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instress
autumn '92



Table of Contents

Autumn Leaves	Photo	Dr. Scott Blanchard	Cover
Letter to My Deceased Lover		John Zongilla	3
Cat Contemplating Kant	Artwork	Dr. Stevan Davies	3
The Little Monsters	Photo	Brian Doran	4
Ivory and Joy	Photo	Peggy Charnick	4
Sisters Who Share		Peggy Charnick	4
My Doll	Photo	Anya Musto	5
The Princess		Robert Thomas	5
Morning Stares (Soweto, S.A.)	Photo	Chris Michaels	6
Busin'		Fr. Michael Bryant	7
Untitled	Photo	Wayne Sorbelli	8
Reservations		Robert Thomas	8
House of Pain		Anya Musto	9
Howe Ave. Park	Photo	Jenn Garceau	9
They Call It Progress		Marie Blizzard	10
Passersby	Photo	Anya Musto	15
him		Jill Gorman	15
More Powerful Than	Photo	Dr. Scott Blanchard	16
The Sphinx Whistles		Rebecca Ardoline	16
The Observation of a Dragonfly		Dan Zalewski	17
the doormat		John Zongilla	18
One of the Five Solemn Senators			
Goes Mad	Artwork	Dr. Stevan Davies	19
Untitled	Photo	Wayne Sorbelli	20
Unfinished		Rebecca Ardoline	20
Dreaming Green		Fr. Michael Bryant	21
Billy	Photo	Jill Gorman	21
May 16th, 1992		Nancy Steffan	22
Castle	Photo	Anya Musto	22
And each year		Anya Musto	23

Instress has been published by the students of College Misericordia since December 1966. The title, coined by Gerard Manley Hopkins, signifies the moment the reader achieves complete understanding of the written word.

Literary Editor: Anya Musto; **Editorial Staff:** Rebecca Ardoline, Peggy Charnick, Joan Curcio, Jenn Garceau; **Advisor:** Dr. Jeffrey Johnson.

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Misericordia

College Misericordia
Dallas, PA 18612

Letter to My Deceased Lover

Dearest Connie,

No camera's photograph, artist's portrait, or even home-produced video montage can ever return you to me. These captured images are artificial, lacking substance, and keep you distant. I need to have you here with me. Reassured by your physical presence so I can grasp your hand for strength and comfort, hold your body close when feeling low, and lay next to you when void of intimacy.

I realize the fact that you have passed away dampens the prospect of us having a traditional relationship. The horrors of rigor mortis ward off our chance for social acceptability being that you would really begin to smell putrid. But I have found an answer inspired by Norman's love for his mother. I shall take thee to a taxidermist where you will become immortalized as an appropriate testimonial of the love I feel for you.

I understand one normally only does this with game won in sport or is only done by eccentric pet owners, but I don't view you as my trophy or domesticated cat. I see you as a necessary part of my life, the foundation for which my being rests. I fear that without you present I would become emotionally and mentally unstable. I would lapse into a condition of social depravity, being consoled only by imaginary friends and animated foodstuff. Your mere presence would help me avoid this pathetic existence.

Believe me when I say that the art of taxidermy will do you justice. I would be sure to dress you in the colors that best compliment you and even keep your hairstyle current. So please understand, my love, that although I may appear selfish, I am certain that you would truly want it this way.

Love Always,
John Zongilla





Sisters Who Share

*We are sisters who share
Same hunger
Same yearning
Same bruised aching memories of childhoods spent
Being lonely and scared.*

*We are sisters who share
Same cuts
Same scars
Same echoes of hurtful words spoken by grown-ups
too drunken to care.*

*We are sisters who share
Same faces
Same smiles
Same longing for some way to rewrite the present
And undo the past.*

*We are sisters who share
Same father
Same mother
Same uncertain sense of where childhood ended
And grown-up began.*

Peggy Charnick





The Princess

Gowns of silk, lace.
bluejeans, sweatshirts.
Tiaras of diamonds, rubies.
comb, brush.
Glass slippers, high heels.
sneakers.
Bedsheets of satin.
sleeping bag.
Rings of gold, jeweled.
bubblegum machine.
Four white stallion.
a parrot.
A gold coach.
red wagon.
A fine yacht.
innertube.
Pheasant under glass.
peanut butter, jelly.
The royal opera.
Miss Piggy.
Loved by nations.
Mom, Dad.
Our Princess.

Robert Thomas





Busin'

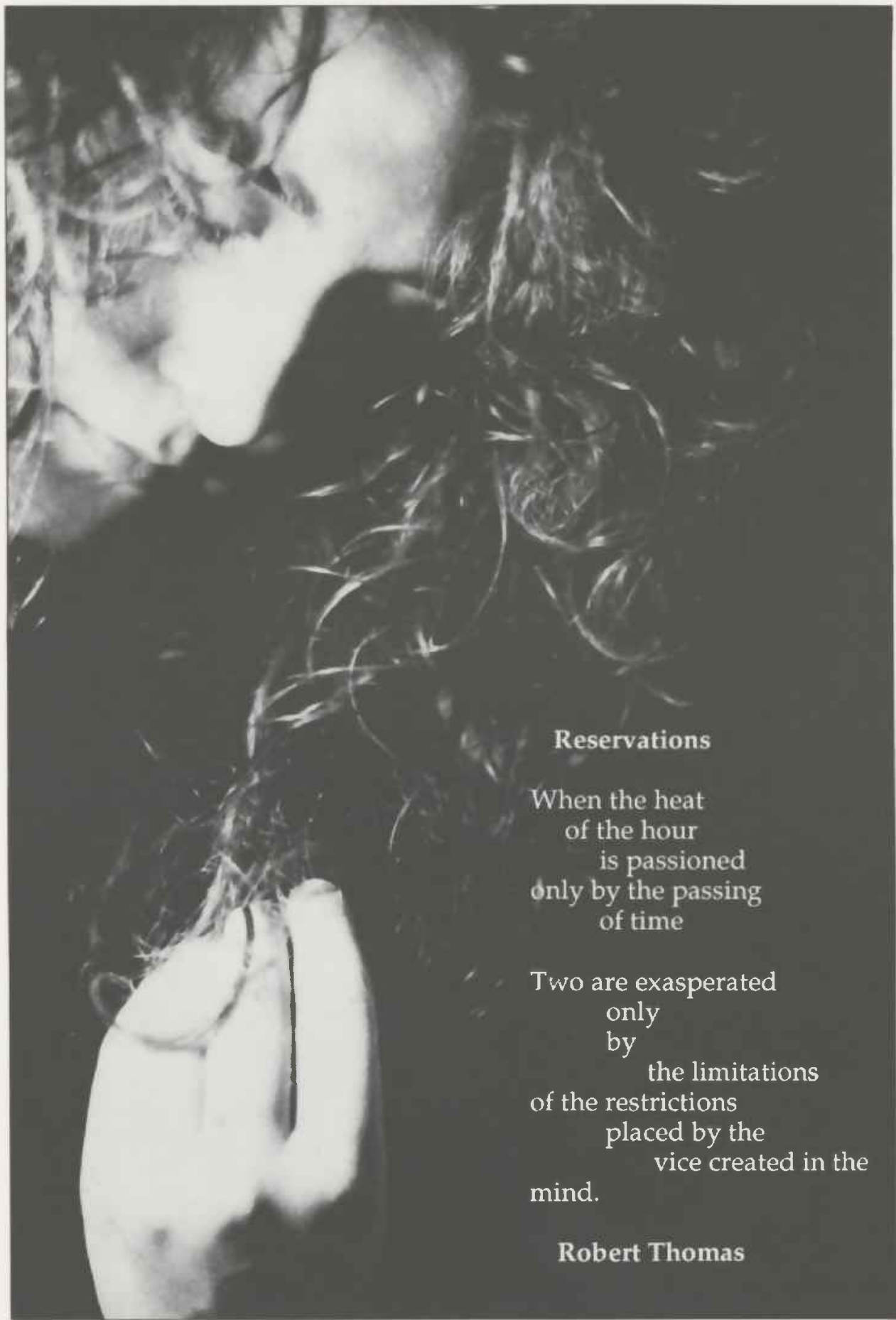
Busin',
Rhymes with abusin'
But not cussin'.
Yet with busin',
There is a lot of this goin' on.

Busin',
Rhymes with cruisin',
Like for a bruising',
Cause there ain't no mussin'
With this goin' on.

Busin',
Rhymes with usin'.
Which the whole street
Finds amusin',
If this is goin' on

Busin',
Rhymes with snoozin',
After all this fussin' from
The busin' that is no longer
Goin' on.

Fr. Michael Bryant



Reservations

When the heat
of the hour
is passionate
only by the passing
of time

Two are exasperated
only
by
the limitations
of the restrictions
placed by the
vice created in the
mind.

Robert Thomas

House of Pain

I was always left uneasy by the words adore, love, and marry and the expression to make love. We children had heard them, sometimes coming to the dinner table before we had been called, hungry us all, so that only the devoid words were half-whispered out, and had read them, on proclamations that caused our ears to perk up and eyes drop ashamedly down over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing inclusive of love in that terrible fighting house, and the things that were adorable were not adored and those who were married were like the trash-piles if hatred was allowed to pile up and up. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the ragged and hungry pets had dignity. Certain dishevelled rooms were the same way and certain special occasions and every Sunday morning with the awful mechanical-smiling of piling in the church pew were the only times you could act as if and have them show any feeling at all. Words of warmth and closeness such as darling, endearment, precious or family were obscene beside fighting words that woke one at night, ugly words slapped back and forth, the vicious slamming of doors in shaking frames, the shedding of resentful tears, the waking of hysterical babies.

Anya Musto



They Call It Progress

Characters: Clarence Rogers
Clara, his wife
Voice of TV announcer
Phil Smith

Scene is a living room with two overstuffed chairs with a table between them. A rug is on the floor between the chairs and a large TV which faces the chairs and is only seen from the back by the audience.

A man and woman, aged mid-70's, wearing casual slacks and sweaters are seated in the chairs facing the TV, from which is blaring loud polka music.

Clarence: I love watchin' Polka Party. Look at those perky short skirts. Those honeys move like lightenin'. Remember when we danced like that, Clara?

Clara: We never danced like that. You've had arthritis since 1962.

Clarence: Well, we did a lot of slow-dancin' cheek-to-cheek.

Clara: Yes, we did, at our wedding. You looked so handsome and you only stepped on my feet two or three times.

Clarence: Aw, Clara, our wedding was 52 years ago.

Clara: I remember like it was yesterday.

Clarence: You probably don't even remember what you burned for supper last night.

Clara: Yes, I do, it was pot roast with potatoes and

The music stops and a male voice is heard speaking from the TV.

Announcer: Are you prepared to depart from this World? Have you provided for those you leave behind? Do you want to be kept alive by artificial means?

Clarence: I'm willing my body parts to science.

Clara: Giggles into hankie. You wear bifocals, a hearing aid, have rheumatoid arthritis in your fingers and two plastic heart valves. What have you got that still works?

Clarence: I haven't heard any complaints after dark under the covers. Pats her knee.

Clara: You old fool. That's my knee with the metal brace.

Announcer: Call our toll-free number to find out more about the new Living Will Computer Software including information about cryogenics.

Clarence: Cryin' won't help a person live longer, it'll just make ya' feel better.

Clara: No, Clarence, that's cry-o-genics. After you die, say from cancer or heart disease, they freeze your body, then thaw you out after they find a cure.

Clarence: I want my body burned and the ashes strewn over the apple orchard.

Clara: Be careful, dear, I once heard of a man who had no next of kin to speak of and his ashes were given to a second cousin once removed who carried him around in her car for two weeks before burying him under a giant fir in Yellowstone National Park.

Announcer: Don't let that ungrateful offspring you refused to send to Disneyland or your last living relative, cousin Bud from Birmingham, make the decision about where you'll spend the hereafter.

Clarence: I'd better look for that dang will and the insurance policies.

Clara: They're in the strong box under the bed with our birth certificates, marriage license and....the other papers.

Announcer: Call our toll-free number 800-555-4321 to order your Living Will Computer Software. Don't delay. Order now. Offer expires tomorrow night at midnight.

Clarence: I believe my fishing license is in that box and I was goin' to the creek tomorrow mornin' with Phil Smith. I'd better go and fetch it before I forget.

Clara: Not you, dear. Your memory is sharp as a tack, why, I'm sure you even remember what you had for supper last night.

Clarence exits and polka music begins blaring from the TV while Clara taps her feet to the beat of the music.

Scene ii. The Rogers' bedroom. Clarence is bent over a grey metal box.

Clarence: Where's that blasted fishin' license? Picks up box and dumps contents on the bed. Here's our birth certificates. Clarence Rogers, born 1917. I look pretty dang good for 75 years of age. Clara Daisy Fremont, born 1919. Still pretty as the day I met her. Clarence sits on the bed and looks out the window. He picks up another document and gently places it back in the metal box, and continues to peruse the remaining papers. Here's the will, all signed and legal. Good thing Clara's nephew Sid is a lawyer. That boy's got a good head on his shoulders. He's always been like a son to us. Like you, Nathaniel, except you never had a chance to grow up and become anything ...except a memory. Shakes head, resumes rummaging through the papers. Clara calls his name from the living room. Coming, dear!
Ow! I think I just found the fishing license.
Picks up license, which is held by a huge safety pin and exits.

Scene iii. A large rock upon which sit two men dressed in fishing gear with a radio between them playing twangy country music.

Phil: Well, they're sure not biting today.

Clarence: Speak for yourself, you old goat! I think I felt a tug on my line.

Phil: Old goat! You've got a good 10 years on me and then some.

Clarence: Why, if you don't get run out of town for peddlin' those cheap sedans to little old ladies, you'll get laughed out of town for wearin' them plaid leisure suits and that worn out rug on your naturally shiny head. Laughs and begins to cough violently into a blue plaid hankie.

Phil: You old dog, I happen to have had an expensive hair weave and was voted top salesman for our district three years in a row. Looks at Clarence with concern. Are you okay, buddy?

Clarence: It's a little warm, is all. Takes out the hankie and wipes sweat from his brow. This fish must be a ten-pounder. Rubs left arm while reeling in line.

Phil: I think the breeze is a little chilly. Maybe we should go on up to the house and get something to eat.

Announcer: Are you prepared to depart this world? Have you provided for those you leave behind? Do you want to be kept alive by artificial means?

Clarence: I feel a little sick to my stomach, must be the heat. Hand me that antacid bottle in my tackle box, will ya', Phil?

Phil: My stomach's starting to ache, let's go up to the house and get a bite.

Clarence: I've got a bite on my line. I can feel it tuggin' on the pole!

Phil: I think that fish just got lucky. Besides in fishing, it's the challenge, not the catch that counts. Let's get you home.

Clarence: I sure could use a big glass of Clara's lemonade. Grasps chest and collapses next to Phil.

Phil: Begins to pound on Clarence's chest and perform CPR procedures. Help! Help! Call an ambulance!

Announcer: Order now, our Living Will Computer Software with complete instructions before midnight tonight.

Scene iv. A hospital waiting room. A large clock on the wall shows the time at 12:05.

Clara: Oh, Phil, what have I done letting the doctor hook Clarence up to that machine?

Phil: Clara, you were in shock -- you wanted Clarence to have every chance to cling to life.

Clara: He's no closer to life this minute than the lettuce and tomatoes I put in the garden salad I intended to serve him for lunch today.

Phil: Clara, you need some rest. Why not let me take you home for a few hours to get some rest and a bite to eat.

Clara: I even bought bleu cheese dressing, especially for Clarence. Now it'll never get eaten.

Phil: Puts his arm around Clara. Don't talk that way. He has a chance, he may pull through.

Clara: I'm not naive, Phil. I'm being realistic. Clarence's will is 45 years old. It doesn't suit the needs of a man living in this day and age where life and death decisions are made in a split second.

Phil: You did what you thought was right at the time.

Clara: Right for me, maybe, but what about Clarence? Do you think he's happy being caught between life and death, heaven and earth, with no control over his final fate? What if he's suffering, Phil? What if he's in pain?

Phil: He's heavily sedated, Clara. He probably doesn't know or feel anything.

Clara: I wish I didn't know or feel anything right now. Like a tomato in a garden salad, nice and snug, covered with a blanket of bleu cheese dressing, Clarence's favorite.
She covers her face with her hands and begins to weep.

Scene v. Clara's living room. She is seated in one of the arm chairs in which she and Clarence sat in scene i. and is facing the television set from which loud polka music is blaring.

Clara: I love this Polka Party show. It's nice to see some new faces and fancy dance steps. I can't believe you've been gone for almost 3 months, Clarence. I miss you so.

Announcer: Are you prepared to depart this world? Have you provided for those you leave behind? Do you want to be kept alive by artificial means?

Clara: Oh, yes, Clarence, I fixed my will so they won't keep me alive with all those machines. I want to die peacefully and naturally, like you did in the end when they took out those tubes and turned off that breathing machine.

Pause.

Phil and Sara came over for supper last night. Phil brought over some fresh trout he caught down at the creek the other day. He said he only got it by chance because you let it get away.

Announcer: Call our toll-free number to find out more about the new Living Will Computer Software. Order now - offer ends at midnight tonight.

Clara: I guess you and that old fish ended up together after all, just not the way you planned.

Polka music resumes loudly as Clara taps her feet to the music.

Marie Blizzard



him

dark cracked hands grip the blanket
and pull it around the neck;
ratty tufts of hair blow in front of eyes
that search for a soft hand;
a body positioned in the middle of nowhere
surrounded by many who are the same,
each fighting to be noticed, knowing that
existence is based upon whether or not
in one brief moment he can convince
someone that he is not like the others,
that he has fallen out of society but
only needs an outstretched hand to
return. his eyes look up...

And I walk by, leaving the scent of my *Tresor*
to keep him full on this brisk December night.

Jill Gorman



The Sphinx Whistles

Sit

In a field on a fresh spring day.
You will hear the young men serenade their young women.
Their voices will tell you the story of Love.

Stand

On a summer night by an open window.
You will hear the crickets and the nightingale.
Their song will tell you the story of Earth.

Walk

Through the woods on a crisp autumn day.
You will hear the squirrels chatter as they gather their food.
Their noises will tell you the story of Life.

Kneel

On a winter eve by the fireplace.
You will hear the crackle and the roar of heat.
Their music will tell you the story of Death.

Rebecca Ardoline

the doormat

I could never fully understand why she needed the doormat. You could argue that it greeted visitors with the warm word "WELCOME," but really only people avoiding eye contact ever notice them. Besides, doormats are generally black, a negative color, which makes them self-contradictory. As for the practical uses of a doormat, I firmly believe they don't significantly reduce the amount of dirt that enters a house. A small carpet is more efficient. So why was my mother so adamant about having one?

She picked it up at a 99¢ Store, a true testimonial of its worth, and placed it before our front door. And there it lay, taunting me every time I entered or left my home via the front door. I felt as if it were a trespasser from another era. I was tormented by its presence. It had to go.

I set forth a plan to rid my life of this nuisance when my mother went grocery shopping. There were a series of burglaries occurring in our neighborhood at this time, and I believed this would work to my advantage. I could remove the doormat and destroy it before my mother got home and blame the thieves for its mysterious disappearance. The only flaw to this plan was that Ms. Clancy lived on her front porch and watched our house like her favorite prime time series. I had to get her away. Killing her would be a bit too extreme, so I decided to call her house at the time the theft would occur. The only thing Ms. Clancy loved more than watching us was gossiping on the phone. When she would answer the phone, I would run quickly to the front door, pull the doormat inside, and then return to the phone and hang up. No one would be the wiser.

I dialed her number and watched in amusement as Ms. Clancy vaulted herself inside to answer the call. This was the same woman who I have had to walk up and back down the stairs whenever she attended Sunday service. When she picked up her receiver, I quickly went to the front door as planned and pulled in the doormat. When I returned to my phone to hang up, I could hear Ms. Clancy cursing on the other end of the receiver calling me such names as "pervert" and "terrorist." Terrorist I could understand, but since when did silence on the other end of a telephone stimulate someone sexually? I did not even pant. I hung up.

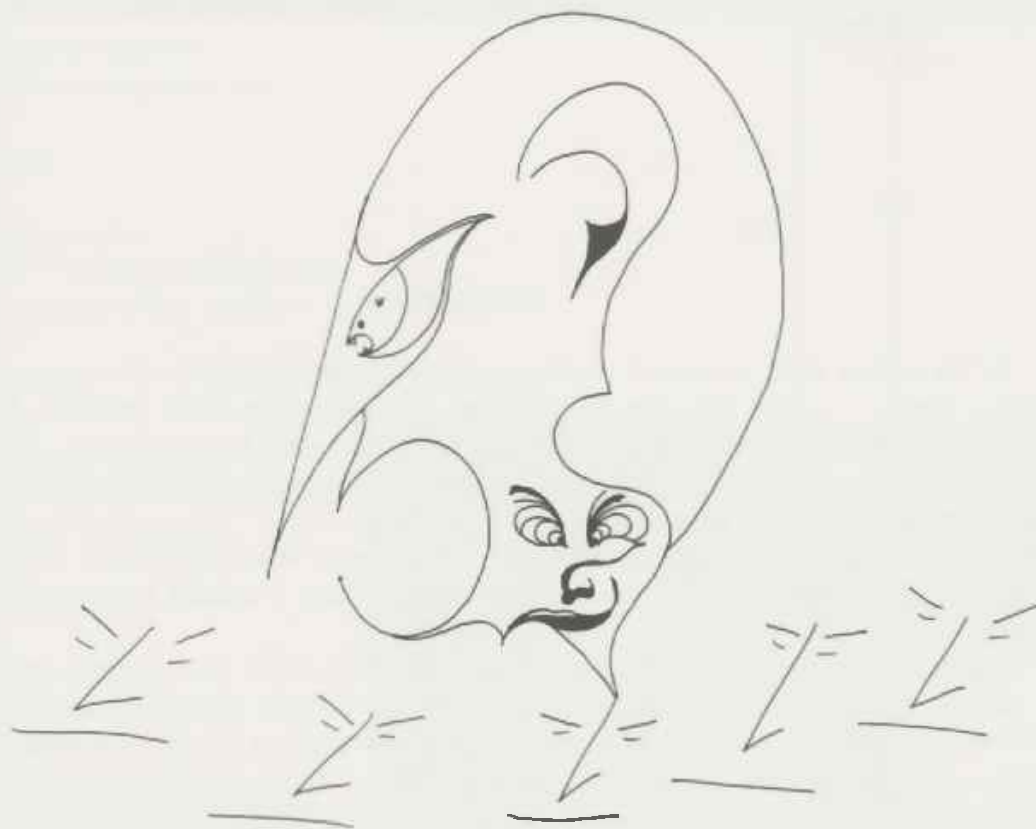
Now that the doormat was in my possession I felt a strange sense of satisfaction. I had the power to control the destiny of my tormentor. Granted, it was an inanimate object, but true mortal enemies of epic old are hard to come by nowadays; this had to suffice. I wanted it to suffer as I had suffered, but realized this was impossible being that it was a doormat. So, I was content with throwing it in my stoker stove and watching the flames engulf it. This was not a wise decision on my part. A billowing cloud of black smoke shot forth from the stoker filling the lower portion of my house with its dark residue. Some of the smoke escaped from an open window alerting Ms. Clancy who promptly called the fire department, exposing me and my folly.

When my mother came home and saw the fire engines and the police, she grew anxious and frightened. But when she noticed the absence of the doormat, she suspected what had happened. She was

not mad at me, just disappointed that I did not share my feelings concerning the doormat with her. I answered this by saying that I knew how much the doormat meant to her and did not want to come between them. We both cried, but our relationship was strengthened by the unfolding events. She replaced her need for a doormat with potpourri, and I no longer suffered any anxiety from using our front door.

the end.

John Zongilla



One of the Five Solemn Senators Goes Mad

Stevan Davies



Unfinished

With a fear that escaped words I stood by the open window. Looking down, I could see the men below. Working on their project, they didn't notice me. In the hall outside the room I could hear voices. Some laughing, nervously, I thought. Test today? What was it that made me come here anyway? It was no place for privacy.

I turned back to the task at hand. The men would be gone in a moment. Home for the day, their work done. Then I would have my privacy.

I sat on the ledge. Facing the window. The view was spectacular. The brilliant colors of the autumn leaves in the bright October sunshine. But it will be winter soon, I thought. The snow on the barren branches would make me shiver. The cold, hard earth too tired to support life. Suddenly, I too was tired. I turned away from the window. Not today. It would have to wait for the winter.

Rebecca Ardoline

Dreaming Green

Peaking from beneath
The eyelids
Of the scales that covered my sight,
I beheld a comforter of green
Tucked in under my chin.

Motor-lulled to sleep.
I fought
The dreariness and peacefulness
That circled me and tugged open
My eyes to be smothered in green.

Ever carefully,
My psyche drank
And with unconscious desire,
I flooded every orifice of thought
With an emerald lust, seducing my soul.

With chartreusian
Sensitivity,
Nothing could shock away
How with pythonian fashion
This slithering green engulfed me.

Limed and minted
I felt
It ooze through my veins,
Blocking out every other possible color
That could have blinded my vision.

Suddenly awakened,
Reality returned
And the flying jungle beneath
Soothed no more and now scared alive
I was color-blinded once again.

Fr. Michael Bryant



May 16th, 1992

The life bursts forth from the castle, echoing
throughout the town shouting with joy.
Many a day your green carpets and cool
breezes comforted me.
The tall timbers my support
The quiet song sung by the creek below the
bridge calmed my fears.
The sun shining so bright it burned,
until darkness overcame the night to
soothe my pain.

O great castle on the hill embrace me.

Soon I will be leaving the quiet and serenity
of this place.
Perhaps, I may carry a piece of this castle with me.

Hold me.
. . . And as the curtains draw to a final close,

Allow the memories begotten here to become
part of me
. . . And may my footprints never be covered.

Nancy Steffan



And each year, in summer comes the growing season....

It is waning twilight, summer 1976. Muddied faces and legs and having-played-all-day unkempt pigtails, my sisters and I tumble into the rust-colored tuna fish can labeled family car. It always ran regardless.... The incentive not to talk back; the reason for Saturday chores; the treat of all treats: the weekly jaunt to Jitty Joe's by the River. We rambled down Lonesome Road, and situated there on the left was the makeshift ice cream parlor, summer hours only. Minutes which seemed light years later, anticipation became reality when I held in my hand that long-awaited saviour, the biggest double-dip cone of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

Standing in the gravel drive-in, enclosed by suffocating yet comforting summer-night heat, I observe and listen, reward in hand, as others chatter and eat. Only the two spotlights of the meager stand light the area.... Suddenly I am conscious as the mint-colored cream undergoes a transformation and drips down my sun-burnt arm. Midst happy summer voices, exuberant and least of all concerned with consequences on a hot July night, I sink my parched lips into the soft, sweet cream, my five-year-old intellect sensing that once I had finished there would be no more.

It is waning twilight, summer 1988. We are on vacation, a camping get-away on Nova Scotia. Campfires blaze, roasting pineapple and marshmallows and pepperoni. It was a long time arguing to get that pepperoni, for while my father swears by it and high cholesterol, my mother strongly disputed it wasn't good for our health. But here we are, free from society and morning alarms and ringing telephones... and going to church on Sunday.

Knees tucked up on an old rickety summer recliner, I am by myself yet not alone. I am conscious of talking and laughing, and of a dog barking. Breathing the clean, cool, lonely night air, I inhale life, and feel infinitesimal underneath all of those smart smart stars... and free. The slamming of the camper door startles me and brings me back to swells of sweet island sadness on that chilly August night. Finishing the postcard on my lap, I sign it love and know that home awaits.

It is waning twilight, summer 1991. The mass is over, and his grandmother crying when the choir sang "Eagle's Wings." I will perhaps become like his grandmother someday, giving back that life to the earth which the earth has given. When you love there is always the letting go.... There was no Irish drinking and dancing this day.

We are night-swimming at Berlew's, me and him and Allison and Bobby. It is very solemn, as hot July nights are. We let ourselves down into the cool, cleansing pool, and he asks me if his grandfather can see him, and if he misses him. I look into his twenty-one-year-old eyes, green-blue with a leprechaun twinkle, and say: He is here, now. Sadness fills me as his eyes overflow, and I lower myself into the chlorinated water over my head and bring myself up again, feeling brave, loving, reborn....

Anya Musto

