Calliope Manuscript Day 1986

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MANUSCRIPT DAY 1986

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CALLIOPE 1986

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GEORGE

Now as at all times
I can see in my mind's eye
My pop.
Chiming "halloa, Toodz!" in the front hall
Five seconds, Poopa
From front door to bathrobe
The second of two
Fashioned of the finest blue terry
Yards of sash cinching your softly bulbous tummy
Given a life of its own as you waltz about the kitchen
dead cow moccasins hide your huge scaly feet
Treading lightly on wagging shnook
Making her help you sing of finding life's sweet mystery
Sip that maroony!
Smack the lips mimicked on my face
Sip again
Swish, all your mouth must taste it
Before I hear it roll down your pudgy throat
Wiggle your toes and chuckle with delight
Doughy body twitching gaily
Your thinning curls reach for the ceiling
Angered by the shirt that so roughly brought them
To attention
Split your face in crazy grin, sir
Show me those nearly perfect teeth you didn't give me
I don't mind
You gave me the grin.

Sue Lott
infatuation's fool

she left her purse in my car
when i dropped her off
and i noticed
but didn't say.

i put it on my desk
and looked at it from across the room
and sniffed it until i was dizzy
and played that it was perfectly natural
for her purse to be on my desk

and when i gave it back to her on monday
all she wanted to know was if i had looked in it

human sacrifice

i was dead serious about leaving you
i'm just waiting for lent

on the eighth day

God invented osmosis one day
and to test it
He put a whole bunch of food
on one side of the world
and none
on the other side

He's still waiting for it to work
and it might be wise for us to push
before He kicks our world
like a cosmic vending machine
spring

jim stood knee deep in lust
outside her window
beneath the icy moon
to watch her undress
quick heart fast dark rub steam breath
knee deep in snow
outside her tenth grade window

when she stopped undressing
and put on her pink robe
heavy lidded jim
noticed in the moonlight
that a patch
of green
in the snow
had melted all around him

and looking out tomorrow morning
on jim's green scribble in the snow
her mom will say
spring is coming very early
to you, daughter.
spring is coming far too early
to you, my child.

why i quit

in all my prayers
and through squinted eyes
i couldn't tell which brand
God was smoking

Joel Brouwer II
GRIM TAPESTRY

Modern art
The tattered remains of a once
Thriving
Industry
Leveled
To rubble.

Polychromatic sections
Pieces
Petite
Propelled by the south winds destiny
Or carried by the north
Forgotten
Unheard of.

A deluge
Drowns the pieces
The puzzle
Obliterated
No use for an old survivor.

Amateurs
Splattered
Unwanted paint
All over the picture
Producing a morose collage
Destined
For the "breaking-point".

Vivid contemplations
Remain
Dreams
On the minds of those
Who pick through the rubble.

Jennifer Howe
UNEDUCATED

Off the highway to Traverse City
Restlessly we wait,
counting the cars that go by,

cracking our bubble gum.
One depleted tire exposed by the rusty jack
tilting our faithful old Buick on its side,
the puzzling spare and lug wrench lying discarded
    nearby.
Dusk descends, and still we wait,
feeling foolish and embarrassed
when the mechanic finally arrives.
I can recite "Self-Reliance"
she can tackle matrices.
we both can name every American president,
but we can't change a flat tire.

Rebecca Tapley
MY MOTHER SAID

Just off the highway to Park City,
One finds almost nothing.
"Almost" consists of open fields,
A closed bank,
A small cluster of even smaller houses,
A gas station, a truckstop, and a sign:
Park City, Pop. 600.
My mother said that understanding all about America
Is seeing the country.
Well, here we are.
Dad drives slowly;
Mom wants us to see all.
Funny that "all" is almost nothing.
No people;
Just homes, shacks, shells of life.
One, its roof is giving up.
Another, an animal shedding its skin.
We drive by the truckstop,
A metropolis of country life.
(Yes, that was what my mother said.)
Old and dusty,
Held together by peeling paint,
Ornamented with the broken plastic from its neon sign.
Inside, the passengers of a Duster, a Nova, and two huge
Peter-bilts.
Yes, I tell my mother, it is certainly thriving.
I yawn, the rest of Park City passing by,  
Except for alone shack.  
Weathered and peeling,  
The front porch buried by a heap of retired furniture,  
Chimney sagging, roof drooping,  
It frowns on its own dilapidation.  
The excuse sits in the sideyard,  
A tremendous black monstrosity.  
I've seen them before,  
In civilization, now so foreign.  
Soon, even the satellite dish is passed.  
The highway isn't far now.  
I think of what my mother said  
Of understanding all about America,  
Then I think about Park City.  
Funny that all is almost nothing.

Kay C. Hope
JANUARY 18

I
"Weather conditions for central Indiana
are very poor. Motorists are advised
to return home as quickly....."

II
Driving into
Night blindness;
Snow and ebony
Silence swirling

The sinister darkness is
Out by the red glare of the
Ambulance light

Police cars line the
Road,
Haphazardly
Scattered.

A gruff voice barks
"Keep moving – don't stop"
And the man dressed in hungry,
Blood orange
grits his teeth to hold in his
Guts.

Shielding his wife from
The blood-red light as it
Helicopters
In a blind circle,
(Kimmy? Kimmy?)
But his voice is dry
Leaves in the
Wind.
III
Lights speed faster
Away, their
Canival colors only
A dim blur;
The last thing I
Saw was her
Raggedy Ann
Doll-
The red of its
Hair like blood
Spilled in snow.

Denise Miller
She had been talking  
For the last half hour  
With scarcely a breath at all  
"George Orwell was way off,"  
I said.  
"I guess so,"  
She said and continued talking  
"Richard Nixon never should have made those tapes,"  
I said (a little louder).  
"I guess so"  
She said and continued talking  
"Do you like Pachelbel's 'Canon in D'?"  
I said.  
"No"  
She said and continued talking  
"I wish that I could control the  
molecular density of specific  
objects,"  
I said.  
"Yeah"  
She said and continued talking  
"My dog died,"  
I said.  
"Oh"  
She said and almost didn't continue talking  
"No, I don't have a dog,"  
I said.  
"Oh"  
She said followed by  
"I wish you would stop interrupting  
and let me finish."
"O.K."
I said and gently set the receiver down
next to me
I fixed myself a couple sandwiches
(one peanut butter and honey,
one peanut butter and jelly)
I washed it all down with a glass of 2% milk
and returned to the conversation
she was still talking.

Martin Burch
IN A MUD PAINTED HOUSE

About a mile south of Rt. 19
That stretches lazily from Breaux Bridge to Sunset,
The stilted and kerchief town of Grand Coteau
Huddles against the wildness of the swamp.
On the corner of Church and Solleau Way,
A stone's throw from Thibideaux's market,
A pink clapboard house, smeared with soft bayou mud,
Leans into the thick magnolia night
Breathes the spice of filet and catfish.
A spiraling, hunchbacked oak stands sentinel,
Witnesses the passage of life in a Cajun village,
Brushes its snarled beards of moss
Against the rusting tin roof.
Out upon the stoop the little ones
Wrap themselves in the liquid night,
Eyes wide as tarbaby's
While Cammy whispers tales through her dark hair
Of haints and injuns that haunt the bayou,
Snatching wayward children from their mères,
Keeping them for their own.
And inside, Maman Guidry smiles, stirring her rice,
Singing a Cajun song in her low lilting drawl,
While the locusts hum in time.

Wendy Watson
WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO MORNING?

Lately I've become accustomed to the way I fall off the wrong side of the bed. My alarm oversleeps and steals all but twenty minutes of my morning. A quick icy shower slaps me awake enough to drive to school; My car hates to wake up so early, too, it jolts resisting, backfires shotgun complaints. I rush to my locker like a headache. Damply agitated! The janitor breaks into my locker every night and sets his messy trap; After I get my door unjammed, books and folders tumble out, a handful of dice, papers flutter and twist sick birds crashing in a hundred different directions. I blunder into class tardy and expecting the worst.

PIGS

Just off the highway to East Grand Rapids I got pulled over: 27 miles per hour in a 25 zone. There's a cop to every five people. They stuff their snouts with powdered doughnuts and suck coffee out of plastic cups. They shine their badges and polish their unused pistols. They prosecute jaywalkers and fantasize about strip searches. They protect and serve the elderly. He told me I had an attitude problem.

Chris Thomas
The Faithful

I pull
   waterproof eyes
   over my face;
   fit a curved tube
   into my mouth
   to become one with the water.

The sun
   glistens
   off bodies
   of faithful worshippers.

Water
   chases my toes
   upon the velvet sand
I dive
   into the swirl
   and seek
   a place
   in the multitude
   of the water-born,
where a tropical rainbow
   of true-believers
   circled me.
Flipping their silver tails,
   they glide past,
   curious
   at this pagan
   intruding upon their
   water temple.
I drift
over the coral reef,
watching, where sun,
water
and coral
create a soft fantasy
of castles,
dragons
and flying horses.
I know,
I cannot share
this beauty
with those on shore,
clouding
the water,
their oil
blinds them.

Leslie Norback
AFTER HOURS

The shrills sound throughout the corridors
Veiled not by concrete barrier
(Closed exits or entrances as you wish)
But by ardent thoughts adrift.
At first acceptance is not granted
For questions remain unanswered.
After moments passed, very brief
The dial spins and eagerness prevails.
Small confusion leads to the right voice
Voicing acknowledgement however silent.
One sided apologies expressed without demand
Put both minds (in eccentric crowns) at ease.
Little chat cross via the line
Over bustling traffic and peaceful woods alike
Though chat is of no intention.
In each intellect boils words
Compressed and locked in tight
Little chance of escape permits.
But in this line is a key
(A scarce pair to say at slightest)
To unleash what struggles to cut loose.
A brace created by time and sync
Strengthened by love and hate, assurance and disarray.
Feelings are free and wills are clear
For now friendship prevails.
Unnoticed minutes pass
and honesty overcomes
And skies grow darker
And times gone reminisce.
The ashtray fills
Loose threads grow longer
Strained backs beg for relief.
A third party intrudes to announce broken rules
Ending the while but not breaking it
For what is established is not vulnerable
To even the greatest constraint.
Pleasantries exchange and final words rattle
Inanimate objects return to cradles
But these conscious minds still conjure images
fighting dense smoke and grueling light.
One may ask "How does it go on
If the connection is no longer to be?"
The line however is not broken
The line beholds the key.

Jeffrey M. Weinstein
AT THE PIANO

Grandma wanted to see me dance
so I plunked down on the wooden bench,
my legs like willow wisps
waving back and forth.
Her blank eyes stared past me,
as small, slender fingers
like ballerina legs,
tiptoed on yellowing keys.
Gradually rope-black pigtails
whipped round and around,
following fingers
flying into tap dances,
ever resting the staccato beats
until reaching the waltzing page,
where my hands glided
into a 1-2-3 shuffle.
Grandma hummed and swayed,
knowing every note on the page.
A wide smile dimpled her face
as she hugged me, arms warm and strong.
Even in her darkness,
she could see me dance.

Teresa Wen
DANDELIONS

Tiny bursts of flame on the spring lawn
spread slowly into a thick carpet of fire.
Then, in a white puff of smoke,
the inferno is quenched in the summer breeze.
Hot, white ashes rise into the wind,
and one by one are gently dropped
to spark their perpetual flame
over the combustible green pasture.

FIGMENTS OF A PEPPERONI PIZZA

A lawnmower chews up my bedpillow
and spits it out.
I call for help.
My words make no sound.

A mattress of dryer lint from the basement
engulfs the women drinking tea in the living room.
I'm all alone.
Someone turns the lights out,
but the brightness remains.

I'm lost amidst giant bowling balls.
I can't find myself.
My brain shrinks.

Falling in bottomless space,
stars streak by my face.
My stomach itches.

Slam!
My body hits the bed,
and the stars fade.
The smell of last night's pizza
lurks about the room like a malignancy.

Jon Steinhauer

-19-
THOUGHTS ON SEEING GRANT WOOD'S
"AMERICAN GOTHIC"

On the canvas, a frown
wrinkles the walnut face
of the balding, bespectacled farmer.
His bloodless paw
clutches a narrow pitchfork,
three iron fingers pointing
righteously at the sky.
The chalky-skinned daughter
glances at her grim father,
a few honey strands leaking
from her tight knot of hair.
A harvest moon brooch,
PINNED TO HER FADED DRESS,
 gleams lustily against the starkness.
 Behind them looms a farmhouse.
Its whitewashed planks run vertically,
like prison bars.
A scrap of blood-red cloth,
echoing the girl's dress,
curtains a spade-shaped window
in the center of the house's cyclops face.
One wonders what gothic secret
hides behind this red
staining the house's immaculate whiteness.

Carmen Lowe
Lately, I've become accustomed to men in mid-life crisis.
Trotting along, each foot sinking deep into yellow sand.
I catch the heavy scent of sweat and Polo as pudgy hairless limbs approach my sandy towel.
The rolls of white fat jiggle, almost hiding the tiny black speedo as he comes to a halt.
"Hey babe, I've got watcha need," he sputters in a torrent of hot beer breath.
Thick 24 karat chains tangle in patches of chest hair. He needs a bra more than I do.
Rolling over, I mutter for him to stop blocking my sun. He huffs away kicking sand in my mouth, scoping with beady, aged-lined eyes in search of a babe who finds Grecian Formula a turn on.

Leslie Robert
INDEPENDENCE DAY

Today, I celebrate
an anniversary of Independence.
I've now lived nearly half of my life
in a house inhabited
only by men.
No women.
We don't need them anymore.
We don't remember them anymore.
A house where a father, his two sons, and their birds
live out the lives of ordinary citizens
without the aid of a woman.
We no longer smell the sickeningly sweet
scent of Chanel #5
There are not lace curtains surrounding the windows
of our house.
But, I do not want you to labor
over the misconception
that we're dirty, dirt-covered slobs.
My father's cleanliness is more
complete than any woman I've ever met.
He has learned,
although it was painful at the time,
how to cook and feed his children
with substantial nutrition.
He is not only our father.
but our mother as well,
and today, we celebrate our independence.

Todd A. Merrifield
THE BUTTHEADS

The dusty television flickers in front of me,
An old episode of Star Trek,
So olive-green and orange,
the dialogue so space-age.
But space-age was modern 20 years ago.
I'm rolling in the dust
of the storyline and characters.
I watch Captain Kirk fall in love with an alien
for the fifty-third time.
Lieutenant Uhura becoming a temptress,
the Buttheads, going into Eden, yeah Brother!
Trapped in the dirt-
something deeper than obligation,
deeper than ritual
draws me to the television set.

Marge Bradshaw
TRAIN RIDE

Silvern train
Streaks like sleet
Past tall thin
Willows and aspens
That rise like a wall
From thick
White ground.
Fields of dead
Brown grasses
Spawn dirty steel shacks
And gold plows
Or tractors that
Sit patiently
As dogs
Waiting for Master
To return.

The train shifts
Back and forth
Like a garter snake
Gliding across sand.

Outside
Grey windows
Through a tunnel of snow--
A blizzard thick as cream
Paints a Van Gogh
Or a Monet--
A wild scene
Full of light and rage.
The whistle sounds--
Shrieks like a great airplane
A rocket or a dinosaur
Slipping slowly into a pool of
Warm oozy tar.
It wails like a young widow.
A fog horn off the rocky coast of Maine or Connecticut.
A Demon mourning the black sulfuric pit.
Or a giant Kodiak bear caught in a steely trap.

Down snow-blown streets
Creep humming monsters
To wait until the screaming beast passes.
Their glowing eyes,
Bright with awe.

Gretchen Spaans
TO MY SHRINK

Oh, but it is dirty, Ingy
Your forehead always troubled with my blither
In your sexy, black, spiky, but square-toed boots
Some distance from the luxurious palm
Of the brown leather hand
Which tightly grips your hips each session
Do you understand as I pay you to?
I can't tell from your face
Two filmy lenses reflecting the window
Behind me and the natty tweed couch that matches the
    carpet
And your stylish slacks
Call me to disobey, defy
The Bible that says to honor
My 'rents who drool that I stop you Ingy
the money, embarrassment, competition, fights
with or without you
Because...
"Because she ain't doin' diddly?"
Yes...
But, Freud never read the Bible
My sexuality knows it, Ingy
I'm stunted
And doesn't it hurt?
Just for an hour
Twice a week

Sue Lott
The ghost of the Pumpkin Man hangs over this small town, kinda like a curse. Everybody knows about the Pumpkin Man, and almost everyone's seen him at one time or another. Some of the younguns still get kinda nervous around pumpkins, and a lot of people carve watermelon on Hallowe'en. 'Course, there are those who still carve pumpkins: y'know, it's like they want to symbolize their independence.

One old man says he remembers a time when the Pumpkin Man was just a legend, but he also remembers his trips into what you might call your alternative universes. Good stories, but only the really younguns take him at all for serious.

Once, there was rumor that the Pumpkin Man had returned when Harry Ruston disappeared for a few days, but the truth was he was out visiting relatives and he just didn't tell anyone. Whenever a barn burns, or a pet strays, or a crop fails, or Melba Martins refrigerator conks out, people say "The Pumpkin Man has returned!"

I never really believe what I hear about him, but I gotta admit, they are good stories.

I remember Jack Mayberry. He was what you might call the town drunk. One night, Jack thought it was a good time for a celebration. Hell, when Jack could find his furniture it was time for a celebration! Anyway, Jack went out and got himself pickled as Hitler. What he did after that was he got himself a pumpkin, put it on his head and tried to be the Pumpkin Man. My uncle got the town together with their shot guns and damned near blasted his ass off. He got lucky, though. He tripped and the pumpkin smashed. He spent three weeks in jail for that one. Didn't drink in public after that, either. Private, I don't know.

I suppose we'll never really get rid of the Pumpkin Man. Yep, as long as superstitious parents tell their kids not to talk to strangers, he's gonna be around. Give these people time. Before long his grave'll get dug up and some really weird things'll happen. These people can get downright sick at times!
You might think the Salem Witch Trials were bad. We had 'em too, but the people hereabouts just killed every one suspect. It's a wonder there's any population at all today. It was a booming business, you might say, until a few people accused the parson of witchcraft, using a false church as a front. The parson wasn't lynched, though. The crowd lynched the folks who accused him. After that, I guess the taste for blood lost its appeal. Took long enough, though! In three months, sixty eight people met their god under a hand supposedly ruled by God. May the people behind that hand burn in Hell for it, too!

This entire town is less than two square miles, and everybody knows everybody else's lives pretty well, kinda like lives were a community property. Even so, when the Pumpkin Man came to town, everybody was a suspect. As I recall, nobody ever did rightly find out just who it really was. One day Bill wakes up, goes out to his barn, and there's the guy on the floor. His neck was twisted awful funny. He must've fallen off the hayloft, looking for a place to stay the night. Maybe he slept up there a lot. Who could tell?

He had a decent size beard, greasy red hair, and misformed teeth, some of which fell out from the fall. The weirdest thing was the eyes! Bloodshot, o.k., but the base color was the weirdest combination of red, grey, and blue. Never seen anythin' like it!

Anyway, he's got his own little part of the local cemetery, and every month we draw lots to see who gets to smash a pumpkin on the headstone. These people are really too superstitious, and probably will be until this town is nothin' but dust.

I gotta get out of this place! But I guess I'll wait, for a little while anyway. Yep, wait just a little bit.

Kenneth D. Hannan
I. Death: A Quite Satisfying Beginning

"Before I go," whispered my father on his bed, "I want you to have this." He pulled out an old scrap of paper from somewhere under the old sheets that he had been lying in for weeks.

My eyes scanned over the weathered map. "Where did you get this?" I inquired.

"From an old pervert in Czechoslovakia named Ivan," said my father. He then added, "He claimed he had the cure for cancer." As to what the cure for cancer had to do with a map of the Himalayas, I thought it better not to ask.

"All my life I wanted to find this place," he continued. "It was a dream, my whole purpose for life, but I couldn't make it."

"Why not? What stopped you?"

"Well, you know how it is; I kept thinking, 'I'll do it tomorrow' or 'it can wait a week,' and, well, time just kind of slipped by, and here I am, not in any position to do much travelling. Anyway, (cough), I want you to complete my task."

Now this was getting a bit ridiculous. "C'mon, Dad, you know how doily production gets this time of year. I don't know..."

"I will die happy if I know that you will find the cavern."

"Okay, whatever you say. I'll get there. See you later, Dad." I then heard the kind of tone you always hear on hospital TV shows right before the nurses pull the sheet over the heart attack victim, then I looked at Dad. He had a big smile on his face; he died happy.

I turned around and walked out of the room, tossing the crumpled up map in the trash on the way out, which missed and fell on the floor; I never was much of a basketball player.

Dolly matters were pressing.

II. Dollies and Pythons

"And now it's time for Colonel Poos and his Dancing Teeth!" announced the television in my Lear jet. It was not getting much of a response, though, because at the time I was too
busy figuring out which mountains were now passing directly underneath me. I had also seen this particular episode quite a few times already, and I wasn't very interested in dancing teeth. I was actually more interested in dolly production, probably resulting from the fact that I'm the manager of London Dolly Inc., en route to an important meeting with the International Lace and Other Dainty Things Corporation.

"We are en route to Amsterdam, aren't we, Mr...."

"Waterhead, Bob Waterhead. Yessir, we're on our way to Amsterdam."

I looked out at the mountains for a few more minutes, then inquired, "There aren't any mountains between London and Amsterdam, are there?"

"Mountains?" Of course not. Why would there be mountains between London and Amsterdam?"

I ignored that question, and decided to turn back to the TV set.

III. Concern Edith Baxter's Back

The next bit happened on the day of my dad's death, about three days before I was up in the previously mentioned lear jet: one of Dad's nurses was having back trouble that day, and was talking to another nurse about it. Priscilla (the latter) gave Edith (the former) the number of the local chiropractor, who was pretty good at fixing backs. However, Edith had nothing to write on. Fortunately, she saw a crumpled piece of paper lying on the floor, of which she tore a corner off to write the number down; she then stuffed the other part of the paper in her purse.

The next day Edith had to pick up her sister who had flown into London from Toledo, but had the nasty experience of having her purse stolen. She made enough of a ruckus to alarm the airport police, who have started to chase the assailant. This thief, (who happened to have a neurotic brother named Bob who flew private lear jets), decided to drop the purse off on a baggage conveyor belt rather than get caught.

The purse landed in a jet en route to Tibet. Not many people fly to Tibet, so naturally the plane wasn't of the highest quality. As a matter of fact, it had a faulty door on the luggage compartment, and subsequently left a trail of luggage all the way from London to Lhasa.
IV. On the Relative Importance of Cockroaches

Bob was now preoccupied with thinking of something he would rather be doing at this point, which is practically anything. He always hated flying planes, but seeing as his father had made 53 bombing runs in World War II, and that at the time of his youth his father ran a pilot training course, and because he had dropped out of high school because he believed that all teachers are cockroaches, he didn't have much choice. At this particular moment he wished to be back at his home in Wyoming, on solid ground, cruising around in his '68 Thunderbird. His Thunderbird had a bumper sticker on the back that read, "I brake for cockroaches." He also would brake for plankton, if any ever got in his way, but he couldn't find a bumper sticker that read, "I brake for plankton." The lady from whom he bought the former bumper sticker told him that it may come in handy some day. So far he hadn't run over any cockroaches, at least none that he could remember.

"Bob," I asked, jarring him out of his daydream, "exactly which mountains are the ones that are now passing beneath us. I was just sort of curious."

Bob started fishing through his maps. "Damn," he thought, "when am I going to get this thing computerized?" Then he would have to do even less flying, leaving most of it up to the computer, which would be all the more nice.

"They look like the Himalayas to me," Bob finally answered. Of course, the Himalayas. I should have known.

Bob looked back through his windows, taking little notice of a small black speck on the horizon.

"Bob?"

"Yeah."

"Just what exactly are we doing in the Himalayas? I don't mean to say that there is anything wrong with them; of course I'm not in much of a position to make any kind of judgement, seeing as I've never been to the Himalayas before."

The speck was growing.

"I don't know, I've just always wanted to see the Himalayas. Kind of pretty, aren't they?"

Just then Bob announced that there was a call for me on his radio, and had it put through to my phone.
"Hello, Ian? This is your father."
"Dad? Didn't I just see you die the other day?"
"No, someone apparently tripped the cord on the heart monitor. They say I'll be better in a few days. I want my map back."
"Sorry, Dad, not today. Gotta go." I hung up.

V. Intermezzo

There once was a lively plankton named Buford. He was a typical plankton, living his life drifting with the currents, feeding on bacteria, and reading his lessons and doing daily homework. However, something was troubling him today, something he had just read. His lesson dealt with the continuing cycles of feeding: how smaller things got eaten by bigger things, and they in turn get eaten by bigger things, and so on. What he wanted to know was this: "Why? Why life and death? What's it all about?"

Then suddenly, as he was swimming along with a million or so of his closest friends, it hit him.
"I've got it!" Buford cried.
"What's your problem?" asked his friend Buford. (Plankton are not very intelligent; Buford is the only name they know. Of course, they usually don't have very much trouble when naming babies.)

Buford then went on to explain to his friends that he had just figured out why they were here, what the meaning of life is, and why some people laugh when other people pass gas.
"Tell us, tell us!" the knowledge-thirsty plankton then asked, but Buford would not.
"If I tell you, then you will go about claiming that you figured it out, and I won't get the credit," retorted Buford. The other plankton pleaded, and swore to him that they would tell everyone that Buford thought it up. If they would all split up and tell everyone whom they met about the meaning of life, word would be spread much faster and the world would be a much better place to live in now that all life forms would know why they're here. Also, they pointed out, what if he would forget? Plankton don't have very good memories.
"No, no," Buford declared. "If anyone will tell it to the world, I will, because I thought it up. Now, we must go and find Tom Brokaw."

So Buford and his friends went out in search of Tom Brokaw, so everyone who watches NBC Nightly News would know why they're here on Earth, what life is all about, and why people laugh when other people pass gas, so the world would then be an overall nicer place to live in.

Swimming lazily along came a blue whale whose name was Reginald (not all whales are named Reginald; some are named Oswald), who was busy wondering why life was so boring. He yawned in weariness, accidentally swallowing Buford and his friends.

That was a story that Dad used to tell me when I was young.

Dad was an unusual person.

VI. Cockroaches Revisited

Somewhere in Czechoslovakia, the fourth through the ninth dimensions, who had been wound up in a tight little ball since the beginning of life, decided to unwind themselves and see what life was like. By chance, they unwound on a cockroach. It was somewhat lucky for this cockroach, because he was just about to be squashed by the rocker of an old rocking chair; then again, it was somewhat unlucky for him, because although he was zapped out from under the chair, he was zapped back 30,000 feet above the Himalayan Mountains. The cockroach had no idea what was going on, except that he had just become very cold.

VII. Exit Bob

At that point we heard an explosion, the type of explosion that is usually heard when an airplane engine blows, and the plane started to dive.

"What exactly was that?: In inquired.
"Sounds like we blew our left engine," Bob answered.
"Don't we have a right engine?"
He paused to read his instruments. "Doesn't look like it. Damn, should've had that checked out before I took off, that's been giving me trouble for the last few flights. I suppose we'll have to bail out."

He tossed me a parachute and we got ready to jump. I hoped that he had these checked out before he took off.

What caused the little incident was this: The cockroach that had just been transported to somewhere 30,000 feet above the Himalayas had just been sucked into our left engine. This would normally have caused no problem, except that this particular cockroach had been feeding on enormous amounts of nitroglycerine, which it had found in the laboratory of a man named Ivan, who happened to be trying to find a cure for cancer, and who also was the owner of the rocking chair.

We bailed out. I had never used a parachute before, but I probably would have enjoyed it if it weren't for the sub-zero temperatures that I was free-falling through. Obviously Bob had never used a parachute before either, because instead of pulling his rip cord he pulled on the belt that held the chute to his body, which then glided away from him and ended up landing on and killing some poor Hindu who was on a pilgrimage to Mount Kallas.

Poor son-of-a-bitch. It would be a rough landing without a parachute. But then he just disappeared, and I never heard from him again, that is, until about twenty years later. Bob reappeared again, under the rocker of Ivan's rocking chair, and ended up with a broken foot. This began a strange chain of events in which Bob started working for Ivan, and, twenty years later, found the cure for cancer and became rich and famous and the world's biggest celebrity, until he died in a plane crash due to engine failure.

I made a rather hard landing on a rock ledge about halfway up one of the mountains, and was knocked unconscious for quite a while. I was then awakened by the roar of a jet engine, and as I looked up and foolishly tried to wave them down, I saw something coming down towards me. I dodged to get out of the way of this object which seemed to have a growing passion to meet with the ground, and barely avoided that which I then had realized was a purse.
Deciding not to listen to whoever it was that said you should never look in a woman's purse, I opened it. I found out that it was Edith Baxter's purse, and that Edith used Tampax. I also found a Duracell flashlight (with new batteries), and a strikingly familiar looking map of the underground tunnels of the Himalayas.

I pondered over what to do for a while, looked at the map to find the entrance to the caverns, and turned around and saw a cave.

VIII. De. Re Underground Caverns and The Like

The next two or so years of my life passed rather uneventfully, except that they were living hell. Not until I got myself quite deeply into the caverns did I realize that a corner had been torn off the map, and I quickly got lost. As for what I did about food and warmth, there were enough edible plants growing down there to keep myself alive, and there was also an underground stream which provided water, along with strange-looking fish to eat. Fortunately the temperature usually was comfortable, and rarely dipped below about 50 degrees.

About halfway through my first year I came upon a monkey who seemed about as lost as I was, and who soon became my constant companion. It's a good thing for that, because I would have lost any sanity I had previously laid claim to if I hadn't had somebody to talk to. After about a year we had some interesting conversations going on about the meaning of life, digital watches, and other related topics.

It soon got to the point at which I had no idea if it was day or night. This came about because of an interesting encounter with a school of plankton:

As Nemo (my friend the monkey) and I were fishing one day, a school of plankton swam up to us.

"Er, could you please direct us to the place where we could find Tom Brokaw," asked one of them, whose name I ascertained to be Buford.

"I don't even know where I am; how could I tell you how to find Tom Brokaw? Anyway, what do you want to talk to him for?" I voiced.
"We are the only survivors of the Great Whale Swallow generations ago, and are destined to reveal to all forms of life the reason for existence," voiced another. Needless to say, he was also known as "Buford."

Now this was getting interesting. "And what is the reason for our existence." I queried.

They then all formed a huddle, and whispered among themselves for a few seconds. Buford then came forward. "We can't say," he declared.

"Why not?"

"Um, well, we forgot what it is."

They all started to mill around. "I don't think he ever told us," cried one voice from the group. another yelled, "Didn't it have something to do with digital watches?"

Then there was a great clamor, arising from the shouts of the plankton, which included "yes," "I think so," "maybe," and "you're screwed," followed by the hoard of plankton crawling up my wrist and removing my watch. I really don't know they unfastened the clasp, but I really didn't care, seeing as by then I couldn't care less what time it was, anyway.

They played around with the watch for awhile and pushed all of the buttons, until they were aroused by a certain sound. The sound came from me; that day I had been eating a ceratin type of fish which frequently made me flatulent, and just then I let loose some gas.

Immediately they all began to laugh hysterically, and kept on laughing. Even Nemo was on the floor. They were still giggling among themselves as they went swimming down the stream with my watch.

IX. Tampons, and Their Significance To Me.

As the end of my second year of wandering was drawing to a close, I was hit by a stroke of luck. Being in an extreme state of boredom, I decided to read the directions that came with the Tampax's; I had already read that ridiculous romance novel I found in Edith's purse 16 times. As I pulled out the directions, a small corner of paper dropped out. There was a phone number written on it; I almost threw it away, but noticed what was on the other side.
In a matter of about five days I made the journey that I had been trying to do for two years. If I had only been more curious about tampons I probably would have saved a lot of time.

Now I was getting closer. As I wearily trudged through the labyrinthine caverns, I checked my map. It wouldn't be long.

As I came up to the entrance to the goal of my journey, I noticed that it started to get brighter inside the caves. The walls gave off an eerie glow as if there were fluorescent lights placed behind the walls, which I now noticed were becoming more and more crystalline. This must be it, I thought in anticipation, as I clicked off my flashlight, which had been in use since I found the purse. If I would ever make it back to the real world, I would know what kind of batteries to buy.

I stepped up to the entrance, and looked out. I looked out as far as I could see, straining my eyes in the process. The interior of the cavern was more immense than I had ever dreamed; it must have been the size of a small city. I could barely make out the wall opposite me. As for the top of the cave, it was as tall as the cavern was wide. My eyes followed the roof from the entrance where I walked into it, as it curved upwards like a huge dome. Everything was crystal. The whole place was sparkling in not only white, but all shades of every color in the spectrum. I think there were even a few that weren't in the spectrum. I could not believe that I had actually found it, what no other human has set eyes on...

"May I see your pass, sir?"

I had not even heard a human being speak for so long; it took me awhile to figure out what that bizarre sound was.

"Sir, may I see your pass?" the voice droned again. He then asked Nemo for his pass.

I finally pulled my eyes away from the hypnotic effect of the crystals, and looked towards the origin of the voice. On the way down I noticed something very familiar.

"What...what the hell is that?!" I stammered.

"It's a McDonald's, sir, that's where you can eat if you get hungry. Don't you recognize the 'M'? But if you don't like that, there's always Wendy's, or..."
"What's it doing here?" I said, as I started to notice all of the neon signs decorating the eateries. I also recognized some other signs. They said, "Caesar's Palace," and "Wanda's Massage Parlor," and "Go-Go Strippers Galore."

"To eat at, sir," he again whined. "Now can I see your pass?"

Pass? What pass?

"Pass, what pass?" I then said out loud, figuring that he couldn't read my mind.

He then explained to me that I should have bought a pass at the door, and then when I responded with something to the effect of "What door?", he went to get his superior. Meanwhile, I gazed at what I believed to be my cavern, watching the thousands of people wandering all over in this underground city. Intricate webs of tracks for what I later found out to be electric-powered trains joined the buildings with the neon signs together. I saw unhappy faces leaving the casinos. I saw happy ones leaving the places with the signs that said, "Wanda's Massage Parlor."

"Which entrance did you come in, sir?" asked the manager, who had just walked up and tapped me on the shoulder.

"That one right there," I replied as I pointed to my cave.

"Didn't you take the subway?" he asked. I later found out that it was only a fifteen minute subway ride from Central Park to here. The ticket fare was a little steep, but then again, there's no plankton to tie you up on the way. When I replied that I didn't even know what he was talking about, he asked, "Then how did you get in here?"

I showed him my map, and explained to him the experiences leading up to my arrival here.

He laughed. I asked him what was so funny. Then he laughed harder. He laughed so hard he started crying. He fell to the floor in his amusement, which looked much like an ice-skating rink I used to pay a quarter to get into when I was young, and laughed so hard that it was starting to annoy me. I decided to give him a good swift kick in the head, which instantly killed him.

A justifiable kick, I might add.
I then decided to lose myself in the crowd, seeing as people were starting to gather around the now dead imbecile. As I walked down the city streets, I heard a phone ring. Looking around, I noticed it was a nearby pay phone. Faced with the dilemma about what to do in a bizarre situation such as this, I thought about the events in the last two years of my life, and decided to do the only reasonable thing.

I answered it.

"Uh, hello?"

"Yeah, Ian, this is your father. I thought I might find you here. I lost my calendar; I was just wondering if you remember when Mother's birthday is. I know it's coming up soon, but I can't quite remember which day."

Of course, it was Dad. I should have known. "The sixth, Dad. By the way, would you happen to know how my business is going?"

"Business?"

"My daily business, Dad."

"Oh yes. It's fine."

"I just wanted to know if anyone is wondering where I am."

"Not that I know of. Most of them think you're still out on coffee break."

A reassuring thought. Our conversation soon drew to a close, and I decided to jump on the subway to get back to the real world. However, the ticket seller would not accept pound notes. He did tell me, though, that he would accept a digital watch with an alarm and hourly chime.

Joel Firehammer
Did I ever tell you about the time Myron Mortley conned me into a blind date with his out-of-town cousin, Ernie? Probably not, it being a memory I'd prefer to crumple rather than frame. You'd expect a relative of Southford High's reigning moron to be equally as nauseating, wouldn't you? Just look at Myron, for Pete's sake—slicked back hair, horn-rimmed glasses, buck teeth and what-have-you.

Of course, it was unfair to assume his cousin would be just as pathetic, I'll admit. Blind dates are about as predictable as the weather, so I suppose it was my own fault for not carrying an umbrella that Friday night. Funny how it only seemed to rain on me, though!

"Sara, this is Ernie," my mother announced, batting her eyes at the raven-haired god beside her in our front hall.

I stared in disbelief. Where were his bony elbows? His buck teeth? His bow tie? Smiling politely, I pulled her aside. "Are you sure this is Myron Mortley's cousin?"

"Yes, I'm Ernie Mortley," the sapphire-eyed stranger confirmed with an amused grin. "Myron and I really don't have very much in common."

Nobody answered; my mother and I were both in a trance.

"Uh, would you like to get going, Sara?" Ernie cleared his throat.

"You bet!" I sang, tossing my awed mother an affectionate You-Lose look over my shoulder. She gave me a hearty thumbs-up.

Ernie swung open the door of a sleek red sports car glowing in our humble driveway. "What a nice car!" Flashing my most winning smile, I slid into the front seat and onto a box of Kleenex.

"Thanks," Ernie beamed, giving the steering wheel an affectionate pat. He focused his whirlpool blue eyes on my adoring brown ones and smiled. "Would you like to get something to eat? The movie doesn't start until eight-thirty."

"I'd love to," I replied, clasping my hands around my knee. "I know a good Chinese restaurant. Do you like Chinese food, Sara?"
"I love Chinese food," I lied.
"Oh good." He seemed pleased. "Have you seen 'In the Dark' before?"
"No I haven't," I lied again. My best friend Lily and I had only seen the movie five times, and memorized every line.
"It's a great movie," he remarked, nodding. "I've seen it once before, but I can't wait to see it again."
"Oh, I know! That part where he came swinging down from the telephone wire was hysterical, wasn't it?" I chuckled.
He glanced sideways at me. "I thought you've never seen it."
"Uh, coming attractions." I cleared my throat.
He pulled into Fung Sing Yoo's drive. As he hurried around the car to open my door, I wrinkled my nose. Even the parking lot smelled like chopped suey! "Thank you," I purred, tripping over the seat belt as I climbed out.
"Are you ok?" He grabbed my arm before I could fall on my face.
I stared at his gorgeous hand, and wished for once my clothes had static cling. No such luck. "Oh, silly me, I'm fine," I responded, fluttering my lashes. A fleck of mascara caught and momentarily blinded me. I stumbled before him into the dark restaurant.
A waitress handed us menus scrawled in Chinese. I stared at mine in silence, peering over the top at Ernie while he calmly scanned his own. Uh oh, was I supposed to know Chinese? Ernie did. Now he'd think I was uncultured, besides being uncoordinated.
He looked up and smiled. "Are you ready to order, Sara? Anything in particular you'd like?"
An interpreter, please, with a glass of water, perhaps. I coughed. "Uhm, I'm not quite sure just yet. Everything looks so good tonight!"
He squinted at my menu and grinned suddenly. "I see you find the Chinese side interesting, too. I used to compare it to the American version, on the flip side."
"Flip side?" I echoed, whirling the menu around. Thank God, they did speak English here! "Ah yes, the good old American version!"
"Can you read Chinese, Sara?" Ernie asked, brows raised.
"Not fluently," I said modestly.

A waitress crowned with silky black hair bowed slightly to us.

"Good evening! Are you ready to order?" she inquired.

I wondered if we were supposed to bow back. Deciding to play it safe, I bent forward a bit, and in the process knocked the salt shaker to the floor. "You're on a roll," I mumbled, stooping to reach it.

"Pardon me?"

"I said egg roll," I spoke up, banging my head on the table before popping up to the surface again. "I'd like an egg roll, please."

"I'll have an egg roll too," Ernie added, eyes shielded beneath a hand.

After dinner we walked across the street to the movie theatre. Already a winding line stretched from the ticket booth, and we joined the end of it amidst enthused chatter. While Ernie's eyes sailed across the bobbing heads of the crowd, I tried to think of something clever to say. "Yow!" Grabbing my foot, I glared at the fat lady who'd stomped on it.

"Sara? Sara!"

Lily was waving her arms ten people ahead of us. Oh no! How would I explain I was out on a date with Myron Mortley's cousin? Lily despised Myron. I dodged behind the fat lady, but Ernie tugged on my sleeve.

"Sara? Someone's calling you," he informed me.

Lily bounced up, out of breath. She stared at Ernie.

"Uh, hi, Lily," I chirped. "Who're you here with?"

"I don't remember. Who are YOU here with?" she smoothed her strawberry blond curls.

"Uh, this is Ernie; Ernie, this is Lily," I muttered, closing my eyes.

"It's an absolute pleasure to meet you," she cooed. "This is just the greatest movie!"

"Yes, I've seen it once before," Ernie agreed.

"Fifth time for us!" Lily sang, swinging an arm around my hunched shoulders.

"Fifth?" Ernie echoed, raising a brow at me.
"Oh, it's our favorite!" Especially the part where he comes swinging down from the telephone wire! That's Sara's scene. Sara just loves that part, don't you, Sara?"
Sara just wanted to die.
Just when I didn't think things could get any worse, they did.
Myron Mortley, toothpick arms wrapped around three boxes of popcorn, a green cotton candy, and a chocolate bar the size of a 2x4, was headed straight for us. Lily wrinkled her freckled nose and nudged Ernie.
"Ugh! Here comes the biggest moron in our school," she gagged.
I covered my eyes with both hands.
"Hey dude!" Myron yelped, delighted to bump into his cousin. "What's boppin', bud?"
"Who's all that food for, pal?" Ernie asked.
"Those guys over there," Myron replied, nodding toward a gang of black-jacketed hoodlums huddled together in the curb. He winked at Ernie. "I told you Sara was one sizzlin' sensation, didn't I?"
My neck began melting as Lily's eyes narrowed at me.
"Hey dudes! We can really party now!" Myron crowed, bending his bony knees in and out. "Hey! Let's all sit together! Everybody!" He spread his arms wide, oblivious to the popcorn, cotton candy and chocolate as it crashed onto his cowboy boots. "Isn't this going to be awesome? It's so lucky we bumped into each other, isn't it?"
"Uh, Myron," I interrupted, yanking him aside. "Just between you and me...See those two girls up ahead? The ones with the long blonde hair?"
He squinted. "And tight jeans?"
I grimaced. "Yes, and tight jeans. Well, I just heard them ask if anyone knew who the great looking guy in the Bugs Bunny T-shirt was."
Myron pointed to his saturated head.
"That's right, Myron!" You! So why don't you go on over and introduce yourself? Sit with them, make their night!"
"Because I reckon you'd justa git jealous, ma'am, and I couldn't rightly let mah main woman down," he slurred, tipping his raccoon cap, and throwing a weasel arm over my shoulder.
"Uh, look, Myron, I'm really flattered," I argued, wrenching myself free, "but I'll always be here. They won't! Take advantage, for Pete's sake!"

He cracked his knuckles and patted his Lone Ranger belt buckle. "Fine then, y'perdy I'll thing. I'll justa mosey on over and make those squaws happy, I reckon."

"Atta go, Tiger," I agreed, slapping his back.

Lily was still staring as I ushered Ernie and her up to the ticket booth. "Why on earth are you talking to Myron Mortley?" she hissed into my ear. "How could you waste time with a Mortley, when you have a date like Ernie?" She cleared her throat and nodded to Ernie. "That Myron! He's so disgusting!"

I was preparing to slap her when the screams struck.

"AAAAAUGHHHHH!"

Startled, everyone turned toward the curb. The gang of hoodlums had gathered around a rusty Chevy. Two stood on its hood, arms stretched upward huge hands grasping Myron's writhing ankles. He dangled like an animated sausage above the concrete. Standing a few yards away were the two tightly-jeaned blondes, smoking and tossing their hair. I slapped my forehead (several times).

"AAAAAUGHHHHHH!

Ernie hurried forward. The hairiest hoodlum glanced at him from the Chevy's hood and snorted. "What's the scene, man?"

"Bad, bad," Myron wheezed, twirling in circles at our feet.

"Shut uppa you mouth!" the hoodlum growled, shaking a chained fist. "You, you dead man, dead, one mo' wood outta you mouth!"

"What's going on, guys?" Ernie asked casually, shaking his own hand at a cigarette one of the blondes offered him.

"This faggot-" the hoodlum gestured toward Myron's purple face- "was hittin' on our chicks! Ain't nobody hit on our chicks! We gonna fix it so's he ain't never gonna hit on our chicks again, man, you dig?"

We all dug.

"YOU dig, faggot?" the hoodlum shoved Myron's back with his boot, sending him sailing back and forth over the Chevy's bumper. He held a finger over the bridge of his horn-rimmed glasses to keep them in place.
He was also attracting a bigger crowd than 'In the Dark'.

"A A A A A U G H H H H H H H!"

"Now Myron," Ernie sighed, stooping on one knee beside his cousin's rotating head. "How many times have I told you never to hit on another man's chick?"

"I forgot," Myron whined, whacking the hoodlum on the knee.

"Ah ah ah, a lesson learned the hard way," Ernie scolded, crossing his arms. He straightened and shook his head while the hoodlums watched. "You know, this is really embarrassing," he continued with a loud sigh. "Especially since this is Flying Fist Fletcher's son and all."

Silence.

"Flying Fist Fletcher? The boxer? The undefeated lightweight fighting at the arena Saturday night?" The hairy hoodlum's eyes bulged. "This geek is Flying Fist Fletcher's son?"

Ernie held up his hands. "He's not mine. I'm only the chauffeur."

"Put 'im down, put 'im down, put 'im down!" the hoodlum barked to his cronies. Myron slapped onto the pavement in a handstand, and then crawled dizzily into the curb.

"Hey buddy, we worry 'bout all this, see? We just kiddin' with ya, man, ya dig? Hey man, maybe ya could get us some tickets, dig? So's we can root on your ol' man, see? How 'bout it, buddy?"

Myron wobbled before him, staring cross-eyed.

"Uh, tell you what," Ernie interrupted, grabbing Myron's arms to steady him. "I'll have a word with Mr. Fletcher myself, and see what I can do."

He led his cousin away.

The hairy hoodlum poked me in the arm. "Hey mama, that geek ain't really flying Fist Fletcher's son, is he?" he asked, in awe.

"They really don't have much in common," I agreed.
I did make it through the night, by the way. On my front porch beneath the full moon, Ernie and I exchanged the traditional "I had a wonderful time", while Myron howled from the sports car, "Aren't cha gonna kiss 'er good night?!" Since I had turned to glare at the obnoxious moron in my driveway, Ernie's kiss landed on my ear. I shook his hand solemnly and watched him slip back into his car, whacking Myron's hand off the gear shift before backing out of the driveway.

I sat down on my front porch, trying to figure out the Mortley connection.

I am still sitting there.

Lisa Felicelli
The sun made long shadows on the cool grass, and the wind made them dance. I lifted my hot face and glared at Tommy Greston. "I'm in charge of this here parade, Tommy, and I'm goin' to lead it past his house." Irritated, I stretched a brown arm down my leg, past the scar from my bike wipe-out, and scratched a mosquito bite. "I guess you can help carry the banner though."

Tommy Greston took part of the banner I held out to him and slithered like a garden snake toward Sally Peters. Twitching my shoulders underneath the faded blanket tied under my chin, I called out, "Company, march forward!" Slowly, our group clambered down Reed Hill Drive, on our way to Lewis' place. I turned around halfway so I could see what our parade looked like. Tommy Greston, his toothless grin splitting his freckled cheeks, bounced next to Sally who marched like a real veteran. Between them, the banner waved like a butterfly, "WELCOME BACK PRIVATE MARSHALL LEWIS" spelled out in crayons. Mom had written out the letters, but Carrie, my baby sister, and I had filled them in. Right now, Carrie was just about disgracing this entire parade as she zig-zagged the road, arms flapping like a bird's wings. Just behind her was Jay Alterson, banging tunelessly on a pan while his fat cheeks puffed in a silent whistle. Last of all came Davy Bush, wearing a newspaper hat and carrying a wooden gun over his left shoulder.

We marched right up Reed Hill, stopping only once under a giant elm so Carrie could shake out the dirt from her tennis shoes. And then, right around the curve, we could see the Lewis's house surrounded by an army of maples. The house, anchored between hills, had a river of green grass floating around it. "Everyone," I commanded, "Look sharp. We are comin' close to Mr. Private Marshall Lewis's house."

Just as we approached their place, the Lewis's Ford, spitting out grey pebbles, coughed past us and crawled up the gravel driveway. We watched the dusty Ford slide to a stop, and my heart started beating as loud as a bass drum. Sally lowered her half of the banner, and Tommy puckered his lips where a low-pitched whistle escaped. Jay Alterson's pudgy jaw dropped open, leaving his wide lips to form a perfect "O." Silently, Carrie
sidled up to me, slipping her sweaty hand in mine, but I hardly noticed because Mr. Private Marshall Lewis himself had climbed out of the wheezing Ford. I nearly swallowed my tongue I was so excited at being near a real soldier. "Mr. Private Lewis," I called out, in my grandest commander’s voice, "Welcome back." Taking a deep breath, I tried to step forward and salute Private Lewis, but my knees were wobbling more than they do before my turn in our school’s recital.

Marshall Lewis halted, his back facing us. Somewhere in the sky, a sparrow cried, and somewhere in the waving grass, a cricket silenced him. Streams of shivers tickled my back as Marshall Lewis slowly turned to face us. His sunken eyes shifted slowly across us as though he were trying to remember, and then they settled on a point just over our heads. Instead of a pea jacket speckled with shiny metals, a tweed coat hung as loose on him as on a hanger. Slowly, he shuffled his dusty brown shoes that were like the ones Mom bought me at Crellon’s Shoe Store in town. I kept waiting for him to say something, but he just stood like a stone statue with his shoulders hunched and his back arched like a frightened tomcat.

Carrie slipped her sweaty hand out of mine and, tugging on my sleeve, whispered in a voice that all of Michigan heard, "Mr. Private Lewis Marshall doesn’t look like anybody special. Let’s go home and play hide-in-seek." I could have killed her right then I was so embarrassed. I don’t think any jury would even have sent me to jail. Instead, I told her to hush up, but she just stuck out her cherry-red tongue and shouted, "I’m goin’ home to play hide-in-seek. Last one there’s it." Tommy Greston at least paused for half a second before following her, and then I watched as Sally did cartwheels down the street. His cheeks puffing, Jay Alterson left, pumping his fat legs like pistons, and Davy Bush, giving his newspaper hat to the wind, sped down Reed Hill faster than a plane, leaving me feeling like a soldier whose own company had deserted him in the middle of a parade ground. Slowly, I turned to face Mr. Lewis, but he had already retreated into his army of maples.

Diane Dragon
No Looking Back: A South African Allegory

A Drama In One Act
For Three men, Two male extras

Man 1: A young black man, handsome, with a great deal of character and intelligence visible in his face. Late twenties, although age is not crucial to the part and could be portrayed by anyone not particularly scarred by time.

Man 2: A white male of approximately the same age. He is quite dapper, with the look of one more interested in his appearance than the world directly surrounding him. He tries to sound intelligent by demonstrating his knowledge of life and politics, but he is actually quite sheltered.

Man 3: Older than the other two characters, he has a British accent and a very distinguished looking, with silver hair set off by the black he continually wears. He is quite autocratic.

Two extras: Dressed identically to Man 3, they follow his every order and react in unison. They never speak, but they have a strong presence—very cool, very frightening. They use no unnecessary movements, for that is wasting useful energy in pointless pursuit. Should be young and strong, quite threatening in stature.

Time: Undeterminable.
Place: Presumably a park, and later a holding room.

The stage is empty, except for a park bench with paint peeling off, preferably an army green color, and a wire wastepaper basket of the type commonly found in a park.

Lights come up slowly. A soft tapping noise (soles on wood) can be heard moving closer, and then, suddenly, Man 1 bursts past the curtain stage left. He is gagged, and dressed in ragged grey clothing that is neither stylish or antiquated. He looks around,
frightened—absolutely terrified by whatever is outside, the audience, and what is following him. Voices can be heard, as well as walkie-talkie static and other "chase" noises. The man collapses on the stage face first after staggering across half of the stage.

Enter stage right. Man 2, young, well-groomed. All in white, with a Jay Gatsby look of classical elegance—pleated trousers, polished shoes, etc. A fedora with a blue band matches his blue belt (the only color on him). Whistling a popular waltz and casually strolling, he thrusts his hands in his pockets.

He steps over the black man to sit on the park bench.

There is no backdrop. He casually pulls out a paper and begins to read.

Man 2: (Directing comment over paper) Nice day, isn't it? (Pause) I said, nice day, isn't it? (Groan from Man 1) I think there could be a little less sun, though. It's bad for my complexion. (Pause) Says there's turmoil in the Middle East. There's always turmoil in the Middle East. I think that's why it's there— to give us something for target practice when they finally get out of hand. (Another groan) I wish you'd answer me in a complete sentence. What is the matter with you? (Slowly gets up from bench, methodically folds paper and sets it on the bench, talking continually) Didn't your parents ever tell you that it's bad manners not to answer when someone is speaking to you? (etc.) (Rolls him over) Why, you're gagged. (Undoes it, drops it quickly as if it is polluted) There. Now do you find it easier to talk?

Man 1: (Slowly) Yes, of course.

Man 2: So, don't you agree with me

Man 1: (Quizzically) About what?

Man 2: The Middle East, of course.
Man 1: (Stuck with the inanity) Yes, I suppose so. It all depends on the leaders—if they can manage to stay within fairly respectable limits, then there won't be any problem.

Man 2: (Walking back to the bench) Yes, you're right. (Opens paper; clearly ending conversation)

Man 1: Aren't you even curious?

Man 2: About what?

Man 1: Why I'm gagged. Why my clothes are torn. Why there is a rope tied to one of my wrists.

Man 2: Not really.

Man 1: What?

Man 2: Well, it doesn't directly concern me, does it? I think that if it did, I'd already know, and since I don't know it doesn't matter to me. It's your own business.

Man 1: (Moving toward him and sitting next to him on the bench. Almost imperceptibly, Man 2 moves away) You really don't want to know?

Man 2: I really don't care at all.

Man 1: Oh. (Long pause) Well, I suppose I should go. (Pause) You don't want to know why, right?

Man 2: (Sarcastically) Very good.

Man 1: That's a very callous attitude, you know. Here I am, another human being in trouble, and you don't even care why. Where is your compassion, your neighborly concern?

Man 2: Neighborly concern went out with two-cent stamps.
Man 1: (Long pause) Goodbye. Thanks for untying me.

Man 2: Uh huh. (Looks back at paper)

Man 1 starts to run off-stage right. Suddenly, his body jerks backward, pushed by a white, older man dressed all in black. Man 2 resumes whistling and does not look up from the article he's reading. The older man (Man 3) does not react to his presence but proceeds to shove a new gag in Man 1's mouth, smothering a cry of distress. Two people enter from stage left, dressed in the same manner as Man 3, moving symmetrically and in constant unison.

Man 3: Well, we've got him now. (Other two nod together, Man 2 remains focused on paper. Man 3 pushes Man 1 to the ground) It was really stupid to run like that. You know that, don't you? (Grabs him by collar, yanks him to a sitting position) DON'T YOU? (Forces him to nod) That's beneficial to your health. I hope this will never happen again.

Man 2: (Finally looking over paper). Hello there. I didn't see you come over in this area. I was just discussing the Middle East with our friend here (Points at Man 1) and we decided everything's getting worse. Don't you agree?

Man 3: What?

Man 2: (Clearly exasperated) I'm getting tired of repeating everything twice! I said, the turmoil is increasing, don't you agree?

Man 3: (Still confused) I guess you're right.

Man 2: (Toward paper again) As long as we have this settled. (The two men begin to tie up Man 1, kicking and thrashing his arms about) Excuse me, but don't you think you could be a little gentler with him? After all, he seems intelligent.
Man 3: (Sarcasm dripping from every word) Don't judge a book by its cover.

Man 2: Oh, yes, I forgot about that. Well, that changes everything. Sorry I interrupted. (Man 1 loses his battle) Please, don't let me stop you.

Man 3: Do you know who un gagged him?

Man 2: Why, yes, I did. It was only for a moment.

Man 3: (Suddenly suspicious) What did he tell you?

Man 2: Nothing. I didn't care to listen, and he was in a hurry to leave.

Man 3: (Glancing at his co-conspirators, who take one step forward) As you know, we can't tell if you are lying or not. Tie him up as well.

Man 2: (Acquiring the same look as Man 1 in the beginning) No! Really. (Hurriedly standing up from bench) He didn't tell me a thing. You're wasting your time.

Man 3: I'll be the judge. (The two men grab him from behind, gag him, and tie him up, with one acting as the right hand and one as the left, as if they are a unified being) Let's go home, boys!

SCENE TWO

The lights go up. There are no props. The walls are white and the floor is covered with a white material that billows occasionally with a gust of wind.

Man 1 and Man 2 are tied and gaged on the floor. Man 3 enters. He grabs Man 2 by the shirtfront, which is now grey with dirt and quite wrinkled, and drags him into a sitting position. He rips the gag off brutally.
Man 3: Are you ready to tell me what you know about this situation?

Man 2: But I already told you, I don't know anything! (Gets slapped in the face)

Man 3: Liar! Filthy liar! (Walks to Man 1, ungags him no less gently)

Man 1: (Coolly) What now?

Man 3: What did you tell that man? How much did you reveal to him?

Man 1: (Shrugging his shoulders) I couldn't tell him anything. He didn't want to know what was going on.

Man 3: You expect me to believe a story as... (Searching for word) contrived as that? Forgive me if I find that a little unlikely. After all, simple curiosity on his part would elicit something, right? Well, (Gags them one at a time) I'll give you a little while to think about your situation, but remember—each minute you waste will give us another minute to think of ways to find out the real truth. (Sarcastically) Have a nice day. (Leaves stage right)

The two men are silent for a second, and then Man 1 jerks up with an idea. Slowly, he inches toward Man 2, until his tied hands are level with the knot on Man 2's gag. Classical music can be heard in the background. He unties Man 2's gag, and then his hands.

Man 2: Well, thank you! (Man 2 shoots him a look, Man 2 lowers his voice to a whisper) I suppose you want me to untie your hands now. (Creeps toward him, and then stops and unties his own feet) Silly me. Why didn't I do this right away? (Starts to stand slowly) You know, your muscles really get cramped when you lie in the same position for so long. And I got an itch under my kneecap.
The last time I had an itch under my kneecap was when I had a cast on my left leg in the seventh grade. I couldn’t scratch it then, either. (Starts to pace a little) It was worse this time, though—I couldn’t try to stop it by shoving a nail file or pencil in the crevice between my leg and the cast. (Impatient sound from Man 1) Oh, I forgot to untie you. (Starts to walk toward him again, and stops) How do I know you’re not dangerous? (Man 1 shakes his head) I mean, it’s a natural concern. I don’t know anything about you except you were being chased by some people. What if you killed someone? (Man 1 shakes his head again, this time more adamantly) What if you’ll kill me? (Man 1 shakes his head, the strongest motion yet) I know about you. Nothing! (Starts to move toward the door)

Man 1: (Muffled by gag) Please—help me.

Man 2: (Coming to a decision) All right. But this will be the last time. I got into a lot of trouble doing this for you the last time, and God knows what will happen to me this time. (Undoes his gag) Now I want you to promise not to hurt me before I untie you.

Man 1: I promise. (Pauses while Man 2 unties his hands) Why did it take you so long to release me? I immediately helped you, even though I was tied. After you had been freed, you had to debate whether you would return the favor. Why?

Man 2: (Quietly) I don’t know. (Pause) Maybe it’s the way I was raised. (Change of voice—deeper, fatherly; spoken bitterly) Look out for number one, buddy boy. Go out and grab all you can. It doesn’t matter if you push other people’s faces in the dirt as long as you can grab what’s in their hands! (Pause, Quietly again) It doesn’t matter. (Pause) Why were they chasing you?

Man 1: (Sarcastically) Because I escaped.

Man 2: Why did you try to escape?
Man 1: You really want to know? Really? It doesn't affect you
directly. You could leave, and never have it bother you
again. It could just vanish from your mind—you could just
go back to your life and forget today. The mind is full of
trapdoors, and for each idea you don't want to keep, you
can just step on that latch and fall down through the floor.
Today doesn't have to affect you at all.

Man 2: Yes!!

Man 1: Yes, you want to forget, or yes, you want to remember?

Man 2: I want to remember. I have to remember. This is just
too big to fall through a trapdoor.

Man 1: Not if you make the door big enough, or whittle the day
small enough.

Man 2: Why did you try to escape?

Man 1: I had to. I have ideas—ideas I can't express here.

Man 2: What ideas?

Man 1: (Getting slightly angry—more irritated than anything else)
Why does it matter? Are you going to judge my ideas and
then tell me if I was right or wrong? An idea is an idea—
whether it's important or not, I should have the right to
think them and tell others about them. Even if it is the
most minuscule, over-thought thought on record, it is my
idea, and goddamnit, I should be allowed to think it!!

Man 2: (Furtively) Shhhh!

Man 1: (Whispering) Sorry.

Man 2: I understand. I was just curious. Didn't mean to upset
you like that.
Man 1: I didn't mean to fly off the handle like that.

Man 2: Why would I know something? I haven't heard anything so far that would hurt them tremendously.

Man 1: Yes, you have.

Man 2: I have?

Man 1: Of course you have. They're looking up people's ideas here, and changing them with their whims. Controlling thoughts.

Man 2: Where are we?

Man 1: Everywhere--and nowhere.

SCENE THREE

A little time has elapsed. They are sitting cross-legged center stage, apparently sharing a strange sort of camaraderie in the middle of this turmoil. They are wiping their eyes and laughing from the last joke.

Man 2: A rabbi, a priest, and Christ were playing golf, and...

Man 1: (Instantly serious) When do you think they'll be coming back?

Man 2: (Matching his mood) I don't know. Soon, I'd guess. They've been gone for almost two hours. Our grace period is up, I'm sure. (Pause) How powerful are they, really? They've left us alone in here for a long time. Maybe something happened to them—maybe they left! Why, we could be free! Free!

Suddenly from stage right, the two extras enter simultaneously, folding their arms and standing with legs apart once they enter completely. For a minute they just stand there, and then they
part, allowing Man 3 to enter. Man 1 and Man 2 scramble for their bonds, and when the two men look at them, they decide it isn't worth the effort. The two extras leave.

Man 3: So, do you have anything to tell me now? I'm very tired of wasting my time and yours.

Man 2: (Very afraid) I told you before, I don't know anything at all! Really, I don't know anything.

Man 1: Sits on the floor, watching the situation, not saying anything.

Man 3: I'm bloody sick of this! (Slaps Man 2 across the face) I told you before, I want answers now!

Man 2: (Covers face) I don't know anything.

Man 1: (Resignedly, Quietly, but with Pride) What do you need to know? You can ask your questions. I may not answer them, but that's a risk you'll have to take, isn't it?

Man 3: (Glowering) What is the name of your movement? (No answer) What is the name of your movement? (Grasps Man 1's shirt, pulls out a lighter, lights it, and moves closer)

Man 1: (Moving backwards, and then answering) Freemen. The Freemen movement.

Man 3: How many?

Man 1: I don't know.

Man 3: What?

Man 1: (Ferocious gleam in eye) I don't know. New people join every day. And not just in this complex—there are people outside of this little world you've created for yourself. They are planning; and someday soon, we'll be the
strongest, and we'll crush you into the ground. You didn't show us any mercy. We won't show you any, either. (Man 2 gradually showing more strength. Man 1 causes Man 3 to drop the lighter, grabs him around the throat and begins to strangle him) No mercy at all. Do you understand?

Man 3: (Choked) Yes.

Man 2: What do we do now? (Man 1 drops Man 3, now unconscious or dead)

Man 1: I don't know. There are more like him. They'll find us, hunt us down, destroy us for killing him. (Gesture toward Man 3) Maybe we could break free, but they'll always be chasing us. Who knows? Maybe we'll live, maybe we'll die, but one thing's certain: there's no looking back.

Kelly Lynette Beehler
We stood in front of the realtor's office in Medford, Nova Scotia, waiting for the realtor to guide us out to the coastal house I had rented for the summer to do my work in. My wife followed along, but not so eagerly. I knew that I was slowly losing her to someone else. Time passed slowly as I continued to stand there and she wandered off looking in small shop's windows. Things seemed to move so calmly and slowly in this town by a little bay. The only thing that seemed to bustle was the fishermen trying to sell their day’s catch.

Drifting mentally away, my attention was returned by a scraggly old woman who stepped briskly from the realty office door cursing the realtor.

"You know damn well 'dat owse is awnted," she screamed at him, "so why's you goin' ta put sum poor 'merican fool's live in danger?" She stopped to catch her breath, and caught a glimpse of me and my gaping mouth at the same time. "I 'spose 'dat green stuff can e'en c'r upt ar own people."

She looked at me and spoke. "d'you 'live in phantoms mister?"

I shook my head "no" honestly and smiled.

"Well, you will," and walked away without uttering a sound.

I stood there slightly amused at her craziness, and smiled widely. The realtor saw my smile and relaxed. He laughed nervously then spoke. "She's our local loon, don't let 'er get to ya."

"Oh, I won't, but I would like to see my summer home and get settled in as soon as possible. I have publishers waiting you know," I said happily, without thinking about it.

-Driftwood-
The trip seemed easy, my Rabbit followed his large car through the rocky coast roads as if it had found a new home. Maybe it knew that we both had.

Elizabeth was rambling on incessantly about something she had seen in a shop window, until I broke a pinhole through her protective shield with a question.

"Why can't we talk anymore, Elizabeth? We haven't been married that long, have we?"

She paused, and I could feel her almost stammering, but she caught herself quickly. Maintaining her deep illusion that I'd never know about him until she was gone.

"I don't understand darling, we talked all the way up here in the car from Detroit."

She gave that innocent look which only her name can describe. "Elizabeth," doesn't that have a whining, ill-begotten ring to it? I simply shut my mind off and let everything slip by me. She wasn't going to talk straight, not ever. Deep inside me the knowing that she was lost from me forever hurt, and I wanted to cast her away. The way one might get rid of his hefty bags on Monday morning trash pick-up. Whoever the garbage man was, he could have her: dimpled legs and all.

My mind drifted back into the real world when we finally came up the drive to the big old house. It was even beautiful in its delapidation. Its Victorian style gingerbread moldings were flaking their ancient white paint all over. The sea-side wall of the house was weatherbeaten to a gray shade more than any other part of the house. However, the house had a solid feeling to it. As if it were in a state of constant preservation.

I heard a slightly audible groan come from Elizabeth, which made the house all the more fascinating to me. It had always been a challenge to me to make the things she didn't like more than bearable.
"You told me it was furnished," I said to Bob, the realtor, "I hope you didn't lie."

"Oh! Of course not Mr. Carent!" He said zestily and handed me the keys, which seemed to be the set to a bunch of locks a hundred years old. They were.

I wasn't disappointed with the inside once we removed the sheets from all the furniture. Everything was as old inside as the house, and all was well preserved; showing very little wear. It was the perfect place to inspire a blocked professional writer. I heard Elizabeth moan again, but this time from the kitchen.

"Everything in here is ancient!" she exclaimed. "It's got a wood stove, and hand pump at the sink." I walked to the kitchen more excited than upset. "Daniel, how do you expect me to function in here?"

"The same way as your grandmother did," I answered her. The look I got in return wasn't friendly. "You always have to have something to bitch about, don't you Elizabeth?"

She stomped off quickly, the way I expected her to react, and I turned around headed for the stairs, which were to the left of the entrance from the living room to the kitchen. Bob followed me up, and I knew that he thought me the equivalent of an excited little child.

The upstairs had four bedrooms, a master and three guest rooms, a sewing room a study, and what I would call a sitting room in the corner of the house's peak, or what the villagers would call a widow's watch. A single rocking chair sat in front of the ocean-facing window, on top of a New England woven gren and gray rug. Otherwise the room was empty.

I felt Bob become uncomfortable and I laughingly asked "That's where they see the ghost, huh?" and pointed to the chair.
"There and on the rock ledge," he spoke slowly, "they say she lost 'er man out there an' is still waitin' for him to come home."

"What do you say?" I asked him, seeing the fear in his eyes. "No sir, I don' believe in no such thing, it's all a bunch of malarcky," he became quickly relieved, and I didn't know if he was acting or not.

Bob had left when Elizabeth came back into the house poutilly and asked me if I was going to sit around and daydream or unload the car. I went out the door without a word, and brought my trunk upstairs to the master bedroom, then carried her countless little suitcases up. I finished then sat on the old, high legged couch, and propped my feet on a footstool.

"Dan," Elizabeth spoke in her sweetest voice, "Where's the phone?"

"In the kitchen darling," I almost snarled, "You can't miss it, it's that big box on the wall."

I knew what would come sooner or later, but kept my mind open.

It didn't come until after we had loaded the dresser drawers with our clothes, and the cupboards with our canned foods. Then came the inevitable "get Dan out of the house so I can call Him on the phone."

"Dan?" she called me from the kitchen. "What time is it?"

"It's three-thirty, why?" I called, almost knowing the excuse that came.

"We're going to be needing some milk, bread, and meat. I just feel too tired to go in after it..." she continued, not able to see the pain on my face, and I sat on the ancient divan silently crying. She could hurt me even when I knew it was coming.
"Don't worry about it, Elizabeth. I'll be right back," I told her from the living room as I walked out and light shut the screen door behind me.

The Rabbit started easily, and I glanced in my mirror to watch Elizabeth check out the window for my departure. She did, and disappeared beyond the curtain after she assumed I was well on my way.

I killed the Rabbit's engine a few hundred feet farther around the rocky road, and quietly hiked my way back. I needed that last little stretch of evidence that would either prove my Elizabeth's guilt or innocence.

Crouching beside the window the sound of her voice on the phone tore my last shred of hope from me. "When are you coming to get me Peter, I don't know if I can stand living with him any longer. His writer's habits are insane! He sometimes gets up in the middle of the night and turns that damn machine on, and types away."

My mind drifted away after sending a final instruction to my body to get in the Rabbit and run the errand. I had to eat.

"To hell with Elizabeth," I mumbled to myself, but I knew that I still loved her.

I changed a little, grew a little older, and I grew a little colder during my errand. I became angry, then depressed. I drove the coastal highway most of the way back then abruptly stopped the little car and hid it in between the rocks of a small beach.

"If they want each other so bad, I'll be damned if I'll give her the chance to take my Rabbit and see him." I mumbled angrily. "If he really wants her so bad, he can come out to this Godforsaken spot and get her!"

I walked up rock-broken sand the direction of the house, and soon found myself climbing the wall of a small rock point.
It was getting dark and cold, but my anger still warmed me. The anger was still inside me, but it was momentarily surpassed by my fascination with the point. Panting at the top, the flat platform at the very tip of the peninsula was a welcome resting place to my body.

I sat there and watch the fog come in, and the moon rise.

Then she came from out of nowhere in particular behind me, in her white lace dress at least as old in design as my grandmother, her knit white shawl, and bare feet. She seemed embarrassed as I sat and stared at her in my bewildered fascination.

"I...didn't know anyone was here," she said shyly, "I'll leave you alone." She turned away, and started walking off.

"No, please don't go, I didn't mean to stare." She shyly turned back to me. "I'm Dan Carent. I rented the old house up the way for the summer."

"It's my pleasure to make your acquaintance Mr. Carent, I'm Sarah Fontaine, and I live in a house up the way also."

She spoke so softly that I had to strain to hear her words, but I still assumed that she was uncomfortable with me there.
"Please, call me Dan?" I asked her.

She smiled faintly, parting her lips slightly, and I noticed that there was no trace of makeup on her thin, pretty face. Sarah's hair was long and thick.

"I come here almost every night during the summer, watch the fog roll in, and see the moon shining down." She blushed as she noticed my gaze intent upon her.

"This is the first time I've ever been here. I'm just out blowing off some steam..." My words ran off into nowhere, when I swore that I heard her say "I know" but I never saw her lips move.
Sarah turned and faintly smiled at me. "Is there something troubling, Dan?" she asked.

"Yes, I suppose there is."

I felt no reserves in telling her how I would soon be losing my wife, and probably everything I owned. She listened silently as I told her how I still loved Elizabeth, but couldn't stand to look at her face any more. Sarah sat and took in everything I said.

"You feel betrayed don't you?" she asked me.

"Completely."

"Will you walk with me, and listen to the ocean's tides roll against the rocks. I believe that you need me as much as I need you."

It was a proposition that stunned me slightly, but I couldn't resist. To me, she was ever so beautiful, and I did need someone. Anyone.

As soon as we caught sight of the old house she stopped walking, and grasped my other hand. "I must go now, Dan. Will you meet me at the point again tomorrow night?" Sarah's voice sounded so sweet and innocent to me then, that even if I had wanted to, I couldn't have resisted.

"I'll be there, I promise," I said softly.

We kissed a very short kiss goodbye, then I stood there, and watched her walk away until her shape faded into the fog.

I entered through the rickety old screen with caution, expecting something to be thrown at me, but to my great disappointment there was nothing like that waiting for me. To me, it would have meant that she still cared.

-66-
"What happened, Dan?" she asked. "I was starting to worry about you." She got up from her stretched out reading position on the old de'van, and met me face to face.

There wasn't even a stitch of emotion in her eyes, and it made me turn bitter. To her, it would be better if I were dead. She would have no one to fight against.

"Take the house, your jag, and everything we own, except for my Rabbit, and my income. If he's such a damned great lover let him start feeding you." There was a frighteningly controlled calm to my voice. A calm that was almost capable of murder.

Elizabeth started to shakily say something, but I interrupted her.

"Either take my offer, or call him now and end it. It's your choice."

She went to the phone, and my heart skipped a beat thinking that maybe she did still love me.

"Peter?" she said. "He knows, and he wants me out. "...you're going to have to come after me." She listened for a moment, then sneered at me as she told Peter she loved him and would be waiting for him.

I slowly walked up the stairs, and acquired: one of the blankets off the master bed, a pillow, and a flashlight. For some reason I headed for the widow's watch, and crashed on the floor inside after I locked the door behind me.

Sleep came unexpectedly easy to me that night, and I felt a sense of well-being come with it.

I awoke to the sound of the rocking chair creaking slightly. Groggily noticing a white figure in the chair facing the window, my subconscious brought conscious to a full alert.

"Elizabeth?" I called.
The figure abruptly turned towards me, revealing the face of Sarah, which in turn faded into that of an old woman, and then into nothingness.

I sat fully awake, and in shock. The sweat poured down my body as I sat up with the blanket unevenly wrapped around me, and the pillow clenched tightly in my arms.

"It was only a nightmare, Dan," I told myself, and believed it, because I wanted to.

The night went by slowly from there on, and I woke up looking as if years had been cut from my life. After a good shave and an insult session with Elizabeth, I felt a little more myself.

Elizabeth was packing, and it didn't really matter to me by this time. I only hoped she'd be gone soon. Best of all, the Rabbit was still hidden in the enclave, and I would get the chance to look the bastard who was stealing my wife from me in the eye.

The fog burnt off by noon and it turned out to be a nice day to be out without a sweater. Which after the cold day before seemed an omen as to what was ahead for me. Peter came at about one. Elizabeth left without one word to me, and Peter just stood next to his green rental car a short man trying to hide his bald spot with a corny, off-shade toupee. I found myself laughing hysterically until they were out of sight, then I started crying. I couldn't let myself cry over her, so I thought of Sarah for the rest of the day.

I worked off the rest of the day doing odd jobs on the exterior of the house, until just before sunrise.

I went in the house and grabbed a sweater and an apple, then I excitedly headed for the point. The air was starting to chill and the fog would be rolling in soon, so I planned on inviting her in for a drink or two.
The quick pace I usually kept was surpassed by the one I was walking then. The only thing that caught my attention when I was on the sand intermittent to the rocks was the bits and pieces of driftwood. Somehow I felt like one of those pieces of driftwood; having been cast off by nature or man, and having the gumption to come back in a new and very different form. Sometimes even a mangled form.

Sarah was standing in the distance, her white shawl wrapped around her, but this time she was wearing shoes. She was as beautiful as the Greeks believed their goddess Aphrodite to be. And yet she was gently alluring, and not as sure of herself as many other women with her looks. Her smile made me smile even more in response.

"Hello," she said to me, reaching out both of her pale hands to me.

"Hello, I said back as I took her hands in mine. I noticed an odd coldness to them again, and again as if she knew it displeased me, they grew warm.

"I saw her leave you today. How are you doing?"

"I'm happy," I said, then would have sworn I heard a reply but never saw her lips move.

"Why are you happy?" You've lost everything."

"Because I knew I could count on you being here tonight."

I couldn't hold myself back any longer and I wrapped my arms around her, passionately kissing her all over.

"It's cold out here, shall we go back to your house?"

"Yes," I answered without hesitation.
I drank more than a couple of the night-caps, and would have sworn she drank with me, but later I only found one dirty glass. I woke up naked and pained all over, lying in the master bed. The sound of that rocking chair creaking in the widow's watch was somehow amplified until it was almost deafening. I reached overbeside me to see if Sarah was there and found nothing but empty covers. The sound was getting louder.

I got up from the bed and slid my shorts on. I then headed towards the sewing room, and the sound died down to a normal creaking. Reaching out my hand and grasping the doorknob I felt it throb and pulsate in my palm. The door opened easily and quickly as I jerked it, wanting to get my hand off the knob.

Sarah sat there in the chair, rocking, and staring into the window. I could only see her back so I walked to the side of the chair. Her face was pointed towards the center pane of glass, and I reached out my hand to touch it. Before I had my fingers on it she turned abruptly so that she was facing me. Her face was that of the old woman's and my hand flashed quickly back to my side. She smiled a sad smile and I mistakenly looked deep into her eyes: I watched our meeting on the point; the discussion I had with Elizabeth when I walked in that night; her getting into balding Peter's rental car as I laughed insanely at them; the rental car flying off one of the coastal roads into the rocky water; and, mine and Sarah's second rendezvous. I heard a silent "I'm sorry" and then there was no longer an old woman in the chair in front of me. The chair finally stopped squeaking.

I was shaking as I sorted the pictures together that I had seen. Sarah had forced Peter to drive off the road. She'd killed them. Why?

I sat down in the rocking chair. There was no reason to fear anything anymore, and I knew then that there never had been. She didn't want to hurt me, she was just past the ability to love me in the usual way. She was a spirit, she technically couldn't exist, let alone love me.
I watched out the window and saw her supple form searching for driftwood in the intermittent beaches. She reached out her hand and waved up to me. I couldn't wave back, I could only cry for both of us.

Keith Ferguson