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Voices
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CONTEST WINNERS

Short Story

First Prize: “The Telling” by Janice Woosley
Honorable Mention: “The Reason” by Carol Blankenship
“Angela” by Janice Woosley

Poetry

First Prize: “Suspended” by Chloe Hughes
“Once” by Carol Blankenship
Honorable Mention: “Man” by Carol Blankenship
“Little Boys” by Janice Woosley
“Spring Comes Slowly” by Sandy Griffis

Art Work

First Prize: “Head” by Rose Marie Collier
Honorable Mention: “Animal” by Shirley Cottrell

Selected for the Richard Oakley Award for Fiction as best short story of the year was “The Coming of Age in Fieldspot” by Algie Ray Smith, which appeared in the Fall-Winter issue. The judges also selected the poems by Miss Hughes and Miss Blankenship, co-winners in the contest, as recipients of the Richard Oakley Award for Poetry.

The editors wish to thank Miss Flora Zbar, Dr. Gerald Randolph, and Mr. Terry Otten for serving as fiction and poetry judges; and Mr. William Loy for judging the art work. We also should like to thank the many students who submitted their work for the contest. Our only regret is that we are unable to use all the work we received.
THE REASON

A Short Story by Carol Blankenship

Samuel sat in his rocker before the window, grimy with coal soot, and watched his granddaughter start across the field that separated his son’s lawn from his own. She took the path which she had made and had taken so many times since her father had built the house there twelve years ago. That was after the doctors said Mary would never walk again. His son had given up his position at Landon College seventy miles away and had brought his family back here so they could help take care of his mother. Now he taught Latin at the county high school and helped Samuel run the farm.

The wind whipped the short skirt against her legs and Ginny raised her head, which had been lowered to protect her face, and looked at the dreary sky as if to ask how much longer it could keep from raining. She was a tiny girl, so tiny the wind seemed to make her veer off the path a few times. She looked too young to be a teacher herself now. Last year at her graduation from Landon, he had sat there watching her, thinking how much she looked like Mary since she had become a young woman, wondering if her face would always have the look of perpetual youth Mary’s had had even after all the strokes.

She had reached the wobbly back gate now and had opened it, holding it firmly to keep the wind from twugging it back against the fence. When she had succeeded in closing the gate again, she disappeared around the corner; but he knew how long it would take her to reach the back door, and he was ready for the little blast of cold air that suddenly reached him as she opened the door without knocking. She never did.

He listened to her footsteps, as brisk as they had been in crossing the field, bringing her through the kitchen, the no-longer-used dining room, and into the living room where he sat stroking the ears of a grey kitten.

Without any greeting except a smile, she went to stand with her back to the lazy heat of the coal stove in front of the boarded-up fireplace. She breathed in quick little snatches as the warmth restored her.

“When I came in, I smelled sweet potatoes baking. It’s such a cozy smell with all this hell and fury outside.”

“Yep, they ought to be done pretty soon now. You’ll have to have one before you go.”

“Goodness, Pa, I just finished breakfast before I started over here. Mom let me sleep late this morning.”

“I’ll say she did! Eleven o’clock! Why I never slept past six in seventy-seven years. You young’uns don’t know what a sunrise is, never seen one. When I was a boy . . .”

And they went ahead with the same argumentative patter they had been using to express their affection for each other all these years. With a hand that shook often these days, he carefully extricated the kitten’s claw from his ancient grey sweater and placed the little cat on the floor. It stretched and headed for the kitchen in search of its mother.

“How was the drive from Landon City last night? Lot of fog?”

“Yes, but I didn’t have any trouble. I got started later than I planned. I had a conference with the parents of the boy I was telling you about when I was home before.”

The enthusiasm in Ginny’s voice as she told him about her especially talented student pleased him. Mary had always got excited about things. She had been so like a child even at the last as she pressed his fingers . . . the same way she had held them after their son was born.

But the girl was talking about something else now. He brought his mind back with an effort.

“Now the reason I came to see you, Pa . . .”

He interrupted her gently, not wanting to hear, “You’ve never needed a reason before.”

She smiled, but she went on, “. . . is that Mom told me . . .”

“That I was being a bad boy?” he interrupted again half-playfully, half-thoughtfully. He wondered what Margory had told the girl about their conversation. He could imagine her whining voice saying, “The stubborn old fool won’t leave that big ruin. It’s falling down over his head anyway. As if it isn’t enough that I have to take care of him, he expects me to keep up that monstrosity as well.” He kept all of the house closed off except four rooms downstairs.

“She told me that you positively refused to consider a move to Landon City.”

“And she sent you to persuade me because she knows you have a way with me.”

She did, too. He had always loved his first granddaughter more than her two sisters. He was careful not to show it, of course, but she was such a wise child. The others were too busy living their own lives to think of an old gray cripple. When something did bring him to their attention, they weren’t unkind. Rather, they were kind in ahumoring way that humiliated him. This girl, so much like Mary, had been his favorite.

Now she answered candidly, “Yes, I’m to persuade you.”

Was that regret in her voice?

“Well, go ahead.”
She didn't smile. "Dad told you he had a chance to go back to Landon?"

He nodded. His Sam might have been head of the department now if he hadn't come back, or maybe he would have found a position with another school that he liked even better. Of course, Sam never mentioned these things any more than he mentioned the fact that he didn't enjoy managing a worn-out farm.

"He wants to go, you know. And since Sally is there in school and I'm teaching in Landon City, it would be nice to have the whole family together."

She waited.

Finally, with the significant raising of one bushy white eyebrow, he said, "Will the family all be together?"

"Pa, how did you guess?"

"Child, for ages young women have brought young men home to meet the family, and grandfathers have known."

"But I only gave him my answer this week."

"Well, I knew the first time you brought him here and introduced him to me. Mary used to smile at me the same way."

So it was true. Even Ginny would be beginning a new life—a life with less room for an old man's dreams although he was sure she would have said there was no reason for anything between them to change. Even in his guilty self-interest, he was glad for her. The young man was a fine lad.

"Pa, you're trying to sidetrack me," she accused.

He chuckled, but to him it had seemed relative.

"They worry so about you over here in this big old house with your coal fire and your bad leg. They're afraid you'll fall on the ice this winter. And you know you aren't well enough to manage the farm alone."

She was right: the years of Mary's illness had worn themselves into his body, which was thin now and stooped. The only chore he did now was gathering in the few eggs each evening. The animals had all been sold, and Sam saw to renting out the land each year and to keeping the books.

"Do you know how long I've lived in this house? All my life. I was born in it. My parents died in it. And then when I met your grandmother, I decided I had been an old bachelor long enough so I brought my young bride here. Your father was born upstairs in that front room on the left. I can see Mary now with the baby in her arms. Her hair was so black then, like yours... And you—do you remember all the rainy days you've spent in that attic going through all those old trunks?" She had an unusual interest in the things of long ago. Before Mary died, she used to come and sit for hours asking to hear about the parties and the riverboats and the people she had never known except through their stories.

Now she said quietly, "He won't go without you."

If she had said it any other way, he could have answered, If he had said, "You've caused them to sacrifice enough already," he could have said, "We didn't ask them to come back and take care of us. We could have managed. I could have cared for Mary alone." But he couldn't have, The illness had been long and wearing. She had required constant attention, and nurses seemed so impersonal she said. And the farm—Sam had been managing the farm these last years; he might as well admit it. He should have seen this all coming two years ago when Mary died and the young people wanted him to stay with them. He had refused vigorously. So Marjory or the girl had come over every day, cooking meals for him as often as he would let them, washing and ironing his clothes, cleaning the house and washing the sooty windows.

And now she was making him responsible for a decision which affected all of them. Why couldn't they just go away and leave him here in his house—his and Mary's?

Samuel realized he had been lost in his own thoughts as he looked up at the girl at last. She had taken the straight chair on the other side of the window where she could look out at the cold rain which had begun to fall. But now she was looking at him. She was expecting him to say something.

He opened his mouth to say it was out of the question, but what came out in a shaky croak was, "My cats, what about my cats?"

Suddenly, she was standing by his chair, one hand pressing his fingers, the other touching his cheek, which he hadn't even noticed was wet. In the soft, low voice he had loved for fifty years, she said, "Never you mind, Pa. I'll tell them it's out of the question."

Then she was gone before he could stop her. And when he did manage to say, "No, wait. Tell them..." the little gust of cold air had already reached him.

He watched her struggling with the gate again and then with her jacket, which she had only carried as she ran out. He knew how cold the rain was this time of the year. It would probably turn to snow before evening. Her black hair was glistening with rain already, but she didn't change her steady, brisk pace. Now, though, she didn't look up but seemed to huddle within herself into a world impervious to rain. She was such a tiny figure in the midst of all that hell and fury.
UPON VIEWING A PAINTING BY JWO

Blue, blue, everywhere blue.
A mass of blue coronation
In a confusion of blue.

To view an outbreak of Spirit
By the master of the brush
Is to hear the
Pitter-Patter of “one’s” feet
Against the clutter of Air
Surrounding oneself.

Peg Downing

THE PHOENIX SPRING

Here
the phoenix
spring ...

dandelions mourning white-haired among
riotous yellow-topped sisters
a confusion of purple violets on a
dirt mound, somber Lenten visitors
lights—blinking, weaving, hinting
what is and what is not—explained
from a window as nebulous physics
lilac budded white and purple-blue,
achingly sweet
pelting temperamental rain on a church
roof cracking awe-filled audible
purple silence
delirious lightness, delicious laughter,
children again, the ground rushing up
and past and back and up again—cheeks
know blue-black velvet sky and stars
just within reach
moonspun tree-limb cobwebs new-gold
against the streetlight breeding
iridescent hours slipping, days
gliding painfully swift—hold:
such shadows will not be carved
in just this way again

look closely—
this
phoenix
spring
here
caught in purple netting

Barbara Reynolds
LITTLE BOYS
Little boys have
gravel for dust
and lead
for petals
And heat for cold
and blessing for not
and egg faces
ringed heads
Reach up and
pull Him down
and ask him
to be a boy
Janice Woosley

TRIAL
The clay was full of little dents
of pushings and proddings
and never-successes
and dirt mashed freely into its
ashen mottled pores
Of knobs all misshapen and clamoring
for a push
of balance
and trite creation from a
broken mould.
Janice Woosley
SPIDER FOREST

Last night I walked in a spider forest
With
Moonlight cobwebs on my face.
Clutched in my hand was a lilac
For it was eerie there in the shadows.
Lovely, too—erie lovely.
And
Then came a tiny, bearded, gnome-like man
Who
Cut the silvery threads with ruby scissors
Sending me back again into
futile nothingness . . .

Wait for me spider forest.

Sam Edwards

LOVE IS A SECRET

Love is a secret locked deeply with a
golden key into the hearts of two people.
And yet, love is as apparent as a majestic
purple mountain rising out of a calm,
averine sea.

Sam Edwards

SHADOWS

I drowned in a shadow once
With
Eternity on my right
The world on my left
And
I in the middle
Screamed nothing from a mountaintop
And
They heard nothing with closed ears
The world drowns in shadows

Sam Edwards

SHADOWS

Four shadows around
a table,
Each with potent aspiration
Greek letters and student babble,
Too-loud laughs display their mirth
Pregnant silences giving birth
To meaningless conversation

Bob Geeslin
She came to Craden on a slow day in September. They said she came in on the bus, but I never did ask her. That was unimportant to me. The first time I saw her she was walking down the road, yes, walking, and she was carrying a small brown crushed leather handbag. I remember thinking that it did not match her skirt very well, or for that matter anything that she was wearing, but I guess that did not matter. She walked very proud with her head up. And she did not act afraid when someone's dog ran from the front yard to bark at her as she passed by. All the men were out at work and most of the women were busy with the last dregs of the summer’s work from the garden. So she passed by most of the houses unnoticed. Except I noticed.

She came to Craden, and it was not long before all the folks knew that her name was Angela Whitten. That was enough news for Craden to digest at one time. I had noticed over the months that things and thought proceeded here at about the same rate in the little valley—slow. Quiet, peaceful, as being peaceful goes, and obscure, as being obscure goes, Craden was not such an awful place for somebody to spend the summer. Why, it had its full share of rose begonias, three year old automobiles, scandals, pious grandfathers, woodpiles in winter, radishes in summer, cold schoolhouses, colder school buses that made long winding routes each day, churches, mules, creeks, houses with plumbing, houses without plumbing, double wedding ring quilts, superstitions, dogs, apple trees, cedar trees, and mailboxes. Craden was a gentle valley, a valley of farmers. And I was there. And then she came.

She came on down the road, past my lodgings, and stopped at Mrs. Garnett’s. Funny that she stopped there. Mrs. Garnett was reputedly very eccentric, only the people there did not call her that; they said she had funny ideas. Frankly, I did not find her so very eccentric. I always thought after that it was ironical she went there. It was almost as if she threw herself in my path to begin with since I was a stranger, she was a stranger, and Mrs. Garnett was sort of the stranger in the community. Why did she come at all? I have often wondered.

I guess it must have been a week after her coming before I met her. Craden offered little social life, truthfully stated, none. Not that it would have mattered. I had not come there to be gregarious. I came there to forget. I met Angela Whitten at church. That strikes me as being funny now after all these years. Funny. That day she had on green, and I hate green. It didn’t look well on her either, but nobody noticed because nobody claimed the distinction of knowing about clothes.

I remember that summer that the same dresses appeared Sunday after Sunday at church, and nobody seemed to mind, Sundays were nice anyway. The church was not too small, and on hot days the windows were raised, and you could hear birds and insects droning away, and despite carefully protected ears, you could hear an occasional tractor, and that was very
bad. The preacher preached on that, and pious eyes blinked in embarrassed unison at the awful hum of tractor wheels turning on Sunday. I neither looked embarrassed nor was for that matter. It wasn't my relatives who were flagrantly breaking the Sabbath. Instead I listened to the beautiful agonies of a fire and brimstone sermon and watched the tall elms at the edge of the cemetery bending in the wind, and the brass planter of cosmos drooping on their veined stems, and the little girl with blonde hair on the front seat struggling to keep from going to sleep under the preacher's eye.

That first Sunday Angela sat about midway of the church. That was the comfortable place to sit, since it was neither indicative of the very righteous or the backsliders as were the front and back seats. Her hair was neatly put up. It had been nicely long that day on the road. She reminded me of someone. I didn't want to be reminded.

Not very long after that winter came. I guess. No, first it was autumn. And that was good. Deep autumn it was, when the trees really shook off their last vestige of dress and raised their arms for winter. It was a nice time for Craden. I saw Angela occasionally at church, but she didn't come every Sunday. I did.

The days stretched long into others, and many passed. Angela gave no indication of leaving. The longer she stayed the shorter my time ran. It was beginning to bear on my mind now. Her coming had resurrected Elizabeth in that green place. The air choked me with her presence, but I had nothing. Not having, Elizabeth, Elizabeth gone, dead already four years, mine, no, dead. The thoughts came to bear on my mind. I couldn't work, I couldn't think. I couldn't do much of anything. The days seemed to stretch like the dough under Mrs. Garnett's rolling pin before they were done. Too long. And Elizabeth sat with every minute, sometimes very close, and then so far from my being with her. It was awful. Angela went to the post office and hung out clothes and walked in the orchard by Mrs. Garnett's house, the sort of thing Elizabeth would do, Elizabeth doing. I couldn't stand it.

I guess I knew long before I decided to leave. I had to go. I put it off as long as I could, and when I looked again, it was still there. The compulsion to run had not abated one bit, and I had to do something. All my furious reasoning was not worth a cent.

I went out of the house very early on the day I decided to go. It was almost spring again. I looked up the valley. It did not have that nice winter haze hovering over it. The hills did not look so bare anymore. A very faint green cast was present on them. I was sorry to go, but I would not say anything. I did not want people to know why I was going. I went solemnly over to the bed of hyacinth just coming up. I would have enjoyed seeing them bloom, but that was just my wishing coming up again. I had learned not to wish because they never came true. That had been almost as bad as casting off the illusion of Santa Claus when I was little. Not to wish, Elizabeth.

I started to cry then, small pinched tears. Men do not cry. All right then. I was not a man. I had to leave, and I did not want to leave. And it was all because of Angela. And my not wanting to leave was because of her. And I was miserable.

It was ten o'clock before I knew it; the day had grown shorter. My bus left at five that afternoon. I had so much to do and so little compulsion to do it. I gathered all my stuff together. I dressed. I sat down in my room and looked at all of it. And I knew what I would do. I think that I knew all along what I would do during those hours. I would go see Angela. I had tried hard not to do it, but the will is only so strong, and no stronger. I waited until almost eleven o'clock before I left. She would probably be wearing green. So what the difference? I went anyway.

I didn't see Mrs. Garnett as I walked up the three big rocks that were steps. I knocked on the screen door, and the knocking seemed to make no noise, just a very light peck, peck. And time hung heavy while I waited. I had not been really close to her since she had come. Just how long had it been since I had seen her until now? Years. And now I was knocking on her door again, a different door, a different Angela. About the third knock I must have regained my painful awareness. Angela? Yes, Angela Whitten. That was her name. I could now hear some footsteps coming down the long cool hall that divided the house. Hers. If I just turned around and ran, very fast, I could still get out of sight before she opened the door.

I saw a grapevine on a trellis near the house. I ran for it and lunged into its tangles, sitting there with the perspiration dripping in my eyes. My hands were shaking violently. I think I was crying again. Big red wasps flew criss-cross over my head. A white cat walked regally by. And Angela came out on the porch and looked around. I almost ran to her again. Instead I gripped a plank holding up the grapevine trellis very tightly, and it wasn't very long before the trembling did not tremble so much, and I could think clearer. I really did think there under eccentric Mrs. Garnett's grapevine. I really did tell myself things while the sun got higher and higher, and it was noon. I don't know how long I stayed under the grapevine.

Angela didn't stay on the front porch very long. She looked about, but not seeing anything, she had no reason to remain. She called once, "Marigold?" I guess that was the white cat's name. But the way she said it. That really helped. That couldn't be Elizabeth's voice. It was just Angela Whitten. Angela Whitten who lived with Mrs. Garnett, who came from where? She was not my Elizabeth already dead.

I went back to my house, and I finished packing. It was time to go.
ONCE

The night half over for others,
I sat without moving
regarding the sad reflection
the pale light within the room
caused on the window, a barrier
between me and the darkness.

The face was light and smooth
against the ruffled darkness of hair
and any expression it might have had
was simple awareness, not understanding.

The near-absence of light
wiped the flaws of reality
from the picture.
The effect was that of a child
painted at the summit of innocence—
a child familiar yet unknown.

She lifted a hand
to the lamp beside her face,
her eyes never leaving mine,
and with a snap
startling in the singing silence,
she disappeared.

In her place appeared a street scene
still in the process of being painted.
not quite covered with snow,
yet promising that the new dawn
would find a thick white frosting
replacing the thin pastel of green sugar
the corner streetlight revealed
on the lawns and roofs
of the darkened houses.

Moving closer to the window,
I turned my head
and saw the light itself.
Even from here
huge, individual snowflakes were distinguishable
into the realm of the light,
and silently, always silently,

lived their lives in the breathless second
taken in floating to the street—
generation after generation
of lifeless bodies making
the sugar turn to frosting.

Perceiving that the window
was no longer a barrier
for I was in darkness,
I hesitated on the threshold of light
and then entered to stand silently,
always silently,
in the midst of a moment of time
as snowflakes settled on my hair
and clung to my eyelashes
and died against my cheek.

Looking up into infinity,
the mother of the snowflakes,
I saw again the child,
through laden lashes,
blurred, different.

There was something . . . something . . .
a smile? . . . a tear? . . .

But as I wondered,
morning came.

Carol Blankenship

MAN

The human being
is infinitely small
and infinitely great.

In terms of the universe,
his minuteness is less
than nothing.

In terms of a thought,
his magnitude
mocks gods.

Carol Blankenship
SPRING COMES SLOWLY

The spring comes slowly
An hiding wings,
But digs its claws
So firmly into the earth.
There is a new sound,
A low stirring sound,
A continuous silent rustle.
Inside every living being
Is a restlessness,
Met only by the yearning,
Whispering, wandering wind.
In me, the sap-blood
Runs fast and fills my
Hapless body with new life.
This life brings me to face
The secret wind, the low moon
If coming freedom, now
Hindered—frettered—tied all 'round
By a sad sort of chain
Pulling, pulling—
    Down down
For next comes summer
Fall, then death.
And spring comes slowly

Sandy Griffis

THE PLAYHOUSE

They played every day in the playhouse by the side of the road. They played on days brimming with heat, the sun beating down in the weeds, pouncing on their two bent, busy heads. They cooked their mud pies intently with perspiration licking down their foreheads. It was a tense, fervid playing known only by Millie and Edgar and those like them.

Each morning they came, each a different way. They did not live close together. But they knew each other. Not a common knowing, the knowledge of children. They played in the playhouse by the side of the road.

Millie left her house early through the back yard gate that hung on one hinge. Every day she passed by the three beef stew cans where she had planted an acorn, a hickory nut, and a walnut. Then she crossed the gravel road and struck her path, taking careful, quick little steps to get to the playhouse. Usually she hummed as she went, a senseless, fragmental tune for which there were no words, only imagination. But she liked to hum. It went nicely with the three hollyhock stalks where Amos Rand's house used to stand, with being Millie, and wearing her brother Victor's faded and outgrown green short pants, and having a piece of yellow ribbon tied around one pigtail instead of the twine. She never hummed after she got in sight of the playhouse. Edgar was usually there before her. She did not hum around Edgar.

Edgar came from his house, shambling down the back steps, not hearing the dog under the floor growl, not going through a yard gate. It had been sitting propped against the smokehouse for a long time now, the paint all scaled off and rotten holes pulled long from feverish hands pulling back and forth at the bent nails. Nails bold imagined sleds together. Edgar would have liked a sled. He went the same way every day, past the dump where all the cans were, cans that said peaches, pork and beans, and hominy, their sharp, haggard edges clashing at molded bits of food hung on them. Remnants of food. He went with his head down and his toes digging into the inch of dust settled in the path. Sometimes he stopped to pick a stcker weed from his hard little heel. Each day he did not aim to go back. Every morning he returned. He was there. And Millie came.

"Hello, Edgar." She smiled a twitchy, afraid smile around the corners of her mouth.

"... 'lo." He sat down on the log with the moss on it. And he did not say anything more.

Some days he would not say another word all day long. He sat, nursing his too big head in his arms. He would sit, and the sun would crawl over his bent head, inching to uncover the grime that faded into the edge of his hair. A wiry little boy, thinking, dreaming, usually about food, tortured thoughts about strawberry ice cream and thin brown vanilla wafers. His
stomach would contert in a hard, starved knot, exhausted. And then he
thought of the magazine picture, a picture of a mountain and some trees.
He had found it in his mother's magazine one day when she was not looking,
and he took it. It was pretty. He had hidden it between the loose baseboard
and the wall behind the couch. When no one was looking, he took it out and
looked at it. Then one day it was gone. It was not where he had put it the
day before. Maybe a rat got it. He just didn't know. It had been nice to look at,
but now it was gone. It was just as well, maybe, because the edges
where it was folded were beginning to fray, and the ink came off on his
fingers when he touched it. The rats got it he guessed.

He sat on the log while Millie cooked in the can lids and the two blue
pieces of glass that were the plates. She had found them by the hollyhock
stalks where the house had burned. They had a baked, wrinkled surface
and the edges were smooth. Every day she filled the can that said garden
peas with water from the branch. It still had the paper on it with a tear-
drop spot of yellow glue holding it together. It made a nice pitcher except
Millie had spilled some water on it one day, and now the paper was sort
of wrinkled.

They had worked hard making the playhouse. One day they had been
walking past the weeds and had stopped to see if there were any birds' nests. They trampled down some of the weeds.

"Edgar, this looks like a room now, don't it?"
"Yeah."
"Hey, how about us making a playhouse?" She said it with her head
turned away.

"I don't know, Millie. Boys don't suppose to make playhouses, are they?" He rolled a rock around under his heel. "But if I just helped you make it, I guess it'd be all right. But I can't play in it. All right?"

So they had built the playhouse. And Edgar had come back the next day to sit. Millie was glad to see him. They played in their weed world, separated from the highway by the high weeds, not visible unless somebody looked close. When they heard voices, they crouched very low, and she could see Edgar's heart beating. They would lay still in the silence hardly breathing, straining, to hear sounds that were not there. Finally they would rise trembling from their burrow. They played again.

"Don't you think we need another log over there?"
"I'll get one, you stay here." He went off down the road, first cautiously
looking up over the bank to see if anyone was coming. He was gone a long
time. Finally he came back with a long, thin plank.

"I passed Ellen Acker's house. She was ringing the dinner bell. I seen
the men coming in from the field."

The rest of the day he sat nursing his head on its corded neck, saying

nothing. The sun got to be a big ball, and it was late afternoon. Time to go.

"Edgar, we'd better go." She said it every afternoon about the same
time.

"Yeah. I... I might not come tomorrow. I may have to do some-
thing." But he came.

The next day was like the last. The next year copied the preceding
one, the only change being in the scrappy height Millie and Edgar grew.
And after that came another year to make the playhouse, hard work, breaking
off each dead weed, and then getting used to the stubbles left. But they
made the playhouse. And Millie still played while Edgar sat with his head
down.

Between the summers and springs they tolerated winter, Millie with
cheery impatience, Edgar with battling determination. They did not see
each other all winter, for Edgar had no coat. But when it got warm enough
for him to take his first tentative barefoot steps, they started out again.
Edgar scuffing the hard dirt in front, Millie behind, glad that he had come
back.

Together they started off, down Millie's path. Around the bend. The
ditch was in sight. But the weeds were very flat, matted together, layered,
and slick with rotting. Their leaves had curled up in withered little cones,
and they smelled like hay caught in the rain. The roadmen had come on
their tractors with the mowing machine blades down. A new project. Keep
America's roadsides beautiful. They had cut down the weeds.

Millie stood very still and looked at her toes, ten of them. Edgar's
stomach growled, and his heart pushed out his throat. He kicked at the
ground, grinding his heel sharply on a little rock.

"Millie..."
"What did they do it for?" Her lip trembled.

Edgar reached down at the ground and intently dug out a smooth round
rock. He held it out in his long thin hand.

"Look here, Millie, don't this rock look pretty..."
"I wonder what they did with the can that had the flowers on it..."
Edgar gouged his thumbnail hard into the rock.
"Millie..."
"... and the two pieces of blue glass."
"Millie, I guess I'd better get home. I got to do something. I..."
They both turned around. Edgar walked in front. The time had come.

Janice Wooley
SPECTRUM OF SPRING

Over the fish steak and the meat pie, through the maze of cigarette smoke, past the baked-on grease, the kaleidoscope of spring bursts and quivers.

Chartreuse buds assert their existence over the darkness of a tree branch. Flashing tulips frolic with yellow jonquils amid the easter-egg green of the grass.

Tangled bushes no longer blooming and massive rocks blaze behind a Midas sweep. Ashes from a cigarette fall in a sunbeam like confetti in a heavenly street.

A cloud daubs the sun, gray reappears. The buds yield to the wind, and drip in the rain. But I continue eating, soon the spectrum will shift. Spring will come again.

Libbie Thompson

JANUARY'S WORLD

I seek the cold, gray melancholy of January's world. The wind whips my face. I open my coat—baring my blue soul to its lashes.

January cannot erase, it is a beginning within itself. The last of my hopes I lay in the torrent of its torments.

"Cure a freeze with snow."
"Draw a burn with fire."
I had a love born in summer sun. "Too much of a good thing."

January. I keep hoping. I keep thinking that Maybe it will be bored with too much of the same and leave and my loneliness will still follow after and I can close my coat and not be sad anymore.

Chloe Hughes
ON AWAKING FROM A DREAM

I heard a song
From mortal mouths,
But more than I could claim—
Why can't I pen it now I pray
And give it a name?

Far fetched ideas—
Pale for a poem.
I think that it's a shame;
Shall I not shake off
This mood they mold
And laugh at fortunes fame?
For
I cannot write.
I do declare the song will not relume;
My fun I'll find
In a true poets' kind
And sleep I will resume.

Chloe Hughes

SUSPENDED

... Suspended, unraveling the ball
to sort, rewind
unrelated thoughts
in the mind.

... Twisting, turning
tumbling, falling
like tangled threads.
But the kitten becomes
bored and seeks other pleasures.

The sun weaves its light
through the silken hairs;
the kitten sleeps, its thoughts
scattered pleasantly
among the dreams, to awake
in awhile and find
the threads gone.

Chloe Hughes
Here One Doesn't Speak English Very Much

An Essay by Beverly Allen

It is amazing what one can do with a knowledge of French that is limited to oui and merci beaucoup. Take my family for example: We arrived at Orly Airport in Paris the second of October, 1958, and the events of the next ten hours could have happened only to Americans in France for the first time.

For a short time we were able to visit Montmartre and Sacre Coeur; then we went by taxi to La Gare de Lyon, where we were to board a train for Chateauroux, our destination. We thought we had done well until we discovered that we were on one side of the station and our bags were on the other. Offhand, this would seem no problem, but our train was to depart in twenty minutes, and we had been warned that French trains operate on a very strict schedule.

We rushed through several groups of people and past ticket collectors who kept yelling to us in French for our tickets, but this we didn't understand. Despite these disruptions, we managed to locate our bags and make our train on time. In our party of seven there were seventeen pieces of luggage, and boarding the train was just a hint of what was to follow.

In Europe, due to the lack of refrigeration, the people go shopping every day for groceries, and the aisles were crowded with shoppers going home after their day at the market. We found ourselves squeezing past fish-net bags containing unplucked chickens, ducks, meat wrapped in newspaper, fruit, wine, bread, and vegetables before we found our compartment.

Our compartment seated eight people. The seats themselves were covered by a frail, filthy material. The ceiling was obscured by coal soot and spider webs, and the floor lay under a film of dirt and grime. In sharp contrast, the headrest covers were spotless and wrinkle free.

An elderly French woman came in and sat beside me. She was a typical farm woman with rosy cheeks, large bones, gray-brown hair, and a huge smile that warmed the atmosphere. She sat there in silence as we talked about our experiences in Paris, but I knew she was trying to understand what we were saying and I felt she earnestly wanted to talk to us, for curiosity knows no nationalities.

After an hour passed, she left our compartment. In her place came a young man of seventeen. He too sat beside me and listened in silence, though I had no idea he knew English until later, when passing around candy, I offered him some. “Yes, I would love some,” he said to our astonishment. He said his names was Jacques Courtier, and from him we learned of many places where we might go antiquing.

But let me continue with our trip. French trains have conductors c'est vrai, but their duties are not the same as their American counterpart. The French conductor doesn't announce the next station. If a traveler wants to know what the next station will be and what time he will arrive there, he must consult a time schedule. In this manner we found that we were to arrive at Chateauroux at 10:30, and we set about planning our strategy as to how we would unload our bags in the short time we figured the train would be in the station.

Napoleon couldn't have done better, and ten minutes before our arrival we had our bags assembled and we were waiting confidently. Our grand plan called for several of us taking what we could carry and getting off immediately. From the platform we would catch the remaining bags as they were thrown from the train window.

It was a sight to behold! Our timing had to be perfect, for we know that any bags left on the train would quickly be off for the Riviera, and that would never do. Happily, everything went as planned, and we felt we had scored a major victory over French punctuality.

But had we? Standing there on the platform we suddenly discovered that our efforts had been in vain. Our car had been disconnected and the rest of the train had gone on. Our victory hadn't been a victory after all!
A PARABLE OF EQUALITY

A Fable by Roger Bichon

Editor's Note: Mr. Bichon's fable is quite original; however, he does credit Mr. James Thurber with the technique.

One day three satyrs were drinking together in a tavern. One satyr, whose body was half man and half horse and whose stature was quite noble and pleasing, was extraordinarily intelligent. One, whose body was half man and half jackass and whose countenance was quite amusing with his long tail and ears, was very stupid. And the third satyr, whose body was half man and half goat and who emitted a horrible odor, was imbecilic.

As time passed and their intoxication increased so did their belligerence toward one another. This belligerence was stimulated by inferior feelings created by the evident gaps among the three, both in intellect and looks.

After considerable harassment from the brilliant intellectual satyr the one which was half man and half jackass drunkenly proclaimed, "You handsome and noble satyrs always act superior to us less noble satyrs. We are never treated with the same respect as one of your kind. Were we not created by the same gods? Are we not equal to you?"

The noble satyr, being intoxicated and not wishing to make enemies with the other, replied, "My friend, I have been shameful in feeling superior. I will make it up to you by becoming the same as you in looks and intelligence." And so the noble satyr became stupid and grew a long tail and ears. Friendship was then restored.

The imbecilic satyr, having overheard the stupid one's admonishment of the noble satyr, addressed him and said, "Indeed, you admonish the noble ones for feeling superior, but yet do you not possess the same feeling toward us imbecilic ones? Will you not follow the noble satyr's example and become equal with me?"

Having been caught in his own trap, the stupid one was forced to reply affirmatively and there upon was transformed into an imbecilic satyr with a horrible odor.

It was at this time that a slobbering idiotic satyr, whose body was half man and half pig and who always lived in squalor and mud, spoke from beneath the table where he had been forced to sit because of his inferiority. "Satyrs! You speak of the injustices done to you, yet you laugh and mock the idiotic ones. Can you become equal with me?"

The other three satyrs, being drunken from both alcohol and their desires to make everyone equal, immediately chorused a brotherly "Yes!" So it was that they all became equals—disgusting drunken idiotic satyrs who from henceforth lived in mud and squalor and were forced to sit at the feet of all others.

Moral: Total equality breeds total inferiority.

SHARDS

Broken bits of bowls and cups,
Once used by those unknown to me.
Translucent, fragil,
living in the earth
For years on end to be uncovered by one who wonders.
Their sides curve upward,
willing to receive but
Not quite able, for their edges end sharply and all they hold are thoughts.

Don Mayfield
They sat in their two chairs in front of the fireplace. They were very old. She sat far more than he did because she was not well, not even well for all of her 82 years. She knew that she was not well in a mild, insipid, senile way. He took care of her gently as old men move and with the remnants of a long time of love. Each morning he helped her out of the bed and up to the fire. Then the long flannel gown came off, and the dress with the buttons down the front went on. And the apron. She was not dressed without the apron. The long plait was twisted into a coil with jerking fingers. She could do that much.

He stirred carefully in the ashen coals in the fireplace. It was a meticulous stirring compounded of many years' experience, of knowing just how much to stir without causing the fire to go out. Then the wood. It was laid on the andirons, and the live coals raked up under it until they touched it. When the first blue blaze struggled up, the old man sat down. It took a lot of his strength, and he sat until he did not feel so light.

The day wore on, and the necessities were slowly finished. The cooking was more often burned than when the old woman was young, but now she didn't complain. Sundays the girls came, and usually they brought a pie or some apples. They combed the old woman's hair, and she grimaced because the tangles hurt. They laughingly said she was tender-headed, and they loved her. The old man did not comb her hair. After the girls left on Sunday the old woman would likely say, "I wish the girls would come. They don't ever come anymore." Her memory grew shorter each day. And the old man would not say anything.

The nights they had the television he sat very close to it off to the side. She sat far back in the rocking chair with the cloth back that curved to fit her humped back. Neither of them knew what was going on. The old man could not see so close, and the old woman did not understand. But they enjoyed it. It was good for conversation.

"Emil, what are they doing? Is that a dog that boy's leading?"

He laughed, chuckling in his bulging stomach. "Look at that, Julie, did you see that man jump out of the hayloft? I wonder if he'll get away. It looks to me like that would have hurt him to jump so far down."

"Emil, do you see a light out the window?"

"What, Julie?"

"I see a light."

"Look, Julie, that's the kind of shortening I use to cook in. Except I don't cook stuff like that for you." He chuckled.
“Do you see that light, Emil?”

“Huh? Oh that?” He turned his thoughts from the western and its commercials. “That’s the television screen reflected.”

“What comes on next?” The western had only begun.

“I don’t know. Maybe we’d better go to bed. The fire is low. If I put on wood, I’ll have to stay up until it burns down a little.”

“Emil, are you sure that’s not a light out there?”

They slept the light, brittle sleep of the old that night. Once Emil stirred and got up to fix the fire a little better. Julie did not move. The two big pillows propped her head in an unnatural position, but old people do not move so easily. Her breath came slow and measured. She slept dreamless.

Emil fixed the fire in his tedious manner, and walked heavily, but with attempted lightness, back to bed. Soon he slept again. Things of long ago skipped lightly through his sleeping mind. He was a young man again, and Julie long hair and was beside the snowball bush in a flocked lavender dress with a white sash. The day was hot, very hot, and she had a fan, but she didn’t use it. She seemed cool from somewhere inside and had no need for it. They talked of things, of what they would do with all their days, of the children they would have, and the time that would bring only good things. The sky met earth, and the union was a happy one. Beautiful. Everything good. Then he awoke. Julie slept dreamless beside him, the flannel gown faded, the long plait unwound. He smiled in the darkness, a toothless smile of old age.

The next morning Emil awoke at five o’clock as was his custom. He had nothing in particular to wake up for, but the habit of years would not let him sleep. He lay awake a few minutes not moving. His joints ached from long staying in the same position. Especially his hands hurt. He sometimes wondered what he would do when his hands got past doing. What would Julie do? And then he would think that he would be going before that, and probably Julie, too. She was in bad health. With that he thought again of his dream. Of Julie. Of days before he became old.

He lay until it began to turn a drab gray outside the window. Then it was a lighter pink gray, and finally it was dawn. He remembered the dream that was so welcome a reprieve from the foolish thinking of being old. He smiled. Today would be special, Today Julie and I will talk about things, he thought. It will be a good day. We will talk.

He arose and painstakingly put on his clothes, being careful to get his gray sweater buttoned right. It was stretched thin over his bulging abdomens. The girls had washed it in water too hot the last time. It was all right though. Today he and Julie would talk.

The fire had almost gone out during the night. When he raked the ashes back, only a small coal showed red. He had to choose a small piece of wood and place it carefully at that. Finally it burned a thin blue blaze. He was shivering in his gray sweater. Julie stirred.

“Emil, where are you?”

“Here I am, Julie, now you just lay still till the fire burns better. It’s almost out.”

“I think I need a drink of water. My mouth feels awfully dry. Do you think I need one of those blue pills. What did the doctor say they were for?”

“Julie, you’ll feel better after I get some breakfast fixed. I don’t think you need a pill this early. The doctor said to take them only before going to bed.”

He went to the kitchen and got her a glass of water, being careful not to let his trembling spill it. Julie reached for it blindly, causing some of it to spill on the quilt.

“Emil, that’s cold,” she said, “I wish you hadn’t spilled it. Are you sure about that blue pill?”

Emil helped her out of bed and to get dressed. He held the two shiny black hairpins for her while she put up her plait. Then he went to the kitchen to cook breakfast. He had been doing the cooking for a long time now. Julie was sick.

All the while he was cooking he kept thinking about the dream. It had been so real. Occasionally he grinned as he cooked. He could hardly wait to tell Julie, but he must tell her at the right time. This was special. They would talk.

He did not tell her during breakfast, nor all that morning. It wouldn’t do to tell her while he was doing the work. He’d tell her after dinner when the dishes were washed, and he could sit by the fire. Yes, he’d tell her after he’d told her after the dishes were done, and he had carried in some wood for the fire. Then he could rest, and he would tell her. He could hardly wait. The morning seemed very long.

He pulled her hump-backed chair up to the fire and helped her to it. She had on her yellow cloth shoes with the rubber soles so she wouldn’t fall. He grinned at her. Then he began.

“Julie, guess what? I had a dream last night. Let me tell you.”

“Tell me, Emil?”

“Julie, I had a dream last night, and we were by the snowball bush, and you had on a lavender dress. You remember that lavender dress you had the summer before we married, don’t you? The one with the white sash? We talked that day behind the snowball bush. Do you remember?” Emil paused to quell the tremble in his eager, quaking voice.
“Emil, do you think I might ought to take that blue pill now,” she said. “I still don’t feel very good.”

“Julie, do you remember the dress I’m talking about? Well, remember that . . . .”

“Emil, is that a cat I see sitting on the window sill. It seems he wouldn’t sit there with the wind blowing so. It is cold today.”

“Julie, his voice quaked higher. “Let me tell you about what we said in the dream last night. You said exactly what you did that day behind the snowball bush. You said . . . .”

“I wish you’d give me that pill. My head hurts real bad. And try to scare that cat away. He sits there every day.”

Emil trembled with wanting to speak, with wanting to tell her. He was almost crying tiny little dry tears.

“Julie, please listen to me. I want to tell you something.”

“I tell you I need that pill and I need it now, Emil. My head hurts. Can’t you hear me?”

Emil sat in his chair until he did not want to cry. His hands did not want to tremble so. His voice became normal again. He felt light much as he did after he carried in the wood and put it on the fire. Slowly he got up and reached for the blue pill bottle.