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A collection of poetry, prose, photography, and artwork composed for the fall term, 1986, by the students of Ursinus College.

The Lantern, the literary magazine of Ursinus College, symbolizes the light shed by creative work. It is named after the structure on Pfahler Hall, which has the architectural design not of a tower or spire, but of a lantern.
What will change the world, before anything else, is the quality of our hope.

Thomas Gibbons
Restorations
PATRONS

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Editorial

Magazine editorials are rarely noted for their profundity, and I don’t expect to buck tradition. I think, and I hope you’ll agree, that this issue of the Lantern speaks for itself. More precisely, it speaks for everyone involved in its production.

Thus, I can be brief. The copy of the Lantern which you hold in your hand is brought to you by the people whose names you’ll find in the staff and patron lists, and in the table of contents. If you are one of these people, I hope you feel some pride in the part you’ve played. If you’re not, you undoubtedly know at least one person who is, and can share that person’s feelings of accomplishment.

Two people whom I mention by name, Ted Galena and Erin Meredith, are the winners of this semester’s contests. Ted drew the issues cover, as well as the black and white drawing on page 15, while Erin Meredith, an Evening School student, contributed the prize-winning short story “A Minor Key”. The short stories you’ll find printed in this issue were culled from 17 contributions, an atypically high number, and proof that a little bribery goes a long way.

Enough of this. You should be reading the Lantern, and not this editorial.

Enjoy.

A.M. Salas
LIVING IN-SANITY

I stare rather idly at the screen
and watch the mentally
(handicapped or
disabled?) insufficient
perform

--but they're not acting
[nicker]
[I just want someone to
spank me]
[i hope to crack open my
shell one day]
[look at them--they're
just sitting over there
planning to bug me]
[when kids call me a clown--
that hurts]

my senses switch to the tabloid
"6-YEAR OLD RAPED & BLUDGEON'D"
and the cries of the wife
as the cigarette is pressed again to her skin

[we just want to be
normal]
[we want to be one of
you]

the screen goes blank as
I thrust the paper into an open
furnace
a stench of burning six-year
old children
and women and bombings
and missiles
rises from the fire
it runs through me like a
cold vapor

[we want to be one of
you]

four walls become hazy and
begin to close--
believe me
]no you don't[

Erika Rohrbach
Sentence of Dawn

The will of night
soon to melt in dawn
is inscribed in the wind
carrying powder fumes
across the barbwired lawn.

With kaleidoscope eyes
men envision hundreds of deaths-
all their own.
Sensing fate
ey they pray under their breaths.
They pray
for yesterday’s time
squandered and wasted,
a treasure unvalued
until now.

The rise of the sun
leads to eternal nights
in freshly tilled graves
for those convicted
by the sentence of dawn.

Vince Leskusky
Addict

White lines
Drawn across an empty
Blackboard.
Somewhere you must have
Missed the point
And gotten lost in the
Dust as it
Blew away.
Will you be
Erased
As well?

Anonymous

Where do they come from?
These lonely, lonely people
With no place to go
And no one to love
Or to love them?
Do they sit all alone
When they get home
(or to their houses)
Watching the world
(through fogged up windows)
Pass them by?

J.D.H
midnight hags astride
grey and ghastly ponies
in my dreams i
wish i may i wish . . .

the clouds scattered
across a wheezing moon and
candles flicker in a
burning masterpiece and
music glides to the
silent inhabitants of the
corners of . . .

my mind
is shifting wrong
to right to left
where is
who is
and when . . .

the gallop of the
senseless beasts dank
and filmy and
omnipresent
echoes in my dreams i
wish i

might touch the night.

Rebecca Moore
Escape

Icy green
The lake
Sparkles
As the sunlight
Dives through
Wetness
Searching
Below the
Warm shelf
Of aqua
In a desperate
Struggle
To capture
Her life
To caress
And lure
A minute
Existence
Towards its
Fate.
She casts
A gaze
Saying only
Goodbye

And swims
Upward
Grasping
The rays
As they
Dance
Between her
Fingers.
She clings
To her dream
Suddenly
Cautious
As the wind
Tangles her
Hair
As her world
Fails to
Exist
As a cloud.
Suffocates
The fire.

Lisa R. Talarico.
Here I sit
A naked page in front of me
(or it was--till I wrote these three lines)
What I'd like to write
Is
How beautiful the opalescent snow is
When it shimmers in the graveyard across the street
But you'd probably think I was morbid
Or sick at the very least.
So, tactfully changing subjects
I want to say
How nice it is to feel that I belong
And that I always feel complete and happy
And that I don't need anything else
But that's only a half-truth.
So, once again I switch to another approach
And say how desperately I care for you.
And how it's not really the loneliness I mind
But it's the way you don't love me that hurts
However--and this is a big however--
You'd run like hell and never look back
So, I'm turning to gossip ("the girls are doing this-or-that")
And asking about friends whose whereabouts are shady
And presenting careful, insignificant questions
Deftly worded to cover up the mixed emotions
Alone, I sit and pray that someday--soon
You'll love me too.
But still I remain on the surface
And this damn page is still blank.

Rebecca Moore
Between the Spring musicale and final examinations, choir practice was a desultory affair. The important concerts were over, their triumphs praised by the teaching nuns in prideful tones permissible when glorifying the Academy. The individual recitals were over too, those jewel-like programs polished to perfection by the music instructors and their latent virtuosos. At the Academy, each student was a potential prima donna. Now, in the music building, lately a beehive of buzzing in perfect pitch, empty practice rooms winked at their deserted instruments, then stared into the silent corridors towards summer vacation.

The tiny campus was quieter now, its only Maytime activity the invasion of wildlife from surrounding woods. Birds nested in the grotto where three stone children knelt adoring a granite Lady of Fatima. Her chiseled grace gazed down upon them from between the sparrows bickering on either shoulder. Squirrels chased through the redwood gazebo in the convent yard, bobbing up and down in the tall grass waiting to be cut by the gardener's hand mower, now in creaky use farther down the field.

Across the quadrangle burbled a fountain of sorts, a cracked and leaning sculpture undermined by moss. In the slimy green pool, goldfish and minnows flashed a game of hide and seek through the algae. Low, clipped hedges formed a charming cul-de-sac lacing the main classrooms. Over all droned the cadence of rote recitation in preparation for finals, and through the open door of the white clapboard building floated the individual wisdom of each sister, and the piping voices of an emerging band of girls.

Glynis headed the procession. She was a tall girl, dark and angular with the special self-consciousness that marks adolescence. A maroon and grey plaid uniform brushed past her knees, hanging from her bony frame as it did not on some of the faster-developing figures of her classmates. But the physical preoccupations of the other girls did not concern her; as lead soprano of the choir Glynis felt secure. She led the others in a hymn to the Virgin as they progressed slowly to the gymnasium, accompanied by Sister Regina Coeli, their music teacher and director of the choir.
Once through the wide doors, the hymn ended, and the girls struggled to the metal folding chairs set up on the basketball court, altos alongside altos, seconds and sopranos found their seats. The gym was the oldest structure on the grounds, save for the convent, and the only building large enough to contain a choir comprised of half of the school’s population. Its acoustics were eccentric, but Glynis was proud of the way her clear, bell-like voice filled the pockets of air surrounding the listening envy of her schoolmates. She prepared herself for the solo she would be called upon to sing by sitting very still and practicing her breathing. Her hands were clasped quietly in her lap, her back straight against the cold chair.

As Sister Regina gave the sign to the accompanist for the first group’s vocalist, Glynis’ concentration was interrupted by the appearance of sister Beatrice coming hand in hand through the side door with a pretty blonde-haired girl. She looked older than Glynis and her classmates. The girl and the nun waited together until the first scales were done, then crossed to Sister Regina at the head of the room. After a brief exchange, Sister Regina turned to the choir and announced, “Ladies, we have here a new student who, because of her father’s job transfer to the East Coast, has come to us at the end of the school year. Cynthia Hume is her name. Cynthia informs me that she has sung in the choir at her old school, and would be very happy if we welcomed her into our own group.” Then, turning to the new girl, Sister asked, “Cynthia, which voice part do you sing?”

Alto, thought Glynis, definitely an alto. Mature girls like Cynthia had husky voices and were serious only about boys. Altos were no threat to Glynis. Everybody knew there were no true altos anyway, not in the seventh grade, and altos never got to sing solo in the musicale. All the best parts were written for sopranos.

“First soprano,” said Cynthia. Her pleasant and unwavering voice seemed totally at ease in the room full of strangers.

“Perhaps you would like to choose a piece to sing for us from the accompanist’s book?” asked Sister Regina.

Cynthia headed straight for the piano where Glynis’ best friend, Joanne, sat, ever plump and helpful in showing Cynthia where to look. Glynis’ stomach fluttered rudely. Cynthia chose a familiar melody, and everyone settled back, eager to be entertained.

Glynis remained on the edge of her chair as her friend struck up the introduction, and the new girl began to sing.
Her voice was lovely. The true, high tones soared to the impossibly sloping ceiling of the gym, circled through the basketball hoop and floated out into the late Spring afternoon like a benediction. Glynis' stomach constricted as if before a blow. Tears stung her eyes and the lump in her throat rose very far into her mouth. She fought it down, shaking with the effort, and tried to control her trembling before all the eyes which she was certain were on her. The enthusiastic applause of the other girls brought her around, and she added her half-hearted clapping to theirs, afraid that, if she did not, they would know her humiliation.

Practice resumed. Cynthia took her seat in Glynis' section, but in the back row among the popular girls, whose imaginations were stirred by her California tan and sun-streaked hair. Because of the unplanned arrival, Glynis was not called upon to sing her solo, and the last practice of the school year was dismissed, leaving Cynthia Hume the undisputed new queen of the choir.

Glynis was glad. She knew that her performance would pale compared to the song of the new arrival, and she walked, grateful and ashamed, toward her mother's waiting car and home.

Final exams went well for Glynis, as always. She had long stopped regarding her academic triumphs as anything more than a given thing, and she found no joy in the honors awarded to her at the student assembly before summer recess. She could not concentrate on the ceremonies. Cynthia's golden head gleamed in the auditorium, blotting out her most precious victories, stealing away her most coveted place in the school.

The summer passed like a slow dream. The lazy warmth of sunshine days saw Glynis wading in the cooling creek in her backyard. The toddling brother by her side learned from her cupped hands the patient, frozen waiting to catch the tadpoles as they slithered in and out of the flat rocks dotting the stream. There were summer rains and sweet smells after, of grass, the earth and snails upended on the pavement.

Glynis played kickball with the boys she'd later feel shy about, meeting them with their parents after Mass, somehow knowing the solemn difference between Sunday clothes and Saturday sneakers. She ran and pedalled her way through the free months of her year, unaware of how she was changing, never knowing she'd be leaving this behind.
Glynis had few friends, a fact which did not strike her as odd. She had already weighed the joys of friendship against the lack of privacy it entailed, and she’d found friendship wanting in dignity. Her natural reticence balked at the telling of secrets to mere acquaintances. She detested easy intimacy and “popular” girls, whose heads seemed stuffed with sawdust and boys, appeared stupid and vain. Glynis hid her fear of rejection at the hands of these girls by avoiding them and their activities, and by spending the summer in relative solitude.

Her best friend, Joanne, lived a short hike away, and the two girls at first spent much time together, devising picnics, and bicycle trips and other ways of sidestepping household chores. But Joanne’s cousin, Billy, came to stay with her family for a few weeks, and the presence of a strange, older male (he was fifteen) discouraged Glynis’ visits. Added to her discomfiture at Billy’s prolonged stay was her puzzlement at Joanne’s strange behavior towards her older cousin.

Her friend, who was straightforward and honest to the point of being blunt with Glynis, became devious and circumspect when dealing with Billy. She could not seem to look him in the eye or speak in a normal tone of voice when he was in the room. Joanne’s new sidelong glances and breathy conversation upset Glynis. She wasn’t certain why her friend seemed so silly to her now. Glynis stayed away for the balance of Billy’s visit, and hoped that Joanne’s new demeanor was only a temporary derangement.

All the while, through the golden days and breezy evenings, Glynis could not forget the new girl and her extraordinary voice. Cynthia’s song soared through her dreams, turning them into nightmares of jealousy and sickening, hurtful fantasies of revenge. She twisted and turned in her injured pride, caught up in its net of helplessness. She knew she couldn’t face September, realizing that her once secure position in the world of her music was now occupied, irrevocably and forever, by that usurper, that unworthy interloper, that meddlesome rival whose existence in Glynis’ world was the source of the worst pain she ever felt in her young life.
If anyone perceived her solitary distress that summer, no one mentioned it to Glynis, and soon she felt at a distance with her family. She took long walks in the woods with her setter, Murph, and locked herself in her room when she got back. Her mother and father, once two separate beings whose expressions of affection were as different as their personalities, had recently converged into one entity, “My Parents”, and represented nothing so much as their awesome ability to say “No.” She had tried to talk to her mother about the problem one late afternoon, as shadows lengthened across the dinner table, but Glynis posed the problem in such hazy terms that her mother lost patience with her. Glynis shrank from her parents irritation back into her room again. Her anguish festered, and most of her dreams centered on the school burning down in the heat of July, or on the untimely death of Cynthia Hume.

Glynis’ only comfort came from a close but unexpected source. Her grandparents lived nearby, and she found a silent but supportive companion in her grandfather that lonely summer. Sometimes they spoke of specific things, like homework and books and movies they’d seen, but most of all they shared a steady, solid friendship that needed little conversation. Without being told he seemed to know when she’d been sick or sad, or when she needed to be with him.

And so he was always there for her, waiting for her to need him. Puttering about in his old garage at the back of the alley behind his house, inspecting the antique mower and the rusting implements that hung on the wall over his workbench, Glynis would sense him in the yard. Somewhere in her mind she saw him working, waiting for her to call out, “Pop-Pop, look at this!” or, “What’s this thing for?” And she took him for granted, as grandchildren will, simply because she trusted his love so much.

He’d lived in a fair-sized city all his life, but she never doubted him when he spoke of the farm he planned to buy as soon as he retired. He talked about the horses and dogs and cows and sheep she would come to visit, of the hens they would feed together at dawn, and she believed him as truly as she believed her catechism. In his plaid flannel shirt, freshly laundered by Gran, with his sharply creased cords and tanned work boots soaped to a warm glow, it wasn’t difficult to picture him, the gentleman farmer, welcoming his grandchildren from the broad porch of a country home.
He liked to take the family on “mystery rides,” long, meandering car trips down country roads, which always ended in a special treat at a new place. He drove slowly and carefully, showing his concern for them all. It seemed her grandmother was like a young girl then, all excited and wondering where they would end up. Glynis knew without thinking that this was a game they had started long before she and her mother were born. She loved being included.

He died that summer in the heat of a bright August morning, the day before her thirteenth birthday. His death was mercifully sudden, in the throes of his first heart attack. The family was left to deep shock and grief, the difficult funeral arrangements and the aftermath of ritual. Glynis thought she would never forgive him.

Through her confusion and grief, Glynis watched the proceedings with disturbed eyes. Buzzards seemed to group around the coffee table in Gran’s living room. She imagined her grandfather laid out in the parlor in his best black suit, while they flicked their ashes into his mouth and eyes, drinks balanced precariously on his chest. They had let his feet dangle into the flowers from the Mount Carmel Guild. As her distorted vision cleared, Glynis recognized familiar family faces behind the beaks, grief-gaunt and strained with sorrow.

They rallied in the parlor, this immediate gathering of a close-knit family, to plan and discuss, to wipe their eyes and reminisce, a nucleus of grief. In the kitchen wept his widow, surrounded by her girls and daughters-in-law, the mainstay of her universe. Gran hugged Glynis to her as she sat in the rocking chair Pop-Pop had scraped and varnished not long ago. “I can’t believe it,” her grandmother whispered hoarsely, and repeated, “I just cannot believe it.”

Out on the front lawn, new graves yawned, each with a freshly baked cake at its foot, impotent offerings from neighbors. Hams and whole chickens littered the counter in the back door and, as her senses returned, found she was staring into her grandfather’s garden. He had coaxed it into a flowering of roses and azalea from the city soot and soil. Was this all that was left of him, all he had bequeathed to her, who needed him so much?

The funeral parlor was crowded with people, relatives of her mother and father’s family, too, and all of the friends who had shared so much with her grandfather. Glynis didn’t recognize them all, but they knew her, and lent their consoling presence to her and her parents and her grandmother. She was fascinated by the sheer number of mourners, and wondered at the affection Pop-Pop had enjoyed in his lifetime. It was a rare feeling, the love which suffused that solemn room on that night, and the next.
His funeral was the largest the parish had seen. The church filled with black-clad mourners there to offer consolation to his widow. Glynis imagined her grandfather, standing between the wide doors in the vestibule behind the somber congregation, wondering what they had done with his comfortable old flannel shirt. She tried to be attentive to the eulogy, but instead became aware of her Pop-Pop’s presence beside her in the pew, just as surely as if he had been sitting there at Mass. He did not appear to be surprised at the presence of all his friends. He seemed to tell her that, to be special, singled out because of one’s own talents, was a natural consequence of personal achievement. To be special, and draw people quietly into a realization of that uniqueness by a silent and steady love, was a miracle of self. A sad, small smile touched Glynis’ lips as she began to listen to Monsignor’s words of redemption.

The cortege stretched for miles, winding along city streets and back roads to the cemetery where he would finally rest. Her grandfather rode in the long black limousine up front. She imagined him perched upon his casket, drawing long breaths on his favorite pipe, wondering why they made him ride with strangers. He could see his widow weeping behind the tinted glass of the next car’s windshield, and longed to tell her that death wasn’t so bad, not really. “Mary,” he sighed, “Mary my girl, why are you so sad?”

Back to school preparations were necessarily rushed; in the flurry of getting ready for a new year, Glynis’ birthday was forgotten. Her mother bought her clothes for the first week, when uniforms were not mandatory, and shoes for the term in the black color prescribed by the dress code. Glynis herself asked that her hair be bobbed in one of the new styles winking out at her from the popular glossies. Her father presented her with a wristwatch, her first, with a real leather band. The night before the first day of school, Glynis lay awake, thinking of the unspoiled notebook neatly arranged on her desk, with newly sharpened pencils and the rubber bookband from the stationery store.

Day brought with it the clear, sharp smell of apples, although it was still summer and very hot. September always made her think of cider and ginger snaps and the promise of crisp days to come. She set out in her mother’s station wagon, remembering the day she’d left and the crushing disappointment she’d felt then. That feeling was far away and vague, now, belonging to another child.
A gaggle of girls had arranged itself on the wood porch of the school building. Cynthia Hume was among them, holding court and tossing her bright hair in the slight breeze. As Glynis approached, they greeted her with laughter left over from their breathless conversation. Glynis made herself welcome by describing antics of her little brother over summer recess. They laughed again, with her this time, and she felt easy in their company. Most of them knew about her grandfather’s death, and expressed awkward condolences; some of their parents had attended his wake. Sympathy for her loss washed over Glynis like the warm sunlight, and she was comforted by the girls’ sensibility of her recent sorrow.

Music was the second period of the day, after homeroom and a brief welcoming speech by Mother Superior. Joanne sat at the piano, smiling nervously at her fingers. Her cousin’s visit had prevented full concentration on her music lessons and shortened her practice hours, and she wondered with much apprehension whether Sister Regina would notice her rusty technique. Joanne needn’t have worried. Sister’s attention was taken up with assigning practice duets to the uneven number of students present and, as Joanne breathed a small prayer of relief, Sister called Glynis to choose her partner for the first song.

Glynis moved past the orderly rows of wooden desks to the front of the classroom. Her mind spun with choices as she walked to the piano. Alice, Mary, Stephanie--whose voice was a fitting accompaniment to her own? She knew that only one girl in the room had an instrument equal to hers. Calmly, Glynis said, “Cynthia, please.”

The girls in the back row giggled; someone clapped and was silenced by Sister’s disapproving glance. Cynthia glided to the piano, her usually composed expression flushed with surprise. Glynis suggested a hymn they both knew, and offered to take the harmony. As the two girls stood side by side, Joan struck the first chords of the introduction.

Sister Regina stood to one side, admiring the pretty picture they made. Dark and light, the two young heads bent over a shared hymnal, their voices blending as one voice. Sister’s thoughts flew ahead to the Christmas concert, picturing their symmetry anchoring opposite sides of the stage, balancing the traditional Nativity scene with the song of the angels. Glynis’ voice was strong and steady, complementing Cynthia’s wavering tremolo. Listening to them Sister believed, with the wistfulness of a teacher who sees her students surpassing her, that they would learn much from each other, and perhaps already had.

The song of the two friends poured from the open door of the classroom, wandered joyously through the halls, and whispered its blessing into the late summer air.
To Picasso's Old Guitarist

Is the little one paralyzed yet?

The shoulder crooks forward
Straining to hide
The pallid old beard
The greyness of skin.

Has it lost coloratura?

Now immobile
Now unable
Rigid in its limpness.

Don't look down so—
nothing but that pinky one—
worthless, where it once pressed
so firmly on her strings.

It used to get so big!
Sure to embellish
Sure to embrace
Sure to make her sing.

On smooth bronze neck
Played youthful runs
Followed by fiery forays
In the savage Spanish sun.

Now the yellowed body
Tired, worn, and cracked
Rests in the ashen bed
Of a once impassioned lap.

Greg Fraser
Nothing More

“You’re a good friend, Harrison,”
I heard just the other day.
“Guys are a pain, but not you;
You’re a good friend, Harrison,”
She said as she laid her head upon
my shoulder.
These words, to you, may sound
encouraging.
But to me they rang of the imminent
loneliness to which I am chained.
A life past, a life present, and a life to come
Will be filled with echoes of those words.
“You’re a good friend, Harrison,”
But nothing more.

J.E.M.

Love or Futility

Ah, Romeo, the life you threw away!
Juliet, was he worth so many lost days?
Can one justify a horrid event
With human feelings and alternatives spent?

Can naivete answer for a deed
Of such grave permanence and futility?
Oh, Romeo! How little thought you gave
Before drinking yourself into the cold grave

Oh, Juliet! Such great pain you endured
To join in darkness the man you had adored
Can a love have such great intensity
That it is worth the decision not to be?

Too young and scared to live a life all alone,
You decided to enter a world unknown.
Tell me, was it worth the high price you paid
For the marriage bed in which you now are laid?

-26-
A Few Inches

It's another late night, and we're heading for morning
I find myself again by your side
One look in your eyes and I'm yearning
But there's nowhere I can hide
I just can't get over this feeling--
I keep telling myself I tried

I see your sweet face smiling
I get a warm flash through my heart
You reach for your glass and you brush my hair
When did this feeling start?

When we sit this close I have to contain
The desire I feel for you
A few inches to a kiss, but I just don't know
If that's what you want me to do

I say it's time for me to go
And I slowly put on my shoes
You come to me and you touch my arm
The time has come to choose

When we stand this close I have to contain
The desire so strong in me
A few inches to a kiss, but I just don't know...
So I slowly turn to leave

As I stand here these thoughts run through my head
I find myself holding your hand
One look in your eyes and I'm held there
By something I don't understand
But tonight there's something different--
Did I feel you squeeze my hand?

Ooh--I love you
I want to be close to you
Ooh--I want you
But I'm afraid to see it through
Ooh--I love you
I just don't know what to do.

Beth Henderson
My Dearest Only Child,

I am writing this to you and entrusting it to your grandmother to give to you when she feels you need it most.

First of all, I want you to know that although your father and I were a mistake, you were not. I loved your father dearly. We made a mistake, but that has nothing to do with you. Oh, this is a special time in a life! How I wish your father hadn't stopped loving me and had stayed to share your growing inside of me. You just kicked me for the first time--the first outward sign that you're alive! I was so happy when the doctor told me I was indeed pregnant with you.

Watching my stomach grow month by month has given me a feeling I can't describe and don't expect you to understand unless you are a girl and have children of your own someday. The expectation and waiting, knowing that there's a life inside of me, has kept me going. I just bought your crib today and sheets to go with it. Your grandmother made a beautiful blanket and gave me some old baby clothes from when I was little. Everything seems to be falling into place so well, and I'm expecting you any day.

I thought I should write some of how it feels to be carrying you because it's something most people never have shared with them and I thought it might show you how much you have meant to me since the beginning. I always wanted to be a mother. That was my lifelong dream, to carry life inside of myself and then help it grow in this world, to be independent and cope with the coldness and harshness of this life.

The second half of the dream is what this letter's all about. I realize that no matter how wonderful it feels to hold you in my arms now and rock you to sleep, there will come a time when your problems won't be that simple and helping you grow won't simply mean feeding you and keeping you clean and warm. No one's life is easy and each life is different. That's why I'm not going to tell you about my life to try to improve yours. I do have a few words of advice, and I hope that in following them your life will be all that it can be and that you can be happy with that life whatever it may be.
My advice to you is to treat everyone with love, but not to be so naive as to think they'll all treat you the same way. Call those that do friends and lean on them when life gets rough. Talk to them and share both the good times and the bad. Your father was only able to share the good times, not the bad. If you find people like that, don't turn away from them, but keep that point in mind and you may still be able to continue as friends but in a different respect. This will help get you through the rough times, but don't expect your friends to be able to make your problems go away.

I have no other advice to give you, no clear cut to answers, and, sitting here seeing your innocent, smiling face, it's hard to imagine you'll ever have such difficult problems—that you'll ever grow up from your carefree childhood. Of course, I know you will, but here today it seems so impossible.

You're reading this now because your grandmother has judged this to be the most difficult time in your life so far. I'm sorry that things aren't going well, and I wish I could be there to help. I've known all along your life would be more difficult than most, and I offer you now the one thing that I feel might help. I want you to know that I love you, that I've always loved you. Remember that and be comforted when times are bad. When the world is coldest to you, think about that and never give up. It hurts me to leave you, to know you'll grow up without parents. This will be a rough life for you as a result, and I hope that someday you'll make a good parent, loving and honest, as I so wanted to be for you. How ironic it was to find I was carrying life, that my lifelong dream was coming true, just as my life is ending. This letter is the fulfillment of the second half of that dream, I cannot reach back from the next world to help you. And so I give you my love now. It is all I have, all I can offer. Take it and let it carry you through life. It is my gift to you, my only gift, for I no longer even have my life to offer you.

With all my love,

Your mother whom you never got to know
Reserved

I feel you
Pulling away again;
You are retreating, but
I haven't even advanced yet.
Why are you so afraid
To share yourself with me?
I am only human, but I have
A mind that reasons,
A heart that sympathizes and accepts
And ears that do more than just hear.
I am here for you
If and when you need me--
You know that you can trust me
With your innermost thoughts and feelings;
I have the same trust in you.
I don't want to play those foolish
Emotional games with you
That so many people I know
Play just to cope with living.
I want us to be open and
Honest with each other--
Communication, not superficial
conversation,
Is vital.
I will give you as much time
As you need--because I am patient
And because I care about you.
Please don't be reserved with me--
I am waiting patiently for you
To reveal to me
Who you really are.

Michelle Grande
A Message to a Disillusioned Friend

Do you really think from up there you're in control?
--No, don't tell ME
I'm not strong enough to knock you from your wall
And bring you down among us
Where the shadows darken already dim lights . . .
In a world lost in fog,
Your brilliance seems to blind you,
So you listen to the sounds
And insist they must make sense
Although the vibrations batter their reason . . .
You still do not know
That Intelligence is found in the eye,
(not the ear)
And Wisdom is placed in the touch
(not the tongue)
So may your soul not tremble when finally you learn
Language is a slave,
Not a god,
To worship it you place yourself below it
And your meaning is lost in echo.

Beth Riccio
Doing It the Hard Way

By Matthew Darrin

In my vast three months of experience at college, I have met many people who study in various ways. Studying for a difficult test such as a biology or chemistry exam requires a great deal of time, patience, and intelligence; none of which I possess. Because of this I foolishly use the “all-nighter” studying technique, which means I do it the hard way. If you choose to study by this method, you can learn how in a few simple steps.

In order to be properly prepared for your studying session, you must perform a few tasks beforehand. First, you must sleep for only a few hours for two nights before your test. Then you will be properly tired for studying the next night. Next, you must build your confidence by discussing the test with your friends. They will tell you that it will be impossible and that they have been studying for a week. Finally, never do any of your homework or reading assignments before you are ready to study it you might have a vague idea of what you are doing when you begin. That would ruin everything. Now that you are exhausted, have no confidence, and have no idea what you are doing, you are ready to begin.

This studying method will not work unless you find a suitable place to study. Any place that is relatively noisy, has many people you know, and objects which can easily distract you will work well. You should now be ready to concentrate at the relatively low level necessary for this technique.

An even better way to reduce concentration is to study with a girlfriend or boyfriend. You will always find yourself taking breaks or being distracted by him or her. I have found that my concentration is seldom at its peak when my girlfriend is sitting in my lap flirting with me. However, this is my favorite part of this studying technique for obvious reasons. By 1:00 when you return from walking your girlfriend home, you are tired, not confident, confused, and unable to concentrate. You have done well.
Once you return home from your girlfriend's house, you gape at the clock and fear strikes your heart. Carefully choosing a better place to study, you swear to yourself that you will study straight through until 7:00. Diligently, you tear open your book and read studiously. This should last about ten minutes. Then, unable to keep your eyes open, you set your alarm for 3:30 (two hours ahead) and collapse into bed. Around 4:30, you will be awakened by an angry roommate who has been trying for an hour to both wake you and turn off your damn alarm clock. Carefully falling out of bed without causing serious injuries, you pick up a hammer or similar object and show your roommate an easy way to turn off your alarm clock.

Now you panic. You realize you have only three hours remaining to study if you skip breakfast. At this point most students take some type of stimulant to keep them awake. More intelligent students take the stimulant earlier and then do not need to buy a new alarm clock the next day. In addition, the stimulants provide so much energy you cannot sit still to study. You find yourself briskly pacing the room, studying from your book with one hand while scrupulously cleaning your room with the other. However, you do study successfully during these hours and learn the basic concepts of the material and possibly a few details. You then shower, briefly panic again, review quickly, and go take the test. It's in the bag--haven't you been studying all night? That's what you will tell your friends.

Of course, this is only one method. There are other ways. For example, you could do your homework when it is assigned and begin to study a few days before your test. But that wouldn't be any fun, now, would it?
The Wall

Looking at you,
I see your eyes darken,
Slamming shut the windows to your soul,
Sealing it behind the facade,
Your ever present wall.
You fortify that wall
Brick by brick,
As I long to tear it down
And free you from your prison.
Look at me,
I have also hidden behind a wall,
Fortified against intruders,
Built with the bricks
Of pain, distrust, and fear;
I have suffered.
But I know well the fear
The trembling, the shyness,
Of emerging from behind that fortress.
Reach out to me
As I have reached for you,
And together
We can tear down your wall,
Brick by brick,
As it was built,
And together we can be strong.

Laura Sassaman
It was the first week of May, May fifth to be exact. But dates aren’t important; never were, never will be. The long line of automobiles had all pulled over to the side of the winding driveway. The headlights were turned off and everyone started to get out of the cars. I was in the fourth car of the procession; family always goes first at these things. I was one of the last people to get out of the cars and the warmth of the mid-morning sun overwhelmed me.

I looked around me and all I saw was green grass. There were even a few newly blossomed plants scattered haphazardly about. I sort of laughed to myself, wondering why a beautiful spring day, a day of awakening, had to be ruined by a funeral.

Someone motioned for me to come up to the hearse. It really is kind of strange, but people seldom talk at funerals. They talk forever and ever at the funeral parlor; cemeteries are different, I guess. So, I ambled over to the hearse. The rear door swung open and we started to pull the casket out.

It really isn’t that difficult being a pallbearer not physically anyway. I used to think that it was very strenuous work, but it isn’t. You don’t actually feel the true weight of the casket because they have a cart with wheels that you place the casket on.

After we had the casket placed properly on the cart, we started the trek to the green tent, the one erected just for our use. It seemed like a mile that we had to walk to get to the open grave, but we eventually made it. When we got to the tent, with its flaps waving in the spring breeze, we lifted the casket. I was beginning to feel its real weight now, and we solemnly marched the final steps to the grave.

Once we placed the casket onto its momentary stainless steel rests, the six of us moved over to one side of the tent, out of the way.

The minister, dressed in his traditional black clerical garb with his starched cardboard collar, walked up to the grave, with his head bowed and with his Bible clutched tightly against his waist. He looked up at everybody. I felt as if he made eye contact with every single person standing around the casket. He turned his gaze to me. I felt my knees start to buckle. It was as if he were telling me how sorry he was and that he knew how I felt. Nobody knew how I felt. I didn’t even know how I felt.

Then he started speaking. I didn’t pay attention. Words meant nothing. I just looked around me. My Dad was holding my Mom so she wouldn’t fall. She was really taking it hard, and tears were streaming down both of their faces. I just stood there, clutching the pale blue carnation that was given to me earlier, and looking down at my feet.
"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Everyone was holding on tightly to their carnations, heads bowed and saying the Twenty-Third Psalm. I didn't bother. I didn't feel like doing much of anything. All I could do was think.

There were those nice summer days out on the golf course. God, we had the best times when we were together. We never played for perfection. Hell, we were probably two of the worst weekend duffers around. But we had fun. We would talk about anything. But most of the time we would talk about nothing. And we would laugh at our golf game.

I would hit that stupid little white ball all over the place, and we would laugh. Oh, he would try to correct me, but it never bothered him if I couldn't do it correctly. The whole point of those days on the golf course was that we were together.

It was easy to talk to him, too. He wasn't overimposing or an overwhelming person. He was quite the opposite; gentle, kind, loving, caring, and . . .

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." The words interrupted my thoughts. I just mouthed the words, sort of oblivious to what was going on around me.

Then there was the time I put my new football through his upstairs window. Boy, I thought he would give me hell for that one. He didn't even yell at me. It was sort of a mumbled curse under his breath. Then he just smiled at me and we went downtown to the hardware store. We spent that brisk fall afternoon putting in the new window. He never yelled at me; I can't forget that.

"Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Nobody had moved yet. Everyone stood like statues. It didn't seem that anyone was talking either. The spoken words might just as well have been a tape recording.
“My cup runneth over” struck me as being pretty funny. It reminded me of those days we would spend cutting his grass.

I would stay over the night before, usually sleeping in the big double bed in the back bedroom. He would come into the room around 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning to wake me up. Then we would go downstairs and have a big bowl of cereal before heading outdoors.

We were quite a sight, the two of us. I would be wearing my little white cutoff jeans and a tank top that almost fell to my knees. He'd wear his work clothes, soiled from years of use. And he'd wear his hat. I swear that hat was bigger than I was; at least it seemed that way. It was one of those wide brimmed straw hats, the kind that covers your whole face. And it was white as winter's snow.

I would walk in front of him, holding onto the sides of the lawnmower’s handles. He'd be walking behind me, actually doing all of the pushing, and continuously telling me to watch my step. What stands out the most though, is the way we spent our time together after we would finish mowing the grass.

He would go inside after telling me to sit down in the lounge chair in the shade of the majestic cherry tree in the backyard. A few minutes later, he would come out with two bottles of beer. He would open one up and give it to me. “Now whatever you do, don’t tell your mother,” he'd say. “She’ll kill me.”

I never did.

“Amen.” They had finished the prayer. One by one they filed past the casket, placing their flowers on it. I didn’t go. I waited until everyone else had gone past. I looked around, and everyone was heading towards their cars. I was alone. It was just me and him.

I walked up to the copper-plated oak coffin, my head bowed. The sunlight was dancing on the shiny metal. I clutched the flower tighter. I didn’t want to part with it. I just looked down at the casket; a tear moistened my cheek and a lump developed in my throat. I reached out, placed the blue carnation at the head of the casket, and passed my hand over the warm, smooth metal. Taking my hand back, I held back my tears and before turning away I whispered, “Good-bye Grandpa. Thanks. I’m gonna miss you Pal.”
fantasy secret

a smile
eyes
pensive--
  imaginethoughts racing
  memory seeking
speaking--
  hear intellect.

bend of arm
strength of shoulder
hand resting
slope of fingers
  gentleness . . .

Tug on my hand
Head turns--

moment over--
dream falls
  shattered pieces fly

returning perspective
distance . . .

Feel
Hand heavy on mine
yet still watching--
  memorized details

linger in my mind

Beth Long
Lisa

Your heart is ever in the stars, your soul is on the wind.
Your laughter is in the trees of summer,
You carry sunshine in.

There is always sunlight in your eyes, a rainbow on your face.
Your smile is more lovely than the nightingale's song,
Your skin is the heather's lace.

A sigh from your lips lets the turmoil calm; a glance, the tempest cease.
Your touch can soothe the world's deepest wounds; A word, and all is at peace.

Beth Henderson
Caesar’s Last Words

Et tu, Brute--Then fall Caesar!
Rome was fine, but obviously I didn’t please her.
If such an honorable man sees fit to assassinate,
Perhaps I did procrastinate.
I could have done more when I did less:
Pruned my laurel crown, hemmed my dress,
Respected the Senate and been less ambitious,
Stopped confusing the names of Casca and Cassius.
So many things I could have said and done
That would’ve made March 15 a little more fun.
(gasp)
Oh, if I’d only heeded that old coot’s warning,
Or listened to Calpurnia’s nagging this morning.
Sure, I was proud--this I cannot deny;
I turned a deaf ear when one did prophesy.

But Brutus, I must say that I was surprised
To look down and see your dagger in my side.
I considered you a friend and had not expected
That you would participate in having my bowels resected.
(ouch)
But, hey, why am I so glum?
It is you who are dumb.
I just realized that I am off the hook.
No more worrying about speeches and how good I look,
No more settling trash strikes and reviewing armies,
No more fruitless fertility rites and stately toga parties

I assume that you, Brutus, will be taking my job.
Do you really believe you can handle that mob?
They're an unruly crowd and they'll listen to you
As long as you do what they yell you to do.
(gasp)
Perhaps I should thank you for ending my reign
Before it even started--hell, it was a pain.
And before I die, I have one last request:
Let Marc give a speech when you lay me to rest.
He's often long-winded but he's always quite clear
I know you'll allow it--what have you to fear?
(Dies)

Bill Connolly
There's a Grouse in My House

With special thanks to Dr. Seuss
To Jennifer and Elvis, my "special" friends

On the sixth of July, at a quarter to four
A grouse came to our house. He came right in the door.
Not just any old grouse, he soon made it clear,
Who would live in the woods like a mouse or a deer,
But a grouse of distinction, a grouse of renown,
A grouse who must live in the center of town.

This grouse was a smart one. He knew all the rules.
He had spent many years at grouse finishing schools.
This grouse could make pancakes. He could sing. He could rhyme.
He could read and could write; he could even tell time.

He would live in no forest, not even a zoo.
A house grouse he was, a quite proper one too.
He marched right in the door, went straight to my room,
Then swept it all clean with a polka dot broom.

"Mr. Grouse," I said nicely, "That's no way to act.
Grouse belong in the forest. Now that is a fact."
He just opened his suitcase and took out his stuff,
And hung it all up 'til I'd had enough.

"Now listen here grouse!" I said in a loud voice,
You moved in my room like one of my toys.
You took over my closet, without asking first.
That wasn't nice. And that's not the worst."
You brought in your bed and your desk and your chest,
And your two-wheeler bicycle and yellow-striped vest.
You brought in your T.V. and your pink telephone,
And a stereophone and all the records you own.

"Now listen here bird, you go home, don’t come back!
Get out of my room. Take your things in a sack.
Take your chess set, your goldfish, your new ballpoint pen
Take your paintings, your schoolbooks. I’m counting to ten
If you don’t go away before I am through,
I’ll turn you to pudding or a tasty grouse stew."

Well up that grouse jumped. He flew onto the sill,
And he looked at me sadly the way a grouse will.
Then he started to cry in a grouse kind of way.
So loud and so long, gosh, what could I say?

He whined and he wailed and he cried such big tears
That a puddle was formed almost up to his ears.
Then he jumped up and down and made such a fuss,
That I said he could stay and live here with us.

Well, then he stopped crying and before very long
Brought out his piano and played me a song.
He sang and he whistled and hummed as he played,
And these are the words I think that he said:

"A grouse is bird like a turkey or quail.
My wings are all colors; there’s a stripe on my tail.
If you let me stay and live here with you,
I’ll teach you to play lots of games that are new.
We’ll be closer than butter is to bread
Just try me and see," that old grouse said.
And so he stayed to live with us.
He stuck to me. I stuck to him.
The grouse became my chum.
We two were just like chewing gum.

And every day, right after nap, we played a game of ball,
Tic-tac-toe, bingo and tag, monopoly and all,
And piggy backs, jump rope, jacks, and Simon says: “Do
this!”
And basketball against the wall. My gosh, he’d never miss!

One day after baseball (the grouse played first base),
He said, “Let’s go now to a grouse special place.”
It was quite far away and up very high,
On top of a mountain very close to the sky.

Well, there we were, just he and I
Up high on that mountain, up in the sky.
Then don’t ask me how and don’t ask me why,
But one Thursday morning he taught me to. . . .
FLY!!

We flew over treetops and over my house.
I was only a boy but I flew like a grouse.
We flew over the chimney and over the wall.
We flew high. We flew low. I had no fear at all.

We flew to the church steeple, and then even higher,
Over factories and people and telephone wire.
We flew back to the mountain, then out to the shore.
I saw a ship captain. I could hear the waves roar.

First take a deep breath and stand up on your toes.
Fold your hands, shut your eyes, and scrunch up your nose.
Face around one half turn, say three magic words.
Then you can fly high, like insects and birds.
He said: "Keep it a secret, don't tell anyone. If people find out, then our flying is done."
So I did what he said. I told not a soul.
Then we flew to Disneyland and to the North Pole.

The weeks went by quickly that wonderful year. I always was happy when the grouse bird was near. But one day he told me he'd soon have to leave. I cried great big tears all over my sleeve.

He said he'd grown tired of living in houses. He missed the green forest. He missed other grouses. He said, "A grouse isn't meant for a boy's kind of life. I need a grouse family and a grouse kind of wife."
In two days he was gone. He'd packed all his things and flew out the window and flapped both his wings. He circled around and then waved goodbye, and in a few seconds he was up in the sky.

I tried to fly after him, tried as hard as I could. But my arms didn't work as I thought that they should. It was just no use, no matter how hard I'd try. With no grouse to help me I just couldn't fly.

Before he was gone, I thought that I'd heard a final farewell from my friend the grouse bird. "Some day when you're grown, I'll come back," he declared. "Remember your old pal; keep my room all prepared."

Now I'm all grown. Many years have gone by. It cannot be real that once I could fly. I try to remember but now it all seems my times with the grouse were nothing but dreams.

Now I have a son. He's only age three. As old as I was when the grouse came to me. Well, sometimes I wonder in May or in June, Does the grouse visit him? Does he live in his room?
How silly it seems. It just cannot be.
Grouse live in the woods way up in a tree.
But once late at night when all were asleep,
I thought I heard wings flap and a funny grouse peep.

I crept up to the window, found a good place to hide,
Pulled up the shade, took a quick look outside.
Then just for a moment, I can't be too certain,
But I thought I saw something fly past my curtain.

Well, I'll never be sure I saw what I did,
But there were six grouses and one little kid.
They flew right by my window, one after the other,
Four baby grouselings, their father and mother.

And flying behind them, was he having fun!
A little boy person, my three-year-old son!
Now what would you do if you saw your child flying?
It came to me quick without even trying.

I pulled back the curtain and pulled in my head.
With three hops and one skip I was right back in bed.
I closed my eyes tightly and counted ten sheep
And in three or four minutes, I fell fast . . . ASLEEP!

Betsy Rosen
If you want me,
(which you won't)
You can find me
Right here
Where I've always been
But you just haven't bothered
To look.
That's O.K.
No one else has either
And I don't really expect
That anyone ever will.
I think the sooner
We all realize that,
The better off
We will be.
Everyone's looking
But nobody's finding
Because we don't realize
There is no buried treasure
In anybody's life
No matter who
You are
And whether you have
The map.
Thirty paces to the left
Of the old maple tree
Twenty more
To the swings
You know--
The treasure maps
We draw as children
Never help us
When we grow up.

J.D.H.
The Education of a Samaritan

Lone man on the corner
Slumped against a pole
Image of dejection
An untouchable

His shoulders droop, his eyes rivet down
As shoppers and school girls walk by
He glances up when they've passed
And wipes his nose with his tie.

His clothes are dingy rags
And his shoes beyond repair
His face devoid of smiles
His eyes welled with despair.

Such a pitiful sight
Would move most people to pity,
Even though one's conditioned
To ignore in this city.

I hesitantly approach him
Uncertain of my plan
Will he accept my aid?
Will he understand?
He senses that I am approaching
Yet his eyes do not meet mine
He simply weeps to himself
And takes a swig of his wine.

I'm frozen in indecision
I consider walking away
Then I realize as much as I want to
I just as much want to stay.

Suddenly he lurches upward
And staggers helplessly up the street
Perhaps if I follow him I can get him to stop
For a shave or for something to eat.

He veers off into an alley
And I quicken my pace to draw near
As I turn around the corner
I realize I have something to fear . . .

'Cause . . .
The old bastard has a gun
And it's pointed in my face
The sweat forms on my brow
And my heart begins to race
For I realize I've been conned
As I hand the old coot my cash
It was my first time as a Samaritan
And you can bet it will be my last.

Bill Connolly
The Death of Illusion

I was awakened by sounds
of laughter and happiness
drifting across the desert;
Unfamiliar sounds
in this world of hate and fear,
they called to me.

I descended from my tower,
I ran, ran across the
barren sand
toward Happiness and Love,
Peace and Security--
Ideals I had always believed existed,
even though no one else had.

As I approached the source
of these joyous sounds,
they dissolved, and changed--
from carousel music to staccato machine
    gun fire;
from children's laughter to the sobs and
groans of dying men.
The sounds of Happiness and Love
had been merely a conjurer's trick,
to trap the naive
who still held their childish illusions
    intact . . .

My shoulders slumped--
I turned to begin the long journey home.
Weary of body and of mind,
My eye was caught
by the glint of metal in the sand--
    slowly, I bent . . .
not an illusion but a reality,
it was a knife.

Sobbing, I lay the knife against my wrist,
And as bitter reality replaced
precious illusion in my mind,
    I cut my flesh . . .
I walked and pondered
Seeking my destiny;
The road was long
And had no end.

I searched
Not knowing what I was looking for;
Though I knew where I stood
I was lost.

Though exhausted, I walked on
Then ran;
Yet my life was retreating farther away
Where? I did not know.

I could search no longer
I was defeated;
Loneliness
had taken over.

I looked up and
There you stood;
You offered me your hand
Though afraid, I accepted.

From where you came
I did not know;
But when I looked into your eyes
They showed the road to my destiny

You showed me love
And made me feel alive;
We traded thoughts
Without sharing words.

I looked into your eyes again
I saw myself and more;
I know that my road will not end here
But I am well rested.

I needed you
And you were there;
I'll be sad when you're gone
But your memory will remain
Forever.

D.M.B.
A woman walked past him and he smiled as if the scent she wore stirred some forbidden memory buried deep inside his mind.

As I watched him smile and reminisce (perhaps) about his nights of passion with her, (maybe) about how he loves and wants her, (probably) forgetting that I love him, I frowned at he who so blatantly admired a (possible) ex lover. Then he turned to me, smiled, and he said something that changed my stupid, jealous mind.

He said:
“She reminds me of you.”

DWAYNE
He walked into my life
With a smile in his heart
Anxious for pleasure,
Hungry for passion.
The days melted into
One continuous purple sky
Clouded only by our moods
Pushing us forward
Through our private
Sunshine.
Others threatened us
With bloody daggers
Poised at our hearts
Forcing us to part
Again and again.
Yet, each reunion
Sweetened our
Continuous need
For each other's soul.
He possessed my world
Sharing his thoughts,
Fears, and love,
Warmed me with his fire
Until I could burn
No more.
The sky faded to black
As the knife sliced
My throat
Soaking him in crimson sweat.
He laughed as though
My pain amused him.
I searched his eyes
For compassion,
Instead I found
The horror of my blindness.
I reached for his hand
And intertwined my fingers
With the edge of a
Silver blade.

Lisa R. Talarico
Blindness

There is a world of
Beauty out there to be seen.
There is beauty in the sunrise,
In the deep blue sky that holds the rainbow,
Captured in miniature
By the dewdrop sparkling in the sun.
There is beauty in the silently swaying trees,
The swiftly winging bird,
In majestic snow-covered mountains.
There is beauty
In the musical stream
Softly murmuring its tune into the stillness,
In the softly spoken word,
A poem . . .
There is beauty
In a touch,
A look,
A smile.
There is so much beauty
Inside the mind,
Deep down in the heart,
In simply being the true self . . .
Yet people refuse to see.

Laura Sassaman
Innocence Unveiled

I look through my window 
out into the world 
and see not the ugliness and dirt 
but the beautiful sky 
washed in blue and golden sunshine. 
and the intensely green grass 
covering the fields.

I see not the metal of cars 
nor the buildings beyond them, 
but only the intoxicating loveliness 
of an innocent world, 
the way it was meant to be.

DWAYNE
My eyes wavered as I gazed down Front Street from the front porch of my parlor. I am a mortician, the only one in Cokeport, Randolph Downing by name. People have said I look more like a cadaver than my late lamented customers.

Sticking to my early morning vigil, I said aloud, "Where is she?" I was looking for Amanda, a sorrel topped beauty who passed my parlor every morning on her way to work. Amanda Melliflous was her name and she was bound for the handicapped children's center.

Did I miss her? I didn't think so. I could hear a pair of heels off in the distance. With the sound getting louder, I knew she was drawing closer.

"Good morning, Amanda. I didn't think you were going to work. Aren't you late?"

"I stopped to order a birthday cake for one of my children."

"You really think the world of those children, Amanda."

"Randolph, I wish I had the money and a big house. I would adopt about a dozen. I promised to take them to the zoo, but we have no transportation. Do you know where I can get a ride for them?"

"Amanda, I will personally drive your kids down. We will use my white hearse. They'll enjoy the trip. Not everyone can say they rode in a hearse while still among the living."

"We'll take you up on it," said the girl.

"I'm glad; a lot of people wouldn't ride in a HEARSE."

"Most people wouldn't sleep in coffins either," she answered.

"People call me odd because of my bed, Amanda. I do sleep in a casket. Best one in my display room, a four-thousand-dollar bone box. Never suffer from dreams or nightmares either."

Saying goodbye, the pair parted and a few days later the white funeral wagon pulled up to the Children's Center. The children were loaded aboard. On the way home they wanted to see my famous bed. Amanda voted this idea down.

Amanda and I exchanged pleasant "Hello's" every morning for the next few weeks. One day, as she walked by, I blurted, "Miss Melliflous, would you go out to dinner with me? I could get reservations at the Fox and Hound Inn. We could drive out in the hearse."

Clearly I had flustered her. She didn't answer. No wonder, with that, "Miss Melliflous." I had always called her Amanda.

In truth, Amanda had forgotten Randolph's formal use of her name as soon as he mentioned the hearse. She did not relish the idea of dating in one. But being a very kind person, she decided she couldn't hurt Randolph's feelings, so she accepted the offer with, "Yes, Randolph, I would enjoy going out to dinner with you."
Saturday evening the hearse pulled up in front of Amanda's rooming house. Soon a crowd gathered. It was thought Randolph was there to pick up a client. Out the door came the lovely young girl and away she went with her strange escort.

Amanda and I became an item of gossip in Cokeport. The Saturday night ritual, dinner and a movie, continued for almost a year. Nothing else happened; I never even kissed the angel, but I was in a dream world. I even smiled on occasion, something I had trained myself not to do, as my business demanded a solemn look. These were very happy days for me, but they came crashing to an end when I decided to ask Amanda a question.

“My dear,” I said with confidence, “we have known each other for almost a year. I know there is a great difference in our ages, but we seem so well suited—the moments with you are the happiest I have ever known. Will you marry me, Amanda? I am wealthy and would do anything to make you happy. If you wish, we could adopt a dozen children from the Children's Center.”

Amanda was silent for a moment; then she spoke softly. “Oh, Randolph! I do love you, but not that way. I should have told you sooner, but I am engaged to another man.”

“What! What!” was all I could say.

“Floyd and I have known each other since high school,” said Amanda. “He was in the Army and is now discharged. We have started to see each other again and have fallen in love. We are going to be married.”

I was heartbroken. Sadness left me as hate took over; I couldn't speak.

“Randolph, you have been a father to me. I loved the quiet talks we had, when you gave me advice. Please don’t be angry. You know my father is dead; would you give the bride away? It would make me happy.”

What about my happiness, flashed through my mind.

“No! Never. I am not your father. Goodnight.”

“Randolph, I’m sorry; I have hurt you. When will I see you?”

“I'll keep in touch,” I muttered.

I walked her to the porch, mumbled I don’t know what, and slammed the massive oak door. Back into the house of death I went. Never one for drinking, I started that night. A new personality was born as the brandy brought out a new me.

I said aloud to my image in the drawing room mirrors, “What a wonderful corpse Amanda would make.”

I could preserve her beauty for all time. One thing I was noted for was my skillful embalming. I once overheard a statement that I could even make a dead cat look alive. It made me smile to remember Mrs. Murphy's cat, Stripes, who had been run over by a truck. The poor old woman was distraught until I finished with Stripes. Then old lady Murphy kept the cat in her parlor in a place of honor. At Mrs.
Murphy's death I slipped the cat in the box with her. Nobody was ever any wiser.

But Amanda wasn't dead. Could I do it? I wondered. How? I thought of the many means of death; I had seen them all. Finally I decided poison was the thing. This way the body would not be disfigured.

"Why not be dramatic? She would die drinking wine with me," I was talking out loud again. "I'll get cyanide from my friend at the electroplating plant."

A bridal chamber was needed. One in an unused part of the house--a secret room. Suddenly it hit me, I had such a place, and nobody knew about the hidden chamber except "Bottles" and I. Max "Bottles" Brown once had owned the parlor. Only it wasn't a funeral home then. It was Brown's brewery. Many a bottle of illegal hooch had first seen the light of day coming from the unknown compartment.

Only Max and I had known of the secret chamber. Now one of us was dead, "Bottles."

A month went by and the plan festered in my head. I had to do it. The pressure was too great watching Amanda pass every morning from behind closed curtains.

I began to work on my bridal chamber. It went slowly as I had no help. I could not let anyone in on my secret.

Opening the door and entering "Bottles' " hidden brewery, I was greeted by a scene of beauty. A rich oriental rug covered the floor. Beautiful crimson wall paper graced the walls.

"The four poster bed is gorgeous," I said aloud. "Amanda, you'll love your exquisite dressing table. How do you like your full length mirror?"

I moved my casket into the bridal chamber. Now we would sleep side by side. I was going to be happy and my troubles would be over.

Now for the wedding dress. I decided on an off-white gown to go with Amanda's rich red hair. "You shall have a Victorian look, my dear," I said audibly, reading from an ad torn hastily from the city newspaper, "with high neckline, ruffled yokes, and leg-o'-mutton sleeves." The language in the ad started me giggling. I was in good spirits. I drove two hundred miles to the city to get the dress. No expense was spared.

If Amanda entered the bridal chamber, she would be blinded with the sparkler I had bought her. A huge diamond to place upon her finger, a priceless pearl necklace belonging to Granny Downing to adorn her neck, a large red ruby to hang from each ear--Amanda's tomb would have all the riches of King Tut's Tomb.

Everything was set; all I had to do was bait the trap. I had not talked to my friend since the night she revealed her wedding plans. I picked up the phone with trembling fingers to dial the number. After four rings the receiver was picked up. I heard the low, sexy voice. I was speechless for a few seconds.
“Hello Amanda. This is Randolph.”

“Oh, Randolph! Is it really you? I was so worried,” blurted the girl. “I thought you had been sick. I called your place many times. No one answered.”

“Amanda, I would like you to come over on Saturday night. We will have dinner together. I shall cook you a gourmet meal fit for a queen. Will you accept the invitation, my dear?”

“Yes, Randolph! It will be like old times.”

“I will be counting the hours until we meet. Good-bye until Saturday.” Good-bye forever I thought to myself.

I smiled to myself. My little beauty will rest in “Bottles’” hidden cemetery. Things were falling into place. I started to laugh. I couldn’t stop. Finally exhaustion hit me and I fell onto my bed. I slept like a baby, in my four-thousand-dollar casket, covered by a satin funeral blanket.

The night of nights finally arrived and I waited in my parlor. A clang of the bell sent me racing toward the door. I was dressed in a long-tailed funeral director’s coat and high silk hat. I was immaculate. I turned the knob and opened the door.

There on the threshold of eternity stood the ravishing young lady with her reddish gold hair cascading down her back. Amanda looked radiant and happy with a dazzling smile.

“Enter my humble abode,” I purred.

“Did you just come from a funeral, Randolph?”

“No, just going to one.”

“You do joke so, Randolph.”

I took my lovely friend into my dining room where I had set the table for a feast. I had my Haviland China, belonging to my mother, on the table; also my best sterling silver. Candlelight illuminated the room with a ghostly glow.

“My dear, before I serve the meal we will drink a toast to happiness.”

Out came the bottle of cyanide-laced wine. I poured two glasses with shaking fingers.

“Oh, Randolph!” she said, as I handed her the glass, “You make everything wonderful.”

“Let us drink, Amanda. It’s thirty year old elderberry wine. Down the hatch, my dear.”

The glasses were lifted. Amanda sipped hers and I pretended to drink. The foul deed was done. All I could do was wait. How long? It seemed like hours, but it was only seconds.

“AH! AH! AH!” gasped Amanda, clutching her throat. “Oh! Randolph--” Then she fell. It was all over.
I caught her before she hit the floor. No bruises or blemishes for Amanda. I did not want her marred. Into the morgue I carried her, drained her of life fluid, and pumped in the super embalming liquid. I made her up and under my expert work a prettier corpse would never be viewed.

I dressed her with loving care. The ivory-colored wedding gown was slipped on, and she was carried into the bridal suite. Placing her on the great bed I stepped back and admired my work.

"Best work I have ever done," I said aloud. "If only people could see and admire the great job of embalming." Amanda looked beautiful.

A great feeling of pride and sadness went through my body as I turned to leave the chamber. I turned the lights low and in the semi-darkness the great diamond sparkled. I closed and locked the door. I slowly climbed upstairs feeling very weary.

I went into the dining room. "I must get rid of the flask of poisoned wine," I remarked aloud. "Also my untouched goblet."

Before I could do this I noticed a letter on the floor. It must have been dropped by Amanda. It was addressed to Floyd Baker. Who was he? Then I remembered--Amanda's intended. Opening the letter I took out the single sheet and read it.

Dear Floyd,

I have decided to call off our wedding. I am still in love with Randolph. If he will have me I will marry him. I am very sorry.

Amanda

I let out a shriek and placed the corner of the letter under the flame of the candle. I held it until it burned down to my fingers.

"Damn it! Damm it!" I screamed in rage and pain.

I knew what I had to do. I picked up my full glass of elderberry wine and returned to the secret room. Once inside "Bottles' hideaway I climbed into my satin-lined bed. Placing the goblet to my lips I drank deeply.