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## contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sabbath Observance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rolf Bouma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEATURES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right of Passage</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rod Blom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter to Patchetstroom</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview: Robbin Jensen</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SHORT STORIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandfather at Home</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dan Hawkins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Against the Dying of the Light</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tim Straayer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last Words</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larry Ten Harmsel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POETRY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dan Hawkins</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R. W. Veltman</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dan Hawkins</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith Van Alten</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ART</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jeff Robinson</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stan Meyers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aaron Visser</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herm Weima</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris Sharda</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COVER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mirrors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tom Koole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The February issue of Dialogue will be on the topic of technology. Contributions in the form of prose, poetry, and visual arts are welcome. The deadline is February 13.
Sabbath Observance

Rolf Bouma

As Calvinists, we pride ourselves on taking our religion seriously. Each of the covenant children must memorize the Catechism; each member of the church must be doctrinally sound; and each church must protect the pure preaching of the Word of God which takes place every Sunday. The pure preaching of the Word is our main support for staying strong in the faith. We have rightfully elevated the Word to a position of supreme authority. However, a strong emphasis on the preached Word of God has led to an impoverishment of worship which stunts the spiritual growth of Christians.

Sunday has some peculiar observances in our circles. A tendency among college students is to treat it like any other day of study with the exception of attending church once or twice. We have lost much of the meaning of the Sabbath. The original intent of the Sabbath was to provide man with a day of rest. God did not intend man to work continually, so he set aside one out of every seven days for rest. Part of the rest which man enjoys on that day should be spent in worship. The relationship between rest and worship is psychological. Man has need of rest. Naturally man’s rejuvenation and enjoyment of God’s creation shape his expectation regarding that day of rest. Worship, if practiced on the Sabbath, not only reinforces the enjoyment of that day but is itself enhanced by association with a day free from the cares and labors of life. Man looks forward to his day of rest, which also happens to be his day of worship, and therefore, looks forward to his worship experience. When man truly enjoys his worship experience, he truly enjoys his day of rest. The two things are mutually beneficial.

If the Sabbath is to function in this manner, two things must be true: first, it must be a day of rest in a real sense; second, it must also contain true worship. True worship is the boat we have so often missed. Worship is primarily an act of giving, not of receiving. We present our praises, our thanks, and our petitions to God in an intense communion with Him. Worship is directed to God, and any edification which occurs is secondary to the purpose of worship. Unfortunately, we have turned the concept of worship upside down. We rate our services by the amount we get out of them and the benefit they have for our lives. This is a result of our preoccupation with the preached Word of God in the worship service.

The sermon is everything. The parts of the service preceding the sermon are performed as preparatory rituals so that we can finally get at the meat of the service. The Congregational Prayer, the Hymns, and the Apostle’s Creed are time consumers which prepare us to settle down and concentrate on the Word. The sermon arrives and we settle back, pop peppermints in our mouths, and really get something. Upon the conclusion of the sermon we perform a few more rituals. After the dismissal we disperse to our cliques to discuss the message and what we got out of it. In some churches this has gone so far that all sense of worship has been lost. In one church I attended, an attempt was made to inaugurate the reciting of the Lord’s Prayer in unison at the close of the Congregational Prayer. After two weeks, so many people bombarded the consistory with complaints that the practice was discontinued. When such opposition arises over a minor change in the liturgy, how can we ever hope to attain the true worship which God expects of us?

To correct the deficiency which our worship exhibits, it is helpful to examine traditions which have a deeper sense of worship. The Roman Catholic tradition, to which we admittedly feel an aversion, has a deep sense of the adoration and love which is part of true worship. The tradition has gone too far in many respects, but still points the way to a truer form of worship. The Lutheran tradition, also, with its musical and liturgical sense, provides a much better structure for the possibility of worship. Much of the content relies on the worshiper, but the forms of worship enhance the content to a great extent.
It may be asked, however, "Where the place of the preached Word of God is done away with, aren't we in danger of becoming like the Catholics, who are accused of worshipping without knowing what they believe or Whom they worship?"

The grave danger that we may lose some sense of the Word of God exists. But two things might eliminate that danger: first, we could stop using the sermon as a substitute for the individual study we must all do; and, second, we can form group discussions led by church members who are capable of exposition of the Scriptures. These can be Bible studies or discussions of books by Christian authors, with care taken that these discussions reflect a Reformed commitment.

Finally, the sermon should not be done away with totally. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions have a distinct place for the homily, and the preached Word of God in the service of worship can deepen one's appreciation of the worship. The sermon simply goes astray when it gains a preeminence over the other parts of the liturgy. The move must enhance the other parts of the liturgy rather than diminish the Word of God. We must gain a new sense of what the Church Year is, what hymns can do, and the depths of understanding to which responsive reading and bare, unexpounded Scripture can lead us.

When we finally realize that the study of Scripture and the deepening of our Christian understanding is primarily a matter outside the worship service, then we will be able to enjoy worship in its proper light—worship as something inexpressible, something that reaches up to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a response to the love and care which He has given us. Then our day of rest may become what it was intended to be: an opportunity to loose ourselves from our daily cares in a closer union with God.

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Right of Passage

Rod Blom

Well, why should we give up the Panama Canal? "After all," said California Senator S. I. Hayakawa, "we stole it fair and square." If the little brown pic-kaninnies "down there" are really upset about the American presence in their country, well, maybe we could bribe them. Those banana republics are all ripe with corruption, anyway. Let's give them New York City in exchange for Continued American control of the canal. Or maybe, uh... let's see, maybe Plains, Georgia. Jimmy Carter surely wants passage of the treaty badly enough not to mind. Oh, I know. San Clemente. And its entire population.

Granting the unfeasibility of these alternatives, the question still nags and tugs at our celebrated ethnocentrism. "We bought it, we paid for it, we built it. And we are going to keep it," declared Ronald Reagan in his 1976 presidential campaign. Case closed. Well, maybe not, Ron. But seventy-eight per cent of the American people agree with you, according to an Opinion Research Corporation poll taken last summer. They also agree to the emphasis on that initial pronoun. We bought it (then we paid for it) and we built it. The rhetoric smacks of Old World imperialism. The British and French also protested after World War II, "We subjugated these peoples, we colonized their lands, and we are going to keep them."

It was in the era of the New Imperialism, that era which stopped short in 1914 at the advent of the Great War, when everyone was snatching up real estate, that the United States grabbed its first of fitful isthmus. That was the age when power determined international reality. America was an athletic adolescent then, only beginning to feel its strength. We had just politely taken the Philippines and Cuba off the hands of the Spanish after a mock war, and now a canal needed building. A French company had failed in the Isthmus of Panama, going bankrupt in the process, and turned to America. To do anything other than meet the challenge would have been less than honorable, so we did the honorable thing.
The first question raised in the Senate concerned location of the canal. A canal through Nicaragua, though longer, would not require locks or digging through mountains. However, a high official with the French canal company, Philippe Bunau-Varilla—whose dream was the completion of the isthmian canal—lobbied hard in the U.S. Senate, and Congress chose the Panama site. The American government agreed to pay the French forty million dollars for the equity of their investment.

Then negotiations began in 1902 with Colombian officials whose territory included Panama. The U.S. offered the Colombian government ten million dollars and an annual $250,000 rent in return for the right of construction and control in perpetuity over a three-mile strip on either side of the waterway. Colombia adamantly refused, and President Theodore Roosevelt became indignant. He broke off negotiations in favor of direct pressure. That also failed, and the Colombians suddenly became, according to T. R., “homicidal corruptionists” trying to “blackmail” the U.S. government.

At this propitious time, the rumblings of Panamanian unrest were heard by the cocked ears of the administration and Congress. The American press discovered a possibility of insurrection in Panama, even secession from Colombia. Bunau-Varilla, still representing the French Canal Company, assured, a secessionist movement leader, Dr. Manuel Amador Guerrero, that the U.S. would support the revolution. An uprising began on November 3, 1903. An American warship had put into the Panamanian Atlantic port of Colon the previous evening; during the subsequent five-day revolt, it prevented the passage of ...
not ours. We exercise "in perpetuity" all powers over the canal that [we] would possess "if [we] were the sovereign of the territory . . . to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights." 4 But we will not be surrendering real estate, only legal sovereignty over 648 square miles of foreign property, over an enclave which splits a foreign country in two.

Yet the Panama Canal is one tangible grand achievement of American technology. It is a source of tremendous national pride. We succeeded where the French failed. American medicine banished the yellow fever and malaria which had killed twenty thousand men during the French attempt. U.S. technology was responsible for removing three times as much earth as was excavated from the Suez Canal. But how significant is this feat in the age of moon shots, space shuttles, satellite communication, and nuclear weaponry that can annihilate all terrestrial life five times over? The world knows enough of Yankee ingenuity.

But what about our commercial interests in the canal under the new treaty? Will its neutrality remain secure? Can the U.S. defend it if it is threatened by hostile powers? Our present commercial interests in the canal are declining. The U.S. receives no profit from tolls. Tolls in 1976 totaled $134.3 million; the operating deficit was $7.4 million. 5 And today, "only about eight per cent of our waterborne trade goes through the canal." 6 We will maintain control over the canal under the new treaty until the year 2000. We will continue to operate it, as well as our fourteen military bases in the zone. A joint board of directors (five Americans, four Panamanians) will take over the duties of the American Panama Canal Company. The U.S. will appoint the proposed Panamanian members. The canal administrator will be American, his deputy Panamanian, until 1990, when the positions will be reversed. A separate, hemisphere-wide treaty makes the U.S. the guarantor of the canal's neutrality indefinitely. If the canal is threatened, the American military is free to intervene, even after the year 2000. The American Joint Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces fully support the treaty as the best defense of the canal.

Another guarantor of neutrality is Panama's own self-interest. Currently, "Panama derives approximately twelve per cent of its gross domestic product and eighteen per cent of its foreign exchange earnings from canal-related activities, and this proportion will increase in the future (under the new treaty). If trade were shut off by closing the canal, the biggest loser would be Panama." 7 What, though, will prevent a future, possibly Communist government from seizing control of the canal and barring our ships? Such an eventuality is only remotely possible. Little Communist influence exists in Panama today. The best way to create a favorable climate for such influence would be to continue the present, testifying arrangement. And throughout the negotiations, Panama's closest friends have been democratic Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Costa Rica. But can Panama run it? This question arises from ethnocentric arrogance. Of course they can run it. The same question was raised about Egyptian capability after the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal. The Egyptians ran it, ran it well, and proved all the skeptics wrong. They are still operating it today. Panamanians already constitute seventy per cent of the canal work force, and they have twenty-three more years of on-the-job training ahead of them.

Now the final and most basic question arrives: will not the relinquishing of the Panama Canal, following so closely on the Vietnam fiasco, signal weakness to the world, and a lack of national will? Will not our international influence be jeopardized and our image debased? No. Emphatically no. Rather, American prestige will be greatly enhanced. The treaty affords the U.S. an occasion to give the world a practical demonstration of its progressive, democratic ideals. Our foreign policy has been identified worldwide as the New Imperialism. Passage of the treaty would be a first step toward bridging the chasm between the American ideals that we preach and the left-handed power politics that we practice. America must reconcile her interests to those of the world.

Such policy is not Wilsonian idealism. It is hard-headed realism. No nation can survive, speaking metaphorically, as an island. If the U.S. reinforces its present and past policy of callous indifference to the aspirations of Latin America by repudiating the treaty, it will only further isolate itself from Latin American nations and the rest of the Third World. It has already drifted too far out of touch. Perhaps the canal treaty will reverse the current. It does serve American interests. "Our interest today is the same as in 1903—not sovereignty over territory deep in Central America, but use of the canal." 8 We have long funded the canal as national symbol, while to Panama the 1903 treaty has remained a symbol of unfulfilled national honor. Resentment has grown against the American presence, yet Panama has never broken the treaty. Ratification of the new treaty this January would give the U.S. and the world a new symbol, a sign that America recognizes a changed order, an order in which international law is based on justice rather than the national convenience of the strong, and acts accordingly.

6Ibid., p. 12.
7Ibid., p. 12.
8Ibid., p. 12.
10Quoted in Time, p. 12.
11Ibid., p. 12.
13Ibid., p. 12.
14Ibid., p. 12.
15Ibid., p. 12.
16Ibid., p. 12.
17Ibid., p. 1.
October 24, 1977

Dear Christian Colleagues:

Recent events in your country have been given daily, and in some cases prominent, attention in our news media. We have followed these accounts with great interest and concern. As Christians in the Calvinistic tradition we have many bonds with your country, because of those actions of your government in recent weeks which led to many sufferings and arrests. Many of the persons in our own country who were directly affected by these decisions are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

We are aware of the difficulties and complexities which must be faced in the quest for racial justice. Our own record, as American and Canadian citizens and as informed Christians, is not a noble one. We feel the need to take steps toward improving our own individual and corporate patterns in this area of race relations.

Even though we must admit to our own shortcomings, we cannot remain silent about the situation in your country. Your attitudes and actions affect our own witness and our posture toward improving our own individual and corporate patterns in the area of race relations. We are concerned about the plight of our brothers and sisters in the situation you face. We are convinced that your government's recent actions, which do not respect racial barriers, are unjust. While we recognize that opportunities are being systematically ignored, we urge you to confess publicly, by word and deed, your guilt for the evils you have committed. We ask you to correct these injustices, not only for the sake of justice, but for the sake of those who have been deprived of the right to speak.

Sincerely,

The following members of the Calvin College Faculty, who have affixed their signatures to copies of this letter:
Membership in the Body of Christ entails many responsibilities. According to the New Testament God has called a remnant not only to the faithful proclamation of His Word to a world lost in sin, but also to the development of a spirit of mutual internal exhortation. It is in this spirit that the letter opposite was addressed last fall to the faculty of the University of Potchefstroom in South Africa.

Professor Richard J. Mouw of Calvin's philosophy department drafted the letter and circulated it among Calvin faculty members for signature. It is not intended to be an official declaration of policy by Calvin College or by the Christian Reformed Church, but rather a brotherly exhortation to fellow members of the Calvinistic Christian community.

Although upwards of three months have elapsed since its posting, we print the letter here for our readers' consideration and reflection on our commitment to the trans-national and trans-racial claims of the Gospel.
Arthur

Long, it has been a long reign
and my crown has no head
to fall to, when it falls from mine.
Modred is dead. Excalibur that opened him
to the sky must soon be flung
into the lake, Bedivere, for cleansing.
Filicide's no easy strain.

You know
he was my son. The kingdom knows
he was my son. The kingdom knew
it was adultery—for both of us: hers
first, then mine. I knew nothing of hers;
the gossip has just reached my ears.
But now I believe it and my eyes darken.
And it is night, fit hour for my death.
The stars I saw through Modred's chest
are reeling as his blow is ringing
still in my helm. The time has come.
Here, take the sword. Let the crown
stay where it's fallen. It seems a ring
of stars. It shall be buried with me.
Go, Bedivere. When you return
it will be over. I have been king.

Dan Hawkins
Mr. Jensen, what do you mean by the word “jauntin” when you talk about your art?

“Jauntin” is a motif I use to express Christian freedom in my art. A “jaunt” covers many things, of course. It’s like a life journey full of creative adventures, glorifying growth, and wonderful surprises. I use certain shapes, mostly bimorphic types, abstract expressions of nature forms, things like the wind. They function as symbols of Christian growth of freedom. The wind might suggest the Holy Spirit. It’s used as a symbol that way in Scripture—the rushing wind. I think of water in the same way. The wind and the water are changing, moving, growing things.

Can you give a specific example?

My sculpture on the campus is a good example. It looks like a fish form, although I didn’t want it to be an exact representation of a fish. I use the shape of fish, and water, and wind as basic organic feelings for the form. I try to develop a form that stimulates the imagination; something moving, growing, or becoming; something that’s not an end; something that can become new shapes on its own. As I work, the shapes evolve to the point where I feel what I want to express is present.

Would you go so far as to say that the primary purpose of art is to communicate?

Art always communicates, to various degrees, regardless of what an artist might say about it. Art is a response. All human beings respond to the world in one way or another. Share is a better word than communicate. It encompasses more.

The faculty at Calvin seems to stress, more than other institutions, communication through art as opposed to playing with materials in art.

That’s true. I’m sure it’s true, mainly because we’re a Christian institution. God has given us the potential to discover the world, to respond, to be creative, to interpret these things, and then to share. I had a discussion with a couple of students from Aquinas once. They thought that in order to teach at Calvin we had to do Christian expression. One of their instructors had told them that. I told them the difference between us and them is that we create art to the glory of God, while they do it for art’s sake. That’s where a lot of art is today. In fact, I used to do art quite a bit that way myself. I didn’t become a Christian until I was twenty-seven. All my art up to that point was for art’s sake.

What is the value of art created for art’s sake? Is communication involved?

We can look at conceptual art as an example. Art like that is simply an individual involved in his own process. Less sharing happens there than in art where a person is concerned with other individuals. Sometimes a record is kept of the process the artist goes through to create his piece. Sometimes he doesn’t even know what’s going to happen. That’s all well and good, but a process doesn’t communicate to people. It only communicates to the artist. I do process art; I teach it that way, but the student grows at that point, works toward a final product, a statement that he can share with other human beings. Most conceptual art stops with the artist. That’s why it looks alike all across the country. That’s what makes it phony to me. I hate to make a general statement like that, but you can’t even tell who did it. Art in the Los Angeles Museum, in Denver, in the Milwaukee Art Center, and in Grand Rapids looks like it’s by the same artist. It’s existential art, moment-to-moment type of thing. That’s why it’s process art. Wherever it stops, it ends.

If it stops with the individual artist, it’s hard to see how it can communicate, especially to somebody who knows nothing about what the artist is trying to do.

That’s what bothers me about the art. It’s that type of art. It explores materials mainly for the sake of materials. The artist creates an object that people still relate to, I suppose, but the
process is the most important part of it and the people no longer see the process. Sometimes the process is recorded on movies, or pictures. A fellow once made a sculpture out of blocks of ice stacked up in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City. It melted. That was it. He said even the bill from the iceman was part of the art. It was part of the record.

You seem to talk about two things in regard to your own art: representation and interplay. Will you explain their meaning and how they work in your art? It seems that you want to communicate ideas through your art, but it also seems that you want your art to invite some sort of action or interplay, to create something on the spot. Would you explain?

Yes, that's right. There are these two things. My art is representational. It expresses the idea of Christian freedom. But it has more than a representational role. I want people to become participants in my art, to sit on it, to touch it, and to accept it for what it is. I usually refuse to explain exactly what my art work is because I want it to stimulate the imagination. People have all kinds of ideas. Some of the kids told me the campus sculpture was a cheese, a stage coach, a dinosaur. That was great. They used their imaginations. They were participants relating to the sculpture. I don't want to compromise my art, but neither am I threatened by explaining it. I go to churches and give talks on my cartoons. You have to communicate to people where they are and teach them to reach. But it's interesting that I've had to explain these sculpture pieces less than anything I've ever done.

Why is that?

One of the reasons is that it is not on a pedestal. When things are on a pedestal or framed, people expect them to be representative in some way. I suppose they're right in expecting that. The art is removed from human interplay. All that's left is a chance to look at it and try to relate to it that way. Most twentieth-century sculpture is off the pedestal. It started with Rodin. He tried to take it off the pedestal, but people kept putting his stuff back on. He was pretty materialistic. He didn't want to lose his job so he said "O.K. put it up on a pedestal." People become part of the art when it's off the pedestal.

Why do you use plastic forms and materials when so many other people in the current trends are using steel wire and lead?

Plastic has the connotation of being phony because it forms into almost anything. It's conducive to imitation like this table top, a plastic sheet that looks like wood. But any material can be used wrongly. Steel can be used wrongly. It can be made to look like something else. I've seen steel stamped out to look like leather grain, even wood grain. I've seen stone or concrete made to look like the siding of a house. I don't use steel because I don't like steel in sculpture. I relate to things emotionally. I tend to be more non-visual in my work. I think more about the way things will feel than about the way things will look. Steel is a violent thing. I think of things like war weapons, automobiles. It's cold and it rusts.

How do the colors and the plastic materials work in your art?

Plastic has a warm touch. It doesn't draw the body heat into itself, particularly in the forms I have. The forms have foam in them. I carve my shapes out. I can also build on these forms. Then I cover them with epoxy resin fiber glass for the structure and the surface quality. I try for a touching texture. You don't usually touch steel sculpture. Plastic is very peaceful, and in my own mind it is usually involved with working things. Even the colors are plastic materials. I try to use strong contrasting colors to get the surprise effect I mentioned in my definition of "jauntin." Life is full of wonderful surprises that give us hope. My sculpture reflects this. It changes as you move around it. Someone talked to me about the campus play sculpture. He had been seeing it from one side because daily he drove into the college from one direction. He saw orange and yellow. He liked that. Then one day he happened to drive around the other way and he saw an entirely new sculpture. It's blue on the other side. He saw it in a completely new relationship. It was a surprise. He had to tell me right away. It was like a totally new experience. That's what I want. That's why some of my things have completely flat sides. When you look at them from different directions you get a completely different foreshortened view. Surprise and the joy that comes with it are important parts of Christian freedom. I try to express that in my sculptures.
Dear editors: Ernest Hemingway said that all great stories ended in death—well, this is the closest I get. Hemingway wrote all kinds of death and then swallowed a shotgun blast. Anyway, I think the whole sentiment is cheaper now that they used it to begin Brian’s Song. I only write all this because I am sure that this short story is an ephemeral contribution to the issue on or of Death; I am not at all sure that this has anything to do with the subject except to say that all we have on this earth are memories—that’s all Death leaves behind.

Grandfather at Home

At my grandfather’s house, the old woman’s car wasn’t in the driveway, so I went straight to the door.

“Is she here?” I asked when Gramp opened up.

“Uh-uh. Come in.”

“Good. I was afraid I might have to get you to come outside. It’s pretty cold, for fall.”

“Hmp.” He tottered over to the sofa. He didn’t make a dent in it when he sat down. No one did—except the old woman. She was fat.

“How’s your leg?” I asked him.

He rolled up his pants to show me. His skin was speckled brown like a salamander’s. He had an ulcer, a tight lump on his shin.

“Still hurts, but not so much as before,” he said.

I settled back in my chair. My head touched something on the table behind me and the thing moved. I jerked around to make sure it didn’t fall off. It was a fancy lamp the old woman had—the stand was a china statue of French King Louis. I had only pushed it close to the edge. I put it back into place and blew the dust from around it. It looked like it hadn’t been moved.

“She doesn’t like anyone touching Louis,” offered Gramp.

“I know, I know. She’s a bitch.”

“Shh!” said the old man quickly, “Her friend Myrna is upstairs.”

Myrna was practically the old woman’s mate. She was always around, spying for her while she was out of the house. The old woman liked to keep tabs on Gramp, though he never
went anywhere but to the movies with me. I wasn't even supposed to talk with him. And I didn't, either. At least I didn't whenever she was in the house.

She liked to keep him tied down like that because she was his wife. But she wasn't my grandmother. She married Gramp after my real grandmother died. She and Gramp finished raising my mother, but the old woman wasn't my grandmother. I was glad of that.

Myrna, upstairs listening, was sure to tell the old bitch that I came over and moved Louis. The old woman'd blame it on Gramp somehow and wouldn't let him go to the movies that week. All she'd have to do was tell him not to go and he'd obey her.

But he was ignoring that until she did. "What movie'll we see this week, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Oh, we could see *The Aztec Astronauts*. That'd be good for a laugh. Or the new Woody Allen film. Did you like the last one?"

"Ate too many Juicy Fruits."

"You weren't bored."

"No, you're right. We'll see Woody Allen. All that spaceman stuff is crap."

The sound of tires popping on the driveway stones interrupted us. The old woman was home.

"You better hop out now, Jim," said Gramp, "or no movie Friday."

"It's too late Gramp, Myrna'll tell her I was here. I better stay and help you out." I was feeling reckless.

"No. Get out." Gramp meant it.

"All right. Call me up when you can."

"O.K." Gramp stood up straight to see me through the back rooms to the kitchen door.

"I'll go myself," I said, and turned to go. I caught an image of him in the hall mirror as I left. Alone in the room, he let his shoulders droop, and his belly sag. His aching leg buckled beneath him.

As I got to the kitchen, I heard the old woman come through the front door. It stopped me. I wanted to stay and listen in on her. Myrna clumped down the stairs. She whispered our conversation to the old woman. I could imagine Gramp shivering with apprehension.

"Damn it, the boy was here, Norman!"

"Yes." Gramp's voice was low.

"You know..."

"Yes. I know."

"... that he should not have been here."

"I can't prevent my own grandson—"

"And I can't let him take you to the movie after he's disobeyed me."

"Well, you could..."

They went on like that. The old woman really laid into him. Gramp took all her abuse because (I guess) he was used to it. But this time he wouldn't obey her.

"We're going to the movies," he declared.

"You have no money in the house, Norman."

"Where is my money?"

"I put it in the bank."

"Take me to the bank."

"You'll have to walk."

"Ah, the boy will get some money. We're going out anyway. Now I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

"You'll have to take the guest room. You're not sleeping in mine."

"Ours," said Gramp, "I'm not sleeping in our room. No I'm not."

He's dead now. I don't blame him for dying. He wanted to leave the old woman. She kept him in the house just like she kept old Louis and he was too old to go anywhere else. I guess he finally decided that going once in a while to the movies wasn't worth the trouble of being watched and collecting dust the rest of the time, so he let himself go.

The old woman's let herself go, too. She's fatter than ever, and the sofa is beginning to show it. She's pretty cross all the time, besides. I caught her one day bawling out the paperboy for failing to fold her copy just so and place it inside the door.

And I saw her one other day when I went in to talk her out of some of Gramp's things. She had been watching TV with the sound off and eating gooey chocolate creams, but now she was asleep with her hand still lying in the candy box, and her head tilted so far back that it was right next to Louis on the table, and her mouth wide open with the dentures half out. I wanted then to jerk those teeth out of her mouth and, before she could utter any flabby protests, smash them with Louis and—why not—smash Louis, too. It was because of the way she looked right then, like some deformed animal instead of a person, instead of Gramp's wife. But she was Gramp's wife and still had the ring to prove it. I saw it on her finger. And turned away and slipped back out the door.
Against the Dying of the Light

It was getting late and I had much to do yet. But I stopped and told myself: no, you must be missing something, something important; there must be some point you’re overlooking. The scientist is no more in love with truth than any other madman. He wouldn’t be human if he were. The only reason for the compelling attraction that makes him chase after it so doggedly is the light at the end of the tunnel it makes. Which is that if he can get there first, or even in a better car than the next gent, he’ll be able to determine just what shape that truth will take.

And think of medical science. Just think of that if you can without getting violently ill. The demons of mercy are the worst of hell’s menagerie, coining cash from agony. Big business and stuffy luncheons, but all proper. Cutthroats with pretty ribbons and credentials on the whitest of sheepskin for the price of three hundred gall bladders.

They use the fear of pain and death as a jewel to dazzle the eyes of peasants. We breathe as they instruct us, consume such noxious fluids and vile salts as they give us, surrender blood and tears; we evacuate our bowels on their command in such receptacles as they give us; we would render up our first-born on a spit if they required it. All for the horror of death. As if life were such a bloody picnic.

I surveyed my fellow sufferers, scattered as they were about the park in positions ranging from the salacious to the pathetic, with a mildly skeptical eye. In the matter of my countenance, however, I tried to register nothing objectionable: I tendered a smile that gingerly toed the line between benignity and senility as I hopefully attempted to decrease the odds—already grave enough—of an inconvenient mugging. I spend all my time and energy trying to keep body and soul together and what do I get? Another day older and deeper in debt.

Nothing like the park for the drama of life, though. A regular theater in the round. Mankind in all its stages of decay romping in the fronds and dying in paper sacks. A young couple in mouldering denim huddled near a monument to the dead probing one another’s tonsils in a desperate attempt to ignore everything else. An antique woman throwing handfuls of her dead husband’s pension to the pigeons—who don’t care either. Kids making noise and tearing up the flower beds. An old man dying of cancer by inches. The flavor of a zoo was strong enough so that the presence of an extraterrestrial flinging slabs of raw meat ‘round to the lot of us would not be grossly inappropriate.

The sun looked like a hemorrhaging tumor as, trapped between two crumbling tenements, it sank into a pit of swelling fetid gases. I fancied I could hear its death rattle as it gasped for something real to breathe in the sea of oily monoxide, but it was only the noisome traffic reverberating faintly from the brittle, ancient glass of store fronts across the park. I wished for it to go and leave me, and I hoped for clouds to cover the stars. Natural metaphor on top of everything else can make a soul untellably weary.

I don’t much like nature—human or garden variety. People are basically hogs, and far too happy to prove the point. But at least you can lock the door to visitors. You can’t lock the door on Nature, though. She’s always there to hound you, to keep your feet on the floor, to keep you awake with the intermittent pain of sentience, to stir your insides around, perhaps, with her septic surgeon’s fingers, and do unspeakable malevolent things to your vital organs. Where is the sense in it, that whatever the virtues of our lives, whatever good and lasting things we have done, none of us is immune to the most humiliating and protracted demises that this bitch Nature can devise?

Good lord! I’ve been speaking out loud again, I thought. That isn’t good. I mustn’t do anything suspicious, let alone anything for which I could be committed. I can’t give any charitable organization the pleasure of seeing me die between its antiseptic sheets. But really, sometimes I do lose patience with this charade of appearing rational. There is no peace this side of the grave—and to my great chagrin I looked up to see proof of the fact: my nephew Tommy was
talking to an officer of the law at the other end of the park.

Tommy is a nice enough fellow, quite respectable—good job, good name, good prospects—but bereft of all important senses such as vision, comprehension, and taste. He has little or no notion that I have a functioning mind of my own. Reminds me of myself thirty years ago rather too dearly, and I could see how dangerous he was to my plans. I deemed a quick retreat to be in my best interests and made off for some monuments which were broader than I.

"Uncle! Where have you been? Elizabeth and I have been worried sick. Wait now, where are you off to?"

I popped behind some shrubbery to inspect the landscaping, but the devil stayed with me, hot on my heels. I bent over and pushed through some bushes, nimble enough for my age and condition, but no match for his. He grabbed my elbow.

"Hold on a minute—"

"Help!" I yelped on an impulse. "Help, I'm being set upon here!" I swung my umbrella and caught him sharp on a shin with the wooden handle. It made a report like a rifle shot. While he reconsidered pursuit I was off again.

"Uncle, it's me—Tommy!" he cried from the other side of the hedge. But I wasn't in the mood for conversation.

"Wait a minute, fella," said a bluecoat as, turning, I blundered into his arms. "What's all this noise?"

"A lunatic," I said, pointing in Tommy's direction, "was attacking me in those bushes, officer. Scandalous."

"Yes, well, let's have a look, shall we?"

"A madman. I really must urge all due caution."

Tommy fell through the bushes, rumpled, looking quite the part I had cast him in. I almost snickered, but it would have given the game away.

"Uncle, what is all this? What's going on?"

"Do you recognize your nephew here, sir?"

And I grinned even though I could see the jig was up. Tommy looked rather comical, pulling twigs from his collar and grass from his knees. The policeman must, of course, have been the one he had been talking to earlier at the edge of the park, and both of them were probably convinced that I needed special handling in deference to my great age and diminishing intellect.

"He's certainly not my nephew," I told the officer with utmost piety. "You'd not find a nephew of mine thrashing about in the shrubbery looking to attack me. Arrest him, sir."

And I made a jab at Tommy with my umbrella to drive home the point.

The officer's expression changed from chagrin to hangdog pity as, I'm sure, Tommy stood behind me conspiratorially tapping his skull with a portentous forefinger, or doing something equally telling to telegraph my incompetence.

"I'm afraid you'll both have to come down to the precinct station so that we can get your statements."

"Can't you simply release him in my custody?" Tommy asked, as if he were the one wronged.

"Not if the gentleman insists he doesn't know you, sir."

There was a world of weight in the officer's minced words, and I had visions of a County Mental Health Clinic lying behind his precinct station. Heaven only knows that those ninny's could find banging around in my bat-ridden belfry were they to get the chance. I considered a new approach to the situation.

"Listen, uncle—"

"Tommy? Is that you? I didn't recognize you. The excitement—" And I looked suitably disoriented and concerned so that they could both think me merely feebleminded rather than crafty.

"You'll be all right, then?"

"I assure you," Tommy told the officer, and he led me over to a bench on which we both sat.

"This has really been unconscionable," he began.

"Elizabeth and I didn't get a wink last night. Where have you been?"

I had to wince a bit at that. Tommy might have stayed awake out of sheer annoyance, but I supposed that Lizzy had been genuinely concerned. Lizzy and I could talk—a rare thing in this noisy world. Ah, she's a good girl. How she wound up with a twit like Tommy is beyond me. Rather too concerned with
the dry goods and dinnerware, but she still knew a bit of life. What it is—and you can see it in her smile—is that she still has a taste of the bitters on her lovely tongue. She had gone and felt some honest pain somewhere along the old road, and it gave her the kiss of life. I couldn't talk to her otherwise. Nothing. A puff of my precious wind on a dandelion gone to seed. Fluff in the air. You can't talk to the air—or it won't do you any good, anyway. A person's no good if never happy. And you can't get your teeth into a real happiness without first, sometime, being laid flat with a pain. And I don't mean a savory little ache, some sprinkle of suffering meant to heighten the social conscience, something to kill a weekend; I mean a brickbat to the noggin, a wallop to deck you flat. It's a trick, that one, catching it just right, but it's the only game in town.

"You're not my warden, Tommy; I'm not your ward."

"There's no call for that kind of talk. We care about you very much and you shouldn't scare us like this. You might have called, you know."

"I was busy."

"Busy with what?"

"Thinking. I've had a lot to think about."

"Uncle," Tommy said, fidgeting and looking at his shoes, "we've talked with Dr. Claherty."

"You've what?"

"He's explained the situation."

"That damned old fool! What ever happened to the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship? I'd like to smash his face!"

"Wait now, he hadn't much choice. After all, we are your—"

he choked on the words, to his credit, "—your next of kin."

It is insidious how people will so casually use the ties of love and family to bind you and flay you senseless. In the name of gracious concern Tommy hoped to nail me safe to his hearth. He would have me bleed and gasp my way to vegetable ruin on his linoleum out of sacred familial duty.

"Damnation. Tommy, you're making a pitiable show of this."

"Please. Don't do this. There's no call to be so unpleasant."

"Don't be outrageous. There's nothing pleasant about the situation, you ninny. I'll work this out without your whimpering, thank you."

"All right, well look, can't we just go home and talk this out sensibly?"

"I don't want to go home. There's nothing to discuss."

"You mustn't talk like that. You've got to take care of yourself now. Dr. Claherty has scheduled treatments that begin immediately."

"Don't you tell me what I've got to do. There comes a time—well the time has come for me, at any rate—when there are aspects of life more important than its length. I will not be drugged and irradiated into hideous insensibility, Tommy. I won't grimly hold on to the calendar only to watch myself churning into a nauseous blood pudding."

Tommy looked quite horrified.

"Uncle, don't be foolish. There's no reason to give up hope like this."

"Don't talk to me of being foolish. We're all of us on this planet a pack of bloody fools and if we give up that sublime distinction we might as well pull the plug on the whole leaking tub. The minute we throw our hope down on the ground it's there to be picked up again—but who can find it when it's all wadded up in our grimy fists? Hope is a thing found, not choked to death."

"You just aren't making sense."

"I'm making the best kind of sense. Personal sense. Because what do I have to look forward to if I go with you? I shouldn't so much mind the privations I'd have to suffer—"
except for one. The people, Tommy, the people. They can't be the same to you if they know you're dying. It's human nature to be repulsed from the sick bed. And the people are all that make living worthwhile. Oh, and don't look at me as if I were a senile old fool who's trying to patch a hollow life with empty platitudes. I know—of all, I know—how little I've had to do with people all my life, how I've clung to my things, my money, my dessicated little lifeless corner of life—but it's all I have to remind me of the people, the saving people.

"Uncle, I—"

"Oh, I know God saves us. For time and for eternity. It's right and good and I'll not deny it. But he sends us his people for the dark moments and the light. People, my friends when I've had them, they saved me from madness. When I think of how they've saved me, Tommy, I'd like to weep. And when I think of how little I've done for them! I can't think of anyone I've ever saved. And that's a burden. It's important, too, because I think it must be that we have to save others to be saved ourselves. It makes me uneasy, in my old age, to think so."

"But uncle, you have to take care of yourself, then. You have to take care of yourself if you're to help others."

"Oh, don't make me angry with such patronizing nonsense," I growled. "You'll not lure me into your deathbed with such cheap trash as that. You may think me daft, boy, but I'll not be submitting to your potions. I think we both know that your bed is as good as the grave to me if I'm fool enough to crawl into it."

"Don't you believe that I have your best interests at heart?"

"I won't argue the point with you, Tommy. I'm not coming with you."

He sighed a great sigh, for I was being a stubborn old fool and somewhere his dinner was getting cold. Now, I know that the right thing for me to have done would have been to go along with him and make him easy. I didn't really imagine that I had enough value left in me to justify making all this trouble for my poor nephew; but I am a stubborn old fool, and I couldn't bear having paid all the dues without reaping some of the benefits. I have been paying for such a long, long time.

"Tommy, it's not for you that I want to avoid being a disintegrating burden. It's for myself. It would be awful for you, but worse yet for me."

"Please be sensible—"

"I have told you that I am being sensible. The best way I know. I'm afraid of so many things! I have been all my life. Afraid to say hello, afraid to say goodbye; afraid to lend a helping hand, or to swing a well-deserved boot; afraid to change, and terrified of remaining the same. I have been afraid to breathe or open my eyes—but Tommy! I find that I'm not afraid to die, if I can do it in my own way."

"Uncle—"

"Please try to understand."

"I can't understand."

"Then please let me be."

Tommy sat in silence next to me as the darkness fell about the park. He stared straight ahead for quite some time, but finally rose to leave, putting his warm palm on my knee as he did so, and giving it a gentle squeeze. He walked away slowly and quietly, without looking back. I wondered if I could have been wrong about him and considered calling out to him even yet, but I thought better of it and sank back on the bench. You must be missing something, I told myself, something important; there must be some important point you're overlooking. The darkness continued to fall.
Last Words

My father was proud of his comprehensive and precise command of the English language although, because he had emigrated from Holland at a relatively advanced age, he never lost his thick accent. His genial character was marred somewhat by a tendency to dispute every subject over which dispute was possible, a charming and harmless enough defect to which, I suppose, most immigrants are prone, or they wouldn't have left the Old Country in the first place.

That a thick twentse brogue detracted from his air of linguistic condescension never occurred to my father nor, very likely, to his zealous jousting opponents, who themselves retained the uitspraak of the rural provinces of Holland from which they hailed. And into which they attempted to turn the Grand Rapids of my childhood. For most of the arguments centered around the "modernist worldliness" of American society and the strict need to reject it.

To his credit, my father always took the doctrinaire "worldly" line in these arguments, and defended it skillfully. On occasion, however, he lacked the time, inclination, or heart to elaborate his position. Then he would simply say "Ya, I virtually agree vit you," a demurrer that most of his immigrant disputants took for unambiguous English compliance.

He was seventy-seven years old when he died, and had been agonizingly sick for months. His death, therefore, came as something of a relief. At his funeral there was none of the usual weeping and gnashing of teeth—just a somnolent numbness. Before the ceremony started, I rambled absently around Shystra's Mortuary, checking to see what other rooms for the afternoon. Alice Lander, a high school flame whom I had not seen in years, was one of the "parties" that had engaged the afternoon. Alice Lander, a high school flame whom I had not seen in years, was one of the "parties" that had engaged the afternoon. Alice Lander, a high school flame whom I had not seen in years, was one of the "parties" that had engaged.

The pitch was not long in coming. "Ve all know, believed, dat Bill Nerland vas a fine man, a hard worker, and a friend to all. He came to dis land thirty years ago met two baby boys and a dying vife, and trough all de dey's toil and travell dat followed, he never lost his spirit." Not bad so far. "Always a friendly hand and an little yoke you could expect from Bill."

"But you also know, brodthers and sisters, dat Bill's heart vas not right met de Lord. De last twenty years he never darkened de door of a church, Vell, I got nieuws for you all." Here Stoat lowered his voice and leaned forward, gripping the diagonal corners of his lectern. "Verily I say unto you, dis very moment Bill Nerland is sitting at de right hand of his Maker, who shall come to juge de living and de dead don't look so surprised young man." Here he pointed a thick finger at me.

"Wim, my son, you know dat I spent de last two veeks visiting your fadther, laboring met him over de state of his soul. I bring dis message to you personally." His menacing digit pinned me down, wriggling. "His last day on dis eart your fadther repented. He as good as admitted he was stiff-necked and hard of heart you look like you don't believe me. Vell, I remember his verbatim vords: 'You know, Henk,' he said to me, 'you're right. Ya. I virtually agree vit you.'

"It wasn't two hours later he passed away."

Larry Ten Harmsel
White

Death, reflected by the crystal horizontal,  
Clear in my purpose I rose  
as the white field pierced my gloom.  
Standing tall, I faced the edge of shattered silence.  
Run away.

Fragile ivory bones strained against taut flesh.  
Marble platforms supported my hesitant feet.  
Could this barren whiteness destroy my walk?  
Endless horizon of pristine life  
Global joy in spherical purity  
Jagged branches dying:
"Only the strong survive..."  
Run away.  

R. W. Veltman

Black Sleep, White Dreams

... the whole city founders readily and deep,  
Sliding on all its pillows  
To the thronged Atlantis of personal sleep.  

—RICHARD WILBUR

The city lies on its belly in the slush.  
Cars splash the sodden streets,  
Shoes are heavy on the feet;  
The trains have stopped sliding through mud.

Oh, but the weary townsmen roll so in their beds  
and wind their sheets like shrouds,  
waiting in the lily moonlight  
for the dark chasm of sleep to open  
(counting perhaps black sheep  
leaping its brim).

Too soon they fall into the deep,  
from the world's end of flat consciousness,  
and the underworld leaps into relief.  
Some dream in maelstroms, some in fire-storms;  
all whirl through Hyperborean snow  
that blinds their vision as they go—

They belly down between blank sheets.

But these are poor protection from the morning  
that comes raining through windows  
all around; its clear drops pierce the bubbles  
in their brains and melt the deep drifts made by night,  
Winds die; men rise all shallow for the day.  

—Faith Van Alten

Dan Hawkins

22