

# DRUID'S CAVE

*This issue dedicated to the memory  
of James Moran*

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## Victims

Deserted sands washed by the clawing spume  
Of Sybil-haunted waves; and you and me  
Like sad Arachne's victims in the loom  
Entangled by the warp and waft of three  
Sisters, before the threads were cut; dancing  
Grains on winds rip past the shadows of two  
Separated friends whose fallen stinging  
Tears flowed down their cheeks and forced a way through  
Hands cupped over eyes. A transitory  
Phase in what we'd hoped, caught by the ocean  
Tides, a gap existing in our story,  
Caesura of lives always in motion;  
The sands have shifted constantly since then  
And runes destroyed are never formed again.

*G.K. Rags*

## Falling Feather

I cannot lock within my room the bird  
who teaches me of Icarus. Beyond my dreams  
of day and flight, when all I see is broken  
wings, he flies into my mind and is  
so full, unlike the rest, that we become  
the space in time, and we are one. The place  
is sacred now.

Since then it's dark, though about  
the space he spreads his feather for the sun.  
His wings are open wide. I see the bird  
so far from father's thoughts: he take my soul  
and weaves it with his own. Our link of strength  
is conversations, flesh, and bone. He's still  
my thought as I see my wings and feel the splash.

*Jean Dudevar*

## Revenge

Again you have stolen a stage that was rightfully mine.  
But what do you do little beast? Sit there sticking out  
that tiny pink triangle of a tongue carelessly turning  
it green. I was reciting The Pledge of Allegiance, some-  
thing you dimwit can not do. But you pull a stunt like  
a side-show freak and steal my audience. Oh! of course  
it's going to be a big deal that the idiot wants to hold  
her own sucker.

I didn't use cheap trickery. I had everyone captivated by  
my story. You can barely babble. I told the story of  
your origin, about how you were hatched by martians from  
outer space, but they didn't want you so they sent you  
in a space ship and on our front door step you landed.  
You just sat there in your stupidity and smallness not  
knowing any respectable course of retaliation. Then you  
stooped to a level lower than I thought possible, even for  
you. I am sure I have a concussion from the blow. Oh you  
are disgusting and I mean you really are. You don't even care  
that one of my hairs is on that green sphere that you insistently  
keep licking.

Weel now you have asked for it and you are going to get it.  
No, I don't know where babies come from, but the martian  
theory about you seems plausible to me. So tonight I'm going  
to come into your room and tell you the rest o the story,  
about how the martians are coming back for you. I think this  
time I'm going to describe in very specific detail their sharp  
teeth and claws and what they like to eat for a midnight snack.

*Ashley Ramita*

## Escape A Tired Heart

You'll take from her until you find a pail  
That's filled with tears, collected pain. She'll try  
To hold her gifts. Your hands are bound to her trail

Of hidden sores, and she is left with frail  
And sorry thoughts; you're blind, she's still and shy.  
You'll take from her until you find a pail

To put outside for rain that makes your stale  
Dark shag a sifter curl to comb. You'll die  
To hold her gifts. Your hands are bound. To her trail

You turn no rake, no sign of care; it's jail  
For you, that trodden place. You don't know why  
You'll take from her. Until you find a pail

To hold you hollow love, she is your bail  
For all injustice, your cold and callous lie.  
To hold her gifts, your hands are bound to her trail

Because the sun runs down; your pains prevail  
And wake you. Sand and tired heart is what  
You'll take from her. Until you find a pail  
To hold her gifts, you hands are bound to her trail.

*K. Johnston*

## Naked Arms Waiting

Mother watches carefully as I hug Father. She and I talk with academic voices. That is how we touch, learn of each other. Father and I talk closely, but not every day, not like she thinks.

She has taught me to cook--full meals. Sometimes she forgets how empty a hungry child is, how I practice in my kitchen every day.

He has taught me to paint, watercolors my favorite. One year I have him a gift. I painted a naked lady-dancer sitting straddled on a chair her back to us. She is day-dreaming. Her clothes and hat hang on the dressing-screen she stares into. Her long brunette hair falls between shoulder blades, against her straight and sinewy back. Father put her on the bathroom wall, above the toilet, across the mirror. There he can sit alone with her, stare at the reflection and dream of dancing.

I would like to boldly hug my mother, chest to timid chest, see her inside face, feel her breath against my neck. If I could paint her a picture, it would be a naked girl, laying on her back, waiting with empty arms outstretched. I would like Mother to hang her in the entrance hall, by the staircase, across from the foyer where everyone could see her.

*R. Johnston*

## Holes Beneath the Cucumbers

I've always been sure of my footing here, cornfields, pastures, small rises near the mines. But I found holes beneath the cucumbers

today. I saw them under the broad leaves when I was out hoeing. Then I thought how I've always been sure of my footing here,

How though we were immigrants sixty years ago, we've made things work, made things grow. But I found holes beneath the cucumbers

and they made me think of the mines you worked in, that you finally died in one September. I've always been sure of my footing here,

or at least I've walked, hoed and planted trees with a firm step. Water runs and dirt moves in the holes beneath the cucumbers.

But the crop's as good as ever this year. Sliced with a knife, they'll be firm and good.

*Laura R. McGowan*

## I've Seen Your Pain

I've seen you pain. It's in your gaze, intent  
Like diamonds' clearest light--their long shadow.  
Those eyes, they burn my soul and I consent.

Experience has taught me patience, yet  
I understand your seach. And now I know  
I've seen your pain. It's in your gaze intent.

You speak of terror's loss, and I upset  
Your song of private life so that you show  
Those eyes. They burn my soul, and I consent  
That I am touched and think that now you'll let  
Me tell my own sorrow. But words backflow.

I've seen your pain. It's in your gaze intent  
Which flows beyond my mind, and I forget  
When love's vocabulary went below  
Those eyes. They burn my soul and I consent.

You see my thought, and now I'm glad I sent  
That look direct into your stare. You know  
I've seen your pain--it's in your gaze intent.  
Those eyes, they burn my soul. And I consent.

*James John Baran*

I have many places  
crowding me  
but they all have  
a secret home  
no one can find  
protected  
in their lairs.

*R. Johnston*

## Death by Smiling

They will justify the deaths by smiling  
widely. Clinking gold Kuggerands in time  
to the clicking of the phone dialing

a very good broker busy filing  
orders and bids for his share of the crime.  
They will justify the deaths by smiling.

you can never reach them past a hireling  
at a teak desk, whose fingers make a rhyme  
to the clicking of the phone dialing

security downstairs with beguiling  
frankness, saying "let me put you on line."  
They will justify the deaths by smiling

blandly, while sidestepping your questioning  
of the ethics that let them make a dime  
to the clicking of the phone dialing

up the cost of rice as men are dying,  
starving. Their fading senses deaf and blind  
They will justify the deaths by smiling  
to the clicking of the phone dialing.

*David X. Lee*

Hold me, she whispered  
                                into my throat, her breath  
weaving  
                                through the hairs on my nape,  
  her voice  
ragged. Hold me, she said,  
  and I did,  
though I knew she hadn't asked it,  
  not aloud,  
to ask was forbidden.  
                                She never said  
hold me.  
                                She whispered into my throat.  
  Her breath  
wandered soft beneath my ear,  
  soundless, as though  
I had imagined her. My illusions  
  withdrew,  
ragged.  
                                Hold me, she said, and I did  
not  
                                know how. I curled  
  around her, she drifted  
through me, past me  
  away. you can't  
hold me, she whispered  
  into my throat,  
  her breath  
short, her eyes wet.  
                                You can't, she said, no  
one can. I touched  
  my fingers to her lips. My pulse  
ragged.  
                                Hold me, she said, and I did  
  not turn away.

*Christine M. Maier*

## Ripe For Love

Your glasses leave the shadows of despair  
That gray the mornings, cloud the cleanest sky.  
In swollen eyes you balance every tear.

To other ripe for love, you say, "Beware,  
A Failure follows, romance is a lie."  
Your glasses leave the shadows of despair

On others who attach to you. She'll care  
But not enough to fill your empty high.  
In swollen eyes you balance every tear

Which fences out the lovers from the lair  
That keeps you safe. In time they will despise  
Your glasses. Leave the shadows of despair

To clowns or mimes who fill the atmosphere  
With mimicked sadness, gloves that poke and pry  
In swollen eyes. You balance every tear

To keep your face a clean white mask, a rare  
Angelic sheath where mysteries lie.  
Your glasses leave the shadows of despair  
In swollen eys. You balance every tear.

*R. Johnston*

## Exorcism

Your furies scream. You fly  
apart. I fold myself  
into my arms to hide

from you. Your rages cry  
in hymns to ancient hells:  
your furies scream. You fly

in fear. You tear my eye  
lids wide, my vision swells,  
your furies scream. You fly

away. Abandoned, I  
retreat, self-blinded; fall  
into my arms to hide

until you bare my eyes.  
and hold my gaze to still  
your furies' scream. You fly  
into my arms to hide.

*Christine M. Maier*

## Feeling

One touch of an artist's brush  
crates leaves on trees, fireflies and bees  
stunning stars that beam or shine  
made from his touch.

The maestro picks up his baton.

One touch, a hush falls quietly over all.

Rockets boom,

missiles blast and zoom,

a ferris wheel unwinds and spins,

a stripling trembles in the dusk

beneath a willow tree and bites his lip from a touch.

It could be your hand on mine.

Enchantment brews.

A tempestuous swirl of feelings whirl.

Or touch a foe;

cringe at the repulsive shudder.

A touch of danger brings fearful, incoherent mutter.

Or one can choose to never touch,

but life will not mean much.

*Marcellus Leonard*

## The pull is soft

I watch the razor gleaming in the dark,  
caught in the shine of silver.

The pull is soft, at first.

It's easy then to walk away

and shut the door. But still

I watch the razor gleaming in the dark  
shadows of my mind.

No need for worry--after all,

the pull is soft. At first

I wear bracelets or long sleeves,

denying it, denying

I watch the razor gleaming in the dark.

Yet in the night I find myself

standing here, staring

at the razor gleaming.

The pull is soft, at first.

*Teri Stone*



## A Tide of Winter

I hear the leaves unleashed. I smell the frost  
and want it to surround me with a tide  
of winter. Close at hand, I feel my ghost  
withdraw from the heat within.

On many nights  
I fall head-first through memories. And then  
I hear the leaves unleashed.

I smell the frost,  
a soul without a home. With stealth it comes,  
yet flees before I seize one chance to taste  
the winter.

Close at hand, I feel my ghost  
twist to find escape. But I have caught  
him by the heart. Desperately he cries.

With leaves unleashed, I smell the frost  
of centuries piled high. And then he tells  
me that I must receive the cool thin breath  
of winter close at hand.

I feel my ghost  
dissolve, then join the ice that whispers in  
my ear. And the flavors mixed, are new.  
Forever changed, they are reborn.

And still  
I hear the leaves. Unleashed, I smell the frost  
of winter. Close at hand, I feel my ghost.

*James John Baran*

## A Defense of P.M.S.

only makes for worsening the mess  
no matter what my lawyer says to me.  
Not guilty by reasons of P.M.S.  
is seldom ever used as a murder defense.  
Oh sure,

explain that one to any jury-  
this only makes for worsening the mess.

My Motrin pills were used as evidence  
and then my O.B. stated testimony...

"Not guilty by reasons of P.M.S."  
is possible considering her stress..."  
The plaintiff called the man a quack M.D.-  
this only makes for worsening the mess!

"But if you win then you'll set precedent!  
(that's been my life long goal)

The First to be  
not guilty by reasons of P.M.S."  
It's to my horror that I must address  
the court and use this guinea pig of a plea.  
This only makes for worsening the mess:  
not guilty by reasons of P.M.S.

*Ashley Ramito*

## Intimations

i read "Telling" for my freshmen on the college speech team.  
it was my first encounter with Dicky. Before i'd read, well, e.e.  
cummings, but never Dickey.

i mean, i understood the poem. After i'd been doing it  
for a while i really got into the end, you know, where she lands in  
a field after falling out of the plane, and her back is broken and  
she's dying. I really liked that.

But I could never get the part when the wind's taking off her clothes,  
so free, then, she's so abandoned: a whirl of jacket and skirt, lets  
her pantyhose and bra and girdle go free in the air like birds, and  
she can breathe and be REAL, i think is what he meant.

I just couldn't get it out; i never felt what she must have, actually  
gliding, with no fear of meeting. well, anyone. it was like i was  
afraid of the judges watching me undress.

But the death part was okay. I knew exactly how it would be. see,  
she'd be pressed down deep in this field, because the impact was so  
great when she hit, and she can only see out of the corners of her  
eyes, and they're filling up with blood, anyway.

*Tere Stone*

## Martyr's Dance

The traffic had to stop for the tirade you aimed  
perfectly at me. You dredged the Orefors and  
Waterford of our past and fired at your strength,  
unknowingly crushing you meangerie of clear displayed  
figures. Then you blamed their disaster on all who  
inhabit this street where you spread your guilt like  
moving-day clutter.

Your shape reels in twisting  
circles across the pavement of concrete and ground  
glass. The surface glitters with bits of past anger;  
wine glasses thrown from delicate hands were aimed  
at smiles but missed and crashed indifferently.

Your scene is simple, a proven point  
not smashed your treasure--the crystal egg, you would  
not need to dramatize your private life.

You run  
from the flying shards and aim for sympathy.  
You cannot see your sliced reflection in the piece  
of mirror that hangs from a light post.

I am safe  
across the street, seeing you whole. Alone you  
stretch out your tragic dance on concrete and glass  
for pedestrians who pass.

*James John Baran*

**Upon the Fourth Anniversary of the  
Installation of the Computerized  
Carillon at Illinois State University**

Peal on, toll on, o electronic bells!  
Ex cathedra, Quasimodo dwells  
A forlorn ghost, not in a belfry tall  
But in a horn atop DeGarmo Hall.  
A rope unseen made fast to spectral hook  
Connects it to a console o'er at Cook.  
Each night he swings out from a cooling vent  
And scales Cook's crenelated battlement,  
And there the hunchback programs in the knells.  
Peal on, toll on, a electronic bells!

The hour echo, Ben-like, through the quad,  
to waken scholars snoozing on the sod.  
Late afternoons its melody is long--  
A call to academic Evensong.  
He who would have Nine Tailors gets a shock;  
For round these parts the tastes run more to rock.  
How came the hunchback here? He never tells.  
Peal on, toll on, o electronic bells!

The dying Esmerelda knew the name  
of every lady-chime in Notre Dame,  
Each fist-thick rope, each slender silken string,  
The touch he'd used to make each beauty sing.  
The deafened phantom, now at I.S.U.,  
Arranges colored diodes: red, green, blue;  
Transistors now become each one a pet--  
This little one, he calls her Juliette.  
Sad hunchback, welcome to this Hell of hells.  
Peal on, toll on, o electronic bells!

*Anne Hubbard Norton*

**At the Kitchen Sink**

You sit there  
right before dinner  
and smash a fly  
into the lace cloth  
of my antique rosewood table  
gotten from Grandman.

She no doubt brought  
casseroles, dinner rolls  
and napkins to him--  
farina, a clean-up Regina  
and Kleenex to kids--  
newspapers to dog  
seed to corner-bird  
who now picks at the bell.

Gray kitchen water  
melts the roastbeef suds  
a few dinner peas stick  
in the metal plug.

The tepid faucet stream  
turns my hands red  
I see shriveled peas resist  
the drain  
dishes to be dried  
pool their water  
on the unfinished counter.

One morning the house  
will float by your moving car,  
all that will stop you  
will be the traffic light.

*Que Que Agua*

## Butterfly Boy

Butterfly Boy,  
Fragilely framed.  
Cheeks blushed  
Carnation pink  
Like the spread  
Of delicate wings  
Across young skin,  
The flush undulating  
in subtle motions.

Butterfly Boy,  
Male, lightly molded.  
Drawn to scents  
of sweet powder,  
Essences of  
Sweet perfumes,  
The shape and drift  
of voile and tulle,  
Chameleon notions.

His lips purse in  
The mussitation  
Of his silent chant,  
Desirous of the  
Mutagenesis,  
The catalytic source  
That causes change.  
He longs to wash  
in mutagenetic lotions

Wanting to change,  
Wanting to fold himself  
Into the soft  
Intangible gauze  
of femininity,  
Searching for the  
Alchemy to change,  
To touch passionate lips  
To magic potions.

## I Take My Name

Carrying my name  
I walk long distances  
while I coax doubts  
from shoes and pockets.  
I dress myself in post office,  
buy a St. Christopher's medal.  
At night I have dreamed  
I am a visitor  
to a luxurious hospital.  
My arms! They stretch out,  
too huge for the room,  
over a circle of wheelchairs.  
A girl, small as a doll, drags herself  
toward me, hugging a box lit up for a train.

*Polly Price*

When she left  
the snow fell  
relentlessly.  
I leaned on the windowframe,  
wiped a clear space  
in the frost on the glass.  
As her image faded,  
I closed the curtain,  
turned away from the window  
to curl into my chair  
until spring.

*Christine M. Maier*

## (homo-sex)

I'm floating on a shiny red raft  
in the middle of celiba sea.  
I must have turned wrong at the bay  
of the masculine wolf! The undercurrent  
in my mind propels me into this whirlpool  
of dry ice as the salty breeze  
of the over-bearing straight  
pushes me towards the river  
of sexual a-nile-ation,  
master of my own tiny ship,  
which is shared only with others  
like me.

*Cathy Winn*

## Waldorf

I found you at my door  
gloves in hand  
and a bag of walnuts.

My kitchen stored  
apples, raisins  
and mayo.

I let you in to  
peel the fruit  
shell the nuts.

We tossed Waldorf  
salad for two

*R. Ray Johnston*

## River Bed

I am unwilling to sleep  
when you lay next to me.  
I, not one for sunbaths,  
too restless in heat,  
must cool myself.  
Flesh on top is sticky  
hot. Inside-hammers  
forge our firey metal  
into bowls--two of them.

It seems your bowl  
can hold more, at times.  
I get afraid of overflow,  
I might drench the bed  
with me.

If you had to stay  
on wet sheets all night  
your skin would shrivel  
look like raisins.

But I have learned  
that you are like a prune  
hoping to become a plum--  
swollen with me.  
You are willing to be  
carried like a barge  
drift closer to the delta  
with every given wave.

*Que Que Agua*

## Contact

Your hand slaps  
The side of my face  
with metaphysical force.  
Interior windows  
Shatter from lack  
of support. The parquet  
Fills with fragments  
of me. Deliberately,  
You shove them under  
The oriental.

*S. A. Casagrande*

## Asylum

The rest of the place was not so good  
We'd been there for a long time  
were real tired of white  
white clothes walls white face.

Was this one place, though  
it was secure  
this corner  
was nice tight red brick angle of wall.  
Nice place to sit.

One morning  
before our drug haze had gone  
and the day begun  
they went outside and found someone  
curled up in the corner  
in a tight ball  
of what he used to be.

Only his eyes were open  
and they were staring at the wall  
looking right through

*Terrri Stone*

## New York-- September 28, 1985

The stone of my city  
stretches  
Beneath imperial feet.

Suspended  
by their ankles,  
Shaven white bodies hang from a rooftop,  
Illustrating in an artistic  
philosophy  
the balance of life and death.

Curiosity molds a crowd below  
Who stare  
in repulsion,  
fascination,  
unwary of the mime's sermon;  
Articulate movements by the inhuman  
preach profundity  
to an audience of stone.

A white form  
jerks,  
neatly dives  
arms outstretched  
to meet concrete.

A spectator claps  
for its performance  
But is silenced, shushed,  
as blood taints  
The painted human  
And stains his stony bed.

*Kristen Hill*

**"Tennessee Williams Was Murdered,  
Brother Charges"**

**--Headline, March 1983**

What green greets Spring before the Spring is green?  
Wary cat's eyes in a brown-weed field,  
a stagnant puddle overlooked by frost,  
ceramic tile trottoir along the bank  
where silken lichen climb like urban smoke.

Up on the shingles, cat imagines prey  
through slitted eyes, Iguana green, below,  
but prey is predator, he finds, and so  
he cowers in gratiating fear.

Young men have sisters sad, and sick, alone,  
and mothers who, insane, relive the past.  
young men have lovers flighty and absurd  
who die or, even worse than dying, don't.  
But heroes have no brothers, have they, Tom?

You'd think vermillion tears would finally fall  
but sad suspicious green will dry them all.

*Anne Hubbard Norton*

**Film at eleven**

A man was shot;  
another hit  
by a car.

We're going to invade  
another country today.  
They've pushed us too far.

I think they're going to bomb us  
and we'll all go to Heaven.  
Stay tuned for more

Film at eleven

*L. Singler*

**Once, more  
Than a Friend**

I tried to phone her three times, each  
time feeling more dejected than the last.  
She wants us to become "eternalized"  
but I'm still ready for change.  
Feeling like the blind, deaf mute  
bullied by hoods, I sit by a misting window  
watching leaves fall with agonizing slowness,  
land atop heaps of other dead leaves,  
and twitch from side to side.

*Mark T. Beyer*

**Single**

Emptiness compressed  
into a pack  
strapped on  
I hurry to the place  
where strangers meet  
lay their parcels at each other's feet  
sip sweep sadness  
from the other's emptiness  
clutching at the light.  
Hot breathing wearily spent  
I leap into the dark vagueness  
to rise homeward bound  
not knowing your name.

*Marcellus Leonard*

As we parted,  
I turned to watch you walk  
and saw my gift  
fall  
from your pocket;  
Like a missile guided by some  
malicious force,  
It struck the pavement—  
and shattered.

"Oops!" you said...

I ran to pick up the pieces,  
slivers which cut  
my hands,  
And took them away.

*Reisten Hill*

## Wooded Mind

The desert has its growth  
the weathered cacti covered  
with weapons, find some moisture  
some sustenance.

My mind is more a forest  
cool with moisture  
the dew that settles  
from morning,  
it takes hours to warm.

I don't believe  
yours is sand  
but I know it's hot  
there, stars have scorched  
your ground—there's  
a Mojave beauty.

*P. Oshroff*

## Umbrella

My umbrella blew away today  
But not, forbid, without a bit of a battle  
You see, we, my umbrella and me,  
We have a tipsy-turvy, always more than nerve  
Yet never more than sturdy-history

Well, when that storm had just started  
She sheltered me and the rain properly departed  
I took and held her tight by the handle, my cain  
"Quite a couple" some would say, "with only time to gain."

But the wind begins to blow...  
The 'brella felt the danger of a feeling she didn't know  
The more the gusts continued  
The more regrets she reissued.

At last after the tug 'n pull and round about  
She broke my dry, turning inside-out  
I held on anyway for some distant plea  
But her mind was her own and flight the destiny

So now I'm walking wet today  
The drops glue my hair to my forehead  
From time to time, the water runs down my face  
Out of memory I dare, with my tongue, to taste.

*Timothy Kelly*



## In Trails

I watch  
my body flat  
on a slab-like bed  
imprisoned in starch-white sheets.

My head is free  
to breathe dead skin  
sanitized tubing  
sour smelling solution-soaked bandages.

I know what happens next:

thick grayish matter  
starts to fill my mouth  
it gags me  
the foul mass overflows  
the clinical sheets

hands come to scoop  
the obscenity from my mouth

handsful  
distort into  
tubular, intestinal forms

rubber-gloved hands  
slowly pull grotesque shapes  
from my mouth  
like a magician  
his eternal  
string of scarves stick  
until the last balloon bubble  
is torn from inside

and I am flat  
on a slab-like bed  
swathed in matted hair  
and sour sheets

*Judi Anderson*

## Scotch Songs

### #4

I drive deep into the maw  
of West Virginia. Hungry  
Mother State Park,  
Fish trap Lake,  
Fluvina County, where sourwood  
honey is sold by the roadside.  
I pull off by the yellow corpse  
of a squirrel and buy  
a jar from an emaciated old  
woman who knows I would pour  
honey on that squirrel if I was not  
so civilized.

### #6

My mother comes and goes  
along the highway. When I am tired  
she creeps across the pavement,  
my lights catch her figure, forcing  
me to stop.

Sometimes she sits beside me  
in the dark car or in my motel room  
next to the river of traffic outside  
my door

In the blue morning she leaves, but tells  
me about things I can not have.

### #8

Somewhere on the Pennyrile Parkway  
I made up a song:

I got the mizries  
I got the blues,  
bats in my armpits,  
honey there ain't  
no good news.

A tune to remember you  
by, for the colors  
in the mandala, for the bright  
fish in the Gulf, for the tent  
in the hurricane  
and those dark hours  
when you slashed my clothes  
and ran from monsters  
in the closet. Oh, yes,  
now I can hum a little tune:

I got the mizries,  
I got the blues,  
bats in my armpits,  
honey there ain't  
no good news.

## #10

"Baby I'm a lonely knight of rock and roll,  
a charter member of the dawn patrol."

I think of you in the midnight hour  
and pour my heart out with the Chivas.  
Take me back over the hills of Tennessee,  
beyond flat tobacco fields and piedmont dust  
and hold me in the warm North Carolina night  
where the beach rubs against the ocean.

You swam too far out from me, too far  
past the breakers. Come back to me now,  
hold me in your arms while wild cats howl in the dark  
and the sky snaps with lightning. Take me back  
with pirate promises. I'm stronger,  
I can breathe beneath the water  
when the highway calls your name.

*Cynthia Brophy*

## The Pigeons Flew UP

Munchi bit his dark, thick lips,  
spread his nostrils wide,  
crotched down low,  
waiting,  
trying to decide,  
"Should I too strike a blow?  
Should I?"  
Pigeons moaned in the lot nearby.  
Beyond peripheral vision,  
tall grass, green as ignorance,  
sifted homemade bullets,  
those that missed his older brothers  
and the others  
defending the turf--  
forty square blocks of grey cement,  
decaying tenements,  
interspersed under an oozing sun  
with what White men call gangs,  
bros call tribes  
(P Stone Nation baby--  
you bettuh show duh sign),  
big bellied girls who love Munchi  
and trash.

Big--  
Munchi wanted to make it big.  
"That's the only reason I keeps it up,"  
he said,  
but inside, Uhm real gentle."  
That's what Munchi thought.  
"Yeah--I burned a dude or two  
cuz I gots to keep 'em off uv me.  
But uhm tired.  
Uhm real tired.  
Might's well git dis overwit."  
So Munchi started out cracking heads,  
any heads he caught--  
hiding in the dark weeds  
grown up tall on vacant lots.

path cut through  
to a church named Peter's Rock.  
And Munchi crotched,  
hidden,  
near the path,  
down on his knees.  
that's when it happened.  
There had to be ten.  
It seemed like twenty.  
Anyway--something orange  
and hot  
and unexpected  
cut Munchi down.  
then they were on him.  
kicked him in the head,  
jumped up on his ches,  
made the Dobie bit his face  
till he was dead.  
But before the light went out,  
he had a vision.

There was another place and time  
when Munchi crotched down low.  
The sun shone, but cast thick dark shadows  
over muttering grass,  
tall and green as ignorance.  
On the jungle's edge children played,  
no match for Munchi.  
A flutter of feathers!  
A squacking fuss!  
Startled hatchings huddled  
to their mother's ruffled breast  
and cried.  
Biting dark, thick lips,  
wearing his shiny price,  
a red sash made from silk  
wound round his long lean hips,  
thinking he was big back at his village,  
he decided,  
"Yes uhm ma strike duh blw.  
Why shouldn't I?"  
When a rope thick as a snake  
tightened suddenly round his wrist

and rude white hands yanked,  
stuffed blood-red silk between his lips.  
It was done.  
He was the one they had decided  
would bring the better price.  
He could work.  
He could breed.  
He could row the boat to New Orleans.

Pain tightened his nappy head,  
twisted purple,  
faded red,  
rumped up and fluttered down.  
Pent up in a cage,  
hands tied behind his back,  
Munchi bit back bitter tears  
for his woman's sake.  
She too had pain tonight.  
Her ripened belly hung low.  
"Will the baby be safe, Munchi, she asked,  
"Where we go?"  
"Shut up! you two down there!  
No talkin'! There must be no talkin'!"  
The baby died,  
or maybe they killed it,  
what with no midwife and all  
and Munchi's woman birthing in the galley.  
But the captain said, "Yaw breed again  
cause the girl ain't worth uh cent lessen she's bigged;  
I gets lots for yaw if she's bigged.

"Muncheel  
youse hears me boy!  
Tote dat crocasack down heah,  
din chop dem weeds over dere tween dat cotton."  
"Lawd listen to dem birdies fuss,  
like duh ones I nevuh seed  
keepin' up all dat rack near duh village."  
And little Munchie grew bigger than his father.  
"Move yo ass boy!  
Yo work is slow!  
Hurry up 'n make dis load.

Got nutherin' comin' up soon's you gits finished.  
Why? Cus dats duh way it bees."  
The vision in Munchi's head  
oozed black purple,  
gushed out red  
on the grey pavement.  
The vision spun around.  
Teenage girls ripe and plump  
double-dutched though his mind,  
metamorphosed into pigeons  
and flew up  
when a base drum hit the beat.  
Drums!  
Horns!  
Banjos!  
He was back in New Orleans signing down the street.  
And the saints went marching into a smoke-filled room  
draped with stale smoke and grief riddled grins.  
Popeyed men mopped sweat off their brows.  
Women done up in brilliance flocked around pianos,  
huddled like birds,  
fluttering their fans.  
lyrics like blue waterfalls spewed out of their mouths  
singing Singing SINGING!  
till everyone and the room turned BLUE.  
Munchi too was blue  
like the purple vision in his head.  
So he sat up and sung too.  
They heard him way up North,  
and he made it BIG.  
But skyscrapers dwarf the biggest men  
and cast longer shadows.  
Five flights to walk up a tenement,  
cold water flat with a bathroom down the hall  
for three apartments.  
Ring the bell three times if you want Munchie.  
Cookin' on a hot plate.  
Washing' out underwear in the face bowl at night.  
Lost his gig and no job yet.  
"Uhm ma pay the rent soon's Ah gits it.  
Uhm tryin' to get a gig.  
Uhm ma send for you honey,

Munchie, his woman and kind and Momma  
livin' in a one room flat.  
Pouring steel is hell for anybody and just as hot.

Yet it fed them when the blues would not.  
So he gave in to the purple,  
the orange,  
the red, hot steel,  
the vacant lot,  
with its green grass gone to seed,  
to the litter in the path to Peter's Rock.

"Am real gentle. Ahm real gentle."  
"What's wrong wid Munchie?" the foreman asked  
"Why is he clutching the hands of the time clock.  
Then the whistle blew,  
and the pigeons flew up.

Marcellus Leonard

(Featuring Dave the Rabbit and his dear friend, Geoff Gruntundle)

"Oh and it's a fucking gunners world, brother Dave," said Geoff as the two lay midst wave and sand and noxema and dime novels and shades, thongs, plastic pail and shovel. "Freedom, freedom to kill at will," he continued, "freedom to draw at thirty paces in full view of the parson, the whore, the drunk, the children waiting in the car as mama runs a errand."

"Check out the one in the green," said Dave in reply, "you know, I'm worried that I find motherhood sexy. I'm worried that it means I'm getting older." He stared unashamedly and scratched a shoulder.

"I'm serious! Are you listening to me?" demanded Geoff. "I really think this whole place is gonna turn into one big shootville and I know you simply don't give a damn. If we don't try to do something now we're gonna find ourselves mounted on somebody's mantle."

"I just, brother Geoff, came here to smell the sea, sit on the sun, and sun in the sand, y'know what I mean? I think we should relax and enjoy the scene. Don't give up on the gunners, my man, understand? We need to talk about talking and gunning with, if you'll excuse me, cunning. Let's use our heads, not shoot them off like mouths."

Geoff grunted but realized he was sort of freaking out.

Now the two daydream about retirement plans:

"Minimize exertion, maximize inertia," posited the rabbit-guy, wondering what he'll look like then. "I'd like to think I'll be able to do as I please."

"Please," fronted Geoffry, "Let's not be unusual here. We're not dong much now, so how will afford not doing much then?"

"The big score, brother, the big score," grinned good Dave. And he re-fantasized current dream states, putting himself in charge and by-passing pain stimuli.

"Pacing, order, context," audibly thought G.G., "Striving for excellence, eliminating exigencies, automatic cakebaking."

"That's it!" exclaimed David, "A gas station ! An all-night rig. You need cigs? We gottem! You need shades? We gottem! You need a lighter? We gottem! What do you need in a car at 4 a.m.? We'll have it, Geoffry, you and me!"

"Gas, David?" he Geoffed.

"Gas, yeah, gas would be good. Of course, as managers, we won't work the graveyard shift."

"But Dave," here's Geoff, "Depending on the neighborho wish an occasional nocturnal turn."

"We'll be too old for that shit!"

"Oh I am disappointed in that," sighed Geoffry. "V old-as-you-feel here anyway, spry bunnyman?"

"Folderol, Geoffry, folderol. You are as old as you are. Peri Silent regrouping follows and each builds a cranial pun squinting and fidgeting and then Geoff, surprisingly, is inspire

"Gimme Gas, David, Gimme Gas! Imagine..."

A name for pre-fab purgatory, a handle on fate, duct-paper clipped. These brothers were finished with station travel.

They san. Ooops, more conversation.

Geoff noticed that his companion was, somewhat absent grinding away on a straw, and no drinks had been bought.

"David, where did you get that," Geoff shockly queried.

"Get what? This? I don't know," attempted Dave, indifferen

You don't know, huh? Right," he began, "Let me tell you things: (A) you do not know from whence it came and (B) know what the latest anal fag-fad is these days. One day it's the next it's ham. That's what I'm hearing anyway."

David, in an instant, removed the staw from his mouth valiantly to ignore his lapse. Suddenly, and quite unexpected revealed himself onto David.

"Holy Shit!" startles D.

"What!" says (not asks) the responder.

"You're not gonna believe this, man," states David, s puzzled.

"My brother," Geoff gestures, "That I do believe indeed."

There was a pause.

"I'm gonna say something about God," announces David, and dangling.

"Yeah?" is Geoff, interested. "Sounds heavy. Lay it on, Jo

"Well, it's a little hazy just now, but here goes. You part about being made in God's image? Imagine this: we Geoffry, you are God. Got it? The whole colective of people in is holy. There's no bearded guy on a cloud with cherubs and I and sin print-outs, man. We are the program!"

Again a pause. The tide is unnoticeable now. Geoffry was though, through all this, that David was being sincere, the telling his truth.

"May I continue?" asks David.

"Oh spew on, little white lupus, spew on."

"Prayer is intrapersonal communication. Self-rhetoric, mumbled ministry, soul aerobics, if you will."

"Holy introspection, rabbit-man!" again Geoffry grins.

"Precisely, my brother, precisely. It's coming clearer: The nearer we are to one another, the nearer we are to God. I even think we should drop 'God' and just say 'us'."

"David," interrupts Geoffry, gleeful. "You realize we're generating some serious blas-feemy here. I mean, this is one heretical song you sing."

"Maybe," returns Dave, "but I can't help it. I am not in control here."

"And I ask rhetorically," this is Geoff, "What is new? Hee hee! More, David, more."

"well, I'm losing the frequency. Static cling, dontcha know. Anyway, so, forget about Jesus, forget about Allah, Buddha, all those guys. they were just guys, like you and me, my Geoff, and some other people just kinda freaked out on them. There you go, looking to someone else when it's all within. The end."

"And I was just getting really excited," pouts Geoff. "But, hey, it was fun while it lasted."

"Indeed it was," says David, rubbing cream on his pink nose, smearing some on his whiskers.

Each now took the new ideas and sort of mulled, David tanning, Geoffry reading and gulls wheezing, an old couple strolled splashing the low tide trim, a horn honked, two friends burned on, and the sun slowly set.

"I am nothing," grunted Geoffry, "without my keys. If I lose them, I can't drive and I can't get in. Everything is locked, and that's a drag. I have keys I no longer need or use, but there's just something about throwing away something that heavy, I mean, y'never know." He nodded as he said this.

David noticed, and wondered, upon noting, if Geoffry had noted as well (and bet he didn't) that they were surrounded by women. Females, for sure. None too close, usually in pairs, some with young ones. Geoffry did notice that Dave was attending intensely to apparently nothing in particular.

"What's up?" queried G-man.

David was, momentarily, seemingly semi-disgruntled:

"I was just thinking," calmed he.

A pause.

"Well, Christ. Lay it on me," (Geoff).

"The question is this: what do you want?"

"No. Women. I ask them: 'what do you want?'"

"Oh. I see."

"I mean it. What the fuck? Gimme some truth y'know what saying? I just want to ask them."

"What makes you think they's ever tell you?"

"Yeah, I know. that's what sucks, if y'know what I mean..."

"Easy now. Don't ruin it."

"Sorry. I just wish I really knew something about them that don't already know."

"No you don't. You can't handle what little you know now."

"Ouch. good point."

"Awright."

David broke out the carrots, gladbagged in the cooler, and off his companion a soda. Geoff accepted and the David nabbed elbow-bend straws. Classic beach maneuver, it was agreed.

END

## Reflective Leakings *Mark Withrow*

The bus will only come within two blocks of the brewery. Kent leaps from the florescent sanctuary, enjoying the sound his black boots make as they meet the gravel. Kent shuts his eyes and thr back his head. This is a recently aquired habit. He will not a himself to face the old brick brewery until he has seen the sky. sky sometimes tells his fortune: if anything is fallling from the work will be hard and draining, if there are clouds in the sky the will be an evening of the unexpected, and if the sky is clear his w will be easy and the hands on his watch will be swift of foot. I opens his eyes. The sky reveals a nearly full moon. He trots tow the South gate kicking up gravel, grinning.

Kent slams his frayed timecard down into the punch clock. Pla it in a grey metal rack to the left, he descends to a flight of st: chipping the peeling paint of the railing with his thumbnail. At the of a long bleak corridor a bulletin board with rotting cork is scre into the wall. A bare bulb hangs overhead.

Kent's eyes quickly run down the assignment sheets for the w until they catch his name of the tail end of the one with bottle hc typed across the top. So, it was Bottle Head Buck and he--toget

those old farts who ran the empty cardboard boxes down to the packing machines.

He could see them now, with their soft, pink skulls like a baby's, little tufts of white hair sticking out here and there. They spent hours playing cards and sucking on long-neck bottles of ale. Kent figures that the reason they alway drink out of the long-neck is because that's the

kind loaded into the boxes they send a flight down to the packer. Since most of the beer is bottled in non-returnables, Woody, Skip, and Calvin get to play a lot of cards (usually three handed spades, although Kent always ran up to Woody and yelled "go fish Woody! Go fish!" It didn't matter if it was Woody's turn or not. Woody never got upset with these outbursts; he would merely gaze up at Kent with his big yellow eyes--eyes not quite as dull as Skip's and Calvin's--and say "spades," drawing out the first "s" sound for several seconds.)

Kent bounds up the metal staircase to the bottle house lunch room. He drags the unused umbrella behind him, making a racket which echoes off the walls and beats him to the lunch room door.

"Go fish Woody! Go fish!"

"Sssssssssssssspades."

Woody returns his eyes to the card game as Kent tosses his coat and umbrella in the nearest corner.

"Has ya bean show the rack son?" inquires Skip.

"I'll get tired of putting it there when you get tired of asking me if I know where to hang it. Say, if you boys suck up a few more ales maybe we'll run long-necks tonight. I'll be glad to do my part," Kent laughs. He pushes back the top to the cooler (it works like the tops of those antique desks, but Kent doubts if it's worth anything) and slams it back down after securing a long-neck ale in a pale-green bottle.

"We're running ale tonight. The bottler's been cleaned and set. We ought to put out enough cases to fill a few trucks and section B of the warehouse unless you go and make another mess" Calvin calmly states.

"Well, I want to do my part all the same" says Kent as he pops off the cap and flicks it just over the old man's head.

"Missed again there fella" mutters Calvin.

"No, I missed by exactly an inch again. You seen Melba?"

"She's around."

"Fine" Kent says, gulping down the middle third of his ale. "The res is squat. See you card sharks later."

"Much later" mumbles Woody as Kent leaves, pulling on a pair of safety glasses and rubber gloves.

At the top of the first flight up from the lunch room a large white

## **NO PERSONNEL BEYOND THIS POINT WITHOUT SAFE-T GLASSES, GLOVES, AND PROTECTIVE EAR PLUGS.**

Kent clears his throat and decorates the sign. He places an in each nostril and picks an old stiff work glove off the unzips his fly, sticks the glove half-way in.

"I'm running for governor of this fair state, ladies and gentlemen and with your help, votes, and money, I plan to reform this land in which we live. Madam, let me shake your hand." Kent out his pelvis and heads into the bottle house.

As he approaches the row of packing machines Kent spots Melba. She isn't watching the machine. Her greying black hair sticks under a pale red baseball cap and Kent sees that she has one out. Dropping his voice to its deepest baritone, he sneaks up on her.

"What is company policy on earplugs in the machinery area?"

Melba turns with a start and makes a Spanky McFarland face at Kent until she spots the extra glove. A broad grin softens her features and she holds up her hand to cover it.

"It must be the radiation in the beer, Mel. I woke up this morning with five instead of one. Do you think I'll get compensation?"

"You'll get fired if you don't get to work." Melba laughs.

Kent smiles, pulls out the imposter glove, and zips up.

"See you at break time Mel," he shouts over his shoulder at the roar of the machinery.

Placing his earplugs in their proper positions, Kent heads for the long-neck bottler. He passes the pasteurizer and gazes in a side window at the green waves of bottles creeping through the scalding steam water. A conveyor belt restricts any of the bottles from escaping. Kent wonders if as many bottles have passed through the pasteurizer as...

"Kent, you're late!" The voice instantly cuts through the noise of the surrounding machines and Kent turns to face Buck Eaton. As Eaton wears a pair of black overalls with the legs tuckered into bright rubber boots. His barrel-shaped chest is concealed behind a black shirt which is buttoned to the top.

"You work number four tonight. And if you dump so much of a drop of ale you'll lap it up like a dog." Eaton turns and waddles, pretending not to hear the dog-like howls coming from Kent.

Kent watches him waddle away, wishing he would wear

would look just like a giant bumble bee drifting aimlessly from machine to machine.

"The field is filled with flowers and the bee cannot be everywhere." Laughing, Kent ambles over to the bottler number four, relieves a sad-faced man named Rudy, and settles onto a well-worn stool. High overhead, hanging from a ceiling black with years of accumulated filth, large grey fans spin slowly as if weary of trying to fly away from the noisy clatter below (while resting on his shoulder the bird pecks Kent

on the ear and whispers in a sweet, low murmur). Kent watches the green bottles marching single file into the bottler, leaving capped and filled in the same manner for the short trip to the pasteurizer. He watches and waits. It is waiting that gives weight to time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three hours into Kent's shift, the green bottles disappear into the steam-filled mouth of the pasteurizer and he shuts off the bottler. As soon as the huge cylinder stops spinning, Kent frowns. He could have let it run. Envisioning himself lapping little puddles of ale off of the cement floor while Buck-a-roo stands over him in a John Belushi "killer bee" imitation, Kent pushes a couple of stragglers onto the wire mesh floor of the pasteurizer. The steam bathes his face in a warm mist, fogging his safety glasses. The last bottles are enveloped by the fog and Kent glances over at the bottle cleaner. Nothing comes out of the machine and Kent pulls off his gloves and rubs his sweaty palms together. He leans back on his stool and waits.

(Voss had been livid. The safety record of his window washing company had been one of the main reasons it had been hired for the skyscraper jobs. He wouldn't stand for some careless fool with a lame story about a bird to give his company bad publicity. No sir. Imagine, hanging there in the breeze like a piece of wet laundry, flapping your arms and squacking while the gawkers, the paramedics, and the press gather below. No good. It was simply no good. Only a coil of rope had prevented a certain plunge to a messy situation for Voss to clean up. It was the supply warehouse or nothing for Kent.)

"Play me or trade me" Kent blurts out. He looks around to see if anyone is near. Across a winding row of conveyor belts an older man not familiar to Kent sits at the gaping mouth of the bottle cleaner. He appears to be asleep until he reaches up to go treasure hunting in his fat, bumpy nose.

Kent turns away and stand on top of his stool to see if he can spot Melba's packer. He just catches the dull red of her cap hovering over

the razor sharp edges of the bottle separators is causing trouble. He stands by, his face red and arms waving. Kent sees his mouth open and closing rapid succession and, flapping his jaw, mirrors the

He hops down off of the stool (the bird had flapped its wings) and whispered "Follow me." Kent looked it in the eye and said "I'll race you" and does a little dance while singing:

The packer is down  
see big bucky frown  
just a fat, ugly clown  
like a King with no crown  
he's a tyrant renowned  
and should be run out of town.

His dance outlasts his ability to rhyme words and the green bottles begin leaving the cleaner to watch.

As Kent's dancing becomes more frenzied his protective instincts go off. He doesn't bother to retrieve them. The man running the bottle cleaner is waving his arms so Kent waves back, beckoning the worker to join in the dance. The man's waving arms become frantic and Kent laughs and spins around and around.

"Get those glasses on and get back to your machine, man," Kent barks out.

Kent turns to see Buck Evans standing below the bottler, his hands on his hips. He removes his earplugs and screams "What was that, Foreman?"

"You get that bottler on line now or I'll have you replaced," Kent crosses his arms and waits.

"Going on line now, boss" replies Kent, switching on the bottle cleaner. The huge cylinder begins to spin and ale gushes from the nozzle. Kent catches a spray that soaks his face and most of his work clothes. He runs down his rubber overalls and sneaks into the warm steam. He staggers back, pushing his glasses up on his forehead.

"You're finished now, mister" he bellows, pointing a chubby finger at Kent. "I'll be right back with your replacement."

Kent sits down on his stool and watches Buck storm off. He watches the empty green bottles approaching the spinning machine.

"Single file, now boys. Nobody get out of line."

The bottles hit the machine and are filled with ale. Kent watches them make their way to the mouth of the pasteurizer and hear the steam mist. Just then a hand taps Kent on the shoulder and he turns to see a baby-faced young man with saucer-shaped blue eyes and



"Boss says I'm supposed to run this bottler" he says with an apologetic shrug of his shoulders.

"Fine. Just fine." Kent grins, grabbing a bottle of ale off the conveyor belt and, pulling an opener out of shirt pocket, popping the cap. Taking a long swig of the cold beer he glances down at the glaring face of Buck Eaton.

"You're in a heap of trouble, buddy" Buck shouts, bearing his teeth. "Follow me."

Buck turns and, stomping the bright yellow boots against the wet cement, marches off toward his office.

"I'll do better than that," Kent grins, jumping onto the conveyor belt. He thrusts his head and shoulders into the pasteurizer's opening and, crawling on his belly, squirms on the wire mesh. He can barely make out some green bottles in the steam ahead. Laughing, he whispers, "I'll race you."

End

## Sagital Crest *Jeff Duncan*

"Big-brained babies." Never mind whether he understood it at the time. It remains that Darwin heard it. He heard it the moment he was born. And as Charles hung upside down--the cord unsnipped, the noxious liquid stringed and steaming--the doctor went on to whoever cared to listen, to whoever could hear pass the gutter cursing. "You see, it aren't that the hole is too slight...oh, it's amply large, look and see for yourselves the expansion...no, it is these baby bodies, precisely the heads, more precisely still, their brains which are too large, and they're getting' larger with every generation. That's where we get our birth pain." Mom Darwin screamed on, and neither the midwife, with her horrible, talonous, pinching fingers, nor the father, who seemed disenchanted, somehow, having seen his wife like this, could hear the doctor's editorial.

But Charles heard it. His head squished into the shape of a grape popsicle, his eyes yet invisible beneath the resinous film he had it all right.

And all of this deduced from a yellowed bit of torn paper found pressed in a book in Terry "Slim-Boy" Hackel's Used Books of Detroit.

copy of The Common Man--Charles's own copy, judging inscription, and written by his grandfather, the amorphous Erasmus Darwin--should be unnoticed for perhaps five years. The shop has been under its present proprietor for that time. The thirty-five cent table, beneath the likes of The Bradys Out Demon Seed, and Ten from Hitchcock. Nonetheless, it was. When the book was at last opened, the old diary scribbling fell from pages sixty five and eighty three (apparently, judging from the

contents, Darwin had removed an entire chapter, entitled "Slips of the Tongue 1750-1775") and landed precariously--a bit of paper, perhaps 3" by 4"--between the protective rungs of a fan, beneath the table. The blades were not spinning, as it was early April. There it rest for several weeks, until "Slim-boy" from inevitable mulching, recognized potential antiquity, and put it in a zip-lock freezer bag to the University.

October 9, 1891

CED.

*... Long been thought that it was the Galapagos, the damnable finches, which illuminated. ... so to speak others maintain that it was gradual, yet still and assuredly from the H.M.S. Beagle. ... but, no, I say it was inherent. ... born with the knowledge. ... always waiting to cast my stone. ... all the while moored by God, beaten down with reminders of how it is real and of my entailing obligation. ...*

The rest of the page is torn away, and even this little bit is in obscurity. Those portions--perhaps twenty of thirty words--could not be distinguished have been omitted. Yet when contextually linked with additional Darwin lore, speculation on carbon dating, rumors, ruminations, these are the historian's textual verification, when available, is catalytic and obligatory--in our quest for truth. This diary scrap is not only for its authenticity; its worth reaches toward that of Lincoln's "lost speech," the Othello forgery, Mengele's skull, the stifling Weavers. It is a wavering domino. A good many skeletons

The ship was rather pathetic when Darwin first saw it docked in Catlinbury Bay, in October of 1842. What with the crude patches of circular tin fastened fore and aft as an early experiment in streamlining, and the crew, handpicked by Captain FitzRoy--bedraggled old friends, fellow veterans of the Captain, most had not been afloat since the turn of the century. And the name, H.M.S. beagle. It reminded Charles, he was to write later, of the butcher's little, hard dog in Shrewsbury, and of how in his youth the dog would fix him with a look of glory-lust whenever he went into town for stew pieces. "Like unstickin' a leech from a sunk log," the butcher would remark to startled customers.

Those early months of the voyage went amiable enough. Too smooth, in fact, for a homesick, young geologist. Groups of buddies trading stories, puffing the various tobacco strains gathered from endless ports and islands. Not much work for the old men who, from time to time, would trade off at bailing water that came sliding through loose seams of the superfluous streamline experiment, taking turns at the wheel or at pulling and mending sail. none had ever mastered the tools of navigation, and Captain FitzRoy, the only one who could operate a compass, plot with the stars, and gauge aereostath, did not feel it fitting for a commander to do these basic tasks. And he made this clear from the beginning. It was young Darwin who suggested to the old boys that they keep close to shore. This they did, every two or three days heading into harbor to ask directions. It was slow going.

The H.M.S. Beagle log suggests that as early as the fourth month, when Darwin's collections were still infantile, the old mates had begun the long and annoying process of alienation. Darwin was told before departure that the entire forward hull, as well as ample deck space, would be given him for his collecting: minerals, fluids, plants, a multitudinous array of animal life. All of this was in writing. It had been agreed upon in advance, but the old mates perhaps had other, more pressing needs. An early log entry by Captain FitzRoy hints at accruing disparity: "This aren't the bleeding ark." And once out at sea the old fellows had Charles outnumbered. His cabin, quite large as these things go, was pirated by two of the eldest men who complained of the salt drafts and would not live the month, they wept, if they were not given dryer quarters. So Darwin was given a large, knotted crate which he tore apart and renailed to form a room in the most forward tip of the hull.

And it was only hours after he lay, half asleep, on the warm deck (he had only just returned from a week safari in the Omu River Basin) when without thinking he expounded on species immutability to the

pious limp-skinned man at the wheel, that five of his small trees were whisked overboard by an unforeseen wave. the indication that Charles sensed betrayal. This was still four years before Captain FitzRoy would find him hammered tight inside his seated waist-high in salt foam, muttering "ten thousand bones" over and over and over.

What pages have been found from his original diary--and from books every day-- are wrinkled and bespeckled with mildew. One theory has it that the old mates moved Charles forward in the vessel so that he would receive a perpetual squirt from the malsealed tin experiment. Thus the saturation. Indeed, many entries begin with "Again pumped sea from "Awoke in wetness," or "I am wrinkled about the fingers." Yet was his to do with as he would. Using additional crate planks,

gave his room a straight edge, sacrificing the spacious curvature of the vessel for the familiarity of more traditional walls.

Another bit of diary, dated June 19, 1889 (discovered, among the pages of a Hardy Boys adventure in Book and Breeding Card Salon), tells of what Darwin phrased as "the Lord's sustained bombardment..." upon him. Here Charles records a day of a church potluck in Shrewsbury. Though he was nearly 50 years old, this particular event, like so many of our remembrances, remained roped and knotted in his mind. "before him with a wild will of its own. He had graduated in catechism that Sunday and, like his friends, was to recite a verse to the community, directly after the taking of the wafer. the lime wine breathed. This, verse tradition is still carried on in Shrewsbury, and today it remains Corinthians 1:36-72 which is alphabetically, among the children for recitation. Shrewsbury Parish records list fourteen catechismal graduates in 1823, whom preceded Charles by name. thus Charles would have not vomited and run to Mom Darwin's arthritic and arms--repeated verses 42-44: "to the southern, deep in rock, thee had crawled before thy glory. Seek the praise, but guard against infamy."

The Omaha diary scrap reads:

June 19, 1889

CED.

Gasper Dvorspince \* had finished and it was to me to speak my full lines to family and townspeople while before me stooped Pastor Preith, and was horrible.

*my pastor and educator, with his misshapen head, too large above the eyes, keeping them always in the black monstrous swinging gait, which I had always thought the burden of long hours at kneeled prayer. Pastor Preith's incessant itching about the head and under the arms. The questions lay down before me, enveloping the scripture why would he not walk in church? Why leap from peil to peil? these thought pressed me to the ground and I was ill and hastened to mother, I was shamed.*

\*an inexplicable alphabetical breach. Again, words and/or lines which are illegible have been deleted.

Historians at Oxford University, where the largest chronologic compilation of Darwin data is housed, believe that later entries in Captain FitzRoy's H.M.S. Beagle log may provide further evidence of Darwin-crew disparity. One entry, written during the ship's fourth year, just three months before it once again docked in Catlinbury, gives brief mention to an incident following Darwin's return to the vessel after a week-long expedition. Although never proved, Darwin had, it

was charged, sabotaged the ship, somehow, forcing it to remain in the archaic port of Kromdrai, along the southern-most tip of Africa. It is here that the Rift Valley dips like a massive palm, sealing Lake Turkana with its twelve obscene fingers in a continental obsidian bowl. The damage inflicted by Darwin--if, indeed, he was guilty--or the reason for this action are too vague to speculate. Yet one theory has it that Charles had found something in the caves at Kromdrai: a skull, a tooth, a tool, something deemed important enough to remain in that hellish valley. However, natives had known of these caves for nearly two-hundred years before Darwin arrived. And, any evolutionary specimens would have likely been removed long before the 1800's. (The natives, even today, are Godless in these regions, and seem to derive unlimited mirth through bastardization of the past--including, to our despair, damaging and hiding fossilized remains. To this day, no one knows why they think it so funny, yet it is unlikely, one must surmise, that they house malevolence toward scholasticism. Perhaps its explanation is rooted genetically.) More likely, it would seem, Darwin

may have tripped upon one of the upper caves at Swartkraai geologists, among them Sir Lionell Bie, believe tht the curious in the cave where the now famous GLX jaw was unearthed other than Darwin's initials. Bruce Montlathes, the discover of the cave and jaw, however, discounts this attributing the marking to simple erosion.

In any event, the H.M.S. Beagle stayed in Kromdrai Port additional two weeks. The frightened, elderly crew drew lot who would ride the dinghy into the wicked city for food and These weeks marked the longest period of abstinence of the voyage.

Repairs were made and Darwin was sent for. Captain Fitz always an economical writer, made note of Darwin's return to "At once struck with his unusual good humor. No more homesickness today. Hair and beard not in keeping. At dinner (Charles) began with his blasphemous ravings." It was late night the three-hundred and twenty-five crates were all aboard--each bore the wrath of Darwin's hasty scribbles: a no letter, and a special mark to distinguish where, precisely, the had been found. They sailed by moonlight, in hopes of being far

from the stench of Kromdrai by daybreak. Charles fell exhausted and elated, only after maternally marching up and from crate to crate, touching them and nuzzling. As is their custom Kromdrai savages hurled their fecal matter at the giant, vessel, and the old crewmates were no less active. By daybreak crate had gone over the side and into the sea. A final sentence this same day in FitzRoy's log was scratched out, but it was careless haste--for the words, with magnifying glass, are quite discerned: "All we have left is his harmless book of finch and young bastard."

Another scrap of diary, dated identically with captain Fitz above account, is on loan at the National Bibliographic File in Baltimore (and will be returned to Marmelia Clysinth, Darwin's great granddaughter, in 1889). Darwin writes of a series of flashback extreme youth, when he was not yet of school age. Each flashback states, came at the hottest pitch of the day, while he was in a Kromdrai bath house--and each plunged him into melancholy. The following was written by Darwin that evening, before learning of the illfated and may have been written in his little chamber, for the water spaces are numerous:

May 5, 1846

CED.

*Such dreams I have experienced in the brown,  
foamy bathing waters of Kromdraai. I repeatedly  
saw my father, the father of my childhood. He sleeps  
while I play at blocks, finally, it is night and he stirs  
in his bed quarters. His head juts from behind the door,  
eyes closer to the ears than nose. And mother snuffs  
the candles, and he reads scripture in the darkness.*

When the H.M.S. Beagle returned to Catlinbury in late October of 1847 (four years, two months and thirteen days after it set sail), the old crew was greeted by a media cavalcade. Sporadic correspondence through trading channels had heightened curiosity among European science scholars--and Darwin's letters, written with propagandic vigor, had promised great triumphs in the natural studies. So it was under duress that Captain FitzRoy, upon the horrific speculations at Darwin's absence from the greeting deck, admitted to the press that Charles had suffered a mental seizure in Africa and had kept to his quarters for three months. And when the doctors advised sending him at once to his good old home in Shrewsbury where he could benefit from the

familiarity of his own snug room, several of the old crewmates gave a snort. Captain Fitzroy assured the reporters and doctors that Darwin's Shrewsbury room would do him little better than his cabin in the hull. As printed in the London Times, October 27, 1847, in a quote taken from this return interview, FitzRoy stated:

"The lad's taken it into his head to resist change. He's a grand collector and observer. But his longing for home was quite strong. Down below, he's made himself a room, a room he declares that's in every way identical to his room in Shrewsbury. And toward the last, he couldn't tell 'em apart."

End

Through Glass, at Women,  
It is a Mirror

John Green

Lights, light up the features of people, light up features of many faces, many sizes. Person, tight jeans, leather coat, much make-up, sex. (She lays naked on my bed, as I walk toward her, her skin white.) high pitched sound, person, boy, runs playfully from mother. (I play with my friend. I do not see his face, he is there. I am behind bushes and trees; he does not find me.) sidewalk, curb, street, mesh garbage can, cup (plastic), paper bag with whiskey bottle in it. I sneak a little from the bottle in my locker at school; I go to class looking and acting a little more drunk than the alcohol has made me. class, the kids know, we laugh together. with me? (question) (reincident a number of times. the inferior feeling I am in high school) sidewalk, sidewalk. two hold hands, girl laughs, boy puts arm around girl, girl looks at hand of boy. (the inferior feeling I am in high school) (talking to Jennifer Denar, at the party, I know she doesn't want to talk to me any more. she nods her head as too much of what I say; she moves away.) a space between me and the next person has occurred. I move up to fill the void in the line. shoes, black. white collar. sidewalk, brick wall, windows in succession, many buildings, street, cars, snow. man pumping gas. (I pump gas into my parents car. I know the guy working behind the counter. HI JAMIE! (a pause. obvious misplacement) HI TIM!) another void. I fill it. I must. (I am in line. the line ahead of me moves forward. MOVE UP WILL YOU! NO! ARE YOU IN LINE!? YEA! THEN MOVE UP! (man moves ahead of me as does the person of the line. I walk to the man that was behind me angrily.) follow the sidewalk, it meets my feet.

"HOW MANY PLEYAS!?"

"WWTT AH JUST ONE."

red carpet, pushed down, short. pictures of females advertising coming attractions. swinging doors, push them open. dark room, people talking. find a seat, red carpet. rows of seats. many heads above seats. some turn; words come out of the heads (supposedly). pick a seat. I can see well. it is a good seat, person on left, fat puffy crotch, flannel shirt, tattoo on arm, country fuck. ["YOU STAY HERE AND DO THE DISHES, UNTIL ALL OF THEM ARE GONE, THEN YOU COME TALK TO ME AND I'M GONNA HAVE SOME WORDS WITH YOU !"] ground.

"GOOD EVENING GENTLEMEN AND WELCOME TO THE VIRGIN AUCTIONS (applause) TONIGHT WE WILL BE SHOWING SOME OF THE WORLD'S FINEST VIRGINS (applause) FEATURING TWENTY HAND PICKED GIRLS FROM NUMEROUS RACES AND RELIGIONS (applause).

(applause, applause, whistle, applause) girl, sex, walks to center stage.

"GENTLEMEN: GENTLEMEN; PLEASE! (prone, atop the figure, I see nothing but soft, soft white skin.) THE NUMBER ONE FEATURE OF THE EVENING, WEARING NOTHING BUT HER CURLS, JANE! (applause, applause) floor, sex, floor.

"WHERE SHALL WE START THE BIDDING? DO I HEAR 25.67? 25.67. DO I HEAR 25.77? 25.77. DO I HEAR 26.00? 26.00 DO I HEAR 26.74?

26.00 GOING ONCE... TWICE... SOLD TO THE MAN IN THE GREY PIN STRIPED SUIT, BLACK SHOES, BLACK SOCKS, WHITE TEE SHIRT, WHITE SHIRT. THANK YOU SIR, YOU MAY PICK HER UP AROUND BACK. (applause) [copulation] girl, sex, goes off stage, man on stages watches her go with eyes following closely. all men know his watch (laughter).

GENTLEMEN, GENTLEMEN, LET ME BE SERIOUS FOR A SECOND, OUR NEXT ATTRACTION, AND I MIGHT SAY SHE IS AN ATTRACTION (ooh, aaa) IS ONE OF OUR FINER FEATURES. PERFECTLY FORMED, YOU CAN'T BEAT HER. WITHOUT FURTHER ADIEU, LET ME INTRODUCE JANE! (applause, applause, whistle applause, whistle)

WHERE SHALL WE START THE BIDDING FOR THIS FINE PIECE? DO I HEAR 30.52? stomach feels strange, many things spinning, nothing moves, I raise my hand [YES TIM? WOULD YOU LIKE TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION FOR THE CLASS?]

30.54? DO I HEAR 30.53? 30.53. OVER TO YOU SIR, DO I HEAR 30.54? same feelings, raise hand [VERY GOOD PETER, YOU SEEM TO KNOW A LOT TODAY.] DO I HEAR 30.55? 30.55? 30.54 ONCE... TWICE...

SOLD TO THE MAN THAT TENDS TO BRAG ABOUT HIS COLLEGE A LOT."

Same strange, sick feeling, sex, weight forward, I stand up. It is known and has been known that everyone is looking at me. (slurring words, saying stupid things, podium in front of me, others staring at me.) tunnel, sides are black with white dots extend arm to open door, open. anxiety, brown hair dark eyes, head tilted downward, hands together.

"HEY! DO YOU KNOW MICHELL DANOWSKI?

[who the hell? Michell Danlowski, Michell Danowski... coming out of room. room at dorm. talking, sitting on couch, legs bent to chest, laughing.] "YEA, YEA!"

"DO YA? WELL, I'M FROM DALEINVILLE TOO.. SO..."

[she wants me to say something. what?] REALLY? [dumb.

WHWH AH, WELL, I DON'T KNOW, IT'S SOME SORT OF AIRLINE THING."

"OH. YEA! GREAT!, GREAT! SO, YOU COME FORM DALIENVILL TOO HUH?" [gee, I sure do have sense of the obvious. eyes! so brown]

"YEA!..."

"IT AS BORING THERE AS IT IS HERE?"

"YEAH, PRETTY MUCH. GOT A JOB IN THE SUMMER THOUGH GUESS IF YOU'VE GOT WORK IT ISN'T THAT BAD."

"YEA, YEA."

\* \* \* \* \*

"WELL, WE'RE HERE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME IN?"

"SURE!"

"THE DECOR ISN'T THE BEST, BUT IT'S HOME."

"OH DON'T SAY THAT, IT LOOKS FINE. AT LEAST YOU'VE HOME!"

"YEA."

"IT WAS SO BIG."

"YEA."

"ONE OF MY BETTER FRIENDS, NAME'S TIM JOHNSON, HE WORKS OUT A LOT, HE WAS ON MY BED, SAID HE WAS KIND FROM ALL THE BEER HE DRANK, GOD CAN HE DRINK TH ANYWAY, WELL... K'MERE, I'LL SHOW YOU."

\* \* \* \* \*

1. Fretag designates that one should let the peak of the sto through here.

2. David Bowie dressed in drag, but now, if he is on stage accept a red rose for a woman.

3. 1% of the violent crimes in the United States are com women.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Anne Jenetca, or Jane, as most men call her, was up day, dressed and ready to go by eight O'clock. She went out door of the apartment building, and caught a ride with some didn't even know. It was easy for her to do. She held up a Mary Anne Jenetca, or Jane, as most men call her, was up day, dressed and ready to go by eight O'clock. She went out door of the apartment building, and caught a ride with some didn't even know. It was easy for her to do. She held up a

"HEY GIRL, GET IN, WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO?"  
 (looking in her purse at a piece of paper) I'M OFF TO MT. DARMEN."  
 "WHAT'S THERE?"  
 "THE VIRGIN AUCTIONS. WHAT ELSE?"  
 "OH YEAH, SURE, I DIDN'T KNOW THEY HELD THEM THERE."  
 "THEY SURE DO! THEY HOLD THEM EVERYWHERE!"  
 "YEA, I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT."  
 (drive, drive, talk, drive)

End

## A Grey Christmas Story

*Mark Simmons*

When I was old enough to start remembering my life with any clarity, my Grandpa was old enough to start forgetting his. He was senile, and we didn't cry over him. He lived with my parents, my brother and I in our house in New York, and he would spend his time sitting in the living room and listening to the radio. His appearance was neat. He kept his white hair combed back and parted on the side, and he kept his tiny moustache neatly trimmed, which on his saggy face made him look very German.

In the winter of 1939, I was ten and my brother was twelve. War was brewing in Europe, and America was still content to sell arms. It was Christmas eve, grey and drizzly wet, and my brother and I walked home from our half day of school. My brother, who was not only older than me but bigger than I ever hoped to be at the time, walked behind me.

"I saw what Ma and Dad are gonna give you tonight," he said. I knew Santa wasn't coming. My brother took care of that two years earlier. "Shut up," I said, "Don't tell me."

"They're getting you a dress. They said they wanted a girl, but you came along."

"Leave me alone, Bob," I said. The sidewalk we were walking along was old and cracked. The houses along the street were set off the sidewalk by three foot slopes, and you had to go up some steps just to get on the walk to the door. My brother ran up ahead of me and landed

"Hal" he laughed, "Yeah, I'll leave you alone." He ran the two remaining to our home while I stood and looked at my pants puddle. Snow was coming down lightly, melting as it hit the ground. Some flakes fell in my eyes and blurred my vision.

When I got home, my mother was at the door. She was a skinny woman of forty, and she kept her brown hair piled on her head. "You had best watch where you're going, Peter, or your pants will be dirty." I saw my brother at the door to the living room with a cookie shoved in his face, and a stack of them in his hand. "Robert told me what happened. Be careful. Now go upstairs and get those off. Then get back down here because your father'll be here in the tree." While I walked up the stairs, silent, I saw my Grandpa in the living room. He was sitting in the faded yellow couch by the fire, clutching his walking stick. He was listening to the end of Armstrong's All American Boy.

Bob came up to our room. When I had my pants off, he threw a cookie at me. "Sorry," he said, "Ma made me tell her why you were with me. I told her you were throwing rocks at houses and tripping

he threw the cookie back at him and it crumbled off his leg on the floor. "Hey! Watch it!" my brother said. He came over and pushed me on the bed. He grabbed my head under his arm and squeezed. I tried to push his arm off, but I was too skinny and young, and he was too

"Say you're sorry."

"Sorry!"

"Say you'll give me your dessert."

"O.K. O.K." He let me go and he walked out. I put on some pants and went back downstairs. I walked past the living room and looked at my Grandpa. He was staring out the window and Christmas music was playing on the radio. I went into the kitchen where my mother was cooking dinner.

"That looks much better," she said, "Now go sit with your brother and wait for your father." She was putting batter for rolls in a tray. Spread over the counter were grey vegetable skins, carrots, and all manner and consistencies of spilled liquids. All the burners on the stove were going, and a goose was in the oven.

I went to the back room of the house where my brother was. I stared at him. One wall of the room was made up of windows. I had a view of the backyard, garage, and alley. It was Christmas eve. Robert was getting excited. We could smell the food cooking and looking out, waiting for my father to drive up with our tree.

"I'm getting the drumsticks," Robert said as we waited. We heard Christmas music playing from the living room.



"You gotta give me one. You're taking my dessert." My father drove into the garage off the alley, and we watched him bring the tree up the walk. He came in, set the tree against the wall, and took off his boots. Robert grabbed the tree, which wasn't very large, and carried it into the living room.

"Hello, Pete, how was school?"

"Fine," I told him.

"It'll be dark soon enough. Go and help Bob with the tree." He walked into the kitchen and kissed my mother. I went into the living room in time to see my brother holding the tree in its stand.

"Screw it in," he told me. I got on the floor and slowly screwed the tight, rusty screw in. Grandpa was watching us. We didn't say anything to him. He talked first.

"Come here," he said, motioning to me. My brother left the room. I went over and sat next to Grandpa on the couch. The fire was dying down and it was getting dark outside. It was only the afternoon. My grandpa put his arm around me and started singing, "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," along with the radio. Along the wall of the living room were portraits of my grandparents, both younger.

There were also some photos of my parents and some baby pictures of my brother and I.

Robert and my father came into the living room, both carrying boxes of ornaments. "Hello, dad," my father said.

"Hello," Grandpa answered. I got up and walked over to the boxes.

"Did you keep busy today?" my father asked, speaking clear and loud.

"You want a piece of candy?" My grandpa nodded to a bowl of mints.

"No thanks," my father answered, "You want to help us with the tree?"

"No...no."

We spent the rest of the afternoon decorating our tree and waiting for dinner. My father brought out a box of presents from his bedroom and placed them under the tree. My brother and I brought out the small gifts we made at school for our parents.

My mother called us for dinner. We went into the dining room and sat down. We spent our Christmas eves alone and went to my uncle's house for Christmas day. My brother and I were washed and clean and sat next to each other. On the other side of the table my mother sat next to my Grandpa and cut his food. My father sat at the head of the table.

On the table was our goose, not very large, some dressing, gravy,

poured some wine for my brother and I. After I drank it, I felt glad to be a part of my family, even to be my brother's brother. We ate quietly, Robert hurriedly, and we finished the goose. My mother cleared the empty plates.

"Where's the dessert?" Robert asked impatiently. He gave a kick under the table.

"Coming," my mother said, bringing out a big bowl of custard and dished it out a little on plates and passed them out.

"Thank you," my Grandpa said.

The soft little pile of yellow on my plate smelled of the caramel sauce poured over it. The sauce was running off the custard, caramel little chunks with it. My brother gulped his down and I stared at my plate.

"Peter, you're not eating," my mother pointed out to me. "Something wrong?"

"No."

"You haven't said much. You're so quiet."

"He's just excited, dear," my father stepped in to say, "That's the way he shows his impatience. That's how I was when I was a boy. I just sat down and thought about my presents. Inside, he's jumping up and down."

"All right, dear," my mother said, "Clean your plates."

My brother traded dessert plates with me and finished mine. I knew if I didn't let him, he would find a way of getting me in trouble with my parents, which was bad enough without it happening on Christmas eve. "Hurry up," he said, "I'm going into the living room to wait." I got up and followed him in. He started going through the packages and making a pile of his own things. He held one red package up and said, "Something soft in here. I think it's your dress. Ha!"

"Shut up. I'm not getting a dress." I was tired from the wine.

"What did you get for Grandpa?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"So, you're not so perfect."

My parents came into the room. Robert went into ripping his present open, and so did I. We both received some underwear and sweaters. Robert's was yellow and mine was grey. My parents opened the clay cups I made for them and pretended they were wonderful.

"How lovely!" my mother said.

"Thanks, Pete," said my father.

My Grandpa spent the time slowly opening his two presents. He took the wrapped box of candy and turned it over, saying, "My, my." He carefully peeled the tape back that held the paper in place. He

his bony fingers in and pulled the box a little way out. "My," he said again. As he began to delicately rewrap the box, my mother said, "Don't wrap it, dad. It's candy, it's yours."

Grandpa opened the box and passed it to my mother. "Have a piece," he said. She passed it to my father who passed it to me. I took a caramel and Robert took three cremes. Grandpa watched my brother and me open our presents. I was excited, but not like my brother was. I was tired. Bob would open a package with a game in it, look at it, put it in his pile, and grab another one. The big present of the year was a small toy train set my brother and I were supposed to share. He kept it over by his pile of things and when I picked up a car he told me to be careful and not to break it.

Grandpa was looking at me, and when I opened my last package, and my mother was playing with the perfume my father gave her, he stood up.

"I've got something for you," he said to me. Something about the way he said it made me thrilled. I was young, and the something my Grandpa was going to give me shot a jolt of excitement through my system. I overcame the effects of the wine for a moment. I thought of all the wonderful old things he had stored away in his closet for years; old knives, toys, maybe a shotgun from when he was young. He left room. My parents looked at each other. Robert's face lost its happiness.

I smiled and sat on the floor, waiting.

"What's he up to?" my father asked my mother.

"I don't know. Maybe you should follow him and make sure he doesn't hurt anything, or himself."

"No. He'll be all right."

Grandpa came back into the room carrying a small lump wrapped in a dirty dinner napkin. He handed it to me and he sat down. The lump was cold. I unwrapped it and found it was a baked potato from dinner. Robert laughed and pushed me over. I was blank.

"Dad, that's a potato," my father said.

"It's for him," Grandpa said, pointing. "Merry Christmas."

My mother came over. I was just tired. She took the potato and the napkin back to the kitchen.

"Thanks, Grandpa," I said.

"Merry Christmas," he said again.

End

## OO CAVE OF THE DRAGONOO

David X.

The sun stood high when the two rounded the curve of the trail that followed the red cliffs. The trail was little more than a path and would doubtless have been overgrown with weeds, if any rain fallen in the last year. As they toiled through the dust, they came upon a large cave mouth that stared ominously in the rock, like a moody invitation. Seeking to escape out of the heat, the two began to climb toward that patch of shade promised. It would be cool, cool and dark. They could almost feel the damp on their dry skin. Beneath them, the ground was rock hard. They crunched through the dead branches and sticks of the dead bush. The mouser glanced down as his ankle turned and noticed they were trampling over bones. Old, dried and cracked.

"Fathred."

The big man was already ahead and paid no attention to the cave. They gained the cliff shelf on which the cave rested. Fathred dusted his hands and looked back. His companion pointed to a pile of debris that was strewn messily by the right side of the cave. The big man leaned over and had a brief look. Then he held his head cautiously inside the cave. After a minute, he turned around quietly and pursed his lips.

"I think we've run across a problem."

"Oh? What kind of problem?"

"I think there's a dragon inside."

There was a dragon down there. A large one, judging by the white smoke that curled in wisps out of the cave mouth. A faint whooshing sound could be heard every other minute as the monster lizard exhaled within the lair. A certain mustiness was in evidence and the lips of the cave were smeared with a yellowish slime.

"Whatever's in there, let's not disturb it."

"Mouser, you're a coward."

"A coward, eh?"

"Of course, it's daylight. These animals prefer to carouse at the twilight and later. Perfectly safe."



"Perfectly safe."

"Quite."

"I didn't know you were such an expert."

The large man coughed modestly. The pair stood in front of a large cave opening in the side of a red stone cliff. Charred shrubs on either side stood mute testimony to the housekeeping of the cave's inhabitant.

"My early training with the bards contributed to my small store of information on the subject. They sang often of the great beasts."

"What's these yellowish stuff on the rocks?"

Fathred stooped to examine the substance. He took an experimental sniff and wrinkled his nose.

"It's must. Dragon must."

"Dragon must?"

"It's a male. It's sort of marking territory. Sort of."

"You mean it's a bull lizard."

"In his prime."

"Well, don't you think we ought to leave it alone?"

"Getting cautious in your old age?"

"Sensible. What don't we just troop along and get the hell out?"

"Tell you what. But first of all look here...It's probably asleep. Fact, I can hear it snoring away in there..."

"It's panting for our blood."

"Notice that pile of cracked bones over there?"

"Couldn't help it. Smells to high heaven."

"I think it's full."

"Looks that way. So?"

"Notice the horse bones?"

"So?"

"There's strings of new leather harness in that mess."

"So the monster eats saddles. What do you expect from something that eats whole horses? Figure he'd eschew bon bons?"

"Remember hearing about this thing when we were at that inn back there?"

"I hate repeating myself...but...so?"

"He's eaten that merchant party. They never showed up in Rantoulos. No trace. Happens regularly around here."

"Cloth merchants, were they?"

"Jewelry"

There was a ten second pause while greed overwhelm the more cautious instincts of the mouser.

"Sure it's asleep?"

"Hey, we're armed. Just keep quiet."

"You're the expert. Where do they keep the jewels?"

"Thank you. They're attracted by jewels. Like crows. He probably got 'em in a neat pile where he can look at them. Now listen. We'll just have a bit of a look around. Nothing heroic. He's probably sleeping like a baby. Just keep quiet."

"Lead on, MacDuff."

In Fathred went, feeling his way over the dank and smelly rocks. The smell got worse as they slithered over the rocks. There was the sound of water dripping somewhere and the mouser licked his lips reflexively. The breathing grew louder as the light began to fade. Their eyes adjusted gradually. The yellowish slime proved to be luminescent to a degree and the duo followed the glowing track. In another minute, the mouser had his look at a real dragon.

There was a large green scaly lump curled with in its in the center of the cavern. They could make out the furled wings that neatly folded away like tidy bat's wings. The long scaly tail circled and over it came the smoky steamy breath of the sleeping monster. The reptile was about four feet long from pointy tail tip to scaly snout and as tall lying down as Fathred was standing up. Right in front of the closed eyes lay the piled booty of many a midnight piratical excursion. The mouser sighed quietly, always swayed by visions of wealth. The dragon twitched in his slumber perhaps a stray brain cell fired as an intruding odor stole in.

Fathred patted the mouser on the shoulder and gave him a by-your-leave gesture toward the jewels. Quiet as a namesake, the mouser crept forward. The musty odor seemed to reach a peak and then subside; probably the olfactory sense merely overloaded. He managed forty feet; thirty; no twenty. At ten, he could see the glowing green saliva that slowly dripped from the half open mouth of the sleeping brute. The pile of jewels glinted dimly. He froze as the bed rumbled cavernously and became aware that the left eye had opened a little, glowing red like a sullen piece of coal. Moving his lips in sincere though rare prayer, he edged toward the cache. Now he stood over the gold and jew

less than five feet from the closed jaws of slumbering death. He stooped ever so quietly and began to pick up the jewels on the top. Into his pockets went the spoils of avarice and he placed them slowly inside, trying to avoid clicks and clinks. He filled all his available pockets and the pouch he'd brought along. There was still a trove at his feet, but now weighing forty pounds heavier; he decided on discretion over valor/greed. Moving quietly, he backed away one step at a time. Ten feet, twenty: he turned about and began feeling his way out. He made his way back and handed Fathred the bulging pouch and together they stole out of the cave.

In the hot air, the mouser wiped the sweat from his forehead and gave a sigh. He dusted his clothing with a free hand. They found their packs and the mouser poured half into each. Fathred picked out a large gold ring with a large red ruby in it and examined it thoughtfully. It was richly carved and heavy. He tossed it casually on top of the rest of the haul in his pack and tied it shut.

"I think we're rich," he said.

"I think you're right," answered his companion, "on the other hand, we should get out of here before he wakes up. He's going to be upset when he recounts his treasure. They do that whenever they wake up."

"Good idea. Let's get the hell out of here."

They took off with a hearty step into the hot sun and were soon out of sight, trudging along the dusty trail and listening to the clink and rattle of satisfyingly fresh stolen booty. A smoothly done theft always lightened the mouser's heart and after a bit he began to sing as they made tracks to the west.

