



NORTHERN LIGHTS . 84

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This edition marks the fifth appearance of NORTHERN LIGHTS. The Journal originated in 1980 as the product of a creative writing course taught by Bill Wresch. Since then, it has been nurtured by members of the English and Art Departments and funded by the University of Wisconsin Marinette County Foundation.

Our typist this year was Sue Polzin. Deana Hipke served as a reader, and Mary Jean Bilek assisted with publication details. Students in Art III designed the classy, promotional posters which hung on campus. Cheryl Stank created the block print which appears on our cover. Unfortunately, we could not publish all the entries submitted this year; we wish, however, to thank everyone who contributed.

Editor: Karen Atwood. Faculty sponsors: Daniel Atwood, James LaMalfa, Jane Yarbrough.

MY CANOE, MY FRIEND . dianne smith

Alive and moving,
Paddling,
Rocks, swirls, waves,
Trees, flowers, squirrels, bees,
Sparkling waters, geese,
Foam, quiet,
Solitude everywhere,
My canoe, my friend.

Portaging through the woods,
Birds, deer, and butterflies,
Nature surrounds,
Fire and lunch,
A piece of living,
The forest cut down for man,
Anxious to be back on the river,
My canoe, my friend.

Flirting with water,
Weeds, turtles,
Reflections of sky and clouds,
Rushes and falls,
Sounds of fury!
Uplifting sprays, colors of rainbow
Wilderness Canada,
Blue waters, sparkling waters,
Sunnays, sunset,
Contemplating the day's experience,
My canoe, my friend.

A TREE LIKE ME . anonymous

Dear tree
You shed your leaves as tears
You don blossoms to cover your bareness
You sing in the wind to temper your fears
Dear tree
The images you reflect
Are much too much
Like me.

INNER STREAMS . james cook

I see such beauty warm and true,
it flows from inner streams,
and surfaces with radiance
of dancing moon-lit beams.

It started with a crystal tear
and grew to form a pool
of genuine simplicity
to cleanse the heartless fool.

The shimmering pool began to flow,
erosion wore away,
the heart of stone that cried alone
had melted from decay.

To cloud the mind in any way
will also haze the heart,
they work together in good weather,
they're useless far apart.

THE AWAKENING . emma perry erekson

A bell tinkled, calling the proprietor, as a young woman gingerly pushed open the door, stepped over the threshold and entered the small shop. Her feet silently crossed the carpet. Her eyes were wide as they glanced about. The wonder she felt was reflected in her countenance. She ventured forward, taking in the beauty of clothing draped over mannequins and filling the racks before her. Dainty ornaments, placed here and there on the shelves, enhanced the loveliness of the garments, creating an aura of beauty unlike anything she had heretofore seen.

The shop seemed empty. The carpet, although clean and comfortable, had been worn by many years of service quieting the feet of countless women who had visited. Some came in fear and some grudgingly, not desiring the apparel, but forced for various reasons into wearing it. Others, like the young woman now within the shop, had waited anxiously, often apprehensively, until the time came for them to be admitted.

There was a certain difficulty in finding the way. Some stumbled into the shop quite by accident and never returned. Still others came in frequently, until the apparel was no longer suitable. Some women never found the shop at all.

She knew all of these things. She had known, too, since early childhood that she would search diligently for the shop and that when she found it and entered, all would be beautiful.

Many thoughts darted through her mind as she passed each rack, carefully looking over the gowns. Not having been here before, she had little idea what to expect. Oh, she had heard others discuss the clothing they had purchased here, and very often the price was high, but that did not deter her. Actually she thought little about how much she would pay, knowing that whatever the cost, she would be willing to meet it. After all, hadn't she awaited this day with anxious heart?

She studied the racks, looking over each creation with interest and fascination. Though delighted with the array, she was unable to find the garment she sought. With a sense of

growing expectancy, she continued to search, determined to find the gown that would most become her. For, you see, she would be allowed only one. Certainly, on occasion, a woman was awarded more than one, but that was very rare, and no one seemed to know the circumstances surrounding such an occurrence. Perhaps these women entered the boutique at a particular time, on a particular day, or perhaps it was their conduct after entering that earned them a premium.

The girl glanced furtively about, remembering tales of those who were suddenly ushered out in a seemingly unwarranted fashion before making their selection. She breathed evenly again in the solace of her surroundings, seeing that she was still alone.

Off to one side, she noticed a rack holding what seemed to be a special selection of garments, obviously set apart. She felt herself moving toward it, drawn there not unwillingly. As she slowly, almost fearfully slid the gowns past her, one by one, she suddenly gasped with wonder. Her eyes came to rest on the most beautiful creation she had ever seen. It was long and flowing--yards and yards of white upon white, lace so delicate that she reached forth her fingers almost reluctantly, fearful that even their gentleness would dissolve the exquisite delicacy. She knew, oh yes, she knew! This one was hers, and hers alone. She carefully lifted the garment off its rack and held it against her slight frame. Then she twirled with excitement, filled with an elation she had never dreamed existed. Oh, it was grand! Words could not express the feelings that welled within her. She stood enthralled, a reverent gratitude overcoming her. Her eyes fell to the gown held tight to her body, and as they rose again to the mirror, she was startled to see another face reflected from behind her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I . . . I didn't realize anyone was here."

The shopkeeper smiled benignly, as though he approved of her selection. He was an old man, bent with years. Thick white hair brushed back from his forehead framed regular features. A short, straight nose supported the wire spectacles that threatened to slide off.

"I see you have made your selection--a beauty, that one--and an excellent choice."

She stepped toward him hesitantly. "Could I . . . shouldn't I . . . try it on?" she asked.

"No need for that," he chuckled easily, "all our garments fit perfectly . . . at least when they leave the shop." Lost in thought, his mouth turned up slightly at the corners; then his head shook pathetically. The smile faded. Oblivious to his sadness, the girl moved to the counter with determination and lovingly laid her selection upon it.

"Ah, yes," the shopkeeper sighed with a tired huskiness. "And now you wish to purchase the garment, do you? You are willing to pay the price? You realize the consequences of this transaction?" He stated the questions, rather than asking them, and gazed steadily into her eyes. The young woman began to comprehend the full consequences--not what they were specifically--but that she would recognize and accept them as they came. She nodded her head, a lump growing in her throat. Overcome by the feeling that she would never be the same, she made the commitment that would be binding for the rest of her life. Nodding again, this time with more certainty, she felt her mouth break slowly into a smile, revealing the joy in her heart as she silently promised to pay the price.

The shopkeeper also nodded, an approving look upon his face. He tenderly picked up the garment and held it toward her, pronouncing what seemed like a blessing:

"Here then--it is yours. Wear it with love, with pride, and with wisdom for all your days."

His head inclined slightly toward a small enclosure which she recognized as a dressing room. She lifted the gown carefully and hurried toward the door. Once inside, her fingers trembled as she removed her clothing, wistfully remembering how well it had served her, but realizing that the time had come to put away childish things. She lowered the new garment over her head and glimpsed the radiant reflection before her.

"So this is what it's like--how beautiful!" she thought. An image of loveliness smiled back at her. Filled with an unexplained reverence, she shivered slightly.

She did not look down on her discarded clothing as she stepped out of the dressing room. The shopkeeper stood eyeing her, as though he were somehow responsible for her appearance. Their eyes met, and a current of love and understanding flowed between them. He stated simply, "It becomes you."

Her eyes shone, full of hope for the unseen future she would help to shape. Her cheeks aglow with a new maturity, and a countenance radiating sublime love, she walked brightly to the door and opened it. The bell tinkled, and she stepped forth, clothed in the robes of motherhood.

IF YOU'RE WONDERING . deana hipke

if you're wondering
 why
 I
am sitting here
 all
 by
 my
 self,
it's because
 I
 am
 a
muse
d.

SOLITARY NIGHTS . debbie buettner

Lonely nights
Walking down the corridor,
I see the room at the end,
where I spend my solitary nights.

I curl into a ball
Under the covers
On the bed,
where I spend time alone.

Looking out the windows
At the blueblack sky,
I see the full moon
and think--
 "what about my life?"

Tears fall as I reflect.
How I dislike remembering.

I close my eyes,
My head sinks slowly
Into my pillow,
And I drift off to sleep,

Then wake to the Morning Sun,
Streaming through the windows.

HIDDEN TREASURE . jay kleiber

There is a treasure
Within this earthen vessel
Longing to be found.

NUCLEAR PHANTASMAGORIA
. karen atwood

The thought of what American would be like
If the nukes had a chance confrontation

Troubles my sleep,

The thought of what America,

The thought of what America,

The thought of what America would be like

If the nukes had a chance confrontation

Troubles my sleep.

Nunc dimittis, now lettest thou thy servant,

Now lettest thou thy servant

Depart in peace.

The thought of what America,

The thought of what America,

The thought of what America would be like

If the nukes had a chance confrontation . . .

Oh! how it

Troubles my sleep.

(Atwood's poem is based on "Cantico del Sole" by Ezra Pound.)

SHADOWS & EYES . anonymous

Shadows

Deep dark shadows hide

Everything outside

Eyes

Quiet cold eyes hide

Everything inside



Sven M. Hartman

BRING BACK THE MUSCLE CAR . pat kass

I was in love during the nineteen sixties. Mine was not a normal love, but an affection for a particular mode of transportation--the muscle car. A muscle car was an average Ford, Chevy, or Plymouth, its engine compartment crammed with a gigantic-size engine. (By comparison, the four-cylinder sub-compacts of the eighties break my heart. I just can't get excited about driving a gas-saving piece of tin with digital read-out instruments.)

The sixties brought me speed. No, not the kind that comes in the form of white tablets, but the sort that comes from pressing an accelerator. The feel of power under my control sends quivers through my spine. Twenty years ago the auto makers were in a muscle car war. They knew the quicker a car moved, the faster it would sell.

Auto producers gave their cars and the engines in them names that made my heart skip a beat. Ford labeled their cars with names like Boss and Mach I. In the engine compartment, Ford pasted decals on the motors that read Cobra Jet and Police Interceptor. Chevy's big motors were called Rats. And their little motors Mouses. Chevy put a "SS" after each car's name which stood for Super Sport. Plymouth's model names included Superbird, Challenger and Magnum. Oldsmobile had a car named 442, each digit representing a fact about the car that appealed to my muscle car enthusiasm--the first "4" stood for four-barrel carb; the second "4" meant four speed transmission; the "2" represented dual exhaust.

During the sixties the styling, the decals, even the color of the body paint were meant to bring sheer excitement. The Plymouth Roadrunner, painted bright orange and green, featured the loveable cartoon creature with his tracks running the entire length of the auto's body. (The Roadrunner's horn even went Beep--Beep!) Racing stripes were "in" and most models sported them. Every little detail of the muscle cars represented speed and excitement.

By contrast, automobiles made today are just plain boring.

Their engine compartments are stuffed with pollution hoses instead of humongous size engines. Manufacturers promote their models with M.P.G. commercials featuring little old ladies--that always look like somebody's grandma--smiling over cars that are smaller than they are. Four-cylinder engines, that strain to do fifty-five, are installed under most engine hoods, and four barrel carburetors have been replaced with carburetors that measure every drop of gas.

Car names today are tedious: Fiesta, Topaz, Rabbit, Citation, Chevette and Alliance. Dull colors like aquamarine, beige, peach, and carnation coat the automobiles produced today. Like the cars of the sixties, modern autos also sport decals--Unleaded Only.

To me a car is more than transportation. Bring back the days of 40-cent-a-gallon gas. Let me get my eight miles per gallon. I want speed, a car that can burn the rubber off the tires, and a four speed transmission I can powershift. Paint my new car a bright color and paste it with decals. Fill its engine compartment with all motor.

Bring back the muscle car. Bring back my love!

AA . deana hipke

she lies there
catatonic

(life is so
ironic)

the situation's
chronic

gin and tonic

GOLDEN BLANKET

. debbie david

A huge golden blanket
Clothes Mother Earth.
A reaper removes her covers.

ANIMAL INEQUITY . mary violi

Raised to be robbed of its
frolicky life,
the calf sizzles in the frying pan.

SHOPPING CENTER . bill marcek

A Shopping Center
An excellent promotion
People turn savage

**DESTINED TO BE
HUNG . jay kleiber**

Destined to be hung,
His face now purple and green--
Creeping Charlie lives.



THE WRITER . jessica audin

The writer went out with her pen,
To extensively study young men,
And she found in her search,
Though there's goodness in church,
The fun's in iniquity's den.

SONNET NO. 1 . deana hipke

Never endeavored to write a sonnet;
Never understood what one was good for.
It's just a poem with sugar poured on it,
And if you've read one, you need read no more.
Shakespeare has the monopoly on it--
Penned fifty or sixty, or several score.
I've no urge to try one--a pox upon it!
Why should I ramble? It's been said before.
Frequently do I wax sentimental,
See gardens in faces--roses, and worse--
But stop myself; it is detrimental
To waste my efforts on such silly verse.
But, to be sure, I'd love the sonnet more
If I had a lover to write one for.

THE CHEMIST . paul salfai

At my lab station near the back of the chemistry laboratory
Where the distilled water tanks sit, and the chalkboard
is covered with redox equations,
My lab partner is filling out an experiment report.

I hesitate at the evaporation hood, detecting
From our test tubes, the odor of inorganic compounds
Similar to an open sack of lawn fertilizer.

Smart as he may be, the interpretation
Of this data is nearly impossible, and most of it useless:
I read out to him some vital information.

But he offers his own hypothesis,
Seeming to forget my reaction and its balanced equation.
A state of perplexity materializes, and

The entire class appears to be confused,
And then he starts to titrate again with a new solution
Of acid, and then is confused again.

I recall the metallic precipitate
Which settled in the test tube, five minutes past;
How we inserted an eyedropper, extracted the centrifugate

And transferred it to an Erlenmeyer flask, not to spill it;
And when for half a minute, through the clear volumetric beaker,
We observed the violent, cloudy, acidic

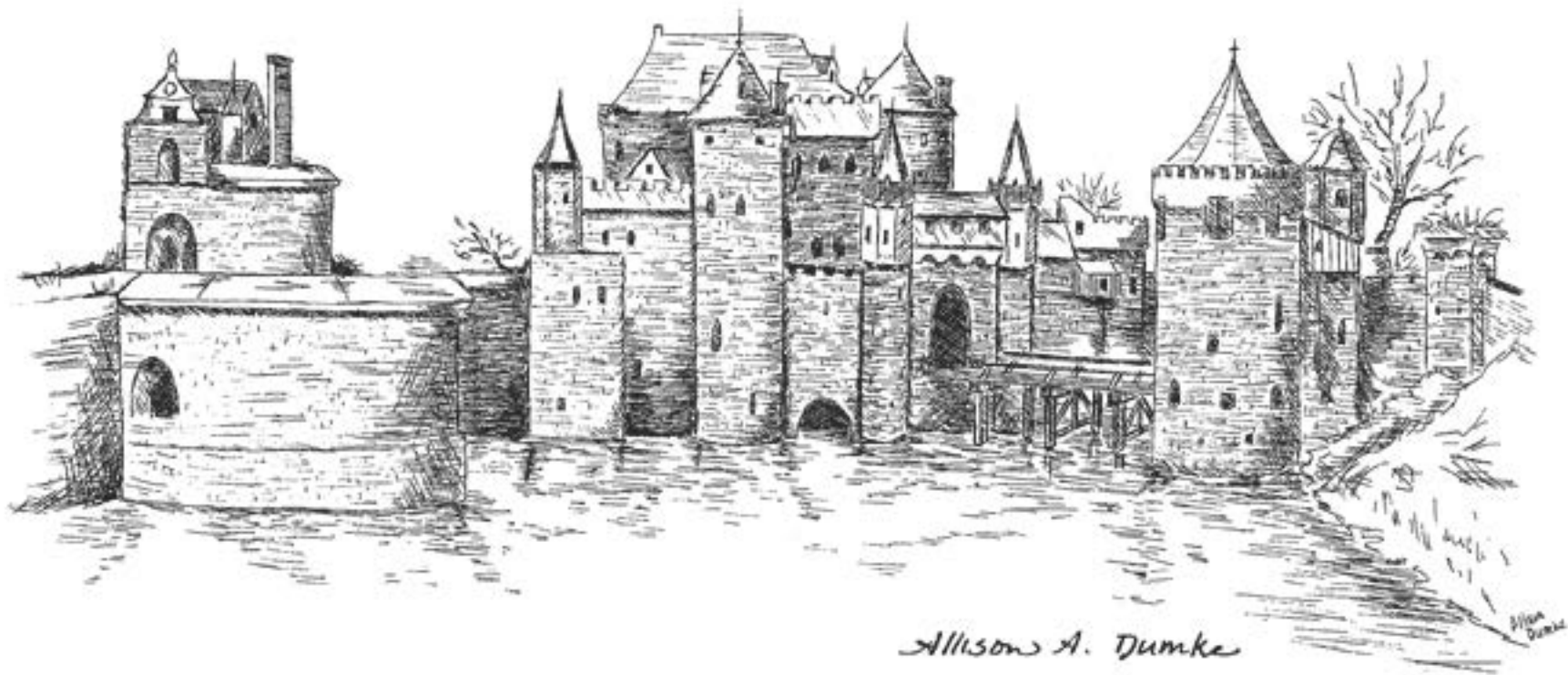
And heterogeneous mixture
React in the hot water bath, simmering like soup
In the thin-walled Pyrex beaker,

And cool there, thickened and coagulated,
For the precipitate was forming; and how our expectations
proved true when, positively,

It settled out of solution,
Sifting slowly for the bottom of the flask
And confirming our predictions of catalytic kinetics.

It is constantly a question, my lab partner,
Of right or wrong, as we had said before. I read over
What I had read to you moments prior, only this time correctly.

(Salfai's poem is a copy-write of Richard Wilbur's "The Writer.")



NOVEMBRRR! . deana hipke

November: the dreariest month. Gone are the blazing maples, the cool sunny days of October. The trees have shed their colorful garb, baring their stiffened arms to the nipping cold. We have gathered their tattered leaves, bagged them and burned them, as if they were the contagious clothing of a plague victim. Yes, summer died long ago, and autumn too has passed away. Winter, in the pregnant clouds of the November sky, is waiting to be born.

The fresh, playful October spirit has been frightened away by a hateful fury that sneaks under doorways and makes the house shiver and moan. The sun has dimmed her light and shortened her working day to conserve energy for the approaching winter, and the dull gray sky sinks lower and lower, threatening to drop the smothering white blanket. Any time, now, any time . . .
Novembrrr!

CLOUDS . anonymous

I am sometimes frightened by clouds:

Are they above us, looking down,

Or are we above them, somehow turned around?

FIRE . james la malfa

Do you know the pleasure of a fire on a frigid
December eve,
Burning hard maple, well seasoned pine and oak?
Watching the conflagration, I see it move
as if alive,
My eye drawn to the undulating, singing flames,
Transfixed, seeing there lemon yellow and
tiger orange bright tongues,
Magenta and violet hues.
White hot particles from the incandescent wood
vault upward,
Escaping to die on the frozen air.

There is a second pleasure, the gathering of wood.
I enter the whispering woods, taking care not
to cut a living tree,
Only those dead and fallen,
For the forest is a holy place,
And this a hymn to those robust forms rooted
round me,
God's silent sentinels.

HOLIDAYS . mark staudenmaier

Holiday seasons come and go:
What a shame--
Holiday kindness, too.

NAKED BRANCHES . julie smiltneck

Naked tree branches
look at fallen leaves
upon the schoolyard lawn.

ONE FLAKE, TWO FLAKES . steve behnke

One flake, two flakes, three flakes, four
One foot, two feet, three feet, four
Beautiful winter.

SIGNS OF SPRING . dianne smith

Spring is
One robin,
One blade of grass,
One tulip,
One bud on a tree,
Maple syrup,
And one shed horse hair
on a pair of blue jeans.

NOCTURNAL DELIGHT · wendy hoffman-hutchinson

For some unfathomable reason
I am roused from slumber in the wee hours
of the morning.
I gather my cocoon-like wrapper
as I migrate to the window seat.

Awesome is the scene
that greets my sleepy vision.
Amid the tranquil hours of darkness,
the heavens have bestowed upon the earth
an encompassing, cottony blanket.

The evergreens and neighboring trees
bow gracefully, as I admire
their raiment of dazzling white.
Serenity envelopes me, as the gentle whispers
of night beckon me back to dreamland.



THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE . theresa krulatz

Truant Officer for the children,
Brainmaker, Backer of Homework,
Maker of Rules and the City's Taxes;
Studying, studying, studying,
Site of everyday homework:

They say you are tiring and I believe them, for I have seen
your halls full of children, some happy, some sad, for many
years now.

They tell me you are hard-working and I answer: Yes, I have
seen the school working very hard, but achieving very little.
And they tell me you are cruel and my reply is: On the faces of
boys and girls I have seen the mark of hatred.

And answering thus I turn again to those who hatefully look upon
this my school, and I give them back the look and say to them:
Show me another place with the courage and pride of helping its
children obtain an education.

Hard as a rock, exchanging a block of wood for a good mind,
smart as a whip, pitted against the students' scheming minds.

Working,
Struggling,
Building,
Planning,
Working, wrecking, reworking,

Under the smirks, thrown by the students, joking with jokes not
so funny,
Joking even as an ignorant joker jokes, who has never told a
funny tale,

Hoping and hoping that under the surface veneer is a foundation,
and under the rules the support and confidence of the parents,

Admonishing,

Tolerant of stupidity, mockery and laughter of youth, half lost,
but never losing completely, the proudness of being:

Truant Officer,
Brainmaker,
Backer of Homework,
Maker of Rules and the City's Taxes.

(Krulatz' poem is based on "Chicago" by Carl Sandburg.)

THE CHOICE

. anonymous

"Don't speak to me as though I were some half-witted child. Answer my question! Is the doctor in?"

"He's very busy right now. If you would just calm..."

"Thank you."

"Sir! You can't go in there!"

"I said, 'Thank you.'"

"He is with a patient now! Doctor, I'm sorry, but I..."

"That's all right. I'll handle it now."

"Excuse me, Madame. I shall wait for you in your office, Doctor."

"Oh, yes...I shan't be long. Thank you. That will be all, Nurse. I believe we are through, Mrs. Lacey. You may dress. Your prescription will be waiting with my nurse in the outer office. Nurse, I'll be in my office for a few minutes."

"Doctor!"

"Mr. Button, I know what you're going to say!"

"Oh, so you know what I'm going to say, do you?"

"Please, let's not make this more difficult."

"Make what difficult? I want to speak to you, but you already know what I'm going to say! Well, Doctor, you are not the only extraordinary mind! I know what you are going to say!"

"Mr. Button, please!"

"Yes, I will, please!"

"Mr. Button..."

"Why did you tell them? Why? We agreed it would be up to me. We agreed. I wanted a little time was all--a little time to think about it, to figure it out, to get acquainted with it. I asked you not to say anything! What about your professional confidence! You're like a lawyer. A criminal can say anything to his lawyer. He can confess anything, and the lawyer cannot use or say anything about it to anyone without the client's consent. I did not give my consent!"

"Please, calm down, Mr. Button."

"Calm down! It's a little late for you to consider me, isn't it?"

"A family can help most at a time like this. I know how you feel, and especially with old people..."

"You! You know how I feel? How do I feel, Doctor? How do I feel?"

"Come now, Mr. Button, you're upset."

"How do I feel?"

"Hhmmmm, you are old and tired and afraid, and afraid to admit to that fear--that fear of being alone and knowing what's ahead. Most people don't want to know what's going to happen or even what's going on. People don't read front pages of newspapers, they watch "Three's Company" instead. They don't go to the doctor for fear of finding out about something. Parents become children and children become parents. It's a comfort having a caring family at such a time. You have paid your dues, so to speak, and now you must let go and be taken care of. Life is a circle. Man conceives life, nurtures it, teaches it, and relinquishes all that he has learned and amassed. It's a circle. At our appointed hour, we all must relinquish. We don't always know what's best for ourselves or we're too stubborn to admit to it. I know your struggle, Mr. Button, and I have made the burden easier for you. Now, simply let go. Give it to us."

"I would like to give you something, Doctor, and if I weren't so old I would. I see now you aren't responsible. You don't see. But, I hold hope that the day you become my age and a doctor says to you what you just said to me, you will see. No! Don't say anything more. A man has few choices in this world--many fewer than you think. My choice, my last choice, you have taken away from me. Good-bye, Doctor."

(This story is an excerpt from a longer work of fiction.)

**CLIMBING INTO THE
SUN . brian martin**

I am tired of scratching my brain
and questioning my sanity. So I'll do
what most would do in this uncertain situation:

Climb, climb away

into the sun,

hide in its shell,

And slowly, but certainly, sort my thoughts.

**TO THE JAZZ
LADY . dan atwood**

Marian, Marian, quite McPartland,
How'd you get that jazz?

Marian, Marian, in my heart,
Land!

Hallelujah!
RAZZMATAZZ!



Jill Russell

PLEASE! FEED THE BEARS . brian thielen

Poor, lonely creature
Nobody cares
Nobody listens
To the white feather bear.

Just for a moment
Please understand--
Can't somebody, anyone,
Extend your deaf hands?
I asked them
I begged them
To show him they care
But nobody listened
To the white feather bear.

Now he has died.
In my heart, so have I
And as they look on,
All of them cry.
Now that they'll listen,
Ears anxious to air,
It's too late to listen
To the white feather bear.

REQUIESCANT IN PACE? . sue de kelver

Sorrow fills me
As I wander through this old cemetery:
Not grief over loved ones,
But disbelief
At the toppled monuments,
Bunched in casual disarray,
As if some bulldozing caretaker
Had decided to erase "Beloved Sarah."

I try to deny the implied disrespect,
But the grave granite markers
Carelessly cascaded down the
 snow-patched slope
Force me to confront the injustice here.

If there is no one left
Who knew "Martha,"
Do we simply disassemble her tombstone?
Are we more righteous than Mother Nature
Who gently erodes the memory
Of fallen strangers
Through ages of windy embraces
And rainy tears?
What man decides who is to be remembered
And for how long?

This perfunctory last rite
Only solidifies
My own covenant with cremation.

Let them try to push aside the wind
As it carries my ashes across the waters.

It will take them centuries
To sift my tiny fragments
From the sea
I'll call
My final resting place.

INTERVIEW WITH J.V. . james la malfa

"The reporter from DEITY is here, your Greatness."

I picked up the emissary's announcement via my audio cilia. Was I nervous. My usually blue opalescent sheen was bright pink, and for a septapod, that means scared. Scared pink, so to speak. If my cartilaginous exoskeleton could have scraped the floor any lower, I would have slithered rather than walked into the throne room. I picked up another sound, a deep resonant boom, probably a six-meter wave. It was the voice of J.V. I was shaking so badly that I almost dropped my recording device.

"This is unreal," my fevered brain repeated, the one on the end of my ventral tentacle. "What am I, Serval of Xicarph, junior reporter for DEITY, doing interviewing J.V.? I'll blow it sure as the seven moons of Xicarph."

Then I thought of what my editor would do if I didn't carry off the interview. It had taken all kinds of machinations to even set up this meeting. If we pulled off this one, we would scoop COSMIC, our biggest rival.

So how did I end up here? Politics. My second crypto-bivalve-interuterine cousin, thrice removed, is one of the palace minions, some sort of middle bureaucrat. Connections, I'll tell you, are the only way you'll get an audience with J.V.--short of being another immortal, that is.

My tremulous line of thinking was interrupted by the arrival of the emissary, a gaseous creature liveried in glowing stellar dust. Quite a dashing outfit. Nothing tacky about this place, I reflected. The emissary beamed a benign thought my way and I brightened visibly. Maybe I would survive the coming ordeal with my para-skin intact. With each passing nano-second, the situation looked a little less hopeless.

"You may enter the inner chamber," the emissary projected.

I bowed low, managing to drop a million credit note on the gleaming marble floor as I strode into the throne room. I looked back with my left eye stalk. The money was gone. Works every time.

As I crossed the white marble floor, the sheer size of the throne room was inspiring. It was actually impossible to tell where the walls--if that's what you call them--met. I had a sense of standing on solid matter all right, but the room would



suddenly go transparent, and I seemed to be surrounded by quadrillions of suns pulsating with every chromatic variation possible.

I scraped my anterior digits and sentient head on the marble and waited to be addressed. After an interminable interval, that great bass voice spoke.

"You may rise, Serval of Xicarph. The audience commences.

I raised my eye stalks, sucked in air with my posterior gills, and replied, "I would like to thank your Lordship for allowing this humble being to interview you. I am also most grateful to your Greatness for creating a local atmosphere of pure ammonia for this miserable being to breathe. The environments are most uncomfortable and make one-on-one interviews somewhat strained."

I glanced up apprehensively. J.V. was seated on a dais sculpted of veined marble. I gazed in awe at the great massive brow, the fierce penetrating eyes that could, and literally had, turned the impious to stone. Or worse. He had taken the form of a gracefully proportioned mature male quadruped, garbed in a shift-like white garment worked with gold in an intricate key pattern. His stately head was swathed in a magnificent white beard, shot through with flecks of gray, which fell over His massive chest like a shower of frozen ammonia crystals. He was truly god-like, which suited a deity. But then, my publication goes for the top--we don't trifle with second rate sovereigns. Unlike the competition, my editor demands class.

"Approach and sit at my feet" rumbled my host.

Breathing rapidly from a mixture of exhilaration and fear, I scrambled up the three broad stairs and seated myself on a low stool. What a scoop! If I could just stay cool and diplomatic. One of COSMIC's ace reporters had gotten itself smuggled into the palace and J.V. had punished it instantly.

"I sense your anxiety, Serval. Please feel free to ask any question you like. This is an approved interview. I grant them every millenium or so."

I did, in fact, relax a bit. My opaque pink epiderm turned back to its normal opalescent blue. I ran over my list of questions, turned on my recorder, and the long-anticipated interview began.

"Your Omniscience, our readers haven't heard much, of late, about that planet You populated with quadrupeds. What is its present status?"

The majestic head turned toward me. A paternal smile graced His comely visage. My luck was holding. I had touched on a favored subject.

"Funny you should ask about humanity and earth. I've been pretty preoccupied with other projects but decided to drop in unexpectedly. Most interesting."

He stroked that silvered spillway of a beard thoughtful in response. I waited, not speaking, letting Him carry the current and drift of the conversation.

"I harbor somewhat of a warm spot in my heart when I reminisce about humans. That's why I sometimes take this form. It's loosely modeled after the art of one of my beloved--ah, humans--that Buonarroti fellow. Now there was an earthling for you. Divinely inspired, all right."

I recorded furiously. The interview was going very well.

"I mean, to have to live out one's mortal existence as a quadruped with only four limbs and ten digits, instead of seven flexible multi-use tentacles like you Xicarphians possess--that's certainly a heavy burden, don't you agree, Serval?"

"Most assuredly, your Emirence," I replied.

"And then there's that little matter of how they reproduce their kind. That certainly would try the patience of more intelligent creatures."

I nodded in agreement. J.V. was not lacking in a sense of humor. Sexual reproduction, ugh. Our method of propagating--cloning--was much neater and certainly had less drastic sociological effects. Ah, well, earth was some sort of test bed, that much we all knew.

The Creator gazed outward toward the cosmos, lost in speculation. It was time to nudge the interview along.

"Your Greatness, if I may, our readers would be most interested in the recent, ah, activity of Yours on earth. Rumor has it that you did another great flood in their Middle East."

"Eh, oh yes, Serval. You caught me napping. Just kicked off several novas in the Milky Way. Needed some more raw material for this solar system I'm working on. You were asking about the Deluge, were you not?"

"Yes, my Lord. I asked if you had made another flood in that area called Mesopotamia. I believe you called it the Deluge."

"Umm, yes, the Deluge. I ran that seven thousand years ago, by earth time. Seems like yesterday. It wasn't a local

flood. I flooded the whole place. Things had gotten quite out of hand. Sometimes you just have to start from scratch."

My recorder was humming at top speed. This was turning into one of the best interviews in the history of journalism.

"Are you ordering another world-wide flood, Almighty? On earth, that is?" I asked. J.V. smiled wearily at me. "No, Serval, no more floods. Times change. You have to stay creative. This time I just wanted to give humanity a slap on the collective wrist, to let them know who was still Boss. They are an obstreperous lot."

"What exactly raised your ire, my Lord?"

"Well, you know, Serval humans have been messing about, in the last few decades, with the possibility of a planet-wide atomic holocaust. That's really preempting my prerogative, although I usually take out a whole solar system at once. It doesn't pay to squash one little ball of mud. Hardly worth one's time, eh, Serval?"

I nodded assent. His logic was unassailable. "What punitive action did you take, my Lord, to put things in perspective on earth?"

"Well, Serval, it was a case of administering poetic justice, if you get my drift. Since humans were going to blot out earth with their technology, I decided to show them what real power was."

"Yes, my Lord, go on," I urged.

"I reversed earth's magnetic poles."

My eyes bulged out of their stalks. What an incredible imagination! In an instant, all of earth's technology would come to a grinding halt. As the poles reversed, all generators, magnetic devices, computer memories, electrical devices would be rendered utterly useless. Until, of course, humans figured out what had happened. Once they caught on, they could readjust their technology, but it would raise hob all right for a few years.

"That's truly a magnificent stroke, your Greatness. No one but You could have thought of that. It's sort of 'one has to be cruel to be kind' type of thing."

"Something like that, Serval. Something like that," He responded with a sly wink.

Well, let me tell you. I was just about breathless with excitement. I could see "journalist of the year" draped across my chests.

"One more question, Your Greatness. How did you reverse earth's magnetic poles, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Why, with the snap of my divine fingers, Serval. Here, I'll show you."

Suddenly, there was an ear-shattering crack. Lightning flashed around me. I turned pink and opaque again. My heads were swimming.

"My Lord," I managed to stammer, "Mmm-y Lord. If you reversed earth's magnetic poles with a snap of your fingers the first time, what was all that about just now?"

The Lord of the Cosmos, the Creator, Jehovah, J.V. threw back his head and laughed, long and with a thunderous roar that nearly deafened my sixteen ears.

"Oh ho ho ho, ah ha ha, Serval. Don't you see the humor? When I reversed the poles the first time, the earthlings were puzzled. But they're quick studies. It happened before. Took thousands of years, though. They caught on pretty fast and were ready. But reversing the poles again just now, so soon after the first time, well you can imagine their consternation. Now that's really funny, don't you agree?"

I had to agree. It was a fine touch all right. However, it was getting late and my instincts told me the interview was over.

"My Lord, on behalf of my editor and DEITY, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my twelve hearts." I bowed low and backed out of the throne room, chancing a glance toward the dais I had so recently shared with my Creator. The room was transparent again. He was staring off into space.

As I left the palace, I shot a glance at the polished bronze door. My old familiar form stared back, blue luminescent scales, seven tentacles, major and minor heads just where they should be. You can't risk offending a deity, journalist or no. Look what happened to that other chap--turned into a bloody quadruped, a human, and banished to earth.

Truly, the Lord is a vengeful God when you make him mad. Human--ugh. I'd rather be turned to stone!