

**NORTHERN
LIGHTS**

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By the Students of
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Contributors

Jessica Audin
Kathy Benser
Andy Bilodeau
Sue DeKolver
Sandy Gibbons
Sue Harter
Kathleen LaPrise
Penny Mullins
Paula B. Ott
Karen Peterson
Steve Rupert
Daniel Walk

could have stayed just a few moments longer. She touched the precious key at the bottom of her pocket and was grateful that, now and then, she had these moments to herself.

She closed the attic door softly behind her and descended the small stairway back into the world. There were baths to run and supper to make...but the music box went on playing as she worked her way through.

Joe couldn't believe that his day of departure had finally arrived. For years he had watched many good friends come and go. For months he had been counting the days, and at long last, his separation from active duty was becoming a reality. This was the day he would be allowed to leave the less than routine style of Navy life behind and head for home where he could try to recapture the simplistic lifestyle of days gone by. There would be no more quarters, no more inspections, no more uniforms, no more "yes Sirs," no more third rate meals, and most of all, no more of the indignations resulting from the frivolous duties which are bestowed upon all military personnel.

Once each and every meticulous chore of the checking out process had been completed, he felt as if he had been overdosingly shot up with some sort of new-fangled freedom drug. His feelings of happiness stretched far beyond any points of reality, and yet, he somehow managed to savor every joyous moment of it.

Laborously slinging an overstuffed seabag over his shoulder, he said his last farewells and was on his way. He slowly made his way to the quarterdeck, where his Naval career was to catch its last gasping breath of life.

Arriving on the quarterdeck, he took a few last glimpses of the hot Virginia sun and facing the officer of the deck, he stood at attention as well as his burdensome seabag would allow. "Request permission to go ashore." The officer of the deck smiled, shot out a very crisp salute and replied "permission granted". Two bells rang out loud and clear and his departure was announced over the ship's loudspeaker. "MM3 Gehrend... plank owner...departing." A final bell was heard as he stepped onto the gangplank, and with a pseudo feeling of pride, he made his way to the pier.

His feet planted on firm ground once again, he began walking towards the main gate where his taxi would be waiting, but an uncontrollable urge forced him to set his seabag down and face the ship one last time. He felt compelled to catch one last glimpse of the monstrous grey beast which had completely devoured three years of his life. "Strange" he thought, "it used to anger me to look at that damn ship, but now, all I can feel is

pity...pity for the poor soul who will take my place.

Placing the seabag on his shoulder once again, he turned and started on his long trek down the pier.

TACTLESS

by Paula B. Ott

I asked her if
she liked my sweater...
She said it was nice, but
the blouse looked better.

My haircut was cute and...
just the right style.
But the one in the book
was sure to beguile.

My green seemed serene,
so totally sublime.
But I should see her
BLUE kitchen sometime.

"It was so good talking
with you," I said.
Though I secretly wished
she would please drop dead.

But I sure didn't want
to follow her act.
'Cause I KNEW I would certainly
use less tact.

tiny, blue sky showed not a trace of a cloud.

The box stood squarely on four tiny legs that bent gracefully down and out from its base and, on one side of the treasure, a silver post from the inside ended flush with the wood and beckoned the lady to insert the key.

With worn and trembling fingers she reached into her pocket and withdrew the fragile key that was always carried with her. She inserted it into the music box and carefully wound it six full turns, then returned the key to her pocket and opened the painted lid.

Instantly the quiet attic was filled with tiny notes, expertly combined into a sweet, yet sad, song. She closed her eyes and the music seemed to engulf her, flooding her mind with the memories that she held so very dear.

And she recalled the day that her husband had brought the tiny box home...an anniversary present for the woman that he loved. How long had he been dead now...six, seven years? How the time seems to fly when there are children to raise. It had been so much easier when he had been there...decisions less costly, bills less of a fear. The days were so long now, with no time to herself. Pack the kids off to school, don't be late for your job, hurry home to make supper, drag the family off to bed...and somehow the washing and cleaning were supposed to do themselves.

She sighed heavily and closed the tiny, wood lid. The heat and the darkness were closing upon her as she turned and placed the music box back into the chest. Outside she could hear the children clammering back from their summer hike and she knew they'd be hungry and dirty and tired.

Straightening her apron and gathering her thoughts, she slowly made her way back to the attic door. Pausing for a moment, she glanced back at the chest and the warm, familiar memories that the attic encanced. If only she

The Music Box by Kathy Benser

She made her way up the narrow, winding steps in the semidark of the late afternoon and felt the summer heat press down upon her. At the top of the stairway an old door, smothered with age, cut off the attic from the rest of the house. In the dim, buffered light, its scalloped wood and dusty grooves looked deeper and richer in an antiqued sort of way.

She passed through the door and softly closed it behind her, perhaps so as not to disturb the old memories or the dust that had settled about. The attic was quiet and warm and familiar. Its wallpaper was tattered and stained and worn, reflecting a soft glow from a tiny, west window beyond which the sky was patterned a bright orange. In another short hour, the sun would be set and darkness would force her to leave the small room.

Turning slowly, she drifted past the boxes of old ornaments and clothes that the children had long since outgrown. Past the photograph albums and bolts of old cloth...past the spot where the aging rug had worn through to show the wooden, lath floor below her...only slowing to a stop when she'd made it to her corner and carefully lifted the old trunk's lid. Inside were yellowing papers with their corners chewed away, books without bindings and scores of loose pages, boxes of old postcards from a homeland far away and an old lacework bedspread that her mother had made.

She retrieved a small box from the latter's soft folds, closed the lid of the trunk and sat down with a sigh. In the dim light of the attic she gazed down at her treasure, never tiring of its uniqueness or the tiny scrollwork of its wood. On the top was an intricate, hand-painted picture of an old mill with its water wheel spouting spray from the pond. Green, leafy willows danced brightly in the background and the



Pen and ink-"Cougar" Sandy Gibbons

The Incredible Bulk

by Sue DeKolver

Patrick was 23, single, 5'10" tall and slightly round. Well, he was more pudgy. Heavy? Let's face it, he was fat. There was no getting around it. He was fat. He had always been fat, and he would always be fat. Not that he didn't want to be thin. Those thigh hugging pants and silky disco shirts were tantalizingly vivid in his mind, but utterly implausible on his body. He longed for a John Travolta build instead of his Goodyear Blimp look, but it just seemed out of the question. Oh, he'd tried dieting. He'd gone the cottage cheese and tomatoe route. He'd eaten more carrot sticks than most rabbits. He'd had nothing but eggs for two weeks--all he got was a high cholesterol count. He'd tried grapefruit. It gave him canker sores. High protein was too expensive. Low cal too boring. Who could face a life without oreos and hot fudge sundaes? And the Stilman water diet only worked on his kidneys. Then someone told him that ex-lax after each meal would eliminate the calories. He eliminated all right, but after the Stilman flush, his system just couldn't handle the ex-lax push.

Patrick was sure he was doomed to a life of amplitude. Never having girls stare at him at the beach--except in disbelief. Never knowing if his shoes matched--unless he looked in a mirror. Then one day, sitting in the dentist's waiting room, he picked up a fashion magazine and there it was, the answer to his prayers: Slim Skin, a revolutionary new reducing aid--guaranteed to eliminate 9 to 18 inches from waist, abdomen and thigh in just 3 days or your money back.



Photo--"Two Cats" Sue Harter



Photo-Cat in the Window" Sue Harter

Doing some quick calculating, Patrick realized that with a concentrated effort, he could shrink his 61" waist line to a svelte 30" on his week vacation. But could this be true? He read on in frenzied anticipation.

"Take off excess inches where you need to lose them, without dieting--and it won't leave you with loose flabby skin."

Oh, God! It was more than he had ever dreamed. His eyes darted across the page.

"Just step into your Slim Skin, snap the attachment hose to your vacuum cleaner with the universal adapter--which fits any make vacuum cleaner--and turn on your machine. Instantly the Slim Skin seems to come alive with a delightful reducing action on every single inch of your body."

It sounded impossible, but at this point Patrick was willing to do anything to look better. And at only \$9.95 he'd be a fool not to give it a try. The dentist's drill didn't penetrate his daydream of body shirts and trim blue jeans. He had his money and order form in the mail before the novocain even had a chance to wear off. Now all he had to do was wait. With his vacation only three weeks away, he prayed that his Slim Skin would arrive in time. Each evening he would rush home, only to find an empty mail box. Two weeks went by. All he got was 15 pounds heavier and a bad case of acne from all the Hershey bars he had eaten to console himself. Then, the night before his vacation began, as he dragged himself up the stairs of his apartment building, his eyes met the plain brown wrapper treasure. It was here at last, and joy of joys, on the day when he most needed it. He burst into his living

room, hungrily ripping open the package. Inside he discovered a large pair of blue, plastic, high waisted pants with a strange nozzle and hose attached. He didn't wait to read the instructions, but jumped out of his clothes and into his Slim Skin, attaching himself to the vacuum cleaner which had been enshrined in the living room for the past three weeks. Flipping the switch, he felt a sudden tingling across his skin, then pressure, and a tightening sensation. Patrick closed his eyes to imagine his new self more clearly. His thoughts drifted thru his favorite daydream to his soon to be stunning self and he somehow lost track of the time. When he returned to reality, the vacuum was still droaning away, but the plastic suit felt less confining. As he looked down, he could scarcely believe his eyes. He really was thinner! Snapping off his Hoover reducing machine, he rushed to find a tape measure. Yes, it was true! Eight inches had mysteriously vanished from his waist. But this was just the beginning. Patrick spent all that evening snuggled inside his new skin being vacuumed into a mere shadow of himself. By Monday afternoon none of his clothes fit, and with more joy than he had known in years, he walked in to the young men's department of the city's finest clothing store and bought himself a complete wardrobe of slick disco shirts, pants, suits and a solid gold chain for his new 15" neck that was no longer hidden by his usual double chin. Strutting thru the shopping mall, he could hear strains of "Staying Alive" echoing thru his head. There he was, the former "Fat Pat" cruising the city like a rock star. He felt women staring at him in awe. Though he tried not to notice his own reflection in the store windows, he was just too terrific to ignore.



Ink, caricature-"Carl Krog" by Andy Bilodeau



Ink, caricature-by Andy Bilodeau

And then he smelled it. The Bakery! His nostrils flared to the aroma of pecan rolls and chocolate eclairs. Suddenly he realized how long it had been since he had eaten any real food. The euphoria of reducing so quickly had made him forget about meals all weekend. Oh, he'd nibbled on some cold chicken and an apple, but nothing to match the tantalizing scents that were bombarding him now: glazed doughnuts, chocolate long johns with cream filling, persians with nuts. His eyes began to roll in his head. His stomach roared. And then it happened. He felt it in his waist band first. His stomach started to expand like an over-inflated inner tube. His shirt buttons strained, then popped in all directions, followed by shreds of the shirt itself. The \$42 slacks that he had picked so carefully to hug his slim thighs exploded at the seams. And unlike his hulking, green, T.V. counterpart, he was left standing, expanding and completely exposed--save the solid gold chain that now cut off his oxygen, leaving his face a bright, toxic blue. He ran, screaming for the nearest exit, toward the safety of his car. While he fought for what seemed an eternity with the locked door, the parking lot began to fill with gaping spectators. Who could this incredible blue faced fat person be? Mercifully the car door opened, and Patrick dove behind the wheel. But he had forgotten one thing. His skinny self had moved the driver's seat several notches closer to the steering wheel. Now his bulging self was wedged between the seat and the wheel, half in half out of the car. He struggled to slide the seat further back and finally slammed the door shut. The short trip home was a blur in his mind. But as he sat on the couch in his apartment, the horror and dissolutionment replayed thru his mind. Reading the Slim Skin instructions for the

first time thoroughly, he realized the mistake he had made. In the fine print, he found the admonition: Warning--not for continued use over an extended period. Thirty minute maximum in any 24 hour period. Any abuse will void all warranty and may lead to unpredictable results.

Oh, great! Now what was he going to do? The only way he could get really thin again was to misuse that stupid suit. And then what? Pop out of his clothes every time he smelled good food! And what would happen if he slipped, and had an impure thought about a banana split? How could he lead a normal life umbilically tied to his vacuum cleaner? He could just imagine the days ahead. Rushing home at lunch for a quick fix with the Hoover instead of a cheeseburger and a malt. And what if romance should enter his life? How would he explain his unnatural attachment to an inanimate object? He visualized his honeymoon, dashing into the closet to shed those unwanted inches. And the rest of the relationship--well, it was just too much to deal with.

So that was it. He was fat again, and this time to stay. No more diets, no more crazy fads. He'd just have to find some way to live with his size. Somehow he'd learn to believe that bigger is better. Maybe he would understand himself better over a pizza and a beer--a large, thick and chewy pizza--super style--supreme--and a pitcher of beer--with some onion rings on the side.

and stupid. If anyone could pull the car out, he could do it, I assured myself. After he walked around it twice, fury seemed to engulf him. He was shaking his head and mumbling and his face was redder than usual. Both of them are caught, I mused...one entombed in mud, the other with anger. Then he threw open the car door and swung himself inside. That same spray of slush showered the back of the car as he leaned on the gas, and the wheels spun mercilessly. He managed to get a good rocking motion, and as I watched, the back tires seemed to veer to one side. I think he's got it, I cheered. Automatically my body leaned the direction the car was sliding, towards the side of the drive, urging, though remotely that it should follow. But he had a different plan. I was amazed at how logically his mind worked, much more so than mine. I would have thought to ascend the hill to park at the back door. He was now very sensibly trying to back the car down the hill and out to the road.

The car continued rocking. As the front wheels would move up the side of their self-dug pits and almost peak the edge, the back wheels would hinder their arrival. However, slow progress was being made. Gradually the wet mud wore down and gravity pulled its weight.

Only shadows were visible against the white of the snow now as time crept by and hindered me in my outlook post. The snow had let up and the world everywhere looked like a winter fairyland...everywhere that is... except the driveway. In the fading light I could barely see the car backing down, down into the greying dusk. But I'm sure he can handle everything, I said, though I wondered why he had not turned the headlights on. What... what is he doing!! I screamed. Suddenly the car was racing backwards and sideways. Was he gunning the motor? Was it the brakes? Like a small child, I pressed my nose to the window, eager to be able to distinguish the white of the car against the snow. Was I seeing right? It can't be! It can't be! At the end of the driveway and a few feet from the road stood a huge oak tree. The left rear fender of my car was now silhouetted into the tree's blackness.

He stood there in the back hall, then, closing the door quietly behind him...dripping with sweat, snow, and mud. As he opened the kitchen door, he began laughing loudly, profanely almost. D'you know what that dumb car did?! he sneered as he pointed to the foot of the hill. I gave him a blank stare...I didn't laugh. I couldn't waste my breath.

THE PROBLEM

BY Paula B. Ott

I was stuck...indelibly stuck. Darn weather, I muttered...has to happen every spring. With that I turned off the ignition, opened the door and thrust my feet into the cozing slush. Looks like this mess is swallowing my car...tires first! The mud from the drive that circled up the hill behind the house, along with the heavy wet snow that had been falling since morning, had formed a suitable trap for man or beast. I should have known better, I said...too late now...can't move forward; can't move back. Standing against the barn at the foot of the hill I spied a spade. With all my might I shoveled, nearly excavating the tires from their plight. Now I'll just start the car and rock it back and forth, I thought. Everything was so wet. The more I accelerated, the deeper the tires seemed to sink. An undercoating of slush was all I accomplished. This is useless, I concluded. Guess I'll have to haul the groceries up to the house. Gathering two bags into my arms, I began to climb. As I lowered my boots, first one, then the other into the massive muck, they almost pulled from my feet with loud sucking noises. The footprints immediately filled with muddy water. After carrying three loads from the car to the house, about two thirds of the way, to the top of the hill, my arms ached. My legs and ankles throbbed. I was soaked to the skin.

In a few minutes I had gathered strength enough to explain my predicament to him. He looked up from his book with an amused, yet quizzical stare. Looks like you got wet, was all he said at first. Then it dawned on him that he was being asked to lend a hand. DUMB WOMAN! he shouted. Been driving for ten years and still don't know how! Now he was furious, like a bear lured from his winter nap by one lone warm day. He threw his book and eye glasses on the table, and as he got up from his favorite chair, he kicked off his slippers and tugged at his belt. You'll never learn how to handle that car! In the back hall, he thrust his arms into his jacket and slammed the closet door fuming all the while he tied on his hunting boots. Then, he strode down the hill, shoulders swaying with confidence.

I sat there at the window...watching...feeling helpless



Ink, caricature-"James LaMalfa" by Andy Bilodeau



Photo-"Baby" Karen Peterson



Ink, caricature-"Lyle Espenschied" by Andy Bilodeau



Ink, caricature-"Masad Mufti" by Andy Bilodeau



Ink, caricature-"W.C. Fields" by Andy Bilodeau

ON MY OWN

Jesus said
You got to find the right way
Or you won't live
To see another day
Jesus turned to me
Hey, you better live right
Don't follow me
And you won't make it through the night

So I stumbled
Around in the dark
Trying to find my way
I left a mark
Trail blazed high
Across the sky
Jesus followed the trail
Asked me why

Why do you have
To be that way
I thought I had you
For another day
If you're going to be free
I'll say good night
For you're sake
I hope you make it alright

So on my own
I stumbled through the night
Leaving a mark
Across the sky
The days seem longer
On my own

Daniel Walk



OTHER LANDS IN MY MIND



Photo-"Watching" by Karen Peterson

Maybe I would like to see another land
If I was born in another time
But since I was born here
Grew up here
Lived here
Died here
I see other lands in my mind

Some are white, green, brown, yellow
Others true, others fantastical
As I sit here
Grow here
Expand here
I see other lands in my mind

Some are distorted, fragmented, fractionalized nightmares
Others ring of my past
But since I grew up here
Lived here
Expanded here
I see other lands in my mind

Daniel Walk

A Trick I Learned From Hecate

I get what I want you know.
Oh, not always right away;
Sometimes I have to wait.
But along this twisted path I've learned:

All things come to she who wait,
And plans,
And conjures.

Jessica Audin



Photo-"Young Girl" Karen Peterson

eyes.

Then, suddenly, she appeared through the haze of the background...her long, black gown blowing free in the wind. He knew it was Gabriel without looking at her face, knew that she would be there even before she arrived. She raised her right hand in mocking gesture...just as he had done when he'd walked out of her life. From her other hand there dangled a rawhide leash, the empty, swivel snap dancing in the light of the storm.

"You should have never left me", he heard her whisper above the wind, "You should have never gone away."

Melting

Gentle, graceful, wind-blown snow jewels
met with clay and concrete gutter,
gathered to a group formation,
then turned to ponds within each other.

Kathleen LaPrise

He turned and tried to set a steady pace walking...keeping a mental tab on the beast as it followed behind, never gaining or lagging but matching his stride. He didn't notice when the first rain began falling till the splattering of drops washed all sound from the air. He was forced to look back now to check the dogs progress...was the rain playing tricks or had the beast edged in nearer?

It was another block before he glanced back once again. The brute had definitely narrowed the gap. It walked with head lowered in slow even steps...unnaturally yet rapidly covering the space, eyes trained ahead at the young man's back.

It seemed an eternity before his apartment loomed into view. How long had he been walking, his ears straining behind him, the rain relentlessly dancing about? He thought that it must have affected his brain, for his home appeared to be fleeing before him. He knew he was still walking, and yet all motion had stopped. He froze as the realization ripped through his being. This was his dream, though somewhat partial and vague. And he knew that the ending that he could never bear to see was lying just ahead and there'd be no way out.

He panicked, struggling to make his legs run and he could hear the beast as it closed in behind him...could feel its hot breath on the back of his neck. And suddenly his front door loomed up before him, grasping his keys he went for the lock. But he knew in his heart that he would never make it...heard the tinkling of the keys upon the cement long before they actually fell from his hand. He turned just as the beast had started to spring and saw the white fangs clearly through the vision of rain, he watched as the drops trickled down the sides of its nose and formed rivers that ran beneath the tones of its

A Listening Ear by Penny Mullins

Jane was a rarity in this world, an uncomplaining listener. And as so many of her friends realized this, she was in constant demand. She never commented unless asked to, and never interjected her own experiences to compare to theirs. She had so many confidantes, you could almost say she collected people. Actually, they collected her.

Like her friend Louise. Perfect housekeeper, excellent mother and practicing bore. Not only was she wonderful, she reminded you of it constantly. But of all her detestably wonderful traits and accomplishments, none of them endeared her to Jane more than her baking skills. Or more truthfully, her lack of them. She was terrible. Her pound cakes weighed tons, her marble cakes had real cats-eyes in them, and her turn-overs rolled over and played dead. Her super-moist cakes were so moist, she ladled them into bowls and served them with spoons. She freely substituted ingredients, her expertise allowing her that luxury. Like bacon grease for butter, flour for powdered sugar, and soda water for baking soda. If she had no milk, she used water, no eggs, she also used water.

Still, you had to hand it to her, she served these monstrosities with aplomb, probably because she had never tasted them (she had to watch her weight, you know). It was amazing, however, that she never took the hint from her own family, they never touched the stuff. She justified it to herself and others by deciding her family just didn't need sugar. The truth was, her children would stop at Jane's house after school, and beg for a twinkie fix, an oreo, even (God forbid) a fig bar. Then with mouths stuffed like the sugar junkies they were, they would plead with Jane not to tell their mother. And so far, she hadn't. Somehow, this had managed to go on for more than three years, during which time Jane had eaten more of their mother's baking than they had. She was sure they could work something out, though. Like the kids telling Louise that Jane was a diabetic, and just couldn't bring herself to tell anyone. Mercifully, Louise was not a gossip. She would

feel sorry for her at first, and then be glad it wasn't her that was stricken. Then she would probably bake her a batch of cookies and leave the sugar out. If that strategy didn't work, she could start bringing home samples of Louise's baking and feed them to Louise's children. That would probably stop them from coming around, but they would harbor lasting suspicions of older women bearing sweets.

So on Tuesday, Jane went to visit Louise, and suffered silently through her tributes to herself, her obedient, wonderful children, and her marvelously loving husband. Jane listened patiently, sympathetically, agreeingly, and heroically for forty-five minutes, until she could excuse herself to vacuum the dog and shampoo the carpet. Then a little embarrassed, she turned the statement around, while Louise smiled indulgently at her less than perfect neighbor. When Jane entered her own yard, she dropped the cookies she had hidden in her pockets during the visit into the garbage can, each one echoing solidly as it bounced in the empty container.

Another "collected" friend of hers, Amy, stopped by on her way to Assertiveness Training Group. She had been in some sort of therapy since 1967, moving from psychoanalysis to encounter groups to est. Now she was in this assertiveness group solely through the efforts of an accomplished telephone salesperson, who railroaded her into it. He probably got her name off a mailing list from Psychology Today. Jane could envision that class, filled with people being pushed and shoved into independence. Actually, the most assertive Amy had ever been was when she fought to trade her over-protective parents for her domineering fiancé. Now her darling husband, who left lists for her in the morning of all the things she was to do during the day. Jane listened sympathetically to Amy's account of her mother-in-law's ever present interference. She had called Amy today, when she found out from her son that Amy was to fix his favorite spaghetti. She had to make sure Amy fixed it correctly, her little boy would spit out anything he didn't like. Amy got her back, though, her

The sound of distant thunder seemed to break the dream's spell, and he gazed off at the storm that was waiting in the east, like a wolf briefly pausing before the terror of its prey. How far had he walked? This section of town looked strange and the streets unfamiliar. He thought in the past year that he had traveled them all, this simply must have been a part that he'd missed.

He turned and began retracing his steps, but the streets seemed to be turning about on themselves. He was moving, yet getting no further ahead...walking, yet putting no distance behind him. He stopped and tried to regain his perspective, straining for something that might be familiar. It was then that he heard the sound off behind him, an almost sickening scrape of nail upon stone...the soft, muffled pad of a paw on cement. He whirled about but the sidewalk behind him was empty. He lightly assured himself that his mind and his early morning drink were playing tricks on his ears in the still-brewing storm.

He composed himself and tried to push his way onward. The sky was growing dark with the threatening rain...black angry clouds that covered all blue. Somewhere up ahead he should recognize something, the town was not so large that one could get lost. Yes, there it is, the old crumbling chapel. He had come much further than he had originally thought...but at least, for the time being, he'd regained his bearings.

There it was again, the faint rustling following behind him. He turned, half expecting the street to be empty, but to his horror the beast's eyes locked with his own. It was there, not more than twenty paces behind him, more of a brute than a dog...it stopped in its tracks. From where he stood, the man could make out its features. The coal, black hair, edged and matted with grey; the massive chest that swelled with each measured breath; the rigid legs, now still, but straining to move; the dark clouded eyes that cut through to his soul.

He locked up the apartment and headed outside, shivering and chilled in the fresh morning air. He had no idea of where he was going, but wandered on in a daze that the dream left behind. He ran it over and over again...like the projection of a film in the back of his mind, ultimately resting on Gabriel a thousand miles away.

"You will always be mine", she had whispered so sweetly...or was it really a threat merely softened by her lips?

And then there was the murder, some stranger in their town, found by the door at the back of his house. Most reports merely stated the cause of death as unknown, but one or two bore faint mention of the possibility of an attack.. something canine in nature, but no details had been given. He had thought it quite odd that, in the middle of town, a dog of such size could be loose yet not noticed by the owner. So massive a beast so as to crush a man's throat before he could even cry out for help. Town dogs were not killers...it didn't add up.

Why was he wasting his time with such reflections? He had traveled three days to leave them behind him, taking whatever road would lay claim to his fancy. And this city was safe from his past and its secret, yet still Gabriel had come here to haunt him. Somehow she had known that his journey had stopped here. Gabriel always knew, somehow, always knew.

"She had known the dead man, too", he thought. "She didn't want me to know but I could tell by her eyes." It had been eerie, the way she had stared at the paper...savoring each word of the account of his death. He took it for granted the man had been a flame that she discarded and he wondered if she would laugh at his own obituary someday. Born of sarcasm, the thought strangely chilled him.

assertive training had not gone for nothing. After she hung up the phone she told her mother-in-law off. Well, not actually told her off, just said no. But that was a start, wasn't it? Jane assured her it was, and for the first time since she had walked in, Amy actually smiled. It would have been more of a triumph, though, if she hadn't hidden it behind her hand.

After Amy left, Jane enjoyed a few short minutes of peace, until the doorbell rang. There, lounging in the doorway, was Bob. He wasn't one of her friends, he was her husband's, but she knew he came to visit her solely to have a captive audience. Plus the fact that Jane was probably the only woman who could stand to listen to him. The way he told it, he was Casanova. The way she had heard it, he was more like Fred Flintstone. An ego-inflated Fred, at that. He could talk for 30 minutes about himself without taking a breath. It would have been wonderful if he were as accomplished as he said he was, it's not many people who have an expert in all fields offering his comments on life. And those comments, they ranged from world affairs, to how to decorate, to how to empty an ashtray properly. Which he did, everytime he had smoked three cigarettes. Never one or two, always three neat butts, lined up side by side, all smoked to the same length. Jane always waited uneasily when he excused himself for the bathroom, he could go into any room in the house from the hallway. He left a trail behind him, compulsive as he was. The toilet paper left on the counter would be neatly hung, or if already hung, it would be reversed(he had definite ideas on that). Clothes on the floor of the kid's rooms would be folded and placed on their dressers, glasses in the kitchen would be rinsed and placed in the sink. The only room he dared not enter was Jane and Dave's bedroom. She had caught him in there once, doing God knows what, and had made it clear it was off-limits.

Bob stayed about an hour, an unusually short visit (most were 5 to 6 hours and at least 2 meals), during which time he managed to ascertain that Jane was on a diet, Steven got a D in English and that Dave was going bald. Jane could never exactly figure out how he got

his information--she just knew she had blundered by the way he shook his head, and the satisfied smile on his face. When he left, she locked the door (not a usual practice) and went into the bathroom to take a shower. Evidence of his visit lingered, he had straightened the towels on the shelf, and had scrubbed out the sink. Jane threw a few towels on the floor, and wedged some tissue, purposely missing the wastebasket with her throw.

Today just wasn't her day, she forgot how close it was to the time the kids came home from school. She emerged from the shower, refreshed and invigorated, to the sounds of pathetic whining and something like the tearing of wood. Her children, with the help of Louise's, were trying to force open the back screen-door with a shovel. She hurriedly let them in, amid the sounds of complaint and accusations of abandonment, so they could fill their faces with sugar-wafers and Kool-aid. After their dose of sugar, their withdrawal symptoms gradually subsided, shown only now and then in hostile sideways glances.

Dave came home from work shortly after Louise's kids had left. He filled any break in time that would have come between the kid's complaints and supper. He told, as usual, about his problems with his boss, and of his dislike of the newly-graduated student they had hired. Just out of college, he would do well selling to other students, but unfortunately, his job was to sell to people. Like he always said, you can take the student out of school, but you can't take the paper out of his brain. Jane listened to his story, never interrupting, just waiting until she could ship him out of the kitchen to get supper ready.

After supper, the kid's baths and bedtime, she waited for Dave to tire and announce his own bedtime. Then sitting with one eye on the clock, she waited an hour, enough time for all to be asleep, and dug into the recesses of the hall closet, pulling out a typewriter and paper. Then, to the wonderful absence of voices, she listened only to the sound of the keys striking the paper, as she related in detail the stories of her day, as only a good listener could do.

Dreams of Gabriel by Kathy Benser

He bolted upright in his bed and opened his eyes. The narrow, pink edging of the sky in the distance proclaimed it was morning and the darkness relinquished its claims to the day. Somewhere, in the growing light, a dog could be heard...its howling stretching out into the corners of the dark, fading into the light that laid hold of the land.

His mind and body still numb from sleep, he drifted into the living room and poured himself a drink. In the quiet light of the dawn the room looked unreal, almost as though laced by the terror of the dream that he couldn't escape. He felt it still yet, gnawing away at the edges of his world...making no distinction between the world of reality and that of sleep...claiming it all as one mass of time. He dropped into a chair, still clutching the glass, and wondered when the dream and the terror would end. Tauntingly, it would vanish, for a month at a time, only to return just when he was so sure it was gone. He had tried to rationalize it and push it aside...yet still it persisted to return in the night. This time had been, by far, the worst. It was all so vivid and unquestionably clear... Gabriel's face in the shadows, the tone of her eyes...and the white of the beast's fangs, masked over by red.

He shuddered at the remembrance, and yet fought to understand it. The beginning dreams of Gabriel had not come as a surprise. He thought it only natural to dream of the one that he loved. But when the relationship was severed, the dreams had stayed on. Running over and over in the course of his sleep, drawing nearer to the end that he could not bear to see. Unwilling to face it he fought to awaken, then laid motionless in bed until the dawn came once more. And he knew that Gabriel had not set him free.

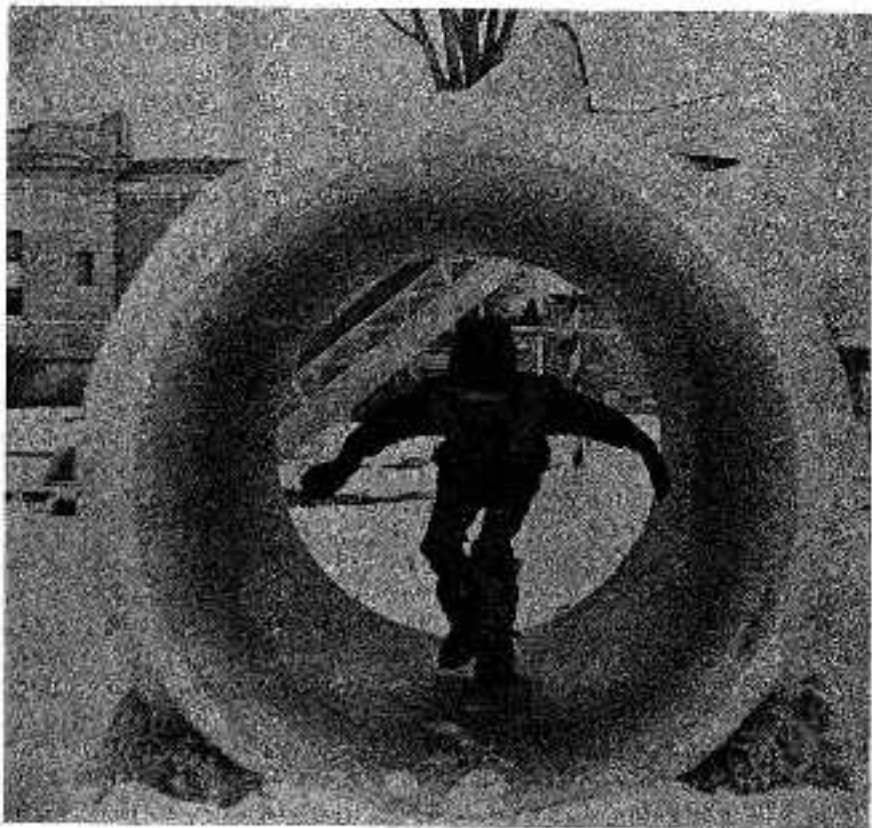
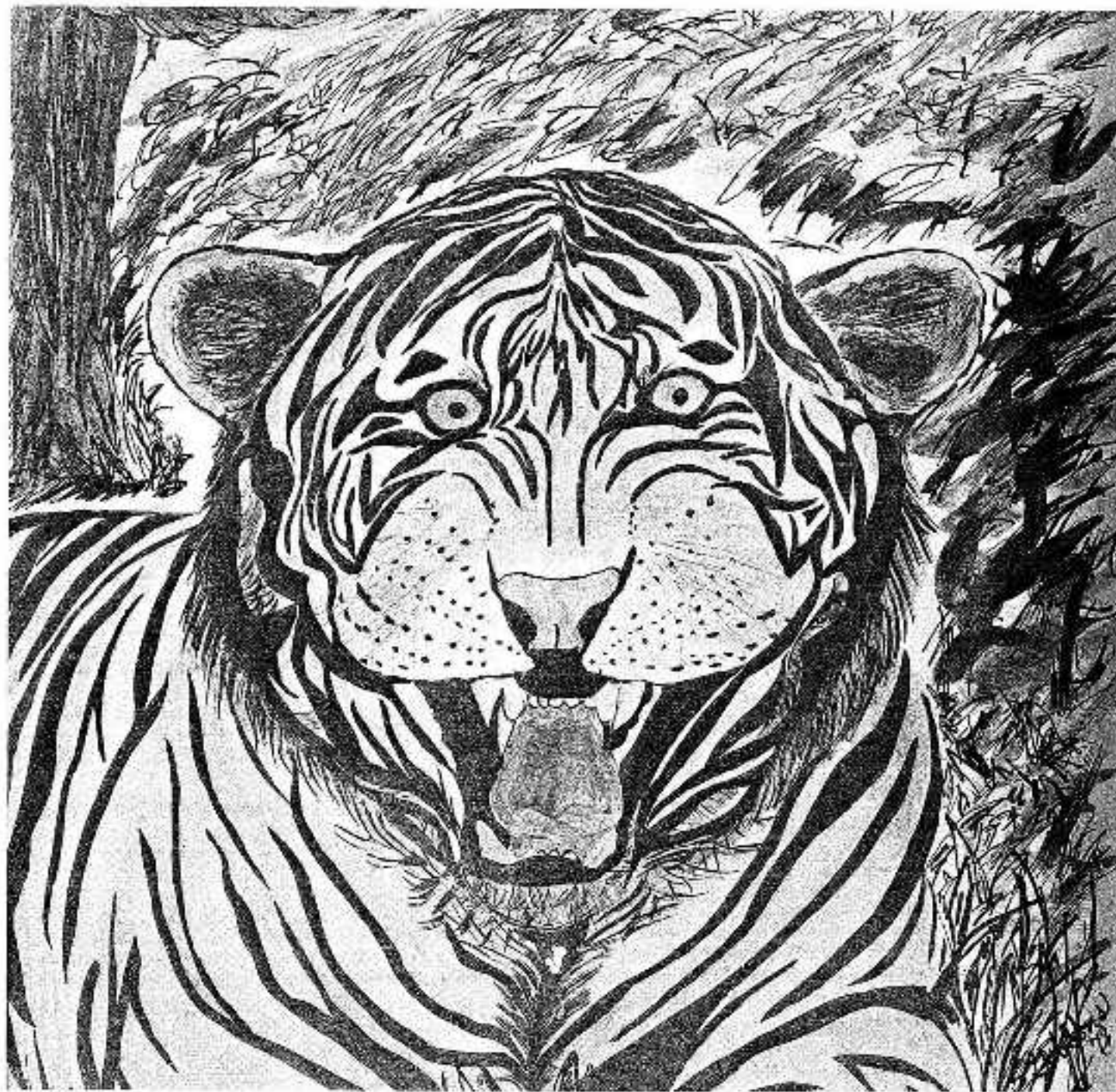


Photo-"Playground" by Karen Peterson



Ink, caricature-"Laurel and Hardy" by Andy Bilodeau



Foldout-Ink-"Tiger, tiger" by Sandy Gibbons