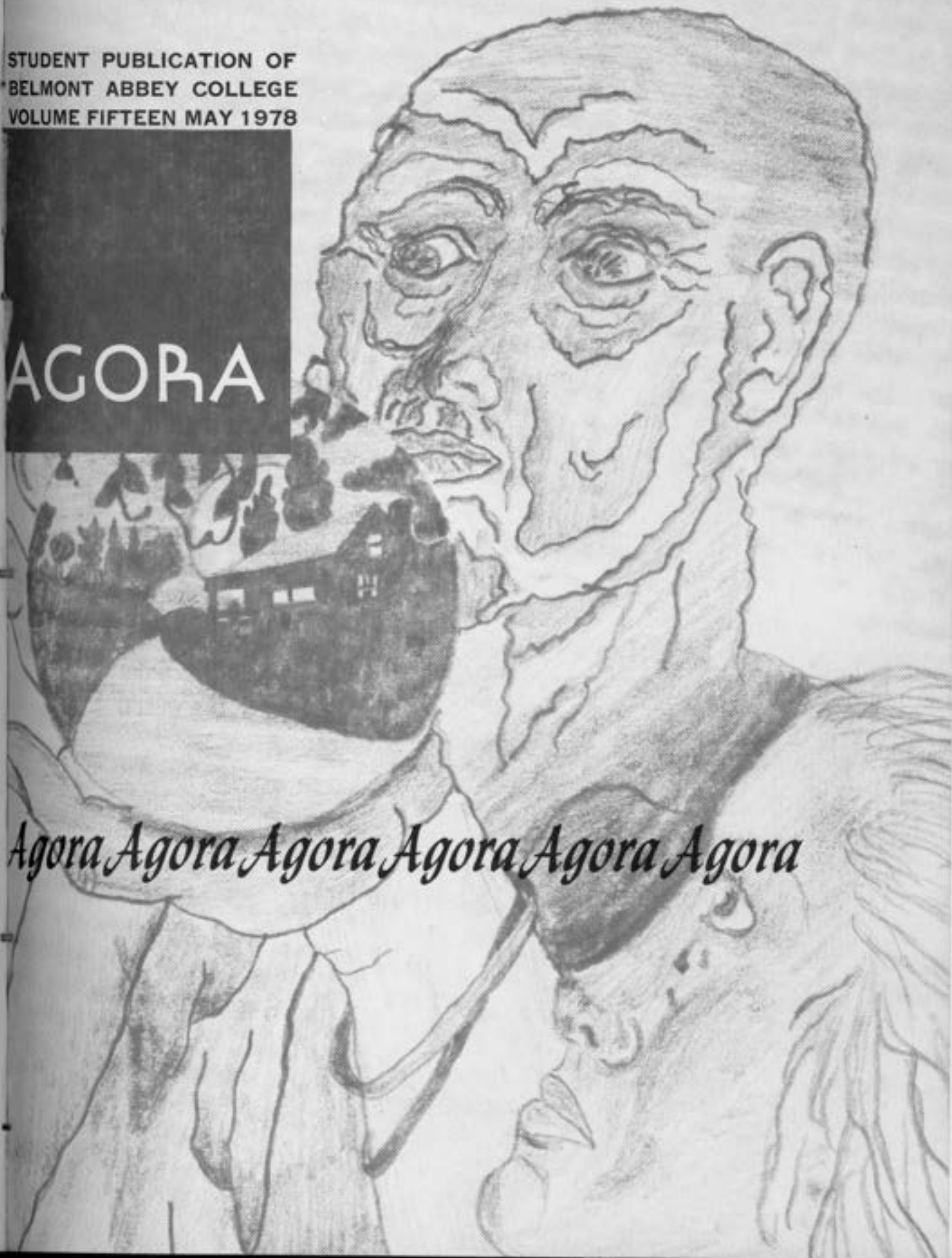


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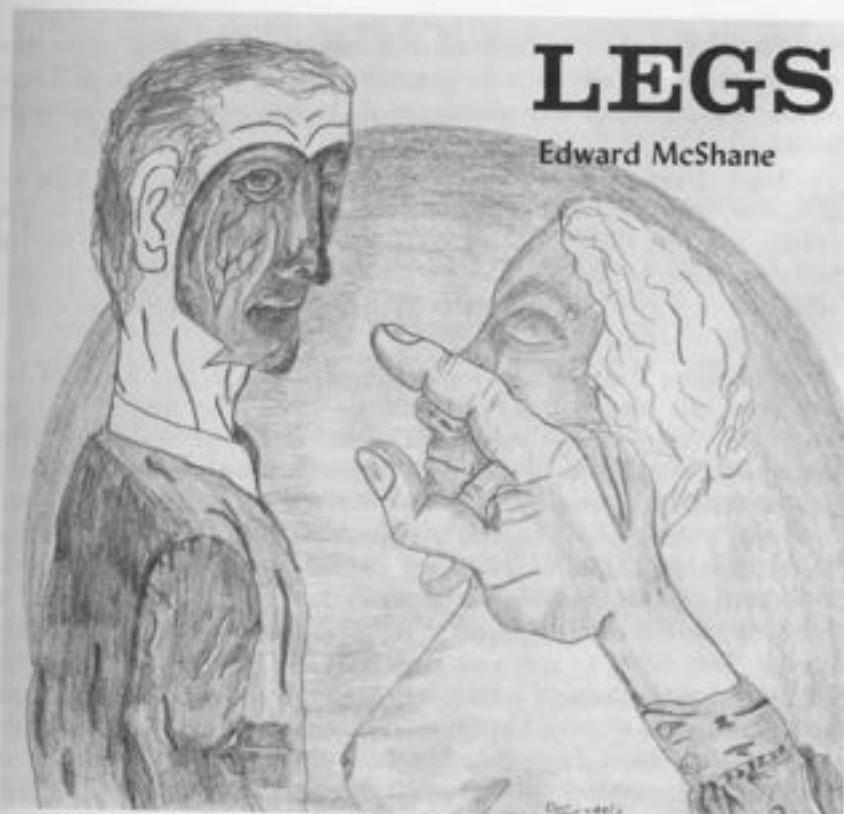
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Illustrations by DeCesaris



LEGS

Edward McShane

On the subway I sometimes see him; or when I walk from my office to Columbus Circle for lunch: a well-dressed, thin-faced, gray-haired young man, carrying a bottle in a brown bag. He sits on one of the slatted benches that ring Central Park, staring off into nothing or perhaps into an infinite regress of men similar to himself sitting on benches, past, present, and future. If I move closer, I realize he is not my father, perhaps what father would have ultimately become. What I will become, maybe what we all become, self-annihilators. Perhaps my delusion is that someday when I move closer to the man on the bench, it will be him, that the fingers will be heavily stained enough with nicotine, that the socks will be the correct color and their tops will not droop, that the soccer scar will be there on the forehead, the eyes blue.

Of course my father is dead. I realize that. I know it. I saw him buried. Yet when I see these other men I am momentarily positive that he is there. That finally we will get to finish the conversation that had just begun, that finally I will learn something about him, about what growing up in Belfast was like, or working on the New York dock, and about him and Sarah, and why he loved her and was loving her worthwhile — and for that matter, existence; why he placed the burden of his secret on me, and if he can forgive me.

I also want to ask him about the legs. How the symptoms begin. What they feel like.

He lives. I feel he lives when I look at my legs. I notice how spindly they are, how the veins pop up on them. They seem good legs, strong legs; perhaps my shortness of breath comes from cigarette smoking?

Legs. I remember the terrifying swoops as he swung me from his shoulders, chuckling and yelling "oops" as Sarah warned him to "be careful with the child." And I remember him also, when I was too old to be intrigued by the shine on his shoes, his legs covered by a blanket, with the black stand-up ashtray at his left hand and a can of Rheingold or a bottle of Guinness in his right.

I sit using that ash tray sometimes now when I visit Sarah. I ask her about his legs, but she will tell me little. She averts her eyes, whispers, "Your father was a good man. God Rest His Soul." The words, sweeter than any I heard her use to him in life, seem addressed to the wedding picture that she has restored above the television set. Her eyes look neither at me nor the picture. I cease to question. In the picture he is smiling in confidence or cunning. There is great dignity in his stance, and in the manner in which Sarah clings to him. She is beautiful, an enormous bouquet of lilies is held like an infant to her breast. They stand by a church Baptismal font; far in the background sunlight streams through a stained glass window; it is unearthly light and reminds me of poor Christmas card art. In front of this sunlight are three frescoes of Jesus enduring three of the more morbid agonies of his life as he marched up the road to Calvary and Crucifixion. How prescient of the photographer to connect that marriage and the crucifixion. It was a Catholic marriage. There was no divorce.

The legs are the focal point. In my legs, he lives. Some mornings I wake totally paralyzed from the waist down. I am able to move only my head and chest. With my hands, I drag myself into a sitting position, back against the headboard. I sit petrified, waiting for the nothingness to creep up my torso. There is no tingling in the extremities, none of the amputee's false sensation, just nothing. I sit and look at the wall until in a few minutes, life comes back to the legs. They, still chilled, carry me across the bedroom to the wall phone in the kitchen. The shrink, as I shriek my terror into the mouthpiece, reassures me that it is only anxiety, nothing organic. Nothing is wrong with me. For a few days, I am convinced, but then one night I will take off my trousers and notice the spindly calves, the veins, the purplish color, and I'll remember the old man.

He was only thirty-eight when some genetic message had gotten through to the fat cells within his veins and arteries. They had been closing gradually over the years; perhaps he had felt the paralysis I do, perhaps the legs fell asleep on him frequently, perhaps looked purpler each night. He told me so little, did not prepare me.

I was sitting on the kitchen floor. They at the table. She weeping, "William, it's the drink."

He: "You don't know the pain, like knives. They said I can't work again without a note from the doctor."

"And will he give you one?"

"No."

I was seven the year the doctors told him he could no longer work. That is how he explained it. Sarah sometimes agreed with this version. Now it is the only one she will accept, but for her then it had to be something connected with the drink. The longshoremen's union records showed that he was not eligible for a pension; he was too young to retire. The gentleman there whom I've spoken to a number of times refuses to divulge any more information.

Sarah found work as maid, returning to the hotel she had worked in when she had been a greenhorn just off the boat. He began to wash the dishes, prepare the meals, and, most of all, sit in the withered green armchair by the front-room window looking vaguely at the street. Sometimes now I will take long walks in upper Manhattan and almost burst into tears as I see others staring mutely into the streets from dirty-curtained front-room windows. Friends often wonder why I am inclined to rent basement apartments.

If he had been completely immobile, Sarah and I might have handled it differently, but he could make it painfully down the stairs — ("Good to see you up, Pop," I would say, passing him or them in the early evening,) and walk the block or two to the Sunset or McKeon's bar once a week, usually on Sarah's payday. We both stood in the kitchen on those Friday nights as she handed us our allowances. A few dollars for the movies for me; to him, a pittance to allow him his pride, never a great deal, never seemingly enough to get drunk on.

At the top of the stairs, I would stop and watch him hold the bannister on the landing, sucking in deep breaths and forcing his shoulders straight. Then he would be lost, moving down the long hallway, until later that night when at two or three AM, I'd sit out on the stoop and wait for him to stagger home and renegotiate those stairs, his arms upon my shoulders. On my walks in Upper Manhattan, I sometimes stop at a neighborhood bar and usually I'll see someone there who reminds me of him. He'll tell me about Parnell or talk about the IRA and the troubles in the North or sing me a song and stick me in hearty fellowship until the twenty dollar bill I have placed on the bar has been drunk up, or he'll flip quarters with me or make bets about Ted Williams lifetime batting average or the length of the longest river in the world. The barman will have a copy of the World Almanac, and my companion will be inevitably correct. Sometimes out of pity I will give wrong answers. I assume my father could also be a hearty companion and gambler; he probably was pitied also and drinks were bought for him by compassionate strangers. How else explain how he could come home so incredibly drunk. His suit (for he was always well-dressed — even

when he worked on the docks he would wear a suit and change into work clothes in the locker room —) would be crumpled or vomit-stained — sometimes even bloody. How many days did I come home from school and see him standing in the kitchen ironing it and preparing it to be crumpled and stained once more?

Physically he never seemed to get better or worse — he had enough strength to walk those few blocks right until the end. But I grew from seven to seventeen and the old man's hair grew whiter, his suit was replaced every two years, his cooking became better, and the trips to the Sunset were decreased as the trips to the hospital clinic increased.

And as I grew and took on strength I began to despise him and wonder about Sarah, for she would go out each night and carry in beer for him and as he drank it, he would become enraged.

I don't know what they fought about. I probably could make up something that would please a psychiatrist, but somehow I don't think there was a reason. They fought because they were fighters. And they were vicious. Some mornings I would wake (for usually I could sleep through it all, having decided to withdraw, retreat, what you will, and survive) and find Sarah had spent the night with neighbors or sleeping in a kitchen chair. One morning I found the old man stretched out motionless on the kitchen floor with blood trickling from his head. I picked him up — I can still remember my surprise at how light he was — and carried him into the bedroom and placed him beside Sarah, who said that he had been drunk and fallen, hitting his head against the refrigerator. She had not helped him. "I hope he learned his lesson," she told me. And yet that very night she was off to the grocery to get him more beer. That was Sarah, propriety, form in all things; she was a wife and wives obeyed their husbands. Even now, Sarah is a creature of form; when she mentions him, she always says, "God rest his soul," and I wonder if she even knows what the words mean.

Form. Form in all things for Sarah, and perhaps it was form that led to their separation also; for surely after twenty years of love-hate, they must have found security in the fact that each was there and could be clung to.

I remember. I will always remember. I wish that I did not have to remember Sarah standing in the middle of the kitchen nude. They had been yelling with a new intensity, for I woke up. I went to protect her. It sounded like they had been slapping each other, and there was Sarah, breasts sagging, crying, hysterical, and he throwing a bucket of water at her, yelling a man's name at her. I cannot remember the man's name. I do not know what he was angry about. But it had to do with a man. I do not know whether she was having or had once had an affair with him. I do not want to know. I was angry. My father looked vicious, burning eyes and slavering mouth of an angry dog. I remember crashing my fist into his face: an ill man, my father.

He crumpled quickly and fell to the floor. Sarah raced into the

bedroom where I heard her weeping for hours. I stood over him and said, "I'm sorry," but he was silent. I left the kitchen and he got up, went to his easy chair, his cigarettes, his beer. That was the last time I saw him in our house.

The next day when I came home from school he was gone. He moved to a furnished room in a welfare hotel on the Upper West Side. I thought it was a ruse on both his and Sarah's part; that he would be back quite soon. But all we heard from him was by postcard. First, an address; then a request for razor blades and an Erskine Caldwell novel that he had been reading.

"Bring him his blades tomorrow, William." Sarah told me.

"Mother, he's obviously gone and bought blades. You know him. I can't picture him going without shaving. I think he wants you to come and convince him to come back home."

"No. He's your father, go see him."

"I don't want to."

"Go, but don't you tell him anything about me. If he asks how I am, say that I'm fine."

"Ask him to come home, Mom."

"That's his decision."

So that Saturday she woke me, gave me breakfast, and sent me off, warning me again not to say anything about her.

Such pride. I, too, am proud. I notice that I have given the impression that I was the dutiful son. Pride. I hated to go. I did not want to see him. I hated the grime of the hotel hallways, the dirty light, the Latin music that seemed to rock the building, and his self-pity.

The first Saturday, he said nothing to me for almost five minutes after he had opened the door and ushered me in. I sat in the one broken-backed chair watching him, trying to think of something to say, while the image of Sarah nude and he with the bucket of water kept fading in and out of my mind.

Finally, looking guilty he said, "Bill, don't you turn against me, too."

He seemed to want something of me. He had never before exposed his emotions to me in this way. A feeling of formality came over me. I did not know what to say but felt that whatever I said would be transformed by him into a reason to stay here or go back home. My parents were thrusting tacit responsibilities on me. I felt used, and at the same time complimented. My father, the raging drunk, was now a hurt child asking me for solace, consolation.

"Everything is going to be all right, Dad. I think she wants you back. Come back, it will make her happy." As I begged I realized I was betraying Sarah.

"You may not have turned against me yet, but in years to come you will." He got up from the rumpled bed and walked hesitantly, painfully, to the refrigerator in the corner of the tiny room. Inside I

saw about a dozen bottles of wine on the rack. He took one and poured two full glasses.

"This is a trifle better than Sneaky Pete . . . I hope you can afford to offer your own son better stuff . . . but I'd like you to share a drink with me while we still have a chance."

He was planning to do away with himself. That was my first thought. For an instant I was indifferent. The man stood before me a case history, but then blood, or perhaps pride, reasserted itself. Only weak men commit suicide, I thought then.

"What do you mean while we still have a chance? We'll have plenty of chances," I said, hoping I was not being cast as some type of preserver, believing he was just suffering from the self-pity of the ill.

"Dad, if you'd only drink a bit less, you and her would get along better. C'mon home and try."

I had not intended to persuade him to come home when I walked into the room, but as soon as he had spoken I felt that he needed to be around Sarah and me.

He looked at me, first with what seemed suspicion; then he smiled and said, "You've become a better son than I could've suspected. From what I remember of that punch the other night it was a beaut," and he was laughing and pouring more wine in my glass. Then he did something he hadn't done since I was a kid. With his hand he mussed up my hair. I felt moved and proud. I sipped the wine which burned my throat and smelled like ether. It was a horrible stuff but I drank it. He was throwing down glass after glass, refilling steadily between his words, "Oh, it had to be a good punch to put me down the way you did." He seemed so gleeful, so happy to have been knocked out.

"Remember when you were a kid, Billy, and I showed you how to box? I did a good job there, now didn't I? Now didn't I?"

I nodded.

"You learnt from the featherweight champion of all Belfast." The joy had left his voice. "Do you feel bad about it, Bill? I never thought I'd see the day when my son would turn on me."

Why wouldn't he shut up? We were getting along so fine, and now he was turning on me. I had not turned on him, but felt that I had betrayed Sarah without really getting any closer to him. That he was still boxing, but now with language. That he was dancing around me with his words, now mock-friendly, then mock-vicious, feinting, moving in and out, looking for my weak spot, dying to floor me, but cautious. Yet I had to stay in there even though I was outclassed. If he were home, the two of them could bicker and fight about what they were taking out on me, so I said, "Dad, I didn't turn on you. You were drunk. I was just trying to stop you from hurting her."

He ran his hands through his graying hair, "I'd never hurt her."
"You could've."

"Oh, let's forget the whole thing. I'm not coming back and you

can tell her that, and tell her to stop sending you down here with messages. I'm sick of both of you. I'm not coming back."

His eyes were fixed on his shoes, and I answered him, my eyes attempting to catch his. "Who asked you to come back? Nobody. And nobody gave me any message." I was angry, my voice rose and he looked up at me from his chair. "I came here to visit you and all you can do is drink and give me some bullshit about what a good guy you are. Well, you're not a good guy. You're a . . . a . . ."

I didn't finish. He was up on his feet and had the door opened. I had hurt him. I could see it in the tic that began to quiver on his cheek, "Billy, get out of here and leave me alone."

I was glad to leave. Glad to get out on Broadway and walk uptown. Glad to look at the pretty girls, their fine legs, the store windows, the strangers who made no demands. He had wanted me to take his side; impartiality he interpreted as turning against him. I thought of other Saturdays when I would go into the confessional and try to explain the same problem to the priest, "Father, the fourth commandment says to honor your father and mother, obey them. But what should you do when one tells you to do one thing and the other tells you to do something else?" The priests had never been able to answer the question, and my only solution was to obey neither by becoming, literally or figuratively, immobile.

As I walked up Broadway I vowed never to see him again. Of course my vow was childish petulance, and when, a few weeks later, he telephoned and asked me to bring his pipes since he was giving up cigarettes again, I knew I would go. Nevertheless, I told him I would mail them to him. He said I had to come see him; he had something very important to tell me.

"This is not life," was the important thing he had to tell me as he sat in the broken-backed chair by his bed, when I walked in the door that Saturday. Then he rolled up his pants legs and showed me his hairy calves: gnarled, pale, with little red splotches glimmering on the skin. "Don't you agree with me? This is no life."

His arms moved above his head, pointing out the dresser, the chair, the bed, the refrigerator-stove combination, the watersoftened walls, and finally the ugly legs again. "I've been thinking about you, about how you must talk to your friends about me, what you must say. About her, also. What she must think at work. There must be some goodlooking strong men there, mustn't there? Don't blush, you fool. You know what I'm talking about."

"Dad, she doesn't think about those things. She just doesn't. I don't know what to say about your legs. Please don't think about them. Let's have a drink." I opened his refrigerator. There was no wine or beer. No whisky in the cupboard.

"There isn't any. That's doctor's orders. You see, Bill, This isn't life and I'm going to do something about it. When I went to the clinic

last week, Doctor Fox told me about an operation that would help my legs. I'm going to have it next week."

"What kind of operation?"

"Well, they're gonna open my heart and attach it to one of those machines, then they'll open my legs and put some plastic tubing in where the veins are clogged, attach it to my heart, and then the blood will be able to get back into my legs."

He said all this very blankly, unemotionally, and from the way he moved his eyes and looked at the floor, I knew the operation was very serious (like a needle slowly inserted into the skin, I felt an inexplicable sharp pain behind my eyelids) and knew he would be dead soon. There could be no other outcome. If the operation was a success, the man who would come through it and walk and perhaps even work again would not be my father; he would be a stranger, a new phenomenon for Sarah and me to deal with. Whatever happened, he was thrusting more confusion on me; I felt that Sarah should be dealing with these profundities; perhaps she could give him the closeness, the understanding that he seemed to be craving. Because that is how I saw his consent to the operation, a wild gallantry in need of an appreciative audience. The old man was being noble, suddenly becoming an allegorical figure in some strange self-dramatization of his own code of honor.

Sarah would know how to act, what role to assume in the script that he seemed to be setting up, but I, seventeen years old and very frightened, could say only, "You had better tell Mother about this."

"No. No. You miss the point. She is not to know until it is over. She has enough to disturb her. This is our little secret."

"I can't hide it from her. I can't."

"Sure you can. I've asked so little of you. You can. Everything is going to be a success, and I want it to be that way without her having to worry for a minute about the whole thing."

"I can't." I couldn't understand. I saw no reason in all the secrecy, and he never gave me any reason; he just said, "Bill, you must."

"She has to know when something this important is happening."

"Bill, I'm not much. A drunk, I guess. But your mother is wonderful. I've been thinking about that since I left and about the shit I put her through. Do you understand? I've been a bastard and put her through shit. You don't know half of it, but now I want to do something clean; something in which she doesn't get involved and hurt."

"So I gotta get involved and hurt, is that what you mean? How can I keep her from knowin' you're in the hospital? I'll want to visit and she'll find out; she'll ask me where I'm goin'. Am I supposed to lie to her?"

"You don't have to come see me. It's gonna be allright anyway. You don't love me. She does and I'm not hurting her anymore."

"But I do love you."

"If you do, you won't tell her."

Again, he had cornered me I felt. Some code that I did not wish to practice had been forced on me and all I could say was, "OK, I'll keep it a secret. I'll try to anyway."

"Good, if you try, you can do it. Now, I go into the hospital on Wednesday and they operate on Friday. You can come see me if you want, but under no circumstances is she to know. Under no circumstances, do you understand?" He was speaking now with that assertion he had used when taking the strap to me as a child.

"Yes, Father, under no circumstances."

"You're the best son a man could have," he said and handed me ten dollars.

"You need this yourself" I said, awed by the amount. He had never given me more than one or two dollars before. Now, at night, I often think of that gesture. There was, I believe, some tacit agreement being reached between us. Was he telling me with that money — how pitiful little it was — that he knew what was going to happen? His smile betrayed no fear or even any attempt at a final leavetaking, as he said, "No I don't need it. The Welfare gave me a check for the month and I'll be freeloading in the hospital for most of it. Buy yourself something."

"Okay. See you Wednesday."

"Only if you want."

On Wednesday and Thursday I did not go to see him. I didn't want to and felt he did not want me there; that he desired his audience should wait until after he had been transformed.

On Friday afternoon they called me from the hospital. He was very bad. I told Sarah. That night we went down to Saint Vincent's together. He died during the night. Sarah was at his bedside. I stayed outside in the waiting room. I could not look into his face after telling Sarah.

As we stood on the steps of Saint Vincent's waiting for a cab, I saw under the garish light of the avenue, men, old and young, alone and in groups, moving from one bar to another.

We got into a taxi and as it drove up the avenue I gazed on the men: not one was well-dressed or clean, all of their socks seemed to droop. They all walked easily, but none looked as if he were contemplating any great action.

But in all their eyes, I saw the suspicion of one who has been betrayed.

I see similar men each day, as I sit here on the park bench. In all their eyes I see the suspicion of one who has been betrayed. In the heat of the sun, I close my eyes. First there are red, yellow, green spots before them, but then I see a long concrete lane and in the distance there is a figure moving toward me on sturdy legs, his arms opened wide. He will pick me up into those arms I know, and muss up my hair, and draw me into his chest and warmth. I shall say "Forgive," and he, "Hush."

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS IN SUMMERTIME

Wednesday nights in summertime
you tongue the freshness
of your just bought
Juicy Fruit and
walk with Ruby Reed
to her Church of God of Prophecy
on Mill Street
where as dark darkens unto dark
pale powdered faces
tremble in the presence
of a thorn wreathed
Christ head
big as an ark
with eyes that
somehow flash miraculous
beams meant to save
the unholy of terrors

"They've got the Holy Ghost,"
says Ruby Reed
as souls tied together
in penance
wail in unknown tongues
and move
toward the preacher's
last altar call
while you
sink
to alter the presence
of your sudden
over-sized self
on the back row
seventh seat to the left
in the Church of God of Prophecy
on Mill Street

— Cathy Smith-Bowers

A LOVE POEM: FOR MY GRANDFATHER

Towards the end
when they told you
that an old acquaintance
had died,

you stirred
in your cushioned chair
stained by life's
thoughtless leaking

and said
"Well thats one bum
I beat out."

Forgive me
I had to smile.

— Dennis McDermott

DISTANCE'S VIEW

It is a fine madness of the mind
Which compells us to share,
Things not seen together,
Nor felt in the same tick of the clock,
But neverless shared.
Our relationship in its nothingness,
Is everything.

— Jean M. O'Toole

A DECENT HOUR: FOR JACK KEROUAC

Toward the very end
in the middle
of the night

not even an old
friend and lover
wants to pull up
a cross-country chair

and pour a long-
distance glass
of wine and just
listen to you

All she can do
is pretend that
it's the connection
that is so bad

and then she lays
something on you like,
"Jesus, man, it sounds
like you're in Siberia!

Look, this is just
impossible! Why don't
you hang up and call
back later at a decent hour."

— Chuck Sullivan

ESCHATOLOGY IN THE VALLEY OF THE SUN

Here on this
holyday of
obligation
the final
numbers are
about to be in
time is
running out
it is all over
as they say
except for
the shouting here
in the Valley
of the Sun
where Phoenix is
burning the Lakers
and an old
official doing
the Network color
tells us that
a hammering dunk
has just put
the last nail
in the coffin

— Chuck Sullivan

THE STALLION

The modern great American cowboy
cruises steadily
in his burnt-red
sports car.

A vastly superior transport over

... four-legged
primitive stallions prairie dancing on green and brown
earth,
snorting
fiery jets of breath defying rope and rider
alike.
braving winter snow and summer dust storm
stinging wind,
waving
wild knotted mane to sun and wind,
earth and sky ...

Yes,
the mechanical cowboy
cruises O so steadily,
capturing
fluttering feminine hearts wholly
won over to
the glimmering scarlet metal stallion,

Now sitting
empty and cold
in parking space #38

Neither
dancing under the moon's pale ringlets

Nor
spurred enough to notice ...

— Doug Queen

MS. FAUSTUS

Fifteen years
since I, Ms. Faustus,
made my pact with
the devil, oral contraceptive.
Fifteen years
since he gifted me biological
control.

But nothing is for nothing
and like Goethe's man before me
now's the time to pay the fee.

In exchange for mental
prowess, the angel of wrath
claimed Faust's immortal soul.
From me, since it was a body
magic, he asks my uterus.

— Grace DiSanto

BORN SIGHTLESS

(Sister Eleanor)

Birth cracked mirrors
across your face

Then silvered fire in your eyes
hardening ice.

But the overflow spilling down
caught the lashes.

— Grace DiSanto

THE DIXIE
TRAVELLER

I travel a lot
on this job
selling detergent
and other chemicals
mostly of 85
up to Greensboro, High Point
sometimes down
as far as Charlotte
and usually I do it by myself.

As I drive
beautiful women smile
from the billboards
selling lotions or trips
to tropical lands
And as I pass another
they focus and slowly
become audible
speaking softly a vision
of sinful freedom.

Dennis
McDermott

A GLANCE

As I pass her
early each morning
she pulls weeds
from her broken sidewalk
in a bathrobe soured
by household cleaners
and dank TV light.

I notice that
as she bends from the waist
her body is a triangle
her rear stuck up
in the air dragging
her robe up her legs.
a stance innocent
yet with the defiance
of an old women
insulated from the hungry glances
of men by the arrogant
poverty of her flesh.

Dennis
McDermott

DEAD LETTER

Nightly, I converse with you,
 eons past the burial,
Your image lingers on,
 and often, I turn,
Hostile to your eyes
 in another's face,
I pause,
 catching your name
In passing conversations;
 Heart still pays
That moment's homage —
 I've spent days removing
Cobwebs,
 And melting down the rings,
All a poor attempt
 to get the final word
In.

— K. L. Haber

RENEWAL

(for Brian)

Midnights
 crowded by memory;
Always the warp
 and weave
 of time,
Lost action,
 or lust
as antagonist,
 The heart one hears,
 ticking
In her cracked
 museum case,
Then emancipated
 and leaping, fieldbound,
Tiger-breathed
 and just as anxious.

— K. L. Haber



The Art of The Weird Poem,

or

L REBECCA MOORE

You, too, Can Be Strange.

Be not deceived! Modern weird poetry is easy to write; just impossible to understand. But, by following a few simple rules, you can write meaningless poetry.

First, you must have a dictionary (to make sure you use archaic spellings), a thesarus, and a meaningless or worthless basic idea.

Let us begin with a common idea:

"Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Sugar is sweet,
And so are you."

This introduces Rule I: Weird Poetry does not rhyme. Therefore, the first transformation is:

"Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
You are sweet as sugar."

Other than the parallel structures of the first two lines, we have loosely tied together three totally unrelated ideas, a sure sign of a successful weird poem.

Next, find synonyms (or antonyms or homonyms, it doesn't really matter) for all the words in the poem. This crucial step separates the poets from the schizophrenics (as if there were a difference). We shall examine in detail the transformation of the first line.

"Roses are Red"

becomes

"Thorns are crimson"

Then, by adding redundant ideas, we derive,

"The thorny Bramble was afire with Crimson"

Next, add arbitrary allegorical symbols:

"The thorny bramble of tyranny and deceit gave way
beneath the crimson flames of virtue and justice."

Next, add as much alliteration as possible (English teachers love to point it out):

"The thorny thicket of tyrannical treachery

and deceit gave way beneath the fearless,
fiery flames, crimson with virtue and justice."

Next, rearrange all articles, verbs, and modifiers:

"Thorny thicket and tyrannical treachery of the
virtue beneath the deceit of the justice gave
way to fearless, fiery crimson flames."

The final transfigured forms of the other two lines read,

"Rendered asunder, ermine and sable, lindered
and low, screamed as the blood flowed."

and

"You are as eternity, decayed forever and
infinitely dead and degraded"

Between the three lines, insert words such as "Yet" or "as" to
link it all into one big run-on sentence fragment. Also, the word
"lindered" is one I made up. It can mean anything you want it to.

Next, insert "thou"'s, "art"'s, and "wherefore"'s everywhere possible. Finally, arrange in lines of 1/5 to 300 words each and use either
no punctuation or periods in the middle of sentences and semicolons at
the ends. The final punctuation mark, however, is a very dramatic
comma and three dots.

Choose a completely unrelated title with a unique feature, like
being spelled backwards.

Thus, the "Roses are Red" poem becomes:

OPUS "M"

Thorny Thicket
and

Tyrannical treachery of
the virtue beneath;
the deceit of the justice gave way!
Yea, verily,
to fearless, fiery

crimson flames as.

Rendered asunder, ermine,
and
sable?

lindered and low:

screamed, as, the bane of
blood

Flowed wherefore

Thou art as eternity: decayed (forever),
and infinitely

dead and degraded, . . .

Isn't life strange?

— L. Rebecca Moore



FOR SALE



**PAMOLU
OLDHAM**



When Marge gets excited, she has to wee right then and there. So that afternoon in August when she saw the FOR SALE sign stuck not two feet from the road, she slammed on brakes and squeezed hard to divert her urge.

She had seen the house before. It was small and clapboard with a lazy front porch across the front. Two large live oaks bent their mossy arms around the house as if to protect from storms and time. She'd seen other houses like this one tucked back from the Inland Waterway as natural as the bay trees or the maypop vines winding along a sandy ditch. But it seemed the normal run of events for the son or daughter who had grown up in one of the upstairs bedrooms of these quaint houses to build an even smaller brick house and plant a lamp in the obligatory plate glass window, or to haul in a trailer and wait until the parents died off either to level the old wooden structure or turn it into a beauty parlor. These houses never appeared on the market.

Marge pulled off the road when a pickup with a small boat in tow honked at her. She cut the engine and hung her arm out the window, not to motion another car or truck but just in the luxury of a new possibility. She had never noticed the bright red cannas growing by the backdoor or even that the backdoor was green.

Marge had never liked the beach. She did not like the family's brown-trimmed cottage built on stilts so cars could park underneath. But for years they'd been coming to the beach, long enough for her to have hooked two 10' x 10' rugs, one of which now lay on their dining-room floor back in the piedmont.

Marge loved this road to the waterway with its cathedral ceiling of Spanish moss. She had slipped away that afternoon, leaving the children on the beach with their father, an older man who had met success before he ever met Marge. For the last two days it had rained. The sand on the beach was stippled and cold to the feet. Marge and the two children had played scrabble until they'd spelled every word imaginable, Marge thought, and everyone had won at monopoly at least once. As a last resort they had driven to the Beach Shop and bought a 1000 piece puzzle of the Eiffel Tower. She and Bob had even worked on it after the children had gone to bed only to find the piece which would have completed the spire, missing. Now the Tower, abandoned on a card table by the window, seemed a monument to the unattainable.

She jumped out of the car and let the door slam of its own weight. She crossed the narrow paved road to the sign. The letters were black and shiney, possibly roofing tar, and had been brushed on a warped piece of plywood and stuck into the sand with a 2' x 4'. The sign was sturdier than need be, Marge thought.

When she looked again at the front porch she noticed a man rock-

ing. He looked straight ahead. He didn't even turn his head when Marge, midway into his front yard, bent to pull a sandspur from her tennis sock.

"Hello?" she asked. "I saw your sign out there."

He moved his gaze to Marge and nodded.

"How are you today?" she asked.

He nodded again. His eyes studied her. They were brown eyes. He turned them back to the sea and continued to rock.

Maybe he's deaf, Marge thought.

"It's a nice day we're having today," she said a little louder.

"We've been having rain over on the island."

"Right nice," he said.

"I've always liked your lane here with all the moss hanging down. Like a cathedral. It's just beautiful here. Not like over on the beach with that glare."

She bent to pick a blade of grass.

"I saw your sign out there," she said.

She split the blade of grass into two pieces.

"See my cannas out yonder?"

"Yes, they're beautiful," she said. "We used to have them back home when I was growing up." Marge turned to look at the branches of the large oak at the edge of the yard. "There's strength in these old oaks," she said.

"They been here a long time. They was already up a good ways when I was a boy," he said.

Marge invisioned him as a boy, chunking oyster shells and bits of conch at the trees. His dog trailing behind would have stopped for a last pee on his territory before heading to the waterway.

"That beach is sure growed up. All them cottages now. They come from just about everywhere. I seen a license plate all the way from Ohio the other day. Right down the street here. I been here seventy years you know."

Marge moved to the steps. She leaned against the railing. She thought of her father who had died of diabetes.

"My wife she passed on five years ago this spring and I been living on here. The boy used to be over in Shallotte but they they moved him to Whiteville. They make fertilizer."

The old man leaned over the railing to spit out a dark brown jet of tobacco juice. His hatband had long since given out causing his hat to bear a striking resemblance to a mushroom cap.

Marge ran two of her fingers down the crease of her yellow linen bermudas.

"We've been looking for a place like this," she said.

"They been catching a lot of spots and pompano over there on the pier lately, ain't they?"

"My husband caught some spots three days ago. I saw a lot of

people were up there on the pier when I passed."

Marge rubbed her hand down the gray railing. Tiny lichen grew in the splits in the wood giving the railing a greenish tinge.

"We've looked all along the coast for a place like this. At least it's what I want. Bob and the children, they really like the beach. It's just too bright over there for me and since I don't like to swim . . ."

"Couldn't give me that beach over yonder. My boy he used to take me over to the pavilion sometimes at night to watch them cavorting. You seen them over there?"

"Some mighty strange dances these days," Marge said and smiled down at her tennis shoes. She pictured the old man mooning at the young girls gyrating to the juke box which the waves crashed against the sea wall.

"I seen a man older than me dancing over yonder the other night, making a fool."

"What I originally stopped for Mr. . . Mr. . ."

"Watkins the name."

". . . Mr. Watkins, is to find out the price of your house so I could tell my husband. I'd love to get off the beach and still they could go over."

He raised slightly from his rocker and spit out another lip of tobacco juice.

"Lady, sometimes I just have to put my sign out there with my boy in Whiteville now."

Marge turned to look at him. She expected him to be ashamed. She expected him to be gazing toward the marshes, pretending to spot a gull or study the cloud formations.

She turned away from him before her eyes betrayed her. She pictured Bob back on the beach eager to identify the fish in his catch to the stray wives who walked the beach in twos and threes or the lone pale insurance salesman with sunburned feet. The whiting would be about eight inches, barely able to cut circles in Bob's new galvanized bucket. The pompano would already be side-up on the bottom, its eyes wide and fixed like exotic berries.

A tear rolled down Marge's cheek. She no longer remembered stopping. She forgot him on the porch. And in that time she could hear the cry of the live oak roots, even the tiny root hairs, she thought, wandering through the vast gray sand. She saw herself in her yellow bermudas, talking with the old man, and she saw Bob squatting beside his new bucket. "What's that cute one there on the bottom with the pale yellow fins?" a stroller would ask. "That's a pompano," he'd answer. He would then pick up the pompano, his big thumb wedged in the small gill. "Little but it's good eatin.'"

Marge wiped the tear away, continuing the up-stroke to fluff her hair. Her mind was cloudy with thoughts as if its sandy bottom had been stirred.

the contributors

EDWARD McSHANE

A native of New York, Mr. McShane attended and received degrees from Hunter College, The University of Denver, and Iowa State University. While at Iowa State, Ed sharpened his craft at the Iowa Writers Workshop culminating in his vivid portrayal of a man searching not only for his father's motivation, but perhaps for his own identity and fate. Ed is currently an assistant professor at Fayetteville State University.

CHUCK SULLIVAN

An alumnus of Belmont Abbey College, Mr. Sullivan's poetry first appeared in *Agora* more than ten years ago. Since then Chuck has been published in *Esquire*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Seventies*, and a host of other national and regional publications. He is the author of *Vanishing Species*, a book of his poems by Red Clay Books. Chuck is employed by the South Carolina Arts Commission and is living in Rock Hill, where he is at work on his second book.

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DENNIS McDERMOTT

A junior at U. N. C. Chapel Hill, Mr. McDermott is making his publishing debut with *Agora*. A native of New Jersey, Dennis is "a victim of industrial transfer to the south," where he frequents bars and subversive establishments in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dennis asked me to mention, with simulated intimacy, that he is a personal friend of the editor of this publication and that such a relationship had nothing to do with the publication of his three very fine poems.

KAREN L. HABER

A native of New York, Karen is currently working as a free-lance writer in St. Louis. Although trained as a journalist, Miss Haber enjoys the freedom from journalism's strict guidelines that poetry allows. Karen is a former pen-pal of the editor.

JEAN M. O'TOOLE

A previously published poetess from the Florida area, we are proud to include her poem in this edition of *Agora*.

DOUG QUEEN

Doug hopes to grow a mustache in the near future. In the meantime he writes poetry and prose. Two habits he is trying to quit.

GRACE DiSANTO

An alumna of Belmont Abbey College, Grace DiSanto is a name familiar to all our readers. Mrs. DiSanto received three national awards for her poetry last year. A loyal supporter of *Agora*, Grace resides in Morganton, N. C.

PAMOLU OLDHAM

Miss Oldham received her B.A. in English from Sweet Briar College, her M.F.A. in fiction from Columbia University, and is currently an instructor in English at Fayetteville Technical Institute. A story of Miss Oldham's is included in *Love Stories By New Women*, published in the spring of 1978 by Red Clay Press. This is Pamolu's first appearance in *Agora* and, for fear of disappointing our audience, we hope to include her in our next edition.

CATHY SMITH-BOWERS

Ms. Bowers sends her poetry from South Carolina where, when she is not chewing Juicy Fruit and observing unsuspecting churchgoers from her fourth floor apartment on Mill Street, she submits her poetry to *Agora*. This is Cathy's first appearance in *Agora* and we hope she will "grace our pages" for many years to come.



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