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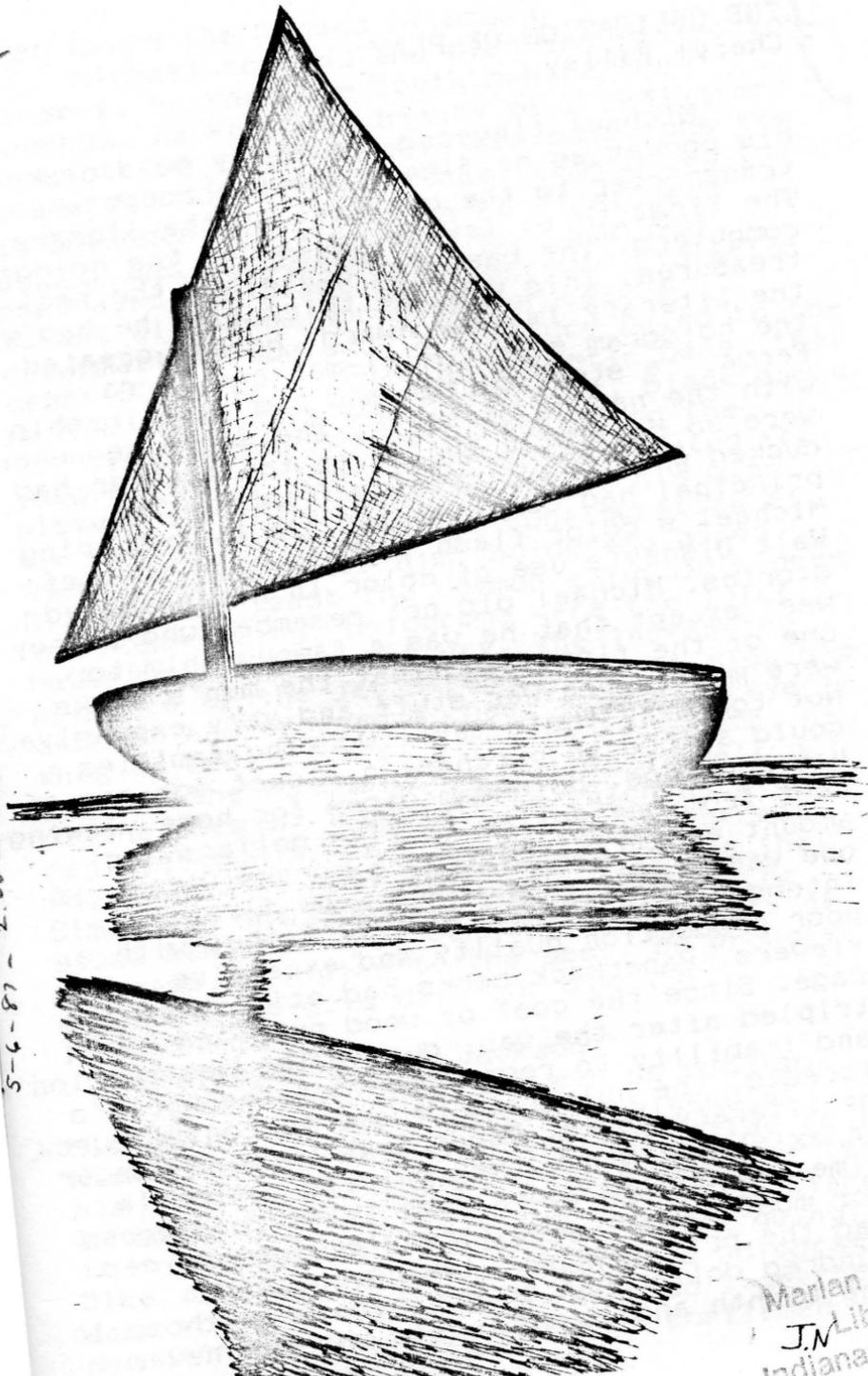
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f THE OBLIGATION OF PLAY

Cheryl Bailey

Michael fingered the shiny gold disk in his pocket as he floated down through the jet transporter to the basement of the library. The first three levels contained the hologram computers. The basement contained the real treasures. This was the third time he had won the Literary Imagery Award. He had created the hologram story of "I-man and Terra Ferma," a story of man and his relationship with the nature of earth. The storm sequences were so realistic that even the teacher had ducked when the lightning flashed. The principal had complimented him by comparing Michael's color flash technique to that of Walt Disney's use of color in his animated stories. Michael did not remember who Disney was, except that he was a famous animator, one of the first, and that the man's works were mostly pre-war stuff and very expensive. Not too many third level working families could afford to purchase a ticket for one of his showings. Hologram discs for home viewing cost from one dollar to five dollars, an amount easily saved from a month's wages, if one was frugal. The discs were first introduced in the early 1990's, but with a poor production quality and expensive viewers. Paperback books had still been the rage. Since the cost of wood pulp and cloth tripled after the war, due to the destruction and inability to regrow most of the world's forests, the holograms became the only source of literary works. Paperbacks were no longer in existence since they quickly rotted in time. Hardbound books were things of legend for most people. The first level employees had the privilege of viewing one for a hundred dollars an hour. There were those in the eighth and lower levels who had never

even heard the legend of books.

Michael touched the disc and smiled to himself; he knew the truth behind the legends. He knew the beauty of a real story and not the altered, pale reproductions the holograms portrayed. Michael remembered the astonishment he felt when he first read Beauty and the Beast. The hologram had portrayed the Beast as a post-war radiation mutant with huge sores and grotesque deformities. How such a creature paled to the description of a truly animalistic beast that hunted fresh game and had tragic, black pools for eyes! Holograms left nothing to the imagination of the viewer; they created the picture for him, rather than let his mind create the image from the configuration of words placed before him. Holograms bored Michael, at least the common affordable ones for homeviewing. Holograms were the idiot boxes of the 21st century. The increasing pressure of the jet stream began to slow his descent and aroused Michael from his reverie. When he became level with the exit ramp, he grabbed the handhold and pulled himself out of the stream. The plate on which he stepped registered his arrival and the jet stream shut down. Michael was pleased to see that Simon was the security guard on duty. He stood behind a huge console to the left of the ramp. Stepping to the desk, he proudly extended the gold disc for Simon's inspection.

"Afternoon, Mr. Jackson."

"It's just Simon between us buddies, Michael," the guard said. He winked at Michael as he took the disc and hefted it in his left hand. "A quarter of a pound if it's an ounce." He smiled at the boy as he placed it on the metabolic analyzer. "Nice going, Mike. It must be a humdinger of a hologram to earn you four full hours. When do I get to see it?" The analyzer read out confirmed

Simon's estimate, a pure one-fourth pound solid gold disc. Simon placed the disc in another compartment and pushed the button above it. A warning buzzer sounded and the top of the compartment slammed down on the disc, then rose back into place. When the buzzer stopped a few seconds later, Simon removed the disc and gave it back to Michael. Now imprinted on its surface were the symbols for Alpha and Omega, and the date, March 18, 2096. The invalidated disc would join the other three in Michael's awards case.

"You get to see the display at the Summer Festival. Mine will be at the center of the national elementary exhibit. If it wins out against the other school levels, it will be entered in the international competition." Michael's eyes shone with excitement.

"A lifetime disc." Simon's voice echoed the awe of such a prize. The International Lifetime Disc Award for entry into the Washington Library of Literary Works was a prize well cherished. It had been awarded only three other times, even though there had been eight international contests. A winning hologram didn't guarantee a lifetime award; only monetary awards were guaranteed.

As they talked, Simon had led Michael to the entrance chamber and helped the boy into a decontamination suit. The suit was a modification of the old twentieth century radiation suits used by the army during the war. "Even if I don't win the nationals, this is prize enough." Michael's words were muffled by the breathing hood he had pulled over his face.

Simon snapped closed the hood and flipped the coverplate back up. He looked Michael straight in the eye and said in a stern, fatherly voice, "Listen up, lad." His smooth brown brow furrowed with concern as he cautioned the boy in the suits use. "you have

only ten minutes of breathing time left once the inner door opens, so choose your category quickly. If you are not sure, hook up and check the librarian; then move to the right area. THERE IS NO OXYGEN IN THE ROOM! IF YOU DON'T PLUG UP, YOU DON'T BREATHE! IF YOU DON'T BREATHE, YOU'RE GONNA DIE! GOT IT?"

"Got it!" Michael nodded vigorously. He knew the rules by heart. Simon knew he knew them, but Simon took his responsibility personally. No one had died on him yet; not even the lady who got so excited reading Browning that her heart quit ticking. Everyone, from the president on down, got his safety lecture, some more colorful than others, but they said the same thing. Oxygen was an enemy. Oxygen and time would turn wood pulp into dried and crumbly patches at the touch of a fingertip. A few of the treasures were close to that state now, too close. It had been several years before anyone had thought about saving culture. After the war, they had been too concerned with saving living creatures and growing food to worry about saving history and growing intellectual minds.

Simon let Michael into the entrance chamber which resembled the air lock of a space craft from the old sci-fi movies. He sealed the door behind Michael and watched him through the plexiglass window of the door. Michael positioned himself in front of a smaller version of the entrance door, took three deep breaths, and slammed the faceplate down and locked it into place. On Michael's thumbs up signal, Simon pressed the large green button above the door. A loud hissing sound followed as the air was sucked out of the chamber. A yellow light flashed beside the green button until the hissing noise stopped, then a green light beside it began to flash. Simon's poised hand pushed the large red button located just beneath the

first button. The second door opened and a warning buzzer sounded. Michael stepped through and the door slid shut behind him. The buzzer ceased. The whole procedure had taken a little over one minute.

Michael knew exactly where he was going and he wasted no time in walking down the third aisle to his left, past the towering bookcase of hand carved oak. The last of the known supply of lumber had gone into the construction of the library. Each aisle of bookcases was made of a different type of wood. Each case had a letter of the alphabet carved into its side. Michael had chosen the aisle in which the first bookcase had the word "fiction" carved across its front. He stopped at the case carved with an ornate, fourteenth century "T" at its top. On the side of each case was a librarian. It consisted of a chair which resembled a pilot's seat with a computer console attached to its front. At the base of the chair was a green outlet into which Michael plugged his air hose. The hose was wrapped around his waist and could be unwrapped to a distance of four feet, the approximate distance between librarians. Michael took a deep breath and inhaled the stale, filtered breathing mixture that flooded his suit. Each librarian had its own air tank located beneath the chair. From his console, Simon could set each tank for the allotted time a visitor had been allowed. This policy discouraged lingerers and slow readers. Michael waved at the ceiling camera located a short distance down the aisle and climbed into his seat. He flicked on the computer and waited for it to come on-line. He leaned back in his chair and let his eyes soak in the wonder of treasures the case held. From behind the plexiglass shields of the case, rectangles of many different shapes and sizes tantalized him. His fingers ached to leaf through their ancient pages, to feel

the texture of their different grains beneath his fingertips. It was a favorite fantasy of his, to take down one of those delicate treasures and curl up under a huge tree on a warm, sunny afternoon and become lost in another time and another world.

Michael sighed; there were very few trees anymore, and the ultraviolet rays of the sun were no longer blocked by the ozone layer, which had decayed. Exposure for more than one or two hours would kill him. Besides, his treasures were securely locked away in the bowels of the earth, like the lost treasures of the Incas that he had read about on one of his other visits. The console screen lit up and the display of authors demanded his attention. Names such as Taylor, Tennyson, Thomas and Thoreau glared out at him in the eerie green light of the display case. Names that once, long ago were spoken with respect and awe. The mention of such names had brought ideas and history into the minds of the listener. These meant little to the eleven-year-old boy who saw them now for the first time, and passed over them with little regard for their importance.

"Who are you picking today?" Simon's voice crackled over the receiver in Michael's hood.

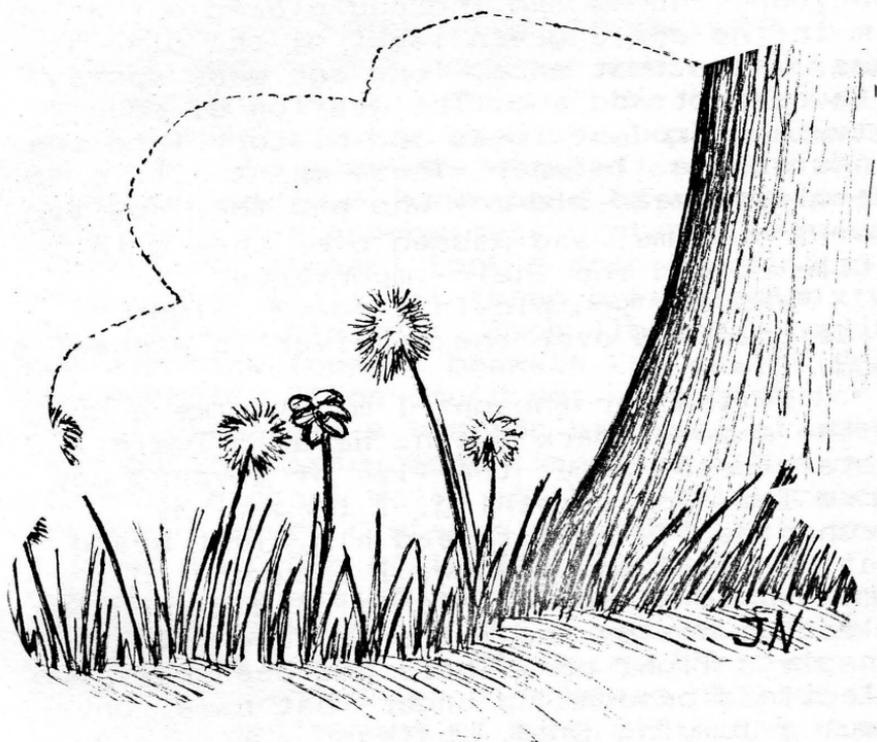
"My teacher thought I might like a guy by the name of Mark Twain. He said Twain wrote stories about the life of a young boy named Tom. Tom something, I forget. My teacher really hadn't read him, just heard that he was good. Anyhow, I thought I'd try him." While he spoke, Michael had marked the selection box by the author's name with the console's light pen. There had been only two selections brought up under that name, one about a jumping frog, whatever a frog was, and one named The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

In a few moments, the book dropped into the plexiglass reading case just below the

screen. Michael turned the light on outside the case and reached to the right of the book. "One day, maybe I'll really touch one," he thought as he manuevered the hand extenders inside the case to open the book. "Ready, Simon?" he inquired of his friend who always shared his adventures.

"Ready and waiting." Simon's voice held a pure smile of delight.

"Chapter one." Michael's voice trembled with excitement as he began the trip into an ancient time. A time now gone, but like Tom Sawyer's great magnificent inspiration, not lost forever.



f SOMEONE, CARE

f Kelley Ross

"These kids are pretty good," I thought as I walked among them into school, blinded momentarily by the reflection of the sunlight off the multi-colored lockers. I glanced around the lobby. The usual pairs, trios and groups stood talking, waiting for the first bell to ring. And there were the solitary ones as well. This always disturbed me, especially this far into the year; no one should be alone in a school this size. Maybe they didn't try to make friends. I shook my head as I walked into the office.

"Well good morning, Mr. Owens," Mrs. Karen, the school clerk, said. She insisted on calling me Mr. Owens despite my persistent attempts otherwise.

"Morning, Mrs. Karen," I countered, even though everyone else called her Joy.

"Hello, Ken," Mr. Wilson, the vice principal, said as he came out of his office with a paper in hand which he gave to Mrs. Karen. "Kristy Brock will be in to see me. Disciplinary problem." He paused and looked at me then back at Joy. "Again."

"Don't ring that bell yet!" shouted a faceless voice as its person darted into the office, grabbed attendance sheets and darted out again.

"Can't you do anything about this Kristy, Ken?" Wilson began, sauntering over to me. I knew from his gait that he was joking. "I mean, can't you give her one of those psychological tests of yours that will render her incompetent to make trouble?"

I scratched the back of my head and pretended to consider his proposal. "Well... there is one, Mr. Wilson. But it's not full-proof. I tried it on you last year--" He

turned with a smile and walked back into his office.

I picked up my attendance sheets and headed for the door to the hallway. Joy sang out her usual "aloha" attached to "Mr. Owens" and, still heading out the door, I turned back and gave her a smirk. Her eyes grew wide as she watched me collide rather roughly with a student who, apparently, wasn't watching where she was going either. Her books fell to the floor. As I watched them fall, I noticed her fists were clenched tightly. I quickly looked to see who it was, but I did not recognize this girl.

"I'm sorry," I said. Her eyes darted to my face and then down to the floor where her books lay scattered. I bent to help her pick them up. Right beneath my feet was one notebook facing down. On the back side was a poem, the title of which was the only thing I caught. The words stung me--"Someone, Care." Her hand, reaching for the book, obscured the other lines. Instinctively, my grip tightened. I looked at her. Her face was hard and her eyes had the same effect upon me as had the title of the poem. I released the book and watched her stand and move silently away--alone.

I saw her several times that day. Each time, she was alone. She struck me as odd in her blue jeans and jacket with its collar turned up. Her clothes just didn't seem to fit her. They fit her outward appearance--clenched fists and determined walk, but they surely didn't fit her eyes. Her eyes haunted me.

The next day, I walked to the door of my office just off the gym in time to see this girl come in from outside. She must have joined cross country. Kristy and a few of her friends sat at the entrance of the girls locker room. This girl walked towards them. I waited.

"Here comes Milhouse," one of Kristy's

friends whined.

"She's bad," Kristy joined in. "Don't mess with her. She's bad."

Milhouse, as I now assumed her name was, stopped.

"You gotta problem?" she addressed the girls. Her voice was stern.

"O-ooooo," one of them returned.

Kristy stood up. "How come you're so bad?" she asked sarcastically.

Milhouse took a step towards her. I thought I'd better intervene.

"Okay. That's enough." I started towards them. "Don't you think you're in enough trouble?" I asked Kristy. She walked through the locker room doors. Her friends followed. I looked at Milhouse. She started for the doors also.

"Wait a minute," I began. "What's your name?"

"Tammy" was the curt reply.

"You haven't been going here all year?"

"No."

"You're running cross country?" I continued.

"Look," Tammy answered, "I've got to get changed and get home."

"Do you like it here?" I asked, trying to continue the conversation and find something out about the girl.

"Who are you?" she asked as if my right to ask depended upon my answer.

"Ken Owens. I'm the athletic trainer and," I paused, not knowing how this would go over with her, "--and a counselor." It didn't go over well. Her face hardened.

"I gotta go," she said quietly as she slipped through the door.

"Well you handled that one beautifully, Owens," I said to myself as I walked back to my office. "Just beautifully."

Coach Stevens walked into the gym after

sending the girls off to run.

"Mike," I called as I walked out of my office to meet him. "Gotta minute?" He waited for me. "Tammy Milhouse on your team, what do you think of her?"

He fingered his mustache and chuckled. "She's a hard one. Our best runner, Ken. We might make state with her."

"I'm talking attitude, Mike."

He shook his head affirmatively. "I figured you were. She's hard there too. Doesn't talk much and isn't hesitant to show she's mad about something."

"Such as--"

"The other day we were running. I was running with them. We were heading towards some major hills so I told the first year runners, including Tammy, to fall back and watch how the older gals paced themselves. Tammy informed me that she knew how to pace herself. I got a bit perturbed and told her, then, to go ahead and prove it. Ken, I thought she was gonna tucker out by the fourth hill. She hit the school grounds two hundred yards in front of our best runner from last season!"

"How does she get along with the others?" I asked.

"She doesn't relate with any of 'em except Maryjo."

I walked down to the office to take a peek at Tammy's records. Mrs. Karen was sitting on her desk.

"That's it," I teased, "lounging again."

"This has been a long day," she said.

I opened the file drawer marked "M" and flipped through.

"Who are you searching for?" Joy asked.

"New kid. Tammy Milhouse."

"She's interesting. You know she's the one you ran into--" she started laughing.

"Yea," I answered, "What do you know about her?" I had found the file and was

looking through the papers.

"Well for one, this is her sixth highschool."

"What?!" I was shocked. "Why?"

"I don't know," Joy replied. "I'd love to find out. Probably the father's in the military or something."

"There's got to be something more to it than that," I mumbled.

As I unlocked the door to my office, someone ran into the gym screaming. I turned around. It was Maryjo. She was talking--or, rather, screaming--so fast, I couldn't make out what she was saying.

"Time out!" I cried. "Now slow it down and tell me what's wrong." Something had happened to one of the runners. That was my guess, and Maryjo proved me correct.

"It's Tammy," she panted. "She fell down Ole Faithful. She's bleeding."

"Is it bad enough for an ambulance?" I asked, knowing she couldn't tell me for sure.

"I don't think so. It's not broken or anything."

"What's not broken?" I asked while grabbing a towel and heading out the door.

"It's her leg. She scraped it all up. She might'a twisted her ankle 'cause she can't walk on it."

Ole Faithful was a steep hill, infamous to the football and cross country teams who suffered its grade almost dally.

Maryjo was walking fast; she broke into a jog as we got outside. I joined her and decided that this was a good time for a few questions.

"Are you and Tammy good friends?" I asked.

"I'd like to be. She's kind of distant."

"Have you met her family?"

"No. Her parents are divorced--or they're getting a divorce. I don't remember

what she said exactly." Maryjo glanced over at me, probably wondering why I was asking about Tammy.

"She hasn't been here all year," I said. I don't know why I said that.

"I know. Something happened at her last school."

"Did she tell you that?" I asked.

"Not exactly. She just says she hates it so I figured something bad must have happened."

Ole Faithful was steep. By the time we reached the top, my legs ached. I looked down the other side. Tammy was neatly propped up against a tree trunk with one leg stretched out before her and the other, the injured one, bent backwards. Her face tightened when she saw me. I took a deep breath and started down the hill.

"Maryjo," I said, realizing I couldn't get Tammy inside myself, "get Stevens or one of the guys." I continued down the hill alone. "Are you okay besides your leg?"

"Yes."

"Let me take a look at that." She winced as I wiped away the blood and dirt. "Hold this on there with a little pressure." I kept my hand on the towel, waiting for her to put her hand there. She held her hand above mine as if she didn't want our hands to touch in the exchange. I moved my hand away. She brought hers in.

"Tam--," I started and then thought better of it. Stevens was coming down the hill.

"Ole Faithful scores another casualty!" he said.

"The other side," I suggested. We picked Tammy up. She started to fall back.

"You're gonna have to put your arms around us, Tammy," Coach said. I was glad I didn't have to say it. Reluctantly, she complied. We carried her inside and put her

on the table in my office.

"Take good care of her, Doc," Coach said. "We're gonna need her."

"He's pretty happy about your being on the team," I said after Coach had left. No answer. I began to clean her leg with disinfectant. She winced again.

"Last year, he had a pretty good team, but they didn't make it to state," I continued. Still no answer. I couldn't understand her. The title of her poem haunted me dally: "Someone, Care." I was trying to show her I cared, but she wasn't responding. I decided on a direct approach.

"What gives you the right to be mad at the world?" My voice was gentle. I gave her my undivided attention. Her face was still hard. She appeared to be weighing her answer. Just before she began to speak, Maryjo came bounding in the office.

"Your mom's here, Tammy. At least I think it's your mom. She asked me where you were. I told her you fell and Doc was cleaning you up. I told her you'd be right out."

I wrapped Tammy's ankle which was swelling already.

"Keep ice on this tonight," I said. I helped her from the table--help she hesitantly accepted. I walked with her to the door. The woman outside couldn't have been much more than 30.

"Is that your mom?" I asked. Tammy nodded. The woman looked concerned.

"Is she all right?" she asked, looking at me and taking Tammy's arm.

"Twisted ankle," I replied, relieved to find her mother concerned and, on first impression, kind. "It's not broken. She'll need to keep ice on that. And, Tammy--" I waited for her to look at me. She didn't. I looked at her mother. She gave me a look which seemed to say "Please excuse her."

"See me tomorrow, Tammy."

I considered calling Tammy's mother but decided against it. Tammy might resent that. I thought I'd just watch her to see if she needed time to get used to us.

The first cross country meet came quickly. Tammy brought home a trophy. It was put in the showcase outside the office. Students and teachers commended Tammy for her race; she wasn't too responsive.

The next meet was an invitational. There was a great deal of prestige associated with it. In addition to this, our great rival, Meridian High, was racing. Therefore, we had two good reasons to win.

I drove out to the meet with a few other faculty members. A light rain had begun to fall as we pulled up to the track. We got out and huddled around Coach Stevens.

"So, are we gonna pull this out?"

"Sure, we are!" he replied. His tone wasn't as optimistic as his choice of words would have allowed.

"This will be our first win in this invitational."

"Seems like that new kid can pull it out."

"She's a strange one. Sure isn't too congenial."

I looked around for Tammy--the uncongenial one. That made me mad. They should know better. I caught Tammy pushing to the front of the pack in order to get a good start. The gun was fired. Tammy sprinted until she reached the heels of the front runner. She slowed but kept close, so close I thought she'd step on the back of the front girl's feet. After a while, Tammy sped up. The girl in front did likewise, trying to retain her lead. Tammy sped up again. Strain began to show on the front girl's face. Tammy's face was rigid, her eyes set straight ahead. Suddenly the front girl began to cut

over directly in front of Tammy. Their feet mixed and both went down hard. The others were gaining. Tammy's knees were bleeding. She glanced behind her and, like a runner bolting from the starting line, she headed for the finish not two hundred yards away. She crossed it alone.

The other girls on our team finished well. The crowd that gathered to hear the final results was large. Tammy was standing with the team, but really apart from it. They were conversing and laughing; Tammy was silent.

Someone grabbed a bullhorn and announced joyfully that we had won it. The result was chaos. The team began to jump up and down and scream. The crowd cheered. Tammy, I think, smiled faintly. "That's it," I thought. "I'm calling Mrs. Milhouse."

The following day, my decision to talk to Tammy's mom was reinforced. Tammy had come down to my office for an ace bandage and had left one of her notebooks. I turned it over to identify it. I saw her name and the poem called "Someone, Care." I felt a cold chill go down my back as I read.

Don't ask me to stand naked before you,
without pretence or other selves,
with no other name but my own--
Just me?

Don't attempt to quiet me,
to silence the thousand voices,
to muffle the cliches, to drown
the actress
whose roles never end with
Just me.

Don't set up a mirror before me;
I've grown beyond that game.
I'll paint an image,
a pseudo reflection
and hide from what really shows--
Just me.

Don't ask...don't attempt...don't--
but know me well enough to see
I yearn for someone
to shatter my wall
and read in my don'ts
a dying plea.

I sat down and slowly dialed the number of the place where Mrs. Milhouse worked. She answered the phone. I identified myself. She remembered our meeting the other day.

"You must excuse my daughter, Mr. Owens. She's been through a lot."

"That's why I'm calling you. Can you tell me what she's been through? Mrs. Milhouse, Tammy relates with no one. I don't think I've heard her say ten words since she got here. Why is Tammy so angry?"

"Mr. Owens, Tammy doesn't want anyone to know what's happened. She just wants to put it behind her. She just wants to start again."

"She's not doing a very good job at it," I said firmly. I read the poem to her. She made a few attempts to respond. I could tell she was crying.

"Let me go to a private phone," she said. She put me on hold and, a few minutes later, picked up on the line. She had recovered herself.

"Mr. Owens, Tammy went to Southwood last year. Because we've moved so often, she never really let herself get involved in too much."

"Why the moving often?" I asked.

"My husband," she said and hesitated, "--well, my ex-husband was in the army. Anyway, Tammy did get quite involved at Southwood. She went out for basketball, volleyball, track. She had so much fun." Her voice cracked. "She was riding home one day. The coach was bringing her home. She came inside. She was so upset. I asked her what was wrong. It took her so long to tell me.

The coach had driven out some and stopped the car. Tammy was so scared. He tried to seduce her. He actually made a pass at a fifteen-year-old girl!"

"What happened?" I asked quietly, shocked at what I was hearing.

"Tammy tried to get out of the car. He said if she'd quit fighting, he'd take her home. He drove her home then but made her promise not to tell anyone or he'd make it hard for her at school. But Tammy tells me everything."

She was silent, and the phone line remained that way for long minutes. My mind was racing. I breathed deeply.

"Mrs. Milhouse, you are divorced then, correct? How long ago?"

"Milhouse is my maiden name. We've been divorced since about a week before this happened to Tammy. After it happened, I pulled her out of there, and we moved. We both wanted to just start over."

"Did you take any legal action against the coach?"

"Mr. Owens, you wouldn't believe the way those teachers stick together down there. I got nowhere with the principal, nowhere with the superintendent. And we couldn't afford a lawyer."

Over the weekend I saw Tammy running on the road. I was driving my car. I thought momentarily of slowing and talking to her but, remembering what that coach had done; I decided against it. That's why she didn't want to touch me or have me touch her. My God! I hated him--whoever it was--who did that to her!

The next week, during cross country practice, Tammy suffered a shin splint. I was glad; she would have to come to my office daily for treatment or she wouldn't be prepared to run, ace bandage or not.

I couldn't tell Tammy that I had talked

to her mom. I wanted her to tell me what happened. She had to break sometime; otherwise, the "new start" would never come. Maybe I would have to help it break.

Wednesday, Tammy came to my office during study hall. She stood in the doorway, waiting for me to speak. I purposely pretended not to notice her. She cleared her throat. I couldn't very well ignore that. However, had it been anyone else, I'd have probably thrown something at him or her.

"Hop up on the table," I said. I wanted her to be as relaxed as possible so I decided to make her get the hot pad out and set it on her leg. She obeyed.

I wasn't sure of the best way to broach the subject. I decided to dive right in.

"Where'd you go to school before this?" I asked nonchalantly.

Her face tightened. "Southwood."

"Did you like it?"

"For a while."

"For a while," I repeated, trying to keep the conversation light. "Why 'for a while'?"

Silence. I looked at her. Her eyes had teared. She reached down, picked the hot pad off of her leg, put it back into the bath, jumped off the table and was out the door. The next day, she didn't come back.

This matter was exploding in my own life. I took it home with me. I took it into the classroom. It crowded in on my thoughts much of the time. I was getting nowhere with Tammy. Coach had told her she had to see me for treatment or she couldn't run so I had gotten additional opportunities. They were fruitless. I only hoped that my willingness to help, my concern would get through to her. I wanted to be that someone in her poem, "Someone, Care."

The final cross country meet was Friday. It was on our home course so I planned on

watching. Tammy was unusually tense Friday--even for her. I walked out to the track just in time to see the team walk out. Tammy, again, was apart from them. She stared in front of her as if in deep concentration. They all stretched out.

"Stretch it out good, Tammy!" I called. I could tell she heard me only by a slight cock of her head when her name was called. "I'm glad I don't do this for the applause," I thought to myself and smiled.

Then Tammy did something that surprised me. She seemed to be checking out the other runners as they lined up for the race, but she wasn't looking directly at them. She was looking beyond them. Her eyes continued to search. She looked at me and quickly away. Her searching ended. She wanted to know if I was watching! Hope jumped inside me. The gun was shot.

Tammy darted out ahead; she was sprinting. Coach stole a look at me and then started yelling.

"Tammy! Slow it down! You'll wear yourself out early!" Then he crossed behind me. As he passed, he said, "I've underestimated her before. Maybe I should keep my mouth shut." He continued, however, to yell.

Tammy didn't listen. Fifty yards...a hundred yards out in front of the leading pack. I crossed the field, heading for the two-mile marker. She was out of my sight now. I could hear yelling in the distance. A light rain began to fall. The time seemed interminable. Where was she? Had she quit? Maybe she had fallen. Just as I turned to head back, I heard heavy breathing and rustling of the grass. She was still running! Her face was etched with pain.

"Tammy, you've got it won now hon. Slow it down. You've got it won."

No sign of her having heard me. She

whizzed by, intent on finishing? I didn't think so. She was running away as she had been all season. I had to stop her, and I planned on doing it right after the race.

I broke into a run and took a short cut to the end. Stevens was there with anything but a look of joy (even though this one was definitely going to set a record). I came up to him as Tammy fell into our sight. Her pace had slowed, but she was still pushing just as hard, fighting for breath.

"What is she trying to prove?!" Coach mumbled as Tammy crossed the finish line staggering. She continued to jog slowly and then, just as slowly, sank to her knees, holding her sides. I ran and grabbed her right arm and Coach grabbed her left. We lifted her.

"Keep walking, Tammy. You'll cramp up worse."

I don't think these words registered with her either. Her eyes were far away. After a while, she straightened up and pulled away from our grasp. Coach Stevens stopped walking. Tammy continued. He looked at me questioningly. I followed Tammy.

"What did you do that for?" I asked rather roughly. No answer. I knew it had to end here. I couldn't let her walk away like this. It had gone too far. Her poem haunted me. What her mom told me haunted me. She was heading for her car. I tried to think. Someone ran up behind me. It was Maryjo.

"Doc!" she called. "What's wrong?"

"Did something happen to make Tammy mad?" I demanded.

She looked confused. "Not unless he changed his mind already." Now it was my turn to look confused. She clarified. "Mike Poston asked her out today."

I began to understand. "He didn't back out," I said assuredly. She's scared. This had to end. I headed for Tammy. She was

nearing her car. I had tried being kind and gentle to no avail. I decided to play this one rough. I ran ahead of her as she was pulling her car door open, and I slammed it shut. She was startled. She turned to face me. Her face was hard.

"You didn't answer my question."

"What question?" she asked harshly.

"I asked you why you ran the race that way."

"I don't see anyone complaining."

"That's not my point. Why did you run so hard? You were clear of everyone for two hundred yards!" No answer. "What are you running from, Tammy!?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know your parents are divorced. Big deal. Lots of kids' parents are divorced. That's nothing to run from. What else are you running from?!" I kept my voice firm and stood close to her so she wouldn't get the idea of walking away. She seemed to grope for words. I saw a weakening in her face. This moment had to be kept alive; it might never come again. And Tammy couldn't afford to wait any longer. She began to shake her head and the weakening increased.

"Why don't you," she began, her voice breaking, "leave me alone." She started to move around me. I placed my hands carefully on her shoulders and pushed her back against the car.

"What gives you the right to be mad at the world!?"

"Plenty!" she exploded, her voice gaining volume. "This is my sixth high school. My parents are divorced. That happened just three months ago! I went to a lousy school last semester--"

I broke in. "Why was it lousy?" She gave me a sarcastic look, one that told me she knew that I knew. "And that makes you angry?"

"Yes it makes me angry!" Her eyes were

wide.

"Okay! That's natural. You've got a right to be angry. But it's been three months, Tammy! Why don't you try to let the anger go? Why don't you give us a chance?"

Her answer was immediate. "Because it's easier not to!"

Her words stunned me. I didn't think she realized why she was holding on to the anger and keeping herself so closed. Tears were falling down her face. Her shoulders sagged. The hard look had vanished, and in its place was a tired, bewildered, frightened look. I spoke gently.

"Tammy, you can trust us. Let us in. Let us help you to start over. Let me in."

And for the first time since I met her, she let me put my arms around her. She laid her head on my shoulder and cried.

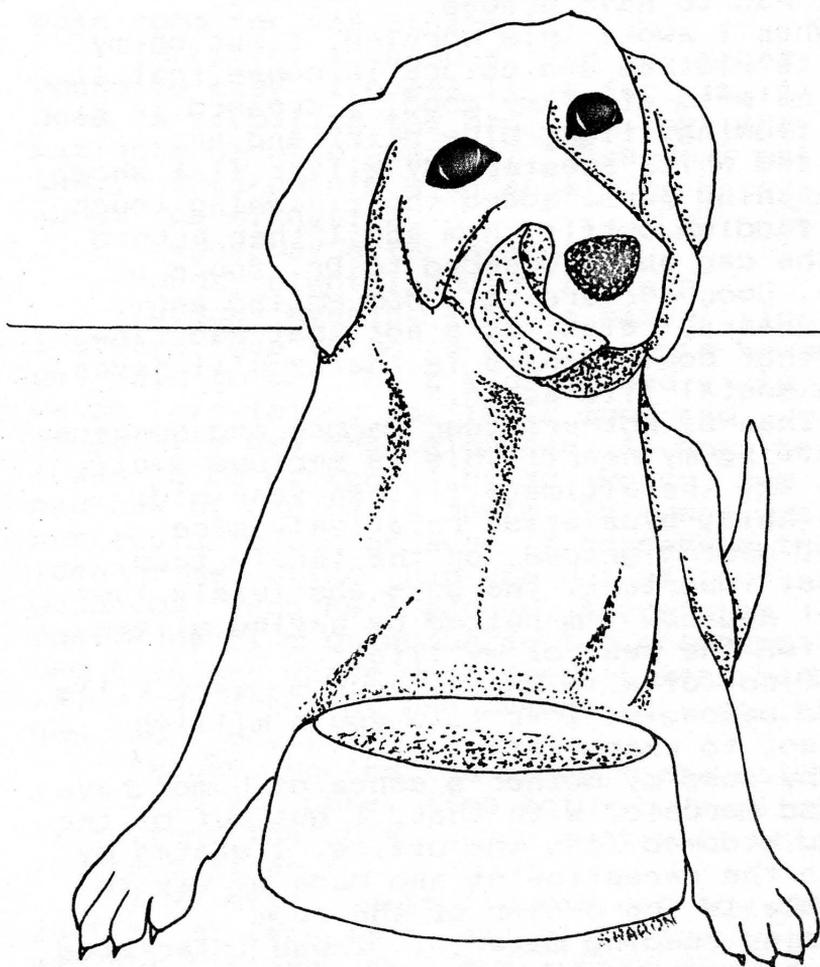
My Friend

Gentle little dog~
Wagging your tail in delight
Because I glanced your way~
How could I speak harshly to you
When you pestered me to play ball?
I should have been honored
That I was your choice.

Is there any other friend
so ecstatic at my arrival?
so quick to come when I call?
so intensely loyal and protective?
... instantly forgiving?

*Are you man's best friend?
Gentle little dog~
You are mine.*

Deirdra Webb



STORY OF SOLACE

Angle Amels

As I looked in the mirror at my crooked and overlapping teeth, I caught a glimpse of the rainy weather from the window behind me. Today had been the worst. It was Monday, and the trip to the orthodontist's office proved to be a disaster. Smiling, he informed me that I had to have braces.

When I awoke this morning, I put on my favorite clothes and colors in hopes that it would help to alter my mood. I dressed in a long, flowing, light blue skirt and an oversized white sweater. My silver flat shoes and matching purse added the finishing touch to my faddish outfit. Mom and I then hopped into the car and proceeded to Dr. Bob's office. Upon our arrival, Mom smiled and said, "Nancy, relax. It's not that bad. The worst that could happen is that you'll never have a social life again."

"Thanks, Mother! Your warmth and concern are melting my heart! This is serious stuff. Here I am, the ultimate fifteen year old: blonde hair, blue eyes, relatively nice figure, decent grades, on the tennis team, but most important, the guys absolutely lust for me! And now I'm ruined by having silver teeth for the rest of my life!"

"First of all, Nancy, your modesty kills me, and secondly, I've told you a million times not to exaggerate."

Why does my mother's sense of humor have to be so moronic? With that, I got out of the car and stormed into the office. I stated my name to the receptionist and made my way to the table in the center of the room containing reading material. I was interested in catching up on the latest fashion and

gossip, so I grabbed a Seventeen Magazine. I was halfway through the article on the correct way to apply makeup when Dr. Bob called me into his office. We went through the routine "Hi--How are ya's," and he dropped the bomb. "Nancy, I looked at your X-rays, and I believe that braces are the only way to solve your problem. You see," he began as he showed me a diagram, "your permanent teeth are so spread out that these little teeth, up here, have no way of coming down. The braces will move these over and make room for the others."

Terrific, I thought. The guy makes it sound so easy. I guess it is for him. All he does is verbalize the bad news, but the patients have to wear it. "When do I get them," I asked him with an air of uncertainty about the situation.

"Wednesday after school."

Monday night I couldn't sleep.

Tuesday evening I had a babysitting job. I always love to go to a neighbor's house and get paid to put their kids to bed early, watch television, eat their food and especially use the telephone. An hour before I was to be picked up by Mr. Reece, Mom and I had one of our dally spats. This one was particularly bad because it concerned the idea of me dating. Dad was out of town, thank goodness. When he's around, there's no challenge. I'm outnumbered two grownups to one teenager whose word doesn't mean beans. I enjoy the frequent one-on-one battles that Mom and I engage in.

"Nancy, you're too young," she said. "If I've told you once, I've told you a million times that the rule is you must wait until you're sixteen."

I've never quite figured out how they justify sixteen as an all right age to date and not fifteen. What's one year going to hurt? I could argue with her until I was blue

In the face, but it's always to no avail. Somehow, I thought to myself, I will persuade at least one of them to take sides with me. It's surprising, but Mom is usually the first parent to be converted. Then if she confronts Dad with the problem while he is experiencing "Just got off the road--don't want to deal with life" syndrome, he normally gives in quite readily.

But I would have to deal with that at a later date. Mr Reece's car horn was my signal for freedom--at least for a few hours.

The couple finally left after giving me a thousand instructions. I opened up my latest love story, Lust in the Leaves, but couldn't concentrate. That's when the telephone hollered my name. I rushed to it and dialed my best friend's number.

"Hello," the voice on the other end beamed.

"Linda, my life is in shambles! The worst nightmare of a sophomore has become reality for me."

"You mean you have to get braces," she screamed with no hesitation.

"Yes. I'm going to be so embarrassed. I get the blasted things on tomorrow after school."

"You sound like you could use a good, old fashioned shopping spree, my friend." She read me like a book.

"Shoot, the way these people pay, I don't anticipate having much money to spend."

"Oh Nancy, have you heard the latest? Dee has excluded us from her group of friends because she now belongs with the senior gang. How did she do that you ask. Simple! She went to a party with all of those girls Saturday night. They went to Tony Craig's house, you know, the senior who's on the six year plan. Anyway, she got so drunk, and to top it off, she ended up with Tony. Now she struts around

like she's too cool for school."

I was flabbergasted. Dee didn't like to drink, and she always talked down about losers like Tony. "You know, Linda, if there's one thing I absolutely can't stand, it's people who don't act themselves. When you have to act different to be accepted, that's a good sign that the people you're associating with aren't worth it."

"Speaking of acting different--guess who brushed by me in the hallway as if I weren't there."

"Who," I asked knowing quite well who she was referring to.

"None other than cheerful Chad. I swear he is the moodiest guy. Actually, I do believe his plans are to use me as a date to the Homecoming dance. I'm surprised he hasn't asked Julie out. He only eyes her up and down everyday. Oh Nancy, guess who told Chad that he was interested in you?"

Up to that point, the conversation was lulling me right to sleep. This question, though, made my mind race. Who could it be? "I give, Linda, tell me!"

"Brad Lutz!"

"No way, Linda! There's no way that gorgeous specimen wants me!"

"Trust me, Nan, would I lie to you?"

That question was debatable, but I didn't care. All that mattered was that I, Nancy Lample, got Brad Lutz to lust. I love it! Oh no! This wasn't good at all! "Linda, tell him I'm not interested."

"Nancy, have you flipped? What's come over you?"

"Have you forgotten already? Tomorrow I become a brace face. He surely won't want to waste his time on a girl who would cut him when they kissed. I just don't stand a chance."

"Gosh, Nancy. That small impediment did slip my mind for a brief moment. Well, maybe

someone else will come along. I have to go now. I have some major homework to pretend I'm doing so Mom won't get red on me."

"Why do today what you can do tomorrow," were my parting words. "See you tomorrow."

"Keep smiling, Nancy."

With friends like that, who needs enemies? She didn't show any encouragement about the braces or Brad. I thought that's what best friends were for. Dang, it's tough growing up.

The Reeces finally returned. They were only one hour past the time that they said they'd be home. They babbled forever about their evening. This was routine. I just smiled as if listening attentively. I couldn't hear their words. I only saw mouths moving. My thoughts were drifting. Tomorrow was the day. Tuesday night I didn't sleep.

Wednesday came with the sounding of my alarm. I found it difficult to fully concentrate during my classes. I knew it was bad when I couldn't concentrate on the latest gossip that was being passed around the lunch table. After my last class, to top things off, Brad smiled and greeted me in the hallway. I returned the smile and melted. How could I be beaming at a time like this? My mother's car was outside waiting to take me to a bad dream. On the way to the orthodontist's office, I thought about the situation more extensively. What was the big deal? My teeth already looked bad. Braces couldn't possibly look much worse. Besides, in the long run, they would make my pearly-whites straight as an arrow. It's the idea of having silver show instead of teeth that scares me. I'll look like a monster, I just know it. Upon our return, Dr. Bob had me go straight to the back to obtain my new toothbrush. I got my name on the cover and everything! Whoopie! Then I sat on a bench and waited for my turn. When it looked as

though it would be hours before they got to me, I decided to critique Dr. Bob's taste in decor. I figured I should keep this ability polished so that it will be perfected by the time I get into the field of interior design. Everything in sight reminded me of braces--how comforting. There was a Howdy Doody doll sitting by the sink with a sickening tin smile. There were two smiley, bracedface posters. There were even cartoons plastered over the wall about the metal hassles. The colors of the room did not help to enlighten the atmosphere. The carpet was rust, while the bed-like structures, occupied by patients, were a deep orange. How original, I thought. The wallpaper was gold with kites and planes for the print. Tacky Dr. Bob.

"Nancy, you may lie down," chimed the voice of the pretty assistant. I did so. Before I had time to think about what was to happen next, Dr. Bob appeared.

"Good afternoon, Miss Lample. I can tell that the anticipation is killing you by the look on your face. I'm sure you have plenty of homework, so we'll get this over as quickly as possible." The procedure had begun. He propped open my mouth with a plastic device. He then put a dab of cement on each tooth. It took five minutes for that to set. Next, he put on the metal squares. That took five more minutes to dry. That was followed by a quick jerk on each metal slab to make sure that it was secure. During this painful episode, I was on the verge of screaming. I had visions of tying Dr. Bob's teeth to a door handle and slamming. The final step was to put on the wires. That was duck soup--until he tightened them. When he finished, he smiled and asked, "How do they feel?"

"Extremely weird," was all I could say.

"Why don't you hop up, take a look in the mirror, and then I'll show you how to brush your teeth."

I was scared to death to look in the mirror. My palms were sweaty, and my legs felt like rubber. Slowly, I inched over to the mirror above the sink. I kept my mouth closed. It was so full of metal, that I was sure the silver was bulging out between my sealed lips. I was there. A quick glance around the room assured me that no one was looking. I closed my eyes, opened my mouth and opened one eye at a time. Oh my gosh! I couldn't believe it! It looked awful! This was the worst. The metal glow of my tin grin radiated throughout the room. Tears came to my eyes as I thought about Brad's smiling face.

"See, they're not so bad, are they?"

I attempted to smile, but it was useless. I made my next appointment, and Mom and I, rather I, made a mad dash for the car. "I refuse to go to school tomorrow on the grounds that I will be injured by the verbal harpoons that I'll receive from everyone."

"Honestly, Nancy! You can't hide forever, and you will go to school. Honey, they don't look bad at all. I know that doesn't mean anything coming from your mother, but it's true."

"Thanks, but this is going to take a while to get used to." When I went to bed that evening, it was difficult to sleep. My teeth were sore, and the thought of facing the human race the next day wasn't pleasant. I didn't sleep much Wednesday night.

The next day was similar to my Monday. It was rainy and dismal. I took extra time getting ready for the day. I wanted to look perfect. Maybe people wouldn't notice my mouth as much. The damp weather managed to mess that up. By the time I got to school, my hair was flat, and my makeup was blotchy. I

was starving, too, because I didn't give myself sufficient time to eat. Lunch finally arrived. Not bad, I thought. A few people noticed, but no one seemed to mind. We'll see. I still have half a day to go. I walked into the lunchroom, and my girlfriends waved me down.

"Let me see," they all said at once.

I forced a grin, and for the most part, everyone agreed that braces didn't look as hideous as they thought they would. They also agreed that they were glad it was me and not them. I couldn't decide what I wanted to eat until my eyes fell upon the last bologna and cheese sandwich. Those were one of my favorites. The bread was even fresh today. I returned to the table and ate ravenously.

"Nancy, have you seen Brad today," one of them asked in a sarcastic manner.

"No, but I heard he looks great," I replied as cool as possible.

"It doesn't look like you have to worry about him asking you out anyway. Braces tend to turn the guys off." The stares from the others at the table told her that she had better keep her mouth shut. "Uh, speaking from experience, of course."

I didn't feel much like socializing, so I politely dismissed myself. I was walking toward the bathroom when I saw him. He was standing by the drinking fountain with his friends. What a guy! He looked astounding in his faded jeans and flannel shirt. I tried to avoid his gaze, but why? Why prolong the agony of not speaking to him? I was nervous because I didn't know what he would think. Would he be turned off? "Hi Brad. How are you?" Without thinking, the words spilled out of my mouth.

"Just fine. I see you have braces. Not bad."

The words made my heart race. At least he notices me. My gosh, Brad Lutz just spoke

a sentence to me! I smiled and walked into the bathroom. I looked into the mirror to redo my lipstick, and there it was. The first nightmare after the braces are on--bread sticking to them. Oh no! Had Brad seen? Was he laughing with his friends right now? Nancy, you dummy! You should know better than to eat fresh bread with braces. This was the ultimate embarrassment! I rushed to the nurse's office. I pleaded for her to call my mother because I had just thrown up. Weak excuse, Nancy, but it will work on Mrs. Crane.

"Yes, Mrs. Lample...this is the school nurse. Nancy is sick and would like you to pick her up."

"Would you please put my daughter on the phone."

Mrs. Crane handed it to me, "Hello, Mom. I really..."

"Listen, missy, I don't know who you think you're fooling, but it certainly isn't me! I will see you this afternoon, at 3:15, when you step off of that bus!"

"But..."

"And that's final!"

I suffered through the day and refused to speak to Mom when I got home. I did my homework, ate dinner in silence, went to my room to watch television and went to bed early. All I had to do was survive tomorrow, and then I had the weekend to re-cooperate from my week.

I was sleeping so soundly that I didn't hear my alarm. Mom poked her head in the doorway and yelled for me to hustle. I glanced out the window to find a gorgeous day staring right at me. I made it to the bus on time, amazing as it was. I made it all morning without seeing him. I stayed in the library during lunch, and somehow I managed to avoid him all afternoon. It took much mental re-routing the night before to

accomplish this task. It was well worth it. The bell sounded as students scurried to their lockers. I did it! Now all I had to do was make it to the bus. I was at my locker, sandwiched between the two people on either side of me, when I thought I felt a finger tap me on the shoulder. I pretended not to notice. I felt it again. What should I do? Who is it? Was it Linda? No, she would kick me to get my attention. Could it be--no, Nancy. The bread scene came to mind and crushed that idea. I slowly and cautiously turned around to find Brad right behind me. My heart stopped momentarily. That must have taken some tactful maneuvering with all the people that were in the hallway.

"Nancy, I know it's kind of short notice, but would you like to go out tonight?"

My heart started up again, but in my throat. "Uh, well, I uh, I, well..." I cleared my throat, "I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'd love to."

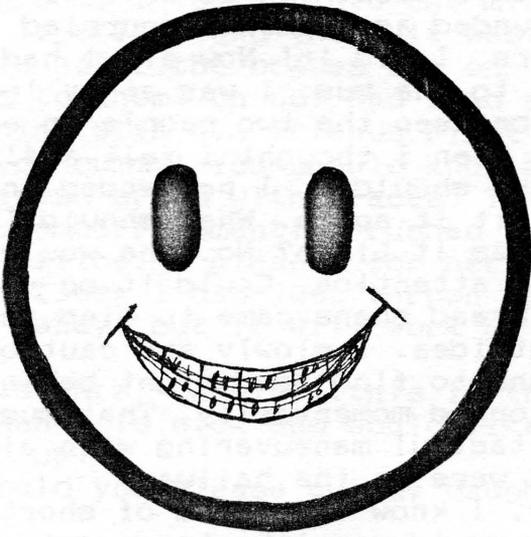
"Great! I'll pick you up at 7:00, and we'll catch a movie and grab something to eat."

EAT!!! That was out of the question. It must have showed because he quickly said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot that I promised Mom I'd stick around for dinner. Make it 8:00 for a movie."

"That would be fine. I'll see you then!" I was so happy, I could have busted.

* * *

"You see, Anna. I understand exactly what you're going through. If your old mom survived such a trauma, so can you. Smile, it's not that bad!" Anna started out the door, "And if you call me from school, you better have a better excuse than I had!"



Wonderland

*Flowers burst forth,
changing and molding.
Summer is neat.*

*I watch the transformations.
I believe in the power of rebirth.
I grow and become and savor.
I smile and spring promises.*

Trees awaken,
commanding and challenging.
Summer is near.

I pray for strength.
I shed tears for humanity.
I salute the flag.
I laugh and spring renews.

Grass realizes emerald,
forming and forcing.
Summer is near.

I awake to life.
I dress in belief.
I wiggle my nose like a bunny.
I taste the fresh air.

Summer is near.

Jim Hillman

ON THE EDGE OF REALITY

Lori Landes

The sun came streaming through Lynn McCutchen's bedroom window. She jerked awake and squinted into the sunlight. --It can't be morning already, she thought. She just lay back in bed and waited for the alarm to go off. Wondering what time it was after several minutes, she casually rolled over to look at her clock. Lynn suddenly jumped out of bed, yanked the plug of her alarm clock out of the wall, and threw it into the trash. --Damn alarm, it didn't work again, she thought. She ran over to her mirror to see if she could leave for work without taking the time to wash her hair. However, her golden locks of hair stuck out in fifty different directions. She let out a soft whimper and flew into the bathroom to take a quick shower.

Lynn locked the front door of her house and made sure it was securely shut. She then dashed out to her car; she knew her clothing store would open a little late today. Her breath formed little white clouds on this cold November day as she desperately tried to get her car started. Finally, it sputtered to life on the fifth try. She shivered in her driver's seat as she patiently waited a minute or two for her car to warm up. She slowly backed out of her driveway, slammed her car into first gear and sped off to work.

After screaming around several turns and missing a few stop signs, Lynn made it to work several minutes early. As she hurried by the appliance store just a few doors down from her clothing store, she caught a glimpse of the news on one of the television sets being displayed in the front window. The particular news story being reported on

stopped her dead in her tracks. She couldn't hear the newscaster through the glass; she only saw his lips moving up and down forming words. But she was only interested in the small picture of a man being shown on the upper right side of the screen next to the reporter. Under the picture it read: "Raymond Sullivan--Escaped." Her eyes grew wider and wider with fear; they became riveted to that picture of Raymond Sullivan. She noticed he still wore a black patch over his right eye. Her thoughts raced back to 1973, when she was just ten years old. Her father had successfully prosecuted the same Raymond Sullivan. He had been sentenced to two life sentences at the state prison for murder. When Sullivan had heard the penalty that he had been dealt, he went into a wild rage. He screamed that he was innocent and that the whole trial was a farce. He had turned towards her father and shouted that he would make him pay for this; he would get his revenge. She had run up to her father at the front of the courtroom and hugged him tightly around the waist. She had stared directly at Raymond Sullivan with a look of both hatred and fear. He had returned her stare. She couldn't stand the sight of that scroggly, old black patch he wore over his eye. He directed his words toward her father but continued to stare right at her. Sullivan's last words had been, "I'd watch out for your family too, if I were you, McCutchen." Sullivan had then started to laugh almost uncontrollably like a maniac. That laugh echoed over and over again in her head.

"Lynn, Lynn, are you all right?" She was shocked back into reality by the manager of the appliance store. He was tapping on the window and trying to scream through the glass at her. She looked up at him in surprise. She managed a weak smile and waved. "Yes, I'm

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Just fine," she mouthed back.

She turned and walked quickly to her own store. Many thoughts raced through her head as she fumbled with the lock to the front door. Her father and mother had both died in a car accident eight years ago. Her sister now lived out west in Arizona. She was the only one left. He was going to come and get his revenge on her. She still couldn't get the lock on the door to her store, and she was almost in a state of panic. She was acting as if there was someone chasing her, and she only had a few seconds to get the door opened.

Suddenly, a hand clamped down on top of hers. Lynn screamed and jumped back. "I'm sorry, Lynn," Phil said. "I didn't mean to scare you." Lynn managed a small laugh as she saw Phil's badge shine in the sunlight. "Are you having a little trouble with your lock?"

"Yes, just a little," Lynn answered. Phil twisted the key around, and the door opened right up.

"There you go, Lynn," Phil said. "Have a nice day." He turned and headed down the sidewalk.

"Thanks a lot!" Lynn yelled. Phil turned and smiled. She walked into her store; her nerves were on edge. She was thankful for the daylight to brighten the store. Being very cautious, she walked into the back room and flipped on the switch to the radio, hoping to catch the nine o'clock news. Music flooded the store as she headed out front to get things arranged properly so she could open. She was running around desperately, almost forgetting about her worries. Suddenly, she heard the name Raymond Sullivan blurted out over the radio. She stopped working and listened intently. The clothes hanger dropped from her hand as she heard that Sullivan was suspected of being near Hampton Lake. That

lake was only four miles from her home.

Lynn slowly bent over and picked up the clothes hanger. Her hands were shaking so badly, she almost dropped it again. She closed her eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm herself. The chimes on the front door of her store clinked together, and Lynn almost jumped out of her skin. She saw her first customer of the day coming in. It was Angle, her most regular customer.

"Hi, Angle," Lynn said trying to sound as cheerful as possible.

"Hi, Lynn," Angle responded.

"How are you today?" Lynn asked.

"Oh, just fine," Angle answered. "Hey, did you hear about that Sullivan guy escaping from prison?"

"Yes--yes, I did," Lynn nervously responded. "It's kind of scary, isn't it?"

"A little bit, I guess," Angle said. "I really doubt we have anything to worry about though," she said with a wave of her hand.

"Oh, by the way, did you get that shipment of wool coats in yet?"

"Yes, I did. They're hanging along the back wall," Lynn answered. "I think you'll like the selection. If you need any help, just yell. I'm going to make a phone call."

Angle smiled and headed towards the coats. Lynn went over by the cash register where the phone was. She decided she had to inform her sister of the situation. As she dialed the phone number, Lynn grimaced thinking about how much this phone call would cost--Oh well, it's worth it, she thought. On the third ring, her sister answered.

"Hello," the voice said at the other end of the line.

"Hello, Pam," Lynn said happily.

"Lynn, is that you?" Pam asked.

"Yes, it is. How are you doing?" Lynn asked in return.

"I'm doing great! Gosh, it's been so

long since I've talked to you. How are you doing?"

"Not the greatest; that's why I'm calling you," Lynn answered.

"What's wrong, Lynn?" Pam asked with concern.

"Pam, I'm really worried. Do you remember that man named Raymond Sullivan who Dad prosecuted back in 1973?" Lynn asked.

"No, not really," Pam said with a bit of confusion in her voice.

"Oh, you remember," Lynn said. "He wore a patch over his right eye. He was found guilty for murder. After he was sentenced, he went into a wild rampage about how he was going to get revenge on our family because he had been falsely accused."

"Oh yes, how could I forget?" Pam responded. "Boy, I was glad when he was finally put behind bars."

"Well, Pam, he's not anymore. He escaped last night. That's why I'm so worried and nervous," Lynn said. "I just heard on the news that he was suspected of being around Hampton Lake. Pam, that's only about four miles from my house. I'm really scared. I don't know what to do." A bit of panic was starting to edge into Lynn's voice.

"Now, calm down," Pam said. "How could he find out where you live?"

"Easy, Pam," Lynn almost screamed. "All he has to do is sneak into a phone booth, look up my name, and there will be my address plain as day for him to see."

"O.K., I forgot," Pam apologized. "Why don't you just come out here for a few days until they capture him?"

"I can't just pick up and leave, Pam. I have a business to run," Lynn responded.

"All right, then. Why don't I just come out there and stay with you until this is all over? I'm sure Dave could manage a few days

without his wife around. How does that sound?" Pam asked.

"That would be great!" Lynn practically shouted into the phone. "Are you sure it's no trouble?"

"Helping you out is no trouble at all," Pam answered. "I'll hop on the next flight to Illinois, and I'll be there as soon as possible."

"O.K. I'll see you later, Pam. Thanks a million." Lynn heard a click at the end of the line and hung up the phone. She felt a little calmer now. A few more customers scrambled in the front door of her store to get out of the cold, but Lynn didn't even notice. She was too preoccupied in counting down the minutes until her sister would arrive.

Closing time had finally rolled around, but Lynn wasn't sure if she was happy or sad. She didn't want to go home, but she was glad the work day was over. She waited until the last customer had left and locked the front door. As she straightened out some of the clothes hanging on the clothes racks, she suddenly heard something crash in the back room. She then heard the pounding of footsteps and the back door open and slam shut. Her eyes were wide open in horror. --Oh my God, that was him, she thought. Her whole body shook as she edged her way towards the back room. She flipped on the light, and a headless mannequin lay face down on the floor. Its head was about three feet from the body still wobbling back and forth from the impact of the crash. Lynn walked up next to the mannequin. She opened her mouth in extreme terror, but nothing came out. She was too terrified to scream. The words "I've come back for you" had been scratched into the back of the mannequin with a nail which was jammed into the right eye. Lynn fainted dead

away.

Lynn woke up shaking on the cold cement floor. She sat up and rubbed her eyes. She then saw the mannequin lying beside her. Without hesitating, she got up and ran out of the room. Trembling, she decided she would head for home and wait on her sister. Lynn just hoped nobody was waiting on her.

Lynn pulled into the driveway of her house very slowly. The house looked dark and quiet. She shut off the car and headed to the front door. Her hand was shaking so badly, she could hardly fit the key into the keyhole. Lynn pushed the door open, and the creaking of the hinges echoed throughout the house. Nothing jumped out at her, so she walked on in. Lynn went through the whole house and turned on every light. She got a small revolver that her father had owned, made sure it was loaded, and went to sit on the couch to wait for her sister.

Lynn waited for several hours with the revolver held tightly in her hand. She was about ready to drift off to sleep, when suddenly, all the power in the house was shut off. Lynn just sat frozen in the darkness of her home. Then she heard it. Raymond Sullivan was laughing somewhere within her house. That same horrid laughter that she had heard in the courtroom thirteen years earlier. She bolted into the kitchen. The laughing seemed to come from every direction; then it suddenly stopped. Lynn heard the squeaking of a door handle turning. She twirled around and saw the handle to the door of the basement being slowly twisted open. She didn't wait to see what was behind the door; she was going to shoot whatever it was. --Damn it, she immediately thought. She had left the revolver on the couch. The door was starting to open. She panicked and ran out the back door and over to her neighbor's. She ran up

to their front door and started pounding.

Lynn started screaming, "Bob, Helen, are you in there?" She kept frantically pounding almost knocking down the door. "Please be home; I need some help!"

The lights came on inside of their house. Lynn saw Bob come running up to the front door still tying the straps of his robe together. He flung open the door.

"What's wrong, Lynn?" he quickly asked.

"Thank God you're home!" Lynn said in short gasps. "That guy that escaped from prison is in my house. He shut off all the power. He's trying to kill me!"

Bob looked over at her house. He started to smile. "Lynn, I think you're just having a bad dream. All the lights are on in your house. See, look for yourself."

Lynn looked over, and it was all lit up. "But, I thought..." and her sentence trailed off. "I guess you're right. Maybe it was just a bad dream. Sorry to have bothered you, Bob. Good night."

"That's all right, Lynn. Good night," Bob replied. "And, hey, don't worry about that prisoner. Why would he want to bother any of us anyway?" Bob shut the door and headed back to bed.

Lynn slowly walked back to her house. She knew this all wasn't a bad dream. --I wish my sister would hurry up and get here, she thought. She walked in the front door and went over to the couch to get the revolver. She stopped dead in her tracks. The revolver was gone. Then, the power in the house suddenly went out again. Not knowing what to do, she ran into her bedroom. She scrambled under her blankets, burying her face in them wishing none of this was happening to her. She heard a car coming down the road and looked up out of her blankets hoping that it was her sister. The car slowed and turned

into her driveway. The headlights flashed across the room. Lynn sat frozen in fear on her bed.

Raymond Sullivan was standing in the doorway of her bedroom. The headlights of her sister's car had flashed across his face. The black eye patch stood out most of all on his gruesome face. He took a few steps further into her room. The moonlight gleamed off her revolver that he now held in his hand. Lynn backed as faraway from him as she could. Sullivan started to laugh again, but he abruptly stopped. Lynn heard her sister knocking on the front door. Sullivan pointed the gun at her and pulled back on the hammer-- ready to fire.

"This is for sending an innocent man to prison," Sullivan practically growled at her. Lynn was screaming and crying hysterically as she stared down the barrel of the revolver.

"Beep, beep, beep," Lynn's alarm screamed across her bedroom. Lynn sat up in bed in a cold sweat. Her heart was beating a million beats per minute. She looked anxiously around the room. There was no Raymond Sullivan. It was morning, not night. Her alarm was on the dresser working just fine, not thrown in the trash. Lynn reached over and shut off her alarm.

"God, I hope I never have another nightmare like that. It had all seemed so real," she said thinking out loud. Lynn shrugged her shoulders and got up to get ready for work. As she trudged towards the bathroom, Lynn didn't even notice the black eye patch dangling from her bedpost.

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