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Western Writers

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

In attempting to follow a new format for the 1968 Voices, the editors were faced with the problem of not having enough acceptable material to fill a larger magazine. In the need for more creative writing, the editors selected from Voices some of the best poems and short stories from 1960 through 1966.

COVER: Superimposition of a wall hanging by Charles Gentry over an etching by Larry Hortenberry. Photographed by Joe Glowacki.

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VOLUME XII

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Johnny, You're A Strange Sweet Boy

Yesterday was Sunday. I know that because I had been alone in the house until ten while everyone was at church, and Amelia always did the washing on Sunday. The day before that was Saturday, the day Mother bought the new candy. Everyone was so happy because they said it tasted cool like Pine mint and Uncle Jack said it looked like blue-green ice. He even said it flowed down his throat. The night before that I'd had the dream again. But this time it was clearer than before, and I needed to tell someone about it.

I was trying to tell my sister, Amelia, about it yesterday. I went out to the barn spigot where she was taking down the clothes, and started telling her, but she wouldn't listen. She said she'd listen later, but she thought about the wonderful new candy and how mad Uncle Jack was getting. She was folding some shirts and I saw my favorite red one. Mother must have sneaked in my room and gotten it. I don't like to have them wash it, and I usually hide it in the back of my closet, behind my rock collection. It really feels so much better when it hasn't been washed.

I knew Mother wouldn't listen to me about my dream either unless there was nothing else to do, and I saw her shelling peas by the tool shed. I really needed to tell someone because it was the first time I could remember everything about it.

Around lunch time Uncle Jack came at me and wanted to know if I knew where Jo Ann was, and told me I'd better tell him if I knew. I don't usually tell Jack much because he gets mad when I say things I'm not supposed to know. He said he was going to look for her in the back acres about three, if she hadn't come home by then. He had found Jo Ann and Harold, who lives across the road at the Abley's, back there once, in the tall grass where the crab apple trees are, and he beat her up so bad he almost killed her. I used to go back there and watch little stick beetles play on top of each other, but he never did that to me. Maybe it's because he really isn't my uncle. I have to call him Uncle Jack, anyway. I also ate some apples back there, some that weren't too green.

Mother went out front after lunch to look at the truck that had pulled up to the Abley's, so I wandered out to tell her about the dream. She was excited about the truck. It was a white candy truck with "Crystal Sweets-Crystallate Candies" on the side. I'd never seen it before but she had already bought come candy from the
candy man on Saturday, and now she was worrying that the Abley's might be buying more of the new candy than we had. She thought about getting the six dollars and thirty-two cents from the stove tin to buy four extra boxes so we wouldn't run out. The funny thing, though, was the way the truck had all this fine, white, powdery stuff all over it, even on the wheels and in the spokes. Some of it had fallen on the Abley's lawn and Mother said it looked like powdered sugar. She went on and on about the truck until she got so tired of thinking about it she sat down in the swing. I started about the dream.

I told her how I dreamt that I was sitting in the high grass, with a lunch box, waiting for the sunrise, and how it was still cold and dark, and I had just been sitting. It was like in the morning, but I never once thought of it being early. I had just taken an apple from the lunch box and started eating when I saw the light start over the horizon. It was still cold, and I was waiting for something, and I somehow knew it was Saturday. I don't know how, but I knew Saturday morning.

The sun had moved up real slowly and it had started getting warmer. I was half finished with my apple when I heard thunder, this big soft rumbling moving all around the sky. Then there was a flash of light, not real bright, but kind of strange. The sun was moving up fast now, and the rumbling got louder, and all of a sudden the sun turned green. That's the part I can't forget, how this mist of green spit up over the sun and then ran dribbling down over the face of it until it was all green. And I even remembered to tell Mother how it made the grass all around me look blue and cold like frost. The thunder stopped and it was real quiet for a few minutes. I touched the grass with my finger to see if the blue would come off, and then the crackling started, sharp cracks so loud it hurt my ears. When I looked back at the sun it was lighter green and in between these dark blue jagged cracks it had turned clear, and I could see right through it. I told Mother how beautiful it was to be able to see right through the sun, like it was a big window, even if it was a little cracked.

My apple had turned mushy brown and stank so bad I couldn't eat it and I knew something strange was happening. But the sun was so pretty I didn't care...I could have sat there forever.

I tried to keep Mother interested, and I guess I would have if she hadn't kept frowning at the candy truck. I knew she wasn't impressed. She kept sneaking looks and thinking about the white stuff on the truck, and about the six dollars and thirty-two cents in the stove tin, and after I finished about the dream she got up and left. I was just going back in the house when Jack came out and made me go along with him to look for Jo Ann.

As we were leaving Amelia came up and told us she had seen two more "Crystal Sweets-Crystallate Candies" trucks go by, besides the one that was still over at Abley's. Jack gave her a smile, but all the time he was thinking what a bitch she was. I meant to ask her if she thought the white stuff on the trucks was sugar or not. It looked like it to me. All she said was she had seen five candy trucks go by the house this morning, and that it was good everyone liked their candies.

We drove around the fields for hours until Jack had to turn on the headlights to see. I liked riding around a lot but Jack didn't. He swore everytime we made a turn and hit the dashboard every time the truck bounced in a gulley. He kept going right, up the long grassy pasture, and then left, down by the gas pond, then back around through the tall grass. He was real mad, and he was thinking so fast that I knew if he found Jo Anne he'd kill her. He even said so three times.

We came back by the rotten woods, and the headlights of the truck hit something shiny in the grass. It was so bright it blinded us for a second, long enough for Jack to drive off into a sink hole. I was looking at the wheels, to see how deep into the mud they had gone, while Jack wandered off swearing. It was real quiet for a moment, and then he thought something like "oh my God." I didn't hear him well so I asked him what he said, but then I realized he hadn't said it. I walked out to him where he stood over something glistening on the ground.

The truck headlights gave enough of a glare to tell it was Jo Ann, and she was still mov-
I stood and watched until I knew she had stopped breathing. I could see right through to her eye balls in her skull, but even so I've never seen her look so pretty. With the truck lights shining through her she was almost like the windows at the church, except not in color. Mother and Uncle Jack took me along to church once, just once, and I don't remember anything much except how pretty the windows were. I remember, though, that Jack got a little mad when I didn't want to go at the end of the service. I just wanted to sit and look at the windows.

Jo Ann's thoughts were slow and smooth, like syrup, not the jumpy ones she had always had before. Jack turned to her awhile, and touched her, and I was looking at her hands when I noticed some of the glass was getting white, like it was frosted. It was like my dream, when the sun turned cool and then sort of cracked. I told Jack to look, and when he touched the place suddenly Jo Ann started to come apart. Her skin started caving in, and Jack and I were standing looking at her insides surrounded by those little piles of glass.

All the way back Jack didn't say a word.

I didn't go inside when we got home. I went out by the caduce trees, instead, and sat down by our bird baths, but it was too late for any birds to be flying. Amelia came out of the house and sat down beside me. I could tell she had been crying because her thoughts were real shaky, but I didn't say anything about it. She touched my hand and then looked across the field, and I think she cried a little, but when she turned back to me she was trying to smile. She started in about how I'd have to be responsible for my part in the family, and help all the others get through what had happened. It was all any-one could do, she said, to bring things back to normal. Then she went on about how I was thirty-four and that I'd have to act every bit my age. It was the same old thing, and I was pretty tired of hearing it, but I wasn't real sure what she was talking about.

She had some "Crystal Sweets-Crystallate Candies", and tried to give me some, saying it would help a little, but I wasn't hungry. She looked at me and said, real softly, "Johnny, you're a strange, sweet boy," and after a few minutes she went back into the house. She thought she felt sick and I thought it was probably all that candy she and Mother ate yesterday. I hadn't had any candy at all. Since my dream I haven't eaten anything sweet. And it's funny too, because I used to really like sweets.

I stayed out by the caduce trees for a long time, wondering when Jo Ann would get home.

It must have been real early this morning, around two or three, when I heard someone moving around in the house. I knew I had been asleep, and it was getting a little cold. At first I thought it was another dream, but I heard the door slam and the car start up in the garage. I didn't remember falling asleep, but the grass felt good under my toes, which reminded me that I had taken my shoes off. I didn't remember that either.

I just sat under the tree awhile, until I heard the car motor die and quit. When I got enough nerve I went over to the garage and peeked through the window. Uncle Jack was sitting at the wheel of our '56 Plymouth, all silvery and glassy like Jo Ann, just staring at the garage wall. His hands were all cracked and they had fallen off his arms into his lap. From the light in the garage he looked more like rock candy than glass, but I really couldn't tell. I went back to the trees and kept looking back at the house. It was getting a lot colder and I wanted to go to bed before the sun came up. I wasn't hungry and I hadn't eaten a thing since my dream. But I did want to get to bed before it really got too cold.

I saw something shining in the parlor window, but I couldn't make it out from where I was, so I started walking back toward the house.
As I crossed the yard where Mother had left most of the clothes in the basket I could see it was Amelia. Mother sometimes leaves the clothes out all night.

All of them were the same way when I went inside. They all looked like glass dummies, like pretty, blue-green, glass statues. Amelia had her hands on the sill at the parlor window, as if she had been looking into the back pasture where I had been sitting. Her face was just starting to crack like a fine, little, white spider's web. Mother was in bed, covered with quilts and a nightgown. It looked like she might have been a little sick because she had all her pills out on the nightstand, but she was so shiny and quiet in the dark, I knew she wasn't sick. Jack stayed out in the garage.

It was quiet in the house, so I went out by the trees.

I don't really remember too well what happened next. I can remember thinking maybe I should go back in the house and get some of the candy I saw on the divan, where Mother must have left the box when she stopped sewing. I thought maybe I just needed something to eat, but I still wasn't hungry at all.

A few minutes ago the "Crystal Sweet-Crystallate Candies" truck pulled up to the house...just before the sun rose. I watched the candy man go inside, but I'm sure he didn't see me because I was sitting behind the caduce trees, way too far away.

When he came back out of the house, he looked around the yard squinty-eyed, like he was looking for someone near the porch. Then he looked up and saw Amelia in the parlor window, and patted his big white hands together. He kept smiling, all the time, this big wide smile, and it reminded me of the painted one on Amelia's old Jolly Joe clown doll. It made me want to smile too. For a moment I thought I saw something white, powdered sugar or something, on his face.

But the best thing of all was the candy man's thoughts. Sometimes they sounded like old Aunt Chloe, when she had tuberculosis and sucked her breath in and out with a shiver and sometimes soft whispers like a cat purring real hard. Once, when he turned and smiled that great big painted smile right at me, I felt them more as colors, big soft blue-green splashes like the fireworks at the drive-in last Fourth of July. Then it got so I couldn't really tell the difference between the colors and the sound.

Even from way back where I sat I could see his eyes sparkling with a whole bunch of different colors in them. He kind of reminded me of a story Amelia told me once about the Magic Man who painted all the windows in the church. He had a different color on the end of each finger, and whenever he would scratch his nose or rub his chin, the color would rub off. And when he finished he looked even prettier than the prettiest window.

The candy man stayed in the yard for a long time, smiling, and thinking like the rainbow in an oil slick. He stayed there until the long line of candy trucks started going by the house. There must have been fifty trucks, enough to sell candy to the next three counties. When the last one went by he jumped in the truck and pulled in behind the line.

Now they've gone over the hill. I'm just sitting here under the caduce trees watching them wind and twist around the snake turns of the road up Orchard Hill. The wind is blowing the white powdery stuff off the trucks, and I can see it moving out across the field sort of like a fog only warm and hazy. I can just barely hear the candy men thinking, all humming together... even prettier than the choir in Church that time.

But now I can't hear anything. And it's real lonely here since the candy men left. Maybe in a little while I'll follow them. Mother always said I should get a job, and maybe if the candy men like me they'll let me sell candy for them, or clean up their trucks or something, or maybe just sit with them while they drive and listen to the humming and purring.... And I could tell them about my dream. I'll have to get my red shirt off the line, and find my lunch box.

No, I guess I'd better say. I'm getting a little hungry...This morning it's Jo Ann's turn to fix breakfast and she makes better pancakes than Amelia.

I don't think I'll have any syrup on them, though.
OMNIPOTENCE

Hovering effortlessly—levitation perhaps—
The star maker moulds
gathering worlds of clay
he fashions a universe
and having begun the beginning

he moves on

incredibly forgetting
the planned
remote control

Dan Irwin

THE BEAUTY OF IT ALL

It’s spring again.
Once more poets
Stuff greedy hearts with fervor
Of love and
The beauty of it all.

But I cannot help but say,
(Aside, of course, for who am I
To disparage God’s ways?)
That it is but chlorophyll
And I am void of feeling.

A sadness......no...
A dullness is somewhere.
Things happen,
Then they are gone
And that is all they are to me:
A passing.

Linda Lenihan
BEAR

The brown, bushy bear
Encircled by the mouth of the cave,
Stands on two paws
And takes a long look
Into the darkness of the recess
And without much thought
Or by some fear,
Forms a dull, shapeless rock
Barely beyond the light
Of the opening,
Far from the inner warmth
Of the cave
And sleeps his
Fruitless sleep.

Roger Selvidge

THE RAIN

It rains.
Rain slays paper hopes.
Even hopes hewn of rock
With time wear away
....In rain.

Sun's out.
People scurry in the sun
Swiftly slashing newer hopes
From yesterday's paper.
...Soon the rain.

Nancy Nelson
THE UNIVAC AND THE UNICORN

Tier upon tier of dead metal
Row upon row of blinking lights
Surrounded by the eternal sound
of leaping electrons and clicking memory cells,
Man’s intellect without his spirit,
Man’s genius without his soul,
Cold, emotionless, eternal,
Unwanting, unneeding, uncaring.
God of the Rational
Lord of Sameness.
Univac.

In a riotous sea of greens, and reds, and blue
Frolics the snow-cream creature called the Unicorn.
Golden hooves sparkle with bright crystal dew
As he leaps in the light of the fresh dawning morn.

Through bloodless veins, past beatless hearts
Streams Man’s thoughts, his deeds, his existence.
Plato, Xerxes, Caesar, Newton
All that has been done or said is reduced
To puncture marks on manila cards.
To be read by eyes that do not comprehend, do not care.
Then flashed away to the proper cubby hole
To be neatly filed for future reference.
Correctly unchanging
Kept safe, secure
And sterile.

Creature of whiteness, the Unicorn drinks
Deep from blue-silver streams.
His mane billows in downy lengths,
The product of gentle dreams.
Power is strong, but it does not last
Knowledge is great, but it scurries away
Steel is mighty, but it bends, it breaks
And all they protected dies.
The galaxy of lights wink out into blindness.
The neat manila cards crumble into colorless dust.
The beatless heart ceases its labors
The miles of wires tangle and sag.
All that was stored, all that was saved, is lost.
The Darkness closes over the ruin
And corruption reigns.

Porcelain surf divides water from land
And beauty runs down to the sea.
High fly the fine black grains of sand
As the unicorn dances . . . free.

Thomas E. Fuller

ONCE A LOVE AGO

once a love ago
or maybe you
in the cool die
of after summer
my heart hoped
like a leaf
treeless
to cling to a
stalk of wish
till the wind blew

Lorraine Ulak
CABARET

Come watch the funny clown
pass by my door each day
making his way to the cabaret.

Come see the funny people
watch the funny clown make faces
watching the cavernous mouths
sucking in joy.
And then the funny clown duck-walks alone
in the night light of the darkened cabaret
(a Jackie Gleason shuffle
among the up-turned chairs and too-sweet debris
and the sad-rag clothes hang in lonesome folds)
as again he cries
"I need you" desperately
clinging to the haunting echoes
of the hollow cabaret.

And we too had laughed
the shrieks of happiness
which were inaudible to the neon tears
that painted our faces
reflecting on either side the
portrait of a clown.

Tommy Winstead

BOXES

I've seen people depart
In bright gleaming everlasting
Stainless steel boxes within boxes,
Pillowed for perfect posture.
Airtight containers that carefully can
Men who were once men enough to
Decay with the wood.

Roger Selvidge
SUMMER: ST. LOUIS

Across the crowded mass of
shadow-people in the smug-smoked
liquor lounge,
the sun's faint, cloudy,
yet piercing rays
outline a
yawn of
silence.

Long legs in nylon
advance on a
quiescent carpet
to sit skin-chafed
on dark blue vinyl
chairs.....Fleshy
lips slipping over gritty
teeth reverberate the
monotone quiet
of business gossip...
and stereo strings still
sting deaf ears with
silence.

Glen Bledsoe

STARS

We made them.
They blaze bright glaring blues
And gold or green.
Dominated by red.
Blinding us with blinking
And concealing any would be stars,
They speak nervously
In silent stammers of their creator
And guide travelers in the night...
These earth stars.

Roger Selvidge
DEFEAT

Strange how it ended...
So quietly.
Wonder if it’s so
With all important things?
So silently.
Like dusk: expected, sad,
      but hardly mourned.
So empty,
Like wind in a dead city.
So easy.
Little pain, few tears,
A sense of loss,
      but not much.
So strange.
We struggle against it,
Fight viciously,
      but in the end:
Condescend.

William R. Greenwell

ROSES

Roses don’t grow so well in tin.
They wither and curl and turn
As brown as the loose earth
Their dry roots never touch.
Unlike thistle, they perish
In the noonday sun,
Leaving the shriveled, parched waste
To be replaced by a new display.
Yet, among the cold marble stones,
The living place roses
For the living.

Roger Selvidge
WHERE IS YOUR FAT LADY?

Zooey, where is your Fat Lady?
Will I see Her tomorrow...or today?

Will She look up to me from Her cancerous existence
and ask for my help?
Or will I lay at Her feet begging Her forgiveness
wallowing eternally in my tears?
Will She sit in cynical judgment?
Or will our eyes meet needing no words?
Will She laugh when my life ends
and Her life goes on?
Or will She ever remember
the doubts of my yesterdays?

Zooey, where is my Fat Lady?
Have I met Her yet?

Kathey Bradshaw

SUMMER

Summer songs of lazy birds
That hide in trees on sticky days
And watch the currents cut the rocks
And ripple in the silver stream
That runs between two dusty banks
Where we played and dug a hole
And built a bridge across the creek
Of fallen trees and fallen limbs
And hid in bushes knit with thorns
And listened to the summer songs
Of lazy birds that sing in trees.

GOD! was I happy then.

Lorraine Ulak
A SHORT STORY BY DENNIS PETRIE

From the back of the classroom I could see Rosemary turn sideways in her seat on the front row and peer at the instructor near the window. She stuck her chubby little arms straight up in the air, and then, grabbing her pony tail by its “tip”, she attempted to fan under its bright green ribbon with her English lit book. Her hands were sweaty, though, and the book fell to the floor with a bang.

“Miss Swartz!” the instructor said as he stopped to peer at her. “What do you have to say about Donne’s imagery?”

Rosemary smiled her cute way—it made the mole on her lower left chin slide gently upward—and picked up her book. She had no idea what he was talking about because she was only concerned with one thing: she was hot. She was always hot. Hot Rosemary, all the kids in class called her. The only reason she had gone to summer school in the first place, I had often heard her say before class, was because the dorm was air-conditioned, I believed it, for I had never seen her out of the place except the few times at the walk-in movie downtown (which was also air-conditioned) and at her classes. She had previously proclaimed our lit classroom a fiery den. Our teacher always finished his lecture early, but he had the unnerving habit of just standing, winding his watch while he waited anxiously and quietly for the bell to scream through the steaming walls.

“Dunn?” Rosemary smiled again at the instructor. “I don’t believe I know that answer. But I could probably answer another one, though. Like if you asked me to recite some J. D. Salinger, I could.”

Rosemary, we all knew, quoted prose with great enjoyment like some people quote poetry. Before the instructor could say anything more, she bounced up to face the class. She straightened out her pretty purple-flowered, low neck, long-sleeved muumuu that had gathered in rolls around her plump little body and began reciting CATCHER IN THE RYE, standing on the toes of her petite Weejuns and rocking slowly to and fro, talking faster as she quoted page after page. I just couldn’t resist noticing how cute she looked as her tight-legged slacks pushed out from under her muumuu when she stretched to stand so tall and so nobly. The ability to remember so much and recite it so exactly excited me enough, but the particular way she lengthened her “o’s” and slurred her “r’s” made me have goose bumps.

The instructor rudely made her sit down and he angrily wound on his watch until the bell finally rang. Everybody else jumped up and went out laughing, but I waited to compliment Rosemary. Actually, I didn’t know exactly what I was going to say.

“Need some help?” I nonchalantly asked
just as she dropped all of her books off her desk. She started stomping all over the tail of her pretty muumuu as she squatted to pick them up. I smiled at her.

Her mole slid slightly upward again (I could tell she was a little bit shy) and she said, "Hurry, let’s get out in the air!"

I slowly pushed her and her load of books through the crowded hallway out onto the walk.

“Do you have a car?” she quickly asked.

“Sure,” I said. I had just repainted my Studebaker a light purple and I instantly thought how much she would like the shade. “Over in the parking lot,” I directed her.

I dumped our books into the back seat of the car and got really excited about riding her around. She fixed her triangular corner window so that she would get a lot of air and I also opened the lower vent on her side all the way. She sighed heavily and said that she was getting really cool.

She acted even more modest after we were riding because she didn’t say anything. Finally, though, she did say, "I’d sure like to be able to drive a car and get air like this whenever I wanted to."

I kind of took this as a hint, so after a little while, I told her we’d drive out into the country so that I could teach her. She became overjoyed at this and started giggling and everything on the way out there.

Actually, I was real embarrassed when she couldn’t get under the steering wheel. It took me at least ten minutes to find her seat size: if I pushed it back too far she couldn’t reach the gas pedal. Rosemary learned about the gears and everything pretty fast and she was driving along as pretty as you please when she suddenly sneezed. The ditch she guided the car into was deep.

“Well,” she said almost crying, “did you ever sneeze without closing your eyes?”

For a long time I just stared out the windows at the gravel road above and the dry grass and yellow sheep-weeds on either side of the car. Then Rosemary saw that I was a little mad so she started quoting again—this time something about King Arthur and how he saved ladies in distress. I must admit that I couldn’t stay mad for long after the cute way she started putting on and taking off her bright green rhinestone bracelet as she quoted. I couldn’t keep my mind on how badly the car was torn up.

Finally Rosemary stopped reciting and whimpered, “Around my neck is hot! And I simply must get a cold bottle of pop or some ice to chew on. Oh, I’m about to smother to death in this car.” She shoved the car door back against a big rock in the ditch and pulled herself up the bank to the gravel road, cleaning her white glasses and wiping her neck with the tail of her muumuu as she went. I followed her.

“What do we do now?” she began. I could tell she was getting hotter by the way she was kicking her feet in the dust. She waved her hands at a sweat bee around her glasses; her neck, face and pierced ears began to acquire a red glow from the heat and the sweat and the wiping.

“Now don’t get excited,” I said. “We’ll get someone to pull us out.” Acres of pines lined the road on the side of my car; on the other side was a hay field for what seemed like miles. Somewhere—perhaps a mile or two-down the winding road I could see a big store-building. I grabbed Rosemary by the sleeves of her muumuu and turned her toward it. “You wait here,” I said, “and I’ll go over there and get someone to pull us out.”

She made a face at me and tried to un-wrinkle her muumuu. “But I’m hot and I want a bottle of pop,” she whined. “And I want a cigarette too.” She leaped back down to the car and retrieved her pocketbook, a carved leather bag with an enormous shoulder strap, and rummaged in it for a cigarette. When she found one, she didn’t have a match.

“Never mind,” I said. “It’ll just make you hotter, anyway.”

But Rosemary was determined. I had started down the road toward the store when I looked back and saw her running into the field
where a few dry shriveled-looking hay bales burned in the sun. I started back to her.

"I found a light!" she screamed. She was headed for a little gas well on a mound of dirt between two bales. There was a flame at the top of its pipe.

"You'll set that field on fire," I warned her. But she continued trying to get a light, bending to the flame with the cigarette hanging from the corner of her mouth. Her pony tail bobbed beautifully as she moved her head.

Before I knew what was happening she was screaming past me that she'd singed every hair on her head, that her cigarette had fallen down the neck of her muumuu, and that a black snake had chased her around two hay bales. She jumped the ditch in one big leap and limped down the road. Her new purple muumuu was flapping in the dust.

I know it's hard to believe, but Rosemary was a fast runner. She doubled up her little fists and picked up her feet high off the ground. From behind, this adorable figure looked almost like a cloud floating up the road. The only thing I could think of as I chased her was the smell of the apricot perfume Rosemary was wearing that day.

Rosemary was seated on the store porch with her legs daintily crossed when I arrived. Above her, on top of the porch roof, there was a gigantic tin sign erected by a soft drink company that read: HENRY EARLE JOHNSON—GEN’L MERCHANDISE—SINCE 1919.

I tried to sit down beside her, but Rosemary grabbed me by the sleeve of my sweat shirt and pulled me through the rusty screen doors of the store.

It was dark and musty inside. I didn’t see anyone there at first. But Rosemary went straight to the freshly painted Warm Morning in the back where, I discovered, there was an old man on a nail keg who was quietly shelling butter beans. He had just missed his pan and was digging in the cuff of his overalls for a butter bean when he suddenly eyed Rosemary and me. He dropped his straw hat and almost spilled his whole pan getting off the keg.

Before he could say anything, though, Rosemary jumped over to him and asked, "Have you got cold drinks here?" I noticed the neat way she shook the wrinkles out of her muumuu as she said that.

"What kind are you lookin for?" the old man demanded to know. "Ain't got many kinds. Drink men about quit stoppin here."

"Just any kind that's good and cold," Rosemary said. "I'm about to smother in this heat." She gave her muumuu another little unwrinkling shake and I sat down on a block of salt to rest.

"Yeh, it is hot, ain't it," the old man replied.

After all that running Rosemary was ready to boil. Her pony tail was drooped; she shifted and stuck out her rosy cheeks and mouth and blew to the left and to the right of her neck and then attempted to blow upwards over her nose to keep the wet bangs from sticking to her forehead. Before continuing her conversation, she strapped her bag on her shoulder and took out a large mirror and powder puff and rubbed her nose. I suddenly realized just how lady-like she really was. She must have been tired, though, for she sat down—with almost a curtsy—on a big sack of Idaho potatoes and rested both of her legs on a carton of empty pop bottles.

"I'll take it in a can," Rosemary then announced, shifting her weight a bit and making the potatoes settle down in their bag.

"Heh?" this storekeeper—who, I guess, was Henry Earle—asked.

"The pop. I said I'd like it in a can. It's colder that way." Rosemary jumped off her sack and gave her whole muumuu a good healthy shake. Bending down with its hem in her hand, she wiped her fat little sunburned, fire-singed, perspiring neck. I could see she was getting hotter by the minute.

Henry Earle fell back down on his keg, reached for his pan of butter beans, and said, "Naw, I ain't got no cans. What drink men stop here now ain't got no pop in cans. At least they don't say nothing about it."
I couldn’t stand to see Rosemary suffer any longer so I bluntly told the man to get us two Cokes even if he didn’t have them in anything but cardboard boxes. I think Rosemary liked it when I said that, for she sighed heavily and pulled at her earrings contentedly.

The old man must have seen I meant business (I think it was the tone I used) because he went directly to the ice box under the huge window at the front of the store.

Waiting, Rosemary found a fly swatter near the mammoth cash register on the counter behind her and started fanning herself with it.

"Schoo! Am I hot!" she gasped as she shook flies from the swatter. She hit me on the leg with it playfully and I pinched her back on her foot (for then she was on Henry Earle’s leg and had her legs daintily crossed again, rubbing the dust from her shoes.) That sort of made her mad so she really batted me one on the head with the heel of her Weejun. She was so cute when she was mad!

We heard a car drive up out front and honk. Henry Earle came from behind the counter and left the building almost running.

Rosemary didn’t like his leaving without giving her a drink at all. She stood up and walked to me. Pulling on the ravelings of my sweat shirt sleeves, she gently shoved me down on the leg and pushed her index finger to my nose. And then she made her voice real high-sounding and said, “All right, big boy, I’ll get you a drink!...Make yaself right ta home....!” She twisted right over to the ice box and made faces at me from behind the lid and waved her fly swatter in the air above her. I think Rosemary was imitating somebody then, but I’m not sure just who it was. She did it real well, though. Actually, I got a little embarrassed and got goose bumps and just stared at the sack of Idaho potatoes for a while.

“Oooh! This is so cool!” was the next thing I heard Rosemary say. She was leaning over the ice box with her head and arms down the little door on top.

“The only thing that really cools me off is ice,” she continued, pinching off little slivers of frost from the sides of the refrigerator and slapping them on her neck. “I sometimes think about how I’d like to cover my whole self in lots and lots of crushed ice and just sit there till next winter. I sometimes think I’d like to do that.”

While she opened a grape soda on the side of the box, I thought about how talented Rosemary was. She could recite things, she was neat and had a way with clothes, she was really graceful, and she could think of smart things to say, like the ice. And the way she looked when she smiled was so comely, I thought.

“No. That would be just awful—all that melted water,” she decided as she handed me a Coke. “Let’s go get some air.” She slammed the screens in my face.

We found Henry Earl standing by an old gas tank and looking down the road at a moss green ‘55 Chevy slowly pulling away in the dust.

“Them was my neighbors, Jewel and his wife and kids. She does the driving and gas buying, and he takes care of the younguns.” He grinned as he got up on the porch and looked at the Coke-bottle thermometer hanging on a post. “Jewel’s old lady was washing his cars with a wash rag while I was puttin in the gas, and he got so embarrassed about it, that he told me his oldest youngun puked in the back seat because his new car was going so fast in this here heat......That old rattle trap wouldn’t go 65!”

Rosemary was getting tickled. She had wrapped her muumuu around her legs as tight as it would go and was pulling her pony tail upward. I tried to calm her. She usually bounced and cackled so much when she got started laughing—the kids at school liked to get her tickled because of this—that sometimes she would nearly pass out. She was hot enough as it was.

I took the pop bottle from her and tried to get her to drink instead of laugh. But then she got strangled and mad and she stomped on my toes. This time, I mean, she was really mad: I could tell by the way she stuck her fingers in her ears and yelled at the top of her lungs.

Henry Earle just chuckled and looked at the thermometer some more, but I was still a lit-
tles shook up. She was by then holding her breath, too, and her face was turning red.

"Your face is turning purple," I said. "It's just the shade of your beautiful dress." (It really wasn't that color at all, but I told her that anyway just to get her to quit.)

She took her fingers out of her ears finally. I grinned and she grinned and that little mole on her lower left chin slid almost to her ear. She got tickled again after that—still wiping and fanning and all—and she blew hot grape pop all over the place.

"Around my neck is hot and sticky and I want some ice!" she exclaimed, stopping again.

And then the big red and blue truck came up the road from the direction of my car and slowed down. TAYLOR-MADE ICE CREAM the sign on it said. The driver, a big Negro about 24 or 25, poked his head out the window.

"Do you sell gas here?" he yelled at Henry Earle over the knock of the truck engine.

"Sure do," Henry Earle yelled back. "Right over there."

The man pulled up to the gas tank and got out. Before Henry could get the nozzle in, the Negro asked if he took credit cards. The old man answered, "No, don't reckon I do. Gas man don't come very often, but I don't reckon he ever said anything about credit cards. I don't remember if he did."

I was moving off the porch toward the ensuing argument, leaving Rosemary sulking and alternately wiping her neck and unwrinkling her muumuu. After humming and hawing over whether he should use his own money or not, the big Negro got back into his truck, slammed the door, and left Henry Earle standing there with the gas hose in his hand.

I was looking straight at the truck as its red and blue blurred up the road, but I didn't notice until after it had passed us and was gaining speed; standing on tiptoes on the metal running board in the rear of the truck with her head and arms stuck all the way through the little refrigerator door was Rosemary! Her purple muumuu was flapping in the wind.

At first I was upset. But before I had chased her very far, I heard Rosemary's sweet little voice in echo from her frosty chamber. She was beginning to recite the first page of CATCHER IN THE RYE and I just knew she was very contented.

Rosemary came to class several days later and she looked real cute in her new long-sleeved, low neck, red and blue striped muumuu. She wasn't mad at me or anything because I hadn't been able to find her that night. She did say, however, that she had a hard time getting bus connections back to the college from Memphis especially since she didn't have her pocket book with her. "It was real hot down there and it makes me hot to carry a pocketbook anyway," she explained.

I sometimes wonder where Rosemary is now. She didn't return to school that fall, but someone told me they heard she had joined a kind of lecture company and was giving lengthy recitations from Ayn Rand. But someone else told me she took a job with some fur storage company in eastern North Dakota.
I HAVE SEEN DEATH

I have seen death in the narrow crowded halls
Mingle with the sheets and the ether.
Stiff and absolute, starched in puritanical whiteness.
I have seen death, winning an undeclared war
With the masked faces, the prayers, and the pity.

I have not seen death among the lilies...
I have not seen him come with soft hands,
As an angel with arched wings ascending.
I have not found him in the tears,
Though I searched through the scent of the roses,
The stone and the well smoothed hair,
And the marble faces.
These were not made of death, the hushed music
Soothing the air with its reverence,
Falling as soft light through church windows,
On the wordless pain, on the prayers, on the firm-set faces.
These were not made of death nor death of them.
I have seen death coming in the night, in the darkness
Break in as a thief with a fierce quickness,
With a straightening and a stone touch and a cry,
Pillage and leave behind the rich silence.
But I have not seen death come among the lilies.

Judy Williams
Spring 1962

WHITE HORSES

In the woods I saw white horses,
Dappled with morning sun,
I walked beside them and loved them
Then at the forks I took one road
And they the other.
The morning sun still there
And wind whispering
Strange sounds
In leafless trees.
I passed closed houses
Where people slept
I saw cars zooming by
In frantic pursuit
Of time.
And suddenly... .
Here in the middle of earth
And insignificant nobody,
I am holy
I am blessed
For I have loved white horses
And morning sun
And heard wind whispering
In leafless trees.

Terry Calvert

Fall–Winter 1963–64

THE STING

I remember summers
When Youth was a lemon drop
Held on the tongue to savor—
To add a sharper flavor
To the sunshine
Of an already-perfect world.

Yes, I remember summers
When patterned days were scorned
And we lived on the jagged edges
Of a borrowed world where nights
Sparkled like a thousand
Flame-reflecting fragments, and
There were no waterclocks.

Now I know the sting
That lingers
When a lemon drop is gone

Carol Blankenship
Fall 1966

BIOGRAPHY

I watched you yesterday
And I saw you press fragrant
Violets
Between pages of well-worn
Books
And whisper pale water-color wishes
To the wind
Today I saw you touch honey-scented
Hair
Held gently like a golden locket
Between bronze, firm
Hands
Wishing in oil and tempera now
Quick-splashed wishes on a pulsing canvas---
And answered gently
By the pink-tinged promise
Of apples
Hanging on the wind.

The last time...
I saw you heave a sick-sweet
Sigh of jasmine
And dust away
Fragile cobweb wishes
Half-formed, hazy charcoal etchings.
I saw you grow old
Paper-thin
Crackly-brITTLE
And blow away---
Wish-torn fragments---
On a wistful, wanton wind.

Beth McDaniel
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 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 ashed 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 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 short-
when he is hurt. He sometimes wondered what time it would be particular to wake up for, but the habit of getting up too long in the same position. Not moving. His joints ached from staying too long 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, and 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 thoughts 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 abdomen. 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?"

"I'll get you a drink in a minute, 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 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 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.
APPLES

Give me apples
Of the only song I sing...
Three verses of a cold, black tree.
A moon
And purple grapes
Passionately crushed
And kissed with warm lips...
Give me green apples of the last night together,
Solemn black dreams
Painted on blue velvet...
Stars that hang on threads
And antique gold
On sun-tanned hands.
Give me green apples
with a core of bitter moonsong:
Silver rain,
Dew on paper grass...
Then there is sun
And summer...
Give me apples
Redder than blood and lips.

FUNERAL

They all came--
The black ones,
Feet light with joy
And heavy with deceit--
And hovered smotheringly over the coffin
Like malevolent Vultures
Waiting for a moment
When I was unwatchful
To take a tasteless bite
Of the bloodless corpse,
And I stood there smiling,
Screaming a silent agony,
While they blew dry noses
On black-trimmed kerchiefs
And had a carnival
Of the heart.

Judy Beth Gibson
Beth McDaniel
DEDICATION

You don’t think I know you
but I do.

I know how you grasp a book
with tense fingers
and how the small
furrows deepen
as you turn the pages,
leaving on each page a greasy thumbprint.

I know you
how you may read this
and laugh
or explain it in terms polysyllabic
or even worse,
care too much.

I know you
but you don’t know me
and you never shall.

I do not write for you,
but for one
who can laugh
and not explain in loud words
with eyes wide
and mouth drawn tight
And one who would never care to know me.

Libby Thompson
NIGHT WIND

We roar down the night
Making a line of life
Through three points...
The great light that splits the darkness,
You shielding me from the on-coming
World with your body,
And me in my scarf and sweatshirt
My slacks and tennis shoes.
The wind is our own and
It kisses our faces with cool night kisses.
We mock the eunuchs of life
In their warm, enclosed, four-wheeled
Boxes of security which stare at us
For a moment with two glaring eyes.
If I were a pennant, I would slap
The wind, furious with speed.
Instead my hands have warmed two
Places on your coat where I hold you.
We lean around a curve where
Black tree tops worship the moon
On our way to a turning point
Where life will stop for a while
And go backward.

Carol Blankenship

LONELINESS

Suddenly...
Loneliness so quiet
I heard snowflakes
Striking leaves
Loneliness so real
I ground it into the earth
And it remained
Frozen—
And
Endured...

Sam Edwards
A SHORT STORY
BY TOMMY WINSTEAD

A picture taken twenty years ago with nothing to go with it, no memory, no before, no after. The picture is like the empty bucket which you held while you stood under a waterfall, only you held the bucket upside down and got nothing.

You could have stood there a hundred years and you wouldn't have gained a thing, the bucket might as well not have had a bottom. Can you imagine going through life standing under Niagara Falls holding a two gallon bucket? A few people standing there holding the bucket right side up and just smiling to beat hell, and the rest standing there with a blank face holding their buckets upside down. Staring at these pictures is like looking into one of those buckets that was held upside down, nothing.

The picture is old and faded nearly to the point where you cannot recognize the people, mostly women, standing around the table in the small side yard of the large white house. It has faded until you cannot tell whether there are leaves on the four trees. On the back of the picture is written in small neat letters “late fall”. I don't know “late fall” when, just “late fall”, like it lasted forever. Then there are more pictures all faded and nearly unrecognizable like the memories that go with them. Not completely lost but just a small image, enough to recall a little, but not enough to remember completely. Maybe it’s the clothes the women wear in the pictures, long skirts with black stockings, all in the past, all ugly, all different from today.

Seeing the old pictures is like looking into an empty two gallon bucket. There's nothing, nothing, nothing. Not even a stain, nothing to discolor the emptiness.

The pictures were taken in a second, and then the camera companies give you this crap, just take a picture and you will have a picture and a positive memory for a thousand years. All you need is a fabulous memory and a camera that takes a picture a second in wonderful, living, lasting color and you're set for life and when you're fifty years old you can retire and sit on your butt and look at color pictures and remember in black and white for the rest of your life.

Looking through the box I find more useless pictures and on the bottom is the one thing that brings back a definite memory: a poem, the poem for Cathy. The poem means nothing; really, it is just a guide, like a history book, to the past. The poem is like a memo—meaningless without the memories. It's probably the only poem I ever wrote in my life, at least that I know of. Anyway I remember Cathy without the poem.

Cathy was the type of person who went around holding her bucket right side up; she didn't miss anything in life. She was never satisfied with herself or with anything else for that matter. She really lived. But Cathy was a long time ago, probably before the pictures were taken.

Cathy was the type of person that made you envious of everything. She had good looks, wonderful personality, and a desire for more of everything. Maybe it was the desire that left her incomplete. It’s hard to explain her, it’s not as though she wasn’t all there, she was, but she just had this bucket that never got filled. She could drive you nuts being that way; it was almost an obsession with her to keep digging for more of anything. The old was left behind when she found something new, and if you were the old boy, it was bye, bye Charlie. That’s another thing about Cathy, she wasn’t sentimental as hell. With her when something was gone it was really gone, no sobs, no sorries, just gone. She made me feel like the jockey who was winning the derby, but when she was gone I looked back and I saw I still had my butt in the starting gate. And I wrote that poem for her, she just elated me to death.
A poem and a memory. That's all that is left of Cathy—no tokens, no letters, nothing really. She was that type of girl, she didn't have to save the showbills to write on the back who she went with to the theatre and when, she just left you with nothing and a memory.

The poem isn't out of this world or anything. I never was much at poetry. All you need to do is just write something down, it doesn't have to be anything fabulous, just a few words and presto you've got an unbeatable reminder for the rest of your life. It's not like a solitary picture that fades—a picture without an explanation is nothing—but words build a picture, maybe a faint one but they do. Just like the poem for Cathy, who, I guess, went through life forever holding her bucket right side up, taking notes, and grinning like hell.

Spring—Summer 1963

SPRING COMES SLOWLY

The spring comes slowly
On hidden 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—fettered—tied all round
By a sad sort of chain
Pulling, pulling—
Down, down
For next summer
Fall, then death.
... And spring comes slowly.

Sandy Griffis
Fall–Winter 1962–63

ALL NIGHT GOOD FOOD COME IN

All night, good food come in
And I looked back again
To read the blinking sign again
For I was cold and lonely

The man I guess who ran the thing
Bald up from his gravy arms
Leaned over grinned
 Said. I seen a lot like you so order up
Give me a happy coffee cup
with tears I said

An angel sat
Wrapped tight around the stool right next to me
All fat and painted as I looked her over
And “Then” hold on with all your bony fingers
He said the man I guess who ran the thing
And round and round we went
And round and round again

In other words she screamed
I hardly know you’re there
And the flowers in her hair
Blew back at me perfumed of sweat and gin
For I was close behind
As round and round we went
And round and round again

The man I guess he grinned
Faster up and down and faster
Singing circus music louder than he grinned
As round and round we went
And round and round again

And then we stopped came down
I nearly fell
The man I guess quit singing
But he grinned and says
I seen a lot like you
And when I’m leaving yells
Come back again

Ralph Price
Fall–Winter 1963–64

LEM

I do not look at him, but I see him:
peegity, pitiful thumping
on the stumped
wooden thing he calls a leg
as he pecks, clacks
his blackly half-shapen
form across the dirt-grained porch.
Awkward, ugly like a dwarf-appendaged
crab, his walk gyrates,
twists the mangled trunk
until he moves.
I do not look at him
but I see him, vividly
vile: the chipped, dirt-streaked wood
rises to pierce
the gnarled meat of a thigh
packed smooth
to the tuck of his filthy trouser.

I do not look at him
as he blumberly
seats himself in the back
of the car, knowing my honk
meant hurry. Speaking
as I do to all animals,
I am patient with the thing I hate;
“Lem, the lawn must be mowed.”

Neill M. Myers
The Death
of the
Unicorn

A SHORT STORY BY JUDY GIBSON

The unicorn died the summer I was ten. A mystic ruler of the walnut lobby from the high ivory mantel, from a throne higher than the grandfather clock, from a place more honored than any ancestral portrait, the unicorn was the only ancestor I knew, the only heritage I claimed in the ranging house which all the brothers called home.

It was not my home. It was only a refuge to me, for I was a rebel child. I lived in the meadows with Quence, the stallion, and with a thin-nosed sable collie called Lancaster. I had a secret retreat in the pine grove, in a place where tree limbs wove a mesh of security around me. I ate wild strawberries and fruits of the passion flower in their seasons; it was my communion, my ritual to Nature.

The house stifled me. The stiff chairs forced me to sit straight up and on the edge so my feet would touch the floor. I would be buttoned into starched dresses in the afternoons and be polite to Aunt Katy or cousin Malinda...the fussy black hats with cloth flowers...the prattle and chatter of relatives and neighbors...."Come see Miss Lucy's doll." "I made it for Lori Ann." "No, don't touch it! You'll get it dirty...Lucy, you say she had the you-know-what-you-know-where since August, and you were about to say...?" "And her so young, with one completely removed!" Mother talked like that, lots of you-know-whats, so I wouldn't know what, but I always did. I knew a lot for a C-H-I-L-O.

The living-room talk....I always figeted, wiggled, squirmed. I sat back in my chair and swung my legs fiercely, until I knew Uncle Ben could probably see up my dress. But I didn't care, because my panties were pink lacy ones that had the day of the week on them but never the right day. Dad always talked to men over in the corner where the smoking stand sat in front of the bay window, and I heard little bits of conversation about crops and such; that bored me sick. Dad sat around in his work clothes, and Mom was in her apron stained with paint from the last time the porch was painted, and I had to sit there and look demure in a starched dress. The boys always said, "There's work to do in the barn," and left. I never considered them lucky, though, because they knew better than not to do work at the barn after they left.

The boys didn't like me much. They didn't like horses, and they said Lancaster was worthless. Besides that, I didn't have to do field work. In fact, I didn't do anything, anything but create a world of my own bigger and more fantastic than anything the people of the house would ever know.
On Friday, Wilbert and Bernadine Somebody came to talk, a lot of dull things tossed back and forth in clouds of cigar smoke in the musty parlor. I was in my room for quite a while when Mother came in and slid open my bureau drawer. I knew what that meant. I let her button the little pearl buttons of the dress down my back, and I surprised even myself by not complaining. I combed my hair—great lengths of pale stuff that I loved to feel on my face and neck in a breeze but hated when the clammy sweat plastered it to my skin. Mother tied a ribbon in it, and we marched in to join the company.

They were in the front hall, and Dad was showing them the unicorn. He was telling them the history of the statue, but his history of it never came out the same twice. I wanted to shout from the doorway, "That isn't what you told the collector last April! You said a thousand then." But instead I said, "Do you like our conversation piece? That's what Mother calls it. Dad calls it Prestige." The two strangers turned toward me and laughed, pleasantly, but without feeling.

"Hello, Hope," Bernadine said to me. "A lovely girl," she said to no one in particular. Wilbert didn't say anything, but just surveyed me as if I were part of the furnishings and moved his eyes away.

They started on the unicorn again, so I slipped away. I went to the kitchen to get something to feed Rondall's turtle. Rondall was only seven, and he shouldn't have had a turtle, not a fine box turtle like Seventeen. Seventeen was seventeen years old. Bobby counted his rings and told me. Bobby and I always fed him, because Rondall didn't know how. Anyhow, I couldn't find anything to feed him but a little bit of tomato, so I took that. His cage was out in the back yard. I kind of fell going down the steps, but I didn't fall all the way down. I caught myself, but a can of Dick's fishing worms on the rail turned over on me, full of rain water from the night before. I was a mess! I felt like crying, but I didn't.

I fed Seventeen and went back inside. I was in the kitchen trying to get the mud off my dress when Mother called.

"Come here, Hope."
"Hope?" I answered her then. "Coming," I said.

My heart started playing ping-pong inside my ears. I saw Bobby's hunting jacket hanging on the door, so I put it on and buttoned it up and went in.

Mother heard me coming into the parlor but she didn't look at me. The other three were looking at me with amusement.

"Well!" chuckled Dad. Mother turned.

"Hope McCollough! Take that dirty jacket off!" she said sharply.

"I'm going hunting with Bobby," I lied.

"No, you aren't. I've told Bobby he can't go with the ground so muddy...I'll talk to him later, but take that filthy jacket off before you get your dress messed up." She started unbuttoning it, and all I could say was, "But...I...already..."

"You already nothing," she grumbled. "You can just tell Bobby I said he couldn't go. The very idea of you going hunting in your 'good...' She saw it, and it was to late for me to run. I wasn't afraid of Mother now, or of a spanking. I was mostly wishing those four alien eyes were not looking at me with such shock. I wished those two people away, dead, or never born, a thousands times in each moment, but still they looked, stared, gaped at me as I stood there in my soggy, muddy princess dress. Bernadine grasped her white pearl button of the dress down my neck in my room for the first time, choking on the words, but I didn't answer."

"I'm not a young lady!" I screamed, with the sound loud in my ears. I felt my cheeks burning with indignation. "I'm not a lady, and I wish I weren't a girl at all. I wish I were a horse or a dog! They don't know THEIR parents and they don't have to wear dresses!" I was crying then, choking on the words, but I didn't care. I had said too much, and I ran, knowing that in
their embarrassment they would let me go, as always.

I ran down the hall and started through the walnut lobby when the golden unicorn swam into sight through my tears. I went to the mantel and stood for a moment transfixed beneath the porcelain statue.

Some impulse suddenly clenched me in its muscular fist, and I could not struggle free from its power. I pulled the stool up beneath the mantle in obedience to the little voice within my head. Standing on the stool I could just reach the base of the statue. I lifted it down carefully and reverently.

Never had I touched the unicorn before! From my fingertips, that thrilled at the feel of the gold, a power suddenly crept into my blood and I was absorbed into the spirit of the unicorn.

I ran from the house and through the fields. The damp ground sucked at my rushing feet, and bushes clawed at my skirt. And the unicorn, tight in my arms and clawed near my throbbing heart, sang as the wind sings to ears that never stop to listen.

“At last, at last! I thought you’d never hear!” the unicorn whispered to me. “There is a secret clearing,” he said, “deep in the woods, the court of unicorns of primeval days, where there is grass softer than the petals of orchids. You must take me there. There are secrets that only you can know.”

Into the woods I ran, up the mossy hills and down into the coves of lacy ferns where the air smelled of pennyroyal.

“A little farther!” said the unicorn. “Soon now. Very soon.”

And suddenly before me were the white bluffs—walls of limestone with gnarled trees growing above and below. And at the foot of the wall was a wide circle of tender grass like a carpet of yellow-green velvet. In a stoney basin was a pool of clear rain water. There was silence except for the distant sound of birds.

“There, see where the nymphs have made a throne for me!” the unicorn said. “There should be a carpet of flowers....always....the fragrance is nectar to me. ‘Paladins fierce and virgins sweet, but he’s never had anything to eat,’ the poet wrote in ‘How To Catch A Unicorn.’ It’s true, I’ve never had anything to eat. That’s how it is with unicorns. We are a hungry lot, but we can exist on beauty alone. Our place is a world of beauty. I can survey it all from my throne.”

I placed the unicorn on the shelf of the rock and raced to the edge of the trees where violets and dogwood and redbud were growing. These I carried back in small bunches, and ranged before the unicorn who stood silently and watched me.

I stood back to survey the throne, then sat in the velvet grass where the unicorn was reflected in the pool. There in the water I saw him toss his head and then lift it high with flaring nostrils as he breathed in the fragrant air.

“At last,” he snorted. “Here I am at last, free from the cold walls of the house. I’ve been calling you for years. Hope! I was afraid you’d never hear me. My life is in the water now...I’m free....see, up on the rocks I’m not alive at all.” I looked up, and there he stood, cold and motionless.

My eyes flashed back to the pool. There was the prancing unicorn, moving in a court of flowers that seemed to be only a blurred cloud of color that rippled beneath his feet.

“One day,” he said, “if you are faithful in visiting me and in keeping flowers at my feet, you may come with closed eyes into our world and when you open your eyes, I won’t be on the throne of rock, but look for me in the pool and I will come out a living unicorn that exists only for you. I will pace in circles around you and touch your cheek with a nose softer than a cloud. And like Bellerophon with his Pegasus of white, you shall ride a golden unicorn into the sky. You shall call me ‘Star of Hope’ and I shall be the golden star you wish on first at night.”

Suddenly, bursting like a bubble, the dream was gone, for so was the sun, slipped behind the trees. The light was a rosy glow in the
west and the night air was damp and cool.

Lonely, tired and hungry, I took one last look at the unicorn among his flowers, stood before him in silent obeisance for a moment, then turned and ran through the darkened woods.

I was afraid, both that I was lost and that I would get a whipping when I did get home, because I had taken the unicorn. At last I saw light through the trees and I ran toward it, bursting into the field as someone in fear of drowning thrusts his head frantically above the water and gasps in astonishment that life is wonderful.

Across the fields I ran, panting and shivering. I heard Mother’s frantic calling and I answered, wondering how long she had been looking for me.

I ran into her arms, weary and frightened. I think she knew I had found my own punishment in the darkness for she said only, “Where were you?” to which I answered, “Lost in the woods.”

She didn’t mention the unicorn, for she had not noticed it was gone. Safe for the moment, I thought. But then what will I do?

The next morning I woke with a flinch. Mother and Dad were talking downstairs. Their voices were thin with excitement. The phone rang and Dad talked awhile, then hung up. I heard him ring the operator and say, “Give me the police!” My heart seemed to hesitate in its beating, and my stomach was like cotton. I jumped out of bed with my heart suddenly pounding. My legs trembled as I ran down the stairs.

“What’s happened?” I gasped.

“Don’t look so scared,” Dad said. “Nobody’s going to hurt YOU. Someone stole the unicorn last night. Bobby left the back door unlocked. Did you hear anything?”

“No,” I answered. My knees were weak and my heart still raced.

“Go back to bed,” Mother said. “You woke up too suddenly. You’ll catch your death shivering around here like that.”

I went back to my room and dressed hurriedly. I escaped out the window, crept across the roof and shimmied down the poplar tree at the corner of the house. Like a doe, I fled across the dew-wet fields, thinking frantically, “It has to be today. The unicorn must choose today. What will I do if they take him away from me?”

I remembered the path through the woods. The ferns, moss, and pennyroyal glistened with dew, and I breathed deeply in the clear air. I felt gay and light and free from the fears that had haunted me at the house. I closed my eyes as I neared the bluffs. Facing the direction of the throne, I felt my way slowly ahead. When I felt the velvet grass beneath my feet, I stopped.

I opened my eyes, and saw on the throne of the unicorn—nothing! He was gone! I lowered my eyes and saw the gold glint of many jagged fragments among the rocks, and in the shallow depression that had been the pool, there was a thin layer of mud sprinkled with chips of gold porcelain. I gaped at the scene, not fully realizing what had happened.

Slowly, the scene blurred and I fell down in the velvet grass weeping salty tears I hoped would destroy even the green carpet of my dreamworld. The trees, once comforting in their silence, became malevolent gnarled growths that sprang over me like gargantuan green frogs. The voices of birds no longer sang, but wept, sobbing melodically from the deep alien recesses of the forest.

I picked myself up from the wet grass, and looked around me as an ant might that crawls from his feast inside the skeletal body of the dead swallowtail butterfly.

That day in the silence of the woodland I buried the unicorn.
Fall 1960

I SWIFTLY TWIST THE KEYS

I swiftly twist the keys which loose the door,
And silently I stand inside the room.
The shadows there are gray, the curtains drawn,
And on the floor are strewn about the toys
With which I played, when sitting all alone.
From all proportions, now this life has grown
And no more will I see the ragged boys.
Who, like myself, comprised a city's spawn.
The old house now must fall, so in my room,
I'll set afire the curtains—such a bore.

Frances L. Daughtery

Fall–Winter 1962–63

TAG

The winter morning comes creeping,
clawing with cold fingers
to keep the frozen crystals from spring.
Spring swells – sending sparrow songs
well into summer sunset.
Then the lavender twilight
comes to my door, drawing me out
to sit silently in adoration of autumn haze
and watch children play their after-supper games.

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