

# PEGASUS



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# Through The Eyes Of A Child

by Diane Houlihan

**T**HEY WERE ALL AROUND ME IN A big, tight circle. Their eyes were as hard as the stones they held in their hands, the stones I knew they'd throw at me sooner or later. They just stared at me. They didn't say anything. They didn't have to.

I wanted to close my eyes and wish them away, but I knew if I did that the tears I was holding back would start to spill over and that would make them happy. I didn't want to make them happy.

I should have been used to them by now. It wasn't hard for them to make their awful circle around me. During recess I would try to sneak away by myself and daydream about beautiful things. Pretty carriages drawn by horses. Fairy tale princesses who looked like me. Then I would look around and they would be everywhere. I shouldn't have been scared anymore. But I was.

It was always the same. First they would stand and look at me, saying nothing. My heart would pound like a hammer in my chest. I made myself stay perfectly still, as quiet as they were. I wouldn't cry. *I wouldn't!*

Then they would begin to chant. They were always coming up with new ones that hurt even more. Their favorite was "Baby doll, baby doll, you're too dumb and you're too small. Instant tears come from you. Bet you wet your diaper, too!" They would chant it over and over again, their faces twisted with their smiles.

I wouldn't be able to hold back the tears anymore. I hated myself for letting them get to me. I got so angry with them and myself and my tears came harder and faster the angrier I got.

They weren't satisfied to just make me cry. They would start to throw the stones at me, just hard enough to hurt. I wanted to run away but there was no way to break through their circle. They'd never let me go.

I would stand there and cry and take it, hating myself for it. I told my mother I fell down when she asked about all my black and blue marks. They said if I told anybody they'd hurt me more. I didn't want them to hurt me anymore.

At first I wanted them to like me instead of hurt me. Then I just wanted them to leave me alone. And then I began to hate them. I didn't daydream about pretty things anymore; I dreamed about hurting and humiliating them, just like they did to me.

But this day was different. Today *my* pockets were filled with sharp, shiny stones. I'd begged my father for weeks to teach me how to throw and I was pretty good now. Good enough to hurt them back.

Today I didn't daydream at all. I just sat and watched as they gathered round me, closing me off. I couldn't stop myself from being scared. The way they stared at me made me want to run away. But there wasn't anywhere to run any-



more. My hands slipped into my pockets and I felt the jagged edges of the stones. I felt better as I fingered them.

The chanting started, the familiar "Baby doll . . ." I looked at them individually for the first time. One girl's voice was louder than the others. That same voice had started most of the taunts. She was big, lots bigger than me, and her face reminded me of a monkey's, all twisted and ugly.

Slowly I drew out a stone, the sharpest one I

could feel. Before they realized what I was doing. I threw it at "monkey face," hitting her on the forehead.

The circle broke up as the others ran to her. She was crying harder than I ever had; she was howling. I edged away, their chants echoing in my ears. "What's the matter, Margie? The little squirt *hurt* you? You can dish it out but you can't take it!"

They were picking on one of their own, just like they had been on me. As I walked away, I knew I should have been glad. But I wasn't.

Diane Houlihan



Jamie Kelly



## BRICK HILLS

Can you remember the brick hills?  
Before they became just a place to sit down?  
Before we forgot they were Magic and Real  
And Alive with the secrets they held?

Can you remember what words were?  
Before they became just the names for things?  
Before we forgot all the things they could mean  
As we learned what each one meant?

Can you remember what We were?  
Before We became just the people we are?  
Before we forgot all the things We could do  
And were taught how things were done?

*Tom Stluka*



## CLOUDS

Clouds blown round  
so willow wispy  
Wind so cool and  
fresh and crispy  
Does so very much  
to lift me  
hold me  
toss me  
turn me  
drift me  
To the places  
that I love.

I can hear  
the ocean calling  
Waves are rising  
crashing  
falling  
With a melody  
enthralling  
Singing songs  
of life and love.

*Amy A. Meehan*



## RAIN

I wake up every morning  
to the sad songs of the rain.  
It softly whispers tales of sorrow,  
memories of pain.  
In the torrents of its anger,  
and the storming of its rage,  
The tears it cries as summer dies,  
the world begins to age.  
I hear and start to wonder  
if I'll ever see the sun.  
I long to feel its golden warmth  
before the day is done.  
But still my days are clouded  
and lost inside the gray.  
The aches and cries, the desperate lies,  
have chased my sun away.

*Diane Houlihan*



## LOVE WITHOUT EXPECTATIONS

As I sit here on this beautiful September day,  
my thoughts go back over the last seven years.

Thoughts of joy, happiness, pain and sorrow;  
mostly  
pain at this time, for we have parted.

For I love you dearly now, as I did then.

Never can you belong to me for you belong to  
another.

I saw the pulling away from me gradually creep-  
ing in  
over the last few months.

What pain! What sorrow!

Joy in knowing that I was the one who took care  
of  
you in your troubled times, even though in the  
end  
it was for the benefit of other people.

Happiness in knowing that you will be secure for  
the  
rest of your life.

Such weakness and insecurities from where you  
are  
coming

Still I love you dearly.

Oh, what a great self-satisfaction it is to have had  
the strength to give my Love Without Expecta-  
tions.



As you have said to me "I will never forget you,"  
what  
a comforting thought at a time when I hurt so  
badly,  
but still not enough to ease the pain.

For I love you dearly.

And I am left with my Love Without Expecta-  
tions.

D.W.



Jamie Kelly



# It's Only A Game

by Clifton Siple

UP AT 6. CAR GONE AGAIN. Called police, then took bus to school. Back at 12; note from police on door, saying "please come down to station." Walked down. Car in lot, detectives going over it with a fine-toothed comb. Drank coffee with the sergeant until Detective Easton came in, shaking head and muttering. Same as before; no damage to car, no prints, no other evidence except note on windshield. This one read "N-KR7."

My car was stolen for the first time two weeks ago. I went through the usual panic at the time: places to go and no way to get there; the thought that I had three hundred dollars worth of tools in the trunk and a stereo tape deck worth twice that in the dashboard; the realization that I carried only minimal insurance which wouldn't cover any damage to the car — if I ever got it back.

I drive a 1972 Dodge that is half body putty and the other half rust; it's not the kind of item eagerly sought by car thieves or chop-shops. I figured some kids had taken it for a joyride, and it would be found the next morning, minus the tape deck and tools, and maybe wrapped around a telephone pole.

Surprise! Twenty minutes after I spoke with the police, my car was found—two blocks away, in Bill Ferguson's driveway. Bill Ferguson, who feels guilty about using time that the last driver left on a parking meter— and so he puts in another quarter— Bill Ferguson, car thief. They roused Bill out of bed and took him to the police station, still in his pajamas. Bill Ferguson, Jaycee, Town Watch member, pillar of his community, being fingerprinted and mug-shot.

I didn't press charges against Bill because, other than a little inconvenience, no harm had been done. That, and aside from the fact that my car was found in his driveway, there wasn't a damn bit of evidence to hold him on. There were no fingerprints, nor any signs of forced entry, and Bill had a pretty good alibi besides.

One thing about the theft was strange enough to be downright spooky; under the windshield wiper, just where one would expect to find a parking ticket, was a note. Not your ordinary scratch-pad-ball-point-pen variety of note, either; the detective investigating the theft told me the note was on *parchment*, hand-written with a *calligraphy* pen, in Old English script. It read "N-K4."

Mystifying, to be sure; neither I nor the police could make heads or tails of it. After puzzling it out for two days, I finally shrugged it off as one of the little mysteries of life, an elegant practical joker perhaps. I went back to business as usual.

And my car was stolen again, three days later.

This time it was in Mrs. Bachetti's driveway. Mrs. Bachetti hardly fits the mold of a car thief; in fact, she's 87, rarely goes out, and moreover, never learned to drive. Needless to say, the police did not haul her down to the station, like they did Bill.

Again, my car was not damaged; how was the thief getting it started without cutting wires or pulling out the ignition lock? Again, nothing was taken; the tools and tape deck were untouched. And once again, there was a note on the windshield; this one, in that elegant script, said "N-QB6."

The game was afoot, as Sherlock Holmes would say; I just wished I knew what the game was.

Lest you think that I was being singled out for persecution, I want you to dwell on this; after the second time it happened, Detective Easton let slip that quite a few cars in the neighborhood had met with similar fates. Once he'd admitted that, his tongue started flapping like a sheet in the wind, spilling everything; two cars were disappearing every night, and were either turning up in other people's driveways or in a parking lot across town. None of them were



damaged in the least, and all of them had notes on the windshields. The notes were never exactly the same, but they all followed a similar pattern: a letter, a hyphen, two more letters, and the second one always an 'x.'

One bright young cop tried running the different messages through the motor vehicle registration computer, thinking they might be license numbers; the results were inconclusive.

The police doubled, then tripled, their patrols. The Town Watch came out in such force that the neighborhood looked like a shopping mall parking lot, with shoppers cruising around looking for spaces close to the stores. A few hardy souls sat up all night, swilling coffee and checking outside every five minutes to see if their cars were still there. A few of them came back from answering "nature's call," only to discover that five minutes is more than enough time to steal a car.

My poor old Dodge was stolen again, and that's what you read about in my journal.

I have the feeling that we're being harassed by a superior intelligence, showing us how puny our efforts are to stop them. Perhaps they're softening us up for the big blow.

No, that's crazy; it's only happening in one little neighborhood, not all over. I wish I knew what the notes mean.

I just found a plan in *Mother Earth News* for an electric fencer like the cattle farmers use, and I think it'll adapt nicely to a motor vehicle. Let's see if a few thousand volts gets the car thieves' attention.

### Saturday, September 24

Car gone again. How the hell did they get past that shock-box? Switch concealed under bumper, works under hood. Wonder how many jolts they got before they figured it out. Got to hitchhike to work; more later.

7:00 p.m.

Cops found car in parking lot this time; note read "KxN." Detective Easton told me that it wouldn't happen again; I laughed at him, especially because fencer was still on when he touched the hood. At least it works. Easton gave me lecture about 'entrapment,' but "says" this was the last time car will be stolen.

And he was right; neither my car, nor any other car found in that lot, was ever stolen

again. But a lot of other cars disappeared night after night, always being found the next day with cryptic little notes on them. I saw Detective Easton in Earl's Tavern on several occasions; he'd be off in a corner by himself, talking into his drink like a loony. Poor guy; he'd be due for a vacation at the funny farm if this case didn't break soon.

Myself, I chose to forget the whole thing; my car was no longer in danger of constant misplacement, and I had better things to do than worry about others' problems. Like relaxing. One lazy Sunday morning, I sat down to read the paper. And saw the message from one of those damned notes, right there in the newspaper.

"Summersfield Police."

"Let me speak to Detective Easton, please."

"I'm sorry sir, Detective Easton has the day off."

"Yeah, and he needs it, too. Just the same, call him and tell him to meet me at the *Tribune's* office in half an hour.

"And your name is, sir?"

I finally convinced them that I was on the level, and Easton showed up at the appointed time, looking more haggard than usual.

"What the hell's this about?" he asked. "This case is driving me over the edge, and you have to mess with me on my day off. What's the plan for today? More electric shocks? Or maybe the water torture?"

"Relax, Easton, I'm about to break your case. Did you bring all those notes?"

"Yeah, I got them out of the evidence file on the way over."

"Great. I persuaded the *Tribune's* editor to let us talk with Dr. Van Dorn."

"Who the hell's he?"

"You'll see."

Dr. Van Dorn looked like the epitome of the wacky professor, resplendent in his rumpled tweeds, and complete with goatee and coke-bottle-thick glasses. I showed him the notes, asking him if they looked familiar.

"Yes, they do." He actually said "Ya, dey do," in a thick Teutonic accent, but I'm not going to



try to duplicate that here; just imagine it, okay?

Easton cut in with, "You are under arrest. You have the right to remain si-"

"Shut up, Easton, I said. "Professor Van Dorn didn't say that he'd written them, he just said they looked familiar. In what way, Professor?"

"It's *Doctor* Van Dorn, and they're chess move notations, just like you see in my column each week."

"*Chess* notations?" bellowed Easton.

"That's right," I said, "And tell me *Doctor*, doesn't an 'x' indicate a captured piece?"

"Yes, it does."

"Just as I thought. You see, Detective Easton, what we have is some very skilled car thieves, playing chess with peoples' cars."

"Chess with peoples' cars? And I thought I was going off the deep end."

"Maybe you are anyway, but that's beside the point. Thank you for your time, Professor. Come on, Easton."

"That's Doctor-"

Slam.

Judging by the number of moves made, and the number of "captured pieces" (cars found in the lot were "captured," therefore never stolen again), this game was in its final stages. We probably could have used the Professor-I mean Doctor- to figure out the next move, but I figured he'd be more in the way than anything else. Besides, I knew now that only two particular cars needed to be watched. A few others might be stolen, but they would turn up the next day in one place or another; but those two I was thinking of were the key "pieces" in the "game."

"Easton," I said, as we walked to our cars, "I think you'd be best off watching the Smiths' and the Walkers' cars."

"Care to tell me why? I mean, it's hard enough to accept this screwy chess theory of yours, let alone letting you plan my strategy for me."

"Because they're the *kings*, Easton."

My neighborhood was once the site of two large farms. Both of them went bust during the

Depression and were repossessed by the bank. Later, in the post-war housing boom, the once-farmland was built up into a "bedroom community," but the two splendid nineteenth-century farmhouses remained. Their current market value is well over \$100,000. Jack Smith owns one of them, Brent Walker the other. Both are well-off financially, and drive cars that reflect that fact; Jack has a Mercedes, Brent a Lincoln Continental. Both yelled loud and long when their vehicles were moved in this new version of an old game.

Their houses were exactly opposite each other in position, on the far ends of the neighborhood, like the back ranks of a chessboard. Neither had had their cars stolen a great number of times; the kings in chess don't move very much. And neither had ended up in the "captured" lot yet; when a king is captured, or "mated," the game ends.

Easton finally took my advice, and had so many cops in the bushes around the Smith and Walker residences that it seemed like the aftermath of a Sunday School picnic. Brent Walker even let Easton hide inside his Lincoln; the Great Detective stretched out on the fine leather upholstery and promptly went to sleep, while the rest of the stakeout team shivered in the chilly autumn air.

And nothing happened.

We must have figured the game out right before the last move, because no more cars were stolen. The "players" probably smelled so much heat around the "kings" that neither dared make the winning move. Maybe one of them saw that he was losing badly and resigned; this happens a lot in chess tournaments.

After a month of having his property looking like an armed camp, Jack Smith decided that the neighborhood was too crazy for him. He sold his fine house, packed up and moved away, with no regrets. And that concluded the grand auto-chess game.

The people who bought Jack Smith's house moved in right before Christmas. Compared to these people, Smith was a pauper; our new neighbors, the Harringtons, didn't associate with us peons. They were only seen coming and going, in their Silver Shadow Rolls Royce.



### Saturday, December 31

Up before sunrise. Figure if I'm going to get in shape, there's no time like the present. So, out for a jog. First half-mile wasn't bad, but after that the cigarettes caught up with me. Burned

out at 3/4 of a mile. Walked past Harringtons' house . . .!

Beautiful white Rolls Royce, not a scratch on it, upside-down on front lawn; note read, "Happy New Year. Checkmate."

Clifton Siple  
3rd Place Winner



Artist Unknown



## TO UNDERTAKE (OR NOT)

I came here because I thought  
of things I ought to know,  
I've learned from all that I've been taught  
I've somewhere else to go.  
Deciding is the hardest task  
I ever undertook.  
What questions are the ones to ask?  
What answers — in which books?  
Some people seem to always know  
what's best for them to do —  
perhaps they haven't choices, though;  
they're not like me — (or you).  
I need a plan of action now  
for all the years to come.  
I need to conquer dreams and doubt,  
to take my chances — (some).  
But (I think) I'll think some more  
of all that I could be.  
For thoughts are paths that dreaming lures  
to soothe reality.

*E.J. Todak*



## **EROGENIC ENCHANTMENT**

Troubles leave the mind; comes joyous laughter

Suddenly entwined in body's rapture

A sneaky, persistent, onward climb

To heights once thought the unreachable kind

Bound for glory; at its peak is sheer delight

Too much, too soon; explodes at greatest heights

Like ripples in a wave; multiples of itself

Leaving the senses to rejoice

While they tingle with joy; rapturous

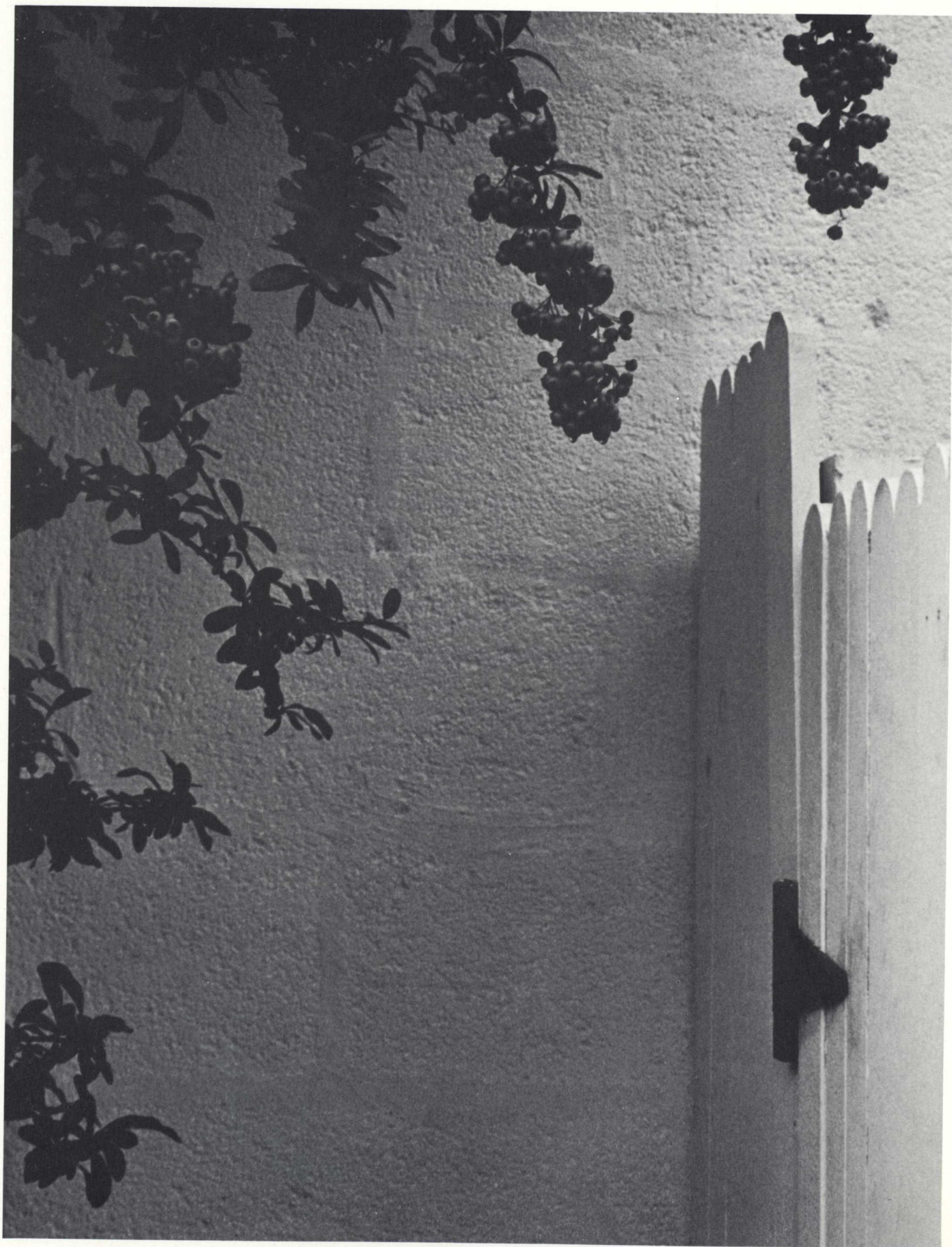
While they await the next time

To climb beyond the unreachable bounds

And experience something more profound

*Tanya Long*







# Breathing

by Caroline Burns

I AWOKE THIS MORNING WITH THE exquisite pain of a familiar dream. Tinted with a haze of green, the room with its many windows held perfect pictures in squared frames of light, pictures of trees and flying morning clouds.

The dream had not taken me for one year, a time in which the homecoming process was all consuming. My childhood home, with all its perfect window pictures, had drained me into the heavy sleep of those who have not slept.

Dylan, wounded and bloodied, was my visitor. He lay in a field of swaying wheat, gold touched. The color of earth, his hair tossed with the breeze, moving with the rhythm of wheat, a contrast to his still figure. The blood seeped slowly, patiently from his bare feet, his long fingers. No blood dare touch his gleaming earth hair, it tossed like soft silence. No blood dare smear his shirtless chest, smooth and cold in the mid-day heat. Like surf, the perfect image had returned, a calm, subconscious acceptance.

With the best intentions, with the correct intentions, I had gone beyond this house of my childhood, this place of pictures that could never quite be reached. All in the same breath, all in the same instant, I had gone and returned. I wanted to find the woman, I wanted to find the child.

Instead, I found contradictions within my sight. Like a child with a snake was I with Dylan. Coming forward with an innocent confidence, then backing off, seeing the slippery snake stuff on the surface, eyes wide with fear.

There was a field in upstate New York; the place going beyond closed windows had taken me. I was many places in between, but they don't register, they do not seem whole. A field of wheat, touched golden, was the only place I went.

On a day when the breeze seemed to be backing down and the heat aggressing, I met my contradictions. When he stood at a distance among the tall stems, eyes squinting past the haze of sun, I felt a small part of me leave, a small dying on a day that was like a trick.

He stood, free in himself, one hand shielding his eyes, the other lazily scratching his back, watching this approaching invader. I felt my heart pounding, the sweat running down my back, soaking a fine loose dress of white cotton. Rough and dry, the earth beneath my bare feet sang traps.

It is the beginning and the end that registers. The middle is not whole and is of no consequence. There were shafts of light, melodies drifting through rooms like breezes through open windows, small dyings and contradictions, all beginning and ending with Dylan.

I had a house there, in upstate New York, (only Dylan, always Dylan, only Dylan), a rented cabin with wide open windows and rough, antique furniture. I have many pictures, like postcards from foreign countries, carved like a dream.

I see him bounding through the screen door, powerfully spinning a kitchen chair around so the seat faced him. As he sat, a polished apple



was scooped from a bowl in the center of the table. After biting the apple with a crack, he reached to pull away a pink ribbon that was holding back my rumpled morning hair. As it fell to the gleaming wood floor, I somehow felt beaten.

I have been confusing the issues. I confused Dylan with breathing. I confused clear skies and jet eyes with serenity.

He came often, to watch me from the wide window sill, to spin my chair around, to ponder himself and to watch me. On some days he was like a painting, not speaking, sitting in my window, one strong leg resting on its sill. On some days he was like a ghost, like pink silk falling to polished wood.

One day, in my house of roughly woven cur-

tains, Dylan sat beside me on the sagging couch. No words, no smiles, just the feel of his long fingers running over my face. I felt every line, every crevice as he soothed the contradictions. No smiles, no words, the screen door tapped exactly three times before coming to rest in its frame. The breeze ruffled the papers spread out on the kitchen table, the cat cried out for milk. From room to room, the air moved freely, drawing pictures as it went. I did not go to the window to see the picture of his back, although to this day I am sure it was perfect.

On this morning after dreaming, I lie amidst the green haze, and I breathe deeply. I inhale air, I exhale Dylan. I inhale warmth and light. I exhale small dyings and their many veils.

Caroline Burns  
Second Place Winner





Patti Magee



## MELANCHOLIC

Man is both powerful and great  
Yet he still cannot dispose of hate

Man ignores universal laws  
Caring not for a common cause

Man is selfish and so cruel  
He turns love against God's rule

What lies beneath that iron mask  
Invades the future and the past

That Man who searches for himself  
Must be truthful to himself

Then he can benefit mankind  
And begin to change the rhymes of time

Influenced by his own destiny  
He does not care about his contemporaries

Fate must lie on Mankind's side  
If not, then Death will have his pride

*Tanya Long*





*Glenn A. Gabe*



## ON TIME/ 5:15 P.M.

The train carries high explosives:  
commuters in rumpled clothing muttering  
about the faulty air-conditioning,  
or predicting the next derailment,  
and by dabbing at fingers  
blackened with the evening edition.

A conductor barks out the next stop  
like a vegetable huckster. His black  
coat is littered with tiny white squares,  
Rapid Transit confetti.

The 5:15 blows past asphalt parking lots  
and slips beneath bridges whose concrete  
was poured in 1935. People standing on the  
grassy embankments flash into view and  
are suddenly lost as if the train's thrust  
had tossed them away.

Into the final gasps of daylight a  
silver serpent slithers into suburbia,  
its single eye shining with an obsessed  
fury.

*Steven Meglio*



## COLORS

The colors—

Such a vivid hue!

All combining as

I view

The change so subtly

as I watch

To saturate my mind

with such

Intensity

I feel so much

The glorious sight

I barely touch

Except on

Rare occasions.

*Amy Meehan*





*Bob Bowden*



## A DAY IN THE COWLANDS

I want to go to the cowlands  
a place where cows grow up and out  
The new mown hay lays light  
for cows to chomp with dignity.  
I would feel free in the cowlands,  
So much more than a calendar drawing,  
So many colors, like a child's drawing.  
I want to go to the land of earth,  
Tan and straining, like a young man's muscles.  
Earth like the taste of a long ride home,  
Earth like light replacing time.  
I want to grow young in the cowlands.  
Let winter come, let winter pass,  
With brown and white regarding blue.  
So much more than a plastic houseplant.  
One swift blade when they moan with time,  
One swift blade when their chomping is done.  
All in one cow-second-silence for those cow soft  
eyes.

*Caroline Burns*



# Taking Chances

by Elizabeth Todak

IT WAS HER BEST PAINTING. IN A work done with spontaneity and love, Jess had captured the joy and freedom of a little girl captaining a swing, the child's long slender legs reaching to the swooping green-leafed branches of the old maple tree. A cool, early spring breeze had tinged the girl's cheeks with a faint bite of shiny red apples, her straw colored hair was tousled and at peace with the motions of the swing.

The woman, brightly plump in her spring flowered dress, surveyed the picture with a discerning eye. "Are you the artist?" she asked, cocking her head at the young man who was mopping his forehead, damp with sweat from the burning sun. Even the cinders of the street seemed to swelter and melt in its intensity.

"Sorry, no." Stu smiled. "My wife is the talented one in this family, I'm afraid. Jessica Kearns. I'm just minding the fort while she checks out the competition."

"She's very good, you know."

"I think so," Stu acknowledged gravely. If only Jess thought so too, he thought, shaking his head. For a moment his eyes wandered over the crowds surging through the roped-off streets that had been designated for Ashland's Annual Arts and Crafts Fair. Jess was somewhere in that crowd. If only she were here to witness this woman's admiration of her work. Jess had somehow survived its painting, trotting off to her desk job each morning, ignoring the primitive urge to close her eyes, to sleep, to make up for the long night hours spent over her easel. But it would be impossible to pick Jess out of the crowd, so Stu turned his attention to the woman, mentally crossing his fingers.

"Yes," she said, "I like the picture. What are you asking for it?"

"Sixty-five, I believe."

"Reasonable. Hmmm. Well, perhaps I'll be back. Thank you." She smiled at him before leaving, Stu smiling back, hoping the faint disappointment he felt wouldn't show in his eyes.

Jess didn't see the woman. She was breathless, flushed from the utter exertion of being part of the crowd. She almost had to push her way through to return to the stall where Stu was sitting on a borrowed lounge chair.

She waved, his face lighting up at seeing her. It was a glad face, lean and angular; a face made for smiling, seemingly free from worry. Stu accepted what life offered head-on, as though it were a gaily wrapped gift he had greedily anticipated receiving. Jess was a stumbler, paying dearly for each tiny step with bit fingernails, empty cigarette packs and the threat of premature grayness nagging the fawn colored hair adorning her head.

"Hi! I'm back! Whew, what a day! What a turnout! Did I sell anything yet?" she asked jokingly.

"Almost. You still might. Some woman really liked the swing picture. Said she might be back."

"You're kidding!" She lit a cigarette with slow deliberation, puffing on it thoughtfully before adding, "Oh really! I can always tell when you're trying to make me feel good, Stu. You should see the exhibits down the street!"

"I don't have to. You're just as good as anyone."



"Prejudiced!" Her tone became wistful. "I know I still have so much to learn, so many techniques to develop. There was this one painting I saw, it was beautiful. I wished I could have done it. It was like reading a profound statement of what life is all about, things you always thought, but were never able to find the words. You read it and say, yeah! That's it!"

"You can paint anything you want. Not many people can do what you do."

"I don't have time to do half the things I'd like."

"You could have more time. We've talked about this time and time again, Jess. You could quit your job, devote your time to painting. I know you want to, but you won't do it."

"Haven't you noticed? It's a new world out there! I can't just quit a good-paying job on the whim and prayer of being a successful artist."

"That depends on whose eyes you wish to be successful in."

"I'd feel silly staying home, when other women were out working. We don't even have any children to use as a valid excuse for my staying home. I know our budget is tight as it is. If I didn't work, we wouldn't be able to save a cent."

"You've decided you'd be a failure before you even try," Stu said gently. "That's what the problem is. By not trying, you can't fail. Someday you'll look down and realize your plate is empty because you never put anything on it for yourself! Don't put off your dreams if you don't have to! Come on, Jess. Ever since I've known you, you've talked about being an artist. When I grow up I want to be. . . we're all grown up. Don't let it go."

"Why is it so important to you, Stu?"

"Because it's important to you. Because you're good and you won't do anything about it! You hate being a secretary, you hate using your hands for typing when they itch to live in paints. You take it out on me, you know. You're glaring every day at 5:00 when you get home. I can't stand the dirty looks, the bitchy tone in your voice."

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to be like that. I get so tired and aggravated."

"Most of the time I understand. I just wish you'd give yourself a chance and do what you want to do."

"I do what I have to do! The economy is crazy! Prices keep going higher and higher. When was the last time you went to the store?"

"So we eat hamburger instead of sirloin," Stu said, grinning.

She shook her head. "My job is a form of security for us."

"If things ever got that bad, there'd be other jobs. Look, Jess. I don't understand your feelings in this at all. We can make it on my salary. That's a fact. Everything else is just a bunch of flimsy excuses you're inventing. Take the opportunity, give yourself a chance. That's all I ask!"

"I sure love how you love me, baby. If it were completely up to you, you'd spoil me rotten."

"You always do this. Turn it into a joke when I know you're not laughing with me."

"Oh, Stu. I'm so tired of talking about the whole thing. Let's drop it, okay?"

"No. I'm going to do you a favor, Jess. I won't drop it. Not until you really think about it and give me an answer."

"How long do I get to decide?" She grinned.

"Not long."

"This is silly! Silly, Stu! I'll tell you what, silly Stu. If that woman, the one who liked my painting, if she comes back and buys it, then I'll do it. It will be just the sign I need to know I'm destined to be a great artist and not just the hack I am. Okay? Is it a deal?"

The lines of Stu's face relaxed into the smile he was accustomed to wearing. "You're right, it is silly. But okay. Have it your way."

The discussion ended as a group of men, women, and their squirming children lingered at their stall, murmuring in soft voices about the heat of the day, admiring Jess's paintings.

Jess didn't feel the heat; she reveled in their comments. Already a new image was painting itself in her mind. It was an image of a small town street, window shopping mothers and dis-



interested young tugging at their hands, yearningly impatient to return to their play. She couldn't wait to make the picture as real upon the canvas as she saw it in her mind.

She didn't want to do it in stolen hours when all else that claimed her attention had been accomplished and it was an effort to recharge flagging energy. She wanted to employ what skills she had in daylight hours, when ambition and energies were at their brightest, not even needing the sun to give them nourishment, because they were fresh and alive in themselves.

I should listen to Stu, she thought. Everything is so definite for him, he sees shades of black and white, while everything is gray for me. I'm muddling about in the gray because I'm afraid to come out in the open. Because if I did, it would be definite and maybe I wouldn't be able to live up to that.

A street vendor, gaily attired in pink and white stripes for the occasion, barked about hot dogs and ice-cold lemonade. His tone was weary, it had been a long day. Stu relieved the man of several hot dogs and drinks. Jess ate hungrily, her eyes roving the brilliantly decorated sidewalks, still festive although the paper streamers and papermache had been ripped in places by the throngs of people struggling by.

"The crowd seems to be thinning out," Stu remarked, "Looks like a lot of people are leaving."

"Getting near dinner-time, I guess. I had fun, didn't you?"

"Sure. Every year the fair gets bigger and bigger."

"So where's this woman, Stu? I'm very curious!"

"Hold your horses. . . She seemed so interested. She'll be back."

"I hope so."

"Jess, isn't it silly to base a decision on an impulsive chance like that?"

"I thought you believed in taking chances!"

"A chance on yourself, not on the whim of a total stranger."

"Thought I'd take up gambling," she quipped. "A stranger seems like a promising longshot."

"I'd rather gamble on something real. Something I know. Like myself. Belief in myself and my abilities."

"My funny philosopher! Sometimes I get reminded all over again how much I love you." Jess wanted to say more, but didn't. A woman, plump in her spring flowered dress, a child by her side, had come to the stall. The woman was examining Jess's swing picture and Stu gave her a sharp nudge. It was the woman — the woman who would buy Jess's painting, shaping the sharp edges of Jess's life into a soft, complete circle.

Jess held her breath, then let out a tiny gasp of excitement. She stared at the picture, attempting to see it as the woman would. Her eyes seemed to blur with the effort, but finally she was able to focus, not on the flaws that were glaringly evident to their creator, but on the picture, itself. What she saw was a little girl swinging on a swing, with all the joy and freedom that youth can muster, soaring to the treetops, reaching out to Jess from the picture.

It's good, thought Jess. Yes. It really is. It could be better, but still . . . it's rather good.

"I just don't know," The woman was saying. "I'll probably regret this later. I always do that. Not buy something I like and then am sorry for it when I get home. What do you think, Gretchen?"

"Pretty." The little girl squared her shoulders. "I can do that. I can swing on a swing. I can go as high as that! Can we go, Mommy? Please? I'm tired." She tugged her mother's hand.

"Oh, dear. I just don't know." The woman's face crinkled in her indecision. The potter at the next stall was groaning as he loaded his display in the trunk of the car. The afternoon was ending without the blare of trumpets and there were places to go and things to be done.

The woman sighed. "I'd better not. Come on, Gretchen. Daddy's waiting for us."

Jess and Stu were silent as they carefully stacked the canvasses, folded the easels, carrying them to the empty car, maintaining their balance of odds.

"It shouldn't matter, you know," Stu said finally, slamming the lid of the trunk down with



a loud thump. "It was just a silly game."

Jess nodded. "Sure. She'll regret it, just like she said."

What about me, she thought. Stu is offering the swing, a chance to ride as high as I can. And I'm afraid of the ride, afraid of falling, of the bruises, afraid that the simple truth lies in not ever being good enough. But doesn't the true chance consist of the freedom of hours to try? Couldn't for now just trying be enough? I want . . . I want so many things.

"I'm sorry, Jess." Stu settled comfortably behind the steering wheel, adjusting the rear-view mirror for obstacles as yet unseen. "I was so sure she'd buy it. I hope you'll think some more about it. I mean it. We can manage fine, I know we can. Please give yourself a chance.

"Just one? Is that all I get?"

"It's up to you." Stu smiled, taking the edge off the rather troubled gleam in his eye. He patted her hand and expertly backed out of the narrow street. "How about a bite to eat? We can stop at Pete and Annie's. They said to, remember? A barbecue, I think. Want to?"

"Okay. Sounds good to me." There was plenty of time. She'd tell him later, later when they were alone in each other's arms and the room was darkening with night, echoing with peaceful sighs of contemplated rest. She'd tell him then. With quiet joy and each other, they would celebrate.

Elizabeth Todak  
1st Place Winner



## STORMS

The sound excites me. When the flash suddenly wanders across the sky, it makes everything bright.

Then it is followed by a huge booming that seems to crack the inner atmosphere.

When I was a child, I used to sit in our big window and really feel the storms.

I was terrified by how loud and magnificent a storm could be. As I watched out the window, I always thought someone was crying because the raindrops ran down the pane just like tears on a person's face.

I still like to watch storms through our big window and feel the power of a blast of thunder and flash of lightning. I'm still amazed by storms.

*R.D. Lydon*





*Artist Unknown*



## DESTINY

To travel the road to Destiny

One must have Faith to guide him to his goal.

The individual will miss his role —

For without Faith, one has no verity.

And beyond the road of Destiny

One will find his inevitable Soul —

The peace and the unity of the whole

Or nightmares reaching toward Eternity.

For every man there lies Eternal Fate,

The predetermined course of his events

Which lies beyond the darkness of man's death

Where there is no certainty, no escape,

No premonitions, no acknowledgment.

Only dimensions of the unknown breath.

*Tanya Long*







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