# Orpheus

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# Orpheus

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# Orpheus

A LITERARY JOURNAL

volume • xv

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*Orpheus* **is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8½" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to understanding the work.**

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**This fifteenth edition of *Orpheus* is dedicated to the faculty whose integrity and teaching excellence earned CSB university status.**

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Dr. Stillwell, a former colleague, had a marvelous way with words; with words he gave the familiar an air of novelty and strangeness. For example, when asked how he was doing, he often replied with the familiar phrase, "Just getting along." It was not what he said that was unique —after all, the phrase itself is quite a common one, a mere shape to fill a lack —but how he framed it. He often said it briskly and drily, as if he were afraid that what he did not say would come to damage him.

Suddenly, after years of getting along in our well ordered world, he chucked everything: his books, his pens, and his life, all in that order, and just walked away.

Rumors about his impolitic departure spread rapaciously; his actions were vigorously analyzed. The general feeling was that Stillwell was a traitor for just chucking everything, especially *his books,* and walking away. He was condemned for fleeing, for opting for definition when he was already "well defined," tenured and free.

"What a mess he made," they said.
"Freud would know that," I said.
"It has been hell," they said.
"Yes," I said.
"Why did he have to do that," they asked.
"What?" I asked.
"Stand in our way," they said.
"Define himself," I said.
"It has been hell," they said.
"Yes," I said.
"It's all over now; we are at *Heavensgate*," they said.
"I have no words for it," I said.
"What?" they asked.
"It converged," I said.
"What?" they asked.
"I don't know," I said.
"That's *Hell*," they said.
"Yes," I said.

I walked into his office after he had gone to see what he left behind as the janitors were sweeping out the vestiges of his past. The office was deserted and empty but on the back of his door was pinned a white, faded postcard with the following scribbled on it, *"You don't know what you are. And more than all that, you won't ever know. You'll live and you'll die and you won't ever know."*

A page from *My World in the University* by Solomon O. Iyasere.

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# Orpheus

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# Poems

Orpheus •

# Poems

# We Are One*

I see pieces of you in me.
I smiled this morning, and it was your smile on my face.
The smile I know from long experience
That accepts and loves what life presents.
We can never be alone
Because we incorporate those around us.
We absorb the best
If we are lucky.
We forgive the worst
And ask for reciprocation.
So much of me is you.
You are leaving me, and
I don't want you to go.
But I will try to live on for you
To pass your best on to my sons
As you did for me.
My integrity is yours.
My warmth is yours.
My love of reading comes from you.
Life goes on.
The best of you will go on
Through me, my friends, my sons.
We are one.

*Written for Ferdinand Marcus Jackl, who died Sept. 10, 1985

# Public Eye

Eternity froze
. . . for just a fraction
Then down to the abyss
You tumbled
stumbled
bloody knees
to the foot of a cross.

The Devil laughed
And rolled his hands
all blood and bone and knots
Night had come
He had You beat
or so he thought.

On public stage
Your lines did play
on frail deed and thought
With a sort of shimmering
A kind of cool . . .
and Hot!

Socrates and Plath did say
In comedy
Divine
You were but a state
away . . .
And faded, shut their eyes.

Dirt mingled
With Your blood
    Finest wine with gall
Dust with mist
Saw new Christians
    scaly dead dyes, fall.

A wedding held
    in Your honor
(Oh, put that towel down)
You left early
    (in Your manner)
Much Amazed by all.

A play, Absurd
    a cast, co-hired
As prop men, techs and gofers
Well received indeed
    they laughed
When You said, "Rise, my daughter"

The show, I hear
    is back around
For another run
But as it is with such things
I hear the ending's . . .
                different.

Lazarus, Your friend,
    knew you
In a different way than others
In the clearest voice, called out,
    From
And to, his brothers.

The Show, again
    is back in town
Let's go see the outcome!
You may like it
    you may hate it, but . . .
    You *won't* miss it.

# Shush

Shush
She said
Then would spin
In her world
Blur world
Happy world
Filled with laughter

If you're lucky
She would run up to you
Grab your hand and whisper
In her native tongue
Something you couldn't imagine
But she knew

She knew
The ancient language
We forgot
In our aging
The magical tongue of joy

Then she would pat you
On the face
And smile
Run back and spin
Into her happy world
Blur happy world

If only she could take us there

# Wings to Fly

Up in the sky past the tops of the trees
Near to the meadow where mockingbird sings

Edge of the sunset in red-orange haze
That's where the dreams of my heart always stay.

Tumbling ocean waves, turbulent green
Out past the pier where no swimmer is seen

Blue lapping waves where the night meets the day
Is not a place where my footsteps will stray.

Wide-open spaces wherever they're found
Look to the stars or look down to the ground

From places so lofty my thoughts reach as high
And wherever I am, with these wings I can fly.

# Forever

Through groves and open fields we walked;
My older brothers,
Friends and others.
Youthful explorers, we strolled and stalked.

In an open pasture among the drying cowpies,
A birthing calf lay
Stalled at half-way.
Struggles were ended where a dying cow lies.

The circling sky spun slowly 'round
This life anew
Hence cast askew,
And back to earth and lowly ground.

Unempathetic I watched the buzzards massing,
And shooed the flies
From open eyes
That took no notice of my passing.

I walked slowly in the fading light.
Returning home,
Lagging alone,
I fall tired in the grass, staring into the night.

A nearsighted boy is no calf nor heifer.
The earth and sky
And, of course, I
Are things that must surely last forever.

A falling star burns bright its last fire.
A myopic gaze
Cuts through the haze.
My heart stops, and then beats faster.

# Geologic Cycles

Geologic cycles
going round and round
turning rock to silly-putty.

Starting out plutonic,
becoming metamorphosed,
breaking down,
being deposited,
and forming sediments,
which are moved down,
to start the cycle all over again.

# Laguna de Xochiltepec

Mi Laguna de Xochiltepec
preciosa mujer de cabellos largos
y bella cara, clara y
limpia—En tus entranas
comida y vida yo
encontré.

Mi LAguna de Xochiltepec,
Madre linda—Yo cuando
pequeno en tus faldas
me cobijé y muchas veces
en tu espalda yo dormí,
corrí y jugué.

Mi bella Madre
Laguna de Xochiltepec con
tus cabellos largos yo construí
mi casa.
Mi bella Madre
Laguna de Xochiltepec con
tus cabellos largos yo
me protegí de los
malos vientos, y calores
que a veces llegaban
y lastimaban mi espalda.

Mi querida Madre
Laguna de Xochiltepec
en tiempos malos yo
siempre a tus pechos
me aferré.

Laguna de Xochiltepec
muchas gracias
por darme vida y
protección.
O muchas gracias Madre mía.

Mi Laguna de Xochiltepec
preciosa mujer de cabellos largos
y bella cara, clara y
limpia—En tus entranas
comida y vida yo
encontré.

O muchas gracias Madre mía.

# Uncovered Steps

Criss-cross of my legs resting and
raising to an upright position on the
comfortable and softness of my
comforter while the beat and rhythm
of music beside me is pounding harshly
directly to my ear, unwary . . .

Suddenly a numbness between my
two folded legs strikes me and some
reason a reminiscence of one affectionate
night having a moderate degree of heat,
wrathed, perplexed I was, nudged out
swiftly from R's shelter along the dark
anchorage where there were only glittering,
twinkling stars staring at my jotting motion
and the momentary brilliance of the moon
above just like a flashlight following and
flashing every bouncing steps I gained
to create, guiding me back toward the
dormitory . . .

Meanwhile, my eyes rolled forward,
backward, side ways and every corner of
shadow like a spy always facile for
any unrelevant action goose bump popping out
under tiny hair-like ranking coldly on my
shivering arms the quick pummelling of
my breath, raising of my chest and the
rushing the thread of my foot functioned,
excreted coldness, heavy perspiration from
top of the head down to my sore, jaded palm
of my feet but reposed after it reached
the destination.

# Motor & Broken Record

Along the long, quiet
road, where there is the
only sound of a starting
motor cribbing, licking
and squirrelling, like my
mother's mouth transforming
steam, water down into her
dark air passage that once
it begins to open up, no
interruption should be made.
Repetition of consultation
frequently conservative and
overprotective that clears
off the dust on the table,
echo spread across the
room irritating my eardrum
and how clear it makes me hear harder.
The tone of her untired vocal
utterance cave that altered seldomly
rising and lowering it performs like an
elevator that goes up and down
and then halts only for very short
seconds, then it continues the same
process again like a broken record
that keeps singing the same song
over and over again until a
fixing hand reposed it.

Fortunately, I'm lucky that such a voice is
  continuously occurring, without her
    my road would remain unstraightened and
      chaos, unlikely to travel alone
    without guidelines like those
  huge direction billboard hanging
up on the air, pointing the right
way graciously, can always count on
  every click of the clock, sunshine of the
    sun or the grayness gloom of what used
  to be a blue, bright sky
my mother's motor and broken record I'll carry.

# Who is Boss?

T.V. lectures and We
dare not turn away
and raise incensed
should another interrupt
        Jello Minds
Thinking is such an effort—
        we vegetate
as T.V. tells us
How things are/
        should be
Not nature, not experience
        Smothering, aborting
imagination, relationships, love—
to dream our lives
into the pattern
of T.V.

Grandma, the world has changed
        since you were young
the T.V. is our God
        (not the Son)
It gives us its truth
        day after day
And provides us with wisdom
        (who needs to pray?)
It entertains children
        metamorphosed, compliant slaves
and teaches each one
        how adults behave.

# Balloons

Balloons in a bundle all float
Away with the quick twist of a
Young boy's hand. A message is
Attached to the string: "Johnny
Stevens 325-3080 Call me if
You find my balloon." How far
Will they go? How long will they
Float? Will they land in a street
And get popped by a car? Will
They land in an old man's backyard?
Who will respond? Who will call?
The balloons with a message . . .
They may float 'round the world
Or stick in the next door neighbor's
Tree.

# Longs Drugs

Eight hours a day, the shelves are stocked with
factory-fresh merchandise. Shopping carts are gathered
from the parking lot for another customer-guided tour of
the store. Day by day, week by week, the customers purge
the store of their favorite merchandise, asking directions
from a clerk to an elusive item while stuffing their carts
with Cheez-Whiz and Lee Press-On Nails.

"Where do you keep your sundry items?"

"On aisle 36, sir, in the far corner of the store."

"Do you carry vinegar?"

"Only when it's on sale ma'am; the only time we carry
any food items is when they're on sale."
Service in self service store. Even in the micro-chip age
of today, people still thrive on one-to-one, human-to-
human contact.

"Carry-out on checkstand one; carry-out on one."
Even senior citizens shop here. They like to have
their heavy purchases carried out to their cars for them.
Seven days a week, 12 hours day, the drug store palace
is toured by the public—all kinds of people: housewives,
husbands, kids, shoplifters, police,...even bums occasionally.
Each night ends with a friendly announcement. "Good evening
Longs shoppers, Longs is now closed. Please bring your final
selections to the front checkstands. Goodnight, and thank you
for shopping at Longs."

# Californian Pets

A cat.
A dog.
May be a bird or a rat.
Perky, sparkling eyes like a kid.
The dogs go out
for a bath
and come back
smelling like the beauty parlor itself.
Breeder's choice,
frozen diet for dogs.
Feline Growth,
science diet for kittens,
salmon dinner or fish filet.
The dogs,
not only on
but in the bed,
on the couch,
and on the chair.
Do we live with pets,
or do the pets live with us?
Their death
strikes people like
the death of a human.
A graveyard for pets
turtle besides bird,
a tombstone indicates age and name
and announces how much they were loved.

# No More Guilt

Father opens the door
screeching hinge
vibrating panel
now he sees me
and I cannot hide
behind wooden tombs
where fingers grasp
my breath
my bowels
and skin slides on my hearty soul
but no more
no more guilt
it is time for my thin grasping fingers
to hold on to what is worth
and start over
not to blend in
but put additions on melting pots
emblems and handles
where once
possessed firm molds

# The Dream

Last night I had a dream
a murder
and we know the murderer
she is the mother
of two tiny victims
in sleep
in tiny molded sheets
in tiny beds
in tiny rooms
of tiny dreams

And the older daughter
I did visit one day
while mother
was away

We see her walking
toward the house
with a gun
and escape out back
only later
the house burned to a thin paste
and tiny smoldering bodies
still lay bare

No they didn't move
nor did we toward them
but escaped with our lives
and down the rails
into town

# Facade

The long red velvet curtains
hanging, hiding
secrets from long ago.
Put up to shield intruders
from discovery.
Caked with an inch of make up,
a mask that does not let
the pores breathe a word.
Building imaginations beyond
fantasy and fact.
The wall, constructed by lies,
can only be penetrated by
the devil wearing a halo.

# To Know

My dear rose
your head is heavy,
you hide shy
your blushing bounty.

Lift your face
and smile at me.

Is your beauty
too much to bear?
Is there shame
beneath your pretty petals?
Or has your season
left you behind?

With my own hand
I must see you smile.

# For Sins Not Mine

Like Abraham, I have sojourn'd to distant lands
—distant lands not mine—
Unsure of where my path would lead,
Unsure of what I would ultimately find.
Too, I have entertained archangels;
Melchezedek, I have given humble tithes.
Too, I have became a father of nations—
And, I have walked in perfect stride! . . .

Like Moses, I have seen the "burning bush."
I have wept a thousand penitential tears.
I have seen the future from my sullen grave
And, have beheld the secrets for years.
But, now, I must make clear thy vision
For the world at large to see;
God hast arisen from His holy place—
And hast spoken His words through me! . . .

Like David, I shall overpower the mighty,
My words shall confound the strong.
In them you'll find a cloud of joy;
In them you'll find no wrong.
Seek me out and I'll set you free,
I'll give you a brand new heart;
For I am the voice of many waters
And, for me, nothing is too hard.

Like Jesus, I have fed the multitudes.
I have walked the turbulent stormy seas.
And, if you knew me well my child—

You would know that I am He.
But, too, like Jesus I shall pass away;
I shall fade in the passage of time.
For, I shall be judged by those with evil hearts
And, suffer for sins not mine! . . .

I am the Voice in the Wilderness....

# Serenade
# (Poem for my Beloved)

Thou art most lovely—thy virgin cherubim,
  The sun sets gently upon thy constellate crown.
Come up hither, from amongst the Pleiades;
  Vex not, my beloved, among rival reeds.
O celestial seraph who art my beloved
  Come up hither, before the "Pure White Dove."
O velvet-winged daughter of yon Aethiopia,
  Many ravens have sought your sinless nest;
Though they have been very persistent—
  Neither have ever achieved success.
Vex not, my beloved, at those who try
  Just keep your eyes fix'd on the sky . . .

O golden brown girl,
Heaven is your prize!

# Cry at Midnight

I

I heard the faint cry of the unborn child last night
Drowned by the whisper of the owl
Perching under the bamboo roof
Watching by the door.
"Please let me in."

II

Her eyes suddenly leapt towards me
Glared, burning with fury pursued—
I tried to open the only window:
In the room a childless woman lay
Unmoved

III

The night was still
Dark, entombed—with the coming of the Ehor festival—
The cry of the unborn child pierces the novocained air:
"It's our second coming
Please let me in"—
But the strange whisper drowned all.

# Reading Poems

lying in the sun  reading poems
(no kidding)  I am decadent.
Some high Priestess studying carefully
words from other women
Putting them together to
understand
the way out far out
meaning of life.

Rhythms fit together  call us from
deep
the pounding of our maker's heart
connecting fetal wonder
to words outside.

Language  itself broad and wondrous
clever and mundane
with crevasses wide and minute
sheltering visiting microbes
thriving
we didn't notice before.

Language  only part of our being
although the radio of words
cavalcades past
every waking mode

If like a passing parade  we notice
the other existence
the whispers of the sea shells
the breath of the wind
the pulse of the sunlight

words can pass without us
the still wonder
can tell us more.

# Alone

Stop - - - - - -
Don't follow me
I want to walk
In solitude.

Floating clouds
Soft as foam
I want to be
All alone.

Shady trees
In a line
You crowd my way
And disturb my mind.

Lonely pebbles
I'm just like you
Uncovered, undiscovered
And in gloom.

# The Thief

The thief came in the middle of the night
And stole my family away.
It came and left her helpless, in pain
Without warning or preparation.

It has turned upside down all of our lives
Leaving no one unaffected.
Hers is not the only life that is changed.
It is his, theirs, mine, yours, and ours.

We all have the pain; we all have the fear
Of living only for today.
The future is shorter; it's been cut by the thief.
We now tightly grab onto the past.

We miss those days when she laughed with us,
When her curls were fully intact.
But her love and her humor are no longer there,
As bare as the scalp on her head.

I hate that thief that appeared one day
As a cloud in the gray and black sky.
It has spread over more than simply her life;
The carcinoma has robbed from us all.

# The Cave

There was a small cave filled
with green vegetation
the cool breeze that flows
creates a green finger
which pulls your nose in

Into the cave fresh
fresh air almost like
the high point of a
mountain
so fine and clean it
cleanses the mortal soul

Rebirth is felt in this
green mystery
Shimmering cold
Icy blue
the rebirth
Careful, go slow
mud and marsh

Splash
Gasp
Tingles down my spine
fingers rolling
muscles relaxing
tension, fear, anxiety gone
Rising slowly

The water falls
so gently from the body
little tears of birth
Cleanses the mortal soul

# Letting Go

Here she is
In my domain
My safety and refuge
Like a cub she is
playful and sweet
Yet the words she
speaks are like a
Serpent's tongue
So sharp and painful

Outside I wonder
There they are holding hands
Squeezing, laughing, being
in Love
Why is that not me

I can't set you free
I can't let go
I try very hard
What we did was a bond
Or was it just my bond
I see him in my dreams
Reliving our night
Then I wake up alone

Please someone help me
I can't stand the pain any more
Let me go
Go away
Someday you will be free too
Just remember I Loved you

# Ignorance

cross on fire

ignorance in the night

kill the black man

run or fight

businessmen by day

demons by night

dressed in suits

hooded in white

the colour of skin

the texture of hair

should not be a thing

at which to stare

and abhor because

of differences without

true difference within

this i doubt

# Last Sunset

Man on the beach
dressed in black
no turning around
no going back
Decisions made
actions done
now standing here
with the setting sun
Grievances abound
in our life
riddled with tension
riddled with strife
Ending it all
is not the way
to avoid the problems
of another day
Man on a cloud
robed in white
here is the source
whence comes the light
Watching over all
supposed to care
will he stop you
if you dare
To take the plunge
to extinguish your flame
to journey back
from where you came

# Ghetto Night

blood on the knife

a look in the eyes

a feint to the left

the blade flashes by

muscles to the limit

sweat glistens bright

cockiness of youth

what a reason to fight

# Cardboard

You amaze me with your real smile
because I never before
imagined you owned one.
You with your needle fingers—
always pointing,
always stabbing,
trying for my heart.
But I hid it from you—
put it in a cardboard box
and slid it under the bed.

I was always trying too hard to make you smile,
pretending floor wax made you happy,
wondering if it was the cracks in the dashboard
that made you hate me.
But it was nothing but the air
I found out later,
when the cold blue blood
trickled out red.

Now with the heated silence
your eyes are finally alive.
The hum of nothing cold rumbles between us.
Pretending not to notice, really
we each breathe our own air,
swallowing the pleasant silence with a smile.
The room is not dark.
Waiting for nothing, I go inside
and bring out a little cardboard box
in the shape of a heart,
and open it up.

# Victim

Holding on
to the slight progression of a dream,
I watch with innocent eyes
your lasting smile
set behind glass.

I remember everything,
even the stray hairs of your eyebrows.
With what silence they
are not moving now,
no new expressions to be made.
Why you went I'll never know,
leaving me trapped here
outside,
alone.

Touching the glass,
I know you're not really here.
Driving past the spot it happened
I feel my head crashing
feel my life passing through my fingers,
the real tears
invading my eyes like friends.
My mind rewinds to the day it happened;
tangled and tired,
I let it be.
Too cold to feel anymore,
too old to dream.

# Time

Time is
a River
flowing as if
everlasting.
But as life,
the river,
must come to an end.
Along its path,
runs into
large rocks,
like hard times
in life,
it crashes.
Whitewaters appear,
trials that seem to last forever,
but soon
disappear.
Waves of all sizes,
like the ever present
scale of decisions
needed to survive
a single day.
Whirlpools out of
nowhere,
confusion
announced.

faced day
throughout
with,
What,
Why,
When,
Where?
But all comes
to an end,
leads to sea,
enters a world
that's
unpredictable.

# Favorite Moments

A special, antique curve
and a quarter knock gave uncle
the twist of Oz and sparkle
up and down my backbone;

Dusty amber as the sun
quarter lit and setting,
an antique china plate
with a special curve that glowed
like the mini-cones out on the parched July grass.

We'd beg the sun to
burn a few million years more,
we thought it worked
when that quarter turn of our minds
set up strings up and down our backbones—
the freedom zither Uncle Sam came to play at dusk.

Makes my eyes quarter shut
in a special arc of lash and eyelid
weary, and ready for night and the sparkle
of dreams, not stars.

Fear was with me then, and I expected
a quarter slice of a disk to land invading
that dark hiatus of the void with the three
floating fears forever a green triangle of hate
dancing on a reflection in the window of the bus to
The Rose Parade where my blood froze stiff and
my brain ice-cubed over quarter chipped
leaving me with this segment of a vision—
a memory, quarter curved and sinking.

# Valley Night

Tonight I noticed
while driving my truck
that the moon's face looked different,

So I made a point
when I got home
to check out the moon
to see if its face was screwed up.

I thought at first it had the familiar face
the Peter Lorre face,
but then I just all-the-sudden saw it for what it was
—a big, round rock in the sky.

I'd never taken that much time to look at the moon;
I wasn't sure what to do.
It was brighter than I thought it should be.
I talked to it; then I thought it would be a better idea
to talk to God, so I asked God if I could go to the moon sometime.

Then I thought
I bet Earth has a lot more to say in the sky
than the moon
which is entirely white
or the sun which is gold and bright . . .

And as I was thinking all these things
I heard a noise, and I looked down, and
I saw a kit fox run by, just ten feet in front of me.
Where did he come from?

# Death

Amidst a nest of needles, a bird silently watches.
Branches of life spread to catch the emerging sun.
Living, growing, struggling with the speed of ages,
Reaching, swaying, striving, the monument towers in the wind.
Born from the pain of a bursting seed,
Grown from the light of a loving sun,
The tree stands strong against time's blow,
But weak against sharp metal teeth.
The cut deepens in the echo of a noisy cry,
And in the quiet of silent suffering,
The crash of death reveals a bird in flight.

Amidst the glory of rebirth, a bird silently watches.
Pages of life beckon to the passing crowd.
Holding, protecting, keeping the stories of ages,
Waiting, wanting to speak, the Book whispers secrets of the wind.
Born from a time of creation,
Grown from the love of a shining Son
The Bible gives strength to those who search,
But finds nothing for rushing apathy.
The wind complains about the senseless clamor,
While ashes of cigarettes rest beside the book.
The dust deepens despite the soft wind,
And in the silence of death, a bird takes flight.

# Wayward Passion

Surging down green-grass mountains
Like a wild, wounded animal
With no purpose or direction,
My passion runs.
I scream with a burst of power
But long for more.
Living for the fire
That lives in me,
I stop time's merciless march.
Eternity crashes headlong into my present passion.
Tomorrow's dreams disappear,
And yesterday's moments never were.
An instant without time. . . .

The clock starts again.
No!

Within the lies of false confidence,
I fight to regain control.
As the living fire leaves me,
Dreams, memories, and worries flood my mind.
Hopes fly, anxieties spin, and nervous memories clank inside my head.
The noise overwhelms me.

Forsaken by my desire
And facing a barren, blank world,
I am alone.

Be still.
Oh, my soul be still.

# Spring

Slip softly into my sweet Spring,
Let dew-dipped daffodils your presence bring.
A tulip yawns, the rosebud nods; and all that's Life applauds.

Slip softly into my sweet Spring.
Call blossoms forth from deepened slumbering.
A leaf uncurls, the ferns rejoice; and boughs their petals mate.

Go gently into your sweet Spring,
Cast careless glances at each new event.
Cocoons unwrap, and Nature sighs; let peace embrace your Soul

Go gently into your sweet Spring,
Give anxious turmoils their last whispering.
Old Winter weeps and hangs his head;
. . . Spring has intervened.

# Cycles

I watch as a balloon floats sleepily from a twisted string,
turning this way, then that.
A languid, peaceful Spring afternoon
urges me to pause.
Soft breezes rustle the wisteria
climbing the lattice above me.
Traditional browns and greens and concrete greys are
broken by the occasional splash of early Spring color.
My mind drifts, but the solitude is
interrupted violently as a baby Sparrow drops at my feet.
Its tiny, featherless form shivers and jerks,
then lies still.
The lifeless body is still warm as I
cradle it in my palm.
Life hangs in the balance in Nature's perfect
unending cycle;
And the balloon still floats sleepily from a twisted string . . .

# Dead Horse Point

High above the point bars
of the muddy Colorado,
Violet cliffs, sculptured in velvet,
are singing now.
Each painted precipice offers
its sacred aria to the stars.
Khaki green and willow are mirrored
majestically in sweet harmony,
As if the Medieval roots of the Ancient Unity
formed this valley.
The ruddy river ribbons in andante tempo
to the blended polyphony along its banks.
Woodwinds, strings, timpani create a concerto
in splendid Vivaldi style.
Burnt sienna, yellow ochre, indigo,
resound their glorious Kyrie . . .
And all Creation echoes its
symphony of praise!

# To Kimberly

You greeted me on the morning of your birth,
Barefoot, bottom-first, tiny.
A precious Angel, a daughter.

You left your infancy behind and womanhood calls you now,
Tall, graceful, poised.
Your life is just beginning.

So many lives have been touched by your sweetness,
Your wit, charm and radiancy.
And many more are yet to be.

As the newborn babe enters a world of conscious humanity,
Your innocence transcends all else.
And shines translucent in your eyes.

Love,
MOM

# My Mistress' Lies

My mistress' lies are never told in fun:
Wrong claims strike deep and lodge tight in the bone,
Odd tales a steadfast pride work quick undone;
Deceits attractive, she'll for none atone.
One foul precedes another sent to burn,
The next a fiery dart well-aimed flies true;
A hateful vow exacts its timely turn
Sure as purple is red hiding in blue.
Humid creased coral lips, silk-sculptured cheeks,
Cool anesthetic eyes that tranquilize
Shroud calculated oaths she rude bespeaks,
And smoothly soften sorry-served replies.
  Yet once unscalded, once to safe emerge;
  No, she in falsehood dwells and lives my scourge.

# Cool Clear Stone

A diamond and a hundred in the field:
The work of many fails the task of one;
In labor lost five score could sharp scythes wield,
But cool clear stone, that's prize with which she's won.
Ripe fruits, long stalks, aspiring sprouts for her,
Grand splendor-decked the gifted table thus?
Kind fools these bring—they'll no devotion stir:
Star-sparkling gem or nothing to discuss.
Why baskets bring and harvest tokens pledge?
Strip bare a flowery stem, autumnal tree?
One rock supplants plucked wealth of vine and hedge,
Her vanity's tight locked, lead orb the key.
  She'll both accept, true, neither will refuse:
  To ponder one, one kindly to abuse.

# To Grandma Gwen

I long to know a woman
Who had gone before I arrived.
I wish to touch the cheeks
Of a vision.
I dream of hearing the voice
That is silent.
I want to know her smile, her love.
But from here it seems impossible.
I never said hello, so it may
Seem strange to say goodbye.
But to my saddened heart
It brings peace, a welcome calm.
Where my voice will not go
Let my tears drop
So that she may know
I say goodbye.

# Rest Home for the Poor

Back alleys, moist trash
I walk by with a hopeless grin.
On to the next block
Sky's gone
I don't look up
Just down here in the shit.
People are rotting
Children are dying
Buildings are crumbling
People working to live
Living to work.
Lost in a nightmare before you're born.
Damned to die among the nameless
Born to live with the lifeless.
No way out
There never was.
Forced to starve
So that others may feast.
In the mausoleum for the damned
The rest home for the poor.

# The Heart Knows No Time

I hear a song
And my heart leaps back
To a time I knew a different love.
I can remember when another
Gave me desire.
I can feel the touch of her hand
On my cheek and the taste
Of her kiss on my lips.
It may have been only lust.
It could have been love.
But at times like this
It burns.
The lover is gone
But she touches my heart
Which knows no time.

# Select California

Select California
that's what the box says
round, ripe oranges
Navels, as in belly-buttons
sweet smell of sunshine
reptilian skin,
smooth yet bumpy,
cool to touch
baby basket balls
rolling around like marbles
tree sweet taste
a waterfall of juice
flows down my chin
sticky face.

# Cold

comes from the inside of some hearts
outerspace
Alaska
from the other side of the world
to this side and back again
from a virus that forever circulates the earth
from steel ray eyes that don't blink

# Mother Ocean

I am a voyeur
watching otters
through binoculars
that give me
clean, clear images
as sharp as
a surgeon's scalpel.
Suddenly a snout
surfaces
pointed in my direction
then, a bob of the head
until two eyes:
serene in their expression,
gaze out at the world
on the shore.
And finally, I catch
one more glimpse
of that relaxing expression
before my otter-friend
takes the plunge
that brings it back
into unity, harmony and peace
with Mother Ocean.

# Tears on the Trail

I left tears in the Chiracahuas.
Tears for you.
Tears because I will be missing you.
Tears as sharp and angular
as blades.
Tears that broke the surface
of the water.
Tears that washed the eyes
that you once rubbed
with love.

# What I Am to You

You say I am like a deer
that seems to hear some noise
then moves its head from
side to side
with its ears standing alert
and upright.

I am animal-like to you
like a bird, with carefully
measured head movements,
that bobs and turns
according to the noises
at hand.

You say I am like a doe
grazing in a green, wooded
pasture whose ear twitches
and head rises to a noise
and you can see the gleam
in its innocent eye.

You say I am like a doe
that raises its head swiftly
after hearing a branch crack
in the woods somewhere from behind.
Its head moves and rises agilely
as its ears twitch, then rest
as if to try to heighten its hearing
to double check for noise.

What am I to you?
I am your deer.
I am your bird.
I am your doe.
I am these things that you see
in me.
I am similes to you
and you are similes to me, my dearest.

# Arizona Summer

These hills and rocks
have their herstory
Tell me your ancestral tales.
Tell me who you are
and how you see the world.
Pull me into your central core
and teach me your ways
from within.

Enter my body
and show me
the ways of bonding
with you
and all the elements
of Mother Earth.
Earth our Mother,
I long to be an
earth mother
with powers
as pure as yours
with gentle hikers' feet
stepping firmly
with respect
for the Earth.

# An Enchanting Sensation

The sun beats down on my body
As the warmth of the sand
Flows through my veins
The crashing of the waves
Soothes my soul as
If I'm floating in air
The sweet aroma of
The salt air comforts me
As I drift off to sleep

# The Beauty of Life

Nature is God's gift to us all
With protection and nurturing
Nature can be ours for the asking
For we are part of nature and
Nature is part of us
So hold nature close
To your heart because
Once nature is gone
So are we

# A Lullaby

She sings me to sleep
With a voice as soft as
Wind gently moving through the trees
Her light touch soothes my skin
As if a breeze is moving
Through my soul

# Writer's Block

Words.
Thirsted for like rain during drought.
they refuse to come.

Words.
Searching for a candle in the darkness,
blown out by the wind.

Words.
Required for survival like flotsom after shipwreck,
drifting just beyond reach.

I'm drowning.

# Spin

What if we find a reason
woven deep within the tapestry
of our crystalline tales
for which we should not marry?
When the prime light bounces from
off the shining yellow wood
and we yield to riding
the spinning, turning fair
we yield to the pink yearning
that twists our fate like iron spun black

We will lie.

# How I Sin

My vision fused
in the white nuclear heat of cell's chiming—
Look: I have again summoned up
this scintillating, antiquated
carving knife
its tip shorn off
the red stains of sins past now rusting its dull
rippled edge
the handle old and cracked like nerves thirsting.

It is this I use.
It is always this that I use
to pierce my chest
look: I force the knife
into my flesh, which yields softly, which
envelops the blade like pig putty and blood
I screaming

push again
my arms live for me now
and push
again, twisting this edge
past the mighty, blanched
ribs
until the blade
sunk deep
actually
touches my heart.

I do not stop:
I am no laggard.

I cut.

bleeding

I saw

# The Period

In the caroming, vast symphony of
vigorous exclamation
restrained requests
casual platitudes
obsessive intent—
it is the period
that dominates.
Snuggled at the feet of the last
supplicant,
it insists
that we stop to consider
it all;
that we take a breath;
that we hear the music.

# Ashtray in the Hallway of the Classroom Building

It stands alone in the hallway

It collects ashes, garbage,
kleenex, wads of gum

Belonging to bomb scare days
its color and design match it

Hasn't been touched for weeks
by a janitor

You know it's filthy
It stinks like death
Rotting habits of smoke
filled, nicotine, lungs.
No longer fashionable

# the silver strand

I
(forty strides this hungry day
have worn your sandy slippers)

i have viewed this beach before
but not in so close a manner
tight houses huddle.
the shore runs full length with green tearing tides.
climbing gray fogs build a dark room—
and often in the night a wailing
the foghorn blasts, go back.

II

saturday people stream back and forth
tiny beach roads—
one body after another take the sand.
dusk they head home  the process repeats.
conversations numerous  become two
then one.

III

after conversations linger on.
their silky shadow tones
become the voices of the night
become the strollers on their lonely way
leaving bits behind.

IV

everything here has a whisper
every rock its shadow—
and the gray misty mornings
hide a thousand secrets.

V

it could have been the sargasso sea
for all the fighting and all the meat
left behind the starting line.

# poetry

is the edge of someplace the edge
about to be entered into the place
is the core of truth in everything
existing from moment's breath feeding
the shape size feel of things concrete
feeding the underbelly of things abstract
waiting  tending and waiting for the
smile of syllables reaching  expressing
what you feel perceiving the world
around you  the golden overgod of the
moment grasped in your hand clutching
it letting it unfold onto the straight
page where the guts of life's experiences
lie transforming it into a butterfly
winging its way to someone who wants
to know why sweet sounds slip off the
tongue of it which laps up the red blue
yellow of life painted on the rainbow
after the storm  stopping for the questions
and answers of the wildflowers growing
on some green hilltop swaying with the
breeze keeping their own rhythm  the design
of sunshine fusing through an empty sweater
its arms hanging limp on both sides of the
vacant chair of a quiet wistful wonderer
miling down a lone road following the lines
of a hungry day hearing the sound of one
leaf moving among the strong  riding on

the tide of the outside coming in going
out moving ever moving after the far flung
motion of people fingered stones  dropping
1000 nights into somebody's hell-hole rising
to the great green places where windy trees
live shuddering in front of black mountains
walking to and fro a james dickey sky
greeting people meeting with nervous
anticipation life's dancing partner

it is after all the sharp intake of everything.

# i almost cannot

i almost cannot say anything the words are there
choking but they cannot come out fear of what
they are saying can it be or the lonesome way we
are drifting over white clouds or the overwhelming
world and you ask me are you tired when you see my
dazed face and i say yes but it is not that simple
the hardness has not come i have been soft for too
long and perhaps i fear the roof of my head might
come off and all the people i will no longer see
will blast into the sky i can't tell you why
except this poetry thing has got me closer and i
am becoming more than a shadow.

# You & I

The lights are on
The TV is talking
But we are not listening.
The door is shut
The room is hot
But we pay no attention.
Soon everything is gone—
Light, TV, door, heat
And only we are there.
When we cross the border
That separates two from one
When we return from the journey
And to consciousness
You whisper I love you
And I know you do.

# Scott

When we first met
I didn't expect to
and I wasn't looking.
Days passed
we spent them together
A stolen kiss
a stolen moment
Oh, how carefully
we walked
around each other's hearts
as though walking
    on eggs
trying not to
    break them.
We both knew
I was leaving
but it didn't matter.
Weeks passed
no one was
more surprised
than I.
We became closer
than we knew
    or wanted.
Hurt came easier then.

We test each other
fought
made up
made love.
Months have passed
I'm no longer surprised.
Now I'm leaving
now it matters
now I need you
more than ever
more than I know
but I'll be back for you.
We talk about love
marriage
children
sometimes we're scared
others we're sure.
Almost one year ago
I didn't know
that you are
the rest of my life.

# The Garden

In the garden
Crimson petals
And spires of gentian blue
Vibrate in sympathy (or symphony)
To whirring wings
And droning bees
And brown feet padding in soft, warm brown earth.

Her limbs move intimately
Among the green branches
Peopled with heart-shaped leaves familiar (or familial)
Among the feathery fingers of ferns
To the tree.

Fragrant with starry blossoms—
A Milky Way—
Resplendent with shining fruit—
A galaxy—
Its splendor catches her breath away.

Trembling, she reaches out,
With a child's inevitable curiosity;
Her cool, fern-like fingers curve
Around the ruddy bauble;
She plucks it.

Juicy sweetness delights her;
Grey vapors thicken over the sun.
Her greedy eyes do not see
The white petals drooping (or dropping),
One by one,
The leaves bleeding (or receding),
And tiny blighted blotches
Eroding fruited spheres (or tears).

She bites closer to the core
And bitterness stains the tongue.
The clustered black seeds part
To reveal—
A tiny scarlet worm.

In the silent, icy dusk,
Unfurred, unfeathered, unleafed,
She feels unspeakably bared (or snared),
A wrenching separation,
An aching emptiness.

Her still sticky fingers stifle fear;
She flees down the jagged frozen earth
As night hunts
The garden.

# Flowers on a Box

I remember:

Cold winds stealing my breath away.
Startling brightness of dark, snow-touched
mountains on a sunless day.
Those suddenly, overwhelmingly oppressive rows
of cypress.
And that small grey box.
"Is Nana really in that box?" asked my nephew
as he stroked it.
The rigid posture of my daughters as though
they were robots.
My father hiding red eyes behind dark glasses.
Focusing my attention on the trembling pink
roses atop the box.
And then it was done. Finished. All over.
We go on with our lives.

And yet the memory is etched in the mind
With the clarity of rooftops and trees
Silhouetted against a setting sun.

# Leaves

In the garden, the leaves are falling,
Dry, brittle, skeletons
Rattling their bones.

A sole gardener, stooped and ancient,
Works among the crysanthemums
In the fading light
Pruning the blighted branches
With gnarled hands.

The children are gone.
The ghosts of their voices echo
Only in memory.

In the garden the leaves are leaving,
Frail, shriveled,
Elements reforming themselves
Back into their origins
To await some distant spring
To dream of a new re-leafing.

# Children

We are star children:
Born of ancient galaxies eons ago,
Dimly remembering within our genes
As we look skyward on crisp, clear nights
And in our dreams of space.

We are sea children:
The rise and fall of the surf
Echoing in our blood's own pulse and flow
Stirring the ancient kelp beds
Of subconscious seas.

We are earth children:
Carrying with us distant memories
Of primeval fern-like forests,
Reaching for the sun like plants,
Living our own springs and winters.

We are children.

# Balance

Sometimes
it is hard
to remember:

Morning sun breaking through a slate sky
Instead of sunsets.

Tender twigs sprouting in spring's greenness
Instead of dead leaves.

Vibrant voices laughing in the playground
Instead of silence.

# Dreamer

Sing me to sleep oh dancing wind
that I may dream of time past
When no-one but you and I touched Mother Earth
where buffalo roamed free to search and seed
that was a time of Shaman's truths
when life was simple, shared by all
rites of passage into man or woman
shameless children ran naked with innocence
into life
I hear the cry of my ancestors gone before me
their souls are with Grandmother Moon
watching silently at night the rituals long past.
The nation stands alone now on fabricated land
that holds no peace for those of us who wait to die
and join the souls of our ancestors who wait with
Grandmother Moon.

# War

Charred lands of burning flesh
guns erect like a boy's first trip
into manhood
a child's cry from the pain of death
half-starved babies the breast is dry.
Bomb scarred homes now shells of what
once was
faces etched with fear of bullets
touching their flesh
the stench of death now fills the air
and
then no more.

# Rape

You took away my power
stripped me naked with your eyes
tore from me the covering that
encompassed my passions
I stand alone
naked as the day I came from the womb
bound and gagged
left to cry out in shame.

# Homeless

Running naked through the streets
Tents on a city block
Bench laden bodies covered in newsprint
Shopping carts cradle life-long dreams
Hands outstretched in want
Crying babies clinging to their mother's breast
Crowds of empty faces look at
Fat Bellied Politicians with closed minds and backs turned
Hoping society will take care of itself
or
Die away silently!

# A Friend

Images of silence
quiet thoughts of papers due
brown eyes search for the answer,
no watch to break at the arm
time passes too quickly
jewelry has no place in this one's life.
Kind, thoughtful, determined to succeed
She will!

# To T—

I think you should listen to Carla Bley
I really do
On a warm summer's evening . . . yes
Phone me when you do
Just to let me know
If you danced
A solitary tango.

# Image '87

Pastoral poetry doesn't describe you,
so let me try the update tack:
Coca-Cola-colored eyes, all brown and syrup slow
Maybelline-coated
Chapstick lips 'round a Pearl Drops smile
Veritably laminated
Skin tone: Alba 77, pre-milk stage
Dermatologist-tested
Fragrance free
No alcohol please

# Vision

I rise over myself and see
Streams of warmth flowing out of me
I see my body there below
And from my heart the blood does flow
I wonder where might flow this blood
So I follow the crimson flood
And at its bloody end I see
People using this pain from me
Then I wake from my dream to find
The dream not only in my mind
Even awake the pain I feel
And I can see the pain is real

# Paint a Picture of Death

Paint a picture of death
With blood all around
Load a gun with lead
Let the gun resound

Paint a picture of death
Paint it with a knife
Take it in your hand
And let it take a life

Paint a picture of death
With the head in a noose
Hold the body high
Then let the body lose

Paint a picture of death
Paint it of yourself
Dip your brush in ink
For it's sooner than you think

# Nirvana

A huge canyon of a mouth
has swallowed me whole.
I am floating into a sea of gray.
The blackened world beckons,
and I answer it.
A slow nod. Yes. Yes.
I want the numbing cloak to
begin its descent upon me.
I welcome it as it covers and invades
my very limbs; I fade.
My Self becomes but nothing,
the world is but a faint glimmer,
and then also nothing.
Floating, falling as the last leaf
of Autumn.
Now, motionless.
All that matters, does not matter.
Oh, peace at last. It always comes last.

# The Answer

Among the stones I
found my answer.
For between them there
always lingers a rose;
Not thorned or spiny.
I seemed to have missed
it the day I searched.
Hurled at me, I am
beaten to the ground.
I wait and feel empty.
Empty as the day long and
hot with summer.
I grow weary and long to be
taken away from here.
I cannot sleep, nor eat, nor cry.
I have been fooled, for
I am not the flower,
I am the stone.

# Sailing

You weep. You called to say
he no longer brings you passion.
The entanglement of white skin
and black night is now
an intrusion in the dark.
Love, that sleep sailing ship, has
taken the white bone timber from your land,
and you feel yourself
being bitten away.
Great chunks of you are
missing in the morning.

Love is drowsy, dreaming, drifting,
dulled in deliberateness.

You pause. You know this passage is
full of the coils and twists of being two
And he has taken such care to show you
the curving cutting bow
and snapping canvas of his
starguided nature. But he remains:
free to sail on the blue supple sea
while you, uncharted, are caught
like a cloud in the blue net of sky.

Love slows, sputtering, sinking,
splendid in epitaph.

# Solstice of Winter

I

The blackness called night lengthens,
and light curls up, shivering.
The round earth turns, poleaxed,
dipping down into its shadow
beneath the added pelts of snow.
Blue violet ice caves glitter,
brittle bright, quenching and
cracking the star seeded land.

II

In the forest, wolves howl.
White feral breaths braid the darkness.
Narrow jaws scissor the thick cold
and the loosened sable night falls
to the pine fragrant floor.
The earth spins,
telling a tale to tame them.

# Christy

A little girl
With big blue eyes
Who should talk about
Games and dolls and toys
Friends, enemies and boys
Looks at me and begins
To discuss love and hate
Careers, responsibilities,
Relationships.
And I wonder who or what
Has forced her to grow up
Before it is her time.
There is already pain
Somewhere in her eyes
And I hear wisdom
In her soft childish voice.
She knows more than her peers,
It makes her parents proud.
But her knowledge is not in
Spelling, reading or math.
She had the knowledge of life,
Which will only bring her sorrow
Before she's had a taste of joy.

# Identity

The water is cold
The night is warm
I'm laughing
Because I never do this.
My mind is blank
I am free
Until my name is called
From the other side
Of the fence,
Then once again
I'm forced to be me.

# Stories

Orpheus •

# She Was Old and Asleep

Mom let me stay home from school that day. The only thing I had to do was wear nice clothes and be quiet. I liked missing school but hated wearing nice clothes. I always felt funny in nice clothes. Mom never let me do anything in them. Mom and Dad dressed up too. We got into the car and went to Grandpa and Grandma's house. I liked going there except when I had to dress up. Then they always grabbed my cheek and told me how cute I looked. I had to be quiet even in the car. Dad and Mom were quiet too. It took longer than usual to get there.

Grandpa and Grandma's house was dark and everyone was quiet. No one called me cute or grabbed my cheek. I felt funny. I wanted to go outside and play, but I knew not to ask. All I saw was black clothes walking around, and all I heard was whispers and sniffles. When a black limo came, everyone hurried everyone hurried
out to their cars. We rode with my uncle. I thought Grandpa and Grandma were lucky. They got to ride in the big, black limo, and we had to ride with my uncle. A motorcycle cop led the way. It was neat running all the red lights. It made me feel important. Everyone on street corners and in their cars were looking at us. "Out of the way! I'm coming through!" I yelled to myself. I knew they were looking at the limo. I wished I was in the limo. I wished I was the motorcycle cop. My uncle had a new C.B. in his car, and he talked to another car as we drove through town. He let me talk on it, but the other car didn't hear me because I didn't know I had to press a button to talk. It was fun.

I knew the fun was over when we reached a dark building with flowers in the front. The motorcycle cop helped everyone park, and Mom reminded me to behave. Everyone squeezed out of their cars and fixed their nice clothes. I could tell that most of them hated wearing nice clothes. We walked in through two

huge doors and were shown to our seats by a man in dark clothes. Grandpa and Grandma sat up at the front. I wished I could sit at the front. I didn't like the seats. The place looked dark and old. I started wishing I was home. Then I noticed a box in the corner. It was a long, brown box with handles on the side. Half of the top was open, but I couldn't see what was inside. From what Mom told me, I guessed that my great-grandma was inside. I didn't ask.

There was a lot of sniffling. It echoed. Music was playing, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from. It was store music but lower and sad. The sniffling noise was louder than the music. I tried to sit still. Mom told me that a man was going to come out in a little while and talk. I wondered from what door he would come in from. I looked around. Everyone looked down at the floor, so I couldn't see anyone. I remembered asking Mom what a great-grandma was. I never knew that Mom had a grandma like I did or that Grandma had a mom.

The man came in from a side door and stood in front of us. He was old and didn't look happy. He didn't look sad either. He had a Bible and some notes. I figured we would have to pray. I was right. He told us to bow our heads, but everyone's head was down already. As he prayed, I looked at the floor, at the ceiling, then at Mom. She had her eyes closed and was praying with everyone else. She looked funny. Different. She looked almost mad. I didn't like it. Finally the praying stopped. The man started talking about God; then he talked about how great my great-grandma was even though he never met her. He said that he heard she was nice. I wondered what would happen if she wasn't nice.

As the man talked, Grandma started to cry. When Grandma cried, my aunts started to cry. Then Mom started. It was all right until Mom cried. I looked at the floor and started to cry a little. I wondered if everyone was suppose to cry. No one had said anything to me about crying. I was glad when Mom stopped. I was glad I wasn't sitting in the front where people could see me.

When the man finished, I was ready to leave. We all had to stand in line and walk pass the box. When it was my turn, I walked up and looked in to see my great-grandma for the first time. She was old and asleep.

# Toothpick

I wondered why we were stopping at this place. A small, gray building with tiny square windows. The black bars on the windows made it look like a prison.

"This isn't the park," I told my dad, who was helping Grandma out of the front seat of our car.

Dad stared down at me. "I told you that we had to stop somewhere first."

My mom called me over to the other side of the car. She held my shoulder and leaned down to whisper in my ear, "We have to visit your grandmother's brother before we can go to the park. He's, well, sick. Oh, and when we go inside, I don't want you to say a thing. Also do everything your father tells you."

I ran toward my dad and grandma. "Dad, Grandma, wait for me!" I smiled at Dad. He didn't smile back. Grandma looked bad. She walked real slow and her eyes stared down at the ground.

"I hate these places," my dad whispered.

My grandma said, "So does he," then she whispered, "So will I."

My dad opened a huge, gray door, and we walked into a dark hallway. Gray was everywhere with some black in spots. No plants, pictures, or paintings anywhere. Big gray doors were on both sides of the hall. I walked with my mom who stayed behind Dad and Grandma. I held her hand, and she smiled.

At the end of the hall was an older, gray haired lady who was sitting behind a round desk. I wondered how she got out from there. My dad asked her some questions, and after a few minutes she answered. She pointed toward one of the gray doors on one side of the hallway. Grandma walked toward it.

"Why is only Grandma going?" I asked Mom.

"She has to talk to him first. He will come out in a minute, and I want you to be quiet."

"Why? What's wrong with him?"

"Well, he's ill in the mind. He has to be taken care of."

"How did he get sick in the mind?"

"Well, he's old," Mom answered. "People have to do everything for him now."

"I'll bet you they don't go to the bathroom for him," I joked. "Do they?"

Mom turned red. I heard a scream. It was an old lady in one of the gray rooms. The door was open so I stared in. She looked half asleep and half awake in her white bed. She talked as if someone was with her, but no one was in the room. "No, stop touching me! Why did you have to die, John? I love you. Stop eating the cookies!" The door was closed by a nurse. My mom grabbed me and pulled me to one side of the hall. A long stretcher with something covered by a white sheet wheeled by us. A nurse rolled in into another room.

"What's that?" I asked and pointed toward the room.

"It's," Mom stopped for a second. "It's just towels, that's all."

Another door opened and my grandma came out with her brother in a wheelchair. He was older than anything I'd ever seen before. He leaned over in his chair. He looked asleep. His white hair fell in his face, and his old, gray suit looked like it was thrown on by someone.

"Albert," Grandma shook her brother's shoulders, "There's some people here to see you."

Albert slowly leaned back in his chair and stared from his sleepy eyes. "Who are you?" His voice was loud and mean.

"This is my son and his family, Albert," Grandma told him in a loud voice.

"I don't care! Go away!" Albert waved his hand at us and started to fall back asleep.

"Now, Albert, they came a long way to see you." Grandma shook him a little. "Remember, I told you to be nice."

Albert held out his hand. Dad shook his hand first. "How are you doing, Albert?" Albert said nothing. Mom came up and shook Albert's hand then walked behind Dad. Dad looked at me, "It's your turn now."

"Do I have to?" I asked. Dad pushed me forward.

Albert stared up at me and smiled. "Come here, boy. Don't worry, I won't bit. Not hard anyway," Albert laughed. "When is your birthday?"

"My birthday?" I stared at Dad. I didn't understand.

"Just answer him," Dad said.

"Uh, my birthday is in July," I answered.

"Good." He reached in one of his gray pockets. "I have a present for you."

I stared at Albert's pocket with wide eyes as he pulled it out. It was a toothpick. He handed it to me. I stared at Mom to see if she was laughing at the joke. She wasn't laughing at all.

"Thank Albert," Mom told me.

I stared at the toothpick, then back at Albert. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, boy," Albert smiled. "It's all I have to give you."

"Thank you," I whispered.

"Well," Dad grabbed my hand, "We have to go now, Albert."

Albert stared at Grandma, "Can't I go with you?"

"No," Grandma told Albert. "You have to stay here a little longer."

"How much longer?" Albert asked as he was wheeled away.

As we walked out of the gray building my mom asked if I wanted to throw my toothpick in the gray trashcan by the door. I said no.

# Thomas

In the thirty-first year of the Emperor Caesar Augustus in the village of Nazareth in the Roman province of Galilee, a baby boy was born. The mother named it Judas, meaning "May the Lord be praised." No one in that district of gnarled olive trees and busy threshing floors, no one including the mother, knew the whereabouts of the father, or even who he was.

By the time the boy was five he had grown accustomed to the taunting of the older boys, who called him "Judas ben Rabbim" ("Judas, son of many"). It would have been difficult for an outsider to tell whether Judas failed to understand the point of the joke or merely ignored it, impervious to its sting. One might have supposed the latter, for he cut a fine little figure as he walked: his tall slender body arched back like the graceful upright of a lyre, and his arms swung loosely, almost jauntily, as if with a secret self-assurance. And in his eyes, which sparkled with intelligence and were set off by long lashes, there was the composure of a little boy who measured his worth by a higher law undiscovered by his playmates. But at night, when his mother's perfumed arms were not busy with someone else, he sometimes crawled into them and wept himself into a bitter sleep.

By the time Judas was six, he had learned that he could no trust his mother. She did not lie outright but merely changed her mind from one hour to the next. Often she simply could not muster the energy, when the time came, to carry through what she had thought such a good idea earlier. The things that she promised the boy—a shopping trip to Sepphoris, a climb up the mount behind the village, the building of a small Sukkoth hut on the roof of the house, even the weekly lighting of the Sabbath candle—had a way of not happening. She gave the impression of one who was overwhelmed by life, and she made Judas feel guilty when he reminded her of a promise unkept. Judas did not

loving his mother, but he learned to doubt everything she said. Sometimes he would scream his disappointment at her, and once, on a whim, she pacified him with a small gift: a black puppy with white markings on its tail and feet that she named Mitzvah. Judas, dressed in his gray sackcloth tunic, carried Mitzvah all over the village, fed him stray bones and scraps of food that the crows missed, and slept with him at night. The people whispered that it was fitting that a *mamzer* should love a filthy dog, but little Judas knew nothing of the meaning of this word; he only knew that animals were more trustworthy than people.

When Judas was seven he went to school. His teacher, a part-time carpenter by trade, was a man named James. Sometimes James would bring with him his younger half-brother, a boy of fifteen named Jesus. It was this Jesus who first noticed that Judas, who sat on the dusty floor of hard earth in the shadows at the back of the room, always finished writing the alphabet on his wax tablet ahead of the other boys. Once Jesus asked him to write the alphabet backwards as the boys began their daily exercise. With eyes shining Judas took up his stylus and stuck it into the wax at the bottom left-hand corner of the tablet.

"Too easy," said Jesus. "Start at the top, Judas. Start at the top, but go in reverse. *Taw* to *aleph*."

Judas glanced up at the long face with the deep-set eyes and the thin wisps of virgin beard. He saw a face that encouraged him, that wanted him to succeed, even to be first. Something buried deep inside Judas sprang to life for the first time, and the letters seemed to etch themselves into the wax. Even going backwards he finished ahead of the other boys.

From that day forward Judas' name changed: "Judas, son of many" gave way to "Backwards Judas." It was at once a compliment and a slight. It would not do to praise a *mamzer* without in the same breath reminding him what he was. But Judas did not mind. He thought of the way that Jesus looked at him. Now he cried himself to sleep not because his heart was bitter, but because he saw Jesus smiling down.

* * *

When Judas was ten, Joseph, the father of James and Jesus, died suddenly, and James took over the family business. Jesus, who was being groomed by both James and the chief rabbi at the synagogue to teach the Law and the Prophets to the youth of Nazareth, also had to retire from teaching to help his brother. Judas wept bitterly when Jesus told the boys about the family's misfortune. Seeing the boy so distraught, Jesus took Judas by the hand and told him in a low voice, "I will come to you."

What did Jesus mean? Judas did not know, but he clung to those words with a death grip. And the loving God of Israel, the eternal Father of whom Jesus

used to speak in class with eyes raised to heaven, seemed to hear the boy as he poured out his heart every night from the chilly rooftop of his mother's profane one-room house. At twilight one winter evening, while he was doing his lessons by the light of the fire, a knock sounded against the wattle door.

"Who is it?" the boy said.

"James, son of Joseph," said a voice muffled by the wind whining through the cracks in the door.

"And Jesus," said another.

With wide eyes and leaping heart Judas threw back the door on its groaning leather hinges. There they stood, two angels of deliverance. Sobbing, Judas threw his arms around Jesus.

They had come to ask his mother's permission to train him as an apprentice in their carpenter shop.

Judas continued in school and excelled, but he lived for the moment that his lessons for the day were over. "Hold the compass," Jesus would say. They worked so closely that the smell of Jesus' breath became familiar to him. They sat side by side at synagogue, shared meals, talked of God and his holy will. Sometimes when Judas stayed overnight he heard Jesus cry out in his sleep. As they grew older and Judas taller, they shared each other's tunics or sandals. They traveled together—to Lebanon to choose choice timbers for a rich man's estate, to the Essene community along the Dead Sea, to Jerusalem for Passover. Judas was more than an apprentice, he was an eager student learning about life from the only person he trusted; he was a younger brother.

As the years passed, Judas' face lengthened; his cheeks narrowed; his chin sharpened, then fuzzed over with its first growth; his eyes sank further beneath his forehead. Someone noticed that Judas and Jesus looked alike. The resemblance was by no means stirking—Judas probably looked as much like three or four other young men of the village. But he and Jesus were inseparable, and the gossips noticed. And so, partly for reasons that were natural and partly out of malice toward Jesus, who was resented by some for his piety, the townspeople gave Judas a new name: Judas Thomas (Judas "the twin").

* * *

The years passed. Judas Thomas, now in his early twenties, still worked with Jesus and James and James's brothers Joseph and Simon at the carpenter shop, but he had become learned by the standards of Nazareth. Thinking that he might someday become a teacher, he studied Greek in Sepphoris; eventually he gave Greek lessons in his spare time to any Nazarene who would pay for it. But his piety was not as developed as his learning, and this bothered him, for he knew in his heart of hearts that God and the holy teachings of the Torah were

absolutely fundamental to everything else. Yet he found it difficult to love the Father that Jesus seemed to love so much. Sometimes he even dared to wonder if the Father existed. Once he caught himself rehearsing an argument for Aristotle's Prime Mover over against the God of Jacob. At such times he frightened himself. Why was he always doubting? He did not know.

There were other changes. He was now "Thomas" to most, even to James and Jesus and the woman he called "Mother," Joseph's holy widow, who loved him and treated him as if he were her own son. Even his Huldah, whom he had married four years before, and who bore him two daughters, used the name when speaking of him to others. Sometimes he thought of *himself* as Thomas.

But the greater change was in Jesus. He was quieter, more intense, more inward, preoccupied, forgetful. He seemed to take little pleasure in his work. Once he confided to Thomas that he wasn't yet doing the business of his Father. Although thirty, he had never taken a wife; he resisted every attempt by Mary and James to arrange a marriage and as a consequence brought down a degree of ridicule upon the house of his father. Yet he regularly preached in the synagogue, and there were some in Nazareth who said that he was "too holy" to marry, that he was an Essene in disguise, that he would someday leave for the "wilderness" of the Dead Sea, and similar things.

James had long ago lost patience with Jesus and complained to influential villagers in order to save his own face. Through it all Jesus studied the Law and the Prophets, preached on the Sabbath to a small group of devoted followers, mostly women, did his duties in the carpenter shop under James's direction, and gave away much of what he earned to the poor. As a result he had many friends, mostly in low places; but no man living in Nazareth knew him well; none, that is, except Thomas, his "twin."

* * *

They greeted each other like the long lost cousins they were—John, who lived in the wilderness east of Jericho next to the Jordan River and ate locusts and dressed in a coarse garment of camel's hair, and Jesus, who now seemed to Thomas to live almost constantly in the unseen presence of his God. John the Baptist: Jesus had come to be baptized by his cousin, whose fame had traveled throughout Judaea all the way to Galilee. Lost in the shadows away from the fire, Thomas watched their faces as they talked about things that were alien to him. As a lone cricket chirped near his ear, Thomas wondered what attracted it to the desert sands where they sat. Why did it leave the thick, protective forest of sedge growing several stone throws away at the river's edge, where leopards roamed by night? Had it been cast out by its brother crickets? Or did it actually prefer its lonely outpost to the din of the rushes below? Was it attracted to the

holy man's fire for some obscure reason known only to an insect? Thomas suddenly felt excluded from the intimate warmth of his own kind. Jesus and John vibrated to the same divine life, whereas his experience of God was faint and second-hand. If only once God would reveal Himself—if only once—if only once—but before he could finish his thought, he fell asleep in the warm air of the Jordan gorge wrapped in only the tunic that he wore.

One night, after fifty days with John in the wilderness, Jesus came home. He was changed; Thomas could tell before he said the first word. He could tell by his bearing, by the way he cupped his hands around his mother's head to kiss her, above all by the way he looked at her, as if she were the mother of worlds instead of sons. There was the look of infinity in his eyes, which spoke to Thomas even in lamplight of some riddle solved, solved for all time. They were at once serene and excited. And as self-assured as the vast night sky outside.

* * *

One day outside Caesarea Philippi, next to the cave spring consecrated to the Roman god Pan, Jesus asked his closest followers, "Who do men say that I am?"

"John the Baptist back from the dead," said Thomas, as usual the quickest to respond.

"Elijah," said one of the others.

"But who do *you* say that I am?" said Jesus, looking at Simon Peter.

Peter dumbly stared back at Jesus for a moment. "You are the Christ, the son of the living God!" he blurted.

It was winter, and Thomas drew his mantle more tightly around him as the wind whistled through the leafless willows overhead. But it was not the wind that stung him, it was this nauseating pretense of Peter's. For that is what it was, of that Thomas had no doubt. Peter was no ignoramus in spite of his blunt fisherman's manner. He knew exactly how to flatter. And he knew exactly what Jesus' weakness was, and how to exploit it. He also knew how to rally the disciples to his leadership. So now he was announcing that Jesus was the Messiah. Had he fogotten that Jesus, whatever his sanctity and moral superiority, was a lowly Nazarene? And a carpenter at that? Had he forgotten that the Messiah was to come for the salvation of all the Jews, and not merely a small band of enthusiasts living along the sea of Galilee? Could Peter be that stupid? Yet here he was playing up to Jesus, encouraging the delusion, and doing so in a manner that was high and mighty, as if he, the fisherman Simon, he alone, had been shown some momentous truth by an angel.

Thomas tried hard not to despise Simon Peter with his bald head and bushy beard, his long thin nose and unprepossessing pale eyes. He tried hard not to

detest the look of confidence on his coarse fisherman's face and the peculiar bullying lilt of omniscience in his voice when he expressed an opinion or gave an order. He tried to bury his resentment of Simon's easy, sometimes boisterous self-confidence and his child's sense of humor that the others felt compelled to laugh at. How hard it was, oh how very hard it was to keep from hating him! But he, Thomas, knew that hatred destroyed the hater, and he would not allow himself to hate.

Thomas could not help resenting Peter for another reason. Peter owned a fishing boat and a house in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, had a little wealth, and a wife and mother-in-law who were gracious to them all; and Jesus had learned to depend on him, in time to think him indispensable. That is how Simon came to be called Peter, the "Rock," in the first place. Thomas had hardly been able to bear it the first time Peter joked about his new nickname, treating it as if it meant little to him, when in fact any fool could tell that no one valued the name as much as the gloating "Rock" himself.

But nothing rankled Thomas more than when Peter and Andrew and their friends James and John, the sons of Zebedee, went off by themselves with Jesus, sometimes for a day or more.

"You are welcome to go anywhere I go, at any time, Brother," Jesus told Thomas when he complained privately. But he felt like a hanger-on; he was not one of the inner circle. He had joined the disciples late. Perhaps it would have been different if he had come down to the Sea of Galilee when Jesus did. But he had stayed on and helped James, and he had set aside a small sum for Huldah and the girls which would last the winter into the spirng. And this was the result.

In order to make his time more bearable, he told himself that the others did not even know Jesus; they certanly did not love him, not truly. Only he, Thomas, knew and loved him. The rest did not even use his name, but called him "Master." Even Peter. Thomas could not understand why Jesus seemed to value the opinions of the inner circle more than his. It grieved him, but he stayed on, for his love for Jesus was unqualified, or so he believed. And sometimes, when for one reason or another he was feeling confident of his own powers, he told himself that underneath appearances Jesus' love for him was greater than for the rest, even John and Simon Peter. After all the years of intimate sharing, how could it be otherwise?

But Thomas stayed on for another reason. There was something wonderful and compelling about Jesus' preaching. Thomas could well understand how rumors began to circulate about his being the Messiah. Just being around him was spiritually infectious. Thomas, yes, even Thomas, felt God's nearness, if not exactly his presence, when under Jesus' spell. He found it easier to pray,

easier than ever before. Life had become more urgent and meaningful. Perhaps Jesus really was a prophet. Perhaps his prophecies, delivered with such uncanny authority, such fire, such awe-inspiring assurance, were true. Thomas could not quite bring himself to believe this, but no one else around him seemed to doubt. All the talk about the close of the age, the necessity to repent, the coming of the Messiah in a fiery climax of redemption—it leaped like lightning from soul to soul, penetrating and burning and quickening. Thomas wanted to believe it, he almost believed it, at times he did believe it. But then he would come to his senses, as it were, and he believed no longer. He hoped, he half believed, but he did not believe. Yet he felt closer to God than ever before.

But now there was this, the ultimate insult to intelligence, no, to common sense. Not just the Messiah, but Jesus *as* the Messiah. And announced by a man who with only a little exaggeration could be described as a buffoon. A fine spray from the waterfall behind the pagan shrine gusted against Thomas' face as he stared back at Jesus after Peter's "revelation."

"Is this true, Lord?" the disciples asked, their faces furrowed with an anxious excitement.

Jesus did not deny it, but only asked that they keep it among themselves.

As the disciples shook their heads in awe or spoke in hushed, confused tones, Thomas studied Jesus' face for hints of what this latest development might mean. Why did Jesus permit them to go on so? Or had he come to believe it himself? Had the madness that enveloped most of Israel—this expectation of a Messiah in the present day—twisted his brain too? Had it finally come to this? As the sun for an instant broke through the grey mantle overhead, Thomas, staring at Jesus, his "big brother," his "twin," rhythmically hammered his forefinger against the cold wet rock that supported him.

* * *

Thomas found the disciples hiding in the house of John Mark's mother in Jerusalem. Jesus had been dead a week, crucified as a criminal. "Thomas, we thought you had fled for good," said Peter with a slight leer as he unbolted the door.

Then Mary Magdalene, the woman who was close to Jesus, came up to Thomas and, with eyes wide and upturned, as if in a trance, said, "Thomas, we have seen the Lord!"

Everyone was there except Judas Iscariot; the women too; and they erupted almost in unison, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas' eyes did not flicker. Set in a face sagging with fatigue and creased by grief, they might have belonged to a corpse. Following Jesus' death, he had walked the roads and footpaths around Jerusalem like a drifter. He did not

know where he was going, and for three days he did not eat. Now he had come back—come back to grieve with his friends, to get their support. He had expected to see faces like his own; it never occurred to him that it could be otherwise. What he saw instead he could not comprehend. He knew only that the disciples did not share is grief. Suddenly he felt angry at them. His eyes came alive again, flashed out as of old.

"Seen the Lord?" he said. "What is this—this—he's been dead for only a week, and you look like you're at a party!" He almost added, "You disgust me!" but checked himself and said instead, "What are—what are you talking about?"

"We have *seen* him, Thomas!" somebody shouted above the others.

"*Seen* him? What are you talking about?"

"He is risen!"

Thomas' brow twitched with confusion as he gaped at the excited faces before him. "Is he alive?" he said in a suddenly subdued voice that betrayed a faint hope.

A cacophany of voices said "yes!" and "no!" at the same time. They had all gathered closely around him and were bursting to tell him their strange news.

"But he—*did* die, didn't he?" said Thomas.

"Yes, yes," the voices said, "but he is *risen*!"

"Risen?"

"Yes, risen!"

"What do you mean, 'risen,'? Where? Where did you see him?"

"Here. Here in this room, in this very room!"

Thomas' eyes fanned over the room. There at the center was the long table where they shared their last meal with Jesus. It seemed so ordinary, so like it had always seemed, except that—and again the great lump rose in his throat as he remembered that Jesus would never share a meal with them again. But why was everyone still here? Were they mad? Why didn't they all go home? His intelligent, suspicious eyes darted around the room from face to face. "Who saw him?" he asked as again he dared to hope.

"We all did!" they shouted with an unfeigned, almost wild enthusiasm.

"But it can't be, you're all—you're all mad!" he said.

"But it happened!" they said. "Thomas, it *happened.*"

Thomas was sure that not one of them except Mary Magdalene loved Jesus as much as he did—surely everyone must know of his devotion to the Master. "Is he getting back at me? Or are they all mad? Or-by some miracle?-but no."

So he said in a loud voice, said with a gravity befitting a judge on the Sanhedrin, "Unless I see in his hands the prints of the nails, and put my finger

in the holes made by the nails, and put my hand in the gash in his side, I will not believe."

All day he sat in a daze, bewildered, resentful, unbelieving but wanting to believe, as the disciples raved and made their giddy plans. He stayed with them overnight. They tolerated him, ignored him, wondered why he stayed. He stayed with them the next day too, studying them, always studying them. It was impossible to deny that something extraordinary had really happened. They were all convinced that Jesus, their crucified Master, had visited them in that very room even though they all had seen him die. They were convinced that he was the Messiah chosen by God to usher in a new age. Most amazing of all, they were convinced that this momentous, unthinkable task had fallen on their shoulders, and that it could be accomplished without their Master's presence. What confidence they had! How their faces glowed! How weighty their words! They undertook the most commonplace duty as if it carried tremendous significance. And Thomas could only look on, look on with wonder, increasingly astonished, even appalled by what was going on around him. Every hour he told himself that it was time for him to go. He should go back home to Nazareth and take up his place as a carpenter alongside James. But as each hour passed, he told himself to wait one more. Just one more! He desperately wanted to believe what everybody around him believed. So the second day wore into the night. And Thomas found himself still in the upper room with the brethren.

That night Thomas had a dream. "Thomas!" he heard. "Thomas, peace be with you!"

Now he was awake, and he saw the Master standing before him.

"Thomas, look at my hands, and put your finger here; and stick out your hand and put it in my side; don't be faithless, but believing!"

The Master wore common sandals, and his feet stood solidly and plainly on the ground, but he was dressed in a white tunic that glowed with an unearthly pale yellow light. His unblinking eyes were compassionate and gentle but vaguely reproachful, almost sad; his beard and hair were clean and fresh.

"My Lord," said Thomas in a voice that almost failed. "Lord . . . Jesus!"

Thomas fell upon him, squeezing his body to his flesh. Then a demon, the same that had tempted him to doubt the God of Jacob several years before, rose up. Though holding Jesus in his arms, Thomas still doubted! He felt his hand slide down Jesus' body. Determined to prove to himself that this was Jesus, as if it were not already apparent, he felt the wound. Even then he did not believe. Then he felt it, somehow felt it under the tunic, and—God knows how—his finger slipped into Jesus' side and traveled the warm wet length of the wound. Then, in an instant of incandescent certainty, the doubt shattered, the

demon ran off howling into the night. Thomas was filled with an indescribable joy and power. It was as if God Himself had touched him and transformed him into an angel, into pure spirit, as if lightning had turned his blood into fire. He felt, he knew that he was changed forever.

Then he heard, "You have believed because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Trembling and sobbing, Thomas fell on his knees, his hands around Jesus' legs. "Master, Master!" he cried, "forgive me!" But Jesus had vanished. In one instant he was in Thomas' arms, in the next he was gone.

Thomas looked around the room as his heart beat in a wild ecstasy. The oil lamp glowed dimly on Bartholomew's shaggy face, and a cock crowed as the wind whistled through a chink in the window. . . . Darkness. . . . Stillness. . . .

"I'VE SEEN THE LORD!" he shouted. He went from body to body shaking each and shouting, "I'VE SEEN THE LORD!" Soon everyone was slapping him, kissing him, embracing him, questioning him, swearing at him. Even the women, who had rushed up from the lower room. Even Simon Peter.

"Thomas, you're with us!" they said. "You're with us!" They tried to go back to sleep, but they could not. The day broke, everyone bathed, prayed. The women brought up bread, yogurt, water. They breakfasted as Thomas told them in detail what had happened.

# Notes in a Journal

*The authors of this piece came together for ten weeks in a class titled "But I have nothing to say. . ." and demonstrated that they do indeed have quite a bit to say. We challenge style analysts to play with each segment, trying to determine where one voice ends and another begins—for each numbered segment boasts from five to eight authors.*

**Patricia Ceccarelli**

**Esther Franey**

**Mimi Merrill**

**Brent Palmer**

**Mary Puckett**

**Brad Ruthrauff**

**Jim Shaffer**

**Jeannine White**

(1)

Well, school is almost over, thank God. I really wish I could have found time to study a little bit harder. Oh, well, there's always next quarter.

I would have liked to have had more time to write. I had so much reading to do that it took my time away from writing. At least, after the quarter is over, I'll have that time before the next quarter to write. I have a lot of ideas, so I'll just write.

Some of those ideas are in the form of poems, stories, and, of course, a few letters that must be sent—but I know in the end I won't be able to do it because of all the Xmas shopping.

At least that's the excuse I'll use this time. I wonder what the truth is. Am I lazy, afraid of failure, or does it just hurt too much to hang it all out there for anyone, myself included, to see?

Maybe I won't have to channel my creativity into writing, or anything. Maybe I'll just get laid instead. Same thing, isn't it?

But I've used that excuse before, found release in passion rather than in words piled upon words—and found myself sated yet unsatisfied. I *must* find time to write; I become something less than myself when writing fades from my life.

Ah—school—too much writing. Writing, writing, writing. All for someone else, not even for myself. No time for passion, no time for creativity. So wrong. So wrong. This must change, *will* change.

School and creativity seem to have merged more than I recall them doing seventeen years ago—my last schooling time. Thinking, then expressing that thought, positive building, is no doubt best expressed in love. But love and passion aren't necessarily the same.

(2)

I used to play a card game like this, where each player passed cards to the next player before playing the hand. I never won at that, and I wonder if I can win at this. I don't think I can lose. If the guy next to me passes me something this inane, I guess I might.

I've been passed worse hands than this before; this may not be a four-of-a-kind, but I can always pull the aces from my sleeve. I love to play cards because you have to think, it's controlled, and you *can* win—and when you do, there's that pin-prick of confidence. An eyedropper full of glory. Yeah, it *is* like cards.

Being dealt a hand and having to play only the cards you first received? No. Let's change the game to draw-poker. If I can't deal with the words, I can throw in the hand. I can't lose.

I can't lose. I don't play. It seems so silly to base good feelings on something so awful as beating someone. Why do people even play these games? I can think of many, many, and much better ways of interacting with others. What about a walk—a talk—laughing, or caring?

I think this writing is really fun. It's letting us be braver than we would be with words otherwise. I think cards can be fun too. They can provide the diversion needed to free people who are otherwise afraid to even sit together, and then some special things are passed besides the deck. But eventually I want to see your eyes and heart and hold your hand—not a card.

Playing cards is just a game. Like any other game, you play to have fun. Much like we're doing now. We're passing each paper and doing the best (our best) with what we have.

Playing cards is fun, but it also teaches us things about ourselves. Do I play close to my chest, do I bet anything, or am I too careful?

(3)

I'm so excited at this moment because school is almost out! The Holidays are almost here, bringing fun, love, and good cheer. The first thing I'll do to enjoy this time of year is . . .

watch television for an evening with the rest of my family who don't see me except on Friday nights and weekends (if then) during school. I hope the shows that are on are the worst reruns of the year so they won't detract from the company of my family. Next, I will play basketball with my son a couple of evenings (probably in the rain and fog). Finally, I will take my wife out to dinner on other than a Friday night.

Well, I don't have a family except for my parents and older brothers and sisters who chime and clang like big clocks and jangle my nerves. So maybe I'll

just find a lot of time to spend alone with Elizabeth and enjoy the quiet comfort of not having to be impressive. Christimas makes its demands, but . . .

nobody says I have to meet them. I've been a rebel before and will be again. The fall seems full of holidays—a three-day weekend, Thanksgiving, the Xmas break—I'd enjoy them more if I could only . . .

enjoy them for what they should be and not as what they are. This year we (my husband and I) are going to Death Valley for Christmas. Away from the false cheer, the fake trees, the commercial Christmas, and back to the land. Back to a celebration of warmth and light and calm serenity (what better place than the desert?) in the middle of a long, cold, dark winter.

I'm going to the mountains. A little farm house nestled in the woods on the Canadian-Idaho-Washington borders is awaiting three lonely Californians, with a promise of fun, food, and family. A white Christmas . . .

I will be here in Bakersfield, recovering from a busy quarter. I'm going to try to spend as much time as I can with my baby. He probably doesn't even know that I'm his mother. . . .

(4)

Creativity—it comes and goes. Who knows why? Sometimes it seems to have abandoned you for good—sometimes it's constantly pouncing upon you, giving you no time to act on and of it. . .

Creativity—slow and mellow change like a sunrise or blossom unfolding, refusing to be rushed, but flowing slowly, surely. . .

Creativity, what's that? I think it's something you have to be born with. Something I think I missed out on. Oh, well, too late now. You see, I've just turned a beautiful *creative* way of describing creativity into just a bunch of words. . .

Creativity—I too think it's something you're born with, but it must be nurtured; watered just like a flower. If not, it may not die, but it won't flourish. It won't grow to fullest potential. It will just be a flower that blooms once or twice instead of one that blooms for years on end. . .

Creativity—We all have it, but not all of us have found the way to tap in to its wonder. I can imagine it's like seeing a firework shooting in all directions, and lighting the way, showing all who have discovered it riches beyond belief. . .

I'm not sure what creativity is, but I've never felt like I had it except in rearranging things already created—creating a new order, I guess. Once I get started doing that, I feel a fire in me; I can't stop and I can't stop speeding up. That's a great high.

Creativity: Outlines are everything. Create the light; then define the light. Create the sky; then make the birds create the Earth; then populate it. Broad

definitions, then details. Creativity within boundaries. Like the river within the river bank: Both make the river.

We explore creativity even as we diligently create that which did not exist until tonight. Out of nothing we create—proving God's existence? Certainly, we prove we are all creative, each in our fashion.

(5)

Writing without purpose, without intention, without a goal—what fun after all these years of directed assignments. To write about writing, to explore its nature, to stare at blue words appearing on white paper—no. Sooner or later my orderly self demands meaning. Writing—the act of moving one's hand on paper or the act of creating meaning? Which is it?

Do words really have any meaning? So often they seem such cheap substitutes for glorious thoughts. Can you really describe or explain the wonders of the universe—or even a simple feeling—on paper?

Yes—probably our deepest appreciations of or sorrows in life are communicated not with words and symbols but with sighs and tears, gasps, smiles and groans, all foreign to pen and paper, yet approached closely in order to be later conveyed in thought. . .

I'm sorry, but this has gone completely over my head at this time.

Words can also cause problems because one person says one thing, and someone else misinterprets. Looks and sighs can also cause us problems. So we must be careful in all our forms of communication.

But it's great, in any form of communication, to just be you. So what if someone misinterprets what you've written; it's for you first and foremost, and if others are offended, so be it. Sometimes we can't please everyone, and if we tried, then our freedom (as in this example of writing) becomes worthless.

Without words, where would we be? I think all that tripe about expressions, body language, etc., is okay, but words are where it's at. Words can be rapiers, lovers, or strangers. You choose.

(6)

I always call foggy weather "Jack the Ripper weather" because that's always the kind of weather one sees when watching old murder mystery movies. You know the kind—fog hugging the streets, footsteps on the old cobblestones, then a scream. . .

A terror runs through my bones, rattling them, and I feel my heart racing as if it will explode on the very next beat. I'm part of that movie and realize that death is in the air. . .

. . . but am I the victim or the perpetrator? I know that I like to wrap myself in the fog and walk around looking for. . .

. . . innocent people to stalk, or even despicable people, if the innocent are huddled inside by a fire, drinking Bailey's Irish Cream, but I will draw out my knife from beneath my cloak of fog and draw out the blood of anyone who will not dash away like a frightened alley cat from my icy...

. . . fate, for I am the Ripper, reborn. Am I the player or am I the role? Whichever, my blood mingles with the blood of my victims, my teeth rip out the throats of the terrified, be it in words or in gory streams that flow beneath the foggy street lamps. The Ripper lives, you fools!

(7)

Time is somethimes fun to ride,
like a waterslide. But sometimes
hours go so slow, I'd swear I
was dragging a buffalo
across an open plain.

Whether manic business
or ravenous boredom eats my mind,
Always, the clock is insane
before my eyes.

(The poet's act is hard to follow—
His speech is heavy, mine seems hollow.)

Time, Time, the rhythm pounds,
The while the clock ticks ritual sounds. . .
and I must break free
from the lines that bind
me to the rule, the ruled
paper, the rigid mind.

Time
What exactly is it?
A tick-tock?
A clock?
Or the rising
    the setting
    of the sun
The cycle of the seasons

Life
    all its complexity—
Why is it bound
    by this thing
    this dictator
    this clock

Time. Eternity. . .

Time. Just a way to let you know when to go to bed and when to wake up. Not to mention knowing when to turn on the T.V. to your favorite program

Time means many things to many people. The fundamentalist's time is what God created. To the liberal, time is something man created to help him live in this world

Time, time: Oh! I wish I could find
Why? Why? Why am I behind?
It distracts my mind when I can't find time
so I quit and just breathe and breathe
and soon time begins, all over again. . .

(8)

Since I'm not sure what it is we are doing, I'm not sure what to write, but then difficulty with words and paper is not new, and anything of personal thought conveyed on paper is a significant accomplishment for now. I've enjoyed the glimpses into who each of you are that this weekly hour has revealed.

I've enjoyed this class, too. It has allowed me to become myself again. I'm able to express how I feel more openly and clearly. This class has also made me aware that I'm not the only one with problems, fears, and anxiety (however the words are spelled).

This class has gotten me started writing down my ideas and feelings about things. It has also allowed me to feel comfortable about not being exactly right in punctuation or paragraphs. It's all right to just write and let the mind wander. I can start out on one topic and end on another. It's a breath of fresh air from term papers where everything has to be perfect.

By the way, I had six of those lousy term papers and now only one remains. When I finish it, I'll be through. No more writing for some old bag who probably doesn't care less what I think about the economic problems our country is having.

But is she so different from me? How much do *I* really care? Like most people, I'm doing the right thing as long as it doesn't hurt me personally. Maybe we should all take a hike in the "old bag's" high heels.

Here. Here. Or is it "Hear! Hear!"? I hope I'm never referred to as an old anything. As for this class, I've always known people are generally anxious and miserable. So this just confirms it. I'm usually surprised to be happy. *Ever*. And when I am happy, I think something's wrong.

How did we move from positive to negative? I refuse the negative. I am a free agent in the universe, able to find joy even in sorrow. It is a privilege to feel and know. I have been privileged to be able to share my feelings and to be privy to the sharings of others in this class. I thank you all for your honesty.

To be happy. It seems so hard sometimes. When term papers pile up, I go under. Walk in a cloud of gloom. But I am realizing there's really no reason for it. Live each day as it comes—smile, and celebrate life!

# A Home for Charlotte

"Stella, how long have ya been a bag lady?" Barney, the butcher, inquires as he hangs a red and white sign telling his customers that his deli is ready for business.

"I am not a bag lady, Barney. I am a Duchess and don't you forget it!" Stella, being used to the friendly exchange of banter, asserts as her leathered face changes from frown to gap-toothed grin.

"Sure, sure, an I'm da Pope!" Barney snickers. "When will they have your place fixed up, Duchess?"

"Soon, Barney, soon," Stella answers, turning her eyes to a window filled with the enticing wares that are Barney's specialty.

"How's 'bout a ham 'n cheese on rye?" Barney offers as Stella notices the savory aroma of deli delights mixed with the repugnant odor of the cigar perpetually hanging from Barney's clenched teeth, giving the image of an old walrus—chin whiskers and all.

"Okay, Barney," Stella complies. "But one of these days . . ." Stella notices kindness and concern in Barney's face as he places the warm, freshly-made sandwich into rag-wrapped hands.

Putting the sandwich—wrapped in a soiled handkerchief—into one of her two bags of personal treasures, Stella slowly shuffles along, dragging her feet as though her old bones no longer bend at the knees.

The pine-scented air hints of trees that stretch along Hollywood Boulevard. These evergreens, standing stoically in a parade of lights and ornaments, cause the name of this street to be changed to Christmas Tree Lane when decorated in this fashion. The stores gaily sparkle with green and red lights framing poinsettia-painted windows frosted from the heat of harried shoppers running helter-skelter, searching for a last-minute gift for a relative or loved one. Stella

notices the nine-to-five junkies, people clothed in furs, faded denim, or shiny black leather with silver ornaments, carrying packages bedecked with multi-colored ribbons and bows. A chilly breeze bites at Stella's age-rigid bones; she has learned that by putting old, thrown-away newspapers between her many layers of ragged clothing, her aged body retains some of its heat.

*"I'm hungry!"* Stella's imagination hears Charlotte speak.

*"Okay, sweetie, we will have our sandwich on the bench across from Frederick's. We can listen to that nice old gentleman in the red flannel suit ringing his bell, begging for money."*

*"That sounds good."* Stella looks down at Charlotte and sees her dark, staring eyes and her Mona Lisa smile.

*"Charlotte, I can remember a time when we lived in New England. The trees looked so comfy in white flannel jackets. People were never in a rush; everyone lived more casually. Christmas was not as commercialized then. People are greedy, ungrateful fools now. They think only of themselves. Just look at these people. Don't they realize that there is so much more to life? You know that life is more than just buying the required token; it is giving of one's self."*

*"Stella, get your mind back on track."*

*"Oh, Charlotte, I know I do not have much time left. The clinic doctor said this cancer could kill me in six months, six weeks, six days, anytime. I know I must find the right person to care for you. But, it cannot be just anybody; it has to be someone who will think not only of themselves, but of others as well. I know you like Barney, Charlotte, but that cigar smoke is dreadful. We will keep looking, I know that soon we will find someone special."*

As Stella ponders her thoughs silently, the local beat cop suddenly accosts her.

"Lady, get off my beat."

"Officer, I know I am not allowed to sleep on this bench, but if you will allow me to rest my weary bones, I will be moving along shortly." Stella, knowing it is wrong for this man to harass her, protests mildly.

"Look, lady, I don't 'llow no scum or low-life on my beat. You'll have ta pick up dem bags a garbage an go somewheres else."

"I want to rest. I said I would move on in a minute." Stella asserts as a crowd begins to gather.

"Look, tramp, in case yer deaf, I said I don't 'llow the likes of yous on my beat; now scram before I run ya in on a vagrancy charge. Get the hell outta here an take yer trash with ya!" The police officer threatens Stella with his angry black nightstick as she slowly picks up her treasures.

A young man in a wheelchair who had watched the confrontation rolls up to Stella as she saunters from the park.

"Ma'am, I saw the way that officer treated you and I would like to apologize. I used to be a cop myself until the accident."

Stella, glancing down to her right, sees sharp blue eyes smiling in a somber, dark-skinned face. "It is all right young man I am used to it."

"No, please, let me buy you a cup of coffee to make up for it. We both know it wasn't right." The young man's voice implores Stella to join him.

Reluctantly, Stella accepts, finding it hard to be rude to this, enthusiastic young man.

Seated in a nearby coffee shop, the young man introduces himself. "I'm Anthony Roberts; my friends call me Tony."

Stella cautiously receives his outstretched hand reaching across the table, shaking it gingerly. "I am Stella."

"Well, Stella, pleased to make your acquaintance. Diverse groups of people are out on the streets these days. It must be the holidays that bring them out. Rich, snobbish women in their furs are pruchasing needless gifts for people who probably already have everything. The spikers in black leather with all those metal studs are so-called nonconformists keeping up with the latest fads. The holidays really affect people. People, normally compassionate and casual, are all speeded up with a reverent disregard for everything and everyone around them. Me. I'm inconvenienced, moving more slowly, I am forced to take notice of things I thought mundane before. I was really feeling sorry for myself until my wife kicked my butt—I'm sorry, Ma'am; she opened my eyes, my heart. April, that's my wife, she's three months pregnant with our second child; our daughter was killed in the accident. Well, she made me realize how enjoyable life is and can be. She teaches at a special education school. I go there three days a week; the other two, I'm in physical therapy. You know, those kids are terrific, accepting me as I am. They don't see these wheels as anything more than a mode of transportation. Stella, I've forgotten my manners; you've got to excuse me; April says when my button gets pushed I can't be turned off. Enough about me. What about you? Do you have a family?"

Stella, naturally skeptical about people, yet feeling as though Tony were familiar, replies, "Yes, I once had a family. My husband died shortly after I gave birth to his son. Oh, he was such a proud father, bragging to anyone who would listen. Much like you, Tony." Stella's laugh-lined eyes glisten as she recalls a fond memory.

"What about your son? Where is he?" Stella notices the interest and concern in Tony's inquiries.

"My son, who was born in France, enlisted in the army seven years after we came to America. He was so proud and dignified in his uniform. His father would have been pleased." Stella answered, suddenly pleased that this young

man was listening. "He was killed three months after he was sent to Viet Nam on September seventeenth. Oh, I will never forget the day I received the telegram." Sadness ages Stella's already age-worn face.

"Say, Stella, what are you doing for Christmas? I would like you to meet April. We don't have much company and Christmas is only two days away, and my daughter's room is so empty. April sure could do with someone other than me to talk with. Come on, Stella, say you will!"

Stella tells Tony she really does not want to impose. "After all, how can you ask me when you haven't asked your wife? Maybe, I shouldn't. No, it is better for me not to."

"Don't be so quick to say no. Tell ya what, I'll phone my wife right now. I'm sure it'll be okay. She'll say yes quicker than I invited you. I'll be right back." Tony wheels himself out before Stella has a chance to protest.

Stella's first thought, as Tony wheels himself outside to the phone booth, is of how convenient the world has become. Tony is able to use the telephone without trouble because one of the phone booths is lowered for use by children and those in wheelchairs.

Stella, glancing at her bags to her left, fancies, *"Oh, Charlotte, what am I getting myself into? What am I doing?"* as she unconsciously nibbles an already short fingernail.

*"Everything will be okay. He seems like such a fine young man, so open and honest. He's so nice."*

*"What will his wife think when this young man brings home an old lady who is dressed in dirty old rags even the Goodwill would throw out?"* Stella worries.

*"Now, Stella, this gentleman has accepted you as you are, surely his wife will do the same."* Charlotte reassures Stella.

"Stella," the man's excitement apparent as he wheels himself back to the table, "everything's set, if you'll agree. April says everything will be fine." Tony flashes his most convincing smile. "April wanted me to ask if ham would be okay for Christmas dinner. Oh, Stella, please say you will!"

"But, Tony, does your wife know that I'm a bag lady? Did you tell her about my clothes?" Stella asks, still fearful, now of rejection—of having her anxious hopes shattered.

"What clothes, Stella?"

Instantly, Stella knew all would be well, reassuring Tony that she would be more than happy to share this special holiday with him and his wife.

Tony phones a taxi to take them home.

Stella considers how pleasantly the word HOME had rolled off of Tony's tongue. Her home had been destroyed by fire over five years ago. She was lucky to have retrieved what she could. *"Thank God Charlotte had been saved."*

The ride relaxed both Tony and Stella. At nine they reached a small farm on the outskirts of the valley. Stella, relaxed and drowsy, is welcomed by a lovely brunette with eyes the color of fresh grass just laundered by the rain.

"Oh, Stella, I feel as though I already know you. Tony told me such nice things. I'm very pleased to meet you; welcome to our home. You're tired; this room is yours," invites April.

Stella sees a lovely canopy bed and almost falls asleep just looking at it. "Is there a place I can wash up?"

"I know you're tired. The bathroom is on your left through the yellow door." April points the way as Stella shuffles her tired feet on the plush carpeting in the hallway.

"Thank you, dear. Would you both mind if I went directly to bed? I cannot believe how tired I am."

As Stella feels herself almost floating to the bathroom, she hears April tell her husband how glad she is that he invited such a lovely lady home for the holidays. She feels her heart quiver.

Stella, snuggling into the welcoming covers, looks at her bags standing like lone sentinels in the corner of the room. *"Charlotte, you are home now."* She falls asleep, secure in the feeling that she has done the right thing.

Stella does not awaken until the sun is high in the west. Startled at first, she quickly remembers her surroundings. She begins to cough uncontrollably, as her doctor predicted. April rushes in, "Oh, Darling, are you all right? Should I call a doctor? Is that blood on your hanky? I'm calling the doctor right now!"

Stella, grabbing gently at April's arm, begs her not to call. She explains she has cancer, expressing her desire to be treated normally, instead of like an invalid. She tells April she wants to die anywhere other than a hospital. Somehow, Stella gets through to April, knowing instinctively that she is understood.

"It's Christmas Eve, are you up to joining Tony and me for dinner? If not, I can bring dinner to you." Stella hears the compassion in April's voice.

"I will rest for now, if you are sure you do not need my help in the kitchen. If I rest now in this lovely little bed with its frothy white canopy, I am sure I can join you for dinner."

"Okay, darling, you just lay quietly. I'll be back in a jiffy with tea and toast."

Stella consumes the tea and toast slowly, savoring the pleasure of all that is being done for her. She naps after her light brunch and a little small talk with April.

Upon wakening, Stella feels more tired than when she had fallen asleep. Noticing a stain of blood on her pillow, she immediately turns the pillow over,

not wanting to alarm April needlessly. *"Well, Charlotte, I think it is time to say good bye."*

*"Stella, we have had good times and bad, but we have always stuck together. Thank you. I do believe you have found the perfect home for me."* Stella, feeling comfortable that Charlotte is happy, resolves her fear of dying.

Stella calls to April and Tony, seeing fear on their caring faces.

"Please let me talk." Stella begs. "Listen very carefully."

She sees their heads bending to hide the sorrow in their eyes.

"My name is Estella Anne Marie Dumande; I was born in France, eighty-seven years ago in my father's castle. I married Duke Andre Louis Dumande in the spring of 1927. Yes, I am a Duchess. I want. . ." Stella begins to cough almost uncontrollably, regaining control quickly to continue. "I want to tell you both how much I appreciate your kindness and the generosity of your hearts. I am dying an old woman, but Tony, after meeting you yesterday, I feel I have known you a lifetime. April, you are a rare woman who has a kindness in her heart that comes close to being saintly. Listen closely, I am not as I appear. I am not a poor derelict. I am rich. I have jewels that will repay you for your generous kindness. No, do not speak, I will hear nothing you say. April dear, please bring me my bags and put them here." The Duchess gently pats a spot on the bed beside the blood-stained pillow that neither notices.

"But. . ." Tony tries to speak as April carries two dirty brown bags and places them on the bed.

"No, Tony, for God's sake, please listen." The Duchess reaches into her bag and pulls out a bedraggled doll, whose dress is tattered like sails in a hurricane. Charlotte's eyes seem to reach into the depths of one's mind.

Duchess whispers, "Inside Charlotte are my jewels. Please take them as a token of my utmost gratitude. All I ask is that you give Charlotte a home she can call her own. You see, Charlotte has not had a home for over five years. She is tired of wandering the streets with me. Before I forget, please give one of my rings to Mr. Angone, he is Barney the butcher; he has treated us ever-so-kindly."

"Yes, Stella, oh Duchess, what can we do?" asks Tony.

"Please sew Charlotte up very carefully after you remove the jewels."

"Yes, Duchess, I will. We love you Duchess." April kisses her weathered cheek while tears stream from her eyes.

*"Good bye old girl."* Stella hears Charlotte for the last time.

Stella squeezes Charlotte in fits of spasmodic coughing. Sparkling jewels fall to the frothy white blanket as Stella passes away.

# The Man

"Up, up, time's up, out, see ya' tonight." The quiet man quickly rolled his soiled bedding. While tying the straps he scratched at a year-old catsup stain and said the same words that he repeated each morning for the past six months, "Thought I was bleeding." He filled his plastic cup with coffee so weak it let the bottom show through, "Dixie cup company six ounce." Outside he greeted the cold dark day with a smile and began his search for food. One more day just like all the rest.

His search took him over the same dusty ground that he had followed for the past four years. The last sip of coffee, dribbling down his unshaven chin, the man slowly pitched the empty cup into the path of a street sweeper. "Must be late," he said, as the giant swirling brush played with the cup before discarding it in the gutter. The man walked to the gutter's edge and saw five cups. "Five for seven," the man chided the departing sweeper.

His feet found the trail through weed-choked lots. After crossing each lot, he tried to recall the last time he had worn a pair of socks.

He found himself walking along broken store fronts, empty of all save the decaying rubble left by others who found the empty stores a match for their empty lives. As the day brightened, he saw in a shop window a figure six feet tall, with wide shoulders and torso tapering to a V at the waist, and arms and hands so strong that no iron could bind them. Dressed in a dark grey suit, tailored to fit a man such as he, he wore shoes of black glove leather, white silk shirt, red tie. Without a word he slowly passed from sight as the man walked passed the broken window

At noon he lined up for a place at a table filled with food. Before him was a sandwich of day-old white bread and grape jelly, and another of brown day-old bread filled with dry cheese. Over there was a broken sweet roll whose sugar

coating had fallen away. To drink was a cup of pink water, sometimes called punch by the workers. The man removed his once proud hat, now sweat soaked and dirty, and draped his dark grey coat over the back of his chair. A patch had fallen off the elbow, leaving a dirty hole in its place. "Home made," he said to himself.

After the meal he retraced his steps back to the mission. He knew that if he was lucky, someone might give him a cup of coffee.

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