



KIOSK

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Second Place	Stephanie Divis for her short story, "Wheel of Fortune"
Third Place	LeAnn Kamm for her short story, "Wading Through It All"

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BART FLEWELLING

Reap What You Sow

In my garden I stalk among bone china
corn stalks
irises and thistles bloom siamese
vegetables spout about the thirsty cracked ground
always upward, gasping, grasping for a summer's breeze
rustling through undeserving trees.
Damned trees stand as church elders peering down
(as if my humanness weren't worthy of their saintly stare)
Will they let God's breeze bless my oppressed green beans?
Will they have mercy to give them what even thorny thistles
have found?

Thou foolish trees, the farmer will cut you asunder
(his boy with a Partner chainsaw)
All those planted that won't bear fruit on this hell-bent
ground
will be hurled into a summer bonfire. . .

for only the meek vegetables
shall inherit this earthly
Garden.

Wheel of Fortune

Someone knocked on Ethel's door. She didn't feel like getting up from 'Wheel of Fortune.' Of course, she already had the puzzle figured out. But she did want to see which one of these dodoes was going to get it. Sighing, Ethel pushed her stout body out of the sagging chair. There was another knock on the door. Why, Ethel wondered, didn't people give a person a chance to get to the door, before they started hammering away again?

Ethel hoped it was a salesman. If it was, she wasn't even going to open the door. That was why she put the peephole there. Still, every time she went to peek out, she couldn't help but remember the gruesome tale she'd heard about the kid on drugs. He had poked a cop's eye out with a pencil when the cop (like a dummy) looked in from the outside because the peephole glass was gone. Ethel shuddered and reassured herself that nobody could poke her eye out.

It was the neighbor, Mrs. High-n-Mighty herself. What the heck did she want, Ethel wondered. She wouldn't dare come visit; she knew better than that by now. Ethel had snubbed her invitations of friendliness enough times. Why couldn't everyone just leave her alone?

As Ethel toyed with the idea of just ignoring her, Mrs. Lundy rapped on the door again, almost right where Ethel's nose was pressed. Ethel's heart felt like it did a flip-flop. Her hand flew to her mouth as she gasped and jumped back.

Flinging open the door, Ethel yelled through the screen, "What is it that's so important, you'd have to pound a lady's door and scare her half to death for?"

"Umm . . . I'm sorry to bother you Mrs. Tuttle. . . . Could I please speak with you a minute?"

"Go ahead. I can't open my screen door else my cat'll get out."

Mrs. Lundy spoke up in a loud voice. "I was drafted as head of the committee for Neighborhood Watch to report suspicious

behavior. . . ."

"Are you sayin' my behavior's suspicious?" Ethel snapped.

"I keep to myself. Nothin' wrong with that, is there?"

"No ma'am . . . I'm sorry . . . let me explain. I just need your signature on this petition. If everyone on the block signs, our block will get a Neighborhood Watch street sign. Thieves will then know that our neighborhood has agreed to report any suspicious behavior."

"Oh yeah . . . now I remember seein' somethin' on the TV 'bout that. I'll sign. I do keep a good eye on things goin' on 'round here anyways. Quick, hand me that paper-n-pen." Mrs. Lundy slipped the materials through the crack Ethel had opened in the door.

"Don't want my cat gettin' out."

Ethel remembered what she'd seen last night and almost giggled, even though it still irked her. Mrs. Lundy's teen-age daughter didn't get home until midnight the other night . . . and she was out with a boy in a car. Maybe if Mrs. Lundy would spend more time at home, Ethel had surmised, her daughter wouldn't be so wild . . . and come home at all hours slammin' car doors, makin' their dog bark, and wakin' Ethel up all the time . . . Ethel knew they had kissed too. She saw them out her window. She'd just shut up for now, though. Her head was pounding, and she just wanted to get rid of Mrs. High-n-Mighty.

"Here's my signature. That's all I want to do. I don't want to tend to no meetin's or nothin' else like that. I'll call the cops if I see anything that looks out a place. Good day."

Ethel shut the door in Mrs. Lundy's face without giving her a chance to say thank you or good-bye. She peered out the peephole and saw Mrs. Lundy standing there. Then Ethel watched her let out a sigh and turn to leave. I've still got it, Ethel thought. I can still put Mrs. High-n-Mighty in her place.

Ethel allowed herself to giggle. She reveled once again in the memory of the look on Mrs. Lundy's face the time she had caught her by surprise and yelled at her for picking the lilacs.

"I'm sorry," the high-falutin' woman had replied, backing

away from the bushes. "These are reaching over onto our side of the property line."

Yeah, Ethel had thought, that's why you're sneakin' 'em when I'm gone at the store. Ethel had told Mrs. Lundy in no uncertain terms that those were her lilac bushes, and it didn't really matter if they looked like they were on Mrs. Lundy's side of the line or not . . . they were planted on Ethel's side, and they were hers . . . so she better just keep her polished nails off them.

It still really burned Ethel up. The nerve of that woman, picking her flowers. . . . She must think she can do anything she wants. Ethel knew her kind—thought they owned the world. Ethel had even considered just cutting the bushes down. But then she would need a privacy fence (one of those nice six foot wood ones), and she couldn't afford it. Those lilac bushes were a great privacy keeper for her. That is the very reason she had planted them when she first bought the house. And now, Ethel fumed again, that Mrs. Lundy moved right in and thought she could pick 'em.

A loud commercial on TV brought Ethel out of her reverie. "Well, I missed the end of 'Wheel of Fortune'," Ethel said to her cat Tyger, who had been looking for a way to sneak out the door. Ethel shuffled out of the entry way, her slippers wisping along the thin green carpet. "Don't matter, I guess. The man with the big, purple lookin' nose probably won. That lady they had on wasn't too quick. I should be on there. I always figure the puzzle before anybody on the show does anyways."

Ethel headed for the kitchen to start the water to boil for her nightly cup of tea. Tyger was weaving in and out of Ethel's legs as she stood at the sink. "Good kitty . . . such a nice Tyg. Should we watch TV? If I remember right, there's a spook show on. We'll just curl up together and watch it. Now don't be gettin' your hopes up, you already ate, this is for me."

It was time now to shut all the shades. In a half hour it would be dark. One thing Ethel couldn't stand was the thought of someone outside, at night, being able to see in. " . . . all's I can see is my reflection. . . . Ever since I was a kid, I been scared of someone peekin' in at me, huh, Tyg." Ethel reached behind the

thin, yellow curtains and closed the Venetian blinds.

While the water boiled, Ethel continued her nightly ritual of pulling all the blinds. Tyger jumped up on the window seat, he knew the routine, too. Seeing Mrs. Lundy's car pull out of the driveway, Ethel said to Tyger, "Those neighbors never stay home. They're always off runnin' somewhere. We like stayin' home, don't we, Tyg? And now that I've earned my pension and retired, we've got lots of time to just sit, watch TV, and read magazines, huh, Tyg?" Ethel picked him up and cuddled him under her chin.

Carrying the cat, Ethel finished her nightly round, checking as always that all the windows were latched. "There, all safe. You sit here on the couch while I get into my robe."

Having made her tea, Ethel settled herself in her favorite spot. Tyger jumped up and stretched himself across the back of the chair. Ethel drank her tea and decided not to watch the movie. She didn't like the lady who was playing the lead part. The magazines were always talking about all the lovers this woman had.

To kill time until the weather came on, Ethel put on her glasses and reached for her National Enquirer. She couldn't believe that a 12-year-old girl and an 11-year-old boy were going to be parents. What kind of parents did they have anyways? Ethel thought of Mrs. Lundy's daughter. She knew the girl had to be about 16 or 17. She hoped she wasn't any younger—she was always out with boys. I'd bet my false teeth that she's pregnant within the year.

The news came on, and the weather man said there was only a slight chance of showers in the afternoon. Ethel decided to get her grocery shopping done in the morning. "Time for bed, Tyg." Ethel liked him sleeping at the foot of her bed, she enjoyed the reassurance of his presence. "I'll get you an extra special can of kitty food tomorrow . . . since you're such a good kitty."

Picking him up, Ethel headed up the steep steps to the bedroom. Hopefully, she would get a good night's sleep. Maybe the daughter would be quiet coming home and maybe

Wheel of Fortune

the dog wouldn't bark. Ethel humphed. She doubted it. It was Friday night and every Friday night was the same. And now it was worse. The son had gotten his own car. He was always coming and going, tires squealing and loud rock music blaring. Damn kids. Ethel would bet her false teeth and her month's bus pass that he would be in an accident before that car was three months old.

Telling herself she would just get as much sleep as she could, Ethel snuggled into bed. No use gettin' upset now. She'd save it all up for when she had words with them. Ethel kicked herself for not bringing it up when Mrs. Lundy was at the door. But, she reminded herself, she'd had a headache. She'd call them tomorrow.

Tyger better cut the noise or she would report it to the cops. After all, she was supposed to be on watch. There was a noise ordinance and she'd just be doing her job. With this thought, Ethel fell asleep.

Two hours later, the barking of the dog woke Ethel up. Sure enough, she thought, as she got up to look out. Over the tops of the lilacs she could make out the neighbor's daughter in the halo of light from the porch. There she was hugging and kissing, lit up like a Christmas tree, for all the world to see. If Ethel had ever had a daughter she knew her daughter would never be kissing on the porch.

Tyger brushed against her leg. The dog's barking had the same effect on him as it did on Ethel. She reached down and ran her hand along the arch of his back. The hair that was standing up lay down with a ripple of skin.

"Poor Tyg. That ole rotten dog. He ticks me off, too. I know you don't like him. Me either."

Ethel lay back down, knowing it would be asking too much to have the son come home now too. She found herself straining her ear for the booming sound of his music that always announced he was on his way home. Squealing tires always followed the loud music and Ethel wanted to be prepared.

Every time that kid took off from the stop sign he had to act

like he was on his way to a fire. "Laying some rubber." Ethel had heard that dumb saying on the TV. The guys on the show thought it was the thing to do. Peel out, lay some rubber. Ethel thought it was stupid. Who in their right mind would want to waste the rubber on their tires? If Ethel had learned to drive she knew she'd never drive fast. She'd drive slow. She wouldn't want to have an accident and hurt herself. "Haste makes waste," Ethel murmured. Tyger snuggled closer to her feet.

The screeching of tires snapped Ethel out of her doze. She heard a car door slam and the dog start barking. Tyger jerked up and ran to sit on Ethel's head. Ethel heard a gruff, "Shut up, dog. It's me. Quiet now, you'll wake everyone up." Reaching up, Ethel untangled Tyger from her long silver ponytail and placed him on the foot of her bed. She thought, just you shut up . . . you young upstart. Ethel rolled over, punched her pillows a few times, settled her hair just right, and whispered good-night to Tyger.

The smell of lilacs woke Ethel up. She loved this time of the year best when she could leave the bedroom window open a crack. If only it was quiet. Ethel retraced the order of noisy events from last night. She tossed the idea around of maybe just calling the police first instead of talking to the neighbors herself. She'd decide later. Now all she wanted was a good breakfast, and to get to the store before the 'slight' chance of showers arrived.

Ethel ate a slice of toast and drank a glass of juice. Then she fixed herself chocolate milk and got a banana, which she quickly dipped into the powdered Hershey's. Tyger ate his breakfast too. He was on a three meal a day schedule without any snacks, just like Ethel was.

When Ethel opened the blinds, the skies looked clear. She decided not to wear her raincoat. She thought the weatherman was probably right this time; it didn't look like it was going to rain until later.

"Bye, Tyg. Be a good kitty. See ya in a little bit." Ethel slipped out the door and locked it. She pinned the key to the inside of her sweater. Her coin purse, with her bus pass and

Wheel of Fortune

grocery list, was safely nestled in the pocket of her blouse.

Ethel was proud of herself for having her grocery list set up so all the items fit into one sack. She went to the store twice a week. At one time she had thought of carrying two bags once a week, but realized that she didn't want to strain herself. If she hurt her back or something, she would have to pay the deductible on her insurance. She couldn't afford that. Then her rates would probably go up. That's all she'd need!

The smell of lilacs was pleasing to Ethel. She admired how nice they looked skirting her yard. Instantly, she thought of Mrs. Lundy . . . and fumed. At least I don't have to walk past their house, she told herself.

Ethel turned the corner. She didn't know how she could still hear that neighbor kid's music from the middle of this block. Her bedroom window was clear on the other side of the house, facing away from this street! None of the other traffic bothered her, just him and his loud music and his screeching tires. She wondered why he didn't just use the other street, a block over, and stay away from her corner.

She spied the bus. It was right on time. Sitting down in the first seat, she scanned the sky. It looked like it might be clouding up. Maybe she should have brought her raincoat after all. Now she just hoped she'd make it home before it rained.

All Ethel needed was an hour to make it to the store and back home. Everything was planned out. She had a half hour in the store. Her list was organized according to the layout of the aisles. And as long as the clerks didn't poke around she'd make the bus with seven minutes to spare.

Everything went perfectly until she got in line. The lady in front of her pulled out her checkbook. Ethel glanced at the other lanes. They were all busy. She looked at her watch. Relax, she told herself. You've got plenty of time.

Then it was her turn. The checker had to go get some ones to make her change. Ethel's eyes automatically sought her watch. She still had time.

Stepping out of the store, Ethel was glad that she had gotten delayed. It was starting to sprinkle. Rats, she thought. But the

bus came early so she only had to wait for two minutes. Ethel convinced herself that at least something had gone better than usual.

It started sprinkling harder and faster during the ten-minute ride home. Ethel reached up and pulled the cord when the bus got close to her corner. As she quickly got off, she cursed the weatherman. The chance of 'slight' showers had started early. And it wasn't slight. It was now a drizzle. A steady one.

Hugging her grocery sack to her chest, Ethel walked as fast as she could, telling herself to be careful on the wet cement. At last, she was at her door.

The sack was soggy and as Ethel tried to unpin her key it gave out, spilling everything. A can of cat food landed on Ethel's big toe.

"Crappy sacks."

She picked up the cat food, unlocked her door, and slipped into the house.

"Here, kitty. Come here, Tyg." At least if he's eating, she thought, I can pick up the groceries without him trying to sneak out. Then she went to the entry way, knelt down, and opened the screen door just enough to slip the groceries in, setting them on the floor beside her. As she reached for the egg carton she saw a streak of gray zip out the door.

Crying, "Oh no!," she jerked open the door, forgot the groceries, and jogged after Tyger, who was racing for the cover of the lilac bushes.

"Here kitty, kitty. Tyger, don't run away."

Ethel crouched to look under the bushes where Tyger had disappeared, but couldn't see him. She heard barking, though. Glancing over at the neighbor's house through the bottom of the bushes, she saw the neighbor's dog with the daughter, who was evidently letting him in from his kennel, and he had seen the cat running straight towards the neighbor's house. Ethel crawled under the bushes, yelling for Tyg. A wet leaf stuck to her cheek.

The daughter was trying to call the dog and reassure Ethel at the same time. "He won't hurt him. We had a cat. He just

wants to play. Don't worry, Mrs. Tuttle."

Yeah right, you little hussy. "Just get that stupid dog under control. Make him quit chasin' my cat . . . Tyger . . . Tyger. . ."

The girl tried to grab the dog, but just as Ethel nabbed up Tyger the dog knocked her down. She hit the ground, the cat crushed to her chest, his claws digging into her arm. She didn't even feel it. The dog was jumping around her head. "Get that dog away from me."

Commanding the dog to sit, the girl got him to settle down. "I'm sorry. I'm so sor. . ."

"Just shut up."

Ethel got up and started home, the cat still crushed in her arms. "You better keep that dog still," Ethel hurled over her shoulder. She was furious, soaking wet, and muddy and her hair had come out of its bun. All she wanted to do was get home. Crossing the neighbor's driveway, she reminded herself not to slip. She didn't want to fall and let Tyger get away. She didn't hear the music or the sound of skidding tires on slick cement and the next thing she knew she was lying in the grass next to the lilac bushes. The dog was barking and tearing after Tyger, who was diving under the bushes.

Ethel woke to the smell of lilacs. She vaguely remembered people crowding her, and riding in an ambulance. Turning her head slightly, she saw a bunch of lilacs in a white vase. Mrs. Lundy jumped up. "Mrs. Tuttle . . . I'm sorry. I'm so glad you're awake. I've been waiting. I brought some lilacs for you. How're you feel. . .?"

"Where's my doctor?" Ethel glared at Mrs. Lundy, her hazel eyes narrowed to slits. "Just shut up and get out of here. I don't want to talk to you or see your face. You're gonna pay for this. My lawyer will contact you. Get out. Get my doctor."

"Ma'am . . . my son would really like to come in . . . he's waiting. He feels. . ."

"Out! Just get out!"

Mrs. Lundy left. Ethel rang for a nurse.

"How could you let that Mrs. Lundy in here? Where is my doctor? I want to know what's wrong with me. My hip hurts."

"Don't get yourself upset, Mrs. Tuttle. Everything's all right. I'll call for your doctor. He can explain. I'm sorry about Mrs. Lundy, but. . ."

"Hurry up with it, would ya? Just get my doctor."

The doctor arrived. He told her it wasn't anything serious. She had been in shock, but a good rest would take care of that. Luckily, she was where she was in the driveway. "The car's fender just barely tapped you, Ethel. And, thank goodness, the boy wasn't going very fast."

Luckily?! Thank goodness?! Ethel thought he was crazy. "Why do I have an ache in my left hip? He hit me on my right side."

"I think you must have landed on a rock. There is a big bruised area there. It'll probably be sore for a day or two, Ethel. You might want to keep your weight off it. You'll have to be the judge. You can use crutches or a walker. A walker is easier; it's not hard on your armpits. I'll prescribe you some pain pills and I want you to stay overnight. You can go home tomorrow."

Pills... overnight... home tomorrow.... This was all a blur to Ethel as she thought: walker... a walker?!

"I got stairs at my house... up to my bedroom. Do you think I'll be able to make it up them?"

"Well, Ethel, like I said, it's not really too serious. I do want you to use that hip as much as possible. Don't baby it too much or your muscles will stiffen up on you. I think you might want to wait a day before trying the stairs, though. Do you have someone to call that could set you up a place to sleep downstairs?"

"I can call my handyman, Bud."

He better do it, Ethel thought. I pay him good enough and I always give him a turkey at Christmas.

"Good. I've got to be on my way now. If there is anything you need, call a nurse. I told them, no visitors without your permission. I am sorry about Mrs. Lundy, but she was so concerned and we saw no harm. I'm sorry it upset you."

"I understand, doctor. I might of over-reacted, but I was already mad at that family before this happened."

"All right, Ethel, just get some rest now. Here's a pain pill to help you sleep. See you tomorrow."

Ethel became aware of the aroma of lilacs again. She really couldn't believe the nerve of that woman. She'd gone and picked the lilacs! She was pleased to have a piece of home here, though. Of course, she would never admit it to Mrs. Lundy. And it still bothered Ethel to think of that Mrs. High-n-mighty touching her flowers.

Thinking of the lilac bushes reminded Ethel of Tyger. She rang for a nurse.

"Did that Mrs. Lundy say anything about my cat?"

"No . . . not to me. Would you like me to call her for you?"

"Yes. I need to know about my Tyger. I can't bring myself to even think about that family without wanting to scream. I better not call them now. I'm tired."

Ethel did plan on calling them, but later, and from the privacy of her own home. She was going to give them hell. If they didn't start being quieter and leave her alone, she was going to add more money on to what she was already going to sue them for.

Waiting for the nurse to come back, Ethel prayed that the neighbors hadn't just let poor Tyger run off. She sure did miss him. She didn't blame him though; she blamed that stupid dog. "Oh no," Ethel cried. She buzzed for the nurse, and when she heard footsteps in the hall she shouted, "Find out about my groceries, too, would ya?"

It wasn't the same nurse. "Excuse me? I'm not sure. . ."

Ethel quickly explained.

"All right. I'll run and see if I can catch her. Don't worry, Mrs. Tuttle."

Ethel felt her heart racing. She wondered when that pain pill was supposed to kick in. All she wanted was to be home huggin' Tyger.

Wishing to be home made Ethel think of the walker. She sighed and reached for the phone, hoping Bud would be home

Wheel of Fortune

on a Saturday afternoon. He probably wouldn't be out doing any yard work in rainy weather. Bud answered. Ethel started explaining what happened when the nurse returned.

"Just a second, nurse. This call's important, too."

Bud said he'd be glad to do that for her. He said he'd go over there first thing in the morning. Ethel told him where to find the key that was hidden outside. "Just put it back when you're done. Thank you, Bud. Stop by tomorrow after supper and I'll pay you. I owe you for this month's work anyways."

"All right, ma'am. Tomorrow night's bowlin', though. I'll try an make it by first."

"Okay. Thanks again, Bud." The nurse had left, but as Ethel was reaching for the buzzer, she poked her head in the doorway.

"Good, you're off the phone. I found out Mrs. Lundy's daughter caught your cat and took him home. When she got there and saw your groceries, she picked them up and put them away for you. She fed your cat and locked your door. Everything's safe. Mrs. Lundy wanted me to tell you, you can call her if you need anything."

"Thank you, nurse. I'm tired now. Must be that pain pill. I'll ring if I need you again."

Ethel's last thoughts before she dozed off were of that 'hussy' being in her house.

The first thing Ethel thought when she woke up was that she had to use the bathroom. She rang for a nurse.

"Hi. Feeling better?"

"I'm not sure yet, but I am sure that I have to go to the bathroom."

"Well, Mrs. Tuttle, now would be a perfect time to see if you are going to need a walker or not. Why don't we get you up and we'll see how it feels to walk first."

Ethel sat up and slowly moved her legs to hang over the edge of the bed. With help from the nurse she stood up and tested the pain. "Ow. Umm. I think maybe I'd like to try it with that walker."

"All right, you just sit here. I'll run get it."

Wheel of Fortune

Ethel wondered why she didn't bring it in the first place. She should have been prepared.

"Here we go, Mrs. Tuttle. Let's see how we'll do in our walker."

Quit talking to me like I was a baby, Ethel thought. There's no 'we' in this—just me.

"Well, let's get goin'. I can't wait all night, ya know."

Ethel made it to the bathroom and back to her bed. She felt weak, but otherwise she felt okay. Her hip hurt, but the walker helped. Ethel knew she would be fine in a couple of days.

"You do that like a pro, Mrs. Tuttle. You won't have any problems getting around. I'm sure the doctor will release you tomorrow, as long as your muscles don't tighten up on you."

"Well, I certainly want to go home."

"I understand. It's almost time for supper. Then I'll give you another pain pill, if you want. Tomorrow will be here before you know it. Do you need anything else?"

"Yes, I do. I noticed I don't have my watch. And where are my clothes? I hate these flimsy gowns. Maybe I could have my sweater and my watch. And do you know if my house key's still pinned to my sweater? And my coin purse . . . do you know if that's still in my shirt pocket?"

"Your coin purse, your watch, and your key are locked up in a security file. But your clothes were a muddy mess. Do you have anyone to bring you clean ones?"

"No. Not really. I don't want to ask Bud for anything else."

Well . . . I'll take them down to laundry service. I know a lady down there. We'll sneak them in for you, Ethel."

"Oh good. Bring my sweater as soon as it's done, would ya?"

"Do you want me to get your watch right away?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sorry . . . I mean, please. I'm being such a grouch. I just want to be home . . . with my Tyger."

"I understand, Mrs. Tuttle. You've been through a lot in one day. Apology accepted. I hear the food cart. Enjoy your meal and then you can rest up. I'll bring your watch in a little bit."

"All right, nurse. Thank you."

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Ethel had a moment to marvel at the idea of her coin purse still being in her blouse pocket. There was such a thing as miracles, she decided. She was glad she'd pinned the key back on her sweater before she started picking up her groceries.

The food arrived and Ethel sat up to eat. She was surprised that the food looked so appealing to her, but she reminded herself that she didn't eat lunch today. She ate everything but the mixed vegetables; she'd always hated them. The potatoes were instant and the meat loaf wasn't as good as hers. But . . . Ethel had to admit it was kind of nice not having to cook for herself. She rang for the nurse when she finished her vanilla pudding.

"I'm done. Could I get a cup of tea, a pain pill, and another pillow? I need two pillows so I can sleep good."

Ethel really wanted a pillow to hug because she missed Tyger, but she wasn't telling the nurse that. The nurse took the pillow from the unoccupied bed that Ethel had been glad to see was empty.

"I'll send in a cup of tea and a pain pill. Here's your watch, but your sweater isn't done yet."

The nurse picked up Ethel's food tray and left the room.

Ethel took her pill and settled in to watch 'Wheel of Fortune.' She wished she had her sweater and her show didn't give her any pleasure. She'd figured out all the puzzles, except one. A young law student had beat her to it. It was only because she had been through so much she reassured herself.

Ethel was amazed it had only been twenty-four hours. It seemed like eons since she had been home.

When Ethel woke up she was surprised that the hospital sounds hadn't bothered her. For once, she thought, I had a peaceful night's rest. She figured it was either the pain pill she took or it was because there was no noise from the neighbors. She did vaguely remember, though, a nurse coming in during the night. Ethel sat up and noticed her clothes folded on the nightstand. Good, she thought, they're done.

Her walker was right by her bed. "Let's see how we'll do," Ethel mocked.

Ethel got out of bed and to the bathroom just fine. She was still sore but she hadn't stiffened up. As she stood there trying to decide if she could slip her slacks on, a nurse came in.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tuttle. How are you feeling?"

"I feel pretty good. I just want to get dressed and leave."

"We have to wait for the doctor's release. But you can dress now if you'd like."

"Okay. I hope I can slip my slacks on."

"I'll help you with them then you can do the rest, I'm sure."

Ethel got over her embarrassment of having the nurse help her dress by reminding herself she was going home. There she could just wear her nightgown and robe. Ethel ate breakfast and waited for her doctor. She'd decided to take a cab home. The nurse had mentioned Mrs. Lundy's offer of a ride home, but Ethel had acted like she didn't hear.

Finally, Ethel thought, as the cab pulled up in front of her house. She couldn't wait to see Tyger. Ethel was glad she didn't have steps. But she did need to ask the cabby to help her with the doors.

"There'll be a tip in it for ya. I need help so my cat won't try to sneak out while I'm gettin' in."

The cab driver held the screen. Ethel couldn't see Tyger when she opened the front door. She didn't call out, though. He was probably scared and hiding, but at least he wasn't trying to sneak out.

She paid the driver and as she shut the door, she called out for Tyger. At the sound of her voice he ran to the entryway only to stop short. He turned and ran, hiding under a chair. She walked over and sat down. She called for Tyger and he jumped up in her chair. He rubbed his head on Ethel's hand. She scratched his neck and cuddled him under her chin.

"Hi, Tyg. Don't be scared. I'm here now. Missed ya . . . did ya miss me?"

Ethel looked around the living room. Bud had pulled out the sofa bed. He'd arranged the room so Ethel could see the TV

Wheel of Fortune

either from the bed or the chair. Ethel reached for her walker. She still felt weak and she didn't trust herself to walk without support. Slowly, she moved around the room, checking to make sure there was nothing to hinder her. Tyger followed, but kept his distance. Ethel decided everything was perfect. She marveled at the good job Bud had done. Her night-clothes were on the bed for her. It was the gown she'd had on the night of all the racket from the neighbors. Ethel fretted over all the grief the neighbors caused her.

An odd thought came to Ethel's mind. Did Mrs. Lundy come over to help Bud . . . did she bring her gown down? Ethel couldn't imagine Bud thinking of that. She shook her head and dismissed this idea.

"That Bud just must be a real thoughtful person, huh, Tyg? Were you scared when he came? Not havin' me here . . . poor Tyg. I'm here now. . . . Come here . . . here, Tyg."

Tyger sulked. Jumping up in the chair he seemed to say, "Forget it. You think I'm comin' near you with that awful contraption in front of you."

"It's all right. You'll get used to it. And I won't be in it long either. We'll be back to normal soon. Let's get something to eat now and then we're gonna take a nap."

Ethel wondered where that 'hussy' had put her groceries. When she got to the kitchen she saw the groceries on the counter. Bud had organized them so they were within easy reach. Ethel had another queer thought. Did Bud do it or did that 'hussy'? Ethel tried to dismiss this thought but it lingered.

Ethel made a cup of tea and some soup. When she opened the refrigerator, she saw the flowers. A 'hope you're feeling better soon' card, signed by the Lundy's, confirmed Ethel's suspicions. Now she knew. The Lundy's had been in her house.

All she wanted was to get better, to sue the neighbors, and to forget about them. She doubted if she would ever be able to forget them. She knew, though, if she got a big enough settlement it would help her not to seethe so much every time she thought of them. She threw the flowers away.

Wheel of Fortune

After lunch Ethel decided to get in her nightgown. She had some trouble slipping off her slacks, but finally felt more comfortable. She figured she would take a pain pill to ease the tension she felt. Ethel thought about Bud maybe stopping by and her not being dressed when he did. She decided not to worry about it. Her robe would cover her.

The soaps were on. She planned on laying in bed and watching TV all afternoon. Tyger jumped up and curled himself around her feet.

"Boy, I'm exhausted, Tyg."

Ethel wondered what kind of punishment that boy was going to get. She knew he was going to have an accident.

"... just didn't know it'd be me. Maybe they made him sell it. It'd sure be peaceful without him tearing around the neighborhood, huh, Tyg?"

Ethel dozed off. When she woke up it was dark.

"Oh, my gosh. I've slept through 'Wheel of Fortune' and supertime."

Ethel's heart was racing. She hadn't pulled the blinds. And now, here she was in her night-clothes—for all the world to see. She tried to calm herself. No need to get upset she reminded herself; haste makes waste.

Trying to still her heart, Ethel carefully got out of bed. She had to go to the bathroom, but she decided to pull the blinds in the living room first. Ethel made her way around the TV-lit room. Tyger kept his distance but he still followed.

"It's okay, Tyg. We're just a little off schedule. Everything'll be all right. Don't be scared... everything's under control."

Ethel did have everything under control. She'd made it to the bathroom, and now she was on her way to the kitchen. After she pulled the shades, she was going to make a cup of tea.

"Then I can relax a minute before I think about makin' something to eat. I'll bet you're hungry again too, huh, Tyg?"

Tyger stayed behind Ethel. He sat down in the doorway.

"It's okay, Tyg. Don't be scared." When Ethel turned on the light she had to overcome the smothering feeling that had taken her breath. I'm acting like a child, Ethel told herself. I refuse to turn out this light... I am not a chicken. I'm sure nobody's out

Wheel of Fortune

there looking in anyways. Ethel let these thoughts convince her that she was not scared.

As she reached for the cord to shut the blinds, Tyger darted into the room, bumping the walker. It slid across the linoleum floor. Ethel clutched the window sill, but fell. The blinds came down on top of her. Tyger howled and dashed out.

"On my God," she bellowed.

Her hip hurt. She quickly evaluated that she had landed on her good side. Ethel had never been so mad, so relieved, and in so much pain at the same time in her life. Her hip really hurt though. She figured a board from the blinds must have knocked it.

Amidst all the racket the blinds made and the pain in her hip, she knew she heard her nightgown rip. She had felt it catch on the windowsill. Wonderful, just wonderful, she thought.

"Why me?" she wailed. "How'm I going to get up. . . ?"

Ethel thought of sliding over to the counter. She wasn't sure if she could pull herself up. What if she fell, again? Calling an ambulance was her next thought. No, she quickly decided against this. She wasn't hurt that bad. And besides, her nightgown was ripped all the way up the side. She didn't want anyone seeing her like this.

Thinking of no one seeing her made her wonder about Bud. She glanced at her watch. Thank God, she thought, it was most likely already past the time he had to be at bowling.

She thought of calling the police, but rejected this idea too. Dragging herself to the living room and using a chair to pull herself up was the only thing left.

"Oh," she groaned. "How will I get the walker then?"

Ethel could think of only one more thing to do. Should she call Mrs. Lundy? Could she bring herself to call her? Mrs. Lundy had told the nurse to tell Ethel to call if she needed anything. . . . She wanted to reject this idea, she didn't want to have to be nice to Mrs. High-n-Mighty.

Frustrated and almost crying, she told herself that at least Mrs. Lundy was a woman. Ethel looked at her ripped gown. Tears burned her eyes. Abruptly, she wiped them with the back of her hand.

Wheel of Fortune

Tyger had slunk back in.

"Oh, Tyger . . . what am I going to do? I'm not mad at you. Poor kitty . . . you've been through so much." Ethel gathered Tyger in her arms. She nuzzled her nose on his ear.

"What should I do . . . ?" Ethel absently said as her gaze landed on the kitchen window.

"I've got to call her. . . . I can't stand the thought of that window being open to the dark . . . and me laying here in my gown. . . ."

Wading Through It All

Running down that dusty road was easy. I felt guilty, though, and maybe a little annoyed. Joe had gone off again and I was supposed to go get him.

My dog sniffed the air before we crossed the fence in the ditch. I think he could smell the new mustard in the field. But the breeze was in the dust and all I could catch of the mustard was its bobbing yellow blooms. I'd brush by them with my bare legs and some of the yellow flowers would shatter and disappear into the oats. Wandering on to the edge of the field I found a place where I could slide down the bank to our dribbling creek. In one quick and agile leap my dog beat me down. I joined him and spotted a clear patch of ground to sit on, to think, to worry. My dog moved closer to sit beside me, contented, and I ran my hands down along his muddied coat. He smelled like the hogs and I knew it'd be all over my hands. I didn't care. It was a comfortable enough smell. And then, as we settled there, I could see the night approaching, young and immature in its light. I liked it. It was the kind you waited for, one of those early summer nights when all you wished for was a rainstorm or newborn kittens. Yet sometimes, on some nights, you needed a better wish than that.

Joe was my uncle. He'd been living with us and taking care of the farm ever since my dad left. I wanted to do it, but Mom groaned every time I said it. So I finally gave up and Joe moved in. Things changed without Dad around. I decided I didn't like him much anymore. I felt ashamed of it and never admitted it to anyone. And I didn't like Joe either but for different reasons. He wasn't like my dad. It was a funny thing. When you think about twins, you'd think God would make them identical all over, in everything. That way, one could always take the place of the other and no one would ever suspect. There was no sense to it.

I pulled at the strings of my faded cutoffs and let the wind take the threads away, sometimes down into the water. The night was getting dusky and vague now, perfect. It was no

wonder when you consider how much practice it had changing into its elder colors over and over again, perpetually, with every turn of the earth. I tried to scrape off the white spots on my shorts; I messed them up painting last week. I wanted to wear them like this, familiar and old, forever.

Joe was a strong, threatening man, his cigar always puffing up turmoil. He wore his cap all day outdoors and when it was time to eat supper he'd come in with that ring around his hair and manure hanging to his boot heels. Every morning I had to get up early to wash his dirty jeans and chambray shirts. It always amazed me how big they were and how heavy when wet from washing, like maybe I was carrying all of him along with me too. I'd lug them out to our clothesline and pretend they were my dad's.

My dog suddenly perked up his ears and started from his spot. He heard something then, something besides the wind which jumbled up all the other noises for me. I thought he looked like a puppy sometimes, the way he'd get all bouncy chasing after something like the squirrels. He started circling a tree, full deep in its shadow, and whining and making mischief. I wondered if I should call him off.

At first Joe and I avoided each other. I guess I tried to get to know him, but that's one thing you're never told how to do. It's supposed to come natural. I always wondered why you couldn't know everybody there was to know while you were growing up. Of course, that didn't always pay off either. I didn't want to know Joe like I knew my dad. Anyway, whenever you tried to talk to Joe he'd get these creases in his forehead and start puffing away on that cigar. It let you know he didn't want you around. He'd get that look before chores in the morning, grab his cap, and take those quick, bent over steps out to the hoghouse. But for a few months I'd followed him out anyway. I never could figure out why I did it. I thought maybe I liked my job; I took care of all the little ones. They stacked up in corners, white mounds upon white mounds, and had eyelashes like little girls. I loved them like you love all babies, but the job got old sometimes. Mostly I think I did it just to see that

Wading Through It All

everything still existed, in spite of it all, when sometimes I felt like it really didn't.

I got up to pull off my boots and go wading in the shallow water. Mom would scream at me for doing it, considering there was always barbed wire in our creek somewhere. I stepped into the murky water deciding I knew the creek too well to be in any danger. You spend a lot of summers wandering and wading when you're young. All your life is raising cats and searching for bullheads to scare up. Looking down at my feet I could see the shadows falling further into the water. I decided I'd just stand still to be safe and let the water wash over my feet. I squinted into the dimness, losing track of my dog. The night was aging quickly now.

At fourteen a lot of things don't make sense. Mostly, when I had things I didn't understand or questions my mom couldn't answer, I just kept them to myself, wading through it all when I had the time. Like sometimes I didn't know what to do when a cat got sick or how to fix the latch on the chicken house so it would stay shut at night. I didn't know what it meant when I said those words every week at communion in church. I could recite them by heart now. "Heavenly Father, receive everything which you have first given us, our selves, our time, and our possessions." And after the service those words would go round and round in my head. Mom never told me much about it, just that I had to close my eyes and say it. But, when it was over I'd always get this picture of me standing naked in the middle of nothing but darkness. I'd look around and I couldn't see anything. And it was cold. It never actually happened, but I worried about it a lot.

My feet were sinking into the sandy bottom of the creek. Bending over, I pulled up a handful of the sand and then let it melt off. It plopped into the water making a sound like it was raining. I wished it would rain. Maybe then Mom's carrots would grow and I wouldn't keep pulling up those spindly orange threads. I swished my hand in the water and then wiped it on my cutoffs thinking about the rain.

I never went out to help Joe any more. Now I took care of

Wading Through It All

our hens. It wasn't a very exciting job, feeding them and searching for eggs for Joe's breakfast. I never ate them, but I'd fry two of the biggest ones every morning for him. And then we used the rest for angel food cakes. Once, for his birthday, Mom baked one and frosted it with store-bought icing. I remember I was really hungry for it. I hadn't eaten all afternoon so I could have a big piece when suppertime came. We brought it in after the meal for him to cut, but he wouldn't do it. Instead, he just passed me the knife and made this sweeping motion with his hand like he was trying to get away a fly. It was the exact thing my dad used to do with his hand, so for an instant I thought maybe he was back, sitting there in his own chair. I hated it. But then Joe left the table and went on out to the porch without his cap. I thought maybe he decided he'd forgotten to close a gate or maybe he was just full of Mom's garden potatoes. But when I went out to ask him, he was leaning there against the railing and rocking. And crying. I hated to look at it. It's always sort of embarrassing to see that stuff, but I stood there anyway and he just cried and cried. I'd never seen anyone cry like that except for new babies. They could bawl until you swore their souls reached out to strangle you. And then you just had to go to that baby and rock it just to make it stop. Joe cried that way on his birthday, like maybe he'd never done it before, like maybe his soul was unused. I've been scared of him ever since.

I could hear our horses whinny into the night, beckoning at their gate. I knew I had to go home. Mom would be making a lunch for me to take to Joe, corned beef sandwiches with mayonnaise. And then she'd make one for me and forget to leave out the mayonnaise that I hated so much. I stepped out of the water onto the bank, the dirt sticking evenly to the bottoms of my feet. I put them in my boots anyway. Wading through the swarthy field, oats, my dog sniffed the air again along the edge of the bank. When I got back I'd have to feed the sows; it was getting late. Joe didn't think I could do it. He thought I didn't pay attention or something. I told him I watched my dad but he never believed me and he'd check them when we got back home. Carefully I began to step up the incline. I couldn't see where I was exactly; the night was coming up on full

Wading Through It All

maturity. I wondered if this was the way I had come down. It was really silly, but for an instant I was afraid. It was kind of like walking down your own dark hallway to go to bed, the one you've walked down for twelve years. You know where you are going and what's there, yet you are compelled to take those tiny, tentative steps. You never quite trust yourself.

The first time he'd sneaked off I had followed him. I hated the place, all those stone names staring at you like you were supposed to do something about it. When Joe found me there he turned all red and took me to the drugstore in town to buy lifesavers and forgiveness. But, he ate the whole pack before we got home.

I eventually got to the top of the bank and made my way back through the mustard patches to the fenceline. The wind had picked up since I left home. When I got to the road it kicked up the light gravel and stung my eyes. I couldn't see it coming and there was no getting away from it. When I'd find Joe tonight he'd just shake me off and get in his pickup, barely waiting for me to jump in beside him. Then he'd munch on his sandwich all the way home and never say a word. And I wouldn't know what to say.

Leaving behind the generous road I neared our lane and could see the flicker of the porch light and a couple of obscure figures on the porch steps. My dog was already there, wagging and waiting. As I got closer I could see a man talking with my mother, the wind tugging at her hair. There was a dimness across his features. I was almost to the light which, no matter how artificial it was, freshened the night's worn face. Then, I saw my dad. The night gathered quickly into my mind, pitchy and confusing. I moved up to the steps to see him weak and crying and familiar. It was how he'd been before he left, his soul withering, drying away with age and use until the tears came and nothing more. But then I remembered it, the burial and all. No, it couldn't be him.

LeANN KAMM

Rockies in August

The August heights, they agonize and draw you
Yearning upward
As if God had sculpted souls in them.
You want to be the trees
Climbing their way up
In rows and rows to the uppermost edge
And at such heights
To sight the valleys down
That twist and turn and curl out
Between unbroken walls.
You want to be the waters
Sweeping their way down
Running determined and infatuated and reckless.

MARLA GEARY

Just One of Those Days

The fan
on the ceiling
six wooden bats
swirling
striking at nothing.

The eyes
in my face
a pair of dice
rolling
focusing nowhere.

The heart
in my chest
a scarred record
skipping
breaking the rhythm.

The thoughts
of my mind
gelatin
stirring
never forming.

The words
on my lips
ice cubes
crying for help
melting away.

The knife
in my hand
a two-faced friend
shining
cutting its last.

The blood
on my shirt
a lie
staining
permanently.

Holier Than Curves of Pink Neon

I

The night was settling inside my skull, soothing my fuzzy brain. It was not yet 9:00 p.m., but everything in my office was dull, almost in slow motion. As I settled back in my chair, adjusting my backside around the crack in the vinyl, I poured a scotch and watched the smooth liquor trickle over the square cubes in the glass. My favorite "Who-dun-it?" rested on top of the piles of old files and unsolved cases that stared me in the face each night about this time. A murdered princess, robberies, a missing nun; you name it I had it. What was the world comin' to? Leaning back, my feet on the desk, I dozed off to the rhythm of the pink neon sign across the street flashing 24 Hour Teller.

"Whatchaupto?" pierced my eardrum at 8:00 a.m. sharp. I had been rudely awoken by the sarcastically nasal tone of Tootsie, my Southern Temp girl. Not only did I question her abilities, but the Southern Temp Service for placing her with me 3 years ago. I hadn't paid her for two and a half years, and I was reasonably sure that they hadn't either, but she hadn't noticed, so it was kept hush, a kind of an unsigned contract.

I made my way down the dusty hallway to the men's john to splash my face and make myself presentable for the day's dilemmas. On the way back, I heard voices in my office; two females. One I could make out as Tootsie's, the other was unknown to me. With a deep breath I made my manly entrance and anticipated the introduction.

"Heyaboss" her dumb tone ringing in my ear, "this is Miss Curvey from the bank across the street." Well, that was the first thing Tootsie had gotten right; Curvey she was!

"Mr. Skumm, I need your help." Little did she know, I desperately needed hers too.

"Step into my office and we'll talk," I insisted, as we strolled through the doorway to my private domain, and latched the

door for confidentiality. "What can I do ya for?"

"Oh, I'm so confused, I'm not sure where to start, Sam . . . may I call you Sam?"

"By all means."

"Thank you. Anyway, someone has stolen my favorite ring. Its a two carat diamond stone that has been in my family for over 100 years. I know that its value is a mere \$5000 and that this seems trivial to you, but it is of great importance to me and I want you to help me find it."

"I see," was all I could come up with. I hadn't had a paying case for a month and a half, and my liquor cabinet was running low, but this was odd. It sounded more like an insurance fraud than a legitimate case; but those legs, they were legit, and her toosh—whew, and well, let's just say that the way her button bulged convinced me to take it off. On, I mean to take on her case.

"What the hell, I'll give 'er a whirl Miss Curvey."

"Oh, Connie, please!"

"OK, Connie, but first give me some details about yourself, occupation, family, stuff like that." I didn't tell her, but measurements were all sized up, 38-26-34 seemed to be the magic numbers. I watched more intently than I listened to Connie Curvey tell of her family diamond, her kitten Cupcake, and her job as teller at the bank across the street.

II

I waited until Monday morning to get crackin' on the case. Connie had left me about noon on Friday and it took the weekend to cool-off. I had a lot to do for this little number and I wasn't really sure where to start. She had given me the name of her "X" boyfriend. That was as good as anything, so I grabbed the phone book and flipped to the C's. Curtis Creepe, where are you? Nothin'. Next, to the Detective's Underground Directory. Ah Ha! 1010 Ritzy Place. Sounded nice. Maybe it was time to see just what Creepe knew about Miss Curvey. I took one more glare at the neon pink sign which was flashing

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in the sunlight, but only the buzzing of the 24 hour teller sign could be heard.

I stopped at the corner and tried to call Connie... no answer. I grabbed a daily rag and hitched a cab to Ritzzy Place.

This was it. I decided 1010 stood for the number of zero's after 10 it took to buy this palace. Complete with car polishers, tennis court, pool with slippery slide, and sidewalk a block long, this wouldn't be hard to take. I strolled up the walk to meet with Creepe. As soon as I had rung the bell, the doorman, with kerchief in hand, wiped the fingerprints from the golden shield and escorted me into the entry way.

"Sam Skumm, Private Investigator," I stated. "I want to see Mr. Creepe."

"Sir, Mr. Creepe is by the pool. Shall I show you out?"

"Lead the way, skinny. Doesn't Creepe pay you enough to eat off of? You look like you could blow away."

"My wages are more than satisfactory, thank you. Through the French doors and to your left. Mr. Creepe has been informed of your pitiful presence. And Mr. Skumm, please remain out of the pool."

Kinda cocky for a servant. I followed the directions to a poolside table. "Mr. Creepe, I'm Sam Skumm."

"Yes, Mr. Skumm, what can I do for you?"

"You can start by telling me about your relationship with Miss Curvey and finish with how you can afford all of this."

"Very bold of you, Skumm. Connie was a friend. A very close friend you might say." As he put his fist to his chin, the sun glared off his pinky-ring. In my estimation about a two carat diamond pinky-ring. Where'd he get it? He could easily afford it; or was it Connie's?

How close a friend, I wondered. Lucky dog. "Miss Curvey has contacted me to help her locate a missing object."

"Don't tell me, the precious diamond that she created inside that pretty little head of hers?"

"Are you suggestin' to me that no such object exists?"

"Detective Skumm, it doesn't take a detective to tell that she's loony as a tune. She phoned me at work days ago accusing me of stealing this fictitious stone. As you can tell, I could

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purchase thousands of petty stones as Connie describes. I suggest you contact your client and clarify your assignment. Good day, Detective."

I didn't have a chance to say another word. I was swiftly escorted to the drive where the cabby awaited. In the car questions rolled through my mind. Why would Connie Curvey make up such a story? Why wouldn't she turn the stone in on an insurance policy? When Connie came into my office she claimed to be confused. What was so confusing about a stolen diamond? What was she getting at and why did she come to see me? There were so many questions with sensible answers. It was time to go beyond Connie Curvey's heavenly looks and get some answers.

III

As my cab rounded the corner and approached Connie's block, we were headed off by an ambulance and cop cars. I leaped from the cab and ran to the scene.

"Hey boys, what'a we got?"

"Looks like murder one, Sam. Guy by the name of. . ."

"Curtis Creepe. Money bags."

"Ya know 'im Sam?"

"Just left his estate a few minutes ago. Questioned him in relation to a case I'm workin' on. Any suspect?"

"He was found in apartment number thirteen. Landlord says lady by the name of Cutsie or somethin' lives there."

"Cutsie all right, but the name's Curvey . . . Connie Curvey. Where is she?"

"Not at the scene. Landlord says she hasn't been 'round since Friday."

I shook my head and entered the crime zone. Where was this hot potato?

IV

Hot potato had reminded me just how hungry I was. I slipped into the nearest greasy-spoon and ordered up a corned

beef on rye with a side of kraut. As I sat there, my nose in the paper, I heard two locals talking; drooling over a new stripper in town. She was dancing at the Top's Off. As I let my mind wander, envisioning this form of talent, suddenly the figure measured up. My Connie Curvey, it appeared, was moonlighting as a stripper. I choked down the grub and made for the door.

"Hey, where's the tip, tight wad?" followed behind me.

"Stay outta dark alleys, sweetie," I replied as the door hit me in the heels.

Once at the Top's off I inquired about the new talent that was to be appearing that night. Shelly Shaplie was her name; locker-room girl to Big Daddy, mobster extraordinaire, wanted for murders, robbery, and kidnapping a nun five years ago. He put his doll up on stage to remind all the little guys of what he had, how much he had, and what he could have if he wanted.

Was Shelly Shaplie actually my missing Connie Curvey? The names were similar enough. I guessed I would have to force myself to sit through the show and see for myself.

V

10:00 p.m. It was showtime. As the lights dimmed and the curtains opened, out wiggled Shelly Shaplie, known to me as Connie Curvey, and her costume was really odd. She was wearing a nun's habit and robe and paraded around the stage in heels high enough to give her a headstart to heaven. Through the hoopala and whistles I watched Big Daddy gloat at his possession. What was the connection? Was he that sick? Had he dressed her up like all his other victims, too? Or was she in her old work clothes? Maybe Connie or Shelly or whatever the hell her name was had "kicked the habit" for fortune and fame. Ruckus from the bouncers grabbin' a man off front stage brought my mind back to the room, and as I directed my attention toward the stage, there she stood in all her glory with what appeared to be about a two carat diamond hanging between those two perfect. . .









I waited 'round after the show to catch a word with my client, but she never came out front. Where could I find her? What was the case? She'd hired me to find her diamond, but now she had it. My prime suspect was dead on her doorstep. She had been a missing person for the last five years at least. She was a bank teller by day, stripper by night. What did it all mean? Why the story about the diamond? Maybe I'd visit her at the bank bright and early tomorrow a.m. Yeah, that was the next move.

VI

9:00 a.m. I strolled up to the bank but never got past the lobby. The bank was locked up tighter than a drum. A notice hung on the door. "BANK CLOSED TODAY IN MEMORY OF CURTIS CONRAD, BANK PRESIDENT" was printed above a photograph of the deceased. Holy hellfire, what next? Curtis Creepe, "X" boyfriend of my client was actually Curtis Conrad, bank president.

On the way back to the office I grabbed the daily edition and scanned the obituaries. Conrad's funeral was at 10:00 today. I gazed out the window wondering what to do next. Nothin' had gone right, the day was drizzly, I watched the pink neon 24 Hour Teller sign flashin' its reflection onto the wet sidewalk. I had nowhere else to go, nothin' to do; it was time to pay my respects. I walked down the hall and took the back stairs out into the alley.

As I rounded the corner and headed toward the front steps of Central Cathedral, I went over the facts again and again. This was a stupid case, these were stupid people. Why couldn't I figure out what the hell it all meant? How was Big Daddy. . .

"Pardon me, Sister," I blurted as I bounced off her chest.

A nod was all the response I got. I picked myself up off the steps, straightened my kraut-stained tie, gave my part a spit-n-smooth and entered on a cautious note.

Inside, I surveyed the pews for an inconspicuous place to sit. It was then that I noticed the nun I had bumped into before.

She was fidgetin' around and acting real uncomfortable. Almost like a whore in church.

That was it. I should've known from the bounce out front. That wasn't no nun, it was Connie Curvey.

Before I could get my thoughts back into my head, she was gone. I raced out of the Cathedral and down the steps toward town. Gone in thin air.

I ran to the office to see if she'd come to pay me a visit. No luck. Why didn't I just keep her cool thousand and forget it. Not a bad idea. I looked out the window, confused and frustrated. My miserable life didn't need crap like this. Let the force take care of it. I wasn't... The sign. Where's the sign? The pink neon 24 Hour Teller sign wasn't flashing. It's hot gray tubes of lettering hung motionless in the bank window. That was it. The answer I'd been lookin' for.

I picked up the phone and called Johnson over at headquarters.

"Don, Sam Skumm. The bank across the street's gonna be hit, and soon. Bring men, lots of 'em."

Then I grabbed my overcoat, umbrella, and trusty Colt, just in case. I strolled over to the liquor cabinet, grabbed the scotch and swallowed my courage. I wasn't sure how, but it was time to earn that thousand. I left the office and pushed the down button on the elevator.

VII

I had timed that just right. As I crossed the street, I dodged onlookers and crouched down beside Johnson.

"Men in there?" I asked.

"Yep. S.W.A.T. on the roof 'cross the street, got it covered. They're in there all right, Sammy, how'd ya know?"

"Let's just say I got somethin' for pink neon."

"You're a queer duck, Sammy. Hey, someone's comin' out."

Sure enough, it was Big Daddy makin' a break for it. He'd been on borrowed time as it was. His career ended in a failed bank heist. He and one of his boys was face down on the

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pavement.

"All men out," the lieutenant signaled. Was that it?

"How'd they get in Johnson?" I inquired for satisfaction.

"Had keys and combos fer everythin'. Musta been an inside job, but we gottem' Sammy."

Little did they know, the most dangerous party was once again missing.

VIII

I took a deep breath and climbed the back stairway to my office. It'd been a full day. A funeral, two dead gangsters, and still a missing nun. I needed a vacation.

I turned the key, pushed the door open and made my way to the scotch. As I grabbed the bottle and headed for my desk I noticed a smell, somethin' sweet, almost like incense in a church. As I looked around, I noticed somethin' outta place on my desk. What the hell? It was a book. The title read "Holy Bible." I'd heard'a it, but never did much readin'. The inscription read, "THANKS FOR YOUR HELP. THE LORD GIVETH TO BIG DADDY AND CONRAD . . . I TAKETH AWAY . . . FOREVER." It was signed "SISTER CONSTANCE" and there was five grand on the Job chapter. I understood her message. She was payin' me fer all my trouble on the job, and now she was gone. That's good business, fair 'n square.

IX

I left a hundred fer Tootsie (ah hell, I owed it to her) with a note that I was on vacation. The day hadn't ended too badly. As I walked down the back stairs and out into the alley, I listed things I needed to pack: aspirin, Alka Seltzer, Roloids. I stopped into the Five and Dime and picked up the necessities.

"And throw in the cheap mystery, pal," I demanded of the clerk standing in front of the rotating book rack.

"Give me somethin' to do on that golden beach." I had said it to impress the youn' whippersnapper. I knew I wouldn't read it; hell, it'd probably hit too close to home.

SUE A. CASE

Dance

Music pulses and lights flash
Our bodies make that eternal
Rhythm as we rest
Against one
Another.

Our hands intertwine, forming
One mutual limb. You
Lean against me
And I feel
You move.

Subconsciously we find the
motion
That will draw us closer.
We sway back
And forth.
We touch,

As lovers have for ages.
Letting ourselves
Be consumed,
For a time,

DENNIS JAMES AMAN

Le Pouvoir Absolu Du Dieu

In the evening, summer
discharge
lightning-raped sky
deeply dark, fearsome, awe
enclosing generosity
this blackened globe of life
power, force, presence
tearing the fabric of existence
altering
the purely pregnant state of being
violent acts of body and soul
in early volitionless, natural
acts of doing
giving, sharing
in life
genesis, generation
eternal generator
meteorological flashes of pain
ripping, ripping
electrical episiotomy.

A noisy, noisy process.

Then
the spiritual physical cleansing
when
the water comes
showering down
plain deafening potency
in the evening
near the end of August
Caesarean.

RICK RECTOR

I Think They're Kestrels

A dodge, a turn, a piercing cry,
a graceful roll inches from a wall—
chasing things too small for me to see,
they come out at dusk,
have names I don't know.
For years I've watched them fly,
and wondered who they cry for.

MARLA GEARY

Time and Change

The sand dunes shifting,
Within the eye of my mind.
The wind is blowing.



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Annie perched on the edge of the step, her face lively with curiosity as she impatiently watched Laura plant the last of her flowers.

"Come on, Laura," she pleaded. "I know something's up. This just isn't like you."

Laura laughed and stood up. She looked over her gardening handiwork and then collapsed onto the porch beside Annie.

"So are you going to tell me why you aren't going?" Annie persisted.

"For heaven's sake, Annie, it's just a high school reunion. What difference does it make whether I go?"

"What difference! The whole purpose of class reunions is to brag about your accomplishments. I've lived next door to you for eight years and if anyone has a life worth bragging about, it's you."

"What are you talking about? There's nothing special about my life."

"Are you kidding? You have three great kids, a beautiful home, your own business, and the only happy marriage in America. Honestly, I'm thinking of getting you a white picket fence for Christmas."

Laura smiled but turned away as Annie spoke. She looked out over the lawn and grabbed the first plausible excuse that came to mind.

"I don't think Wayne would be comfortable at my reunion."

"I don't buy that," Annie said, shaking her head. "Everyone likes Wayne. I'll grant you that he's not Mr. Excitement, but he's clean and polite, and, let's face it, when it comes to men, that's as good as it gets. At least you can dress him up and take him places and know he won't embarrass you. A lot of women aren't that lucky." Annie's voice became serious as she looked closely at Laura's face. "What's the real reason?"

Laura hesitated a moment and then blurted, "There was this guy. . . ." How could she explain Richard to anyone who

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didn't know him?

Annie tried to interpret her statement. "So you had a high school sweetheart. What's wrong with that?"

"There's more to it than a high school romance," Laura said. "Richard has been the standard I've used to judge everything I've done."

Annie turned toward her, "Start at the beginning."

Laura took a deep breath and reached back across the years to pull the memories together.

"We dated through all four years of high school. Richard was the class star. He set state records in sports, was class president and homecoming king. And all the while maintained straight A's in classes like calculus, trig, and chemistry."

"And you?" Annie asked.

"I did all right. Marching band, choir, school newspaper. Graduated second in the class."

"Behind Richard?" Annie asked.

"Behind Richard."

"Then what happened?"

"Before he left for college, he gave me a dime store ring with a piece of coal the size of a one carat diamond glued to it. He said if I would wait a few years, it would turn into a diamond."

"I have to admit, that's romantic," Annie said.

"So he took off for Stanford to study engineering, and I came to college in Michigan to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. I met Wayne here, quit college, and got married."

Annie pursed her lips and let out a low whistle. "So you turned down a Stanford engineer for a plumber?" she asked.

"Well, with the benefit of twenty years of hindsight, that's the way it looks," Laura said. "At the time, I was trading a piece of junk jewelry for the biggest diamond I'd ever seen."

Annie took Laura's left hand in hers and peered closely at the single chip in her wedding ring. She rolled her eyes and said, "Our brain cells aren't fully developed at eighteen, are they?"

"It was more than the diamond," Laura said, pulling her

hand away. "Richard had such high standards. He was always pushing me to join groups and take tough classes. He scolded me if I spent money on things he considered frivolous. I knew he just wanted me to be the best I could be, and he was very proud when I succeeded at something. But it was hard being under that pressure all the time. When I met Wayne, I realized it didn't have to be that way."

"Did you love Wayne?" Annie asked.

"I loved the idea of being married. I liked him, and I've grown to love him over the years, but I've never adored him the way I did Richard." Suddenly Laura realized what Annie must be thinking and quickly added, "I have no intention of leaving Wayne, and I'm not in love with Richard anymore. It's just that there have been times I've wondered if I took the easy way out by marrying Wayne. He was easy-going and didn't expect perfection like Richard always demanded."

"What did you mean about Richard being the standard of your life?" Annie asked.

"Every time I've been faced with a major decision, I've asked myself, 'What would Richard do?'" Laura replied. "When my first child was born, I really wanted to name her Sunshine."

"Groovy," Annie said, looking like she was eating lemons.

"Can you imagine Caroline being introduced at her high school debates as 'Sunshine Brenner'? She would never have forgiven me. Luckily, before I named her, I asked myself, 'Would Richard approve?' I knew he would choose a sensible name, so I chose Caroline." Laura shook her head. "And I see that he was right."

"No," Annie said. "You made the choice. You were right."

"When we were looking for a new house, the real estate people kept showing us blank suburban boxes. I knew Richard would scoff at a house that didn't have its own personality, so I kept searching until I found this," she said, indicating the graceful white colonial rising behind them. "I love this house. Richard was right."

"Does he guide every decision you make?" Annie asked.

"He's always in the background. It started because I didn't have any confidence in my own decisions. Then after a while,

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it just became a habit to wonder what he would think. On our family vacations, I take my kids into every museum and historical monument I can find because Richard felt that education should be part of everything you did. Because of the lectures he gave me in high school, I've tried hard to be more careful with money, and now we have a comfortable nest egg. Richard was right." Laura sighed and stared out across the lawn. "I didn't go to my ten year reunion because I felt like a failure for not finishing college. That year, I started back and got my Accounting degree."

"And you're very successful. Why can't you face him?"

Laura's voice was very small as she said, "What if I still don't measure up?"

Annie leaned back with her elbows on the step above and asked, "Do you want my opinion?"

"Of course I do."

"Speaking as someone who has attended these things, I'd be willing to bet that Richard peaked early. People who are a big success in high school often do. If he's as intense as you say, he probably can't sustain a decent relationship. I'll bet he went through several careers trying to find himself, and he probably has a drug problem. As a matter of fact, he'll probably be too ashamed to show his out-of-shape body at the reunion."

Laura laughed at her friend's vehemence. "To tell you the truth, Annie, it's occurred to me that he might be a failure, but if he is, what does that say for my choice of mentor? Either way, I can't win. I don't see how I can gain anything by going to my reunion."

"Laura, you were the one who set the standards. It was your image of him that has guided you. You may have even given him characteristics he never had. You were the one who made all of those decisions, not Richard. You have a life you can be proud of. Please go to your reunion. You need to put this to rest."

"Maybe you're right. Actually, I would kind of like to see those people again," Laura said hesitantly.

"Good. Then it's settled," Annie looked triumphant as the

two women watched Laura's husband pull into the driveway.

Her two sons burst from the car almost before it stopped. They ran past the women with only a quick, "Hi Mom, Hi Annie" thrown over their shoulders. Wayne removed fishing poles and a tackle box from the trunk of the car and walked toward the front steps.

"I don't see any fish," Laura said. "No luck, huh?"

"You should have seen the one that got away," Wayne replied.

Laura heard Annie choke back a laugh, but ignored her.

"By the way," she said to her husband, "I've decided to go to my class reunion next month after all. Annie has agreed to keep an eye on the kids for us."

"I did?" Annie said. "Oh, sure. Be happy to."

"Sounds okay to me," Wayne said as he headed into the house. "Go ahead and make the arrangements."

The hotel ballroom was brimming with people when Laura and Wayne arrived. Twenty years had brought a lot of changes to the town and the people, but there was still an air of familiarity to everything. The old stores and the faces she recognized brought Laura an unexpected sense of comfort, while the receding hairlines and pot bellies on the people she remembered as teenagers made her realize how much time had passed.

As they picked up their name tags at the reception table, Laura quickly scanned the names that had not yet been claimed. Richard's was still there. So he had not arrived yet. She knew she would not miss his grand entrance. If memory served, he was usually the center of attention in any room he entered.

To her surprise, Laura found herself enjoying the party immediately. Wayne became embroiled in a debate about the new baseball season with a group of other husbands, so she moved from one group to another, trying to remember how each person had fit into her life. She had conversations with several people only to realize as she walked away that she probably had never spoken to them in high school. Each of them had something to offer; entertaining details of their

present lives or memories she had forgotten. The effort of catching up on twenty years with three hundred people almost made her forget the reason she was there.

She was heading for the bar when she saw him walk in. There was no need to read his name tag. The searching blue eyes she remembered were now shielded by glasses, and his hair showed a touch of gray at the temples, but the years had not changed his presence. As Laura watched from a distance, several women gave him enthusiastic hugs and men eagerly shook his hand. His conversations with them were brief as he moved into the room. He seemed to be scanning the crowd, looking for someone. She saw him greet one of her high school friends and lean toward her to say something. Barbara nodded her head and began searching the room. When her eyes reached Laura, she smiled and winked at her before pointing Richard in her direction.

He made his way toward her, and she found herself straightening her shoulders and lifting her head. Something seemed different. He approached her quickly, and she instinctively extended her hand to keep him from hugging her. He looked at her hand with surprise, but then took it in both of his and held it for a moment. He didn't seem as tall as she remembered. She felt more on his level than she ever had before.

"It's been a long time, Laura," he said. "How have you been?"

"Just great," she replied, then realized she meant it. "How is everything with you?"

"Couldn't be better. I'm starting a new business in a new city and in September I'll have a new wife."

"Congratulations! Is she with you? My husband is here. I'd like for you to meet him."

"No, she couldn't make it. She's on assignment in Mexico."

"Oh, is she a reporter?"

"No, she's a model. I met her in Miami when I was setting up this new business I'm going into."

"What kind of business is it? Something in the engineering field?"

"No. I got burned out on that about five years ago. I didn't

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like working for someone else. I never was much of a team player."

"But you played football all through high school."

"Yeah, as the quarterback. I called the plays and if I'd had my way, I would have carried the whole game. Anyway, a friend of mine asked me to go in with him on a pleasure boat cruise line. You know, taking tourists out on the ocean for a few hours. It sounds like a really good deal."

"It sounds risky and expensive. Do either of you have any experience in this? I've written business plans for quite a few small businesses and. . ."

"Who needs experience? We both love sailing and as long as you want success badly enough, you'll make it work. As for the expense, well, you have to spend your money on something, right?"

Laura shook her head slowly. "Are you the same guy who once chewed me out for spending ten dollars on a manicure and told me I could have done it myself for free?"

Richard laughed and said, "People change, Laura. You can't live by the same standards you had as a teen-ager."

"You can if they're good ones," she replied, feeling her back stiffen. Sensing an argument, Laura changed the subject. "Do you have any kids?"

"Yeah, I have a daughter."

"Really, what's her name?"

"Tiffany."

Laura smiled and tucked the information away to share with Annie. "I have three children myself. Two boys and a girl. My daughter, Caroline, is president of her class and. . ."

"You've certainly kept your figure for being the mother of three. You really look great."

"Well, uh, thank you. So do you. My husband and I took up bicycling a few years ago. We really enjoy it."

"I joined a fitness center about ten years ago. My ex-wife always threw a fit when I paid the yearly fee, but it's a great place to meet people, and I really like the sauna."

Laura smiled and shook her head. "Gotta spend your

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money on something, right?"

"Exactly. Of course, if she'd had her way, I would have spent it on a diamond."

"Why?"

"We got married during college, so all I could afford was a gold band. I always meant to get her a diamond, but the money was never there, and then after a few years, the marriage started falling apart, so I figured it wasn't important then."

Laura couldn't resist. "Hmm. I seem to remember being promised a diamond myself. I got coal instead."

Richard looked puzzled and then laughed. "I'd forgotten all about that. Boy, that was really corny, wasn't it?"

"No. It was romantic. And I probably would have waited too, if I hadn't met Wayne." To herself, Laura added, "and waited and waited."

"Where is this guy who won the only woman who ever turned me down?"

With a sense of relief, Laura searched the crowd until she spotted Wayne, then motioned for him to come over. As she watched him walk toward her, she noticed for the first time things she had seen for nearly twenty years. His kind face with its perpetual smile, his solid, strong body, the hands that she had seen diaper babies and roof houses. When he stopped beside her, she put her arm around him and introduced him to Richard. The two men shook hands and Laura searched for something to fill the pause until Richard asked, "What line of work are you in, Wayne?"

"I own a plumbing business."

"Oh, a plumber, huh? Boy, that's something I couldn't do. Ranks right up there with mortician on my list of careers."

Wayne's smile never left his face as he replied, "Try getting along without us."

"Good point." Richard looked past Wayne's shoulder and seemed to see someone he recognized. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll make the rounds and see who's here. It was great seeing you, Laura. I hope we can talk again before the reunion's over. Nice meeting you, Wayne."

He was gone before Laura could respond, and as she turned back toward her husband, it occurred to her that she had not really gotten to tell Richard about her life. To her surprise, it suddenly didn't matter whether he approved of her or not. He was not the person who had made her decisions. He was just the crutch she used to convince herself that she could do it.

Wayne was still staring after Richard with a surprised look on his face. "I don't think your friend liked me," he said.

"Forget him." Laura put both arms around his waist. "Why don't we get out of here and go somewhere for dinner?"

"Are you sure? I don't mind staying if you want to."

Laura grabbed his hand and pulled him to the door. In the lobby, Wayne began searching for his car keys. When he stuck his hand into the pocket of his jacket, the smile suddenly disappeared from his face and he let out a low groan. Laura watched as he pulled out a small jeweler's box and looked at it forlornly.

"I bought this for your birthday next month, but Annie talked me into giving it to you tonight. She said I should give it to you before the reunion so you could show it off to your old friends." He held the box out to her almost apologetically. "I hope you like it anyway, even if I'm late."

Laura opened the box and gasped when she saw the diamond solitaire hanging from a slender gold chain. Wayne laughed as he gently lifted her chin to close her mouth, then took the box from her shaking hands. He pulled the necklace from its velvet case and reached behind her to clasp it around her neck.

"I remember when we were looking for your engagement ring, how much you liked the bigger diamonds. You deserved a carat back then, but I just couldn't swing it. Better late than never, right?"

Laura finally found her voice. "Wayne, it's gorgeous. I don't know what to say."

"So, do you want to go back to the party to show off?" Wayne asked, grinning at her.

Laura looked back toward the ballroom and then up at her

Junk Jewelry

husband. "No," she said, putting her arm through his, "I don't have to prove anything to anyone in there."

BART FLEWELLING

The Graduate

Out in her gravel driveway (a half-mile from the highway)
we stand iron-clad in the moonlight
my arms hung around her hips
I needed to say. . .

We were at last adults, together, but finally alone.
The calluses on my sweaty palm holding her were crusty and
thick from shaking hands.

(bigger calluses were in my plans)
Calluses seemingly to hold corn husks tonite, but
What did she say. . .

Flipping photos of a simpler ignorant age: buckteeth,
braces, Brady Bunch (groovy!). Her parents entertaining guests;
we ignore (flip), hungry hormones (flip)
What did I say. . .

'Bout time those in-laws hit the sack.
"Close that door and turn out the light" (no ma, I won't be home
tonite)

"Man, it's been a long day. Well,"
(ten feet deep, lots of water)

Arm inside Arm we walk out the door into a cathedral of (i
do)
youth.

SAY IT! SAY IT!

Spring breeze SMACKS me in the nose making it run.
(smell)

she tastes like something fattening

Pigs stand witness, grunting happiness of a coming
summer.
(you smell)

Her scent, callous hands, smooth skin
Damn gravel under my cardboard bottomed Pro Wings.
cramping thighs (her eyes)
(I, i,i,i!)

constellations, salutations, exaggerations

SAY . . . (three words)

. . . heaven's cellar
light years away (a couple feet) from boyish dreams
Touchdown!!!
and girlish screams
(giggle)
one young man finds what has evaded him in youth,
it must be good enough. Even if it isn't, it has to do.

Nothing is completely lost. Nothing that can't be found

JANE MASKE

Dad's Gallery

Remember March leaf buds in Jacobson's timber?
Dad cups his hands, in worn Hardware Hank gloves,
around his pipe.

Old Spice and Field & Stream break open buds on
branches.

Sun soaks moisture into their stems.

Dad manicures woodland with tractor and flatbed,
now deserving of Grant Wood's brush.

Remember leaves of October?

Dad, wearing a tan jacket, work boots, and a cap
with ear flaps, shuffles through

Black walnut, maple, oak, and ash bursting in
red hot burgundy and tangy tangerine.

Puffs of smoke trail as he hikes the hills.

Wind twirls leaves into ravines across the Des
Moines

River where they attach to dried ears of Iowa corn.
Some cover walnuts Dad will shuck with his corn
sheller.

Some become science projects or settle in ditches
next to cattails.

Others wait to fall in December.

LeANN KAMM

Threads

Mom sews up my socks again
Entangling, knotting threads as she goes.
I go to bed early
Fervent and awake.
Later, when the night closes up and
The radio leaks one last song
You'll come home with the look
Of where you've been,
With who knows what midnight Jezebels,
Dragging sin and
Mangling cupids at our door.
Then I'll know how to give up
To you, to sleep
Leave them there, ripped and torn awry,
For mother to pick up
Sew them back together like Raggedy
Anns.
In the morning we'll wake, side by side,
Like lines that never meet.
And mom will lay them out for another
day,
Darned and souvenired.

The Portrait

It was five in the morning and he was finally walking home. After three years in Paris, he was accustomed to late nights and sunrises.

He whistled as he briskly walked through the purple of the morning. Each intoxicated step jogged his memory. The alcohol, the laughter, the woman came back to him. He would have to paint this one. The calm in her sleeping face resembled the Madonna's. He laughed at the irony. Yes, the taste of the early morning satisfied him, as it always did. And yet, his whistle held a trace of self-contempt.

As he approached the sleeping apartment building, an unfamiliar tune mingled with his own. His steps quickened. Observing his fellow creatures of the early morning intrigued him. But as he rounded the corner of the building, the foreign music became the song of an organ grinder. The grinder tipped his hat, with only a smile for his reward. The young man's thoughts filled with admiration for the dedicated artist of the early morning. On the side of the organ was a bronze plate with the inscription, "A disciplined body is a disciplined mine is a disciplined artist." The words singed his conscience.

Ten years later, in a make-shift studio, the artist discovered a canvas for his travels: the mind of a young woman. He would paint her. He would position and control this figure and capture the enthusiasm of his youth in her face. But the eyes were wrong. They were happy and expectant. "Lower your gaze. Yes, that's it. Turn the corners of your mouth upwards, but only slightly. Now, think of something about yourself that could never be shared. You detest this part of you." Her gaze turned cold, almost contemptuous, but her smile remained. Yes, now it was his art, it was his portrait.

ANGLE HEART

Nature

Fiery stars shining
Dim sun burning
Hearts pounding with pain
Mother earth melting

All in the name of christianity
The leaves of conformity falling

Don't yield to the seasons
Don't watch the stars
Don't feel the sun on your face
Don't check your heart beat

May the mud of the earth cover you
May you smother in your
dreams of pride
May nature run its course

DENNIS JAMES AMAN

The Boscobel Spirit

I watch you work the sideline,
from a distance. You are pacing, searching,
trying to find the rhythm of the game.
Figuring the angles, waiting
for your shot to appear out of the play.
Wanting to be
at the exactly right time
and place. Precise, present,
holding a space.
Setting an internal pace: you
are here, on this spot, now.
Fitted neatly into this moment:
"This is what I am doing, here and now.
Do not disturb. I am doing only this."
In the moment, in the moment.
With sadness, I watch.
You, a part of my past.
I notice the part of you that's sexy
to me, which I never had noticed before.
Spirit, sense of self.
Youness. You have
such spirit for this life.
This time, this place, this game.
This you.

CAREY POTTER

Universal Similarities

(An Encounter of Janice and the Girls)

She was throwing empty food trays onto the big silver cart so fast that the leftover carrots and peas were flying across the floor.

"God damned kitchen. They serve these people the damnedest food. Look at this here tray . . . pancakes, stewed tomatoes and anger cake. It's no wonder we gotta shove it in their mouths."

Janice had a habit of letting everyone know what was on her mind. And not only was the food on her mind, but all over the front of her dingy, snagged polyester uniform.

"Let's get this down the hall so we can take a break."

She'd been working here longer than anyone else. Every year they gave her a bigger turkey, and every year her uniform got a little more gray; like her hair.

"Yeah kiddo. I know every resident in the place. I see 'em come in and I watch 'em die. You oughta be glad you're only here over vacation, for beer money. Summertime's bad though . . . gotta give 'em baths at least twice a week. Schedule's on the board in each bathroom. Just follow me kid. We'll have ya trained in no time. Nothin' to it."

I listened to her, watching her front tooth wiggle with every "I" and "t". Her hair was pulled back on the sides; one side had a yellow barrette, the other a red one. As I followed her down the stairs to the break room, I counted the hooks on her bra . . . there must have been at least 6 . . . and the fat bulged over the top of the elastic. Her pink and blue dotted underwear showed through her uniform pants, and a large safety pin held the pieces of worn-out elastic together at the waistband.

"Kiddo, got 35 cents for a Coke? The nuns let us keep the prices down, so long as we return the bottles."

I could hear voices of several women mumbling and laughing as we rounded the corner. Their sounds bounced off of the yellow concrete walls.

"Girls, this here's Jody. She's new . . ."

"Sure is. Look at that white uniform. Hair's fixed up real nice too," Bev interrupted.

"Damn-it Bev, give the kid a break. She's here to earn some summer money. Ain't ya honey."

"Hi. Nice to. . . ." That was all I could spit out before they were jabbering and laughing and puffing on their cigarettes " . . . Yeah, and Georgina had another blow-out this morning. Weren't even near the toilet and she just went down on us and shit all over the floor. I told the kitchen not to give her fruit for breakfast, but do they listen to me? Hell no. I'm just an aide."

"An aide with shit on her shoes," added Janice.

As I sat there, sipping on my Coke, I noticed a group of 4 women sitting beside this Bev person. Heads together. They were doing some serious discussing. Before I could even imagine what educated things they were debating, old mother hen Janice blurts out . . .

"What the hell's so good fer the ears over there?"

The lady facing Janice turned bright red.

"Oh, nothin'. We're just gabbin'."

"'Bout what honey? Must be good by the look on your face. Let us in on it. Common Wilma, the kid over there needs some learnin' while she's here."

The group disassembled and Wilma straightened her name tag as she slid her chair up toward the rest of the group. I noticed the same dingy, snagged uniform, and the clips in her hair. She was a "fixture" just like Janice.

"You know. We were just talkin' about those fun little ideas that just pop into your mind about dark. The ideas that you only tell your girlfriends, so's no man's getting the wrong idea."

"Fantasies?" I blurted out the word before I knew I was thinking it.

"Yep. There, see. Even that upstandin' little schooly over there has 'em."

"Well . . ." I started.

"Ya mean like . . . in the bathtub, and the water's running,

and the bubbles are growing . . . the shower curtain's pulled half-way closed. I'm relaxin', got my hair up. My eyes closed. All of a sudden, I hear a thump, and I see the bathroom door opening slowly."

"Yeah. . . ."

"Shh . . . and the shadow from the door gets smaller and smaller. I don't scream, 'cuz I figure if he was here to kill me, he'd of busted in and done it already."

"O.K. So then what?"

"He's big. His firm chest sticks out so far it brushes the curtain as his strong hand grabs it and pulls it back so's he can take me all in. Scannin' me from the spigot on the wall to my face . . . full view. . . ."

Big view, I thought to myself. He'll probably run away when he sees what's behind curtain #1.

"... He looks at me and says, 'Culligan Man', and his lonely days are over!"

"Damn you Janice. Really. Don't you ever have them thoughts? Somethin' romantic?"

"Alls I wanted to do was have a little fun, but seems you're all hell-bent on hearin' Wilma's lust wishes, so you go right on ahead."

"Well, I don't go sharin' this with everyone, but I had the best dream last night, and I just gotta tell someone before I bust. O.K. I'm on my way home from 6:30 mass on Saturday night. I decided to walk because the trees are so pretty now, and it isn't dark yet at 7:30 when mass is out. Anyway, I'm just walkin' and lookin' and all of a sudden this guy grabs me and pulls me behind the hedge in the Hilger's yard . . . over on 8th Street . . . and he looks me right in the eye and it's Father Bob's face and somebody else's body . . . and he says 'baby, I been wantin' you for a long time now,' and then he jerks up my skirt . . . the brown plaid one I have . . . and has his way with me . . . and it's the best I've ever had. Here I am, being screwed by this guy I don't even know . . . I'm fresh from mass . . . and I'm not scared or nothin' . . . but it's not a sin, 'cause I'm not screwin' back . . . I'm just laying there . . . lookin' up into the sky . . . and the birds are

waving at me, so I figure it ain't all wrong. . . ."

"Oh, Jesus Christ woman."

"Aw, shut up Janice. You're just pissed because you can't have them thoughts. I can't help it. I just dreamed it."

"Well? So what happened then?" Janice gave in.

"Nothin'. He just disappeared and left me layin' there with my skirt up around my ears."

"You're shittin'? Not even an 'I'll call you?'"

"Jan, it was a dream. Not my real life. Oh damn, it's 1:30. Time to go girls. Who wants to bet me \$5.00 that Georgina shit again?"

"Forget it. I'll give ya \$5 to clean her up."

"First ya knock my dreams, then ya try to bribe me. Don't ya think I know you by now? Hey kiddo . . . watch out for her. She's a bad influence."

That coming from a woman who fantasizes about promiscuity with a religious figure, I thought.

"Anything make you sick kid? Can ya handle pee, or the other, or snot? How 'bout barf? That's the only one that makes me sick. How 'bout you?"

This stinkin' summer job, I thought.

"I really don't care for any of those," I confessed.

"That's O.K. You'll get used to 'em. Hell, by the end of the summer you'll be wishin' you could stay here . . . with Wilma and me and the other girls. . . ."

We reached the top of the stairs and she turned around and gave me a warm welcome-smile.

"Like it or not, kiddo, you're one of us fer now."

SUE A. CASE

Justice and Mercy

His ponderous feet
Move slow in procession.
Bitter, button-hole eyes
Beat the heart out of all.
But bare bones and truth,
Naked as Adam in Eden
Are plucked
From what remains.

He strains his hand
To meet her's.
She is a faint thing,
A thought,
Wispy as angel hair.

Her butterfly feet fly
Etching a path alongside his.
She sees with wise eyes,
Adding flesh to the bare
Bone, and clothing
Naked truth
In humanity.

MARLA GEARY

Enlightenment

You coveted me, trapped me
and I was submissive, your slave
but there was ecstasy in this captivity.

invulnerable
You reigned over me
Cereberus of my creed.

a starving child
You placated me with a taste
of Your plate.

You were the only One I knew
and I was fulfilled, jubilant
but satisfaction breeds want.

hungry
I delved into sweet frivolity
turning from you.

unearthing experience
You would not approve of
the others.

spitefully,
You pried my mouth open
gorged me with Your spoon of truth.

I ate misery, confusion, desperation
but You
always knew.

My innocence
my faith
stripped

by You, my jealous Love
leaving me
with my naked knowledge.

Bible

Bible, pillowed pages, cushion for a sinner's fall,
Blackboard rules, the arms to bear Almighty glory,
The history of the world and crystal ball,
God's own mouth, an angel's bedtime story.

Prophet's wail, sacred dust collector,
The spiritual hammer, devout monk's only mate,
Consecrated doodles and preacher's sceptor,
The welcome mat at Heaven's gate.

A shield to fight the devil's sword,
Holy table, blessed chair and seat,
Truth's knapsack, invitation from our Lord,
Spark to gospel fire and the divine meat.

Almighty propaganda, the believer's prize,
Old man's crutch and godly ties.

RECITAL

(for Michelle McClure, who introduced me to this piece by Copland)

	harmonies	
	disarming	
	leisurely	
	are hardly	
	hints of what	
	will softly soon	
	explode as fingers	deftly delicately play at cat
	and mouse the quick	finesse and dazzling discipline
	trick chaos mimic	instinct as it trips an ageold dance
	strike chords that	resonate with something deep within
how	we take delight in	what for that poor mouse is terror
still	why think of him?	all that matters is that he amuse
the	cat is playing	lefthand tabby prancing after righthand scampers
into	meekandsqueaking	hurry-scurries up down up till lefthand leaps at
righthand	bright and	spritely teasing baiting chasing pause and in an
instant	swiftpaw falls	and whispers all is whiskertwitch and quiver fluff
and cuff	a fit	of frenzy rushing
hushing as	a	cunning paw
tips out a	C	F A
a rapid		D G
one last		B #
silence		

BART FLEWELLING

Home Sweet? Home

Crumbled and cracked, broken and bowed
Ancient gritty gravel driveway housing a white '66 Ford.
Behind even older hills, my father's castle hadn't
really a front door.
Come and see

Cement step and mouldy porch board presenting
wounds of its lifelong war against seven kids and fat Aunt
Judy's shoes.

Quilted together, the door was Mom's Frankenstein;
plastic, lathe, nail.

Coffee grounds, gangrenous banana skins on ghostly
linoleum, fronting our garbage can, a plastic ice-cream pail.

Clean this shit up!
Well, don't be a stranger, come on in!

Earthquake trenches and cracks crawling, slithering up
greasy yellow kitchen walls that were patched up, cleaned
up

We tried to clear up the wall's acne, but the crap came
back
again and again and again. . .

Come and see Mom shovel us our goulash at the cheap
wood (dining room?) table.

Us kids slurping and grunting in harmony, a Broadway
chorus in a stable.

There's a woodburner singing in a high, tree splitting
soprano, and shitting smoke stains across Mom's wallpaper.
Man, it's gettin' cold in here!

. . . up haunted house steps (creak) that you knew . . . the
traitors let you know exactly when you were past your
curfew.

How Sweet? Home

Into childish halls, painted brilliantly with crayolas by prodigies who were wise to meanings of what every dirty word was.

We got damn handy at crayoning around the cracks and crevasses.

I stalk down to my room reminiscing simpler ages
All these rooms I own, purchased heavily with laughter and a wash basin full of tears.

I guess it's time to put Peter Pan's toys away,
no more infantile fantasies acted upon childish stages.

Home sweet home, I love you so much
Let this long and winding road never disappear
nor the blue and black crayolas
of those Peter Pan years.

DAVE DIAMOND

The New Poetry

I want some lethal lines,
a hanging noose
a poem that kills,

I'm tired of new slants on butterflies
let's cut the crap.

Gimme a pen in the guts
shoot me up

Make it hurt

Let's hear it from the kids dying in
their rooms.

TIM ORWIG

Puerta del Oriente
for Cecelia

This moment of creation needs a large canvas
Like Troya's "Paisje del Oriente Ecuatoriana."
Ride the bus bound for Macas, "Emerald of the East,"
From Cuenca up the Paute River gorge
Where roof crosses anchor houses to God.
You'll pass women spinning as they walk,
Girls jumping through hoops of string,
Men plowing rock slopes with wooden stakes.
Sheep are grains of sand on the valley floor.
Higher up are lakes that reflect only sky,
Mother and source of the Andes rivers;
The Virgin blesses the divide; past her shrine
Air warms and thickens as you unwind
The switchbacks down her eastern flank.
Around the last blind curve you are borne
Into a new world. From this cleft you
Can see a thousand square miles in a wide arc.
This is Oriente, door to the Amazon,
Promised green for three thousand miles.

JAN D. HODGE

In Memoriam: Basilio C. Molina

Ten thousand miles we'd come, and just in time
to watch him die—this father to my wife
I know so slightly. How strange it is to watch:
next to the bed on which he lies past hurt
children play cards. I have so much to learn.
Watching their game, I think hard of the child
we left at home so that she could be schooled
in wood shop, algebra, and French—schooled
in safer things than death. Yet could a child
encounter death more gently?

Then I learn
how deeply quiet words can sometimes hurt.
"Do you want anything?" I ask, and watch
as he looks first at me, then at my wife:
"I want to see your daughter one last time."

STEPHEN COYNE

Missed

I used to scatter
bread in the yard
and wait on the porch
for birds to feed.
Slingshot in hand
like a wish, I tried
for weeks to kill
until a lucky shot
put a rock
into the temple
of a sparrow
and sent it
reeling sideways
across the yard.
It upended by the hedge—
disheveled, brown
feather duster—
and I ran to it
and kneeled.
The eye beneath
the circle of blood
was alive,
so I recomposed
the feathers
and lifted the bird,
as light, almost,
as air. Its heart
beat in my hand so fast
it seemed to whirl
until, without warning,
it stopped,
and the eye glazed,
and the body slumped.
I put a finger
under the chin
and lifted that head again.
I had not been hoping
for something to fly
irrevocably away.



KIOSK