

1985

## Exile Vol. XXXII No. 2

Joan R. DeWitt  
*Denison University*

Theresa Copeland  
*Denison University*

Leigh Walton  
*Denison University*

Amy Becker  
*Denison University*

Jeff Masten  
*Denison University*

*See next page for additional authors*

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### Recommended Citation

DeWitt, Joan R.; Copeland, Theresa; Walton, Leigh; Becker, Amy; Masten, Jeff; Woodward, Teresa; Benko, Debra; Jordan, Carrie; and Hall, Karen J. (1985) "Exile Vol. XXXII No. 2," *Exile*: Vol. 32 : No. 2 , Article 1. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol32/iss2/1>

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## Exile Vol. XXXII No. 2

### Authors

Joan R. DeWitt, Theresa Copeland, Leigh Walton, Amy Becker, Jeff Masten, Teresa Woodward, Debra Benko, Carrie Jordan, and Karen J. Hall

EXILE  
Spring 1986



EXILE  
Denison University's  
Literary Magazine

You of the finer sense,  
Broken against false knowledge,  
You who cannot know at firsthand,  
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:  
I have weathered the storm,  
I have beaten out my exile.

*Ezra Pound*

Spring 1986



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In honor of Mr. Paul Bennett, poet and founder of the writing program  
at Denison, of which *EXILE* is an expression.

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# Learning to Knock

I learned to knock  
When the Mises moved in —  
To that vacant farm house  
On the land next to ours  
And became our first neighbors.  
I invaded their privacy.

The circumstance could have been different.  
I might have seen something more intimate  
Than faces, expressionless,  
Frozen in time like a photograph:  
Mrs. Mise posed by the sink,  
Cuffs pushed up behind elbows;  
Mr. Mise, sitting there,  
Loading his pipe with some air  
Of authority rising from his hot face  
Like vapour from cow dung  
On a humid afternoon.

I ran back out the door,  
Let the screen bang behind me.

"Knock before entering" became the slogan  
After the telephone call from the neighbors.  
Ever open-minded, my sisters and I  
Employed the idea, hanging signs  
From our door knobs, establishing boundaries.

*Amy Becker*

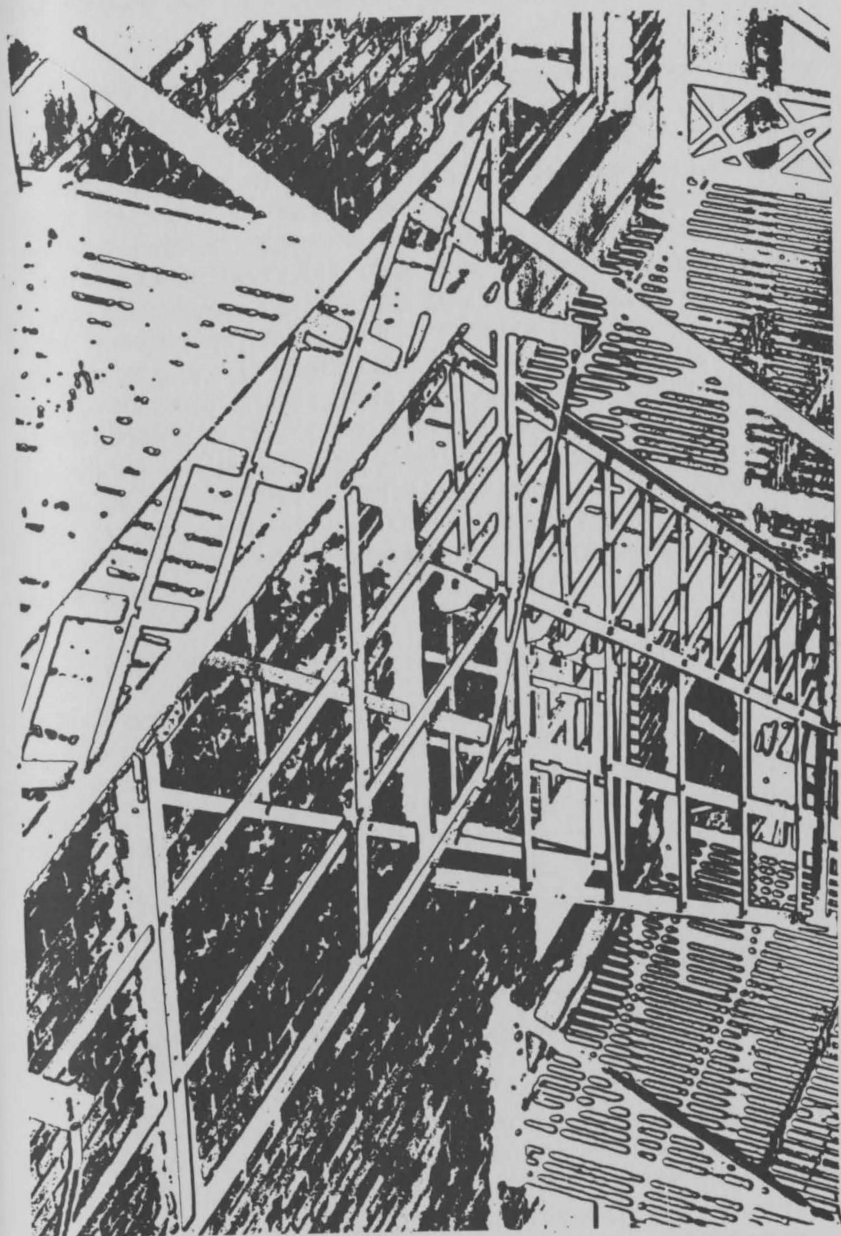
## Syndrome

I could write you now  
of men whose blood has turned  
against them and runs the other way  
while they lie thinly between hospital sheets  
submitting to uncommon colds  
and rare carcinomas because now  
they have no choice,

But outside their friends hustle under cover  
of a darkness they think protects them,  
slamming bodies they don't know and booze  
together in a formula that isn't what they want  
but what they have, ignoring the warnings  
as if they were just more cops  
to avoid. And this is where

the disease is.

*Jeff Masten*



# THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK



# My Mother Wears Yellow on Tuesdays

If I were to relay this observation to Michelle this late at night, she would roll away from me, and in that theatrically charming three-o'clock-in-the-morning voice of hers, tell me to Get-Off-It. If I were to tell her that for the past seven weeks my mother has worn seven different skirts of the same shade of lemon-yellow and accented these with three ivory-colored bracelets on her left wrist, she would light a cigarette, look at the ceiling and make reference to any number of popular complexes, including, of course, the Cinderella, the Electra and some version of the Oedipal. I am, Michelle tells me in no uncertain terms, Fucking-Up our relationship with my hang-ups. We have been this close for seven months. Sleeping together for the last two.

Fortunately, for both of us, she continues to sleep and I keep my observations to myself. Tonight was a good night, not only for Michelle, but me as well. Neither of us needs a neo-Freudian analysis of the others' thoughts to wake up to over coffee in the morning. Too often our morning words are like vinegar. Sweet and sour and more bitter than either of us expects them to be.

(what has done this?)

But I cannot remove myself from the yellow. Tomorrow morning Michelle and I will walk, touching slightly at the elbows, to my car. I will drop her off at the savings and loan where she has worked for eight years and climbed only three notches on the pay scale. Before exiting, she will squeeze my hand, tell me not to take any wooden nickels and ask for two dollars for cigarettes. I will watch her awkwardly enter that building. She is clumsy conforming to the dress code. But she looks beautiful. She knows this. They know this.

Since it will be Tuesday, I will, instead of returning to the apartment, make the drive to my mother's. My engagement for the week. The yellow will be stronger than ever. Driving, I will smoke and wish only for the meeting to be over.

It is late October and it has been raining unseasonably for days. The bright safety patrol rain slickers, stationed two and four to a corner, warn drivers of the children and seem to beckon me to my mother's house. I think of this suddenly and I am four-years-old watching from my parent's bedroom window. I stand on their bed and the bedspread is cool and comforting to my feet. I hear my mother sending Michael off to school and I watch until I see him reach the corner. He steps off



the curb, stops and turns and waves. I remember this. My mother tells me that when I am older, I too, will go to school. I can think of nothing better as Michael goes there and he is my older brother. Tonight, I think of that time and the memories are gentle. I know that if I know them tomorrow, they will be gentle and comforting then as well. But now, even in the late-night darkness, the orange patrol flags are becoming neon arrows that point me not to those times, nor to my mother's house, but back to Michelle and what has happened. And what exactly has happened? Soon, sometime soon, she will want to know this.

We meet first in a bar that shrieks in this neon — in blues and reds — that it is The Stone Cafe. She is between Marcus and William. I am with Tom. Tom likes me for my lack of decorum. He thinks I am a rebel, naturally. He says that this is "cute." We have listened to a young poet read of his memories with his grandfather and his father on his boat "Temptation." Tom and Marcus and William have fallen in-love with his words. Everyone in the bar seems to be in-love with his words. They have repeated key phrases for an hour. Twice, I think Tom is so touched that he is crying. But the entire scene reminds me of the vending section of a stadium at half-time. The smoke. I am tired.

"Such subtle passion," Tom says. "A little much," I say, "Temptation — ?" Tom laughs. He is nervous. He moves his glass in a circle on the table. Marcus and William are embarrassed and look at each other, raising their eyebrows. "Can you believe this shit?" Michelle mouths from across the table. We have just met and I cannot remember her name. But I think her question is wonderful. She is wearing beads that make her look like she has twenty-five eyes and this too is wonderful. Tom has not told me that she handles his accounts at the bank. I think she must be an artist.

I want to ask her about *The Color Purple*. I have read the book twice in the past two weeks and I know that she has read it. I call Tom "Harpo," when he orders another sandwich to see if she notices.

The jukebox at The Stone Cafe is full of Janis, Joni Mitchell, Dylan, Baez and Rickie Lee Jones. Tom likes Joni Mitchell as much as he likes this young poet. He sings "Help Me," to me in the morning from the shower. I love him for this. Rickie is singing to her loves-gone-bad again. The smoke hangs above us like cotton or clouds — whatever — something poetic — everything is reminding me of some strange poem this night.

"Fucking the mind is worse than minding the fuck," Michelle tells Marcus while Tom eats his sandwich. This startles everyone. She makes no comment on my comment. The evening is going stale. By the end I feel like I am all elbows. If she is not a painter, then she is a dancer, I think.

I do not want Tom to be with me tonight, but I cannot set myself free of him. He tells me I am his Cressida. He locks himself in his apartment for a month to work on his paper. He tells me that Hemingway is a magic man. He says his words make melodies. I think of the "Snows of Kilimanjaro" and the man with the gangrene in his leg. I feel the cold bravery and the harshness. I ask for Michelle's number and she comes for lunch.

We drink wine and it is easier than I thought it would be. She tells me that she loves to stare at sleeping people, but that she hates to invade privacy like that. I think I could love her, but am frightened. She is direct. It embarrasses me that she works in a bank. Tom calls to tell me that he has been typing "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" out on the typewriter and taping the sound. "Music man," he says. "Genius."

Tonight, I stare at Michelle while she sleeps and feel not that I am invading her, but that she is wearing her beads and all the eyes are looking at me, into me. She trembles when she sleeps.

(what has done this?)

Tomorrow, when I reach my mother's house, I will find her in a yellow skirt standing in the foyer. She will be happy to see me. Lately, our Tuesday mornings have taken a confessional turn and she will tell me shyly, "I had a drink last night." She is holding onto her life and has been ordered to stay away from the booze. Or, she will tell me, "Yellow is not my best color, especially at this time of year, but it's Margarette's favorite." And she will wait for a mini-confession from me. As I drive her to Margarette's — a final attempt on both of their parts to maintain the weekly garden, bridge and tennis meetings they had when both their husbands were alive — I will search again for the memory of Michael walking to school.

Yet now I hear and see my mother grabbing Margarette by the hands and sobbing that Michelle and I are pitiful. Truly pitiful. I am thinking too much tonight. This makes me sad. I look at the ceiling and exhale solemnly. I want Michelle to laugh with me at my solemnness.

(what has done this?)

It has begun to rain again. I listen to the rain and think of Tom at his typewriter typing out "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." Each drop of rain is another word. He is looking so very hard for brilliance. Michelle feels warm next to me. I concentrate on this warmth, but it will be sometime before I sleep.

Morning, and once again I am awake while Michelle sleeps. The rain has stopped and we are in a terrarium. Safe. At this time last month, I jogged. Robert Dubois of the apartment below us is preparing for work now. He leaves his bedroom curtains open and when I jogged past, I could see right in. His wife, Melinda, stays in bed while he prepares. She is young, in her early twenties, like me. He is ugly and works in a shoe store. This is alright, Michelle tells me. He is married and working things out. This is alright. I stopped jogging at this time of the morning because I could not stop myself from looking in that open window. Stability is the key to this life, Michelle says. At times I think I know this.

I fix my eyes on Michelle's seven plants in the darkness and concentrate on what I will do after my visit with my mother. She may want to give me more money. Tom wants me to be his assistant for his final Hemingway push and I think about taking a chance with it. We are still friends. Tom would look at the window of plants and find a line from Hemingway to ruin them. Michelle just stares at them and smiles.

The deejay on the radio sounds tired. He is making jokes that are not funny and playing a laugh track. He is asking for requests. I am tempted to call and request that he stop the Noah's Ark jokes. He says that two streets have flooded during the night.

Michelle wakes and smiles. "It's been a pleasure sleeping with you," she says. There is no vinegar smell in her words. I feel warm again and make coffee while she showers.

"You know what we should do," Michelle says as she enters the kitchen. I am at the refrigerator. My back is to her. "We should hang a spider plant from the rear-view mirror of your car to relax the people on the road." For some reason this is more funny than anything the deejay has said the entire week. I laugh so hard I get tears in my eyes.

"I like you," I say before I know it.

"Me too," Michelle says. "Me too."

I give her money for cigarettes, drop her off and she does stumble when she exits the car. The wet leaves clustered against the parking blocks look like leaf forts. My brother made the Alamo. I made an igloo for the Eskimos who live in the South. I could love her. But it is still so strange and so very personal. I do not like to answer questions about what I am doing. Michael, my brother, says he is worried about me and wants me to come to his house to rake leaves. He is an architect and is successful. I do not like his kind of people right now.

Since it is not raining, the safety patrols are not wearing their yellow slickers. Their bright sweaters stand apart from the wet leaves and I am

on my school's campus sneaking a cigarette. A single cigarette could make me fly for the day.

I pull into my mother's driveway. She has had Davy, the old traveling neighborhood gardener clear the yard of leaves. There are three trees in the front and their leaves fill seven or eight garbage bags each year. These are stacked neatly in front of the garage. They are a pile of stones. My father gave Davy a hot cider midway through the job. They sit in the den and talk about horses. For the next few days, my father does imitations of this old Black man. He dances around the kitchen, talks fast and wipes his forehead. Michael and I think this is the best.

At the front door, I know suddenly that my mother is remembering these times too since Davy raked Saturday. All of a sudden I am sad. My eyes are hot.

She is not in the foyer when I enter, but calls to me from the den. "Doesn't the lawn look wonderful, Stephanie?" Her voice is deeper than usual. It is more relaxed. She may have had a drink this morning.

"It looks great, everything's so manicured, so nice so lovely." I say this all too fast and my words enter the den before I do.

She is sitting at his desk looking at the pictures again. My father, her husband. We cannot leave for Margarette's until I see them. He is young in the pictures. Two of them. In one he is holding a dog. The other, he is in front of a church. He is smiling in both. He looks nothing like he did when he played with Michael and I in the leaves. Or when he danced around the kitchen. In the pictures, his eyebrows are not pulled together. He is not concentrating. I have never seen him smile like that before. My mother wants me to see him refinished. She is stripping away all the old varnish of those years.

(what has done this?)

"He was like Tom is for you now. Always looking after me. I knitted the sweater." As an afterthought, "You don't remember all of that, do you?"

"No. I didn't know him when you did." I see Michelle at her desk refusing to let the work control her. What we appreciate in our youth, we can appreciate forever, she tells me. At times I think I know this. "I didn't know him when he was young and things," I say. "I'm sorry. I just didn't."

She stands and she is wearing the yellow again. Her hair is gray and cut short. She is slim. She is wearing lipstick. She looks pretty. I would like to look like this when I am old. She lays the pictures on top of each other and then spreads them out. She looks behind me at the wall of his books.

"Tom is making all sorts of connections about Hemingway and the music. He's amazing. I think I'll help him finish up, bring it together." Again I speak too fast and my words seem to go through her.

She looks down at the pictures. I imagine her sitting in their room, reading the yellowed clippings. Moving her finger along the line of his name. Talking about him. Looking in the mirror. Smiling. "Margarette says he's a brilliant young man," she says. She wants so much to give me what she had. What she has given Michael. And I am not sure exactly what that was. Exactly what that is.

We drive to Margarette's and my mother is silent. She looks out the window at the stately homes, at the groomed lawns. I see her profile, her chin slightly raised and in her silence, in her calm I find some odd shards of comfort. For these few moments, I feel that it is okay that Michelle and I sleep curled together. It is okay that my breasts fit between Michelle's breasts like leggo blocks. It is okay that Michelle dreams of sleeping with a pregnant woman. For these few moments it is all okay. We are and are not common.







# Beauty and the Beasts

for T.R. Hummer's "The Beating"

Everybody started chanting it like it was prayer.  
Those stupid boys at recess  
chasing after me like I was the one  
that done it. Clifton — scratching  
lies he knew stood no chance

of coming true, than he did of being human.  
Why'd they do it — all that bawdy singing  
till everybody heard it, and that Clifton, all wild and thick  
who scared you just by smelling him, would sweat  
while they circled around me, smug

with their new discovery, like some  
pack of dogs tearing at raw meat,  
until I started trembling, wishing God and the devil  
would slash Clifton's fat hands for carving  
such torment. It wasn't anger

that caught me. It was humiliation  
that anyone that dumb would love me.  
How could he? He'd been below me all his life,  
so far, it was hard to see how he'd think I'd care,  
ever. He was a beast whipping those boys.

He went down on them, pigs  
all of them, and gave them a slap of the pain  
I'd never forget how to use: how my beauty  
can attract for all the wrong reasons  
and sting, real sharp, when I want it

to; burn, like lemon spit, on broken skin.

*Leigh Walton*



# The sound & the silence (Series 1)

For my future child

- I. As I cradle you  
to my swelling breasts  
stroking the soft down  
swirling around  
your still soft skull  
breathing deeply  
your sweet and sour scent  
called by your quiet breathing  
into lullabies  
keeping time  
with the to and fro  
of the bentwood's graceful arms

Womanchild  
I wonder  
at the mysteries  
behind your ebony eyes  
laughing when open  
making me cry  
at their innocence  
I wonder  
how can I tell you  
the truth necessary  
for your survival

I do not want  
to stir your slumber  
with my nightmares

- II. Though I know  
silence  
is a secret  
woman shared  
for centuries

Among those who know  
a certain obliviousness  
to pain  
is necessary  
in this world  
if you are to pull his fingers  
from your woman's throat  
and not cry out  
increasing his satisfaction  
as he slices your breast

- III. And silence  
rests  
behind the dull grey eyes  
of the girl  
in the third row  
who doesn't yet know  
her times tables  
but already knows  
the value of the silence  
she preserves  
through the forced caresses  
of her father's hands

In the dark  
she is silent  
shivering  
with the pain  
and the blood  
staining her flowered sheets  
disturbing her slumber

IV. And silence  
doesn't save  
the thirteen year old  
w/ thick braids  
and budding breasts  
from summer's sudden lust  
hot and hurried hands  
fumbling  
with buttons and hooks  
and silky slips  
spreading oily rainbows  
on garage floors  
or from  
a mother's tight lipped stares  
at a stomach slowly swollen  
nor  
cold steel stirrups  
and sundering pain  
in the spring

V. And silence is  
shared  
for centuries too long  
among women mourning  
with tears streaming  
like light  
through stained glass  
on the face of a sister  
now and ever silent  
to wash away  
the purplish-brown bruises  
adorning her  
like jewels  
the gifts of a loving man  
accepted  
without question  
as the price of love

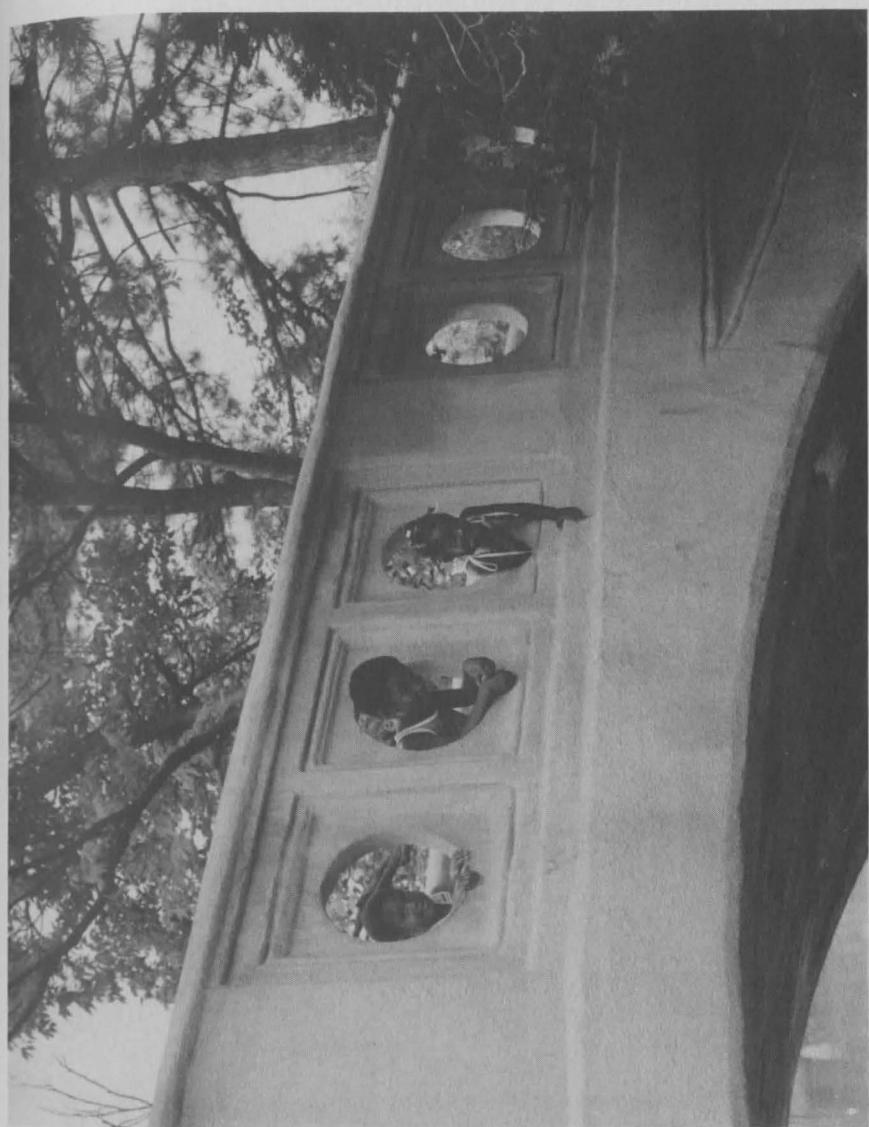
VI. And silence  
fairly sounds  
from the carefully carved face  
of the woman  
not touched by  
the green glowing light  
of streetlamps  
but by  
heavy handed men  
liquor breathed  
and unconscious  
to her need  
to silence  
her children's hunger cries

With her body  
she buys the bread  
of silence  
and sells her soul  
to the sanctuary  
of survival  
when silence goes too far  
and her children  
are taken from her  
by a grim and silent judge  
because no one  
could find the sound  
of her defense  
remarking only  
that her failure  
is the failure of the system

VII. A system that works  
far too well  
to keep silent  
the scream  
of the woman  
with white scars  
from the silvered snail's trail  
of a razor's edge  
applied  
to assuage her guilt  
at not being born  
beautiful  
and with a dancer's grace  
she glides  
silently  
over the edge  
of Miller's bridge

VIII. With you  
small one  
I would break the silence  
giving thanks for the cries  
shattering my solemnity  
At last you awake  
How soon the world?

*Teresa Woodward*





# Tilly

Tilly stooped to wipe up the puddle of stewed tomatoes that had spilled over the side of the mason jar. She caught the spreading juice in a tattered blue and white checked dish towel. While still on her knees she traced the multitude of stains on the yellowing linoleum floor. The symmetry of the shapes was as beautiful to Tilly as the portrait of the old black woman that her grandmother had worshipped almost as faithfully as she had Jesus Christ. It was an oil painting of an elderly Negro woman clutching the Bible in one hand and the shackles from her slave days in the other. The tears that rolled down her cheeks channeled through the wrinkles on her face. Her grandmother had lovingly hung the painting over her bed and every night, before going to sleep, she would kiss the beautifully wrinkled dried lips of the old woman.

Tilly's thoughts were halted by the slamming of the screen door.

"Woman, whatcha doin' lollygaggin' around on the floor like ya ain't got nothin' to do? I guess you done forgot we have four more bushels of tomatoes to put up before the end of the week."

"We, Mac? Whose we? You must be talkin' 'bout me and this lil mouse I got tucked in my pocket, cause I don't see you doin' anything that resembles puttin' up tomatoes. All I ever see you doin' is sittin' out in the back drinkin' lemonade and instructin' them little boys on the right and wrong way to pick up a tomato. The hardest work I done seen you do all day is liftin' your fat rear end outta that chair so you can rid yourself of some of that lemonade."

"Lord sweet heavenly Jesus. Ain't it just like an old colored woman, forever fussin'. A man does everything he knows how to give his woman the good life and she can't find it in her heart to do nothing but complain. Complain, complain, complain."

"The good life." Tilly mumbled to herself.

"Scuse me?"

"Nothin'. We done run outta jars again. Your gonna have to go down to Tucket's and get some more." She had stopped *really* fighting with Mac years ago. After thirty years of marriage even the occasional fits of screaming and throwing glasses and plates got old. Besides, it did absolutely no good because Mac was stone deaf to any words that were displeasing to his ears. And after all, if she was going to use up all that energy fighting with someone, it might as well be somebody she cared more than spit about.

"I'm feelin' kinda tired today . . ."

"Today and everyday."

"There ya go again, complain, complain, complain. I swear to mercy there just ain't no pleasein' ya." He then proceeded to roll his



eyeballs heavenward to address the cobweb hanging gracefully in the right corner of the kitchen ceiling. "Lord Jesus, give me the strength to get through these trying times. Lord ya know how I..."

"Are you goin' to go get those jars or am I goin' have to get them myself?"

"Well, Honey, maybe you better go get em, ya know, my bad feet and all. A man don't wanna push his health ya know. We ain't as young as we used to be, Tilly."

Tilly was all too aware of the passage of time. Of course Mac had never been young to Tilly. He had been twenty years older than her when they married. But in the passing years Tilly had grown so old in mind and spirit that the age difference had become insignificant. Preparing to leave for Tucket's, Tilly carefully screwed the rubber-lined lid on the last jar of tomatoes and set it in the crate alongside the other twenty-four. She turned to pick up her purse off the kitchen table just in time to watch Mac climb the stairs to his bedroom for his afternoon nap. His arthritic legs wobbled unsteadily. He always made it look like more of a struggle than it really was. Pity. That's the name of the game. Always keep Tilly feeling sorry for you. That'll keep her in line.

Tilly cruised down Jay Street on her way to Tucket's, enjoying the breeze circulating through the open car window. She loved driving down Jay Street, being surrounded by familiar faces and sounds. People like Roberta Simpson, with her old nosey self. Roberta was an institution on Jay Street. Nobody in the neighborhood knew just how old she was, but it was a general consensus that Roberta had been around about as long as dirt. She, her mother, and her little brother Sam had been one of the first black families to move to Jay Street. Roberta knew everyone's business and never hesitated to share her wealth of knowledge with anyone who was willing to listen. Everybody in the neighborhood knew that if you wanted to get the dirt on someone all you had to do was sit down for an afternoon of coffee and almond cookies with Roberta. There were also characters like Peapod and Gingersnap Ray who spent the biggest part of their day standing or the corner of Fifth and Jay lying to each other.

Tilly pulled into a parking space in front of Tucket's. She was just within ear shot of Gingersnap and Peapod's latest prate.

"Hey Ginger, man did I tell you I got me a letter from my aunt down South? She told me she was puttin' me in her will."

"Is that right?"

"Yea buddy. The way I got it figgered when the old lady finally kicks off I'll be raking in pret' near \$2,000 bucks."

"That much, huh?"

Tilly tilted her head closer to the open window making certain she didn't miss a word.

"Sho nuff, and that's just for starters. I did tell you 'bout her yacht, didn't I?"

"Her yacht?"

"You say that like you don't believe me, but I swear if I'm lying I'm dyin'. She keeps it tied up in her backyard. She probably gonna give that to me too."

"Peapod brother, that shit ain't nothin'. I got a aunt up 'round Chicago that got plenty more money than your aunt."

"Right, and even if she do, you ain't gettin' none of it."

"Like hell I ain't. Peapod man, I will have you know that out of all my mother's sons I'm my aunt's favorite."

"Considering your family, that ain't sayin' a whole lot."

"Did I tell you 'bout her condominium in Florida? Yea man, it's huge and it looks right out over the Pacific. Out on the beach they got these lil things called sand crabs that come right up to you and you can feed them just like pets."

"Ginger, you full of shit."

"Oh yea? Well suck my dick."

"Would man, but I ain't got time for a search party."

Tilly figured that the two of them could go on like this deep into the night. She got out of the car and headed toward the store, giving a little wink to Ginger and Peapod as she passed.

Tilly loved Jay street. Any time of the day or night you could hear music blaring, kids showing off their new steps while the old folks showed off their old steps. Men harmonizing on the steps outside Clark's grocery, and little kids roller skating down the middle of the street daring the cars to hit them. Just walking down the street made Tilly feel like she was a part of something big.

She and Mac had arrived on Jay street just two days after they got married. Their honeymoon had been spent packing their meager belongings in the back of an old raggedy Ford pick-up that Mac had been gypped into buying. Tilly had never really thought much about marriage but when Mac came by telling her that he had been offered a job putting up fence post in Indiana and he wanted her to come with him, Tilly jumped at the opportunity. She had not been in love with Mac but marriage was a way to escape her prosaic life in East Bernstadt, Kentucky. Although Tilly was underage, because her grandmother had died some months before, she had no one's permission to ask, so she and Mac married right away. The last thing Tilly did before she left Kentucky was take the old woman's painting down and put it with the rest of her grandmother's things. Her tears seemed to Tilly to be flowing heavier than before. Tilly guessed that she did not have the old woman's blessings. Actually, Mac had been a vert attractive man of 36, though he had told Tilly that he was 26. He had thick, slightly

nappy brown hair that he kept tamed down with a generous portion of conking oil. His skin was the color of hot chocolate laced with Carnation milk. His lips were not as meaty as Tilly would have liked, but many other women found them quite satisfactory. But after their marriage Mac's features gradually changed. Day after day he got fatter and balder and his skin became an ashy grey color. His once straight white teeth yellowed and steadily decreased in number until you could count the number of teeth in Mac's mouth on one finger. Tilly had often thought that maybe if there had been children in the house things would have been different between her and Mac.

In all their years of marriage Tilly had only given birth to one child, Ava. But one night after only seven months of breathing, Ava's breath just stopped. Mac didn't get too torn up about it. He had wanted a boy anyway. The tragedy left Tilly almost desperate to experience motherhood. Yet no matter how hard she tried Tilly was never able to conceive another child. Eventually Mac suggested that she sleep in the guest room. It was just as well for Tilly, Mac had never bothered to make it worth her while anyway.

By the time Tilly reached Tucket's, the Saturday night crowd had already started to gather. Some years back Tucket's had become the official hangout for the fun-loving men and women of Jay street. It was a laidback atmosphere where people could forget about the hard labor of the past week, financial worries, family troubles, and just enjoy living. The weekly checker game had also become a tradition. The men would play while the women watched and signified.

"Fred, whycha move your man over there? Ya should have moved it right over there where I told ya to."

"Will ya hush Vera? Ya makin' me lose my concentration."

"Whatcha concentratin' with, Fred? Everybody knows you ain't got the sense God gave a grape. You should let me play 'against ya. I'd give ya a run for your money."

"Nothin' doin', Vera. First time we let a woman in on the game she'll try to take over. The next thing we'll look up and we'll be playing the game with yellow and purple pieces on a calico board."

Vera Washington was always making small talk with the men — when she wasn't taking them to bed. Vera had a reputation for sleeping with other women's husbands. Back about 20 years ago Vera and Mac had been keeping time together. Mac would get off work on Friday, pick up Vera, and then Vera and his paycheck would drive down to Oxford for the weekend. He'd take her around town, bar hopping and treating her like she was the Queen of Sheba. Then on Sunday morning he'd come dragging in wanting to know where his breakfast was. Tilly only let this go on for a few weeks, then she quickly and forcefully put a stop to it. One bright August Sunday, she waited patiently on the big,

overstuffed davenport in the front room for Mac to return from one of his weekend excursions. On her lap she held a double-barreled shotgun that she had borrowed from old man Harris down the street. She told him that her basement was full of rats and she was going to use the gun to blast them. When Mac walked in the door the only thing visible to him was the two holes in the end of the shotgun. Then Tilly, in the gentle, unemotional tone that had become her style, simply informed Mac that if she ever heard tell of him and Vera doing any kind of swinging together she was going to blow his balls off — and that was the end of that.

It wasn't that Tilly particularly minded that Mac was having an affair but she'd be damned if he was going to be messing with a woman that was ten years older than her and looked like she was second kin to the horse family. For Tilly it was one thing for her husband to be adulterating with a sweet young thing but it was quite humiliating for him to be stepping out on her with an old, ugly horse.

Tilly pried herself away from the checker game and walked up to the service counter.

"What can I do ya for, Tilly Bell?"

Tilly loved for Tucket to call her Tilly Bell. It made her feel young and beautiful again.

"Well Tucket, I need some more jars. We done ran out again."

"That man got you canning more tomatoes? That's a damn shame. Let me tell ya, if I had a good lookin' woman like you livin' in my house — well, let's just say the kitchen would not be the room we'd be spendin' all our time in."

"Elroy Tucket, you better hush your fresh mouth, I'm a married woman. Besides, I bet you say that very same line to all the broken down old ladies that come in her."

"Well, Tilly Bell, if all the broken down old ladies that came through that door looked as fine as you, I'd shonuff be complimentin' them all. But, I been tendin' this store for close to 42 years now and I have yet to see a woman in this town that could hold a candle to you."

"Hush now 'fore I get to turning all red in the face."

Tilly had often fantasized about having a torrid affair with Tucket. But as quickly as the thought entered her mind she would just as quickly brush it aside. From past experience she had found that the dream itself was much more pleasant than the actual fulfillment of the dream.

"Can I put these in the car for ya, Tilly?" Tucket had already picked up the case of jars and started heading for the door without waiting for her answer.

"Why thank ya, Tucket, that's mighty sweet of ya."

Tucket loaded the case of bell jars into the trunk of Tilly's car. He turned and gave her a playful pat on the rump and strutted toward the

front door of the store, stopping once to sit Exodus Jones, the neighborhood drunk, upright on the stoop. Tilly stood by the car a little longer to watch Tucket's petite frame disappear inside the store. She admired the way his pants bagged on his slightly flat rearend.

Tilly slid into the front seat of the car and slammed the door. The noise aroused a flicker of life in Exodus. His left eye lid fluttered as he slowly fell back over on his side. He drew his hungry looking body into a semicircle and drifted back into his comatose state — never once spilling so much as a drop of his bottle's precious contents.

Tilly drove slowly down Jay street, her eyes gliding from one side of the street to the other. On the right of her she watched a set of plump twin boys, with sandy colored afros and dirty noses, riding double on the banana seat of an old, rusty, blue bicycle. Tilly wondered who their father was. She'd have to ask Roberta. She knew their mother was Marta Calloway. She also knew that if their mother was Marta then their daddy had to be white. That was the only type of men Marta liked. If they were white and clean, she was satisfied. Most of the folks on Jay Street detested Marta because of her preference in men and they treated her like a leper. The men felt insulted and the women used Marta's situation as a conversation piece. Anytime they were hard pressed for something to talk about they could always bring up Marta. That subject was good for at least a couple of hours of talk. Tilly didn't care one way or the other. As far as she was concerned, if Marta wanted to sleep with white men and risk catching some kind of white disease, then that was her business. After all she had a black man and he was no prize either.

Tilly pulled the gold Pontiac up to the curb in front of 321 North Jay. She noticed that some of the shingles on the roof were starting to slide. She'd have to get one of Lydia's boys to fix the roof for her. She had just payed out \$75.00 to get the hole in the front porch patched up. It was all Frita's fault. If she hadn't been trying to jitterbug, with her fat self, she never would have fallen through the loose boards on the porch and Tilly wouldn't have had to get it fixed until at least next winter. Lord, she was tired of pouring money into that old toreup house. She had never liked the house, but it had been cheap so Mac bought it. Tilly didn't bring up the idea of moving anymore. She knew Mac would scoff at the mere suggestion of finding a new place to live. Besides it would probably kill him to leave his funky garden.

Tilly carried the case of jars inside and set them on the kitchen table. She heard Mac struggling down the stairs before she actually saw him. She noticed that the lag between each step was a little longer than usual.

"Ya have any trouble gettin' the jars?"

"What kind of trouble was I goin' to have gettin' some jars, Mac?"

"Just trying to make conversation."

"Mac, don'tcha' think we're just a little too old for you to be startin' something new, like holding decent conversation?"

"Lord, just ain't no pleasin' ya. Did you remember to get my medicine?"

"You didn't tell me you was out, Mac."

"I surely did, you just gettin' old and forgetful, that all. You know they say that's the first thing to go on a woman."

"Well, we both know what the first thing to go on a man is, don't we?"

Mac ignored the insult and shuffled over to the kitchen table to examine the new jars. He swayed a little latching onto the back of the kitchen chair to steady himself.

"Tucket pick these out for ya?"

"Yea."

"He sho is good at runnin' that little store of his. Ain't too good at keepin' a woman though. How many wives has he had now, 'bout two if my memory serves me correctly. Has it been two, Tilly?"

"Something like that. I don't really keep track of Tucket's affairs."

"Uhm, yea well, he lies too. He says things that anyone with a half a brain would know he was lyin', especially that mess he tells women. Have you noticed how much he lies?" Mac pulled a chair out from the table, wheezing a little as he eased himself into it.

"No, can't say that I have." Tilly began filling the kitchen sink with hot water. She decided to wash the new jars out tonight so she could get an early start on tomorrow's canning. She loved plunging her hands into the warm soapy water. It was the best time for dreaming. Her mind played with the idea of catching a Greyhound out of Indiana and heading back to Kentucky. A cool breeze coming in from the open window, passed over her face, drying some of the sweat that had accumulated on her forehead. She imagined her and Tucket on a wild road odyssey to nowhere. She could almost feel the rushing wind whipping through the open car window.

Tilly plunged her hands deeper into the sink causing some water to splash out on the floor.

"Damn woman, watch watcha' doin', your makin' a mess all over the floor."

Tilly reached for a dishtowel and bent down to soak up the water. She swished her index finger in the soapy pool and fantasized about her and Tucket on an empty beach. Two old black folks playing tag on the sand and soaking each other with ocean water. As night approached they would lie on a red blanket and explore each other's age-worn bodies. Then finally, at dusk, Tucket would roll over and take



her to heaven. Tilly wondered if this would be enough to stop the old woman's tears.

Somewhere in the back of her mind Tilly heard the shattering of glass.

She traced the pattern of dark spots on the floor pausing momentarily on the shadow lying quietly by the kitchen table.

*Theresa Capelano*







## The Dark

One eye watches through a tangled web  
Of hair as you rise, cross  
The room, wrap your cool body  
In thin trousers.  
Your white skin is vaguely translucent.  
A soft glow separates you from the dark.

It matters little whether you know I lie awake, watching  
You move through the dark like fog.  
It matters less that you are leaving.  
When you've gone, I'll throw back these heavy  
Covers, spread my naked limbs across this bed  
And let my own pale body illuminate the room.  
I'll breathe the shadows that hang like smoke.

*Amy Becker*

## By the Toussaint River

She led me here, to her river,  
named for its explorer, the first in Ohio,  
a Frenchman who had come to the Great Lakes via the Saint Lawrence

We leaned against a willow  
at the edge of this trickle  
which meets more trees, a bridge,  
and a gold neon sign flashing "Toussaint Tavern"  
before river becomes Lake Erie.

I read her a poem of hands, of my hands  
like shoes polished black for Sunday, and her hands,  
pale sheafs of corn in the December fields.  
My hand, her first recorded explorer,  
became a milkweed pod, covering, releasing,  
the white tufts that were her fingers when

she forgot me.  
The willow tree divided us.  
She forgot the first time my hand met hers.

We were recklessly laughing when our hands collided,  
and hands being hands, my hand  
pushed aside my list of "Don'ts"  
and introduced each one of my fingers to hers.

For the moment a lightning bug is a lantern,  
she forgot she brought me under the willow.  
She knew only that her hand  
is the underside of a willow leaf  
and mine is willow bark.

When she was nine,  
for days after her father told her never  
to watch another horror movie  
the yellow bulb of her night light  
became a shadow passing into her,  
entering under her fingernails.  
Seeing bullheads swimming near her pole,  
licking ice cream in her head —  
did not stop the shadow —  
only her arms wrapping her father's neck.

Tonight she thinks ripples, cattails, cicada songs.  
A willow branch brushes her cheek.  
Her hand hugs mine.

*Debra Benko*

## Wish Dolls

I.

A man  
wrapped himself  
in waves of color  
that glowed against  
his naked yellow skin  
as he knelt in silence  
and touched his forehead  
softly to the earth.

Feathers floating  
above his braids  
soaked up the wind  
and lifted his heavy head  
to the sky,  
followed by hands  
which fluttered  
like wings of an insect  
stuck in a web.

Chanting in tones  
to crack valley walls,  
he gathered up the clouds  
where gods await the call  
of the chosen few  
who protect men and women  
from the bite of wild dogs,  
the sting of enemy spears.

II.

A young girl,  
hair in snarls,  
and flannel pajamas  
twisted like a straight jacket  
from too many restless dreams,  
awakens in the dark  
and jumps from her floral bed  
which turns black as night  
and devours children.

Hands struggle  
in and out of drawers,  
like a nervous thief  
in the blinding dark,  
for a small yellow box  
the shape of a coffin,  
her link to comfort.

One by one  
she raises tiny dolls in tiny braids  
dressed in green, blue, red —  
lines them like braves  
instructing them with whimpers  
to call to the heavens,  
to drive fears to the wind,  
to protect a small child  
from clawing beasts  
that prowl in the night.

*Carrie Jordan*

## Bob's Mind Wanders in Class

She stand easily behind the rostrum  
Before each section of Women's Studies  
Proclaiming we must isolate and celebrate  
Our feminine consciousness  
From the back row I squint at that androgynous figure  
Flailing an open fist.  
Her words are superfluous.  
I tear my cuticles between practiced incisors.  
Echoes of "penis power" and "male domination"  
Fill this auditorium, and I remember him

Up in that dark wrestling room,  
Weights crashing below us, soul music  
Wafting up through some shaft.  
We'd opened one window  
To clear the left-over pheromones.  
We whispered, waiting  
For an authoritative voice to  
Scrape away the metal chair propped  
Before the lockless double doors  
And interrupt our wrestling.

Now I've bitten off too much  
Flesh; I suck blood, sweet,  
From my torn cuticle. I feel no more,  
No less feminine than anyone.  
I celebrate my consciousness in isolation.

*Amy Becker*







## The Woman I Call Mother

After the third mister-ectomy  
they have convinced her  
that she is a bitch,  
that she did drive them to other women,  
that it was her fault.  
She finds herself gazing  
in mirrors, counting wrinkles,  
wishing the alimony was enough  
for a face lift.  
She sits alone, having lost  
her children to adulthood,  
and dreams of clorox cocktails  
and bottles of sleeping pills  
and the flowers at her funeral.

I write to her weekly,  
call her when she does not respond,  
make sure she is not alone  
on the ex-anniversaries.  
Each summer I make a pilgrimage  
to this woman I call mother.  
Each summer I try to help her  
uncover the human being  
so many men have buried.

*Karen J. Hall*

# The Rights of Spring

Mr. Martin Wallace drives the one and half hours, each way, every Sunday to see her. Anyone could make the trip in 40 minutes but Mr. Martin Wallace likes to savor the tranquility of country roads trafficked only with churchgoers. And if he makes sure he is in his car by nine, he can catch the beginning of the Lester Lanin Morning Special and arrive at Oakwood by the finale.

A hat, usually with a small feather or tassel, and a pipe with fine London tobacco is all he brings on his journey. For her he brings the *Times* crossword puzzle, the new yarn and patterns she requested, orange tea, and gold on her birthday. This time he brought some empty Band-aid tins and a small vanity mirror. Lately, she has taken up painting household objects with the same talents her mother had. She is planning on making personalized mirrors for Christmas this year, instead of sweaters. He also has pictures of little Peggy's fourth birthday last Tuesday. They wrapped up a piece of cake for him to bring to her, and Peggy drew her a picture. She'd put it up on the cork board with the rest of them.

Mr. Martin Wallace always parks in the same spot each week. He has no problem with others taking it. He always arrives half an hour before visiting hours open to have a smoke and wash the salt and sand off the car windows. He keeps Windex and cloth in the trunk, along with a flashlight and jug of fresh water, in case of emergency.

She chose Oakwood without his guidance. It was her lungs that were going, not her judgement. She selected it immediately because its sun room reminded her of the solarium in her father's house on the lagoon: yellow and white with many pictures of patients at the country club golf tournament or at their most successful garden party. The first time he came to visit, Martin brought the picture of her with Betsy Bloomingdale at a charity ball in Palm Beach. She hung it next to Ginny Meredith dancing with Bobby Kennedy and felt triumphant.

Three years ago they told Martin that the cigarettes had won the battle and she now had only one functioning lung. If they monitored it with a respirator she would have another six to eighteen months. The doctors hinted, strongly, that Martin tell her this. Martin figured the doctors feared she'd begin pitching ashtrays or stabbing at them with her size 8 needles if they were to break the news.

Martin rented a room by the lagoon for a long weekend and told her there. This was a bold move on this part, Martin hated water. Actually he feared it, feared that one day there wouldn't be enough salt left in it to keep him afloat. The only time he could stand to be near it was when he hoped its spray and stench would revitalize whatever was soon to expire.

When he told her, she smiled, lit a cigarette and walked to the dock. Martin flushed the remainder of her pack down the toilet and read the morning paper. When she returned she simply suggested that they search out the most appealing hot house that would allow her to flourish radiantly before she withered. "Like flowers we are," she told him, lighting another cigarette from the pack she kept in her pocket, "as transient and always most ravishing moments before wilting."

She is sitting with her back to him as he enters the sun room. There is a portable respirator at her side and Martin can see that she is attached. The young nurse is recording Eleanor's rate of respiration and tells her she can "go ahead;" Martin notices he has begun to sweat a bit and begins unbuttoning his overcoat. The nurse smiles at him on her way out.

"What have we here, Ellie?" He walks over to her side and pats her hand. "I thought that never left your room."

Martin smiles at her without parting his lips and places the crossword puzzle on her breakfast tray. Eleanor Mackay is still beautiful, and her hair as white as talc. Her dress suggests she's been to mass; the wrinkles tell him her night was restless and she was up early. The sun is bright and glaring into the solarium off last night's snowfall. The tulips on her tray are full and stand at attention. She pulls the bifocals off her nose and lets them fall to the end of the gold chain around her neck.

"Bad night?", he asks without waiting for a reply. "I didn't sleep well either."

She grins and points to the chair opposite her chaise. She untapes the plastic tubing from her mouth and turns off the respirator. Her chest rises and falls in short, quick jumps and she coughs once. Martin thinks her skin looks a bit thin but her lips are still as red as a drunk's. He relaxes a bit.

"Heat was on too high last night. I nearly suffocated. I'm feeling better though," she waited for him to nod in belief, "are the roads slick?"

Martin Wallace was never allowed to marry Eleanor Hamilton, but he did write her term papers while at college. He even started to renovate an old barn for the two of them to live in once they received degrees, but Captain William Mackay married her and took her to Tulsa three weeks before graduation. Martin decided to hold onto his barn and finish it anyway. Eight years later Eleanor left her Captain and two daughters, and came to stay with Martin for short jaunts in between her travels. After the Captain's death she brought her daughters to visit with him awhile and eventually bought an old farm house five miles down the road.

Martin sits in a cushioned chair with his back to the sun and smiles at her huge knuckles and red fingernails. "Did you finish last week's puzzle?"

"Oh yes, easily. I'm beginning to believe they're lowering their standards."

"Could be. Maybe you're just catching on to their methods. You're rather quick with those things."

"With what things?" Her cheeks dimple and Martin knows she's going to make him play the whole game.

"Figuring out the easiest way through or around things. Are you sure you don't have Mrs. Lander's son helping you with the clues?"

"You old fool, you know I do my own research."

Martin starts this game every week with her. Each week it's a new area, but she knows the final score before it begins. She throws out the opening pitch and he spends the rest of the afternoon trying to drive it home.

She puts her glasses back on and reaches for the puzzle. With her eyebrows raised and her chin tucked into her straightened neck, she glances down the list of hints.

"Oh, it may be a bit more challenging this week. But one can never tell without a pen and scratch paper."

In school Martin considered Eleanor sharp, and rather lazy. But he was so awestruck by her beauty and interest in the components of the hydrogen bomb that he practically completed the research for her chemistry paper the same evening she asked him for some assistance.

"Maybe we can figure it out faster if we do it together?" Martin's eyes are laughing with anticipation of the response he knows is to follow. Eleanor is certain to compliment his kindness in offering and hint that she didn't know he too enjoyed the challenge of a good vocabulary. But instead she folds the paper and places it in her lap.

"No, I'll take a better look at it later. It'll give me something to do." She massages her throat and reaches for the glass of water on her tray.

Martin pushes himself against the wooden arms of the chair and leans forward. "I almost forgot. Margaret wanted me to give you this. It's from little Peggy's birthday."

"I'm certain it's not a belated invitation to the party."

"She knows it's too long a trip for you Ellie."

"Malarky."

Martin fishes through a hugh brown bag from the Cellar at Macy's and pulls out a somewhat mashed piece of yellow cake, its dark icing smashed against the saran wrap.

"I don't like chocolate."

He pulls out a drawing of a girl with a birthday hat.

"Little Peggy specifically asked me to bring this to you. She misses you, Ellie."

He reaches into his breast pocket and pulls out an envelope of Kodak paper and hands it to her. She takes it and quickly shuffles

through the glossy exposures of celebration.

"She looks more like her father everyday."

Martin tries to remember the last time she's seen Peggy, or when Margaret ever bothered to invite her to a party for the child.

Eleanor gasped deeply.

"Well, I am certain Peggy was very satisfied with you there, spoiling her."

"I don't spoil her. I just bring twice as much as I should. Something from me and something from you."

"Honestly, Martin the child wouldn't know me if you forced Margaret to bring her here and place her on my lap." She took a deep breath and shook her head. "But Margaret would never come here on my account. Well, not unless you requested it."

Martin considers answering her but suggests a game of cards instead. Eleanor shakes her head. He shuffles though the deck.

"I'll even play one of your games El. Spit."

Eleanor was pouting. She knew Martin would never dispute her statement, even though she knows he loves Margaret. He would eagerly defend Margaret if he just wasn't so worried about the argument they both know would follow.

"Gin, then? I'll even give you a fair shot this time."

"I'd like a glass of gin, I'll tell you that."

She's asked for a drink. That tells Martin that she's feeling guilty again. At his 50th birthday party, Margaret told Martin the only tender thing Eleanor has ever done for Samantha and her was to allow them so much time with him. It may only have been the result of Eleanor needing Martin around the house for handy work or a bit of morale, but the more time he spent with them, the less time they were left alone with her.

Martin places little Peggy's birthday cake in the refrigerator and sits at the end of Eleanor's chaise, placing his old hand on the bump in her quilt he figures is her knee.

"How about some tea?"

Before she can accept Martin reaches for the nurse button behind Eleanor's head. She takes his hand, and holds it a moment.

"It's faster if you just make it yourself. There's some in my room. Ask one of the nurses for a kettle of hot water."

He brings her shrunken hand to his mouth and softly kisses it. She slaps his arm with the back of her other hand.

"Go, you old crow."

Martin walks down the bright corridor toward her wing. Many of the patients are up and about, more so than usual. Martin figures it's because of the sun and warm temperature. The pretty nurse who was with Eleanor earlier was coming out of her room with a tray of pills.

"Oh, Mr. Wallace, is Mrs. Mackay still in the sun room?"

Martin thought that question odd. Eleanor stayed in the sun room throughout visiting hours every Sunday. Except when her lungs forced her to remain in bed.

"Yes. Is something wrong?"

"No. She was just complaining of pains this morning. She had a bit of a set back last night. we put her on some pain killers. Doctor Micheals wants to monitor her for the next few days. Just to make sure her lungs are still strong enough to keep her breathing on her own."

"I was just going to make us some tea."

"Go ahead. I'll give her these, and we'll hook her back up when she's finished.

The nurse rolled the cart up the hall and Martin wished they would call him when she had these set backs. He could bring her something extra, like a new plant or the article in last month's *Atlantic Monthly* that reminded him about her brother John. At least he would know not to bring those things that remind her there's still a bridge to be mended.

Martin opens up the closet next to her television set and carefully searches for the canister of tea. He thinks the closet smells like an old lady; tea, jasmine, softly scented tissues and lilac bath balls. There is even a slightly musty smelling talc in a circular container with a big puff. He takes the tea and looks for some of the fresh mint he brought her last week.

Behind her box of potpourri he finds a large sliver frame. The photo in it is a bit yellowed and wrinkled, but very clear. It is of Martin with Margaret and Samantha at one of Eleanor's May Day celebrations. He has wrapped the girls up to the Maypole with all the ribbons, and is standing with a hand on each of their shoulders. The girls are laughing, hard. He never knew Eleanor had any pictures of him with the girls, let alone saved one for so long. He takes it and places it on Eleanor's bed side table. He closes the closet door, forgetting about the mint, and leaves her room.

There are three women with Eleanor when Martin returns. They're standing around her in a semi-circle. All are talking rather randomly and loud. Martin grins a bit because the women look silly. He wonders why people always talk louder and slower when someone is ill, as if all sickness affects one's hearing. He can tell without even seeing her face that Eleanor is bored with these rather fat ladies. Her head keeps looking beyond the one in the red circus tent to the snow melting off the awning.

"Ladies, how is everyone today?" Martin sees Eleanor's shoulders rise and fall with a sigh of freedom.

The ladies instantly direct their attention at him, asking many cocktail party questions. They are equally relieve that he has entered and diverted their efforts from entertaining Eleanor.



Martin offers them all a cup of tea, to which they decline, and directs the conversation back to Eleanor.

"Ellie tells me you're working on a lovely quilt for your latest grand-child, Mrs. Swinerton. I hear you've done a remarkable job."

The shortest one brings her knarled hand to her heart and gasps.

"Why Eleanor, I'll take that as the grandest compliment I could receive. You're such a seamstress, and for you to take such notice of my efforts, well, thank you very much."

The ladies are doting on her. Martin knows it. Eleanor knows it. They really don't even speak to one another on a regular basis. Eleanor claims they've been forgotten; they've been here too long. "They just won't die." She tells Martin this every week when they come in to infringe upon her novelty.

"Ladies, how about some bridge? I've been trying to get Ellie to play cards all afternoon."

Martin glances at Eleanor for some reaction. He figures she'll be shaking her head rapidly or running her forefinger back-and-forth of her neck. But she's staring through the sliding doors. Her shoulders are rising and falling irratically. Her swollen hands are clasped tightly on her neck.

The ladies flounder with reason for why they really can't stay. Martin acknowledges them with a broad grin and goes to Eleanor.

He sits on her side, too frightened to upset her with his own concern.

"How you feeling El?" He rubs her clenched hands.

She nods her head, swallows and slowly answers. "Fine."

After a minute her breathing gains some rhythm and she turns to Martin. Her eyes are glassy.

"I'm okay."

He smiles and offers her some water.

"I know."

Martin reaches for the book next to the vase of tulips. The sun is beginning to set on their petals. Their colors dance on the glass tray. The young nurse comes in with a chart and tells Eleanor its time to reattach herself. For a few hours, that's all. Eleanor ignores the nurse's voice but reaches for the tubing. The nurse checks her watch, writes down the time, switches on the machine and resets the pressure.

"I'll be back at 5:30, Mrs. Mackay, for dinner."

Martin hands her a book and she reaches for the bifocals resting in her cleavage. She can't raise them to her face because the tubing is in the way. She shuts her eyes tightly and lets her glasses drop to the end of her chain. Martin wishes he had noticed this earlier.

"Who is that nurse, Ellie? I've never seen her before."

He reaches across her and unhooks the chain from the ends of the her bifocals. His throat is thick.



"Don't tell me old Miss Ferry decided to retire on us," He smooths her hair and hands the glasses to her. She takes them without looking at him and begins to read.

Martin sets up and pulls the paper from his bag. He returns to the chair opposite her and reads, frequently glancing up to watch her. Reading falls into pace with the inhale and exhale of the machine. Martin checks his watch and folds the paper. The room is beginning to cool with the hour. Eleanor is asleep and breathing normally. He gathers his belongings and places them in the bag. He takes the book and places it on the table. The tulips have begun to fold.

He stands above her and rubs the feather on his hat. He dusts the top of her head with light kisses. Her eyes open suddenly and the hissing of the respirator quickens. He reaches into her lap, lifts her hand to his lips. She slowly raises her still hand and squeezes the back of his wrist, gently allowing her thumb to rub across his veins.

"Stay well. I'll see you next Sunday." And Martin leaves her to her breathing.

Mr. Martin Wallace takes his car home by means of the Parkway. The traffic is heavier but the smell of the air saltier. The radio has Billy Graham sanctifying those unable or unwilling to get to a house of worship, and Martin begins to hum bits of Gershwin. He figures that he's headed for the lagoon — there are piles of soaked sand on the edge of the road and the signs have speckled patterns of salt rot — but can't quite remember when he made this decision. Yet, he can easily remember the directions and before Billy has echoed a final Amen, Martin pulls his car along the curb and stares at the water more greyed by phosphates than winter.

For minutes Martin hears nothing except the yellowed foam at the water's hem suck at the shore, and he knows he no longer vests any powers in the senses of the sea. The ringing of phones on the gasp station lets Martin know that Billy Graham is now accepting confessions. He stares at the cracking sea grass and knows that the young pretty nurse is calling. She needs to tell him something the vibrant purples and yellows of the tulips on Eleanor's breakfast tray already radiated throughout the sun room.





## Contributor Notes

Many Becker enjoys traveling through strange and new places.

Debra Benko is not an economics major.

Holland Behrens is a senior at Denison and an Art History major.

Theresa Copeland is a senior English/Writing major from Newark, Ohio.

Aimee Creelman, a senior Studio Art major, spent a semester in New York City where she was an apprentice in a papermaking studio.

Joan R. DeWitt is a senior English/Writing major.

Linda Gates.

Karen J. Hall is waiting

Carrie Jordan has her moments in art and English. If she had to do it over again, she'd have more of them, just moments, one after another.

Alison Lange is a senior Political Science/Spanish major from Katomah, New York.

Jeff Masten is, among other things, a senior English major.

Leight Walton is a senior with many immediate plans for the future.

Teresa Woodward says, "You're never too old for Kool-Aid. Love, movie star kisses, and blessings!" — Mother Teresa.

