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# calliope vol. 4

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POETRY AND FICTION  
FROM WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY'S  
FIFTH ANNUAL MANUSCRIPT DAY

EDITED BY EVE SHELNUTT & MARTIN GROSSMAN

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## IN APPRECIATION

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# poetry

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JAMES BONAMICI

LORI HARVEY

JEANNE JABIN

PEGGY MOORE

KATY NEWBERG

AMY PATTULLO

PETER J. REED

D. DIANE RIGGS

ANNE SCHREIBER

CINDY SIEGRIST

MINDY WOLF

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JAMES BONAMICI

METROPOLIS

We drove to Grandmother's  
For Thanksgiving;  
To her house, her life,  
Laid in bride and grain of flesh  
By hand with the perseverance  
Of ten thousand immigrants.  
For this woman older than pain,  
In the large pale dress  
And archaic smile that is each day,  
We gave our thanks.  
We were a family  
Stacked in corners like piles  
Of withering newspapers,  
Or strewn as salamis and olives  
In shadows  
Over ancient oak table tops,  
Eating our spaghetti and turkey  
From paper plates,  
And sipping bitter white wine  
From dust-covered Seagrams' bottles  
Brought up from the cellar.  
We were an orphan, one of many  
Oceans from our home,  
Cradled in a sea of porcelain madonnas  
And railroad tracks,  
Concrete lapping at the garden's edge.

## LORI HARVEY

I used to  
    say yes  
when that  
    was the fitting  
and proper thing  
    to say (even though  
the subject at hand  
happened to pull strongly  
at the 'no' side of me)  
    but now  
            when the  
    crowd says, "Pepsi Please"  
I step out of  
    the circle and  
calmly say, "Red-pop"  
(providing, of course,  
I happen to be in  
the mood for red-pop  
on that particular day).



JEANNE JABIN

TRIBUTE TO THE GROWN-UP

Reciting your Plato  
You win applause from the crowd  
    nodding  
on a rocker of pride

I retort in Beginner's Russian  
As you erase memories like typing errors.

## PEGGY MOORE

See the pictures of  
    bums  
in Detroit.  
Forgotten people  
who forgot themselves  
and let themselves  
Fade and blow away  
like yellowed newspapers  
in a back alley.

---

**KATY NEWBERG**

My grandfather's in a rest home.  
That's what they call it.  
I think it's death row.  
Patients condemned there to die,  
no dignity left.  
Can't even decide what they'll have for lunch.  
But I'm going to go visit him.  
I hate going there.  
Everyone stares at me when I walk in.  
The lobby is filled with them:  
Sitting there, watching each other.  
He's been there 3 years,  
ever since his wife died.  
He's got kids, but they don't want him.  
Too much trouble.  
Every Christmas we all make the annual pilgrimage  
to see him.  
We do our duty and absolve our sins.  
I went last time.  
But he wrote me a letter.  
He wants me to come see him.  
I could tell it was him from the envelope.  
The writing was all shaky.  
Thursday after school I go see him.  
I'm on his bed, and he sits in his chair by his dresser.  
We talk about school and my parents,  
but I'm just being polite and he knows it.  
He looks so old.  
Stuck in this box with a bed that's too short.  
An off-white bedspread with green roses.  
Stains in the carpet.  
Smiling nurses walk the halls with supper trays.  
I leave him, saying I'll be back next week.  
I can't stay any longer.  
Saturday night he died in his sleep.

KATY NEWBERG

ODE TO ROD MCKUEN

Suddenly I spot you—  
crouched among the milkweeds.  
Rushing to your side, I kneel  
and discover what I knew not before—  
you're dead.  
We embrace and kiss passionately.  
We are one.  
Drawing apart, the shredded skin  
from my chapped lips  
gets caught in your braces.  
Oh God—how beautiful!  
Whilst lying there, side by side,  
we look up, and ponder our fates  
upon the cotton clouds of hope.  
You are my Antony and I your Cleopatra.  
Against the empty candy wrappers of time  
we stand out, you and I, as  
two fresh Willy Wonka bars.  
Later, we know we must go,  
but find ourselves somehow pulled back, restrained.  
We talk of many things—  
love, hate, mankind's future, and solve  
the infinite mystery of life.  
At last, we are released  
and walk home, hand in hand,  
as the crickets chirp of our departure,  
and the wind whistles through the reeds,  
to bid us good-bye.

---

KATY NEWBERG

PIPE DREAMS

The sky was falling—  
It really was.  
Cruised out of the White Rabbit  
after inhaling nine tequilas  
and stood there.  
The sky had finally given up  
and pieces were dropping all over.  
I couldn't believe it.  
I mean, hell, the *sky* doesn't fall down.  
Rain, maybe, but not the *sky*.  
But this was it all right, the genuine product.  
Whole sheets were falling down and denting cars.  
Mothers were taking their children off the streets.  
But I knew the truth—I wouldn't be fooled.  
They were cotton clouds, man.  
It was an omen. .  
I cruised back in for another.

KATY NEWBERG

## TOURIST TRAP

Hot . . . dusty  
The floorboards bend  
    as if in a funhouse.  
Behind the desk—the man looks up.  
Beads of sweat dotting his black forehead—  
    drop to the paper spread before him.  
He says nothing—  
    Just waits . . . .  
Trying English, then French,  
    then David Frost British—  
    “Is this the police station?”  
His friends all around us . . .  
    Watching.  
They share a private joke,  
    slouched up against the wall.  
The fan above flicks slowly around  
    like an old age sprinkler  
    run out of water.  
(But isn't that a badge on his shirt  
    and posters on the wall?  
    Why doesn't he say anything?)  
Suddenly afraid—we spin around—  
    wanting only to escape this wooded jungle.  
Rushing out into the now glaring sunlight.  
The crowd jostling among itself . . .  
    mingling with the traffic horns . . .  
We are swept up and surrounded.  
While from in there—  
    laughter rings out.

---

AMY PATTULLO

FROM FISK'S KNOB

Look over Michigan:  
Her udder's full.  
Trees so green . . .  
(You would wear that green  
In velvet  
To make like being sensuous. And in Canada,  
They would weave it into Hudson's Bay Blankets.)

The crickets—  
Singing their round tune,  
A lunging tune that surges  
Like the boat of a muscled rower. (Singing it in high  
Grasses that tremble like the fledgy water trailing from  
that boat.)

A wet peach, that ripe sun,  
Is dying over the corn,  
Over the locusts and bees, the catbird, wary  
In the long shadows,  
On the virile sumac,  
And, too, on the mad bats.

This land is heavy with rich milk.  
(Devonshire cream.  
And tea cakes, and short bread.)

PETER J. REED

HUMANITARIAN

We were on the third floor  
and she had some dog  
with her.

"Whose dog?" I said.

"I found it." That was her.

"That means it's somebody's."

"Yeah, well I guess so," she said.

"Best thing to do when you find somebody's dog," I said,  
"is kick it in the ass and tell it to go home."

"Oh. Yeah?"

"Yup," I said, knowing she would ask me why.

"Why kick it?" I had this one all figured out.

She was the humanitarian type.

"Oh, that's just so it won't follow you," I told her,  
"so it'll think you don't like it."

"Oh. Yeah."

"Ummhumm." That was me.

MYSTERY TO ME

I feel so bad tonight.

My shoes go

shit

shit

shit

on the pavement.

It's cold and wet

and I have no idea

where you are.



PETER J. REED

POOR WILLIE

Poor Willie,  
    born with thick glasses on.  
Even the teachers cackle behind his back,  
    they think he don't hear.

D. DIANE RIGGS

PEARL S. BUCK ON A WINTER MORNING

A frosty afghan  
around my shoulders,  
I creak Chinese-lady steps,  
running from the flood,  
to the warm shelter of  
coffee-kitchen,  
wondering if the grey newspaper  
is worth it.

"TEACH"

Like the Salvation Army,  
I fill beggars'  
hunger  
with bowls of  
real-world soup,  
ladling chunks of  
hidden vegetable meaning  
into pink and blue plastic containers.

With the seven o'clock mist  
of sunrise revelation'  
in their eyes  
they will stand in line  
for seconds  
and thirds.

## ANNE SCHREIBER

i used to think of myself  
as one of those people  
who doesn't belong in the city

i belong  
ugliness needs company

i sit and read my books  
making sure  
i'm not reading a cheap novel  
too many things are cheap as it is  
it's cheap to be born  
it's cheap to survive it  
it's cheap to forget it  
it's cheap to regret it  
what would i have to pay  
to do it twice?

i'm sitting here  
in person?  
these days it gets so that  
i can't even tell.

CINDY SIEGRIST

NEXT TO THE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

I can tell I dig you  
Because everybody reminds me of you  
Like the blond parking lot attendant  
Even though you have brown hair.  
And I bring your name up in conversation  
About twenty times a day  
Even though nobody else knows you  
Or cares that you can play "Police Dog Blues"  
On your guitar,  
And because I keep telling myself  
Not to think of you  
Which only proves that I am thinking of you  
And whenever I go anywhere  
I look for you  
Even at the supermarket in the vegetable section.  
Oh well,  
Maybe—just maybe—  
Sometimes you think of me  
too.

---

CINDY SIEGRIST

THE SILVER STAGE  
OR  
HOW TO BECOME PART OF HOLLYWOOD  
WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING A STAR

Hey High-stepper  
You think you turn me on  
With your statuesque platforms  
Your stream-lined satin pants  
Your sassy strut  
Your silly serenade?  
Well Glitter Boy . . .  
Your place or mine?

MINDY WOLF

THE WAR BABIES

The war babies are kept in  
laboratory jars safe from  
tumbling strongboxes and the  
flood of sunshine on the windows.  
Curled into the brown-tinted jars their  
black tongues tasting the stinging  
hive of their energy,  
their stomachs rumbling quietly like  
ocean-shells and they are nursed by  
long, thin breasts.  
The war babies.  
So easily exploded if the complicated  
chests of wire begin to fail.

# fiction

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JAN NYQUIST  
MARTHA GAITSKILL  
BOB SILLS  
FARA SKINNER

---

JAN NYQUIST

THE EXCHANGE

---

Sliding from my seat at the Sunday dinner table, I grabbed the china dessert plates, sticky with pound cake crumbs and tiny melted pools of vanilla ice cream, leaving the English teacups for my mother. Grandpa sat staring, his jawline wrinkles tugging at the corners of his beady eyes. I stacked the dishes in the sink and only the roast beef gravy and ketchup stains remained on the table, a little more at Grandpa's place than usual.

"Do you want to go home yet?" mother asked gently.

"Anytime you want to take me," Grandpa replied, pronouncing the words hard behind a strong Scotch brogue and decayed teeth.

"Would you rather rest a minute?" Mom insisted, her kind face anxious for his comfort.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he answered absently, letting the words fade in the silent aftermath of the dinner.

Placing his shaking hands on the table, he slowly lifted himself out of the chair.

"One, two, five," he groaned, his face a mask of anxiety. His bent form slowly raised. Once he had been well over six feet. Now, his trouser waistline clung to the middle of his chest. With calves turned outward, he shuffled across the carpet, edging toward the piano. Slowly he lowered his body on the needlepoint piano bench. Fumbling for the right keys, he confidently played his favorite hymn, *The Old Rugged Cross*, that his hands had long ago memorized.

I slouched in our rocking chair, listening as Grandpa continued playing the familiar songs our family always sang when we met for Thanksgiving and Christmas. The chords sank into one another as if Grandpa's fingers were stuck to the keys. I remember when notes seemed to dance from his hands. He played crisp, firm marches, banging clear sounds, while my sister, brother and I paraded around his living room. And then he softly, gently played his beloved hymns from the old country. We'd stand by his mahogany upright, listening,

watching his hands brush the piano keys, while his face, lined like the music, soaked in every chord that later he seemed to smile out.

Suddenly, he played a song I had never heard before.

"Grandpa," I asked, "what's the name of that hymn?"

"Oh—eh. I don't know," he replied. "It has no name. I made it up just now."

"Grandpa, you should write that down. I might want to play your song someday."

"I'll remember it," he said, pausing for a moment. "You said you'd play a sonatina for me."

"Are you sure you have time to hear it?" I asked, knowing that he did, but wanting to get out of it. I had just taken an interest in piano in the last few years and had taken lessons from a teacher nearby. Grandpa taught piano lessons for nearly fifty years and had desperately tried to convert my cousins into pianists, unsuccessfully. Mom decided not to tell him I was taking lessons from another teacher. He always philosophized about piano lessons: "No one can teach you something better than someone who loves you. Besides, why pay someone else to give piano lessons when I'd give them for free."

I had heard Grandpa teaching piano students when I stayed with him. Frustrated students sat at his piano and played their music over and over again until every note was perfect. Then they practiced scales and more scales. I didn't want that. I just wanted to be able to play for enjoyment. Grandpa knew I was trying to play the piano, but he thought I was teaching myself with some of his telephone coaching. He listened to me practicing while talking to my mother on the phone. Then he'd ask to talk to me. "More bass, lots more bass," he'd comment. Or, "I think you're having trouble with your fingerings." I still can't understand how he could hear me playing the piano over the phone when he can barely hear someone talking right next to him.

I sat down on the piano bench, moving it back and forth, hoping the action would stir my memory. I couldn't remember what note the sonatina started on. Grandpa slouched over the piano. His face, drained of color by his deteriorating liver and poor blood, nearly matched the white strands of hair that slid across his forehead. We



both were looking down. The ivory keys stared at me like clenched teeth.

"G—that's where it starts," I thought, not letting my mind think of the other notes, hoping they would be there when I needed them. My hands raised, shaking like my grandfather's diabetic ones. The first chord. I played smoothly, my fingers remembering the notes and dynamics, yet feeling as if they never touched the keys. I came to the first repeat, wanting to ignore it as I always did, but knowing Grandpa would notice it, I repeated the section. More notes. More repeats. Finally, the last chord sounded. I couldn't look at Grandpa. At last he broke the silence.

"You will have to carry on the Watt piano playing even if your name is Nyquist. I have some books for you." Startled, I looked at him. Tears crawled from under his frameless bifocals.

"Do you want to go home yet?" interrupted my mother.

"Yeah," he mumbled, standing up and stooping over again to kiss me on the mouth as he always did. I'd always hated it. He kissed so slobbery and had bad breath. When I was younger, I always tried to sneak out of his house without a good-bye kiss or turn my face so he'd kiss my cheek. Today I didn't mind. I pulled his head toward me and kissed him again. On the mouth.

He picked up his hat, warped with stains and dents. His hand tilted it on his head.

"I love you. You're a dear girl," he said as he turned and headed for the front door where the step wasn't so steep. He paused there an instant, then turned back to me and with a twinkle announced, "Your grace notes were a little long."

## MARTHA GAITSKILL

## WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE I . . . .

"Mother! Mother!" I saw my daughter charge through milk bottles, old raggy coats, and kittens on the porch and push the sagging screen door open.

"Yea?" I smiled watching her prance about breaking her self-made, "ladylike" rules.

"I'm a runner-up for homecoming queen! I can't believe it!"

Homecoming queen. Stumbling out of the woods, shouting for seeing a raccoon family, discovering a new mushroom, arranging an ecology program, I could understand. But she had come home entranced by the prospect of becoming homecoming queen!

"And I've just GOT to find a beautiful dress to wear! I'll buy more lipstick, perfume, and nailpolish!"

Boring. Again I was listening to someone talk about cosmetics. But this time it was my daughter.

"That's nice, Tamarra." I could feel the old plastic smile creep onto my face to hide boredom. I hadn't pulled that smile out since high school. And now I was bringing it out for my daughter.

"I've just GOT to tell, Cindy!" Tamarra bounced upstairs over the debris of shoes, clothes, tennis rackets. I watched her artificially curly hair leap from her back to the top of her head like a slinky. I had to smile a semi-bitter smile—but still an attached smile.

We had moved here when her father died; just one year ago, I can't help feeling it was fortunate Jim died—I miss him—nothing would replace the hollow underwater feeling I had now, but this new Tamarra wouldn't understand. She would worry about what her friends would think. Her friends. Such peculiar people . . .

"Mother!" Tamarra charged into my thoughts, scattering them across the room. "Cindy's having a party Friday! Can I go?"

Parties. Maybe I could still relate with her . . . Maybe we still had something in common . . . the Castle, a broken down building far from the world's traffic. Walking past it through fields, feeling the air

breathe autumn on your face, gathering dead wood for the fire, finding a place with trees nearby. Pulling a log out of the woods for Fire's home. Encircling the heat, talking and laughing by the semi dark camp. Drinking wine, vodka, beer. The scent of marijuana flowing past or stopping to talk individually. As the party dissolves, staggering about picking up assorted bottles and finding orphan ones to adopt temporarily.

Tamarra, misinterpreting my silence, added,  
"Don't worry; Cindy's parents will be there."

"Oh . . . you're having it at her house?" The Castle dissolved into the birthday parties I had always detested.

"Of course! . . . ,," she laughed. "Oh don't worry . . . I'd never go to some hang-out or . . . or something . . . can I go?"

I looked at her eager, bright eyed expression, like a small girl wanting to see caged animals.

"Sure." I could feel a sigh coming and grabbed it back, just before it hit surface. She bubbled again and hopped upstairs to tell Cindy.

Friday rained an assortment of colorful leaves all about me. My eyes read hazy as I mopped my face in the leaves and rolled about with the kittens, all with fiery standing fur and brilliant eyes.

The sun claimed this my day of contemplation, but I had a lot to do before the Wildlife Preservation meeting. Dragging myself up with this thought, I started toward the house . . . the glistening sweet pond beckoned me . . . rolling my jeans, I accepted, doing the jig with the ducks. And I laughed for another hour . . .

"Mother! . . . I'm home!" She barged onto the back porch and on seeing me wallowing on the muddy bank squealed, "Mother! People will see! Have you no dignity? How can you act like a common slut or something?"

Hiding my surprise at her sudden, or seemingly sudden, change of ideas, I calmly shook the mud off, pulled my jeans legs down, brushed the leaves from my hair and asked,

"What—exactly—is a 'slut'?"

Tamarra blushed, giggled and replied, "You know . . . a . . . a woman who doesn't save herself for marriage . . . a woman who isn't clean . . . I didn't really mean you were one . . . it's just . . . well . . . embarrassing to see you sitting in the middle of a mud puddle with

dogs, cats and ducks . . . . Cindy's mother would never dare do something like that!"

Anger blazed through my wet, numbed body, but logic (where it came from I'll never know) told me to stay down.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not Cindy's mother . . . you did similar things yourself before . . . before we came here."

One mistake. I said it like an accusation.

"I know, but I was young . . . I mean, things are different now."

"Why?"

"It just is . . . it's . . ." She turned around, hesitated and picked up Delilia—the cat she had barely talked to after six months of living here. "Can I go to Cindy's early?"

"Yea." This time I allowed myself to sigh, but waited till I was far enough into the thicket before releasing it completely. I then went to check on the wounded squirrel. As I quietly moved toward her, she raised her soft brownish red head, and calmly, with trusting eyes, watched me gently examine her wounded paw. I was right. We would have to say goodbye soon—probably tomorrow.

I sat with her, stroking her soft, but still coarse, fur, and watched the sun disappear behind the earth.

Tamarra was already eating dinner when I came in. I hauled out an apple, some brown bread and cheese, adding a glass of wine.

"Want some?"

"No thanks . . . Cindy said she is afraid some of the boys will bring alcohol—or, even worse, marijuana or some other drug."

"What makes her think that?"

"Well, she used to be friends with this guy John . . . but then he started getting into all sorts of trouble . . . and he's coming."

"Then why did she ask him?"

"Well, he trapped her in the hall . . . she always tries to avoid him but she banged into him in the hall and so she . . . well, she couldn't very well not ask him . . . could she?"

"Hummm . . . what will they do to him if he does bring something?" Here it comes.

"Don't worry . . . they'll probably just make him leave."

Relief devoured most of my tension. I finished eating, and started the formula for the motherless puppy I had found.

"Yuck! . . . this story's disgusting!" Tammarra flung her magazine across the table, turned away from it and sat scowling.

"What's wrong with it? . . . What's it about?"

"A girl who acts like a little whore—and doesn't get married or ANYthing!"

"Oh."

"I mean she lived with men!"

"Hummm."

"Did people really do that back then? And smoke marijuana illegally and drink before they were 18?"

"Yeah." Where is she getting this? What is she leading up to? . . . maybe I can divert her. "What do you think about marriage, Tamarra?"

"Oh! It would be wonderful! Cindy has been looking in catalogs at all the dresses . . . she's going to let me borrow them."

Thinking I succeeded in maneuvering her thoughts, I went to feed puppy. He had long, wiggley fur, and a tail almost as big as his body.

He laughingly hobble-limped forward and slurped his formula all over his white freckled nose.

"Mother!"

Sweet puppy, I'll call you Jim."

"Yeah?"

"What does a marriage license say? . . . Could I see yours?"

Jim started choking, giving me an excuse for delay. But it wasn't long enough.

"Well . . . Tell me where it is and I'll get it myself."

"Tamarra, I . . ." I what?

"Yea? . . . . Where is it?"

"I don't . . . I don't have one—I never did." If she had been ignorant until this point, my silence filled her in.

"Oh, mother!"

"You need to remember . . . we loved you just as much—maybe more—than married people."

"All my friends parents are married."

"Cindy's mother is divorced."

"But when she had Cindy she was married."

"And now she's divorced."

Jim stopped chewing my sweatshirt, and curled up in my lap for sleep.

"I'll be back by twelve."

"Right."

I opened my eyes to the morning moon and rain clouds. On missing the bluejay's yell, I glanced at the clock—4:17.

I put on my blue flannel, elephant decorated dress, found my shawl, ignored shoes and crept out to see the squirrel.

As I lifted the cage door, she jerked awake, sending a clatter throughout the woods. Reluctantly I stepped aside. She looked at me, comparing me to the opened cage and darkened thicket. She leaped out onto the dewy grass, and hobbled over to the edge of the woods. With coarse fur sending waves down her spine, she turned back. Her eyes glittered at me and blinked. My cold body was warmed by it, and the sun overtook the rain.

---

BOB SILLS

## SPINE-TINGLING ADVENTURES OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

---

Few realize the fantastic achievements made by those people with inferior mental faculties. In fact, the history of feeble-mindedness has contributed a respectable portion of incidents to the story of mankind.

Take, for instance, Herman Washington, the younger brother of George Washington. A disgrace to his family and his ambitious brother, Herman was banished from the country because of his stupidity, which placed him in the imbecile class. Just for the records, his symptoms included a strange, mild air of stupidity which surrounded its victim, and eventually invaded the ear openings and conquered the region between them. Another of his traits was an overall dull and sluggish personality, coupled by an overall dull and sluggish I.Q.

The news of Herman Washington's immense stupidity spread quickly around the globe and, before long, he was world renowned as a very foolish fellow. Finally poor, dejected Herman could stand it no longer. He defected (in more ways than one) from the cruel and mentally superior world which he had grown to know and understand—almost.

Some months later, his raft came upon an iceberg in the frozen North Atlantic and upon it he discovered a primitive and dumb tribe of outcasts which he immediately recognized as "his kind of people". He then beached or, rather, iced his craft onto the floating island of ice. Rolling under a bordering barbed wire fence, he found himself standing perilously before a stampede of wild Appaloosa penguins. Instantly frozen to the spot in shock, his mouth gaped open and his eyes, the size of bewildered grapefruits and still growing, saw nothing but the mean looking faces of the waddling, diabolical infernal, slowly advancing toward him with an occasional "Quack, Quack!" The ice trembled beneath the tiny webbed feet of the vile group as they closed in on the frozen Herman, who actually was frozen now in the

—60 degree temperature.

Herman defrosted days later in a small ice-house, and realized that the penguin ranchers in the area must have seen him in his dilemma and rallied to divert the charging herd. This sounded reasonable to Herman, and the theory would also explain all the mangled fences, crushed houses, and dirty looks he had observed from the townspeople.

In time, Herman came to love these kind people, and led them in a revolution overthrowing the Morons, who had ruled the colony from their home iceberg. For this, the native Imbeciles declared him the first president of Upper Bosnia, which was the iceberg's new name. Herman soon became known as the all-time Father of feeble-mindedness, the country, and three idiotic daughters. But above all, he was known for his great military strategies.

In one of Herman's most memorable battles, he led a band of rowboats across the mighty Melaware River to fight a fierce group of intelligent seals. Finding the river frozen solid, Herman's loyal men decided to humor him and proceeded to get into their boats and paddle across the ice. Once realizing his miscalculation, he sheepishly followed them across on ice skates and later led them to victory. However, Herman was not much help in the actual fighting. Unaccustomed to the ice skates, he was continually tripping and stumbling across the battlefield.

Nevertheless, Herman was loved by his people, who remember him rolling pennies and ice-balled food stamps across the frozen Dotomac River during a period of high depression. One man swears that he even caught a scuffed-up ice skate that was flung from the other bank. Even today, ancient ice sculptures of Herman litter the countryside of the capitol, Frozington, D. C.

Another famous "Mistake of Nature" with a low brain quality was Clyde Franklin, who had a steadily re-curring case of moronity. He existed from 1695 to 1788.

Clyde first became frustrated with himself when his three-year-old little brother, Benjamin Franklin (also destined for fame), had invented the better bear trap, while Clyde, at the age of 15, had nothing to show but his numerous experiments in personal humiliation as his greatest scientific work. He became further upset when little Benjy



used Clyde and a chocolate chip cookie as props in testing bear traps. Bearing countless scars on his fingers and lips, Clyde finally decided it was time to set out and discover the world. He thought of inventing the world, but decided it would be easier to simply discover it. The legends suggest that the fact that his mother had run out of chocolate chip cookies also had a little to do with his decision.

Clyde hiked far into the woods and came upon a large body of water containing much seaweed, turtles, muskrats, and water. He concluded that this was the ocean which he had always heard about, so he built a small raft out of thin boards he had taken from a boat which was docked there. Clyde sailed the mighty Miller Swamp for several miles and discovered a strange new land when he came ashore days later. He found a small village, where Clyde and the people there seemed to be able to communicate well on a common level—both socially and mentally, since the villagers were also idiots. The land had a strange and intriguing name which Clyde had heard his parents whispering about many times before. The name was Funnyfarm, although it didn't appear to be any kind of a farm. The leader of the spread was a mean tyrant of an imbecile whose brilliance amazed the dumfounded townsfolk. He called himself King Morge III. He supplied the people with barely enough food, and he put heavy taxes on the nails, Tang, and other essentials. Occasionally he visited the colony Funnyfarm, but usually he stayed at the homeland called Fritain.

One night on the colony's best port, Doston, which straddled Cow Creek and was the point of the best trout fishing for miles, a group of rebels raided the Fritish ships and dumped the highly-priced Tang into the water. Huge quantities of Tang were lost, turning the water orange. Many cases of pretzels were also dumped into the water, which explained the effectiveness of beer as fish bait for the next few weeks, although they found it difficult getting it to stay on a hook. The incident became known as the Doston Tang Party. A long revolution followed shortly afterward, and eventually Funnyfarm gained its independence. Clyde became active as the leader of the new country and took to inventing as a hobby. He invented the dark bulb, which gave off immense darkness when unplugged. He invented a better insect killer, which was in the form of a large, heavy club. He invented

a new clock, which contained a single moving part to be manually operated. The only moving part was a dial with letters, symbols, and other neat junk scattered around it. For instance, when the dial has rotated half way past the big hand and is comin' darn close to the bigger hand, the time would be 48 Q's past 3½, which is equivalent to 13 WF's into N, or high noon. Simple. It was no good for practical use, but it did probe the imaginations of the townspeople and made them wonder why about several things, including Clyde. These were a few of Clyde's best inventions, and/or brainstorm, but there were many, many more. Five in all.

After working for hours on all that inventing, Clyde needed some recreation. On one such day, Clyde picked up a free kite at the Zephyr station and headed for a clearing. But Clyde had one problem—he only had about thirty yards of string. How could he fly the kite without running to the end of the string and losing everything? He thought of tying the end to his hand, but then he remembered that, for some reason, he was never able to tie *strong* knots in anything but his shoe laces. Showing his natural genius, Clyde took off his right penny loafer and tied it onto the line, planning to put the shoe back on. (Yes, I realize that penny loafers don't have laces, but I hardly believe it is our place to argue with legends.) Clyde was hysterically happy with himself until he saw that he had tied the shoe onto the kite tail mistakenly, and his shoe was flying high in the air as the kite ascended with the first gust of wind. In a small slot in the front of the shoe, Clyde kept an ordinary snowmobile key. When asked why he kept his snowmobile key in his right shoe, he said it was because he had a hole in his left shoe, and there the key could fall out. Someone else asked him why he carried the key around, being the middle of summer. "Because, if it were the middle of winter, I would have it in my ignition. When else would I get the chance to carry an ordinary snowmobile key in my shoe?" Clyde replied cleverly. And why do you keep *it* in your shoe, an intrigued passerby asked. "Because I don't have a penny," was his sly answer. Another man walked up and politely asked, "How are you this fine day?" Clyde became enraged and snapped, "Who do you think you are, walking right up here and asking me a question? Why don't you go fly a kite?"

Following Clyde's cunning putdown, the stranger shrank and

crawled home to bed, as the plot continued to thicken to a frightening level.

Following the official investigation and interrogation, Clyde again tried to retrieve his shoe. Just then it started to rain, and the lightning began flashing. "Rain, rain, go away, come again some—" and a streak of lightning struck the flying penny loafer and connected with the ordinary snowmobile key. Clyde's shoe was instantly flash-fried, to say nothing of Clyde. "Well, I'll be a (expletive deleted)!" Clyde cried as he wandered off.

Clyde learned much scientific knowledge from this experience, which he summarized in his moral to the story: Never bite a chocolate chip cookie which is placed in a bear trap.

FARA SKINNER

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THE VISIT

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Gail walked down the dirt road, as slowly as she could; she didn't want to go. The dirt in the road was scuffing up her white sandals. What should she say to her father, how should she act? Gail hadn't seen him in three years, and that was only a visit.

She walked up to the big brick house that belonged to her grandparents. She was living there for the summer, working at the Bible camp her grandfather was managing.

Gail walked in slowly, and went to the kitchen, where she heard voices. She paused in the doorway, and took a deep breath. What could she say? Ask him about his family. That was always a safe one. Gail pushed open the door. There, at the table with Grandma, was her father.

He was different than how she'd imagined him. He looked older, like the 35 he was. She'd remembered him so young. He was no longer slim, but slightly heavy. His clothes were old, out of fashion.

Memories flooded her mind. The time she visited him in Kalama-zoo. The time he came up for her birthday, and took her for a walk in the woods, read a book to her. Tossing a beach ball around, playing "Coal Mine" and "Horsey".

Grandma turned around. "Well, hello! Hello! Look who's here! Come in, sit down!" Gail smiled and sat down, her stomach knotted up. The man smiled back. "What does he think of me?" Gail wondered. "Am I how he imagined me?"

"Hi!" She said as grandma left the room. An awkward silence followed.

"Well, Gail, you're quite a young lady now."

"Yes." Gail stared at the table-cloth, then slowly sneaked a look at him. He was so different, yet the same. His voice was different, too—very soft-spoken. She could faintly remember sitting on his lap once, eating ice-cream. Was this really the same man? She studied the table-cloth some more.

"How do you like working here?"

"I love it!" Gail looked at him, then slid her glance away when their eyes met. She swallowed. This man was her father! Surely she should be able to think of something to say!

"Uh-how-how's your sisters?" he asked.

"Oh fine. How's your wife and kids?"

"They're fine . . . I—uh, I'm borrowing Dad's car to drive back down tomorrow, and bring them up. I didn't want to bring them in my car, in case it broke down. Would—uh—would you like to ride down with me?"

Her mother's voice haunted her. "You probably don't remember, but he was awfully cruel to you girls when you were little . . ." Gail remembered. She tried not to, but she did, faintly. It was all just a dream, with no feelings in it. What could she say to a stranger for two hours? She didn't want to meet his family.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I have to work tomorrow. I teach the three to five year olds, in the chapel."

"Oh." Gail couldn't tell if he was disappointed or relieved or what. She remembered some things she knew about him—he could never hold down a job. His new family didn't have much money. He was always behind in his support payments. She cleared her throat.

"Um, going to the beach today?" She asked.

"Yeah, I might go later."

"Well, I'm going. Maybe you can meet me there. Later."

"Sure." Gail smiled, took one last look, and ran upstairs, where Grandma was just coming down.

"Well, Gail! Are you glad to see your first Daddy?" Grandma asked.

Gail mustered up enough enthusiasm to say "Yeah!" and started to walk away, but Grandma stopped her.

"Are you two getting along all right?"

Gail sighed, exasperated. "Yeah, we're going to the beach later."

She started to squirm away, but Grandma closed in on her. "Now Gail, I want you to be especially nice to Iva, all right?"

Gail set her face in a firm line. "Yeah, sure, of course," she said as nicely as she could, starting up the stairs for the third time.

"Because," Grandma whispered up the stairs after her, "she's not

too well lately . . . ”

Gail nodded, “Yeah, yeah, sure,” as she hurried away. She didn’t care about her father’s wife at all.

A few minutes later, Gail was walking back up the dirt road, a T-shirt hanging modestly over her bathing suit. She thought of the time Grandma took her to visit him in Kalamazoo. The memory came in flashes: riding with Grandma in the top-down car—waiting in some hospital lobby, watching nurses walk by—seeing her father walk in the lobby, smiling—wondering how he got out of bed if he was sick—going to see a movie—going out for a hamburger.

She hadn’t known at the time that it was a mental hospital.

Gail walked up the beach, and noticed a red flag flying. The waves were high. It would be good body-surfing.

Gail wandered into the pool, located right on the beach. It was practically deserted, everyone was out battling the waves. She went up on the sundeck and opened a book.

The only times her mother ever mentioned Gail’s father was when the support check didn’t come, and it was all bad. A few times Mom mentioned a girlfriend. Once she pointed the girlfriend out to Gail, and visions of her father as a playboy seeped away when she saw a fat, unkempt woman with too much lipstick on.

Gail looked up, and saw her father asking Bruce, the lifeguard, something. Bruce pointed to the sundeck, and her father started walking towards it.

Gail suddenly got an urge to cry. He looked even heavier in the bathing suit. Why did people have to get old, anyhow? Yet his smile was the same as she’d always remembered. He seemed really glad to see her.

They went out to the lake, to body-surf. Gail’s mood lifted a little, it was kind of fun. Once a wave knocked her down, and he reached down and picked her up awkwardly.

“Thanks, Daddy!” she said breathlessly. He dropped his arm slowly, clumsily, and Gail quickly turned around just in time to catch the next wave.

Finally, tired, they started walking up the beach, Gail a step ahead.

“You know,” he said, “I can remember your favorite T.V. show

when you were little. It was Flintstones." Gail looked at him a second, then smiled quickly, and looked back down at the sand. What were you supposed to say to something like that? Why should he want to remember that? She went back to the time she was dusting and found a letter under the piano. It was from her father to her mother's new husband, offering to let him adopt Gail and her two sisters. She'd almost died when she read that.

Uncle Jason walked up and offered to take them for a canoe ride up the less-turbulent channel. Gail decided to stay, and the two men walked off.

She went back to the pool, to get her things. Bruce walked up, twirling his whistle around in rhythm to his gum-chewing. "Your father seems like a very nice man," he said.

"I guess so."

"You don't think so?"

"I don't know!" Gail replied crossly. She didn't know what she thought. What did everyone expect of her, anyhow? She walked away.

Next day found Gail walking down the dirt road. It was hot out and the road was dusty. She didn't want to meet her father's family.

Gail hadn't seen too much of her father since yesterday afternoon. She'd hidden behind the excuse of work last night and this morning, so she wouldn't have to see him. Gail didn't really have to work, but she didn't want him to find out. She wouldn't hurt him for the world.

Everyone was in the yard, sitting outside. Grandma was holding Timmy. Timmy looked like he was about eight months old. He was fat, and by far the ugliest baby she'd ever seen. Betty was running around the yard. She was too thin and never talked, only smiled a lot. Gail sat on a lawn chair; she said hello to Iva. Her father had met Iva in the hospital. A couple of mentals.

No one was talking. Gail couldn't stand it. She told them that she had to work at the cook-out, and left. She hurried down the road and over to the conference ground, where the cook-out was in progress.

The line was awfully long, there were about two-hundred people. Bruce was on the grill, flipping hamburgers furiously. Fellow waitresses ran around, making sure the buffet tables were filled.

Grandpa walked up and asked Gail to bring some food home to

Iva and her father, since they didn't feel up to coming. Gail knew it was really because Iva didn't like crowds, or any people, for that matter.

She filled a tray up with food and walked home.

The old car was gone, the yard was empty. Gail walked inside, and found Grandma crying on the couch.

"Grandma?" Gail asked. "Grandma? What's wrong?"

Grandma sighed, then explained, "I didn't know what to say to Iva, so I asked if the baby had lots of sun. Iva blew up, said I was meddling, and that she took care of her children. She argued with your father, and me . . ." And then, apparently, went upstairs to pack what she had just unpacked.

Her father told Grandma that Iva was afraid "They" were going to get her and take her kids away from her. She was relapsing. She might have to go back to the mental hospital. Maybe they'd better go home.

Gail made Grandma lie down, and went up to her room, the one overlooking Mona Lake.

They were gone. Looking out over the lake, all Gail could feel was relief. She hoped her mother never found out they had come. They were strangers, those people. They had driven in and out of her life. She didn't care about them. So why was she crying?



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