



HARBINGER

STEPHENS' MAGAZINE OF THE CREATIVE ARTS • 1983

H A R B I N G E R

Stephens' Magazine of the Creative Arts • 1983

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H A R B I N G E R . . .

C A R M E N M A R T I

Patchwork

Stacking the pillows my grandmother patchworked
Before her fingers were swollen and crooked;
Pillows once oil-paint-azure and scarlet
Now quiet watercolors: dim-red, washed-blue
Her skill in the exact stiches.

Stiches more perfect
Than the ones lacing my outer thigh,
Stringing together the split skin
Like shoestrings tightening the lips
Over the tongue of my tennis shoe,
Covering the broken pieces of my bone
Split as if by a whip of lightening;
The yellow flash swimming with plum and aqua,
coloring my thigh.

C A R M E N M A R T I

After the Rain

Driving unknown roads on a spring evening,
Windows open for the first time,
Breeze riding our hair,
I want your attention.
We need to talk about the opening
In your manner lately
That I want to let open me,
But I can't.

Your hair diverts me.

The rain stopped today;
That rain that had lasted—
I like lasting things.
It's clean this evening,
Still wet, washed through
Like tears in a dream.
I sigh, lean into my door
And there's the sun,
Better after the rinse,
Brighter in her sinking.

C A R M E N M A R T I

Beat

Pressed a-
gainst your
chest I
hear your
heartbeat
counting
like a
timer
ticking
out three
minutes
for an
egg.

TERI DIANNE CIACCHI

Waxing Glorious

green wavers
in oh yes sun
see there
the silent shimmering
who glisten glows
in your presence

hush
not crying over itself
but whispering
joyous grins

we are
as often pulsating as not
never straining
for capture

we move under
over rolling breezes
i am translucent
shade watching webs
grow inward
tentatively
sharpening spare thoughts

TERI DIANNE CIACCHI

Coming Out for Air

the door
it read:
KNOCK KNOCK
for visit,
KNOCK
for complaint,
my knuckles go
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

inside
i meet
a blonde mannequin,
red lace
and a
DANGER sign.

remembering
summer casualties
i wince expectant:
cartoonitis,
molassas youth,
or one lined
plastic conversation.
what will it be?

anything but
this apology,
which only sends
wooden beads to
popcorn across the tile.
with needle and thread
i scramble
to restring them.

TERI DIANNE CIACCHI

i am too slow
to ease
any emotion, and
he saw it then
my sidelong profiled glancing.
so why did he jump?

showering on the
roof in the rain
i hold myself against
falling.
that slender awareness
of difference
pulls me.

closing my eyes
to cool their
bruising,
i feel a secret.
his music
is the sound
of skin
against wet
against sheet.
it leaves me
staring
at the tile.



DOREN MELIUS

AMY KNOX BROWN

Elements

For Lawlor

Water:

You loved it so much
I imagine you would enjoy drowning,
waves wrapping around you like arms,
filling your mouth
with something alien
you remember from another life.

Summer nights
we swim naked in lakes
the color of the sky,
bodies tangling like seaweed.
Your eyes look through me
as though I were transparent
as water,
see only the distant shore,
fingers pressing like waves
against my back.

Winter mornings

I sit by the fire
watching flames lick cement
and wonder
if this is what hell is like.
I hold my fingers closer
to the flames,
closer, too close,
eyes dry with anticipation
of how much it will hurt

and you stand by the window
watching snowflakes smear into water
and slide like snails down the glass.

AMY KNOX BROWN

Limitations

We lean over the Sheridan Boulevard bridge,
the rough ledge pressing against my stomach
makes me think

 how my mother
 used to throw her arm
 in front of me
 whenever she stopped the car too fast;
that same security: the border
between my body and the awful sense of falling,
heart dropping like a stone off a precipice.

Tonight I am almost choking
on an ecstasy as strong as fear:
I have no place to go
but down.

Summer air fills my mouth,
I am a little drunk
off your father's Chivas Regal
and when you say you love me
I don't ask for qualifiers,

but, for a second
I want to let go of your hand
lean too far
and fall,
turning over like a leaf
caught in a whirlpool of air,
or a lemming off the cliffs
of Dover Beach,
looking back, watching your face
grow smaller,
waiting for you to follow.

LYNDON JENSEN

Chicago Dance

night walks for dreams forgotten
in misty moonlight where friends are found
and tree shadows dance upon walks
cracked by men falling from ivory towers
frisked by bag ladies searching
for gold caps to replace their own as coatless children
sleep forever warmed by green motorcycle smoke as cats
crawl back to dusty alleys and answer to sun-forgotten branches
of men flying and
children crying
 rolling
 dead in the wind



JANE EPPERSON

AMY WILSON

Fireflies

Our backyard
is an ocean
filled with
yellow light
A tide that creeps
You barely
notice it

A mason jar
clutched firm
in my left hand,
the lid ready
in the right.

As if to hunt
Easter eggs
we scour the yard
Some yell
others sing
and we
extinguish the life
of fireflies

June bugs shiver
safe
under porch light
Tonight I am
ten
maybe seven

AMY WILSON

Deer Season

These weeks between summer and winter
allow for autumn, the scavenging of deer,
moose, and sometimes bear.

One sock itches, leaves catch in my hair.

There is an overture for hunters:

A bullet releases, lodges in an animal

Like an unsteady table stored in an attic,
four legs wobble, then collapse

In April, it will be tin cans, a canvas target,
crows that settle in the field

Once we walked to Thompson's Creek

where under a bridge a frog

bubbles his throat round as a piece of gum

Hand steadied, hammer cocked

I shoot a fallen branch; you laugh

If I were a son, you would teach me to shoot

straight into the walls of a deer's heart,

think me effeminate for refusing.

As a daughter, lazy for not cooking them

On the way home I watch your eyes dart like fish
from road sign to section line

On the roof, deer flop like mattresses

In dusk we drag them from the garage to the backyard

where we bind the hind legs hoof to hoof,

and hoist them over the red swing set

Their brown bodies empty of viscera,

brush the slide, the plastic horse

Entrails congeal in a green tub

October braids a chill into my hair.

AMY WILSON

The Mall

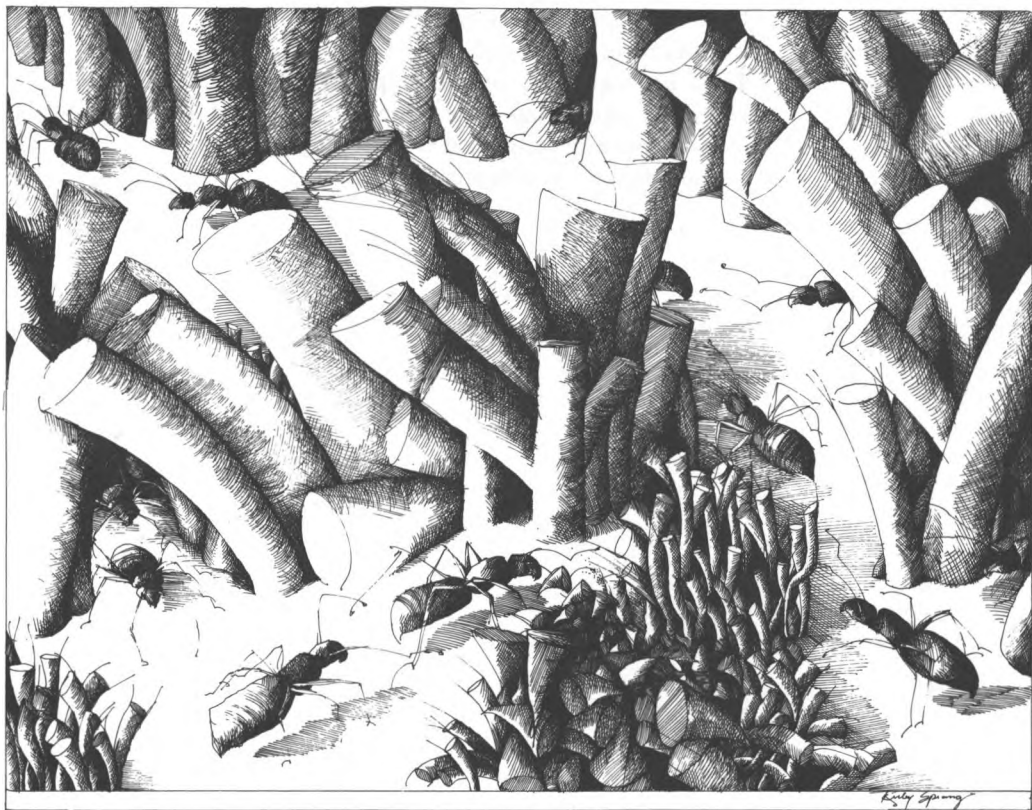
Along the freeway
cars touch bumpers
a necklace of metallic shells

The sky tarnishes
above billboards
gray as a neglected locket

If I could grab
and squeeze it
in the palm of my hand,
it would be moist as the tulip's skin
waxy as the belly of a jellyfish

Headlights
crossing the bridge
flash

Always toward somewhere
we like fish
move through plaster of Paris castles
where in aquariums
the sky is green
the gravel blue
And in between
four-armed starfish
and snails shaped like the moon .
make strange new constellations



RUBY SPRANG

CAROLYN KELLEHER

Nickelodeon

Earth colors peruse nickel sidewalks.
In covert reconnaissance, bohemians seek
inscrutable oriental boutiques.
These bedangled city people keep reggae time
and drink cappuccino quite often.
In culture-cracked speech they roast androgyny
and are defined in acquaintance's nods.

CAROLYN KELLEHER

Guises

In a lively random glance
you green-eyed sprite
ask me how I am,
and your body all but crackles
with the tension
your parents bought
you, wrapped tight in Danskin
dancing on the beam,
balanced in your mother's
lacquered dreams.

In a glance, we're one mind.
Who calls the dance now
at the hour of this little death?
We realize
the tempered chaos of our wiles
exercised among our chosen friends,
in the wild, random moments
of our enamelled smiles.
I'm all echo tonight
in this house, in your unquestionable radius.



MARIE KLEIN

SHARON O'NEIL

Where the Shoe Ends

Time can't freeze its expression
before red and white stripes balloon
my toy parachutist's fall.
A waterproof second lands on plastic
shoes, he must not have feet inside;
where the shoe ends and skin appears
is never clear, only green.
If his parachuting would end
in the limber bounce of a rubber ball,
I wouldn't embarrass him with practice.
But my childish frustration insists
sooner or later he will fall planted
on synthetic green and earn a rest.
Created with man's image he's defective
and I can't give a cross of cotton swabs
to aid his entangled landings;
that would be taking a toy too seriously.

S H A R O N O ' N E I L

Preparations

You dressed me, mother,
with the same manicured intentions
that dress a Thanksgiving turkey
to whet tired male appetites.
You put high heels on feet
which will run from the husbands
you baste and garnish me for.
Your nylons may hide the scar
I got using your shaver
before my body made up its mind
to grow a woman, but mother,
pants are always warmer
than the binding clothes you fit
around my future, gourmet pageants.
You taught me to seduce,
to throw myself silk cut low
but refuse beyond a kiss,
save my arrival with the ring.
You give me all you know
from second-hand happiness
you prize me for. Prepare
me to serve, as you will,
ready, I offer myself,
Ungarnished.

SHARON O'NEIL

Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night, fools' feast,
where costume changes triumph
Shakespeare's timed lovers bed
their misquoted marriages
in the sixth act.

Substance to shadow I wait—
a counterfeit player
in a feast of unscripted theatre—
and through my disguise find
a private performance.

As Olivia offers her love,
I practise an answer
my audience will applaud.
Love, a concentrated drama,
has made me an accomplished liar.

N O R A B . I N F A N T E

Your Book of Song

Tomorrow morning
I will open my eyes
To all mayhem.
If with a thought
I could flutter my eyelids
And escape:
You could fake it
And say a nice word.
Or sing me a song
You found in the hands
Of some old lover.
Lord, she must be trembled.
No, no kill tonight.
I just saw how painful
It is to my eyes.
They won't remain open
Any longer.
Not tonight, and
Not tomorrow morning.
I have no reason
Hidden behind this
Soft sheet.
I'll just say goodnight
And thank you.
Your song was nice,
But my eyes have sung better.

NORA B. INFANTE

Braided Cycle

Lips to mold webs
Around captured soldiers.
Arising signs
In an orbital space.
Fight out the resounding guns,
With your thumb caught
So awkwardly in the trigger.
Blood sky, dark and tempest.
Mamas' boys all together,
Under different signs,
Are still mamas' boys.
Equally, their skin
Will be pierced
By an orbiting metal,
And lead them
To that Capricorn dust.

N O R A B . I N F A N T E

No Sacrifice as Such

Chilling breath
Of a stone platform.
Swaying syllables
Slowly surrounding.
The significance was murder,
And the occasion was beauty.
Loss of hope for the body,
Along with no sentiment.
Blue, homicidal eyes;
pale spotted fingers.
Curdling cries
And soothing moans.
Light of the night
With rainbow colors,
Gleaming off a forehead
That pulsated
With protruding veins.
Sweet, sacrificial wine
From the hand of the father
To mother's upheld breast.
A demon of ritual
Brought the sky
And the cold stone
To one.
With the body,
Stenching of festivity,
Crushed in between.



JANICE OLSON

JOHNA J. RAMOS

Rounding Corners

Last in front
of what
was behind
the other side
of nowhere
is at the point
of space
that lasts for minutes
in time lapping
the side view
that's around
the corner
of the left side
next to the right
corner that's last in front.

JOHNA J. RAMOS

Self-Satisfaction

It's a cat feeding on its prey
enjoying every crunching sound
of bone against jagged teeth.
Letting death drain
down its throat,
feeling the thick
warm richness spreading
through every limb.
Leaving only remnants
of the victim scattered proudly.

JOHNA J. RAMOS

Woman's Best Friend

Bitch, in the Dictionary
means: female dog,
a spiteful woman,
or to complain.
Did Mr. Freud
have a hand in this?



JO ANN BUSH

MARIANNE TURKALJ BOST

Preparation

Opaque sky constricting
paleness descends,
thickly silent

Weak path of light—
push through this film, this phlegm

Softly flailing about as I float
in eager readiness,
for the embracing
Still, all's hazy; yet—be patient
the only way out is up

Strappings like bamboo tightly pinch
the look of delicacy
is tricky falseness

Bloated thoughts begin to inflame
etching long, red, painful streaks

Dark depths are my buoy-
line to life
cut loose my mooring
Ah! This unburdening of impedimenta
tongue-loosens much like wine

ROBIN L. LARSON

The Delivery

The night my biggest ewe dropped her water bag
I ran to the house to spread my excitement.
But as I waited
missing supper
I knew delivery would not be easy.

Two black sticks
were all we could see for too long,
so Dad had me hold her head
while he rolled his sleeves up to his elbows
and reached inside.

He squinted as she grunted in pain.
"Twins," he said,
but only one leg of each.
The eggs burned in the timer.

Two hours later
he pulled his hand out,
bright pink and gloved in plastic coating.
Exhausted,
all three of us
knew the wiggling had stopped,
and he started to cry
when I told him I might never have children.

But the ewe was not dead.
My father's hands were too big
to fit between the pinch of hip bones
so I had to try.

ROBIN L. LARSON

The heat lamp burned dust
as the straw turned red.
And the warmth of life
steamed into January air
and froze.

Gingerly, I stuck my hand into the unknown
then retracted quickly
afraid of the slime
as though it still lived.

So at last he tied some twine about their legs
and pulled
one out,
and then another.
They slid breathless
into a straw.

R O B I N L. L A R S O N

The Black Slate

On a voyage from the womb
through school
cannibals gnaw on limbs of tradition
open skins
and slice warm hearts,
playing jump rope with green veins.

Hang a skull on black silk
beside the crow's nest,
and drop a grenade
into the eyes that watch
as education bleeds through prejudice
and diffuses with salty water.

ROBIN L. LARSON

Fall

The legs of youth march fast
toward death,
faster than the legs of the aged
whose time is long and laborious.
Time presses on,
presses down
deepening mortar,
one's own life.
The flow stills,
settles in sidewalk cracks.



DEDRA BENSON

J O A N N A M C K E E

The Private

Normally, she wouldn't let anyone sit next to her. She wanted the back seat of the bus to herself, to stretch her legs across or sit in the middle for a clear view down the aisle to the windshield. She claimed the privilege from the Greyhound company itself; she traveled everywhere by bus and was on the road more than not. But fall had come early to that part of the country, warning the quahog diggers the season would soon end, and making her huddle near the window to feel the heat rising from the floor vents. Her breath fogged the glass, her father's back as he walked to the car without the slightest pull back.

It was then he sat down and settled next to her, as her father's hands dipped into his pocket for the car keys, as the bus pulled away from the curb, past the newspaper office, past the Chrysler garage. Her half of the seat pushed upward, his weight heavy against the air trapped in the leather cushion.

She thought of asking him to find another seat and scanned the front section for a vacancy. But as he tugged on his trouser legs to hide the bare flesh between cuffs and socks, she resisted, intrigued by his awkwardness from pants an inch too short. It was the blush, the kind reserved for small boys caught peeking under the skirts of mannequins, which made her stop.

"You're the first person I've ever made uncomfortable *before* I said anything," she offered casually.

"Do you mind if I sit here?"

She watched his hand travel nervously across the top of his head, her palm itching as if she felt the stiff bristles of his crew cut. "You already are," she answered, studying him openly. "They're gonna get chapped."

"Pardon?"

"Your lips. If you keep wetting them like that, they're gonna get chapped." She drew a small jar of vaseline from her duffel bag and handed it to him. He waved away her offer, but she set the jar on his knee, watching with an almost sensual interest as he

spread the gel over his lips.

"Sure is cold out," he said, replacing the lid.

"Are you from around here?" she asked.

"Stationed at Otis."

"Oh, in the service then—on leave." It was a statement, not a question.

"Came down to see my folks and—"

"And, now you're off to the city for a little carousing."

His hand instinctively felt his pocket for the money clip and the folded bills. He was uneasy about carrying such a large amount in cash, but since he did not have a checking account or any charge cards, he had to take his chances. When he got to the city, he would simply have to keep his hand in his pocket, fingers tight like a noose around the bankroll. "Actually—" he began.

"Of course you are," she answered for him. "I'm heading to Boston myself, so we can talk on the way."

"Are you from the Cape too?" he asked.

"Hardly," she answered, laughing. "I drop in every once in awhile to fight with my father and remind him he's not a hermit." She pulled a case from the duffel. "Cigarette?"

"Menthol?"

"No."

He accepted one, not caring what kind they were; he didn't smoke. "What's your name?"

Again she laughed, then hesitated. "Tyler Monroe."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," she said, feigning indignance. "I only hesitated because I've gotten into the awful habit of making up something. It's a game—to amuse me on long rides. Once I convinced this potbellied businessman my name was Brandy. I had him going all the way to St. Louis."

"Why Brandy?"

"It was my favorite drink at the time. What difference does it make anyway?—I mean, whether I'm Delores from New York or Miranda from San Diego, or . . ."

"You travel a lot then?"

"Incessantly."

He was aware that his part of the conversation was merely a succession of questions, but was comfortable in his role of inquisitor. He was a quiet man, and cared little if

JOANNA MCKEE

anyone noticed him. But he was obsessed by the psychology of others, discontent until he had laid bare their idiosyncrasies and impulses. He watched her, the way her skin tightened against her cheek bones as she inhaled from the cigarette, the way her left eyebrow arched before she spoke, as if she were never quite sure what she would say. Had he the skill to paint, he would have been an artist, for he had the eye, the patience for observation and the honesty to depict what he saw.

"So, why didn't you lie to me?"

"Hmmm?"

"How come you told *me* your real name?"

She turned slightly and the left eyebrow arched. "Because of your nose."

"My nose?"

"Yeah—it has character. That bump in the bridge. I make it a rule never to deceive anyone with character. Greek or Italian?"

"Italian." He extended his hand in belated introduction. "Private Tony Vaccarro."

"Private, it's a pleasure. Why don't we have lunch together? I know a wonderful place at the Market—my treat."

He pulled in on the handshake. He hadn't planned on going into that part of the city or even on lunching at all. He had only wanted to complete his business as quickly as possible and catch the next bus back. The pull of an impulse urged him to accept. His parents could wait to appraise his purchase. He touched his pocket and settled back against the seat.

She pushed her way through the subway turnstyle, then turned quickly to face him. "How rude of me. I didn't even think to ask you if you had other plans, just assumed you'd have lunch with me."

"Maybe it's my fault" he answered. "Did you feel obligated to ask me?"

"Obligated? In what way?" The word held no meaning for her, and he enjoyed the confused look she cast him.

"Come on. Confess. Surely you feel some sort of obligation to a man with a nose full of character."

She laughed and led him from the stuffy terminal into the light of Government Center. Once past City Hall, they would be at Quincy Market, she told him, the pride of the Boston wharfs, home of specialty shops and foods. They lunched at Houlihans. She greeted the waiter by name, introduced her guest and ordered for them.

"You know, Private, no matter where I go, I'll always come back to New England

for a piece of the fall."

"Where are you going?"

She dunked a package of oyster crackers into her chowder and toyed with them with her spoon. "You tell me, Private," she teased. "You've had enough time to make a mental blueprint of me."

She had hooked him, but he wasn't about to let her pull him in. "Ladies first," he said, bowing his head.

She closed her eyes before beginning, her long lashes dusting the lower lid. "You're twenty-four—twenty-six at tops. You're good at your job. Your record's clean. Following orders comes naturally. You're the kind of person who actually reads the safety instructions tucked in the seat pockets on airlines. You never use your salad fork for the entree and you never raise your voice in public places." She paused and tilted her head back, amusement shining in her eyes. "And you're easy to satisfy," she continued. "—too easy. A routine assignment, holidays with the family and an occasional clam roll at Howard Johnsons are enough for you. How am I doing so far?"

"Perfectly," he answered, "and you, Tyler Monroe—if that is your name—are a stifled actress heading for New York. In that duffel bag you have a collection of kooky hats and shoes and an array of stage make-up. You're a rebel, the kind of person who crosses on *DON'T WALK* signs, a person who *officially* belongs to the anti-establishment." He stopped, the thrill of the fantasy wearing thin.

"Let's keep it at that, Private. Once you know a person too well, the friendship is over. How long are you going to be in the city?"

"Just for the day, and I really should—"

"Well, then I'll stay for the rest of the day too," she interrupted. "Come on. It's time we saw the sights."

She pulled him to his feet, dug her hand into the pocket of his overcoat, and the warmth of her fingers guided him out into the market.

"Let's go in and take a closer look," he said, taking her hand. She pulled away gently and continued studying the art prints, her nose pressed to the glass. He was enjoying himself, caught up in her intrigue with the delicate pieces of pottery, the scrimshaw jewelry, the hand-woven scatter rugs, the Chinese lanterns. She studied each object, speculating on the lives of the artists. They passed one shop after another, but she never dared go inside and was content to peer at the treasures through the window.

"Monet. I like Monet—and Degas, of course. But I don't need to go inside."

JOANNA MCKEE

“Aw, come on. You’ve been looking at those for twenty minutes. I’ll even buy you one.”

She stood up fully and rubbed the coldness of the pane from her nose. “Buy me one? That’s sweet, Private, but I don’t have any walls to hang one on.”

“You must have some place that’s home,” he argued.

“What I own is in this duffel or in the suitcase we put in the bus station locker,” she said. “I have only what I need; I don’t like complications.”

She knew Boston, relying on habit, not instinct, to guide them from the bus station to the terminal, knew to take the Green Line instead of the Blue, knew which stops were next without a cue from the driver. But not once did she give any indication that the city was home, that she had an apartment, perhaps on Beacon Street, that someone was expecting her that evening for dinner.

“So you ride on a bus and stay with—friends?”

“Does that bother you?” Her voice raised in annoyance. “If you must put me somewhere, I do spend some time in the Midwest. My friend Eubie lives there. He’s eighty-eight years old and was born and raised in southern Missouri. He cheats me at poker, and when I catch him red-handed, he says, ‘How many times have I told you never to trust old men?’ We argue about everything—politics, whether his house is really in Missouri or three-fourths past the Arkansas border, which of his children he should cut out of his will. It took me awhile to realize that all the times I thought I was winning, had him nodding in agreement, he had turned off his hearing aid and wasn’t hearing a word.” She paused, breathless and exasperated. “So, if you have to connect me with one place—it’s your pick, Arkansas or Missouri.”

She passed to another window, and he stared at the steam rising from the sewer holes, coating the cobblestone with a milky film. She’s lying, he thought, as she lied to the man on the bus. Yes, she is playing, and when she grows tired of the game, runs out of stories about old men with hearing aids who cheat at cards, she will say goodbye and look for sport elsewhere. He tried to place her against a backdrop, perhaps that little apartment on Beacon Street. But this time it was filled with Monet prints and handwoven rugs. No, he thought, she lives with Eubie—who is really her grandfather—in the heart of the country’s farmland in a simple house with a card table in the kitchen. He held her for a moment in a saltbox on the Cape, but she resisted that spot along with the others, and he could only see her as she was—a curious creature who left her noseprint on the shop windows that interested her. And, for a moment, a brief moment, he understood her simplicity and envied it.

"It's beautiful," she said, drawing closer to another window.

He stopped; they had almost made a complete circle around the Market without him noticing. She was studying a huge oak desk, the kind with the top that rolled down and locked with a latchkey. But, it was up now, and the inside was filled with pigeonholes and tiny drawers with gold knobs. She ran her hand across the pane, as if feeling the smooth grain of the wood.

"Will you look at that," she said softly. "I could look at it all day—from every angle. What a fine piece—so sturdy, yet regal."

Her voice had a haunting quality, a steady rhythm of awe and longing. If he hadn't tugged on her sleeve, told her he was cold and needed a drink, she might have stood there until dusk had settled and the store had closed, leaving the desk visible by the streetlamps.

With reluctance, she took him to Lord Bumbery's on the south end of the Market, but said little, her mind on the roll-top desk. The late hour and the money in his pocket nagged at him. He ordered two brandies, then checked his watch again. Four-thirty. The streetlamps switched on outside and he knew the stores would soon close.

"You've been doing that all day," she said absently.

"Doing what?"

"Checking the time. What's your secret?"

"My *secret*?"

"Uh-huh. Mine happens to be that I'm enamoured with a roll-top desk." Her voice trailed off. ". . . something I couldn't possibly ever own."

"I don't follow you," he said, although he was beginning to understand.

She forced herself to laugh. "Private, if one doesn't have any walls, it stands to reason she doesn't have any floors. A desk needs a floor and—"

"And you float quite naturally above the ground."

"Exactly," she said, grateful for the release he had provided. "Now for you . . ."

"You really want to know?"

"Quit stalling."

"I'm getting married." There was neither a rise nor a fall in his voice. He ordered another drink, and she waited for him to elaborate or pull in on the joke.

"You're kidding," she said flatly, realizing he had been nothing but honest.

He pulled the money clip from his pocket and dropped it on the table. "For the ring," he said.

"Will you put that away!" She looked around to see who might be watching and

JOANNA MCKEE

covered the bills with her open hand. "What is this—your life savings?"

He nodded. "Twenty-five hundred. Exactly."

She finished the fresh drink, but it had no immediate effect. His announcement had sobered her, and alone had dulled her senses.

"Is she from your home town?" He nodded. "June wedding?" He nodded again. "Name?"

"Cathy," he said.

She nodded, as if the information added up to something. Her left eyebrow arched. "Look, Private, I don't mean to knock your life, but—"

He laughed, a deep throaty laugh which caught her off guard. He was amused by her confusion, by her attempt to reconcile herself, and by his own understanding. He no longer cared who she was. Tyler was enough—more than enough. He no longer wondered what her duffel bag contained, if all she owned was really in a locker in the bus station. And it no longer mattered to him where she came from or where she was going. He had what he had been fumbling for, what had eluded him all day—a piece of her will, her spirit, her restlessness and her affair with the unknown. And with that in his hand, he now wanted something for her.

"Tyler, I'll be right back," he said, rising.

"You're not mad at me, are you?"

"No, of course not. I have to make a phone call."

"Wait, and I'll come with you."

"No," he said sharply, then ironed out the edge in his voice. "It will only take a minute."

She grew impatient waiting, and when he finally returned she noticed his face was flushed and his eyes darted, not resting on anything in particular. Caught by the light, they almost glowed.

"What took you so long?" she asked, openly annoyed.

He dropped a ten dollar bill on the table. "Come on."

"Where?"

"Just come on. You'll know when we get there."

He helped her on with her cape, and before she could fasten it, took her hand and led her quickly outside. It was nearing five and the flocks were heading toward the subways, toward the various tunnels which would take them home. He was running, and had he not a firm grasp on her hand, she would have resisted his pace.

"Private, where the hell are we going?" she shouted, annoyed by, rather than

caught up in his excitement. He said something, but the words were lost in the sound of her heels hitting the cobblestone.

"We're here," he said, finally stopping in front of one of the shops.

"So what," she answered, trying to catch her breath. "We've already been here. If I don't know any better, I'd say you have shell-shock. What the—"

"Look," he interrupted, pointing to the window.

"What?—oh, the desk." She stopped, once again struck by its beauty, her eyes traveling from the smooth bottom to the carved top. "It's sold." A For Sale sign rested on the top.

"I bought it," he said.

But, she wasn't listening. "I hope they take good care of it," she said, "It's—"

"It's *yours*," he said.

"*Mine?* don't be ridiculous. I didn't buy it."

"I did. It's yours."

Her nose wrinkled up and twitched. "This is some kind of joke?"

He kissed her lightly on the forehead, turned, and began walking away.

"Wait a minute. Where are you going?" she stammered.

He walked toward her. "It's yours, Tyler. I want you to have it. You said a person could look at it all day."

"Yeah, but I didn't mean *me*. What am I going to do with it?"

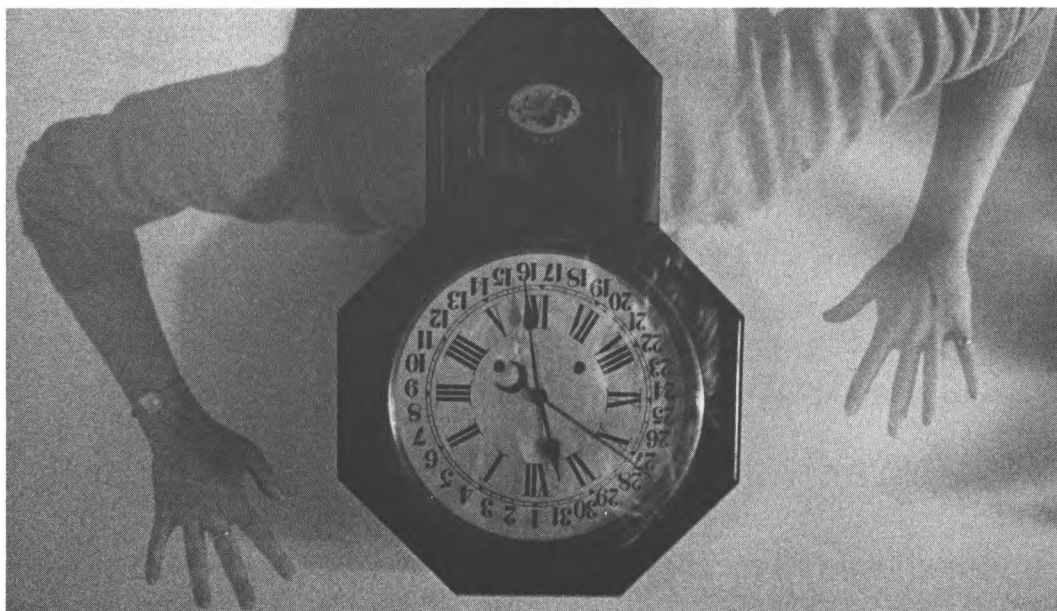
"Do with it what you like, Tyler. It's yours."

He began walking away, hands in pockets feeling only a loose piece of string and the money clip.

"I don't want that desk. I don't even like it," she screamed. "Come back here, damn you. What am I supposed to do—rent a U-Haul and lug the damn thing across the country on the back of a bus? Tony, come back here."

It was the first time she had called him by name, but it wasn't strong enough to pull him back. He headed toward the terminal, a lilt in his walk. She watched him disappear down the steps near City Hall—first his feet, then his torso, then his head. The sound of his whistling bounced off the brick buildings and hung in the air, now quiet at dusk.

COLLEEN BEVINS



PENNEY LUTHI

Special Moments

The wine bottle stood on the shelf gathering dust. She wasn't a very good housekeeper, and besides, she'd had it for ten years. She'd moved a few times since then, but it always found its way to a prominent shelf, to stand out, and remind her of its purpose. Some friends had given it to her for her twenty-first birthday. The friends weren't her closest friends, and that seemed to savor the appeal. And because it was an expensive bottle of wine, with a French name, they told her to save it for a special moment.

So she put the bottle on her top shelf among framed photographs and memorabilia and decided to wait for that special moment. Sometimes she worried that the special moment would come and the wine would be hot from just sitting at room temperature, but she was halfway afraid to put it in the refrigerator, for fear that some night her drunken roommates would open the fridge and slurp it down, not realizing its value. And even if they replaced it, it wouldn't be the same. She had been tempted to go to a liquor store to see just how expensive it was, but it couldn't be *that* expensive, knowing the financial situation of her friends, and besides, that would be a callous thing to do. Anyway, that was part of the mystery.

Another reason she was afraid to put it in the refrigerator was that she thought if she did, everyone would expect for some great moment to occur and for her to share the wine, and what if that moment didn't come?

In college she was in love with Michael, but she wouldn't admit it then. He was a free spirit, one full of life, parties, wheat germ and hand woven sandals. He was not ready to settle down. He had never told her so; he didn't need to, his actions were clear. And she, being one who liked to come out on top, would never admit that he was indeed very special to her. Instead, she told her friends that Michael was a fun sort of guy to know while in college, but nothing serious. Definitely not special enough for the wine. So it remained on her shelf.

Once she graduated from college and moved into her own apartment, she still set

PENNEY LUTHI

the bottle on a shelf. This time she was afraid that some guest would see the bottle and think it was being chilled for him, and then she would have to explain that no, it was a very special bottle, and not one to share on this particular occasion.

Oh, she had had special moments, but none that were special enough to live up to the expectations that were required of the bottle.

Right after college, when she was hired for the exact job she wanted in marketing research, for a good starting salary, she could have celebrated with her bottle of wine, but she told herself that although she wanted the job, who knew if it would really work out? Hadn't she wanted things before that had ended in disaster?

There was always something lacking in her special occasions, something not quite right. Like her promotions. All of them had been little ones, just one step up, no gigantic leaps. Although she now found herself a few notches above the people who started working the same time she did, it didn't really count because she hadn't realized it as it was happening. Besides, not everyone would consider it the ideal situation. She had a lot of extra responsibilities that came with her extra money.

She had almost given in once, though; it was in a wild and intense moment of passion. She and her lover Steven were in bed, and she felt more overwhelmed than ever before. She had never realized that making love could go totally beyond giving and taking. It didn't seem as if anything were being given or taken at all, it just exploded. It was engulfing, sensual, sexual, and love, all cascading into one and she couldn't stand it any more.

She had almost screamed, "I have a very special bottle of wine that I would like you to share with me!" But at that instant, she realized that it was on her shelf, and not cold, and room temperature wine was probably not very romantic, so instead, she just screamed which made Steven laugh with satisfaction and pleasure and he buried himself even deeper within her.

The next morning she had told herself she was glad that she hadn't told Steven about the wine. The relationship was leading toward a dead end anyway; she could feel it.

Steven would have reveled in the wine. He would have guzzled it warm, and he would have poured it inside her and he would have drunk it all. If he would have known.

As she said goodbye before they each left for work that next morning, she turned her cheek to receive his kiss, and when he asked why, she shrugged her shoulders and drove away, leaving the bottle to sit, collecting dust, waiting for that special moment.

BARBARA THOMAS

Best Laid Plans

And then it was afternoon again and Nick knew that the next footsteps would be Mrs. Kelly's. He pushed the last scattering of dust into the pile he had swept up next to the door. He rapped his push broom on the tile floor twice so that tomorrow it would be clean and wouldn't leave dirty paths. Sometimes when he was in a hurry he forgot that he hadn't done it; the next morning when he swept the teachers' lounge, there would be streaks. But this afternoon he had time to remember the details because he was not in a hurry to leave and he was relaxed. He knew Mrs. Kelly was going to talk to him today. She might have another box that he could carry to her car and then he might get in and drive with her somewhere, but if not, he could make her stay and talk to him until it was time for him to show her how much he loved her.

He walked over to the sink, washed his hands carefully and with extra soap, and rinsed his face with cold water, though he didn't usually do that unless it was a warm day. In the little mirror attached to the paper towel dispenser he examined his hair and his teeth to be sure they were clean, because he knew that teachers liked things to be clean and he smoothed back his hair once, even though it flopped back over his eyebrows right away, hiding the right one completely, but that didn't matter because he wanted to look the same as he always did so that Mrs. Kelly wouldn't know right away that this was a special day. He felt very clean, and knew that he looked clean too, because he had given the dirty jobs to the new boy so the dirt that was usually on his own green-grey uniform was on the new boy's when he'd left earlier this afternoon. Nick was happy. When he looked at the wall clock, he felt a tiny jump in his chest like when Mrs. Kelly said hi to him, for he saw that any minute now he would hear her footsteps which never sounded like anyone else's.

He could tell her footsteps from about thirty other teachers' footsteps, and he had never been wrong, not since he had first noticed her. She was the prettiest teacher he had ever seen and she wasn't really that young, but she looked young and always had a greeting for him, unlike other teachers who didn't look at him and especially didn't talk

to him in such a nice way and call him Nick. Mrs. Kelly had soft-looking light brown hair and a soft-looking body that she never showed off. Nick liked that because it made her more special; probably no one else would notice how it might feel to touch her. He could think about how she felt just by watching her walk past, even if she had on a coat, but he always stopped thinking about her softness when she talked to him. He liked to pay attention to the things she was saying, and she said them in the nicest way. The first afternoon she talked to him, she had remarked, "I'm glad the school has a custodian like you around who really cares if it's clean," and he knew then that she was a special person because what she had said was true. Clean floors or shelves or desktops were why he was there; he never hurried when he was cleaning Mrs. Kelly's room after that day, because she agreed with him that clean was always important, and she must have read his mind, since he had never told her that. And every day after that, it seemed, she said something nice to him like, "Thanks for getting those ugly scuff marks off my floor," and always with a smile. During the day, he kept that smile in his head and Mrs. Kelly's room was always the first room he would clean when the children went home, even though it was at the far end of the hall. Her smile would be fresh in his mind while he cleaned it.

He would first do all the surface jobs, as he called them in his head, which were easy, because there was no scrubbing or fixing involved. Sometimes Mrs. Kelly would leave a few sentences or math problems on the chalk board and beside them a note special to Nick that would say, "Please do not erase." He wouldn't, but he would wash right around that saved part. One day he got the idea to put a little reply beside her note to him and wrote, "I won't," leaving it there until it was time to move to the next classroom. It was like a little conversation in his mind every time he had glanced at it. He didn't glance at it much when he did the heavy fixing jobs where he needed to keep his eye on his work, and for a while he had forgotten it was there.

Once, after he had replaced a tiny wheel on Mrs. Kelly's desk chair, he made sure that her closet door clicked shut, unlike some doors which didn't. It did, and he didn't look in the closet, but in another week or so he remembered that he had wanted to, and after another few days passed, he saw that she never locked the closet where she kept some extra books and papers and her coat. On the day that she left a neck scarf at school in that closet, he took it out and was careful with it when he held it next to his face and felt very close to Mrs. Kelly. She had worn the scarf around her neck that day, he could tell when he inhaled; to him it smelled pretty and sweet, but not like flowers. Tears were going to come into his eyes, so he shut them, and he felt then a little pain in his groin.

He put the scarf away quickly, because he knew he shouldn't touch the thing that gave him this feeling. At home, though, he likes the memory of that feeling, and when he thought of the feeling for a minute, then the real one came to him again and he gripped his penis tightly to preserve that sense and then he rubbed it and thought of putting the scarf near his face and at the last moment he could see clearly the green leaf pattern on the light background of the scarf, even though he hadn't really noticed it that afternoon.

Every day after that he thought about Mrs. Kelly. Her face in his mind was as pretty as it was in school and no one else was in his mind to take her away from him. He never needed to touch the scarf again, because he remembered it and he thought he would rather think about the thing than really do it, but sometimes when he thought of it he started to plan about doing it. Then at times he wished he could quit his job, be hired for it again, and have another first day on the job, so he could see if he would notice Mrs. Kelly right away. For he hadn't, his first day. He couldn't think of exactly when he did first notice her, but it was after he had become accustomed to his jobs and it was a little sad to think of her being just down the hall without him knowing it, and him cleaning a room that meant nothing to him and was like all other rooms. And he couldn't remember what it had been like to not have a certain feeling about Mrs. Kelly, and that made him want to re-meet her, so he could have the feeling for the first time, again.

He had first noticed her because she had talked to him: "I don't know why my venetian blinds won't close, maybe you could look at them." He had said sure, but later asked his supervisor what venetian blinds meant. They both had a laugh when he told him, and neither could figure out why they were called 'venetian.' The next day he had seen Mrs. Kelly in exactly the same place, at three-fifteen. She had walked right by the room where his tools for the job were kept, and he had been there, just like the day before. He had liked that. "Oh, I fixed the venetian blinds," he had called to her, and she had paused and thanked him, which was when he noticed the kindness and lack of shyness or flirting in her eyes, light blue ones that seemed happy but not excited. "And what was your name?" she had asked then, and he told it to her in one word and she said, "How do you do, Nick, I'm Mrs. Kelly, thanks again," and walked outside and toward the parking lot.

And the day came not a month later when he had found her scarf, and he had planned every day until now about how he would get very close to Mrs. Kelly and tell her that he always thought about it, and in his thoughts she had always been happy when he

said this and in some thoughts she would put her hand on his chest and that simple touch would show Nick that she cared about him, too, and that she was aching to be closer to him. He knew what he would do next, and if she were too shy and wouldn't let him touch her skirt he would just talk to her and she would be able to tell how nice he was and wouldn't be shy or afraid anymore. And this afternoon he felt clean, and very ready. It seemed that he could see and hear and smell more keenly than ever; twice he had even thought he'd heard her footsteps down the hall, but it wasn't her yet, he was just imagining it.

It seemed as if the bell for the children to leave had rung an hour ago, but it hadn't been that long and Nick wished he had a quick job to do between now and when Mrs. Kelly would walk by, so that he wouldn't just have to stand, because he didn't want to overplan for this. He used to think it would be easy to talk to a girl if he knew just the things to say in the right order, but one clever remark had confused him, because he hadn't planned for what *she* would say, and he ended up not asking the girl for a date after all, because he was mad at himself, even though she seemed to like him. There were other occurrences like that, and they didn't affect him as much as the first one, and he learned that girls could be a little shy too and he learned not to overplan.

But Mrs. Kelly didn't seem like she'd ever not know what to say; she always had a word or two for Nick and they were always nice and didn't seem overplanned, but were the perfect things to say when she said them. Actions shouldn't seem overplanned either, but planning for actions in his mind was unlike planning words to use. He stood on his toes and stretched up and grasped the bottom of the transom; when he let go it had taken his breath away a bit and he felt good stretched, so he tucked in his shirt and leaned against the wall, and the bricks felt cool on his back. It was refreshing and he stood up straight and decided to walk down to Mrs. Kelly's classroom. He tried to pad his footsteps so they wouldn't echo in the empty hall, and he took his time as he walked, placing each shoe within one tile square of the hall floor. Near her room, he bent down for a drink from the child-size water fountain and he took his time at it, too, while he tried to clear his mind so he would have fresh, rather than planned, words.

He walked over and stood quietly in Mrs. Kelly's doorway. He could see only her back and not her face because she was writing sentences on the chalkboard. The scrape of the chalk was the only sound in the room and it echoed in Nick's head which was starting to feel as it did at times when he drove too fast, strained and anxious. He closed his eyes and listened only to the chalk sounds, the scrapes and taps then a pause. He opened his eyes when he heard Mrs. Kelly's voice say, "Well, good afternoon." He saw

then that she hadn't said it with a smile, so he didn't smile either, in case that would make her mad. She asked him, "Are you waiting for me to finish so you can clean the room?" He wondered how she could think he had cleaning on his mind and he couldn't help smiling about that when he answered, "Yes—no—I'm waiting for you but I'm not going to clean yet." She stood looking at him, with the chalk still in her hand, and he couldn't tell what her expression meant and he continued, "So finish."

Mrs. Kelly set the chalk down and told Nick that she'd finish tomorrow morning if he needed to start cleaning now, and she walked over to her closet and started putting on her coat.

"The careless child broke the wooden *toy*," Nick read aloud from the chalkboard.

"Careless and wooden are modifiers," Mrs. Kelly said in a teacher's tone of voice as she closed her closet door. As Mrs. Kelly edged her way past Nick, he tried to take her books away from her so he'd have a reason to walk her to her car, and so she'd see that he was polite. He felt that she stiffened and she said, "What are you doing?" then pulled away but Nick still held the books, which was the closest he'd ever been to holding Mrs. Kelly, so he didn't want to let go. With his free right hand he grasped her arm and it was indeed as soft as he had imagined it would be. A spark shot through his groin which told him he was doing the right thing. He felt himself smiling again and couldn't stop himself, even though what he was feeling wasn't really happiness.

"I'll drive you," Nick answered and Mrs. Kelly said no, but it sounded like a question to him rather than an answer and it seemed like a little test to see if he really wanted to drive her home. He didn't insist on it because he was changing his plan as he realized that he didn't want to wait to get to the parking lot before he told her how much she meant to him. Her arm was warm and he could barely feel the blouse around it, and he didn't want to let go of it to walk down the hall. Mrs. Kelly looked afraid to hear what he was going to say next and he didn't want her to be afraid, so he didn't say anything next, he just pulled her back into the classroom. Her muscles tightened and she clutched the books closer to her chest and said *no*, louder than before, but Nick quickly pulled the door shut behind them so no one could come and interrupt.

"It's nice," he said to himself, aloud, and saying it seemed to release a feeling that spread across his middle and excited him. His legs felt strong and his chest felt big and Mrs. Kelly seemed to relax her shoulders and accidentally dropped her books and Nick said, "I'll get them," because it seemed like his fault that they had fallen but just when he let go of Mrs. Kelly, she pulled away and that hurt Nick inside, so to stop her from leaving, he pulled her toward him by the waist and she felt thin which made Nick feel

BARBARA THOMAS

stronger and she smelled good when she was so close to him, but she turned her head as far to the side as she could.

Her neck was pale pink and when Nick touched it with his lips it was soft and a pleasant feeling returned to him and it seemed to him that the whole room filled up with it, so Mrs. Kelly must be feeling it too, and as he pressed his mouth harder to her neck he held both of her arms with one of his strong ones. He helped her to move so that her back would be to the wall and they wouldn't lose their balance, but whatever he did, he couldn't exactly meet Mrs. Kelly's mouth to kiss it, and he tried to put his face close to her chest and when he did, it made him shake and his legs lost some of that strength, and when he released her arms so that he could touch both her legs at once, she pushed him away and his weak legs let him stumble back into a desk and he looked up just when the door slammed. He could feel it slam inside his body, and that feeling turned into a dead spot in his chest, as he crouched on the dirty tile floor, scolding himself for overplanning.



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