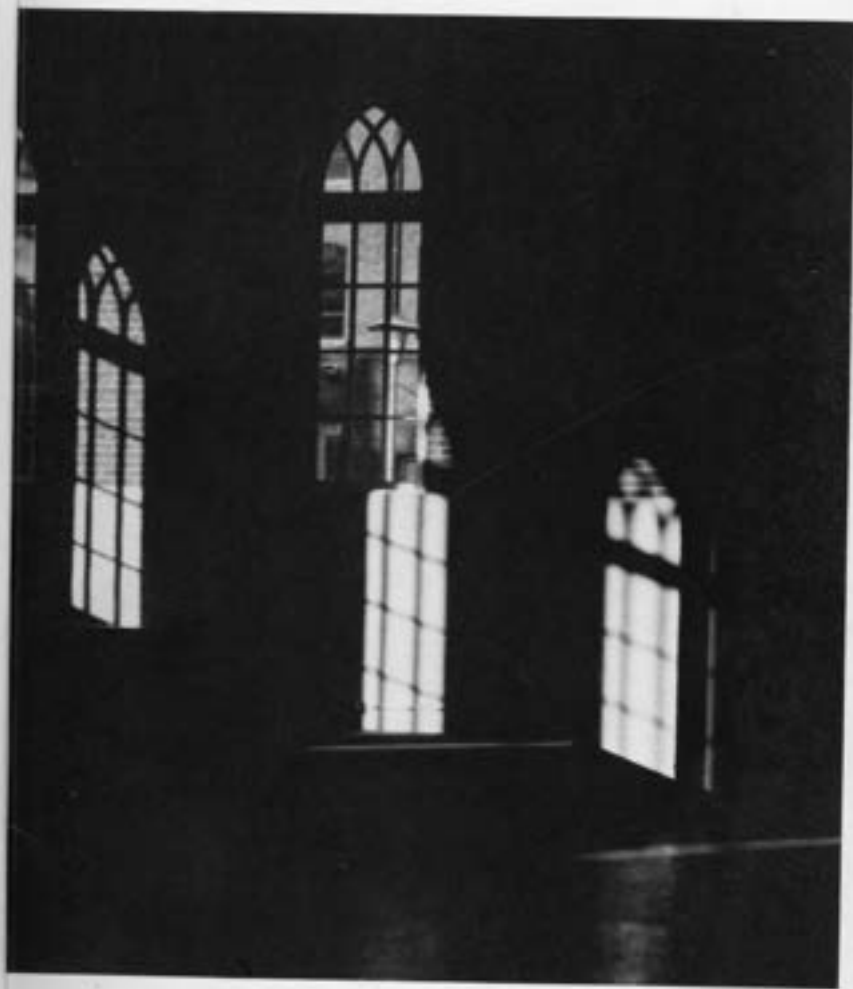


AGORA



Belmont Abbey College
Vol. XXIX Spring 1995

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Photograph by Marshall Jones, taken from inside the Haid on a windy winter day in 1994.

AGORA

"Birthplace of democracy,
the Agora dozes at the foot of the Acropolis.
Athenians thronged here to discuss,
harangue, litigate, philosophize."

*Greece and Rome:
Builders of our World*

Volume XXIX
Spring 1995

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Belmont Abbey College,
funded by the college and organized with the help
of the Abbey Writing Center.*

Dedication

This issue of Agora is dedicated to Professor Jean Moore in recognition of her varied and distinguished contributions to the College for many, many years. She was, first and foremost, an educator who astonished all with her ability to inspire and motivate her students year after year, while also writing, providing fundamental support for the Abbey Players (including a dramatization of her own book about her father, Shop Boy), supporting Agora with her work and her efforts, and serving the larger community. Her tragic death brought all of her virtues and her innumerable achievements suddenly into focus, and the heartfelt expressions of sorrow and the many memories which came unprompted from all members of the Abbey community are perhaps the greatest testament to a life truly well lived. Someone essential has been taken from us, and we will remember her well.

Russell Fowler

Contributors

John Murphy, a BAC senior in Liberal Studies, intends to pursue an interest in creative writing professionally.

Camille Hopkins, a BAC graduate, will receive an MA in English from the University of Toronto in May.

Dennis Narduzzi is a senior Theology major from Greenville, S.C.

Newley Purnell is an English major who plans to study creative writing at Emory University next year.

Elizabeth Costales, a BAC graduate, is an editor at Auerbach Publishing in New York where she has continued her passion for the theater by acting and directing.

Brother Leo Fowler, O.S.B., a member of the Vincent Taylor Library staff, is working toward a master's degree in library science.

Mary Ellen Weir, R.S.M., is a member of the English faculty at BAC.

Margrete Anderson works at the library and is an active member of Friends of the Library.

Cliff Rhodes, A BAC graduate and a published poet, is heading toward graduate school.

Russell Fowler is the Chairperson of the BAC English Department, and is a frequent contributor of poems to journals.

George Herndl was a member of the BAC English Department for over thirty years and is now retired. He is the Editor of the Delta Epsilon Sigma, a national literary journal which offers writing competitions to students.

Sameer Malhotra is a Business and Computer Science major at the Abbey.

Deanna Christian, a BAC graduate, in English this year, is the Editor of this issue of the Agora.

Linda Pellerin is an Abbey graduate and works in the BAC Development Office. She is interested in studying writing on the graduate level.

The Great Books Mother Goose

Diane Hollingsworth

SOCRATES, gadfly tease,
Bothered Aristophanes.
Drove Athenians to think;
Fatal hemlock had to drink

OEDIIPUS, what a jinx,
Solved the riddle of the Sphinx.
He kept looking, saw the light,
Learned the truth—but lost his sight.

ARISTOTLE had a plan
For the happiness of man:
Said, the mean is the direction,
When you practise for perfection.
Most of us would like to throttle
That old windbag Aristotle.

JESUS CHRIST, our blessed Saviour,
Came to teach us true behavior.
If we take Him at His Word,
Does He bring peace, or a sword?

Old AUGUSTINE
Fell a -lustin'—
How disgustin'.
"Take and read."
He took heed.
He was freed.

When holy ST. BENEDICT made up his rule,
He sent all the monks to a moderate school:
"Be good to each other, and love God, and pray,
And I'll see you all up in Heaven one day."

SIR GAWAIN was bold.
The story is old.
If Sir Gawain's will had been
stronger,
The story would have been
even longer.

Foxy statesman, MACHIAVELLI
Pounded scruples into jelly.
Said: If power you would seek,
Seize the day, and don't be meek.
I am sure that Niccolo
Went where all true villains go.

Double, double,
Cauldrons bubble,
Got MACBETH in a heap of trouble.
Murdered Duncan in his bed;
Then MacDuff cut off his head.

FRANCIS BACON, in defiance,
Claimed the future lay in science.
Found among Bensalem's sages
Wisdom for the coming ages.

Switzerland's JEAN-JEACQUES ROUSSEAU
Said, Early Man was good, you know;
Life is eating, drinking, sex:
Modern folks are too complex.

Wordy WORDSWORTH worshipped nature
In poetic nomenclature.
In the stones of Tintern Abbey
Found a sermon—not too shabby.

WILLIM BLAKE, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee pen, and bade thee tell
Of the marriage of Heaven and Hell?
William Blake, you're so artistic
For a crazy English mystic.

CONRAD was a gloomy Pole,
Heart of Darkness took its toll;
Marlowe cried: "Full steam ahead!"
The message? "Mistah Kurtz—he dead."

With a sense of *deja vu*,
We approach ALBERT CAMUS.
Life is meaningless, we fear;
Existentialism's here.

Tell me, now you've had a look
Into many a GREAT BOOK,
Full of wisdom, wit, and lore:
Are you wiser than before?

Daily Prayer

Margrete Anderson

Dear Lord in Heaven, to you I pray
stand beside me, as I go through my day.
Help me to face the things that I dread.
Let me insure that my children are fed.
The good in all, please help me to find
and to those in need, let me be kind.
I don't need wealth, or riches as such
enough for today, do I ask too much.
Help me understand, those who are mean
and all is not always as it may seem.
As today's sun gives way to the darkness of night
let me know that I've done all that I might
to make the world better for those who are here,
for strangers as well as those I hold dear.
Help me today with my daily task
tomorrow, one day will be all that I ask.

"the streets were alive"

Dennis Narduzzi

the streets were alive,
they moved with gigantic throngs,
that throng going anywhere,
that throng quick and sure,

the buildings loomed as gods,
they being steel and concrete,
they were like temples,
some gleamed with pride,
some reeked in decay.

the air was thick,
the sun oppressive,
the clouds taking various shape,
the people went never looking,
they went by without a care.

life is precarious,
love is disastrous,
does God exist?
people say he or it does,
i wonder if they have a clue.

life is short, sweet,
life is what we make of it,
we have a limited time,
do we understand?
or is it true that **GOD's** plan baffles man???

Long Distance

Elizabeth Costales

Dixie calls
with a nightbird in the back-
ground.
The quiet
travels northward and
slips into my skull
like a lover.
Laughter from the mockingbird
I see darkness through the line,
and
a train—
the Crescent—
is headed towards me
to repossess.
It spirits me away with its
barren call.
This
takes all my strength.

(untitled)

Camille Hopkins

For Craig Kirkland

When he first let me put bow to strings
that summer, so light and solid,
they made that haunting yawn
I could never repeat

the way he raised the viola
to his shoulder in the habit
of a young mother, arm bent
and swinging, back hunched
and drowning
in the small practice room;

maybe it was the viola I wanted,
curved into his neck (his head
leaning in gently) above
those unmarked rows
that held music—he could
find the path easy as reaching for
a ripened daisy

in summer, it sang out
a ribbon my body could bend to,
notes to carry through
rooms of rows
where I stretched
and leaned to see him
play Holst.

How could I have cared, really,
that he didn't know,
when it was not his voice
I sought but wood, catgut, and hollowness,
music to orbit by, and such
iron in my light hands?

"Hannah"

Mary Ellen Weir, RSM

(In 1830 at a slave auction, an old woman named Hannah is sold, to the highest bidder, for 50 cents. She could be sold for no more owing to her age and decrepitude.)

blue november sky is crackle
blurts me back when I was twelve

but now they help me unto the block
the block
how many auctions have I stood
this one my last
I'm part of an estate settlement I must go
to save them debt

I'm so old now but you should have seen me young
when I fell in love
fell in love with the sky
the stars that would burst on my face at night
just looking up

if there is one me I still feel
it's the blue sky crackle
oh it's so fresh so much like a baby's eye
like mine, once,
how my mother shone to me
sheer silver joy
in my clear baby eye

they have to help me unto the stone hard block.
how many blocks I've stood on
some good masters, some bad

but always,
always, I have felt the sky.

they shout not much for me.

20. 30.

35. Silence. 40. embarrassed for me. I see the sky
through the wall of the market the honeyed men
some just babies to me

I see the november tree through the arch low,
end of the market hallway.

I remember the sound of night, near the woods. the leaf that fell
how I felt each leaf
each fall of every leaf
50 cents.

Sold. A merciful man buys me.
they help me down the block. I round up with his other niggers.

oh
when all the world cracks like guns
seems so strange the sky's still blue

Chameleons

John Murphy

Characters

Cathy Watson, a single black mother in her mid-twenties.

Mr. Watson, Cathy's father.

Mrs. Watson, Cathy's mother.

Michal Watson, Cathy's son who is five years old.

Bill Reed, Cathy's boyfriend, who is a single white male that is twenty-nine years old.

Scene: A summer afternoon in the small Southern town of Lincolnton, North Carolina. Outside heat shimmers upwards from the softened asphalt road that runs in front of Cathy Watson's rented duplex apartment. Inside, the front room of the apartment is sparsely, yet tastefully decorated. There is a couch, a coffee-table with a crystal vase filled with freshly cut flowers, two wing-tipped chairs facing one another at opposite ends of the table, and on the back wall hangs a framed print of an African-American painting. The front door is at stage right with a window beside it. And the kitchen is located off stage left.

The curtain rises and Cathy Watson is busily dusting the furniture as the doorbell rings.

Cathy: Just a second. (She fixes her dress nervously as she crosses the stage and looks through the door's peephole.)

Mrs. Watson: (from off stage right.) Hurry-up girl! Your Daddy and me are melting in this heat.

Cathy: Yes Mama. (Cathy fumbles with the two deadbolts and eventually opens the door.) I'm sorry it took me so long, I . . .

Mrs. Watson: You'd think you needed a combination to open it. (She passes Cathy's extended arms and looks critically around the apartment.)

Cathy: I'm sorry Mama. Hey Daddy. (Cathy steps forward with her still extended arms and wraps them around her Father.)

Mr. Watson: How you been girl?

Cathy: Oh, just wonderful Daddy.

Mr. Watson: It sure smells good in here. Is that fried chicken I smell?

Cathy: Fried chicken, pinto beans, collard greens and cornbread too. You know I'm going to fix your favorite when you come down.

Mr. Watson: (smiling.) That's my girl.
(Cathy smiles lovingly at her Father.)

Mrs. Watson: I guess you don't have much time to clean your house being a business-woman and all. (She smiles after speaking and her smile seems to drain the smiles of Cathy and her father.)

Cathy: Mama, I ..

Mr. Watson: So, where's my grandson? I'd like to see him.

Cathy: He's playing next door. I'll be right back. (Cathy exits stage right and is heard calling for her son:) Michal! (and again a few seconds later:) Michal!

Mrs. Watson: (runs her finger along the table and holds it under her husband's nose to show him the invisible dust.) Doesn't look like this table's been dusted in a month of Sundays.

(Mr. Watson looks pleadingly at his wife in an attempt to diffuse her mood as the front door swings open and Michal runs on stage.)

Michal: Grandpa, Grandma! (Michal begins to pass his grandmother for his grandfather, but stops and quickly embraces his grandmother before jumping into his grandfather's arms.) How you been grandpa? I've missed you.

Mr. Watson: Fine, just fine son. (Hugging Michal tightly, Mr. Watson whispers in the boy's ear:) I missed you boy.

Mrs. Watson: So Michal, what's this big surprise your mama's called us down here for?

(Michal clings tighter to his grandfather's neck as if this action would dismiss his grandmother's question.)

Mrs. Watson: Did you hear me speak to you Michal?

(Michal's Grandfather places him on the floor facing his Grandmother.)

Michal: Yes, I heard you Grandma, but I think Mama should. . .

Cathy: (entering from stage right). You think Mama should what son?

Mrs. Watson: I was just askin the boy what your big surprise was.

(Cathy looks from her Mother to her Father.)

Cathy: I've met someone. He should be here soon. He's the most wonderful. . .

Mrs. Watson: Lordy, Lordy, Lordy! Well, surprise, surprise! She's found herself another man.

Mr. Watson: Margret.

Mrs. Watson: Well didn't I tell you? I knew it was just another man.

Mr. Watson: Now Margret please don't. . .

Cathy: Oh never mind Daddy, I'm going ot check the food. Come and help your mama son. (Smiling at Michal she takes his hand and they exit stage left.)

Mr. Watson: You couldn't give her a chance before you started?

Mrs. Watson: A chance? I've watched too many men go by in your daughter's life, it's been a damn parade.

Mr. Watson: You two used to be so close. You gotta bend a little, she's tryin'.

Mrs. Watson: Oh fiddle. (She waves her hand to accent the dismissal of her husband's rebuke.)

(Cathy enters from stage left holding her son in her arms.)

Cathy: Daddy it's going to be a while, the greens are still tough.
(He smiles at her as she hands her son to him and he sits on the couch with Michal on his lap.)

Mrs. Watson: SDo who is your latest fling?

Cathy: He's not a fling Mama, I care a great deal for him.

Mrs. Watson: Who is this man? Does he have a job, or is he like the last one, the one before that?

Cathy: His name is Bill Reed and yes he does have a job. He reminds me of Daddy, I guess that's why I love him so much.
(Michal climbs from his grandfather's lap and stands in front of his grandmother.)

Michal: Bill is cool Grandma. He is teaching me Karate. He has a black belt.
(Michal throws a kick towards his grandmother.)

Mrs. Watson: Oh that's fine, that's a fine skill you have of kicking at your grandmother.
(The doorbell rings.)

Cathy: Oh my God!

Mr. Watson: Cathy, you know that ain't right!

Cathy: I know Daddy, I'm sorry. I just wanted to spend this time explaining, I mean preparing. (Pause.) Oh hell!

Mr. Watson: Cathy!
(Cathy exits stage right and shuts the door behind her.)

Mrs. Watson: (in a hissing whisper:) She don't listen to no one.

Mr. Watson: Shush!

Mrs. Watson: Somethin' up when that girl invites us down here. How long has it been since we been in her home? I'll tell you. It's been near a year.

Mr. Watson: (absently). We was here a few months ago on my birthday.

Mrs. Watson: That's just like you. (She looks across the room at her grandson playing intently with a super-hero figure, and then snaps her head back and speaks with spite:) Where's his father? Who's his father? You know what they call a child with no daddy?

Mr. Watson: It ain't a matter of who fathered the boy. We know who he be; it's a matter of why ain't he a father to him. The boy is a Watson, and you best never hint that word again! (Cathy peeks her head through the door at stage right and speaks in a timid voice:) Mama, (pause). Daddy. Bill is here. (Cathy's mother and father look

towards the door with anticipation yet Cathy holds her position with only her head poking through the door's slight opening.)

Mrs. Watson: Well girl?

(Cathy hesitantly opens the door with Bill standing beside her.) This is...

Mrs. Watson: A white man!

Mr. Watson: Damn!

Bill: Mr. Watson, I've heard alot of good things about you.

Mrs. Watson: God bless America!

(Cathy's father limply shakes Bill's head as Bill extends his left hand toward Cathy's mother.)

Mrs. Watson: God bless;; (Startled.) Get your damn hand out of my face.

(She turns aggressively towards her daughter.) You a ho'. You nuttin' but a ho'. (Mr. Watson let's go of Bill's hand and crosses the room to his grandson.)

Mr. Watson: Come on Michal. I think we need to take us a walk.

(Mr. Watson exits stage right with the child.)

Mrs. Watson: You see, you see what your doing to your father? I know you don't care none for me, but you act like you love him.

Cathy: Mama I don't want to hurt either of you, I love you both.

Mrs. Watson: Love? You call this love? You ain't got no love in you.

Cathy: Mama I know Bill's race is a shock to you, but please sit down and give me a chance to explain.

Mrs. Watson: I don't need no explainin'. I understand just fine. You always thought you was better than us.

Bill: Mrs. Watson, if you would please give us...

Mrs. Watson: Shut your god-damn mouth white man, I got nuttin' to say to the likes of you.

Bill: Excuse me. (Bill exits stage left.)

Cathy: You didn't raise us to be like that. You taught us that all people were the same.

Mrs. Watson: As I was saying, you always thought you was better. You think you is high-yella. Well, I got news for you, you're black, even if you is light skinned.

Cathy: I know I'm black and I'm proud of that fact.

Mrs. Watson: OH? You say you proud of it, but you ain't never acted nuttin' but ashamed of your people.

Cathy: That's not true!

Mrs. Watson: Then why you talk the way you do? You done that since you first started school and started runnin' with those little white girls. Whereare they now? I'll tell ya, they gots sense enough to stay with they own kind.

Cathy: Mama, you're talking about the first grade and Sandra Jackson is still one of my best friends.

Mrs. Watson: Of course she is, you too good to have black friends.

Cathy: You know that's not true. I've brought Beverly up to eat at your farm before.

Mrs. Watson: Who, that thing you brought with those extensions in her hair? She just like you, a wanna-be white. I seen the way she looked down her nose at us. The two of you up there made me sick. You both talk like yourwhiter than Wonder Bread.

Cathy: (exasperated.) Mama, I just speak ENGLISH. It's not white or black, it's just English.

Mrs. Watson: What you sayin' I don't talk English?

Cathy: No Mama, I...

Mrs. Watson: That your Daddy and all the folk where you from don't talk English?

(Cathy reaches for and holds her mother's hands.)

Cathy: I do love you, and I don't want you to resent me Mama. I don't think I'm better than anyone.

(Cathy's mother jerks her hands free.)

Mrs. Watson: When you visit, all you talks about is how good your doin' at your job promotions; and how good you doin in that night college you goes to. (Tears begin to run down Cathy's downcast face.)

Cathy: I wasn't bragging; I just wanted you and Daddy to be proud of me.

Mrs. Watson: There ain't nuttin' to be proud of. I guess I could've done them things too if I wanted to neglect my children.

(Cathy wipes the tears away from her face and glares at her mother.)

Cathy: Neglect? (Slightly raising her voice.) I don't neglect Michal!

Mrs. Watson: (harsh and loud.) Don't yell at me! What's you call puttin' him in storage every day until you's ready to get him?

Cathy: (folding her arms to emphasize her dismay.) Are you referring to the daycare program he's in? It's the best available.

Mrs. Watson: Daycare? Oh that's a good one. He told me you don't pick him up till after 10:00 in the evenin' sometimes.

Cathy: I'm earning my degree so that I'll be able to give Michal a better life.

Mrs. Watson: I didn't know what you been doin' leavin' my grandson in that place all night, but after seeing this white man, I got a pretty good idea. (The door opens and Michal leads his grandfather, who is breathing somewhat heavily and walking gingerly on stage.)

Cathy: Daddy what's wrong?

Michal: I didn't mean to Mama, but I kicked Grandpa in the same place I got hurt when I fell on the see-saw.

(Bill enters from the kitchen and kneels in front of the child.)

Bill: I told you never to punch or kick anyone.

Mr. Watson: What you teachin' him that nonsense for anyway?

(Bill rises.)

Bill: I thought it would be good for him.

Mr. Watson: You don't know what would be good for my grandson. What can you do for him?

Bill: I've tried to be a friend to him.

Mr. Watson: That's all well and fine, but is you goin' to take him to get his hair cut?

Bill: What?

Mr. Watson: The boy needs a hair-cut. Is you goin' to take him to get it cut?

Bill: Well, I (slight pause.) I'm afraid I don't understand.

Mr. Watson: I think you do understand. Michal and me wasn't gone long, but we was gone long enough to walk around the corner to the park. They got basketball courts, playing fields, swings. (Briefly closing his eyes reminded of the pain.) and even see-saws. Michal tells me you ain't never taken him there.

Cathy: Daddy we mostly stay inside, but Bill...

Mrs. Watson: Yeah, I bet he stay inside, he don't want to be seen with a...

Cathy: (with urgency). Michal! (Pauses and sternly looks at her mother as she calmly commands her son.) Go outside and play until I call for you. (Michal smiles at Bill as he exits past him.)

Cathy: Mama, how could you say that in front of Michal?

Mrs. Watson: Say what in front of Michal? I didn't say nutin', but you know you ain't nutin' but a nigger ho' to this white man. (Cathy breaks down into tears and Bill embraces her.)

Bill: I love your daughter. I've never called anyone that in my life.

Mrs. Watson: Yeah, I bet you haven't.

Bill: I wasn't raised that way. (Adamantly.) I've never...

Mrs. Watson: (raising her voice over his). Oh, I've seen the way your people are raised.

Bill: What do you mean my people?

Mrs. Watson: (spitting the words). I mean white people. Ya'll acts one way to our face and another way behind our backs. Ya'll ain't nutin' but devils.

Cathy: (pleading with an escalating voice). Mama, please stop.

Mr. Watson: There's houses right up this road that has them Confederate flags hangin' off the front porch. And you knows that Lincolnton High School been on the news for calling themselves the Rebels and wavin' them flags at the ball games. On T.V. is look like a clan meetin'! Tell the black children that gots to go to school there 'bout a long time ago.

Bill: Mr. Watson, it's true I've never taken Michal to the park, and it's also true

I wouldn't feel comfortable taking him to get his hair cut. (Bill looks at Mrs. Watson and she looks away as if his glance soured her tastebuds.) It's not because I'm ashamed of Michal. I care a great deal for your grandson, but I know how people are around here. I've seen the way we're looked at in public.

Mr. Watson: Then you knows how worried this makes me?

Bill: I wouldn't let anyone hurt Michal or Cathy.

Mr. Watson: You might not be able to stop them. What you goin' to do if someone drive by and shoots in the winda?

Cathy: That's not going to happen Daddy.

Mr. Watson: You don't know what's goin' to happen girl!

Cathy: (frantically). What are we supposed to do stop loving each other?

Mr. Watson: I don't know, but I knows you gotta think 'bout that son of yours first.

Cathy: Michal loves him too Daddy.

(Mr. Watson looks down shaking his head slowly.)

Mrs. Watson: I got just one thing to ask you girl: Have you met his parents yet?

Cathy: No Mama, I haven't...

Mrs. Watson: I din't think so and you never will. (Now glaring at Bill.) Will she?

Bill: Look this wasn't my idea. I mean Cathy wanted me to meet you. At this point, I don't see what this has to do with my family.

Mrs. Watson: That's what I thought.

Mr. Watson: I think it'd be best if we just go on home now.

(Cathy's father takes his wife's arm and they begin to exit.)

Cathy: Daddy its almost ready, please stay for dinner.

(Cathy holds her father's arm.)

Cathy: Please Daddy.

Mr. Watson: I'm sorry Cathy, but I can't give my blessin' to this. Your a grown woman and if it was just you I wouldn't say a word, but there's your son to consider. We'll say goodbye to Michal outside.

(The Watson's exit and Cathy closes the door softly and rests her forehead upon it.)

Cathy: (turning to face Bill, she speaks with forced optimism). Believe it or not, I've seen Mama act worse before, and Daddy will get used to us being together after awhile.

Bill: It's not your parents I'm worried about. I'm not sure if I'm going to get used to it.

(Cathy crosses to Bill and embraces him)

Cathy: Your just upset over their visit.

Bill: (holding Cathy's hands and stepping back to an arms length, he guides her

to sit on the couch). It's more than their visit. I care a great deal for you, but I'm tired of everything being so complicated.

Cathy: I love you. (Pause.) I hope you're not saying what I think you are.

Bill: I'm saying I don't know if I can handle this relationship any longer.

Cathy: Oh great! I bring my parents down to meet you, they leave pissed-off, and now your running out on me.

Bill: I didn't ask to meet your parents Cathy, you insisted on it. And that's what I mean, nothing is simple with us. Everything from going to the store to meeting your parents has the potential of turning into a racial issue.

Cathy: (pleading). Bill please don't say this nonsense. You know that we love each other, and that we belong together.

Bill: I do love you, but there's more to it than that. We can't hide in this little apartment for the rest of our lives.

Cathy: We'll start going one more. Who cares what ignorant people think. I see mixed couples all the time. We can go out to dinner tonight.

Bill: (rising from the couch). No, listen to me: I've tried, I've really tried, but I can't get used to the way people treat us. When we do go out I'm so tense I could explode. I'm not the type of person that can pretend I don't notice the staring and the whispering.

Cathy: (quickly rising and speaking anxiously). It's just the area; we can move to somewhere else. Maybe to a city. People are more open-minded in larger cities.

Bill: This isn't something I can run from Cathy. It's inside me. One thing your mother was right about is that you should have met my parents. I mean, I've never been this serious about someone and not brought them to meet my family.

Cathy: I don't care. We don't need anyone else.

Bill: I do! I can't shut out my family and friends from my life. They couldn't accept us any more than your parents did.

Cathy: You don't know that. You haven't given them the chance to decide.

Bill: I'm deciding for them. I'm not going through this again.

Cathy: (frantically). What about Michal? He loves you!

Bill: You know that I love him, but your father is right, I'm not going to take him to get his hair cut. If I could change my skin color at this moment I would, but I can't. And I can't change the way I feel about us being together. I'm sorry. (The door opens and Michal enters.)

Michal: Mama, I'm hungry. Can we eat now?

Cathy: Honey, please give us a few more...

Bill: No, the two of you need to eat and I've got to be getting home.

Michal: Your not going to stay to eat with us Bill?

Bill: I can't. Come and give me a hug good-bye..

(Bill picks Michal up and hugs him tightly as Michal cups his hands and whispers into Bill's ear.)

Michal: I love you.

Bill: Yeah, I know you do.

(Bill puts Michal on the floor.)

Michal: (smiling). Say it back Bill.

Bill: I love you too. (Pauses as he seems to reflect on his words and then looking at Cathy.) I'll come and visit him.

Cathy: (spoken incredulously as she holds her palms upwards). So that's it? (sitting on the couch in dismay.)

Bill: (already reaching for the door-knob). I'm sorry. (Bill exits.)

Cathy: (tearful). Come give me a hug Son. (She picks Michal up and holds him on her lap as she gently rocks back and forth.)

Michal: What's wrong? Why are you crying?

Cathy: It's just going to be the two of us for awhile. (She kisses his cheek.)
Curtain.

— DEATH —

Sameer Malhotra

Death — thou art a poem
I have been promised a poem
I will get it.

In the drowning pulse,
when pain goes to sleep,
with a sombre face,
the moon reaches the other side.

The day is within water,
the night near the bank.
It's neither dark nor dawn
Neither mid-night, nor day.

When the body dies,
And the soul begins to breathe.
I have been promised a poem
Death will give it to me.

The Cracked Tree

Newley Purnell

The cracked tree was born of fury and whim,
His existence and genesis merely a burden to him.
Who gave me my branches, by physical wealth?—
The question he could not stop asking himself.
He remembered the hole into which he was set,
(planting, they called it)
But knew not the original seed, not yet.

From sapling to oak he grew without halt,
Always conscious of his roots, for in them was the fault.
He lived in a valley bathed in natural green;
This lustre, the others; their color the universal sheen.
To the sky they all reached, every last one,
For it framed all life: the imperious sun.
To get life from the sun?—the cracked tree felt no yearning,
Because in its rays he could feel his leaves burning.
All around him was desolation, no goodness to be found;
His elemental difference made discord abound.

He decided he was flawed, devoid of an answer,
And his simple life began to grow like a cancer.
For a way out he endlessly searched, not tired,
Until his sacred deed he dutifully conspired.
His quest was complete; upon his action he decided—
For what use was living, his nature long since divided?
With tremendous release and wondrous lack of sorrow,
The cracked tree realized that there would be no tomorrow.
And with that he uprooted himself, his mission was done;
Then lay down, his eyes closed, basking in the sun.

The Ring of Truth

Linda Pellerin

I can't tell you exactly when I became really frightened. I know it was after I found the ring, but things kind of get cloudy after that. All I know is that by the time it was over, I was glad I believed in God and glad I still had my wits about me. It all started out so simple. Aggie and I were in the kitchen of the Victorian house we call home. We were both working on our Master's degrees so we rented rooms to students from Williams College to make ends meet. We were roommates in this very same house when we were undergrads at the College just five years ago. That's how we met, Aggie and me. We are totally different from each other, I'm Irish-Catholic, with red hair; and she's Italian-Jew with long, dark hair. I'm from Boston and wear Oxford blouses with penny loafers; and she's from California and wears hippie dresses and thong sandals. I'm studying journalism and she's studying paranormal psychology. But we've learned to accept our differences for the most part, except Aggie loves to play upon my Catholic superstitions and fears. Williamstown, MA is a quiet, college community and we loved it so much when we were undergrads, we decided to stay.

Anyway, there we were in the roomy, eat-in kitchen making apple pies for Sunday dinner. Sunday's are our favorite because the students are usually home and we always gather for a big Sunday dinner. It was one of those fall days where it was gloomy and chilly and the weather didn't seem to know what it wanted to do. The five girls who lived with us were all squirreled away either napping or studying. It was that kind of day. Aggie had just finished mixing the dough and I was about to roll it out. So, I took off my rings and put them on the window sill and that's when Aggie spotted the black onyx.

"I didn't know you finally found a black onyx." She said. I had been looking for a black onyx ring for years. Aggie prided herself on knowing everything and she was surprised at being clueless to this minor event in my life. She was a self-proclaimed psychic and loved to try to scare the devil out of me, literally.

So I've got my mind on the crust and kind of told her as an afterthought that I found the ring in my bedroom lodged between two pipes in the corner.

"Really? That's odd." She said as she reached for the ring. I braced myself for what I knew was coming. Aggie always thinks she can hold things and get visions from them, so I figured I'd let her play her little game. I went right on rolling out my dough.

"Hmm." She said and I started to laugh.

"Oh no you don't." I told her. "You're not going to scare me this time. I don't even want to know."

"Are you sure?" She asked. "I'm getting a really strong vision this time and you might find it interesting, but if you really don't want to know, I won't tell you." Aggie put the ring back on the shelf and began to pour sugar onto the apples we had peeled and sliced just moments ago. Ok, so I'm Catholic and every little thing scares the bejesus out of me, but I'm also one of the nosiest people in town and I can't stand the suspense. After about five minutes I had to ask her what she saw.

"But I thought you didn't want to know." She said in that infuriating sing-song voice of hers.

"Yeah, yeah, just cut the crap and tell me what you saw." I said to her. Sometimes my patience runs a little thin with Aggie and I'd already had a really bad week.

"How long have you had the ring?" She asked. I thought about it and told her it had been about a week. "Have you been wearing it all the time?" She was looking at me kind of funny. I ignored the look and told her, "Mmm, it fit and you know how small my fingers are, so I figured it was divine providence of something, why not?"

She kind of smirked and went to the window sill where she picked up the ring and began to finger it again. "You've had kind of a bad week haven't you?" I nodded, looking back at her with this eat-shit-and-die look. I knew she would try to scare me.

"It's the ring," she said dramatically, holding it up in the air in triumph.

"What do you mean, 'It's the ring,' I said as I dumped the apples into the pie dishes, looking over at her as if she was crazy.

"The ring is the reason for your shitty week." By now her tone is like my mother's. You know, that 'it's OK honey, I'll explain it in simple terms for you' tone.

"How do you mean?" I said, while I sprinkled cinnamon on the apples and put the top crusts on the pies. "Does it have some bad karma or something?" The only things I know about the psychic world are what I've learned from Aggie and the karma thing is one of them. You do something bad to someone in one life and they come back and do something bad to you in another life. Then you're even, according to Aggie and all her psychic friends.

"That's exactly what I mean." I could tell Aggie was proud of me. "The woman who owned this is dead now and I think there's a lot of sadness connected to the ring. Didn't you feel it when you were wearing it?"

I got to thinking about it and she was right. I did feel the sadness. Maybe that's why my week had been so bad. So I put the pies in the oven, turned on the timer and sat down at the kitchen table. "Tell me more." I said.

"Well," Aggie began, "I'd say the ring is about 40 years old. The woman who owned it was tall, thin and had short, dark hair. She was real cute and was probably one of those flappers. I see a red dress with fringe on it. She might have been an entertainer. I feel music or singing." She placed the ring on

the table in front of me and I picked it up with my forefinger and thumb, holding the ring out away from me. I really didn't want anything to do with it.

"Eeeuuu," I said, and tossed it back to Aggie. "It's yours if you want it."

Aggie caught it and shook her head. "Nope, you found it. It's yours to deal with. And by the way, I'm not finished." She poured us each a cup of tea and sat down across from me, putting the ring in front of me again. "You notice how the ring is square with the diamond chip in the center?" She outlined the edge of the ring with her baby finger. I nodded, remembering when I found it, how odd I thought it was. Usually black onyx rings are round, oval or diamond shaped. Aggie continued, "I feel this woman, who died young by the way, received the ring as a gift from her boyfriend. But she always felt boxed in by him and the ring seemed to reinforce her feelings of restraint." Aggie was giving me one of those 'here's where I get to scare you' looks.

"Oh great," I said to her, knowing she was really enjoying this. I knew I wasn't going to get any sleep for the next week and she was sitting there smiling at me.

"Oh, it get better." She said to me, still smirking.

"What do you mean?" I asked warily. I didn't like the look of satisfaction on her face all the time.

"That's it. I'm throwing the ring away. This is too weird even for you." I was on my feet and heading for the trash can with the ring clutched in my hot little hand as Aggie headed me off at the pass. Blocking my way, she grabbed my arm and said she had an idea. "Well it had better be a good one." I said, because by now my chest was feeling tight and I was having trouble breathing.

"Let me regress you." She said, looking me in the eye. This time there was no laughter there. I knew she was serious, but to tell you the truth, I've never been comfortable with the idea of being hypnotized and transported back into past lives, and I really didn't trust her.

"I don't know, Aggie," I said. "What if something goes wrong? What if you can't get me back? Will I die or just remain in limbo?"

"No, silly goose, of course not. And if it makes you feel any better, I'll get Captain Jack to help. What do you say?" Aggie reached for her necklace, but I stopped her. Captain Jack was a spirit that Aggie claimed lived in the house with us. By rubbing the heart pendant on the necklace she always wore, Captain Jack would appear to her. I have never seen a spirit, but had seen Aggie talking to what appeared to me to be thin air. I must admit, the thought of spirits in the house gave me the creeps and the thought of Captain Jack helping in this did not thrill me.

"No, that's OK. I guess I trust you." I told her. "When do you want to do this?" I asked with a great deal of trepidation.

"How about now." She said and my heart filled with dread. Somehow I had known she was going to say that. "We can get this done and over with before the pies are out of the oven." Aggie was confident and she led me to her

room and told me to lie down on the bed.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" I asked as I settled on the crazy quilt on her big four-poster bed. "Of course, you silly. I do this all the time with students just for fun." Aggie had positioned herself in an overstuffed, green velour chair directly next to me so closely that she could touch me if necessary.

"Ok." I said in a shaky voice. "Let's get this over with."

"It's not going to be that bad. This isn't going to hurt one bit." Aggie was all business now as she reached for her tape recorder.

I don't remember much about going under except that Aggie just kept telling me to relax and I remember getting sleepy. The next thing I know, it's like I'm watching a B-grade movie in color. There was this tall woman with short, dark hair and she was having an argument with a man who was even taller than she was. They were in a room very similar to my bedroom. The man called her Betsy and she called him Stan, but I recognized the man as being Aggie in another life. There was a horrible fight going on and Betsy accused Stan of being unfaithful to her. Then she backed away from him as he grabbed a knife and threatened her with it. By now Stan was really, really angry and he went after Betsy. I realized that Betsy was me in another life just as Stan plunged the knife into her chest, then looked with horror at what he had done. I could feel the pain shooting through me as if it were happening to me. My chest felt as if it were on fire and I was having difficulty breathing. Stan looked stunned and tried to comfort Betsy, but she kept trying to push him away. Then Betsy slumped to the floor and Stan gathered her up in his arms. She look up into his anguished face and whispered, "I will never forgive you for this." I saw and felt her spirit rise up from her and disappear. Stan reached for the black onyx ring on her right hand and removed it, throwing it into the corner where it lodged between two pipes.

Aggie must have moved me ahead in time because the next thing I saw was a funeral and Stan standing at the grave site, with two policemen on either side of him. I remember being very angry. Suddenly I was back, with Aggie sitting next to me. I looked over at her and she was giving me a weak smile.

"See, that wasn't so bad was it?" She asked gently as I rubbed my chest with my left hand. I smiled sheepishly and shook my head. "Just as I thought." She said, "You and this woman are connected. I believe you have the same soul. That's why the ring affects you the way it does. You have to get rid of it." I remember laughing nervously and sitting up on the bed. Looking at the antique alarm clock on Aggie's nightstand I was surprised that the whole session had only taken a few minutes.

"You realize Stan was you in another life, don't you?" I told Aggie. "No wonder you like to torment me so much." Aggie looked rather grim and nodded her head. "So now that we're both scared shitless, what do we do about this?" I asked Aggie and for once she seemed to be at a loss for words. I grabbed her arm and repeated my question, "I said, what are we going to do

about this?"

She got up and went to the other side of her room where her bookcase stood overflowing with books ranging from Nustrodamis to Edgar Cayce. She pulled one of her psychic books off the shelf, then she sat down again and began leafing through it. "What are you looking for?" I asked.

She eventually smiled and tapped one of the pages, "Yes, here it is. The formula for removing spells."

"Oh, great." I exclaimed. "Now you're going to try witchcraft on me. No, thanks. I'm outta here." I got up and walked to the door, but for some reason it wouldn't open.

Aggie gave me a funny look, "I didn't lock the door, Kath." But by now I'm really getting upset. I didn't quite relish the thought of being locked in a room with someone who had killed me in another life.

"Quit trying to scare me Aggie." I said, but she looked serious this time. She reached for her necklace and then she looked over into the corner of the room and as I looked there with her, for the first time in my life, I saw Captain Jack. He was really quite handsome with his gray beard and his Captain's hat placed squarely on his head. He had an old Navy P-coat on and navy blue bell-bottomed pants. He reached out his hand toward me, but this was more than I could bear as I grabbed the doorknob tighter. My eyes must have been as big as saucers. He then turned to Aggie and in a deep, resonate voice said, "The ring has to go."

Aggie looked at me again, "Kath, we have to remain calm. This woman, Betsy, is part of you and Captain Jack says your luck will start to change if you get rid of the ring. Betsy's feelings are attached to it. And getting the ring out of the way should help me too." I told Aggie in so many words that I was perfectly willing to get rid of the ring just as soon as I could get out of her damn room. And to top it all off, I could smell my pies boiling over in the oven.

I then began to tug at the door, but still wouldn't budge even though it wasn't supposed to be locked. Finally I called to one of the students to see if she could help from the other side. She pushed and I pulled and the door still wouldn't open. By now there's a crowd outside the room and Aggie was getting a little upset with me. But frankly, I didn't

want to be in her room with this old Captain Jack spirit, even if he did look harmless. And Aggie didn't seem to be the friend she had been, because now I knew what she had done to me in another life.

Finally Aggie got up and went to the door and it opened just as nice as you please. I was so angry and frightened that I could barely speak. "You did that on purpose." I accused. But she just shook her head and said maybe Captain Jack wanted me to stay. I left her alone there with him and went to get the pies out of the oven, huffing and fuming all the way.

Later, just before dinner, Aggie caught up with me on the back porch. She said she had talked a long time with Captain Jack and he felt we should bury the ring, dark and deep. It seemed like a pretty simple solution to me, so I

agreed. "Will that also get rid of good, ole Stan?" I asked her. She gave me a 'it's not my fault I used to be a woman-killing bastard' look and followed me into the kitchen.

I grabbed the ring and brought it out back. Aggie picked up a shovel that had been leaning against a post. We chose the rose garden because it had already been cultivated for the winter. The ground was really wet and the dirt kept sticking to the shovel like canned dog food to a spoon, but we finally managed to bury the ring. As soon as it was in the ground, I began to feel much better and apologized to Aggie for being such a scaredy-cat. She apologized too, saying she never thought it would be that serious.

I felt kind of weird for the next couple of days thinking that I used to be somebody else and that she had died violently. But then I began to be in better control of my life. Aggie said I probably wouldn't be that frightened of confrontation anymore because that was one of the things I was working on in this lifetime, according to Captain Jack.

That was all a few months ago. Winter has come and gone and spring is here in full bloom with the roses splashing their vibrant colors all over the neighborhood. Aggie and I have gotten our masters, but plan to stay on at the house for another year or two or until one of us meets the man of our dreams. Aggie continues to talk to Captain Jack, and I'm getting to know him better too. He's not as frightening as I first thought and it's getting so I like to see him appear now and again. I feel like we have a grandfather living with us to offer us comfort and advice. The students think its cool and there's a waiting list for rooms at the house.

As for me, I've become a sort of celebrity and the students never get tired of hearing about my past-life experience. Aggie and I still have long discussions about the spirit world and she was right, I'm not as frightened and uncomfortable as I used to be. And we're getting along better than ever. Life seems to be back to normal, pretty much. That is except for one thing. We can't seem to get roses to grow in the backyard anymore.

Sequence

Cliff Rhodes

The sequence of events,
the songs and screams,
in order and degree
are knowledge and pain.
The searing flesh cutting
laser lance love,
the Truth, the Beauty.
Sinning in seeking.
Itch beyond skin gouged nails,
and bloody stripes.
Burn through carbon black
white crusty chunks of bone.
Is there a phoenix of relief?
Bird, animal, man raised,
sacrificed in flame.
Salvation in death,
or rebirth, or death again.
When will it end.
Not life and death,
but existence and non.
How long
does it go on.

"Tate"

Deanna Christian

A calming breeze gently against my frail body as I walked up Fourth Street to the grocers. I had finally moved out on my own, and the world seemed to be catering to my every whim. My fondest dreams were becoming my realities. I had a small apartment, a brand new job writing my own column for the Tennessee Tribune, and a more than wonderful family. I pondered all of this while the crisp air tickled my nose. It almost felt as if I was skipping through the freshly fallen leaves, when actually I was walking through them.

My parents were coming over for the first time to see my place and have dinner. Of course, I had forgotten the rolls, as usual they were the one item I had tried hardest to remember. As I entered Dan's Grocer and Gas, the bright brass bells attached to the door rang clickety-clink.

"Oh, Hi Rachael!", Mr. Dan said with a grin, "forget the rolls again?"

He was an older man who had spent his whole life running his beloved store. When he grinned a line ran right down the middle of his forehead. It reminded me of a stream with high mounds of brown, splotchy earth on each side. I gave him a look of self-disgust and then smiled and said, "Yes!"

As I paid for the rolls and headed back home, Mr. Dan yelled a final "Good luck with your dinner!" I waved at him through the big glass window at the front of the store. It was almost six and that meant no more lagging behind for me. Rushing down the sidewalk, I unlocked my apartment door at ten till. Just ten more minutes and they'll be here I thought. Maybe they will be a little late, and the rolls will be ready before they arrive.

I threw the rolls into the oven and scanned the kitchen table to see if I had missed anything before I left. Everything looked great, so I checked the food which I had kept warming in the microwave. "BUZZZZZZ!!!!!!" The timer for the rolls went off so loud that it made me jump. The digital clock on the oven kept blinking 6:10. Where were they? I was ready for them to arrive. I arranged the rolls in my best silver serving basket; the one my grandma had given me as a moving-in present, the one her grandma had given her.

I recalled grandma's words, "Tate", she had said. She had always called me Tate, which was my middle name, her last name, and my mom's maiden name. "Tate, this may just look like a simple silver serving basket, but it has been in the family for years. It is the only heirloom that has survived. It's very important to me; I hope you'll always cherish it."

I put the rolls in the basket, but they didn't look just right, so I arranged them again. I wanted everything to be perfect. I was so excited! I sat down in my favorite blue cushioned chair and waited. After awhile, there was still no knock at the door. My imagination started to run wild. What if they had had a car wreck? What if they had gotten robbed getting into the car? What if...well,

maybe they were just running late. Yes, running late did run in my family. I had decided they probably had to stop for gas, because my dad always waited until the fuel soon light started blinking before he would stop.

I walked into my bedroom to call, and noticed the red light on my answering machine was blinking at me teasingly. In the excitement and rush to make everything perfect, I had not thought to check my answering machine. I uttered a sigh of relief, positive they had called to tell me that they were indeed running late.

As I pressed the button, I heard my mom's voice, but it wasn't her normal voice. It was her shaky voice. When she finished uttering, "Rachael", I immediately recognized that this was her "something's wrong" tone. It was the same tone she had used when she told me my kitten, Daisy, had died when I was in the third grade. And that same dreaded tone that had corrected me during the roughest parts of my adolescent years.

"Rachael", the machine had relayed once again. "It's your grandma, she is in the hospital Rachael. She, ...has had a...heart attack. That's all I know right now. We're going to the hospital. She's at Holston Valley Memorial. Don't speed over here; drive carefully and wear your seatbelt. I love you."

The machine stopped followed by a loud, long beep. It seemed to beep louder than it ever had before, so loud it hurt my ears. I sank down in the floor in disbelief. Not my grandma, she walks three miles everyday and she always eats healthy food. It couldn't be my grandma. My body felt numb and I could feel my heart pound in my ears; it sounded like a native's angry drum beat. I ran into the living room, grabbed my purse and keys, and made the thirty minute trip to the hospital in fifteen minutes flat.

As I hurried down corridors, I felt like a mouse trapped in a maze, even though I knew exactly where the emergency room was. I kept seeing my grandma's sparkling blue eyes. I felt like crying, but I kept telling myself she was going to be fine, just fine. The words "just fine" seemed to echo through my head. Don't panic yet, I reassured myself, it may not be that bad.

As I came upon the corridor that the emergency room was on, I saw the outline of my parents hunched in a corner of the waiting room. I slowly walked towards them, scared of what they might tell me. I felt like I was getting ready to take a test that I had forgotten to study for.

My mom looked up at me, her eyes watery. She had been crying. I could always tell when she had been crying, no matter how hard she tried to cover it up. She hugged me and filled me in on everything that had happened. Grandma was in emergency surgery, and that was the only important thing they knew, none of the other details mattered to me, just grandma.

My dad sat beside mom with a dazed expression on his face. I slumped down in the chair beside him, and he held my sweaty hand. There was a small inkling of relief that came over me. At least she was in surgery and maybe everything would be fine. No one spoke, and I was glad. We all three just sat there and waited. It seemed as if I had been in that waiting room everyday of

my life, like I worked there. Everything looked old and familiar to me, but it was a bad kind of familiar, like the familiarity of the dentist's chair.

Each minute brought new frustrations. I asked the nurse at the desk so many times when they would know something that she finally said, "Madam, I promise that we will let you be the first to know." I had to be getting on her nerves; I was getting on my nerves, simply because there was nothing I could do, but wait. Even

though I hate coffee, I went and got some anyway, just to have something to do, and something warm to hold in my hands. It was almost like a security blanket.

Slowly the hours passed, and as I started to go for another coffee trip, a doctor approached the waiting room. Hoping it was grandma's doctor, I walked towards her. I could read nothing from her stern face. "Is the Tate family here?", she announced.

"Yes", my mom, my dad, and I replied at the same time. We walked over to the doctor and introduced ourselves. She shook hands with us all.

"I'm Dr. Zerell", she said.

I waited, scared and hopeful, for her next words. My stomach suddenly tightened as if I'd eaten too many green apples.

Then, Dr. Zerell said, "Mrs. Tate is still in critical condition, but her surgery went well, and if no further complications arise, she will be fine."

Finally, I could breathe freely again. Until I heard those words, I had felt suffocated.

Dr. Zerell continued to tell us that we could see her later that night, but not to expect too much. Grandma would still be on a breathing machine, which was routine for patients that had open-heart surgery.

I was so happy, I didn't pay much attention to anything else Dr. Zerell said. I stood here smiling at my parents who still had serious looks on their faces, and were still taking in every word the doctor said.

When Dr. Zerell left, I told my parents I was going to go look for a get-well present for grandma. As I walked to the hospital gift shop, almost the only store open at this time of night, the entire hospital looked brighter than it had before. It almost seemed to know that my grandma had made it through the darkest part. I almost believed it understood my happiness.

As soon as I entered the store, my eyes caught sight of the perfect gift. It was a baby blue night gown with pale pink flowers, my grandma's favorite colors. I had it wrapped and headed back to the waiting room. I realized grandma wouldn't be able to open it yet, but I wanted it to be there when she could.

When I got back to the waiting room, my parents weren't there. They had probably gone to the intensive care waiting room, where they were going to move grandma.

Then, I heard someone moaning and crying. My heart dropped. Uncontrollably, I burst into tears. I knew that voice; it was my mom's voice. I had never heard her moan or actually heard her cry; I had only seen her cry, but

I knew it was her voice. I ran towards the noise.

My dad and mom were in a small room just to the side of the emergency waiting room. They didn't look at me; they just cried. They didn't have to say anything; I knew by their faces and my mom's eerie moans. My body was shaking, and I gasped for breath. My grandma had died. The beautiful present I had bought fell to the ground. I didn't understand why this was happening to me.

Several months later, I was ready to sort through some of grandma's personal things. In an old cedar drawer I found some pictures of her as a young woman, and letters she had written many years ago. I had never thought of my grandma as young, and I had never thought of myself as growing old. I had never realized that she had once been a lot like me.

The pictures and letters painted a magical picture for me of a young girl with hopes, dreams, and realities similar to mine. As I looked into her sparkling blue eyes, I saw my mother, and as I saw my mother, I also saw myself. My grandma lived and died, and for the first time in my life, I realized someday I would die too.

STUDENT'S RESOLVE

Brother Leo Fowler, O.S.B.

Here I sit, this book within my hands,
Making great and ambitious plans.
Not for my feet shifting sands,
Or a life poor and bland.

There will surely come a day
when without pause or delay
whether at work or at play
all will hasten to what I have to say.

But this knowledge that I seek,
is surely broad and deep.
And over my eyes there sneaks
the creeping of glorious sleep.

So with this book I snuggle,
or should I say, I struggle.
All this study's lots of trouble
and Math is trouble doubled.

I see outside some sun
calling me for a bit of fun.
Study for me this day is done
As I'm not the studious one.

I know that for my delay
I will most surely pay.
But I know the book will stay
for study another day.

In Memoriam

Jean Sutherland Moore, 1924-1995

In 1959, having survived the London Blitz, translation to America as a "war bride," and the nurturing of three children to an age no longer requiring her constant attention, Jean Moore came to Belmont Abbey College as a student. And what a student! With a passion for ideas and especially for literature, she studied intensely, mastered every assignment, produced term papers and exam essays that caused professors to sigh deeply, reassured what they were doing in the world. She of course read all the books on the required list, for which her department held students responsible on its Final Comprehensive Examination. She also read all the books on the department's recommended list— a two-page affair.

After graduate studies at UNC-Greensboro (with the likes of Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor), she came home to BAC in 1964 as an English Department faculty member.

For twenty-eight years she was an invaluable awakener of interest and talent. Her special pedagogic gift was to elicit student engagement with literature, causing students to grow ideas they were proud of, being sure the ideas were entirely their own. She retired from full-time teaching in 1992, taught part-time for two more years, and said the spring semester of 1994 was her last. During the Fall of 1994, however, she told a friend, "I miss the students." One suspects she would have returned.

Jean was a person who always did what was right, even at some risk to her own welfare, and never made a fuss about it. To a remarkable extent, the manner of her life fulfilled the motto on the crest of her hereditary Sutherland clan—"sans peur." She rather concealed than advertised her merits and achievements, and her friends valued her the most for this habit of quietness in an age of noisy ego-assertion.

She had an extraordinary power of imagination, in the larger Wordsworthian sense—the ability to identify with others, to experience their lives vicariously. It made her charitably accepting of

other people, warts and all, to an extent so unusual as to seem to her friends unique. It was hard indeed to get her to agree with a serious condemnation of another person. The same imaginative power made her a writer: she could tell stories about her characters from the inside. Her reader grasps, morally and psychologically, how they are and what they do. The present story combines this insight with a poignant parallel between the author and the protagonist. Not that Professor Moore was, like Daphne Deerhorn, slackening pace. A volunteer at both an AIDS hospice and a nature museum, active in organizing AAUW and AAUP programs, auditor of college and elderhostel courses . . . always a student—recently, of Welsh, of calligraphy, of current literature—she was interested and active.

On Feb. 20, 1995, Professor Moore died in an automobile collision caused by a drinking driver. Wishing her to rest in peace seems inadequate. We do of course wish her peace, but with confidence that her spirit, if such be possible, is happily engaged in learning something new.

George Herndl

Expectations

Jean S. Moore

"He who expects nothing is never disappointed," goes an old saying, one I have learned to live by, especially since I became chronologically challenged, that is to say, a senior citizen—in other words, *old*. It came as no disappointment to me, therefore, when just last month the dentist's assistant quit in the middle of my tooth. Dr. Champeau (would you believe he pronounces it Shampoo?) had been recommended to me by my neighbor as being "great, crown-wise." He actually said that.

Before she quit, as they worked on me, the assistant started to yell at him in an intense, sort of whispered yell, in code for my benefit.

"I can't believe this is happening," she muttered over the top of my head. "This isn't the way it was supposed to be. That's what you *said*, when we talked about *that*." He said something to her in school Spanish that quieted her for a moment. I wondered whether it was the equivalent of that old French phrase used to warn family members not to be indiscreet "in front of the domestics." Suddenly she flung down her dental instruments with a wide flourish of disgust and left the examining room with him in pursuit. She screamed some more in his adjacent office, also in code, about *that*. The gist seemed to be unmet expectations of some sort. This was followed by a slam that vibrated the walls, and then the ringing clunk of a fallen doorknob. What an exit!

A breathless silence now seemed to swell palpably into the corners of the room like the cotton wadding Dr. Champeau had wedged into my mouth. Fortunately for me, the padded chair was very comfortable, although it was tilted so that I felt like a trapeze artist getting ready to do a double backwards flip with a cry of "Hoopla!" I relaxed, albeit open-mouthed, and recalled my famous flip of long ago. As a teenager, I had spent a week-end with a friend whose bathtub, much smaller than standard, was tucked into an alcove, and of course I had wondered how high I could "walk" up the wall above the faucets while lying in the tub. My legs flopped over my head and across to the wall at my back, while they wedged, momentarily holding my shoulders and head under the water. Even in this extremity, my first thought had been what would my parents think when they heard their daughter had drowned upside down in a bathtub? How conservative I must have been. My teenage impression was that Mother blamed my growing six feet tall (in a family of short people) on behavior like this.

In time, the rolls of cotton that Champeau had inserted around my gums turned into soggy sponges. How did Brando manage in "The Godfather?" I wondered why one doesn't simply get up and walk out of dentists', or in fact, doctors' offices when left for exorbitant amounts of time. Is that why doctors

take your clothes? Imagine poor old Mr. Lindquist in his wheelchair—a rest-home attendant put him on the toilet and then went on her vacation! But we patients wait it out, it seems. Is that where the word "patient" comes from? I think it's from the Latin "to endure"—certainly appropriate. I must look it up.

At this point, Dr. Shampoo returned in a very clenched state, and finished my tooth in a crashing silence. Somehow I felt all this was to be expected, considering how I broke the tooth in the first place, and the run of bad luck that followed. I had made my reservation to attend a big fashion show luncheon at the clubroom of the Office of Aging—God, what a name! Someone under thirty must have thought that one up. Did they figure that everyone is aging, so the name didn't brand anyone as being old? Tell me another.

The morning of the lunch, I put out my new yellow and black dress and a single string of pearls—not real, of course—and then decided to take Chip for a walk before dressing. The block he's a chip off is his half-spaniel dad, Roge, short for Roger. I planned a short stroll around the perimeter of the local college campus, as far as the burger joint people called Guadalarhardee's; it had once been a Mexican restaurant. When we reached the corner of the library and the car-wash, Chip made a sudden lunge after a squirrel, and I was pulled face-down onto the sidewalk by his leash. Two ladies sprinted out of the library crying, "Are you all right?" What did they think, with a bump rising on one cheekbone and Chip's leash knotted around my ankles?

When I limped home and looked in a mirror, I discovered a chipped tooth and a swollen, bleeding lip. "No fashion luncheon for you, I'm afraid," I told my battered reflection. But the face perversely replied, "Nobody's going to be looking at you. Go anyway." It was quite true that nobody ever noticed me; I didn't even turn heads when I was young, except for my height. Logic or not, I shouldn't have listened. Wasn't it embarrassment enough, being scooped off the sidewalk by a brace of librarians?

At lunch, sitting with my back carefully placed to a window to avoid the light, I was quietly lipping my chicken salad with one side of my mouth when the pianist launched into, "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody," and the first fashion model sashayed onto the make-shift runway. Do I need to tell you that she was wearing my yellow and black, and the woman with the microphone had spotted it?

"Ladies . . . and gentleman," she loudly announced, acknowledging the husband somebody had dragged there, "a member of our audience is wearing this same lovely ensemble. Won't you please stand, Miss Deerhorn?" I don't think she pronounced "ensemble" correctly; I must look it up. As I stood, spotlights transfixed me in converging beams, like enemy searchlights singling out a WW II airplane. Would ack-ack explode me on the spot? I fervently hoped so. Everybody was staring at the battered face and chipped tooth. "He who expects nothing . . ." By now one would think I could relax and just let misfortune smile on me.

Chip's father, Roger, had been the local veterinarian's transfusion

dog—a life of service to others. I had asked if I could keep him when I'd had to board my cat at the vet's while I was in hospital for surgery. That was the time the hospital tried to X-ray my leg when it was my hand needing surgery. An attendant mixed up the names, I was told, although the real reason was that another patient, very deaf, answered when they called my name. How could anyone mix up Daphne Deerhorn?

Yes, there really is someone still alive named Daphne. It means laurel, although I've won no laurel wreaths in my lifetime, but the name was very popular eighty years ago, when I was born. My students used to call me Miss Shoehorn—sometimes it slipped out when they talked to me—probably because of my nose. In profile, I look a lot like Bob Hope.

When I picked up my cat, what a sad-looking bunch the caged animals were, each clinging to its pitiful belongings, a toy or a blanket, like refugees from a disaster. I've never liked creatures to be caged; rather ironic, considering my job at the time.

I used to teach college English to an unusual segment of the population, prisoners in a minimum-security prison located right next to our community college. The prison helped to put us on the map; before it was built, this place was so small we had to share our town drunk with the next burg. I had worked in the college from the day it opened its doors, but later the job at the prison was a demotion of sorts, a slap on the wrist for my causing a minor scandal during World War II. I was supposed to serve time too, perhaps. Although I resented the cut in pay, I needed the job, and over time I came to appreciate the freedom—how bizarre—of teaching in jail. I was free of college politics, nobody bothered me, and I think the college preferred to forget my existence. It was mutual.

My course originally grew out of the prison's high school equivalency program, because, ironically, when the inmates completed their high school requirements they still had time to serve. Does this say something about the human condition, graduating and still serving time? It might have some application to enforced retirement.

I had no choice about retiring when I reached sixty-five, although I enjoyed my job most of the time, and would have liked to stay on. New men were constantly arriving, while others were on their way to the outside. The newcomers always wore the same expressions on their faces on the first day of class, like kids strapped into a carnival ride they've changed their minds about, but after a while they got used to old Shoehorn and began to feel safer.

"How about making a collection of writings from inside various prisons?" Each session I'd suggest this, making it somehow their idea. They'd find things like Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" all the way back to the Cavalier poets of England: "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." A few men took these lines literally and took a hike. I took them to heart and was contented to stay where I was.

One young boy named Bo Something was what I would call a real

student. His last name erased itself from my memory tapes, but I never forgot him. He was small and dark, with close-set slitted eyes like a half-awake cat's. I don't have any snapshots of the students; cameras made them nervous, but Bo's slitted stare seems flashbulbed forever into my mind's eye. He always came to class wound up, and wanted to talk about whatever we were studying, although outside class he never opened his mouth in my presence. I don't think I ever knew what he'd been convicted of, but from somewhere he'd acquired quite a talent, or so I believed.

It sometimes pleased me to think Bo might be quiet because he was creative and perhaps thinking up plots and themes, or images for poems, or maybe he was plotting a creative escape, not something that had been run into the ground. He graduated from our Community College years ago, of course, and served out his time, in that order, and then vanished, as so many of my students did.

Who am I to point the finger at convicts? My father was arrested once, and I was, very nearly, just last month. Dad was only seventeen and the tale Grandmother Deerhorn told was that he couldn't resist the temptation one hot afternoon to go swimming in a local quarry that was clearly marked, "No Trespassing." The police fished him out on their way back to the jail from a raid on a house of prostitution. So there was young Dad in the swimming attire of the turn of the century, with a towel and a little bundle of clothes, and a dozen friendly girls all jostling around in the Black Maria. He was quite enjoying his adventure until he needed to send for somebody to post bail. His father was out of town on business, and he had no idea where his mother was that afternoon because he never listened to her. In desperation, he sent for his genteel Great-Aunt Emily Deerhorn, born before Queen Victoria's reign and stiffer than a flag-pole, who he was sure would be completely scandalized. Eventually, she arrived, tiny and fearsome in black taffeta and a bonnet. Policemen bustled around like school-boys, finding a chair, hoping she wouldn't be too embarrassed. She sat and glared at them until they produced her penitent great-nephew. She said, "For heaven's sake, Johnny, stop looking hangdog and get dressed. I've been bailing Deerhorns out of this jail for fifty years!" How deflating to a first-time jailbird!

In keeping with this family history, last month I was almost arrested, also for trespassing as it happened, and I'd do it again, too. I used to jog down to the college bakery (now I'd have to say I do the geriatric shuffle), to buy donut holes. On the way back I passed a driveway where a child was cruelly beating a poor howling dog, and screaming at it. I *had* to go into their yard to put a stop to it, and as soon as the boy looked up and saw me looming over him, all six feet, he dropped the leash and the dog ran off whimpering, with its stomach clearing a path on the ground.

A red-faced person I'll generously call the lady of the house evidently spotted me through a window and called the police, and then she came out and accused me of upsetting the child. She used very colorful language, and

ordinarily I'd have been professionally interested in the linguistic side of her tirade, but I was too angry to think clearly.

"He upset himself," I shouted. "He was purple in the face and wringing with perspiration before I even arrived, from yelling at the dog—in English, as if it understood—and beating it. Does the boy understand German or French? He expects a little animal to know English." Just then a young laid-back kid in a cop uniform drove up and escorted me off the premises, with the lady of the house, arms akimbo (I love that expression) pitching eye-grenades at me. Like Dad's experience with the law, it was an anti-climax. I would have hoped, at the very least, to hear an invisible voice bull-horn "Freeze" from behind the shrubbery.

"We've had complaints about them before," he told me in the police car. "Take my advice and keep away from that house." He said he knew me from my prison days, so he must have been older than he looked, but of course everybody looks young to me now.

A nosy neighbor who'd seen me drive home with the cop called my son Jim about the dog incident. The efficient neighborhood grapevine at work. Jim phoned long distance right away, angry at me, not the dog-beater, and what's more my neighbor had called him collect. I try to remember that he can't help being mean. You're surprised I have a son? Well, I never said I didn't have one; he was a war baby, and I certainly don't intend to explain him after all these years. It is true, though, that he really can't help his manner. He used to have a small orchard in his yard, and a few years ago he fell out of one of the trees he was working on. It didn't affect his mental abilities at all (he's a successful business proctologist—my term for a tax accountant), but his personality has changed, as if he needs to blame someone, me, for everything. With Jim, when concern gets in the saddle, as they say, pretty soon paranoia is riding. He'd like to blame the tree accident on his wife, but she wasn't there so he can't. He treated her like a squaw, so she folded her tepee and left. I don't know where she's living now, and I often miss her, but I don't blame her for keeping away, and I hope she's happy.

Jim's abrasive personality is the reason I can't expect him to advise me, now that I've come to a crossroads. There are days when I feel whole highways in my life are washing away, a common sensation among the elderly.

My crossroads is that I have to move house. Would that be "crossroads is" or "crossroads are"? I must look it up. My condo is two-story, and arthritis is fast making stairs impossible. I've found a new one-story place, but I can't face the move on my own, and all my friends seem to have died or become feeble. I used to envy many of them, widows who'd been left well-fixed and with a nice house, while I struggled for decades with my mortgage; and when I was a girl I envied so many of the popular (shorter) girls at school with their curly hair and sexy figures, the Ashli's and Pixie's and Wally's.

"How are things way up there, Daph?" Ashli said every damn day in the school cafeteria, followed by, "Come on down; there's food down here," or

some such unimaginative snide nonsense. "Mind you don't blot out the sun," was another of her favorites.

"Why, Ashli, you've got dandruff," I'd say, peering down at the top of her head, or "You're going bald, Ashli!" She hated that.

Now I know I needn't have envied any of them, a fringe benefit of old age. I've done all right, but some of these girls have faced hard lives, illness, blindness, catastrophes. Ashli was widowed during World War II; that war was no picnic for me either. In adversity, we became close friends and stayed so for over fifty years. She died last year and I miss her.

It's strange how, after our school days, we all seemed to march through life in lock-step, all reaching the same milestone ages together, all affected by the milestone events. World War II was the last time I allowed myself expectations. Nevertheless, Jim Senior packed up his troubles and marched away; not the only one, of course. There was a song about it: "As soon as the band began to play, he packed up his troubles and . . ." I expected too much, I suppose.

Problems have a way of working out unexpectedly. After all these years, I ran into my former student, Bo Something, at the newspaper recycling bin. I recognized those slitted eyes right away, although he'd grown a beard, and *he* recognized my stature.

"Do you know anyone who needs some work, Bo?" I grunted as I heaved my bag of newspapers into the bin. "I need help moving house."

"I'm out of a job," was his only remark. He certainly hadn't grown loquacious in the intervening years. He didn't offer any news or ask of any. The classroom was the only place he had ever talked to me anyway, but at the prison he'd always got on with a job, and in no time Chip and I, and all my books and little possessions were installed in 2A, Fairview Park Condominiums. The "park" consisted of a few scrub pines in the back, but the developers were expecting to create a small landscaped area eventually. I've not accumulated much in my life, but sometimes that pays off, and you can only smell one rose at a time anyway. (The syntax is wrong there, but the idea is right). I hadn't been in my new home a week when the Condo administrator, practically a child, visited me. "Miss Deerhorn," she stammered, focusing on her coffee cup. "I wonder if you know that your friend—the bearded man, you know—seems to be, um, living in our . . . park?"

"He's what?"

"Well, you know, it appears he's sleeping in the woods behind the condominiums." She was struggling to be tactful. "I wondered if you'd noticed."

"No. And you want me to get rid of him?" What in the world does "get rid of" mean, in this context? For some idiotic reason, I hadn't realized Bo was homeless, because he had to be over forty. As if there's an age limit!

I didn't have money to pay for the help I needed, and Bo apparently didn't have a place to stay, so Chip and I picked our way through the woods to look for him, to make a trade. He was sitting on a bent trunk of a tree that had

been almost flattened by some past storm, writing something on a scrap of newspaper.

"Martin Luther King began his letter from Birmingham jail on the margin of a newspaper. Do you remember that?" I began, "and when he was deprived of writing materials, Sir Thomas More wrote with coal on the walls of his prison in the Tower of London." Why was I delivering a class lecture?

Bo said, "Well, I'm free." One of his longer sentences.

"I'm glad to hear that," I said, sitting on the bent trunk, "because I can't afford to pay you for any work, so I'm *looking* on someone who's free." With this unpromising beginning, it's a wonder we reached an agreement, but I invited him to move into my spare room, and in return, he was to help me with any heavy work, and also drive me around. I *can* still drive, but I like to look around at the world.

His "move" was interesting. It consisted of his walking through the door! Apparently, he didn't possess so much as the average bag lady, but the next week he carried in a stereo and a TV. Soon after, he brought in a VCR, a laser disc player and a pile of films, and finally a typewriter.

Over the phone, Jim of course had some predictable theories about where these possessions came from. "You'll probably be murdered in your sleep," he said, with a tinge of satisfaction. "You're asking for trouble with him loose in the house."

"Jim, murderers aren't put in minimum security prisons," I argued. "He's actually protection for me, if you view things another way."

"Protection! He'll bring home a bunch of riff-raff. With all the loot he's hauled into your house, he'll probably steal you blind too. Be firm. Get rid of him." I decided to be firm all right, and hang up.

"Goodbye, dear," I said. "I'll keep you posted." How do I know that Bo's stuff is "loot"? To tell the truth, I've been enjoying listening to our stereo. I've never heard such pure reception—certainly not on my little el cheapo radio. I enjoy eating with somebody intelligent to talk to. Bo's been reading my books—I have thousands—and I enjoy the films we see on our laser disc player. I can't get over the fact that it can change to the other side of the disc right in the middle of a chariot race, without a single horse stumbling. Still, before I talk to Jim, it hadn't occurred to me that Bo might bring friends here.

Jim claims that the neighbors on each side of me will be scandalized; how flattering. I try to remember it's not his fault he had an accident. He was pleasant to be around when he was a little boy, if I'm remembering accurately.

Today, Bo drove me to Dr. Champeau's for a final check on the chipped tooth work, and I was glad to find a new dental assistant working with him. He was quite cheerful and not so clenched up this time, and he gave my tooth a clean bill of health. Bo will often talk in the car, often to argue. He tries to tell me what to do all the time, and I guess I get on him about his life too, and I try to find out why he's typing all the time. I hear that typewriter going for hours on end.

We had a typical run-in today. We stopped at a red light, and a pickup painted with psychedelic dragons drew up beside us. Its windows were down and so-called music was amplified to burst blood vessels at fifty yards. I've lived too long to be forced to have my insides wrenched loose by the BAM-BAM of what I call the Heartbeat of America, so, to retaliate, I keep a tape of Wagner in my car, turn up the volume, and roll my windows down. It's strange that Bo didn't seem to even notice the pickup's noise, but he really snapped to attention at Gotterdamering in full screech.

"turn it down! What are you doing?" he yelled, jabbing at the radio button. Then he actually smacked my hand when I turned it back up again. I smacked him back and left the volume on. As the traffic light turned green, the pickup roared away, with three faces staring back at us through their rear window like clones from Munch's "Scream."

"If you want to listen to loud drums, Bo," I was stung to shout, "Go to my gynecologist's. You can hear amplified babies' heart-beats there all the time on the monitor." I turned off the Wagner.

"Oh? What's an amplified baby?" he asked with a rare flash of humor. "Where's your grammar book, Miss Sh - Deerhorn?"

It's curious, but I never have learned why Bo was in prison. I don't like to ask, and I really don't care. When he isn't helping me or eating, he's taken to typing almost all day. I hope it's a novel or a movie script. I think he could write a good one. Will I be in it?

So far as I've seen, he has no friends and receives no mail. I wonder whether he's in hiding, or on the "lam," whatever that means. I'll look it up. Or does he also live somewhere else? I suppose I didn't really expect Bo to bring friends home, if this *is* his home, and they could have been noisy or worse, thieves or . . . or . . . yes, murderers. Jim could be right. Still, they always behaved in my classes; we had a good time, and a few students showed real promise. I can still picture the reluctant-carnival-ride expressions on their first day. They're all out there somewhere in the world now, I imagine, respectable citizens for the most part, making four times my salary. Probably they've forgotten old Miss Shoehorn, but perhaps they'll remember a few lines from a poem they had actually liked. Stone walls do not a prison make . . .

Well, I've made my mistakes too, and one big one, and I've served my time, so to speak. Did Mother make the same one? The reason I'm so tall? What does it matter now. My walls won't be Bo's prison. He knows he can leave whenever he wants, but I know now that he'll stay, because we both know I won't bother his work. This is the legacy the college has left me, although, as you can imagine, I'm being very careful to expect nothing.

SUBMISSIONS

The *Agora* is published by students every spring at Belmont Abbey College. Submissions of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and pen-and-ink artwork are accepted between October and February, with notification of acceptance in April. Copies of the magazine will be mailed to those accepted.

Please remove your name and address from your submissions and include, rather, a cover sheet listing your name, address, telephone number, and a brief biographical profile along with the names of your submissions (or, if untitled, the opening lines of the work or a description of the subject). This will help us in our selection process, which involves reading "anonymous" submissions and voting on them as a group.

To submit work or ask for more details, write

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