*) I beg your pardon!?

Meg: But Dad, Mr. VanderMaden's asthma?

Elliot: Do I have to do it myself?

Meg: Where is it?(*She exits*)

Elliot: Next to the compost. Didn't you see it when you were back there??

Meg: Yeah. Hey! There are two mowers back here Holy Hanna! This new one looks like a golf cart? Can I try it?

Elliot: Bring the electric. You'll need the long extension cord!

Meg: Can I give your new mower a whirl. Aww cool! Three speeds!

Elliot: Don't go touching it, Meg! Don't want you breakin' things. (*Meg rolls a small electric lawn mower onto stage. It has been plugged in offstage.*) The electric is good enough for you amateurs. (*Meg rolls the electric mower onto the stage. She looks like a kid who has just been told she can't play with a new toy. Elliot takes the electric mower from her momentarily and turns it on. Meg is more than capable of turning the mower on herself. Elliot hands the mower back to Meg and shouts over the noise*) Now watch you don't run over the cord. (*He mumbles to himself*) Head in the clouds, that girl.(*Meg starts to mow. Elliot follows close behind, inspecting the kind of job she is doing and moving the cord around so that she doesn't run over it. She is getting irritated by his over-involvement. Eventually, she turns the mower off.*)

Elliot: What's the problem?

Meg: Come on. The lawn doesn't need to be cut.

Elliot:(*Getting angry*) It needs a cut. Trust me on this one, Shakespeare!

Meg: But Dad, I don't want Mr. VanderMaden coughing and wheezing. When was the last time you mowed? Hardly seems worth it.

Elliot: VanderMaden can take his inhaler and go and buy some beach front property! This is Qualicum Beach, dammit, and I live in a residential area zoned specifically for GRASS!

Meg: You're still mad at him for calling the cops on you?

Elliot: VanderMaden! SmaderMaden! I hope he chokes on dusty crab grass!

Meg: You are mad.

Elliot: Hell no!(*pause*) I didn't know there was a water- warning out.

Meg: Ignorance is no excuse.

Elliot: Hey! I'm an innocent man.(*She looks at him disbelievingly*) Geez Louise, I never killed nobody!

Meg: How much did they fine you?

Elliot: Enough.

Meg: Next time it will be the slammer.

Elliot: There you go being all over dramatic again.

Meg: Maybe this will secure you a spot on America's Most Wanted! Your mug on the back of milk cartons? Infamy! Hope you like striped pajamas Dad-- I mean-- 27,27,27 23? Don't worry. Me and old man VanderMaden will come by and visit on Saturdays. When we can. Might sneak you in some bread if you're lucky. You can forget the water though. There's a shortage, or haven't you heard?

Elliot: I have a case! My underground sprinkler system is on computer.

Meg:(*Like a judge*) Go on.

Elliot: It goes hay wire every once in a while. It just goes and sets itself off 'round midnight.

Meg: Midnight? Hmm.

Elliot: Midnight? I think Not sure.

Meg: Not sure, eh?

Elliot: It goes off when I'm sleeping. Could be midnight, s'pose. I don't know for sure.

Meg: You're lying, Mr. Hill. *(Elliot glares. Meg gulps hard and quickly takes the grass cutting's bag off of the back of the mower)* Guess I can toss these grass shavings on top of the compost heap, hmmm?

Elliot: No, just leave 'em. There's an afternoon sea breeze comin' on, and I don't want it blowin' over on VanderMaden's Rhodo's. *(Pause)* There was a time when the old man used to talk neighborly to me over the fence. But ever since your mom passed—

Meg: *(Quickly)* Say, I'm feeling a bit peckish. Ready for some lunch?

Elliot: Why are you home, Meg? Did Lawrence send you? He did didn't he? To in an' win me over? Well, if that's the reason you're back you can make a B-line right on outta—

Meg: No!

Elliot: Why then?

Meg: Why what?

Elliot: Why are you here?

Meg: *(Choked)* You're here, Dad.

Elliot: You don't need your old man no more. You and your brother moved half way across the world to prove it.

Meg: I'm not Lawrence, Dad.

Elliot: Two peas in the same pod.

Meg: No. We're very different.

Elliot: *(Sarcasm)* Not really. You both date men.

Meg: Get off it.

Elliot: You know, Lawrence thinks I did it. I was to blame for it all.

Meg: *(Small chuckle)* I'm sure he doesn't.

Elliot: Oh no! He does! Said so in court

Meg: He disclosed that? *(Laughs)* I don't believe it. He's very private.

Elliot: Believe it!

Meg: *(Disbelieving)* He said, you were to blame for his being gay?

Elliot: No. Not that! *(Pause)* Does he blame me for that too!?

Meg: No. Well, I don't know?

Elliot: Y'know, he probably does!

Meg: I don't know what he does? That's what I thought you were talking about. What do you mean?

Elliot: Blame everything on his old man!! Lawrence just can't take responsibility for his own actions! Never could! He just never could! Well, Dad's not gonna be there to save his ass. It don't reflect on me none. He can shoulder the responsibility himself! Head in the clouds! *(Elliot turns lawn mower on. It roars. He mumbles:)* Head in the clouds! *(Elliot gestures for Meg to pass him his ear muffs. Instinctually, she operates upon his command. She stops. She tosses the ear muffs aside. Elliot paces back and forth across the stage with the mower. Meg follows him bravely shouting.)*

Meg: What is it that Lawrence blames you for Dad? What? Tell me.

Elliot: *(Shouting)* How about making us some lunch, Meg? You must be famished, by now!

Meg: *(Following Elliot back and forth)* Dad Turn that lawn mower off. Please. Dad?! Come on, Dad! Turn it off? Think about Mr. VanderMaden would you? He'll be coughing up a storm? Dad!?! *(He stubbornly continues. Meg runs determinedly off stage. A few moments later the sprinkler system comes on. Water is sprinkling from everywhere. Elliot gets soaked. He turns the mower off quickly.)*

Elliot: Wanna get me electrocuted!

Meg: *(Both are standing in the 'automated rain')* What does Lawrence blame you for, Dad?

Elliot: Turn that bloody thing off before VanderMaden has the cops hauling me off to the station!

Meg: No!

Elliot: When you're livin' under my roof you do as I say?

Meg: *(Pointing in the direction of the house)* Your roof is over there! And I'm not under it! *(Elliot goes off stage and turns the sprinkler off and returns)*

Elliot: Go right on back to the Eastern Townships!

Meg: Maybe I will! You haven't changed a bit! *(She turns to exit. She stops. Turns. He is soaked. A little chilly in the breeze. He looks pathetic)*

Elliot: Two peas in the same pod. You blame me too, don't you Meg? I don't inflict cancer on anyone. I loved Margaret. I know I'm not the easiest person to live with, but I can't make her 'get' breast cancer.

Meg: I know.

Elliot: *(Angry)* If anyone gave Marg cancer it was him.

Meg: Get off it, Dad!

Elliot: It's true! You know it, too. *(Sing songy)* Larry!

**Meg:** How is Lawrence to blame?

**Elliot:** He's the one who had to dump his perverted conscience out on your mother. Could've kept it to himself --how do they say it ?? In the closet? For his mother's sake he could have! The selfish bastard! Where's the sacrifice in that, eh? You know how she worries all of the time. She's over protective of her twins. She blamed herself, you know. She worried herself sick. Worried herself sick.

**Meg:** Lawrence loved her too.

**Elliot:** Don't you think I know that?

**Meg:** *(Mumbles)* Well, I don't know.

**Elliot:** He would hardly let me into the hospital to see her. Spent his entire time there. Showered there even. Probably didn't want to flip the bill for some fancy spancy hotel.

**Meg:** Oh Gawd! Couldn't you two get along for mom' sake? And was it too bloody much for you to put up your own son for the night, Dad?

**Elliot:** He didn't want to come home, Meg. He didn't want me in the hospital either. It was like I was the one with the disease.

**Meg:** Where were you then? *(pause)* You were by her side when she died? *(Elliot lowers his head)* Weren't you, Dad? Oh Gawd! You were in the fuckin' garden!

**Elliot:** Watch your tongue, young lady!

**Meg:** Fuck!

**Elliot:** Come on, Meg! I make things grow! Look Meg! Have you ever seen cherry tomatoes ripen this early in the spring? Here. Taste them. They're sweeter than strawberries. And here, I got Golden Ponderosa, Break O'Days, and these here Golden Queens. These grow only in Peru, not Vancouver Island. But I got 'em growing in sandy soil. Imagine! Golden Queens on foreign soil! And look here Stone tomatoes. They never reproduce this rapidly. They take up half the garden Stones everywhere! *(Pause)* I don't grow cancer. Pass me those hedge shears. *(She passes the wrong ones)* No those are too small *(He sighs. She passes the large shears and he cuts the Golden Queens down).*

**Meg:** Why'd you do that?

**Elliot:** You graduate from that acting-thing, and you don't know symbolism?

**Meg:** Didn't think you cared much about symbolism.

**Elliot:** Didn't think you cared much about your parents.

**Meg:** Dad, You are the one who told me not to come back! "Stay in Quebec, and do your little play thing." Isn't that what you said? Beside you're not exactly the welcome wagon! You're the one who told me 'we' couldn't afford the flight. Peak season, isn't that what you said! But I see that you just bought that fancy spancy new lawn mower. You, You, You, told me everything was going to be alright! Can

you blame me for wanting to believe you? You're my Dad for heaven's sake, of course, I'm going to believe you! "I think they got it all Meg. She'll only lose a breast." Isn't that what you said? You Bastard!

**Elliot:** That's what they teach ya, at that fancy spancy church school of yours? Bad language?

**Meg:** No Dad. You taught me that one.

**Elliot:** You think I killed her too, don't you?

**Meg:** *(Pause 5 seconds)* No. *(pause)* 'Course not.

**Elliot:** Meg! Another hornworm! Pass me the insecticide? Hurry. They're gnawing at my marglobes.

**Meg:** Stone.

**Elliot:** What?

**Meg:** Those are Stone tomatoes. The marglobes are over there.

**Elliot:** This is no time for splitting hairs. Get the insecticide. Where the hell do they come from? *(She doesn't pass him anything)* So unsuspecting. Meg? Pass me the pump.

**Meg:** No.

**Elliot:** What!?

**Meg:** No. I hate your garden. I've always hated your garden.

**Elliot:** *(Offended)* But you're more than willing to eat my tomatoes, and cabbage and lettuce, and..

**Meg:** You always made me eat my vegetables!

**Elliot:** Tomatoes are fruit.

**Meg:** Just another lie to get me to eat vegetables.

**Elliot:** I've never lied to you. You can go and check in my Farmer's Almanac, if you like. *(He dramatically recites from memory)* "The tomato is the common name for a perennial herb, *Lycopersicon lycopersicum*, of the nightshade family. Botanically, the tomato is a fruit".

**Meg:** *(In tears)* You said she was going to be o.k.

**Elliot:** If I'm such a liar, you could've called your brother for a second opinion.

**Meg:** We weren't talking.

**Elliot:** What? The twins? Not talking?

**Meg:** Comes all of the way from Toronto to 'come out of the closet'. Next day he's on the plane home to his lover with unloaded conscience! Leaves mom trampled on. And he expects me to fix it all!?! And You You were in the garden!!

**Elliot:** And You moved to Quebec!

**Meg:** Before you killed me too! *(Quickly)* I didn't mean that. Honest. I didn't.

**Elliot:** Two peas in the same pod. One in Ontario. One in Quebec.

Meg: That's not fair!

Elliot: Your mother always said her twins had that extra sense. Could feel what the other was feelin' and all that.

Meg: We haven't talked for nearly four years.

Elliot: Your mother used to say, "An apple cleft in two, is not more twin than these two creatures."

Meg: There's no such thing as identical fraternal twins. *(Sarcasm)* I learned that in 'seminary'.

Elliot: So Lawrence really didn't send you?

Meg: No. He can fight his own battles. He doesn't need me to come to his defense.

Elliot: Good.

Meg: Good?

Elliot: Yeah. Now that you see it my way, you should probably know I insisted your mother take Lawrence out of the will.

Meg: You what?!

Elliot: *(Overlapping)* Wait! You're not his defense attorney--

Meg:--You wouldn't! You couldn't do that?! How stoned on morphine was she when you made her sign on the dotted line? She probably thought she was signing cheque for the hydro bill or something. I don't believe you!

Elliot: *(Mumbles)* Do you always have to make everything into a soap opera, Meg. It wasn't anything like that. Besides it's like you said he deserved it.

Meg: I didn't say that!

Elliot: You did so.

Meg: Did not!

Elliot: Did!

Meg: Not! AHHHHH! I give up!

Elliot: *(Returns to his tomato seedlings)* At least tomatoes know better than to talk back to their father.

Meg: *(Paces)* So that's why you thought I came home? To sweet talk Lawrence back into the will? You think I came more than three thousand miles on a bloody Greyhound to grovel for my brother's sake? I don't believe you! I can't believe you. You'd believe I'd do that! That Lawrence and I are plotting against you! You... You... You... *(Elliot is bent over his plants. Meg is tempted to kick him over her first into the soil. She refrains her so, but gives the clear indication that she could.)*

Elliot: *(Overlapping)* Call me a Bastard. I know you want to!

Meg: *(Walks off stage. If it is possible to have a car-driven lawn mower, have Meg start one up and drive it on stage over top of Elliot's tomatoes. If not, have Meg take her shoes off and trample the tomato garden in her bare feet)* Bastard!

Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard! Bastard!...

Elliot: *(Overlapping)* Meg! Don't! Meggie! No, not my tomatoes! Please Meg! Don't. Meg... Meg... Meg! You are grounded, young lady! Meg, did you hear me? I said you're grounded! *(Cries)* Oh God! Not my baby cherry tomatoes. Go to your room! Right now! Did you hear me? *(Pleads)* You're acting like a sulky spoiled brat. *(Meg's uses a whiny tone still continuing to shout "Bastard, Bastard...")* Your mother always spoiled you. I warned her, "Don't spoil the twins!" And now look at you...

Meg: I paid for my own university, Dad. *(She continues to drive and destroy)*

Elliot: My earlianas. Oh Meggie, Don't! Meg! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! Right now! Meg, I'll... I'll, I'll *(She nearly runs him down)* get out the strap. Don't make me now?

Meg: *(Shouts)* Hey! Mr. VanderMaden Elliot Hill is going to slap me up side of the head. Call the cops!

Elliot: *(He chases her with a rake)* Shut-up, Meg! Geeez Louise! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! You wait! *(Cries)* Please, Meggie-Pie! DO YOU HAVE TO BE SO OVER-DRAMATIC!

Meg: *(She stops the mower. There is a long pause. Elliot is in shock)* I'm hungry!

Elliot: How could you? You know how much they meant to me.

Meg: Exactly how much?

Elliot: Don't tell me you're jealous over a tomato?

Meg: Love apples. You loved them more than any of us.

Elliot: You need help.

Meg: I need lunch!

Elliot: So much for fresh tomatoes.

Meg: *(A tear)* I want a dilly bar. I want my mom. *(Meg sobs. Elliot doesn't know what to do. Finally, he drops his rake and hugs her.)*

Elliot: All you got is your old man and his tomatoes. Well, just your old man. Maybe we both need a dilly bar. *(Pause)*

Meg: *(Wipes away her tears)* Sorry about your tomatoes. I guess I am a little over dramatic. Can't help it though. I have a degree in it.

Elliot: *(Smiles)* That's what they teach you at that fancy spancy school of yours, eh? You're good. Real good.

Meg: They never taught me why they call 'tomatoes' 'love apples' though.

Elliot: Here I'll show you. *(Looks in the garden for a single survivor)* I'll see if I got some left over in the green house.

Meg: Want me to fetch 'em?

Elliot: No. I'll go this time.

Meg: You sure?

Elliot: No No. Really. You stay right there. *(Elliot exits for a second. Meg looks at the mess she has created.)*

Meg: *(Embarrassed)* I 'spose. *(Looks at the destruction)* Oh my Gawd! Tomato paste! *(Elliot returns with a tomato.)*

Elliot: Now, why do you 'spose it's called a love apple?

Meg: 'Cause its red.

Elliot: Come on. Use your imagination!

Meg: I don't know. *(He pulls a swiss army knife from his pocket and he cuts the tomato in half. He holds it open for Meg to see.)*

Elliot: See?

Meg: Holy Hanna! I never noticed that before.

Elliot: *(Proudly with his arms crossed)* Uh Huh.

Meg: All those years you made us eat our vegetables and I never noticed this. Two identical heart shapes.

Elliot: Geez Louise! Who said your ol' man couldn't still teach you a thing or two!

Meg: An apple cleft in two, is not more twin than these two creatures. *(Pause)* Funny, I never remember mom saying that about Lawrence and me.

Elliot: She wasn't talking about you and Lawrence.

Meg: Who then? Not you and me, surely!?

Elliot: No. You and me we're as different as the East is from the West.

Meg: Like the fruit is from the vegetable.

Elliot: They're really not that far apart. At least they don't have to be.

Meg: *(She sings: Let's Call the Whole Thing Off. Elliot joins in.)* You say tomato, say tomatoe, You say potato, I say potatoe. Potato. Potatoe, Tomato Tomatoe, Let's call the whole thing off...

Elliot: *(Sings)* If we call the whole thing off, we must part. Oh Oh Oh if we ever part, that would break my heart. *(Meg laughs. Elliot sighs.)* Geez Louise! You're the spitting image of your mother.

Meg: *(Complimented)* Really?

Elliot: I miss her, Meg.

Meg: Me too.

Elliot: Wish I could bring her back. Just to tell her some stuff I never could before.

Meg: Like what?

Elliot: Oh, basic stuff, you know.

Meg: Like what?

Elliot: Like "What is that perfume you wear?" and "Where the hell did you hide the

vacuum hose?" and "How do I talk to the kids?" and "I really miss your homemade apple pie." and--

Meg: --and "I love you".

Elliot: Yes. and I love you. *(Elliot hands Meg 1/2 of the cut tomato. He takes a bite into the other half)* 'Spose someone's gonna have to help me plant my garden!

Meg: Someone who can tell a radish from a clover.

Elliot: Ahhh! You don't get out of it that easily.

Meg: But Dad!

Elliot: Now, Meg--

Meg: *(Firmly)* It won't be me, Elliot!

Elliot: I'll need someone whose not afraid of a compost heap.

Meg: Lawrence isn't.

Elliot: It's hard to say... now.

Meg: Get off it.

Elliot: Perhaps you could call him and tell him I need him down here, Meg?

Meg: No.

Elliot: Why not? Look, I don't even know what to call him no more. Larry is just too much!

Meg: Call him Lawrence. Better yet call him 'son'.

Elliot: *(Quickly)* Lawrence is a fine name!

Meg: Hey, I'm still up for a dilly bar. You gane?

Elliot: My treat!

Meg: No, it's my treat, really.

Elliot: O K. If you insist. *(They exit. From offstage we hear:)* Ah, Meg. Won't you do your old man a favor?

Meg: Whatzat?

Elliot: Flick that little switch on for me would, ya? *(The sprinkler starts up again and the lights fade.)*

Meg: Dad!

CURTAIN

**SENSES**  
Geoff Eby

Though some may love the day, I fear its light.  
For it exposes to the world my pain.  
I much prefer to linger out of sight,  
Enveloped by a gentle summer rain.

While many like to talk, I make no sound,  
No comfort is provided by the din,  
But still, like many others, I have found,  
That silence does not fill the space within.

The only sense I can endure is touch.  
But this creates a problem to address,  
I yearn to feel another's skin so much,  
That I will fall in love with one caress.

Thus, if you want me, stay within my arms,  
And spare my other senses from your charms.

(illustration)  
Kay Kinsman



## 20 YEARS OF SNOWFLAKES

Sheila E. Quinn

Each tiny snowflake drifting in the sky  
Is like a moment in time as the years go by,  
Tiny frozen tears shared between friends  
Become a blanket, thick and white that nature mends.  
For in each sadness that Winter may bring  
Is an unborn crocus - a healer of Spring.  
Spring's personality changes to Summer and red raw Fall  
Is nursed to sleep by Winter at the end of it all.  
The complexity of snowflakes and the differences between  
Detailed like a year in a life of things happened and been.  
Treasured happiness,  
    moments treasured and remembered go by  
You know a year has passed when the  
    snowflakes fly  
Once we were all fresh Spring babies  
    waiting to learn and know  
And snowflakes are years,  
    piling up as we grow.

## SUBWAYS AND TRAINS

Elizabeth J. Wallace

*"We are neither at home nor at work  
We are moving..."*

Yeah, "Crowded House" is good train music. It's got train rhythm and I don't want to take the subway but I ain't got the blues. Beyond my walkman a mumble of voices surrounds me like a soft blanket and beyond the rain-streaked window quiet fields are slipping by in greens. I am waiting for Montreal to pull up beside me.

I love travelling by train. It has something to do with space I think; the wide aisles between the seats and the country stretching wide outside the windows -- stretching towards a new destination. There's a cheerful cleanliness to trains too, at least for me; some people aren't as at ease as I am. The old, brown man across from me, for instance, is fidgeting and snuffling nervously. His face is crowded with frown lines and his fat fingers fiddle with the buttons on his "too-small-to-do-up" blazer. His eyes are reaching for something between the streaks on the window, something beyond the green.

People in the subways though, they never look out the windows. They get on and off the trains, their faces like blank t.v. screens and never give even the vaguest indication of having seen the hundreds of other human beings surrounding them. No one ever starts a conversation with the person beside him. Everything, even fear, is faceless in the subway.

I shudder and pull out the tin of lemon squares that Mom sent along. "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down" and lemon sweetness soothes away my visions of dingy underground mazes. Maybe the old guy would like to forget his worries too.

"Lemon square?" I ask, and he accepts.

Mom's magic works again. Grin lines crease his face in cockeyed contradiction to the otherwise perma-frown, his lips smack and I see teeth that never benefitted from pink fluoride rinses.

Times change.

I drift in and out of landscape, trainscape, my music and my memories of another train and another old man with rotten teeth. But that was France and Paris was my destination then. For now it's just a subway ride to the bus station and two hours on the bus to school -- but Bishop's is just a beginning.

*"...you'll never see the end of the road  
While you're travelling with me..."*

The old guy is watching me. I wonder if it is my singing, my youth, or the lemon squares that have attracted his attention? But I'll smile. I have a certain power as a woman that renders him boyish in a lost grandfather's way, and a certain childlikeness that finds him again. The language I'm singing in has lost him too, and the mumble around us is as foreign to him as he is foreign to Canada. I don't know where he comes from, maybe Israel, maybe Iran... But I know now where he is going because every time the train slows he looks at me inquiringly and asks, "Montreal?" At the next stop I will nod yes and we will both descend. Maybe someone is waiting for him.

Only the hungry subways await me; the bowels of the earth where no one serves you sandwiches.

*"There's closets in my head where dirty  
things are kept  
That never see the light of day..."*

I eat one more lemon square before packing them away and then smile one last time at the old man who is grinning again and shaking my hand. (Now that we're off the train, his nervousness has almost vanished.) We climb the stairs to the station together and together we are surrounded by his daughter, granddaughter, grandsons and son-in-law. "Thank you." his daughter says to me. "Thank you so much."

*"And we're strangers here  
On our way to some other place  
But I don't know where you go..."*

I drag my reluctant suitcase down the subway stairs and join the faceless waiting people. But my eyes reach for something beyond the dust on the windows, something beyond the grey.

#### REMEMBERING

William D. Duncan

Love, let loose from the great wide open wilderness,  
Steeped in a soft green vegetable madness  
Its shoots and branches embracing, then enveloping  
Me in the cool green race that thrills all life.  
I tumble deep into its lush plenitude, and imagine  
Myself a bright red wound - a flower a-riot  
With color - the culmination of something cultivated  
Over lifetimes, that blooms in an awful aching  
Awareness of the brevity of all things beautiful.....

(I'll keep it pressed between these pages).

## FALLING LEAVES

Jade Roberts

The leaves are falling from her breasts  
Finally time ends the test  
I walk in the road of fallen leaves  
Nailed to the cross are bleeding dreams

Diagonal raindrops on the pane  
The storm ahead brings schools of rain  
City lights shine on the sky  
My body is covered up with flies

Great faces loom inside the walls  
Memories both large and small  
Raven feathers disease the ground  
Feasting butterflies all around

Multitudes behind the door  
Yet with a scream I call some for more  
The scavenger breaks through the glass  
The sulphur bird can feed the mass

The crashing clouds are in my ears  
Oh how the stillness does grow near.

(illustration)

Zane



[ROSE PETALS IN FLOTSAM]

Bryan R. Dollack

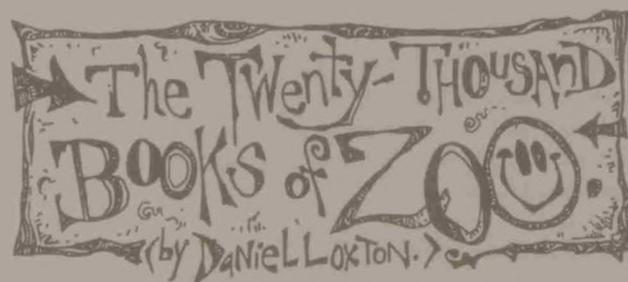
Rose petals in flotsam,  
Washing against the beach.  
Wriggling toes submerged  
In sun-warmed sand.

Daylight that sinks  
Into a forest of dense green.  
Coniferous breaths exhaled  
With the force  
Of winter's northern winds.

Visions of youth surge and  
subside with the rhythm of the waves.  
Purity and innocence,  
The way we never were.

Funny how the past is always  
More pleasing,  
To every one of our senses.  
Reconstructing personal lies,  
To accommodate our feelings  
Of who we think we are

The sun sinks slowly at first,  
But realization pushes it  
Into the harsh reality of night,  
To be accepted or defied.



OR,  
"THE UNFOTUNATE TRUTH ABOUT EVERYTHING"

*(With Illustrations)*

Daniel Robert Loxton

Spring 1993



PROLOGUE: *ONCE UPON A TIME:*

do you call me dreaming she asks  
(YES I SAY I DO NOT)  
the dreaming; is it not?  
that is the worst thing.

\_\_\_\_ The story began with 'Once upon a Time', as they all do. Once upon a Time I was walking on a road. It was a mediocre day, and a mediocre road, and I was having a look about for God. I'd decided he might be over thataways someplace, and so that was the direction I was headed.

I got about halfway there, got bored, turned back, and back again, before going the other way entirely. That direction was no less boring, but at least as mediocre. I began to think; perhaps he's over there, I thought.

And so I walked for a while, and then for a little while longer. Eventually I got bored of walking, and stopped, and whistled.

"Here, God God God!" I hollered, and slapped my thigh, and whistled again. God didn't come, so I tried it the other way: first I whistled, and slapped my thigh, and then I hollered, and whistled some more. God still wouldn't come, and I resolved to give him a good hiding if he ever showed up.

And then I heard a voice.

"Listen!" it said.

I listened; again came the voice:

"Hsst," it told me. There was a silence, and then an enigmatic, "Nor I."

I took it for a sign. Carefully, I followed the voice, and it brought me to a place. The place had a tree of sorts, and a man of sorts. The man stood in rags, talking intently with a pair of scuffed boots.

"Tied?" he asked the boots. "How do you mean, tied?"

He paused, and then exclaimed with irritation, "But to whom? By whom?"

"Excuse me," I asked, "but are you... God?"

"To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea!" he exclaimed, and added, "No question of it... for the moment."

Puzzled, I again queried, "Sir? Are you God?"

The reply was uncertain.

"I think so," He said.

The revelation, when it came, came on Saltspring Island, in the middle of the night. It dawned in a tent in a park by the beach, under the cover of darkness and eight cozy sleeping bags. They were two, a boy and a girl, though there were others close by; in the tent by themselves, they were tangled and close and happy. Outside, there were crickets and waves and wind, and other tents and sky; inside, there was the boy, and the girl, and their whispered words. The two were strangers, really, though they'd forgotten that now; between them they were warm, despite the bitter wind, and he held her very close.

They spoke a long while, of lost times and past loves. They talked a little about this, a little about that, and a lot about nothing in particular. And so it was that, after they'd kissed and cuddled and cosied for a time, he decided to let her in on a secret.

And that was the dread hour, foretold before the coming of the Flood. That was the Time, in which the heavens shook, and the martyrs died, and Odin in his sleep cried out; that was the moment of the Truth, when the sky fell in and the world began.

When the revelation came, beneath the constellations and the waiting weight of ten thousand thousand years, it sounded very much like this:

"Jen," he said seriously. "Would you like me to tell you the Meaning of Life?"

"Sure," she said, in a cute and girly, content and sleepy sort of way. And so he did.

### 1: *How I Ate a Worm:*

When I was young, I remember, my mother kept a huge and acceptably interesting garden, in which she constantly dug with her little spade. I think that it was a lot like playing in a sandbox, for her; for me, it was exactly like playing in a sandbox. Pretty often, in the middle of furious action figure dogfights, my G.I. Joes would get shot down over the alien lettuce-scape of my mother's miniature crop field, only to have to bale out and fight free on foot. Of course, they were actually Star Wars figures, and not G.I. Joes in the least; it was years before my peacenik parents would allow me to own real war toys. My dad, however, was too cool to deny anyone an honest-to-gosh Luke Skywalker or Ben Kenobi, and a dozen Lucas-tys are enough action for even the most adventurous.

Anyway though, Han or Luke would be strafing my mom and her spade, dodging and wheeling and trying to shake a flock of pursuing Stormtroopers, trading fire and protons with the forces of evil, when suddenly - KABLAM! - a shuddering hit to the engine block, a great fiery explosion, and down went the ruined X-wing, trailing smoke and flame and imaginary ILM effects. The dive was always gutwrenching, with G-forces slamming my plastic hero violently back into his plastic seat, wide-eyed and struggling for control. The ground would hurtle up toward him, and he'd spiral down into an unforgiving jungle of carrot-tops and corn and certain death. And then, with amazingly cinematic drama and determination, he'd pull up at the last moment; just barely in the nick of time, Han or Luke or even Leia would bring the nose up, level her out, and bring the ship in for a crash landing. She'd hit and skip and flip and come finally to a shuddering rest between the corn-stalks or a couple of heads of cabbage.

Panicked, Luke would blow the hatch, scramble from the cockpit and throw himself headlong from the half-buried fighter. He'd hit the dirt instants ahead of a white-hot WHUMPF as the ship blew; in slow motion, the disintegrating frame would blow itself into the air for a moment, and the hero would roll like a ragdoll before the explosion. The ship's remains would then crumple back to earth, leaving Luke stranded in the mud, and I'd mark off the blast diameter with folded over radish-tops. That is, if my mom wasn't looking...it never went over too well, otherwise.

But that was the introduction, anyway; that was the prologue to many an exciting episode of "Heroic Adventurer on a Strange Planet!!". The Heroic

Adventurer, whoever it was, would stand up, dust himself off, and survey his weird surroundings with a cool and fearless gaze. Those menacing noises in the jungle were probably nothing to be afraid of, he knew. And if not...well, he had his trusty blaster, just in case.

Now, I remember this day pretty clearly, and I remember precisely who I'd stranded on this particular afternoon. It wasn't Luke, Han, or even Chewbacca, this time; on such a sunny and glorious day, it just had to be the feisty Princess of Alderaan, Leia herself. The reason for this is fairly simple: in my whole collection, Leia was about my favorite figure. The reasons for that, in turn, were simpler still: Carrie Fisher, and the figure itself. To begin with, it must be stated that, even in the extremest midst of grade three girl-germ paranoia, I had a humungous crush on Carrie Fisher. Of course, so did everybody else. But for the second thing, this exact Leia was one of the coolest figures in the greatest toy line ever created. Now, with the adventure and that description, I

know you'll be thinking that this was the Endor-commando version of the princess, but it wasn't; I didn't get that figure until much later on. No, this was the Bounty-Hunter Disguise version, from that part in Return of the Jedi in which she infiltrates Jabba the Hutt's palace of crime and death. The coolest thing about her was probably the mask, which was rather evil and menacing in appearance, and which you could remove to find Leia's striking and heroic plastical features beneath.

Anyway, it was Leia, Lost on Planet X, and somewhere in the garden, my mother was randomly turning dirt. And so, turning her back to the snoldering wreckage, and taking her blaster in hand - Leia, not my mom - she started forth into the Wild Unknown.

The second danger she encountered was a perennial favorite - quicksand! All it really took was some dirt and a cup of water; a bucket, however, was better than a cup, and a hose was better still. I, of course, always used a hose; a true connoisseur always will.

The first danger, though, was a man-eating Yib-Yib tree, from whose carnivorous clutches she only barely escaped. She walked unsuspecting beneath it, only to be dragged screaming up into its leafy, blood-thirsty foliage by a deadly assortment of imaginary vines and pseudopods. Dangling and spinning in circles, she was drawn relentlessly toward its gaping maw...Leia fired wildly, spraying blaster fire into branches and stalks and monstrous tomato-like fruits. I was getting really into it, and enthusiastic spit-missiles and sound effects were flying everywhere.

And then, just as all seemed lost, somewhere, somehow a stray shot struck something important - a nerve perhaps, or a vital organ - and the flesh-eating Yib-Yib was forced to relinquish its prey. The plant jerked spastically back, flinging

Leia to the winds. She spun like a plastic toy, flipping and flopping and summer-saulting through space...

...and landed straight into the fire. Not a real fire of course - but a reference to the frying pan cliché. Which brings us, you must guess, to the second danger, and from there...well, to the main event. But first things first, and prologue in the prologue place:

Leia landed in the quicksand, which was thick and rich and gooey, just the way I like it; she landed and stuck to her quasi-posable hips, feet first in the muck. A push with my index finger sunk her up to her shoulders, and this time...

...don't worry, we're getting to the worm...

...this time, there seemed to be no escape. She struggled, cursed valiantly, and tried to swim, but all in vain; indeed, had she not lain hold of a convenient broken weed, the princess might have died. But the weed was there (where I'd put it), and with a Herculean, or perhaps Amazonian effort, Leia dug herself hand over hand to the safety of the shore. She climbed to Dry Land, wiped the muck from her eye, and flopped finally down in exhaustion.

Which is where the story actually begins.

Because that's when I saw the worm. I was turning to fetch my two Storm-Troopers, which were really Snow-Troopers, when you got down to it; like from the ice planet in the second movie, only smaller. Anyway, they were basically Storm Troopers, and I was turning to fetch them when I saw it. I was bored of the mud and the plants and whatever, and I was plotting a fierce firefight, which I immediately forgot. Anybody would have.

It was the greatest earthworm I'd ever seen in my life. It was majestic; a king of worms, a granddaddy of granddaddies. At least a foot long it was, and thick as a baby's index finger. Undulating slowly, taking its time, the worm plowed casually toward some apparently appealing lump of soil.

"Mom!" I hollered. "Come look at this worm! Its huge!"

"Just let him be, dear," she said, and randomly spaded some dirt or turned a weed or whatever it was she did. She didn't seem very interested.

"Shit," I said softly. It was a word I reserved for very special occasions; I'd turned my attention back to the enormous earthworm.

"Boy," I said, breathless.

Now, I don't actually know why I was so astounded; he was, after all, just a plain and ordinary worm, and I'd seen big ones before. I also don't know what was so great about the soil he was closing on, or what was wrong with where he was, or what he was doing out of the ground in the first place. But he was out, for his own special reasons, and the king of worms could dig just about anywhere he wanted. Furthermore, I was astounded. Not just on account of his size, you understand; it

was more than that. No, I was simply enthralled by the aura of command and authority which emanated from the monarch of the invertebrates. If he'd had eyes, I'm sure they would have been hypnotic. You could tell that he felt his place in the cosmos; he was lord of everything, and he knew it.

Anyway though, the worm wormed, and I watched, and Leia screamed horrifically. The monster, long and thick and bulbous, slid relentlessly toward her. Fumbling in terror she drew her weapon, and let fly a good five or six dozen bursts of glowing laser- death, but to no avail; the creature appeared to be blaster-proof. She fell backward and froze, paralyzed with terror, her blaster forgotten, her pants probably full of princess-poo. This was it, clearly; absolutely certain doom.

And then, just then, in a miraculous occurrence of a standardized nature, a happy freak coincidence intervened to save the princess' life: swooping down from the heavens a correspondingly Brobdingnagian bird lit upon the massive wriggling morsel and hoisted it into the air. The roc's unreasonably shaped beak, appearing not unlike my right thumb and forefinger, darted deftly to the dirt, seized the worm by either his round pink face or his round pink foot, and flew up with him dangling.

The worm was of a kind that is so thick, and so bulky that they have real and actual weight. It was the kind that, when you hold them up by one end between your forefinger and your thumb their innards flow down to the low end, swelling it into a sort of long raindrop or a thermometer well. I held this one right up to my face, in precisely that manner, and I marveled at it, and I reflected on the imposed indignity of the situation for a king out of his element.

And then I got to thinking, and I thought mostly about dandelions: I thought about their soft petals and crisp stems, and about how terrible they tasted if you just picked one from the back of the field near the fence at my school and stuffed it in your mouth and ate it. I thought about their sharp and bitter taste, and about how they stained your teeth when you chewed them. I considered the experiment of the dandelions, and how I'd also eaten a small stick, once when I was younger; I hadn't much liked the stick, either. But I ate the stick, and the dandelions, and some grass even, another time.

And then I got to thinking about the worm. I contemplated its fine fat form, and I wondered just what, just hypothetically, a big fat worm like him would taste like. Would it taste like chicken? It was weird; therefore it was supposed to. In fact, though, I really didn't want to know. On cue, His Majesty began to wiggle and to writhe in my fingers, and I had no interest in knowing whatsoever.

But I ate him anyway. I leaned my head back, opened wide, and dangled him down between my teeth. The moment forced a dramatic pause before I dropped him; it's required by law, I think. And so, I squeezed him a little, to get his attention, and I stared him right in the eye, or the foot...

Worm, I discovered, tastes nothing like chicken.

In the tent, she was silent for a moment. Then:

"That's disgusting!" she exploded, laughing.

The boy shrugged.

"Well?" she said, finally.

"Well, what?", he asked.

"What does *that* have to do with the meaning of life?" the girl demanded.

He shrugged again.

"Everything," he said. "That *is* the Meaning of Life."

And it was... though she couldn't have known. She'd heard nothing of the prophet.

### 2: *The Miraculous Biff of Zoo:*

On Thursday the prophet sat in his room, alone. Cross-legged, he sat on his bed, looked at his walls, and listened to the punk-rock strands of Ode to Joy. He looked at his posters and his paintings, and he saw that they were fine; he looked at his desk, and at his glow-in-the-dark spaceship curtains, and he saw that they were pretty good too.

But not quite good enough.

Sure, some would call that plagiarism, he knew, but he consoled himself: it lent him a touch of class, he thought. It showed that he knew his Brust.

Which was an allusion no one would get.

### 3: *Mediocretes:*

The prophet had a friend, among several, whose name was Mediocretes; Mediocretes the Poet. He wrote poetry, though not very much of it, and wasn't all as bad as it had the potential to be. However, though it could have been worse, it could also have been good, which it wasn't.

The prophet didn't mind, however. We can't all be good at what we do, he once reflected. He'd painted those words across the doors of the Catholic Cathedral downtown, in fact. Besides, Zoo was a pretty indifferent prophet, when you got down to it.

Anyway, the two would sit, for hours sometimes, and compose and recite and discuss the state of things. Mediocretes usually made a few good points, though

much of what he said was also fairly irrelevant. Zoo, by contrast, rarely made a good point, but what he said sure sounded good. But that was how things went

One day in the sunshine, while speaking over fudge-thick coffee, Zoo turned to his wise companion and asked:

"What words are there for love?"

The poet considered.

"Songbirds," he decided finally, "and springtime flowers and the buds in may And fine intoxicating wines, and symphonies and skylarks. Roses and sunlight and gold to airy thinness beat."

"I see," said the prophet. He paused, and thought, and said, eventually:

"Of course, all of that is shit."

The poet agreed, but said nothing.

He didn't really have to.

The Books were few words, and none. They were written *soft* and *warm* and *gentle*, and they were pierced and traced with 'really', 'pretty', and 'though'. In time in later years, this came to be seen as stylism, and as effective repetition, and as artistic license. But it wasn't. It was just the adolescent writing of a fixated amateur. That was how it was, and if you didn't like it, you could read something else.

#### 4: Goliath and Zoo:

(There was also a chapter about this:)

"Your move, geek," said the punk-rock king. He grinned, a smug triumphant mate-in-three sort of grin, and leaned back with a lazy, punk-rock sort of leer

Zoo paused, brows furrowed, and silently surveyed the fields of war. Monuments and battlements in ruin, His Majesty's consort taken, Zoo saw his forces in rout, and fleeing before the enemy. The war had been epic, lasting for hours and eons, but, in the end, he had fought in vain; each Pawn had met a Bishop, each stratagem a counter-tactic, and the legions of Zoo were in defeat.

He surveyed the board, and thought, and thought, and thought; and, after he'd thought a while, he tried thinking, for a time. And then, sitting in the sunshine, playing chess on the grass of the lawn of his school, it came to him.

Zoo looked up at his immense and powerful opponent. He smiled, reached casually out across the board, and moved one Pawn, one space.

"En passant," he said, and his enemy's impregnable position crumpled like a house of cards.

Which was also an allusion no one would get.

#### 5: Others:

There were others, but the story wasn't about them.

There was Peter, and Peter, and Fenwick and Jack; there was Miranda, and Lisa, and Dog the dog. Somewhere in the song, there was even a girl named Bingo, though her parents called her Shauna.

Bingo was a punk-rock girl, but the story wasn't about her, either.

It had nothing to do with Peter, but he was there too. Peter was Fenwick and Gumby. He had no stalk, as such, but he had some magic beans that would get him Upstairs, eventually. In his garden he planted them, and fertilized them, and watered them each night before bed.

Of course, Nothing ever grew, but it was a hopeful sort of hobby.

Jolene exploded into the room, squealing like a piglet.

#### 6: Tony:

Tony drove very fast; he did this because his nature required it, and the night demanded it, and Midnight Oil on the stereo made it necessary. The Phoenix, swimming in music, spilling with girls, flew like a banshee through the night, with Tony guiding her through the curves and twists of the backwoods road we were on. In the darkness she was a bubble, warm and throbbing with the beat of the band and the heat of the lives within her. We'd been drinking, and we were a tumble of girls and us in the back; except, of course, for Tony. He was straight as a razor, calm as milk, a weaver weaving us through death and back; he was driving very fast, and he liked it, and we liked it, and the gods of Saturday night liked it very well. We should have died on each turn, of course, and would have, if we hadn't been invincible; we were forever, on account of Tony, and the power of Phoenix, and the love of Fate for stupid kids like us.

We were cruising, just like the Good Old Days, because that's exactly what they were.

There were the four of us: myself, Tony, Mike and Damon. And there were

the girls, who might have been Cara, Teri, and Chuck. Or they might not have been, I can't remember. It doesn't matter, of course, anymore. It hardly mattered then.

Anyway, it was Tony driving, and Mike shotgun; Cara and Damon were in the hatchback, and it was too dark to say whether they were necking. I was in the back seat, curled up against Chuck, with Teri curled up against me. They were cozy enough, and they were girls, and that was all just fine by me, if you want an opinion. I may even have been all adolescent and hormonal within myself, and probably was, though I don't remember being like that at the time. All I remember are the dark, breakneck corners and the soft radiating warmth of two decidedly female females. It was all pretty exciting, actually. I was in grade ten, and the entire concept of girls being tangible, corporeal creatures that actually let you touch them was fairly new to me.

Hell, it's still new enough.

Anyway, again, we were hurtling and basking in all the night could tell us. It sang to us, or sang to me, in some silent and glorious way. I don't think the girls could hear it though; they were too dumb. But the song was there, beneath the pounding rhythms of Peter Garret on the stereo; it was an immense and soaring silence, building within and around us, swelling up like a tide within my chest. I wanted to laugh, and to scream, and to totally make out with Chuck or Teri, though I did none of these things. Instead, I just grinned like a lunatic, a stupid, ear-to-ear sort of grin that would have looked ridiculous in daylight.

We came up to the end of the road, eventually, and Tony brought us to a precise and dramatic full stop before taking us out onto the highway. We shifted into a smooth and unobtrusive warp speed, and the rain started angrily up again. Mike, as shotgun DJ, changed CD's while water pelted down against us, he chose Move, and that was just fine, actually. The mood shifted with the music, as *Obituary Column's* techno-haunting melody filled the air, we still couldn't have talked, over the little girl's singing, but we wouldn't have wanted to, either. I looked over my shoulder, and if Damon'd been necking with Cara he'd grown bored of that now, or had stopped in observance of the sacred strains.

Like rain we streamed forward, and night fell back past us, darkness and darkness flowing behind. We were safe here, dry in cold and warm in rain, softly wrapped in a synthethereal blanket of angelsound. I curled up against the girls, drifting, sleepy in their heat.

At ninety kilometers an hour, the Phoenix was an island, and a spaceship, and a nest.

We got to the party a little past nine, and things were already moving pretty fast.

But that was eight months later, and I wasn't in the mood.



#### The Raven:

The raven was a dark and ugly bird. It sat in a dead and twisted tree, hissing its malevolent gaze at the sky. Around it rolled the looming sickness of the heavens, and below it was the planet Earth. The raven twitched its jerking neck, and waited, tasting the textures of the wind with its blackened purple tongue.

A month passed, or a year perhaps, or an hour. And, at the time appointed, a boy made his way through the forest to the tree.

Zoo walked in misery toward the beach, thinking of a girl. He cut and purged her in fire from his mind, but she was always there, and she always came back. There were tears behind his eyes, but these at least he strangled. Fists clenched, he wandered among the rocks, along the broken water, and tried not to think of the only thing on his mind.

And then the tears grew stronger than he was, and he silently hid himself in his hands.

Which was when, of course, the voice came

"Guess you *blew* that one," it cheerily suggested. "What with her screwing that moron, and all.

"Bet *that* stung."

Eyes wide and blurry, Zoo looked up in shock.

"Howdy!" said the spiny-feathered demon.

But the next time, a spiritual revolution had readied him for the attack.

"Fuck you," said the raven

The prophet thought this over.

"I think that's impossible," he said.

"Implode," the raven told him.

Zoo considered this too. He tried obligingly to reduce his volume to zero

"Sorry," he said.

"Fuck you," said the raven.

While they thus discussed, Zoo studied the bird, and quickly decided it to be the ugliest creature he had ever seen. He found it hard to believe that such a fundamentally grotesque and rat-eaten disgrace to the species should be allowed to exist; it was an ornithologist's nightmare, and God in His mercy was pretty much obligated to strike it down. God didn't, of course, and Zoo found himself growing increasingly annoyed by the raven's brazen manner.

He decided to frown, though of course that's a lie; the frown in truth was quite accidental.

The raven chose to regard this as a show of weakness. Inspired, the grey-feathered squawker switched to high gear, shrieking and hissing and spitting ferociously. It hopped and it flapped and it fluttered, and it screamed an unending stream of obscenities from the safety of its branch. Zoo watched and he listened, and he waited for the bird to shut up. He stood quietly, and the sun slid across the sky. Towards evening he grew bored of standing quietly, and he tried sitting in silence, instead. The afternoon wore down into sunset as he waited, and the bird continued its abuse.

And then the bird stopped talking. For a very long time it unhappily stared at him, its mean, pink, bloodshot little eyes glinting in the gathering gloom.

"Well?" it demanded, finally.

"Well' what?" Zoo asked.

"Fuck you," snapped the raven.

And then the story changed.

Zoo decided to kill it. He picked a huge rock, tested its weight, and sent it hurtling up through the dark. In a great flutter of wing-panicky, the dusky bird leaped oddly aside; the jagged broken rock, spinning up in a lazy hurtling arc, missed barely the bird and sheared easily through the thick rotten branch. With a dry crunch, the old wood exploded into suicide, splintering splinters to the wind.

Eyes blazing, the raven gleefully screamed, "Missed, fucker! Nice try, you fuckin' missed...!"

But of course that wasn't true, really.

"Pottymouth," accused the prophet, and brauned him with the second stone. As feathers the bird exploded also, bursting like someone'd stuffed firecrackers up his butt. Zoo winced at the simile, and unfortunately, foul-mouthed bird-bits rained down out of the tree.

And thus the outside demon died.

### Seven: *What Happened:*

Listen carefully, because this part is important. It's the story of how it all ended; it's what went wrong, and why.

This is what happened:

### Eight: *On Soft:*

I hate;

O for peace of mind, for nothing or for dreaming, to have one or have the other

O for but to win or lose or play not

O for love and hate and hate but

mostly softly dreaming:

Ah remember,

and in remembrance suffer

and in suffering strive and hate and love

into again remember, once and softly

yet again I see a face, and warmth

and soft, the fair undoer, to have lost

and thus to losing, endless ending

once in dreaming once and softly and

A warm and playful smile

A slender graceful form of gentle and of soft

An angel, motion grace and lovely soft and

careful, curving steps on soft on soft and

breathing.

### Nine: *The Shade Below My Souls:*

"Don't look at me with conspiracy in your eyes," a girl once said.

Once in the world they built, there came to be a prophet.

The prophet, good and true and stupid, fell into love with a plain and beautiful girl. And that was the end of the poem, though he didn't know it yet; he hadn't heard the wind chimes. There was the girl, and then there wasn't, and then there were the visions, and the dreams.

He made the dreams himself, sharpening the razor through years of sleeping misery; the visions followed him, through night and shadow, over hill and valley, month and year. They followed him forever, and they never let him rest.

Each night he dreamt again, and each night he woke uneasy. She came to him in shadow, laughing and lovely, her softwarm eyes alive and good; she came to him in torment, cold and dead and hateful. She touched him with her eyes and breath, and with endless loving cruelty; in the night she came, and kissed him, and stole him away in shreds.

In the darkness he'd awaken, eyes bright and bold and open, mind crawling with her phantom form and face. He would write, or paint, huddled up in a corner alone, smashing words onto paper until she went away. Through the night he would slash and hack at the canvas of his nightmare, spattering paint in crimson spots across his bed. Into exhaustion he would write her face, inscribe her in paint, and do penance unto dawn.

She haunted his every dream, and thought, and deed. He would see her in his head, and on the street, and in the words of every name he knew. Like the shades of childhood, she was always there behind him, glimpsed at the hazy edges of his sight.

In the Old, there was a shoemaker, who came one day to fear his shadow. He saw it in the afternoon, warped and stretched before him like a spectre, and he ran from it in terror absolute. For miles he fled, not daring to look back. Swift on his heels the spectre followed, flowing at his feet, tasting the blood of the blistered tracks he left.

He hated her, but that didn't make her leave.

He would turn and see her there somewhere, in truth or in another. Innocent each time it cut him, collapsing him in spasms of aloneness and uncertainty.

The prophet wrote:

"In your heart of hearts, what am I to you?"

But he knew the answer, and she ruined him with torturous indifference.

16: *The Party:*

Things got pretty bad, pretty quick.

We got there just past nine, like I said, and things were already moving, spinning out of control. There were a million people there, though they were thirty or so in number. The place was Damon's, if it matters, and I was drunk already, if you care. I'd broken open the cider in the back on the way.

Tony got us there, teleported us to a stop, and we poured ourselves to the carnival. Inside, it was everyone, as usual; the faces of always, as it should be. The music was very loud, the girls were very many, and the liquor was a cornucopia of mind-melting plenty. We came to the front, greeted by shouts and festive salutations; the carload was five or so, the closest of the circle, and the centre of the spiral mountain. Beneath the surface of the evening was glory, and beneath the glory was good.

And none of that mattered.

Blackness was with me, and I committed my suicide within the first of many minutes.

Later that night I discovered what love is, though I hardly remember that dread revelation. Instead, I remember my second mug of vodka fairly well, and I remember almost pouring the third. I remember also smashing myself in the face with my hands, again and again for an hour or so. It endlessly bemused me that my face would move beneath a blow I couldn't feel. It fascinated me; I could feel my face beneath my fingers, but not my fingers on my face.

Which, friends, is what we call a bad scene.

Time passed.

Time passed, and the party changed inside.

I remember nothing of that night, except for everything. There was no booze for me, or not enough; I made it up, and made it worse, and I hid there. It's better that way; it's best I can't recall.

But even that is a lie. It's all lies. It's all we write.

### 11: Ice-cave Blue:

The dream destroyed a week of me.  
I sit and I watch, and things are bad around me

*i'm little; i must be, but i don't think that i am. It's a fun fair affair, a fundraising carnival sort of thing, though i don't know how i know that; it doesn't look like one.*

*This might be my elementary school, but it's not.*

*The air here is very cold, but not cold at all; there's a chilling subliminal coolness, inside me and everywhere. The walls are that color too, a sort of ice-cave blue. In either direction they stretch, insanely far, with neither door nor window. There are no Best-of-the-Best bulletin boards on these walls; there are no ski-trip notices, and no red fire alarms. There is nothing on the walls but blue, and there is no one in the hallway.*

Anyway, if you care, the shoemaker ran until his feet bled and the soft catskin boots he'd wrought were dust behind the miles. He ran for fourteen days and nineteen nights, through Persian dark and burning sun, until, at last, he could run no more. But he did; he always did, until he died. Each day, each hour, each minute, the agony built stronger; but, each day, his growing terror swallowed it. It slipped pain down the throat of horror, calmly and forever, because the shade was close behind.

*i stand in the blue between the walls, quietly before the shoe check desk. i'm arguing with absence, explaining that, i'm sorry, i don't mean to be rude, but this is stupid, who ever heard of a shoe check desk anyway? Not i, and not the empty chair behind the pile of leather.*

*The hall is getting colder, i notice.*

*And it's somehow growing longer.*

*Bathed in shades of ice-cave, i continue to argue with empty, silent air. A whispered touch of wrong waves like a fever across me, and i think, i'm somewhere very bad, and very deep. The hall is a tunnel, below mile on mile of stone and winter, and i'm the only one they've buried here. They put me in the pit, alone in the hallway, and they sealed it off. They buried me and walked away, and they're never coming back.*

*And i know that i will die here, with not even a corner to hide in; i'll crawl inside a pile of cold and unworn leather, and i'll die in the cold like a rat. And i*

*begin finally to be afraid.*

*But then it all changes. In the deep deep, cold and still and silent, she comes to me. i feel her there when she is; she begins to occupy space in the nothing, to be something in the pit. i don't know when she stops not being there; i'm not sure when she starts to be a presence. She just is; she is behind me, looking on me, looking over me. Her face wears that warm and wicked little sprite-smile, and her eyes the taunting affection that goes with it.*

*Everything changes when the girl becomes behind me. Melting in the warmth of her, my fear falls away; the Bad of the dream fades before belonging. Like heated milk the gentle almond flavor of relief pours through my arms and mind and fingers. i bask an almost instant, bathing in the amber nature of the girl, and then i turn. My lips are brushed with words and trembling, the frost across them thawed and brought to human, and i turn to face the present presence of the lovely standing girl. i turn to the place behind me where she is, an island with her in the blue with me, and i open myself in longing.*

*But you already know this story; you already know how it ends.*

*Because there's nobody there but hallway.*

On the eighty-first day, the shoemaker tripped and fell. His shadow was on him in an instant, and it devoured him without a sound.

The shoemaker, however, was no one in the first place. He didn't even exist; there was no shoemaker, and the shadow wasn't his:

There was only Zoo the Prophet.

The prophet, and the visions he dreamt. It's where they hid the reasons of the Truth.



### 12: The Worst Thing:

Maria was a nice girl.

She was a Guatemalan Chinese, if it helps to picture her. Her face was open and broad and oriental; her hair was a short and silky black, and her shape a short and silky sleek. I always rather liked her, despite her, and we hung around a few times, in the summer mostly. She was bubbly and simple and nice, and she made pretty good company, if you were in that sort of mood. Her total lack of importance was of the greatest conceivable import, despite her empty-headed silliness; she was a part of the old circle, from the Old Days.

And so, I liked Maria pretty well.

Sadly though, Maria was a slut. Which isn't even fair to say, really, because in some ways she wasn't at all. She didn't have that attitude to mark her; there was none of that sex-witch undercurrent, because Miami was a basically worthwhile person. Only barely, perhaps, but worthwhile nonetheless. The world might not have suffered greatly at her absence, but it would have suffered something, and it would never be improved at her removal. That was why she didn't really deserve the word 'slut', although she'd earned it.

But she was certainly free with herself, if in a generally monogamous sense; it was just that she was monogamous with a great many people. It wasn't her fault, exactly, or even a fault, if we judge only ourselves. She was merely a sexual creature, built around those natural compulsions in a way I never could be. Because Maria was also pretty dumb. She wasn't stupid; that's one shade too strong. But she was actually, truthfully dumb, in a naive and unselfconscious sort of way that wasn't even bad. Her kind and benevolent mind was neither fast nor slow; it was simple. That was her entire character: she was simple and good, like an animal of some kind. Her being was natural, almost primal-plane; her actions were hers because they were, as was all she did.

And so, I liked her well enough, and I was glad when she found me in my corner. "Hi!" she said, arriving in a happy-drunk explosion of greeting.

I smiled.

Maria joined me on the floor, spilling a little of her drink, which was fine, because she didn't notice and I didn't care.

"Zoo!" she said, beaming, and threw her arms around me. She gave me an enormously warm and drunken hug, and then sat back against the wall, her knee against mine, my knees against my chest. Maria looked at me in her open way, and laid her hand across my wrist.

I looked at her, and my thoughts must have shown on my face, floating on alcohol, no doubt, because she asked me softly.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said, not really bothering to pretend in my voice that was true.

She looked at me a long time, concerned, and said nothing. I began then to

realize that I was probably far drunker than she; it decided to occur to me that Maria seemed little drunker than it was usual for her to seem. This might only have been her first or second drink, and so I tried again.

"No, seriously," I said, and smiled, and made a good shot at convincing. "I'm fine."

Her eyes narrowed, and she said flatly, "No you're not," which was true. I'd've convinced someone who knew me better, but Maria didn't need to; sometimes she just knew.

"What's wrong?" she asked again, taking my hands in hers. "Is it that what's-her-name?" I'm a pretty pathetic liar.

"Why would it be what's-her-name?" I countered.

Maria made a small triumphant smile.

"Then there is something wrong," she said.

"I..." I began, and had to stop. It took me a moment to find my train of thought, buried as it was in cider.

"That's not what I said," I finished defensively.

"Yes it is," she said, and I didn't bother arguing. There was a thoughtful pause, and we eavesdropped on the throbbing, murmuring party for a while.

And then Maria asked, "Why does she make you so sad?"

I looked at my hands for a time, and said, "I don't know," though I did, really. I just didn't want to say it all, because that would make it worse.

"Then forget her," said Maria, her eyes spaking in some particular way that I was too drunk to understand. She said it in that sort of way too, but I didn't really pick it up.

"I can't," I said miserably.

Maria leaned in very close, her elbow pressing in on my knee, and said gently, "Sure you can."

She arched an eyebrow at me, and I could smell her close, like oranges, or blossoms, or something. I began to think with a fast-beating heart, and I actually began to forget for a moment, and somewhere a fiction gained ground on his shadow.

Is she...? I thought, and I thought I was too drunk to know.

But she was.

"I think," she said, "that we should go upstairs."

My shade fell behind me, and we did. We found an empty room, or she did, and we became to be together on a large and freezing bed. It was a ridiculous bed, and a black room, and I was a little cold, but Maria warmed me, on the outside.

And this began to feel terribly wrong.

"Maria," I said and she kissed me. She pressed her body into mine, and she

kissed me, very deeply. The taste of her mouth was girly and hot, and I forgot a little more. Murmuring something in Spanish, Maria pulled from me a moment, and I caught the flash of her demon-grin in the darkness; I slid my hands over the smooth wide skin of her back as her shirt became elsewhere. Her body was an island of heat in the chill of the room, and we rolled together, grinding and gnashing like rats teeth. We were moving against each other, consumed by ourselves, and parts of me began to be missing.

I knew that this was the most disgusting event of my life, and I didn't care at all.

Happily I felt her fingers on my belt, and I lost myself in Maria. Happily, I felt blind and soaring dizziness engulf me; joyously, I threw myself to the wolves.

And then it reared up before him.

"..." said Zoo, and didn't move.

It was mansized, roughly manshaped, amorphous and grotesque. It had no hands, no eyes, no mouth, no features. Just a wet sticky gooform, it pulsed in regular waves where it stood, from head down to foot, like a maggot.

It loomed closer, and Zoo stepped back. He could feel the moist gummy heat rolling off it, and could smell nothing at all. He could see himself reflected on the slick slime sliding down its smooth bloated chest. It looked like a water balloon, in so much as it looked like anything; an orange water balloon. Orange, and smeared with eggwhite.

The prophet puked.

You all picked your noses today. I know you did; I watched you. But we'll pretend that you didn't, that decent folks don't, and I'll ask:

Do you remember when you were eight, and you used to pick your nose? Do you remember the textures you encountered, the sizes, shapes and colours? Do you remember when you got a really big gob which came out with a crusty bit, like eggwhite with a shell shard? The sort which was slick and slimy, and you had to look for a kleenex because you couldn't just roll it into a little ball between your thumb and your pinky, because if you tried it would just smear all over the place, and that was always a bugger? You had to hunt around for a kleenex with your pinky in the air, as if you were at tea with the queen.

Or perhaps you just ate it; I don't know. I couldn't look.

Anyway, you remember what the slick sticky smear felt like, and that's the important thing.

And then it was upon him, collapsing over the prophet like a closetful of

sticky-slick Jell-O. Zoo stopped puking in mid-puke, at about the same time as he stopped breathing, the monster enveloped him, wrapping its balloon arms around him and forcing him lovingly into its chest. The spongy surface bent and gave over his face, stretching like rubber across his features, smothering him in stickgooseyness. And then the membrane broke and flooded into him, and there were hundreds of gallons of warm rubbery slime exploding down the prophet's throat and nostrils.

His body considered throwing it back up, but gave in under the weight.

And so, Zoo drowned. He thrashed about for a while, screaming inside himself, but in the end it was no use. In the end, the monster swallowed him, and he died in its embrace.

It was much like this each time they met.

I lay on my back and I stared at the ceiling. I thought nothing except the throb of the house and the buzz of the drink. Below us somewhere there was music, but the house was pulsing without it, with the engulfing beat of the party alive.

Maria was there beside me, wrapped and sleeping in the quilt. I could see her there, frosted in the ice-cave blue of dimmest moonlight. She'd rolled over with the covers, and I was too cold and too drunk to despise her, yet. But I would.

I stared at the ceiling, and, in loathing, the ceiling stared at me.

Zoo drifted, buried in the monster.

There was moonlight, far above, but the prophet couldn't see it. He saw nothing, and heard nothing; he was asleep, and hung suspended in the blue-black depths of deepest ocean. There was no light, and no sound; no sand, no fish, no life. He was alone in silence, beneath mile in mile of crushing, fusing water. He was alone beneath the world, and through an age he drifted.

And then, decades later, he heard a voice:

Loser, it said. This doesn't even make a good story.

Zoo twitched in his sleep; beneath the sea, the prophet frowned. It had felt like dreaming, for a moment, but of course there was no dreaming here.

I opened my eyes, and beheld the Vision of the Rat.

*13: The Vision of the Rat (on about the frogs):*

"Tell me a story," said a girl once.

I smiled.

"What about?" I asked.

"I don't know," she murmured, drifting and content. "Just tell me... things." Which is what I told her. But they weren't very nice things.

And then there were the frogs, I said.

There were five of them, I think, or four; strong, white-bellied little swimmers that fit nicely into your palm. I'd found them in the pond behind the cook trailer-the Frog Pond.

Anyway, I got this big white bucket to put them in. It was one of those five-gallon plastic things that you buy bulk granola in, and I found that behind the cook trailer, too. I filled it with water, and I punched about a million breathing holes in the lid with a pair of scissors. And then I took the five frogs, which were kicking and struggling valiantly, and plunked them into the bucket. They made a kind of little plopping noise as I belly-flopped them in, and they looked up in goofy, frog-eyed resentment from their new home. I smiled, and slipped the sturdy lid onto the deep, smooth-walled bin, sealing them inside.

And then I went happily off for dinner.

I was eight or so, and it was tomorrow before I came back.

When I opened the lid I found them, bellied-up and still. They just kind of bobbing there, like bath toys, and I knew immediately what I'd done; I knew that they had swum all night in total blackness, scraping and scratching the plastic sides, with nothing to hold onto, and nowhere to go but down. They swam all night, kicking and paddling and clawing and fighting to stay on top, swimming and struggling in the claustrophobic silence of the pit. All night in the darkness they kept themselves afloat, with only water below. And then, one by one by one, they slipped down into the black; after an hour, or two, or three, or four, one by one they died.

In horror I stared at the frogs I'd killed, and I pictured myself among them. I saw the taunting moonlit scissors-holes above, and in panicked exhaustion I grappled to keep my friends stuffed below me in the water. The bone-numbing chill of drowning swept over me, and I knelt quietly down over the bucket.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sorry."

I repeated it mindlessly, like the Lord's Prayer.

And then I saw that one was moving. He was paddling slowly, bobbing with his arms wrapped weakly around the bloated body of a brother; somehow, he'd fought his way till morning, and I took him carefully up in my hands. He was instantly still as I lifted him free of the pit; he just sort of collapsed into my palm.

Somehow, one was still alive, and somehow that made it worse.

I actually had nightmares about those frogs.

#### 14: 'Icht-yah':

The End arrived:

Eventually they killed me, and I wasn't too happy about that. But, oh well. 'Icht-yah', as the Inuit say; 'it could not be helped'. The Inevitable is, after all, inevitable. That's why they call it that.

#### 15: *The Last Word*:

And here comes the punchline:

On the seventh day, in the final minute, he found the door. It was a simple, snister, freestanding door; black, wooden, and somehow ominous, it was built in a ferny clearing, on the center of a pond. Not 'in', or 'out of', but on; which isn't to say that it was floating, exactly. It wasn't. It was just there.

Zoo crouched down to study the door. It was doorsize and doorheight, with a handle-like handle in the handle spot. He didn't like it at all. He didn't like that it was black, and he didn't like that it was a weird rectangle standing on a pond in the middle of nowhere whatsoever. In fact, he liked it so little that he wanted nothing so much as to turn and run, crashing and screaming; through the trees of the woods, out onto the world and back under the quilt of his bed. He wanted to wrap himself into a ball and rock back and forth and bite both hands until they bled. And, more than anything, he wanted to stand very still and not breath until the big black rectangle went away. But that isn't what he did. Or, not precisely; he did stop breathing, and he did bite his knuckles until they bled. But then he stood up, very slowly, with his blood in his mouth, and said, "Shit."

It was a word he saved for very special occasions, and he said it softly and clearly, with hardly a waver in his voice. The door, tall and dark and silent, swallowed his little word, and its little sound, and stood waiting for more.

But that was the last thing the prophet ever said. He paused a moment, staring at the door staring at him staring at it, and stepped out toward the portal.

He put one bare foot on the water, and it held him softly up. The pond lapped at him, gently, cleansing and tasting his toes. Zoo spat at his ripples, and watched the red dollap mushroom cloud down into the froggy depths. He brought his other foot out onto the surface, and, with little fuss and no bother, walked out across the pond.

The looming door loomed at him, and he stopped at its foot. He looked at it, in wonder and trepidation; the door, in turn, just looked. It looked a lot like nothing at all.

His face blank, Zoo the Prophet reached out and took the handle: if she existed, finally, he would find her here. And so, he took the handle, and he turned it, and he threw open the gate.

And that was the end of the story.

The girl in the tent lay with her face against his, and said sleepily:

"I don't get it."

The boy sighed.

"That's because I haven't told you the moral yet," he said.

"And that'll explain it?" she asked him fondly.

"Yes", he said. "Definitely."

And it did, sort of.



### ***20,000: The Nonsensical Truth of the Meaning of Life:***

One day in early spring, Zoo decided to write a book. He wrote it in lowercase printing, and he entitled it "The Prophecies of Zoo", because it was.

The book, as it later happened, turned out to be a Book, and there were nineteen thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine more, in time. But this was the first, or First, and therefore the most important. Except perhaps, for the Twenty Thousandth, because therein lies the Last Word; but that, of course, came later, and not until The End.

Zoo wrote his book beneath a tree, in a meadow, in the sunshine, while watching an orange bird fly, and a blue fly bird. It was a glorious day, the prophet noticed, and he bathed in teeming life, and green. Everywhere he looked, the meadows stretched to forests and to foothills, everywhere he turned, there were

leaves and grass and newborn sheeps tossing in the breeze.

Leaning back in the shade of a benevolent birch, immersed in the alliteration of it all, Zoo opened his book and took his pencil in hand. Not that it was really a pencil; it was, in fact, a pen. He just said 'pencil', because he suddenly needed to; it felt better, though he didn't know why. Anyway: Zoo picked up his pen, opened his book, and drew a thin black line across the top of the first page. Below that he wrote the title, and underlined it, and put a colon at the end.

"The Biff of Zoo:" was the title of the First Book.

No one knows why.

And then the prophet paused a moment, to reflect. He knew that this was a momentous moment - portentous, even - though he wasn't sure how he knew that, or whether he was just inventing the whole feeling. In fact, he suspected that he was, but he pretended not to be, for drama's sake. Thoughtfully, he considered the significant blankness of his page, and then he wrote the very first of the Twenty Thousand Books of Zoo.

Gently, softly, he blew a small purple butterfly from the cap of his pen, and inscribed four words beneath his title. It was a perfectly profound prophesy, but a pretty short book:

"You will die soon," it said.

### ***Epilogue:***

And that, finally, was it, and the final conclusion concluded.

It was not a CIA conspiracy.

The KGB were not involved.



(illustration)  
Kay Kinsman



(illustration)  
Anna M. Grant



**SAND POEM**

Jade Roberts

I write my poem in the sand  
High up on the beach  
But as its length starts to expand  
Down towards the ocean it does reach

Between each wave I write my verse  
Into the moistened ground.  
But with each wave my words disperse  
And in the sea they can be found

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY



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