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The Winners

POETRY

"Two poems for St. Carol"
Dan Hawkins

"jessica anne"
Faith Van Alten

"Memories—One Fall"
Ross McElroy

"for (a) Debbie"
Greg Tasker

"thirty cedar waxwings"
Faith Van Alten

"Vice Versa"
Eric Jager

FICTION

Beulah
Lori Allen

Against the Dying of the Light
T. A. Straayer

The Kodak Kid Meets the Shadow
Bob Boomsma

In Bits and Pieces
Dale Mentink

The Judges

David Den Boer, present at the creation of Calvin's Writer's Guild and chairman for two years, came back this year to judge Poetry for the FAF and, incidentally, "to see what campus writers were up to after a lapse of a few years." Den Boer is Director of Photocomposition at the J.I. Scott advertising agency in Grand Rapids; his poems have appeared in many little magazines around the country, most recently in Kansas Quarterly and in Phoebe, published at George Mason University.

David Schaafsma, editor of Prism 1975 and originator of "Good Groceries," returns to Calvin writing as this year's judge of Fiction for the Fine Arts Festival. He was glad to find that the arts, far from dead at Calvin, "continue to be new and refreshing. David and his wife, Jill, live in the city, and David teaches creative writing, film, and literature at Unity Christian High in Hudsonville. Sometime this fall, his story, Harry, will appear in an anthology of "moral fiction" to be published by Harper & Row.
Ronald Watson, professor of Art and chairman of his department at Aquinas College, judged the Visual Arts Guild competition in two- and three-dimensional works. Watson's own works deal with the phenomenon produced by the refraction of natural light through the plastic materials he uses; they are oriented to react with their environments. Himself active in his own environment, local artist Watson is involved in the Urban Institute for Contemporary Art, has coordinated several important Grand Rapids exhibits (the Sculpture on Pedestals Show of 1973 among them), and has exhibited his works throughout the Midwest.
“Bee-yoo-lah!” Her mother’s cry rang out in the fading afternoon, wavered in the humid air and finally curled down to a whisper beneath the house where Beulah was squatting. The house was a weathered gray and very old, and its rough boards were splitting under the weight of their years. The house was built up off the ground on large cement blocks to protect it from termites, and it was here in this refuge, along with layers of soft dirt, cobwebs and sagging rafters, that Beulah sat.

Beulah was undersize for her age, which was almost nine. She was skinny and pale, with long, apathetic hair that trickled down over her shoulders in thin twisted ropes. She had large brown eyes that looked out on the world with a myopic, blank stare, as if she were forever trying to puzzle out an image that constantly evaded her. She was also at the moment very dirty from the decades of loosened dirt underneath the old house, and she wondered dully if perhaps her mother was angry.

She heard her mother’s soft, hesitating steps come near to the edge of the house, then saw her legs come into view. And behind them, a strange pair of legs. She knew they didn’t belong to any of her brothers. Her mother called again, softly, and Beulah began crawling toward the legs.

“This is Beulah, Mrs. Goldman,” said Beulah’s mother. She was a small thin woman with a prettiness that seemed faded from too many washings, and a weary look, as if she spent too much time on work other than her own. She picked up the small girl and held her close, but Beulah made no affectionate response. She merely stared past the stranger with her unfocussed eyes.

“Why isn’t she in school with Joel and Edmund?” asked the strange woman professionally, her eyes on Beulah’s smudged little face. There seemed to hang about her that bustling, no-nonsense but naively kind attitude of those who are determined to help the poor. Beulah’s mother sighed softly, her eyes troubled.

“The Lord has given me a burden to bear,” she said sadly. “Beulah’s what the doctor says is ‘slow’. Retarded, he said. Somethin’ went wrong when she was born, I guess. She can’t learn nothin’.” Mrs. Goldman nodded, her eyes studying Beulah with growing interest. She opened her large green notebook and studied something.

“Has she ever been tested, Mrs. Christy?” she asked after a moment. Beulah’s mother shook her head as she shifted Beulah to her other arm and brushed a strand of hair from her eyes.

“No, ma’am,” she said. “Seems all she wants to do is sit under the house and look at things nobody else can see. She won’t come out but if she gets the notion to.” Mrs. Goldman nodded again.

“Yes,” she said. Her eyes softened. She extended her slender hand to touch Beulah’s dirty cheek. Beulah did not blink, or even flinch. She merely stared solemnly past the social worker, her eyes fixed on some distant object.

“ ‘That’s too bad, really,” said Mrs. Goldman, dropping her hand. Beulah’s mother set her down in the bare dirt and Beulah crawled purposefully back under the house. They watched until she vanished in the shadows, then they turned and began walking toward the social worker’s car.

“That’s all she does all day, sit under the house?” asked Mrs. Goldman, her hand on the car door handle, a puzzled frown on her face.

“Yes’m,” said Beulah’s mother. “If I try to pull her out and she don’t want to come, she screams so, I’m afraid what the neighbors’ll think.” Mrs. Goldman smiled ruefully at the mention of the Christy’s neighbors, who consisted of two families half a mile down the road. “The funny thing,” Beulah’s mother continued, “is that she always comes in at nine o’clock every night, reg’lar as clockwork. She jus’ knows, and she comes in and lets me wash her up and put her to bed real nice.”

“Amazing,” said Mrs. Goldman, shaking her head. She opened the door of the car, slid in, and placed her notebook on the seat next to her. She opened her mouth to speak, faltered, then began again.

“Mrs. Christy,” she said earnestly, “would you mind terribly if, next time I came out, I would bring Beulah something? A doll or something for her to play with? A sort of get acquainted
present, so I could get to know you all better?” Mrs. Christy’s face shone.

“Why, thank you,” she said gratefully, “I sure wouldn’t mind at all. I don’t know if she’d play with it though. But—it’s jus’ that the boys—” she stopped, embarrassed.

“Oh,” said Mrs. Goldman quickly, “I’ll bring Joey and Eddy something too. So they won’t feel left out.”

“Thanks so much, Mrs. Goldman,” Beulah’s mother said gratefully. “See you next week!” Mrs. Goldman started the car and backed around in a swirl of dust. Beulah’s mother watched the car until it disappeared down the road.

“Lookit the dolly, Beulah,” said Beulah’s mother, coaxingly. Joel and Edmund were already fast asleep, possessively clutching the small toy guns that Mrs. Goldman had brought them. Beulah had refused to come out from under the house when Mrs. Goldman had come with the doll, and now, at nine o’clock, she made her regular appearance at the screen door, standing silently, waiting to be let in. Beulah’s mother gently opened the sagging door and with a shy smile on her face, held the small china doll in front of Beulah.

“Lookit!” said Beulah’s mother again. “It’s got nice brown hair and pretty blue eyes just like you—see?” The doll did resemble Beulah, and Beulah’s eyes seemed to lose their blank stare for a moment and focus on the amazing object. A look of wary surprise, or alarm, passed over her face, before she again lapsed into her customary daze. Beulah’s mother pushed the doll into her limp arms, but Beulah made no move to take it, merely giving a small sign of resignation.

“Hold it, Beulah,” she cajoled. Her hopes had risen at the expression on Beulah’s face, but were fast dropping again at her obvious disinterest. She took the doll back, desperately searching for something else to interest Beulah.

“Lookit, Beulah!” she exclaimed suddenly. “Even the arms and legs move, jus’ like yours, see?” She manipulated the small jointed arms back and forth. Suddenly Beulah’s eyes widened and, with that same alarmed expression on her face, she began moving her arms in synchrony with the movements of the doll’s arms. Beulah’s mother stopped for a moment, shocked at this unexpected response from a small girl who for eight years had done nothing on her own without rigorous urging. Trembling, she took the doll’s left arm and moved it slowly up and down, scarcely breathing for fear what she had seen had only been an accident. Beulah, eyes still blank, moved her left arm up and down.

“Oh, Beulah! “ her mother shrieked joyfully, dropping the doll and hugging the little girl to her. Beulah made no movement, but her eyes moved to the doll, lying on the floor where her mother had dropped it. Becoming limp, Beulah slid out of her mother’s arms and dropped to the floor near the doll. Beulah’s mother gasped, horrified.

“Oh, Beulah, honey, I’m sorry!” she said. She picked the doll up and dusted it off carefully, then pushed it on Beulah, who, without urging, had gotten up off the floor by herself. Beulah’s mother picked up the little girl, doll and all, kissed the dirty, empty little face, and took her off to a sponge bath.

“You should just see her, Mrs. Goldman!” said Beulah’s mother excitedly. “She still sits under the house, but she has the doll by her all the time—she jus’ dotes on it.” Mrs. Goldman had ever expected to see plain Mrs. Christy so animated.

“Mrs. Christy, please!” she said, laughing as she stepped from the car. “I’m so glad she likes it. I did try to get one that looked as much like her as I could.”

“Yes,” nodded Beulah’s mother as she followed the social worker to the house. “She likes it so much—if I move the doll’s arm, Beulah does the same thing. She moves the same arm as what I move on the doll!” Mrs. Goldman looked interested.

“Really?” she said. “I wonder if she could possibly be educated to do simple tasks. Of course she’d have to go to the state school—”

“Oh—you couldn’t take her away from me!” Beulah’s mother protested, horrified. “She’s all I have...” she faded off uncertainly.

“What about the boys, Mrs. Christy?” Mrs. Goldman asked pointedly. Beulah’s mother grew red, and twisted her shirt in her hands.

“They’re fine boys,” she murmured softly. “They already broke the guns you brought ‘em though... Beulah’s my daughter!” she burst out suddenly. Mrs. Goldman gazed at Beulah’s mother pityingly.

“Oh, Grace,” she said reprovingly. “Don’t you want Beulah to go to school?” Beulah’s mother rubbed her eyes with the tips of her fingers.

“I don’t...” she trailed off. They had come up to the edge of the house, and Mrs. Goldman knelt in the dirt, disregarding her nylons, and peered under the steps. She could see nothing through the scattered beams, shadows and eerie-looking white grass. As her eyes became used to the dark-
ness, she could see a small shape huddled far towards the rear of the house.

"Beulah!" she called softly. "Will she come?" she said aside to Beulah's mother.

"Beulah..." Beulah's mother coaxed. She waited for a moment, but the small shape did not stir. "I guess not," she said regretfully. The two women got to their feet, Mrs. Goldman brushing off her knees.

"I think," said Mrs. Goldman, "that when I get back to town I will look into a school for Beulah, all right?" Beulah's mother looked at her feet in their cheap canvas tennis shoes, but she nodded, biting her lip. "They really won't let her in," she said in a sudden flash of hope. Mrs. Goldman smiled gently.

"You love her very much, don't you?" she said. Beulah's mother looked at her feet in their cheap canvas tennis shoes, and nodded. "I'll see what I can do," Mrs. Goldman said. She walked toward her car. Beulah's mother looked up suddenly, and ran after her.

"Tomorrow—tomorrow Beulah's birthday," she said, smiling shyly.

"Really?" Mrs. Goldman asked as she got into her car. "Nine years old, right? I'd love to come out, but I'll be gone this weekend. Tell her happy birthday for me, will you?" Beulah's mother nodded and her smile faded.

Whatever effect the doll had had on Beulah's personality, her face remained as vacant as ever. Yet, Beulah's eyes seemed to have changed. They were still blank, but now they wore a continual look of resigned fear. The next day, on her ninth birthday, Beulah's mother dressed her, placed the doll in her arms, and opened the door so that Beulah could go in. She paused for a moment, still on hands and knees, as she saw the doll. It was propped stiffly against a cement block; the staring glass eyes danced mockingly in the soft dusk was just settling, the moon sending shafts of light between the porch rails. Beulah's dark little form was huddled in the corner, and she crawled toward it, whispering Beulah's name softly. She paused for a moment, still on hands and knees, as she saw the doll. It was propped stiffly against a cement block; the staring glass eyes danced mockingly in the moonlight. Mrs. Christy shuddered and continued crawling toward Beulah's small form. "Beulah," she whispered softly. "Time to come in, baby."

Suddenly she stopped, poised on hands and knees, as she saw what until now only the doll had seen. Revealed in the pale shadows of the moonlight, Beulah lay on the ground, a large beam across her small body, her face turned to the face of the doll. And Beulah’s eyes, no longer dull or vacant, but wide with awed discovery, finally stared with recognition into herself.

![Image](image_url)

**Villanelle for the Apocalypse**

Although we've said some day we'll get it right
We have more than days to worry about:
It's a hot time in the old town tonight.

There's been some kind of trouble to excite
Old passions and new fears, no doubt,
Although we've said some day we'll get it right,

Papa's burned up and he's looking for a fight;
Mamma's breaking china in a Cobalt-60 pout:
Our nuclear family's a fission site;
It's a hot time in the old town tonight.

To find a beach beyond the mushroom clout:
Although we've said some day we'll get it right.

I wish we had the jack to book a flight
To find a beach beyond the mushroom clout:
It's a hot time in the old town tonight.

We're playing now for blood and bones despite
Ourselves; we'll play until we've played it out.
Although we've said some day we'll get it right,
It's a hot time in the old town tonight.

T. A. Straayer
Meal

Geraldine A. Selles
Two Poems for Saint Carol

Of the Fields

Saint Carol because she has forever walks through the broadest fields steps between each of the roses as before her & after her they rise become live coals between her lips & they speak Saint Carol calls the flowers by their names.

Of the Waters

Around her feet the temporary floods rejoice at her splashless grace she is Saint Carol of the Waters & they sing to her in their own voices there is no language in which she can be told to come in out of the rain.

Dan Hawkins

Saint Carol

first place poetry

Judge's comment

""Two Poems for Saint Carol" contains an objectivity that is good to see ... a depersonalizing of the emotions, a projection of love feelings given over to metaphor, and a good metaphor at that, one of saintliness. The first place poet shows a working knowledge of poetic form and a striving after some readable structure within the poem. Also, the poem was chosen because of the striking word choices like 'splashless grace.' It is well done in nearly every respect."
this child is special
she is the very first of her generation
and she must see bright colors
her mother has threaded ribbons
through her wicker baby basket:
blue, red, gold

jessica anne
second place poetry

Faith Van Alten

Judge's comment
"If catching one moment in a life, however small that life, and then
being able to move the reader into that life and show why it is
important and beautiful makes a good poem (and it does), then
'jessica anne' is my choice. I like the compactness of the poem, the
energy driven down to one small thought that contains both grace
and hope. And, yes indeed, we must always show colors to the young
and to the old as well. I particularly liked the sound of the poem, as in
'through her wicker baby basket'; the sound, of course, is as impor­tant in a poem as the meaning."

Breathe in deeply, the cold air sears
As you stare down the sun, setting—
But don't go back home
Telling them you felt nothing.

Again you try,
But his absence doesn’t bring tears to your eyes,
Never did.
Always, he will be right.

War was never glorious to you,
And brothers are supposed to be different,
Aren’t they?
Wonder how he feels now under all those leaves.

Memories—One Fall
third place poetry

Ross McElroy

Judge's comment
"There is some remarkable feeling in 'Memories—One Fall.' The idea
isn’t that original, but a poem’s idea never really has to be—it must be
spoken in a new way, and this poem does that. A striking last line and
very good word choice and usage throughout (particularly in lines
two and three of the first verse) indicate to me a fine job of composi­tion."
from

The Kodak Kid Meets the Shadow

Third place fiction

Editor's Note: The Kodak Kid is part of a larger intention, the story of nineteen-year-old Bert Triesma's cross-country travels with truck driver Shorty Benson, and of Bert's struggles to understand himself and his growing up. Up to this point in the segment Kodak Kid, Bert has been resting in the bunk of Shorty's cab, drifting in and out of a sleep filled with recollections and memories, as the truck crosses Wyoming. Bert finally wakes up fully when they make a rest stop.

"Hey Shorty, where are we?"

"Rawlins. Didn't wake up as soon as I thought I would, but we're still okay for time."

They walked out into the store and passed the fuel desk. The guy behind the counter was laughing and said, "Why you ol' son of a bitch. What you doin up here. I thought you was over to Pocatello this week."

"Neah," the other man said, "Winston tipped his rig again so they're sendin' me down to Craig."

Shorty and Bert went into the hall to the cafe. A bulletin board ran the length of the wall—a white board with plastic covering. Bert slowed to look at the pictures with Shorty right behind him.

Wrecks. Truck wrecks like the one they, his family, had seen that morning in Utah just before that bridge. Where ... Bert stopped. It was flat, as high as the tires might have been or less.

"Look at that Shorty, flat."

"Yeah, some poor bastard fell asleep and ran off the side of the mountain. That's why I told you if you ever get sleepy, don't worry if ya haven't driven that far, just pull over, for Christ's sakes pull over and stop cause that trailer's comin' on behind and ... .

Shorty stopped mid-sentence; and, for just a second, Bert looked at him.

Bob Boomsma

"Don't worry, even if ya just started driving and ya get tired. And don't worry about being a big man or anything cause it'll kill ya the first time you close your eyes."

One of the wreck pictures showed just a bunch of scrap on the ground—pieces of metal scattered around. Bert thought he could see a wheel; otherwise, he figured, he wouldn't have even known it was a truck. At the bottom of the photo he read, "Sam Burnet, July 29, 1974. Continental divide." In a photo above, the frame of a blue long nose was curved up like a rocking chair, and the cab was smashed down off the back of the driver's side.

"Come on, let's get some coffee," Shorty said. Bert moved along behind him.

One picture had a white cross with flowers by it.

"Looking at wrecks," Shorty said, "Geez."

At the door to the cafe, Shorty turned to Bert.

"Still want to drive?"

Bert said yeah softly. Shorty bust ed out in his choppy nasal laughter, "Come on kid."

They sat at a window booth, drank coffee, and smoked watching trucks pass. A couple of car loads of tourists pulled up outside the restaurant.

One family had a loaded-down station wagon with stuff crawling up the back windows. A bloated canvas tarp was pulled over the rack on top. They came in noisy and sat at the far end of the cafe. Bert watched the mother settle her baby in a high chair while their little boy jumped up and down on the seat. Bert looked up at the sign above the aisle. RESERVED FOR TRUCKERS.

"Sure you don't want something to eat?" Shorty asked.

"Neah, I'm not very hungry."

Shorty paid for the coffee. Bert walked slowly past the pictures and stopped at a White Freightliner without a windshield or roof. Shorty passed him.

"Just a second Shorty, I gotta hit the john."

Shorty was talking to the man behind the counter when Bert came out. Bert looked in the glass display cases and thought the man looked familiar. Then the whole place started looking more familiar. The guy behind the counter looked at Bert and said, "Don't I know you?"
Bert shook his head, "I don't think so."
"You didn't use to run up around Casper did you?"
"No, I don't think I've ever been in here before."
"Well, you sure look familiar."
"Yeah? You look kinda familiar yourself."
"Yeah? Funny, you look kinda like a guy that used to pull oil rigs up around Casper with my brother."
"No, sorry, not me."
Bert thought the guy was beginning to look more like an old friend or someone from somewhere way back. Bert figured he was about twenty-five. He had close cropped hair and glasses. He was a little overweight and wore a black knit short sleeve shirt.

Bert and Shorty walked out to the truck.
"Not gonna buy any souvenirs or Indian jewelry for your girl friend?" Shorty asked, drawing out the word jewelry like jayoualray.
"Nope," Bert laughed and picked up a stone. "Got all my souvenirs right here in my hand, Shorty."
Bert threw the stone to the sage at the edge of the lot.
"Sure is a beautiful day," he said, "Hey Shorty, I'm gonna take a picture of the truck here. Naw, well maybe out there by the road at a good angle."
"Whatever you say kid, why don't you wait till we wash it?"
"Naw, that doesn't matter."
Shorty started the truck, and they rolled up to the exit.
"Wait Shorty, right here."
Bert jumped down and crossed the dirt road and backed down a ditch into some sage. The trailer was bright white in the sun. The front of the Peterbilt cab was out of the sun and dark.

That green cab isn't so bad after all, Bert thought. Gold stripes along the side of the cab sparkled.
"Yeah, that's good, right there, okay." When he was self-conscious Bert mumbled to himself.
He climbed back into the cab.
"Yeah, it looked good. Maybe a little too much glare off the trailer but no big deal."

They bumped onto the interstate ramp and slowly picked up speed on the grade. The highway ahead was straight to the sky. They passed the sign. I-80 WEST.

"Someday Shorty, I'm gonna steal one of those signs." Shorty looked over his glasses at Bert and laughed.
Through the windshield on the pavement ahead, Bert noticed the shadow of the truck—little bumps of the lights and horns rode the front of the shadow fifteen feet out from the cab. Bert sat up on the engine housing near the window and put his camera up to his head.
"What you doing now?" Shorty asked.
"Gonna take a picture of the shadow."
"What?"
"The shadow of the truck, see." Bert pointed down to the road.
Shorty laughed moving forward in his seat, "You're crazy kid, you're nuts."
Bert took aim with his instamatic.
"Yeah, I know."
His laughter made it hard to steady his camera.
"It just looks bad, man."
They rounded a corner and Bert got a side shot of the shadow. Shorty looked at him with wide eyes and tried to look serious but couldn't keep from laughing.
"You're nuts, kid."
"I know, so?"

"The shadow knows."
"What?"
"Nothing, an old radio show."
"Huh?"
"Nah, forget it."
Bert put his camera away, and Shorty laughed some more, calming down.
"Hey Shorty, you mind me taking pictures once in a while?"
"No, why?"
"I dunno. It just seemed sort of, you know, like stupid all of a sudden, like something some kid would do."
Shorty smiled.
"Yeah kid?"
"Yeah, okay."
"Just don't waste your film."
Bert sat back and looked up a long grade while Shorty started down-shifting. Shorty settled himself in his seat. Bert made loud gearing noises and gave a long drawn-out high pitched cool with a black accent.
"Dat's cool."
"Yeah cool kid, and speaking of cool, next time you go back to sleep be sure to close that side window. I started up the mountain last night without noticing it was open and about froze my ass off up on the summit. It almost started raining, got a few drops on the windshield so I had to stop and close it."
"Oh, yeah, sorry Shorty."
"It's all right kid, just think about it next time."
"Yeah, sure."
Shorty shifted into the low range as they approached the top of the grade.

"This is the divide," Shorty shouted over the roaring engine. Bert looked out his side window. Unpainted buildings of a small homestead scattered on the other side of the interstate fence. A black Dodge pickup sat in the yard splattered with mud. On the side of a big shed with a bowed roof, Bert could see the back end of a green car.

The truck had slowed to a crawl and the engine was screaming.
"Five miles an hour," Shorty shouted.
"I'm tired," Bert called back.
"Yeah, these slow climbs'll put you right to sleep. You didn't get much sleep last night either."
Bert sat up on the engine housing so he could hear better.
"I been thinking Bert. You were talking about going up to Idaho, right, to go camping?"
"Yeah."
"There's a place up here called Little America, and you can go north from there on a short cut. Get that atlas out and take a look. I think it's 30 or something that goes out from there. It hooks up with the interstate in Idaho."
Bert got out the atlas and checked.
"Yeah," he said, "It's 30 north, cuts off at the first exit past Little America."

"I'm gonna stop in Little America anyway. We can shower there and get something to eat. I could probably get a ride out of there for you; otherwise, if you're interested, you can go on into California with me. Lettuce is moving out of Guadalupe this week and the sooner we get down there the faster I can get it back to Boston."

Bert was looking at Shorty. Shorty looked up at him from the road. "You don't have to feel obliged or anything. I can pay you a hundred dollars a week plus expenses."
"Yeah, I'll be coming back up through Salt Lake so you could go north from there if you wanted on our way back."
"Wow," Bert said.
"Think about it. Why don't you get some sleep. It's a good piece to Little America yet?"

"Yeah, good idea."

Bert started to climb into the bunk.

"Hey, catch that window," Shorty shouted.

"Oh yeah, dah, gee." Bert said as he twisted his lips. Hecrossed his eyes and started making spastic movements with him arm toward the window crank.

"You don't have to now," Shorty said, "just remember."

"Okay."

"Cool kid, right? Hey why don't you take off those dirty jeans before you get into the bunk."

"Yeah, really."

"Keep it a little cleaner back there. Momma said she put some clean sheets down on the side. You can put those on at Little America."

Bert laid down in the bunk. He left the curtain rolled up. Warm air coming through the windows and bunk vent felt good on his back. Shorty started gearing the truck up. They were over the summit. The air moved faster and whistled in the vent above his head. Shorty let off on the fuel, and the electric engine brake clicked in sounding like a kid making farting noises with the palms of his hands on his mouth. Bert picked up the smell of cigarette smoke and leaned out of the bunk.

"What now?" Shorty asked.

"Smells good."

Bert reached over the engine housing and got his cigarettes off the dash. He curled up on the bunk and smoked looking out at the road. The truck rounded sharp corners speeding down the mountain. Centrifical forces pulled Bert gently from side to side. He swayed with it until he exaggerated it and was pulled over.

"This is where that Jake Brake comes in handy," Shorty said.

Bert nodded.

"You could really use me on the run into California Shorty?"

"I said so didn't I?"

"Yeah, but... I dunno. This all seems like a dream sometimes. I told you I always wanted to drive one of these trucks. It's great to ride in one, and then I get to drive, and now you're offering me a job."

Shorty laughed and said, "Yeah, well you did all right last night. You can drive across the Salt Flats this afternoon, and then when we get down in California. We'll break you in easy. The faster I can get that lettuce back the better."

"Yeah."

Bert threw his cigarette butt out the window.

"Gotta watch that in California kid. You'll start a forest fire."

"Sounds good, I mean... ."

Shorty started his choppy nasal laughter.

Bert settled into the bunk.

California, he thought, lettuce. Migrant workers crowded to the sides of trucks on a dirt road in a field. He remembered his family stopping to buy Bing cherries at a roadside stand. That was in '69 or so on their way to San Francisco. His little brother had a pet turtle along called Timothy II. It rode in the back of the station wagon in a little plastic tub.

Timothy got sick and died in Yellowstone Park later in the trip. He would stick his head way out of his shell and make croaking noises. They had a funeral service and buried him between roots at the bottom of a tree. Jenny put a rock she had found on the grave. If we ever get back, they had said, we'll camp at the same place.

Every so often when they ate supper, Dad would say, "I've got a flashback. Who can guess what it is?"

Finally Jenny would guess that this time he had thought of Timothy turtle.

Then Dad would say the letter of the loop and the number of the campsite.

D-6 or B-4. Bert had read about a turtle and a truck. Somewhere the turtle gets hit by a red truck and bounces off the road like a tiddly-wink or C-6. Bert slipped through the white hole of the six.

He was in the black field again, with white specks moving past him quickly until he saw the turtle moving along on the other side of the road. The road was white like his father's legs in summer when they'd talk him into the pool at a motel. His legs hung off the side of the pool into the water. He couldn't swim.

Bert moved his arms around in front of himself making little waves. He kicked off and began a doggy paddle. He put his face in the water and opened his eyes. He looked at his hands and down to his feet. He realized he was shining.
fool,
when asked
‘Where are you
from?’ has only
one answer— ‘From the
belly of my mother,
with the usual blood and
pain, but she was glad to see me.
She held me in her arms, shared her milk,
my sister helped her out a lot too. Soon
i was on my own, walking at night on sidewalks,
playing pinball, talking to myself inside phone booths.
Then i started a losing streak with pinball, i looked
around for help, found it in an old red barn where a colt
was just being born! and i asked the old man who lived
in the house next to the barn ‘Who owns this horse?’ He
replied ‘Who owns you?’ i said ‘Where’d it come from?’
He asked me ‘Where’d you come from?’ He took me
in for a cup of camomile tea,
i said ‘Thanks’ then asked him ‘Have
any candy bars?’ ‘No’ he said
with a smile. ‘Ever play
pinball?’ Unsure, he
shook his head. ‘Well,
do you think
i’m a
fool?’
Petals

Helen Reitsma
Vice Versa

Literary Criticism,
Once but verbal voyeurism,
Now includes the various ways
To rape and plunder poems and plays.
This specious calling consecrates
The felonies it sublimates,
Allowing criminality
A scholarly mentality.
In learned journals pedants write,
Divesting beauty of delight:
The articles strewn everywhere
Suggest assault—no love affair.
Quarterly the leering critic,
A psychopath who’s analytic,
Spoils Virtue with his thesis,
Chops her up, and leaves the pieces.
For one who’s bent upon this vice,
A misdemeanor won’t suffice;
The studied master must devise
A crime which wholly satisfies.

Eric Jager

thirty cedar waxwings

thirty cedar waxwings
i saw them
i counted them
thirty in the berry bushes
by the east window
they were flocking together
pecking berries
their tails edged in yellow
a red slash on each wing
a black mask across the eyes
thirty silky beige bandits, crested.
i think they’re going north

Faith Van Alten

for (a) Debbie

when
the incredible crush
of your small-steps
comes
so close
and i might say something
any word would say something
but i unmoving
cannot
smooth your grief
or stay your
going
desperately home to
love your son
i too am
a boy

Greg Tasker
Among the many pieces of music scheduled for performance at the FAF this year is Dialogue contributor Todd Huizinga's song, "I Heard a Fly Buzz when I Died." Todd's avant-garde efforts, "Patriotism and Windshield Wipers..." and The Minimal Song Series: I, have startled readers of the November and March issues. In this more conventional piece, Todd explains that he has turned his attention to "a study of the movement of three chromatic lines." The music, atonal and contrapuntal as it is, is by Todd; the words are from Emily Dickinson's poem of the same name.

"I heard a fly buzz"

Todd Huizinga

Moderato

Voice

1st Flute

2nd Flute

I heard a fly buzz when I died The stillness in the room was like the stillness in the air Between the Heaves of Storm
The Eyes around had grown then dry
And Breaths were gathering

firm
For that last onset when the King
Be witnessed

in the Room
I willed

my Keepsakes signed away what portion of me be Assign- a-
ble. And then it was there interposed a fly with blue un-
certain stumbling Buzz between the light and me and
then the windows failed and then I could not see to see
It was getting late and I had much to do yet. But I stopped
and told myself: no, you must be missing something, some­
thing important; there must be some point you’re overlooking.
The scientist is no more in love with the 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 gallbladders.

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 recepticles as they give us; we would render up our
first-born on a spit of they required it. All for the horror of death.
As if life were such a bloody picnic.

I surveyed my fellow humans, 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 inconven­
tient 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 pickling 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 with yellow parchment skin, a swelling liver, and
gelatinous bowels entering the final stretch. The flavor of a
zoo was strong enough so that the presence of an extraterres­
trial flinging slabs of raw meat ‘round to the lot of us would not
be grossly inappropriate.

The sun was a hemorrhaging horror which, trapped be­
tween two crumbling tenements, sank into a pit of sweltering
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 rattle of 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 naturally verminous, 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 unspeak­
able 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 may 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 taken into hand. I can’t give any
charitable organization the pleasure of seeing me die be­
tween 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

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Judge’s comment

"A fine story, Against the Dying of the Light is a well-constructed,
compassionate rendering of a difficult human situation. The heart
of the story—the character of Uncle—fits with its dark humor. I like the
subtle motif of light and darkness, especially with regard to the title."
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 a knack for getting a leg up in the world—by stepping on the smaller chaps, etc., and this has a way of rather anaesthetizing him to the fact that any of the rest of us exist in any essential fashion. One of the teeming hordes of moral solipsists at large these days. He has, for instance, 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 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 panted, 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 in which I had cast him. 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 the point home.

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 that he doesn't recognize you, sir."

There was a world of weight in the officer's minced words, and I had visions of a County Health Clinic lying behind his precinct station. Heaven only knows what those ninnies 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 would both think me merely feeble-minded 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 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
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 walloo 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?"

"I was 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. 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 hold grimly 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."

"The day you tell me not to be foolish, you—you—" and I felt my blood pressure rising to the occasion, my temples flexing like the gills of a beached trout. I was impressed that the old machinery could still deliver that much steam, but it occurred to me that I had probably ought to be treating my admittedly antique viscera with a tad more reserve. An untimely stroke would be most disconcerting; were I to be carried out of the park in a basket I knew I should lose all respect for myself. But my reason answered my righteous anger only feebly, and the two swept me round and round in a lunatic dialectic which in turn pressed me further and further toward some kind of therapeutic explosion—whether of rage or laughter, I couldn't quite say: at my age I am always finding it as difficult to take myself seriously as the reverse.

In the end it was, I suppose, Tommy's amusingly pathetic look of desperation and chagrin which turned the trick. I could certainly see the poor boy's point, after all. It was a delicate matter.

"I'm not giving up hope," I finally sighed. "It's just that I don't seem to find much of it in Claherty's office. His cure, you see, would carry rather too stiff a price."

Tommy brightened. "Oh, but you don't have to worry—"

"I'm not talking about the fee," I said, interrupting his hastily drawn conclusion. "I'm talking about the toll the cure itself would take. On all of us. It could tear you and Lizzy apart just watching my protracted..."

"Your hiding like this has already—" he began, and stopped to stare at me, smiling to think that, yes, Lizzy probably had been torturing the whelp during my absence, and I was presented with the disintegrating burden. It's selfish reasons even more than that. If I give in, I'm marked. 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. And everyone else would be equally aware. The very hint of impending death would weave as palpable a shroud about me as the one soon to follow, and no one, but no one, would be able to see past it. Most of my friends would no doubt blanch at the thought of being in the same room with me if they knew my condition. And the rest would drive me to despair by treating me with the walking-on-eggshells patronizing cheerfulness which has for so long been your disgustingly habitual attitude."

He winced at this; I had probably hurt him by saying it, insofar as he could be hurt by anything I might say, but I wasn't going to back down.

"But, uncle, you're just not talking sense."

"You mean to say that I'm not talking sensibly, which is another thing altogether. Lord, Tommy, how many times haven't you waited about my insistence that you do the
sensible thing? I'm a living monument to the sensible thing. But I've got a stake in the game now, a real stake for once, and it's put a new light on things."

He looked dim enough at that, so I pressed on. "I mean to say, I hope you're not thinking that I sat calmly in that ass Claherty's pleasant little consultation room and had a balanced little chat about my seriocomic malignancies. My sclerotic old brain was fizzing 'way too much for me to make out anything he was saying anyway; I only heard the words, and of course they made no sense at all."

He still looked the dullard. "Listen, Tommy, I understand that it's difficult for you to accept such an untidy situation as this, but I really must insist."

"Uncle, really, you're just not thinking clearly now. If you'd come home with me and—"

"Now just you stop and listen to me," I bellowed, staggering to my feet, rather denting my impact by winding myself in the process. But I was becoming the tiniest bit peeved by his resolute refusal to comprehend. "We'll just chop off your arms and legs and see if you care to calmly discuss the various medical alternatives. I've said that I appreciate your position in this whole affair, but I'm not about to toss away the comfort of my remaining days so that you can be satisfied with your having done the right thing. I've seen my share of friends drain away down the tubes of Claherty and his ilk out of little more than this duty to kin, and I'll be damned if it happens to me!"

But I saw that this was all a great waste of effort. My tirade was at once draining my strength and exploding my composure, and it served no end in convincing Tommy anyway. It only backed him further into his corner. I leaned forward on to the support of my umbrella and closed my eyes. "I've got to think is all. Perhaps in a few days I'll be more inclined to consider your help, but for now I need some time to think," I appealed to him with tired eyes.

"Will you come home with me now?"

I almost laughed at his lunatic persistence. "No, I've a place to stay."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"You can leave... and Tommy... ."

"Yes?"

"You can try to understand."

"I can't understand."

"Then please let me be."

He rose to stand in silence next to me as the darkness fell about the park. He stared at the ground for quite some time, but finally turned to leave, touching, as he did so, my shoulder with his long-suffering palm, and gave 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 to the bench where I sat a good long time before I could myself find the strength to walk away.
I'm not sure why I returned to the park the following evening, because it was surely the first place that Tommy would come looking for me again. After years of relative certainty concerning everything that I was about, I found it most unsettling to find myself acting on impulses which made no real sense to me. I found it convenient to dismiss this rash act as merely another of the coercions of habit which had led me successfully—albeit by the nose—through the better part of a lifetime. Still, I couldn't help being anxious about Tommy showing up again, anxious equally with anticipation and dread.

It was because I was fretfully looking out for Tommy that I missed Liz's arrival. Suddenly she was there on the bench beside me, startling as an angel visitant.

"Waiting for someone?" she asked.

"Liz," I said. Relieved, I took her warm hand into mine, not unmindful of the charity on her part in allowing me to do so, for her hand was smooth and supple, a delicately mottled pink, a perfect feminine hand, while mine was chill and loose, a sort of glove, the skin too large for the bony claw beneath, a victim of radical weight loss and poor circulation. It took a courage and grace born of genuine love to take my hand and hold it as she did—without hesitation or distaste—something I could never have done myself were our roles reversed, given as I am to half-measures and niggardly gestures.

"Liz. Good of you to come."

"We've been so worried."

"We? I've seen Tommy, of course, and I think you give him more than his due." "He does the best he can. He does care, you know, as best he knows how."

"You're right. It was wrong of me to say that. I only fault him so because, well, he's as stupid as I am about so many things." She smiled wanly at this, thereby revealing, I suppose, that this had always been fairly clear to her. "I expect never let it interfere with her plans.

managed to let us think we were having our way with her, but he's sent you to rein me in because he couldn't do the job."

"I don't think you should have to."

"No, but it's the best thing for all of us."

"Is it? It's clear Tommy thinks so, but I thought you might see things from my point of view. You know the situation? Claherty's told you? I'm shot through with the stuff, you know. It's all quite beyond any hope of a cure—as if such a thing made much difference to me in the long run anyway. But you know what the attempt would involve—nothing but prolonged misery."

"Yes," she said quietly, and bowed her head.

"I don't think I could face that."

"I don't think you should have to."

"But how—"

"We can forego the treatments if you're sure it's what you really want." "Tommy wouldn't stand for it."

"He needn't know," she said, a little distraught, I thought. "Oh, I don't know. There'll be a need for pain killers at the least, won't there? Some kind of medication, anyway. I'm sure that'll do for Tom if he doesn't look closely. But it's important that you be home, don't you see, not all by yourself. That would be too awful. You've got to come home."

I scarcely knew what to say, for it was clear that the woman really did care for me. Feeling all the fool, I embraced her as best I could through my overcoat and inhibitions, and rested my head on her shoulder. My bulwark never failing. Such luck, I thought. At length she helped me up, and arm in arm we left the reborn park to begin our journey home through the graciously descending dark.

Belinda's Sweet Pain

Belinda casts her eyes over fertile fields of grass beyond the glance of a man with a shovel who, nature moist, breaks open soiled moss.

Far off she sees a man alone (no harvest moon shines now) who offered her unspoken the night's unbroken fire.

With a quick laugh she turns her eyes to men who chide: "Belinda will dance the dance tonight!"

Wind rakes the golden fields; men gather up their tools that wield open the earth's supple skin and they follow Belinda back to town.

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Belinda's eyes no longer travel the moss-green hills now dry and dull with winter's frozen rage.
The lone man walks into town unseen, unheard, unknown to all and slips between the narrow halls to view Belinda's wanton ways. Then music fills the hall where you and I are gathered. We drink the wine of the clustering vine but force the goat's raw flesh. Through a window lunar light flickers against the one-man stage; we watch Belinda in her frenzy dance the pulsing, thrusting dionysiac rag.
Taking Unpleasant Dictation

Marty Homan
Life is short, art is long. —Hippocrates

Life does indeed seem short and, as Samuel Johnson saw it, nasty and brutish to boot. Art, on the other hand, lasts a long time, as long, say, as the Sphinx has stood watch over Egypt.

Here at Calvin in the springtime, things stand a little differently. The Fortress of Science commands the view from the Commons Lawn, and Life with all its biological implications is irrefutably demonstrating the principle of self-perpetuation, while Art occupies a green-and-white striped tent during its two-day sojourn. And after the tent is struck, future engineers and artists alike will continue to soak up the first life-giving rays of the year.

This brief glory, the Fine Arts Festival, doesn't seem to hold a candle, much less a thing more illuminating, like a mirror, to the Real Life of this campus. Arts and artists shine for a time, but—here's the riddle—in what light? Not in the flame of the Guilds, which has sputtered through the last eight years despite the care and ability of its keepers, and not in the steady glow of community nurture. The brilliance of individual performances is what generates it.

It appears that here, life is long (eternal, we might point out from our peculiar vantage) and art is very short. Moreover, this saying appears to be true, for the saving of a soul is worth more than all the paintings and poems man could ever make.

But as the saving of souls is accomplished by grace, so is their keeping. And while some—they are a majority—are kept alive through dealing with "realities"—of business or psychology or truck driving, others—saints, geniuses, and artists, perhaps—must deal with less tangible matters. This is not part of the mystique of art, which is another kind of grace, but part of the mystery of grace itself.

The grace that lies beyond the reach of art, beyond individual talent and a fine performance (and not only in the realm of the fine arts), comes first from God, but then through every brother's keeper. It goes beyond all misapprehension, extending far and wide, raining richly until the harvest.
“Oh my goodness, that’s my college!”

Prism 1979