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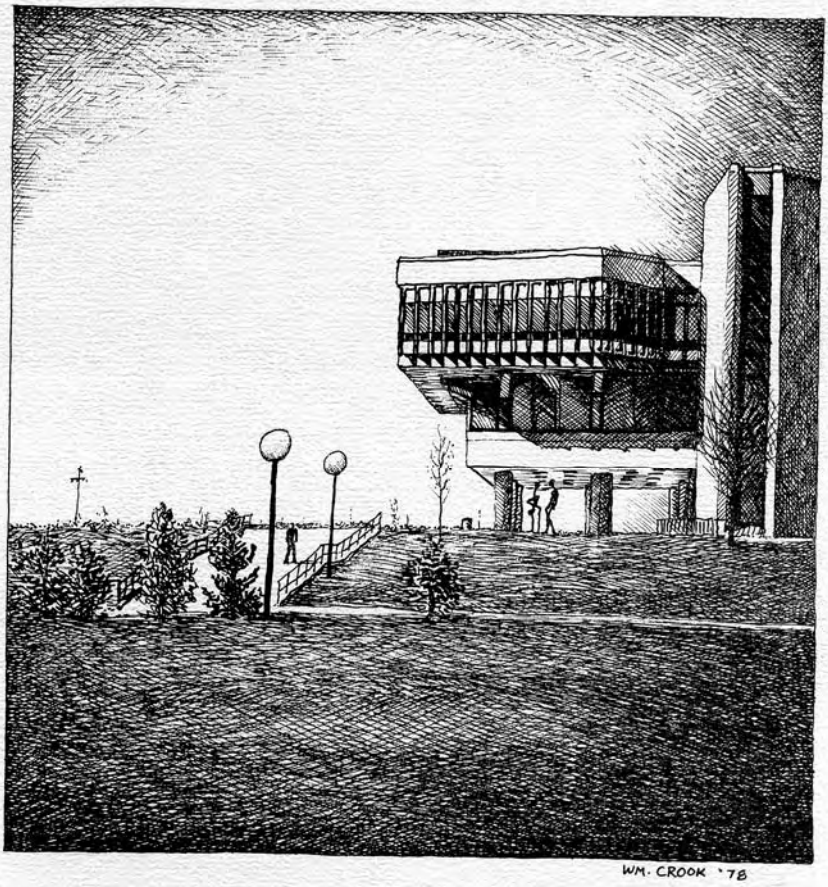

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Photograph by Brenda Yarnell

"All poets are mad, or, to be gentler, estranged, alienated, perceiving too much, feeling too much, ranging too far, lingering too long at the pools of exaltation and morbidity. Not to explore life all the way is not to be a poet, and one must draw what consolation he can from the thought that the alternatives must be rather dull."

Mark Harris in *Vachel Lindsay*, 1963.

Every artist – every human – experiences the need to feel, to notice, to become absorbed. In this sense then we are all poets. We must, as Mr. Harris says, explore the whole of life, and satiate our impulse toward both joy and suffering.

Following is this group of poets' consolation for life's otherwise dull alternatives.

–Ron

Table of Contents

FICTION

Beverely J. Kroll, *1st place* – Shirl. 58
Gary Adkins, *2nd place* – Seed Plot 12
Becky Bradway – The Old Woman 32
Delores Ele – The Luck of the Caror 42
Lorrie Farrington – She Didn't Know 39
Anthony C. Kallas – Good Moring Blues 5
Jane Morrel – Miss Lucy Lee Brown Saga 28
Rosie Richmond – The Screening Committee 21

NON-FICTION

Bill Brown, *1st place* – Damming out the Darkness 9
Joan Nudo, *2nd place* – My Mother's Hands 34
Lorrie Farrington – Study of People in an Ice Storm 25
Irwin Jarett – Magic Moments 49

POETRY

Peter Erio, *1st place* – Mama-Negra 19
Ron Deverman, *2nd place* – drought 30
Ricardo Mario Amezquita – Dimension of Poem 62
Martha Collins – Gypsy Poem I 56
Roberta DeKay – Shaman's Flute 56
Ron Deverman – "the darkening of the afternoon" 55
Katherine Lawson – "some feelings" 57
Michael Miner – After Delvaux 36
Tim Osborne – Anabel Lee/Disco Version 8
Victor Pearn – holoblastic 27
Margaret Pendar – Modern Dilemma 41
Terry Peters, *excerpts from* – Souvenirs for the Peace Corps Generation 18
Sandra Riseman – Burlesque 52
Sandra Riseman – "She will not be tied" 53
Cathy Silber – One Way 37
Kathy Wooldridge – My Father 4
Kathy Wooldridge – Correspondent 48

PHOTOGRAPHY

Terry Guy, *1st place* – A Lonely Place ..... cover
David Edwards, *2nd place* – Clayville – Print #2 38
Mark Cantrall – "crescent moon" 10
Mark Cantrall – "open door" 31
Terry Guy – Pokie 63
John Hamm – Wait 'Til Mom Sees This One 22
S. E. Hinton – Mannequin and reflections 44
Dennis Kirchner – "snow on fence" 26
Dennis Kirchner – "cats" 53
Greg Mansfield – "still life" 7
Greg Mansfield – "apple" 48
Greg Mansfield – "boy on step" 54
Therese Sheehy – "old shed and silo" 15
Brenda Yarnell – "shingles" 2
Brenda Yarnell – "frozen waterfall" 24

ARTWORK

Bill Crook, Jr., *1st place* – Brookens Library 1
Bill Crook, Jr. – "girl waiting" 57

Note: No music awards or second place artwork were given.

Anthony C. Kallas

GOOD MORNING BLUES

The air inside the little two bedroom house is very cool; almost arctic. Hum-thrumm goes the conditioner, hum-thrumm, working on the thermo-regulated climate.

In the kitchen a cyclopian light is shining; it too is designed to burn cooly. A muffled buzz escapes with its snowy glow.

Beneath it a girl is working. Facing the counter she is methodically scooping spoonfuls of coffee into a silver percolator. Eight... nine... ten... She counts to herself. Then locks on the lid with a singular twist.

As soon as the plug is placed in the socket the pot responds with automated life. Hiss-crackle-pfutt it sputters. Then warming: pfutt-chaa-pfutt. And again: pfutt-chaa-pfutt. A rhythm, its echo, a rhythm again.

The girl stands watching. Soon the percolator's clear glass eye is winking brown. Steam begins to seep from the spout in puffs, then stronger, a steady pulsing stream.

A man sits smoking in the living room. A serious look is on his face. A white writing tablet is on his lap. A grey mechanical pencil is on the tablet.

From the rocking chair where he sits, the man has a good view of the girl in the kitchen. She is pretty and slender. Her blonde hair falls in waves to her shoulders.

Outside, the early morning sun is rising. A few timid rays glint gold in her hair.

The man stubbs out his cigarette and immediately lights another.

"Well?" he says.

"Coffee will be ready in a minute," the girl answers.

"That's not what I mean."

"No?"

The pungent aroma of coffee drifts through the house.

"No." He picks up the pencil and begins thumbing through the tablet.

"What do you mean?" she asks.

"You know," he answers.

"No, I don't."

"Then forget it."

"Just like that?"

"Yes."

She comes and stands in the doorway. "You know it bothers me," she says.

"Yes."

"It really hurts."

"Yes."

"Then why must you do it?"

The man looks up. He is weary. "I don't know," he says.
"You must."
"No."
"Haven't any idea?"
"It's a need." He shrugs.
"A need?"
"Yes."
"The drinking?"
"Yes."
"The women?"
"Yes. Yes. Yes."
"I don't understand." She turns back into the kitchen, then emerges, carrying a steaming mug of coffee in each hand.
"And last night?"
He takes his coffee and drinks immediately. His taste runs to scalding extremes.
"Well?"
"The same."
Carefully she sits in the straight chair. Her coffee's still too hot.
"How much booze?"
"Gallons."
"And pills?"
"Tons."
"And women?"
"Harems."
"You needn't be so poetic."
"I'm not."
"No?"
"No."
"I can't stand this."
He speaks calmly. "Then you shouldn't ask."
Pouting, she bites at her lower lip.
"Look," he says. "Let's drop it." He's wearing a faded-blue bathrobe slopped over his street clothes.
"You could get a job," she says.
"I've got one."
"A real one that pays money."
"Christ!"
"After all, it's my money that pays."
"I know." He lights another cigarette.
"While you..."
"I'm trying."
"Trying?"
"It takes time."
"How long?"
"I don't know."
"Years?"
"Yes. Maybe more."
"More?"
"A lifetime."
She shakes her head. "I don't think I can wait."

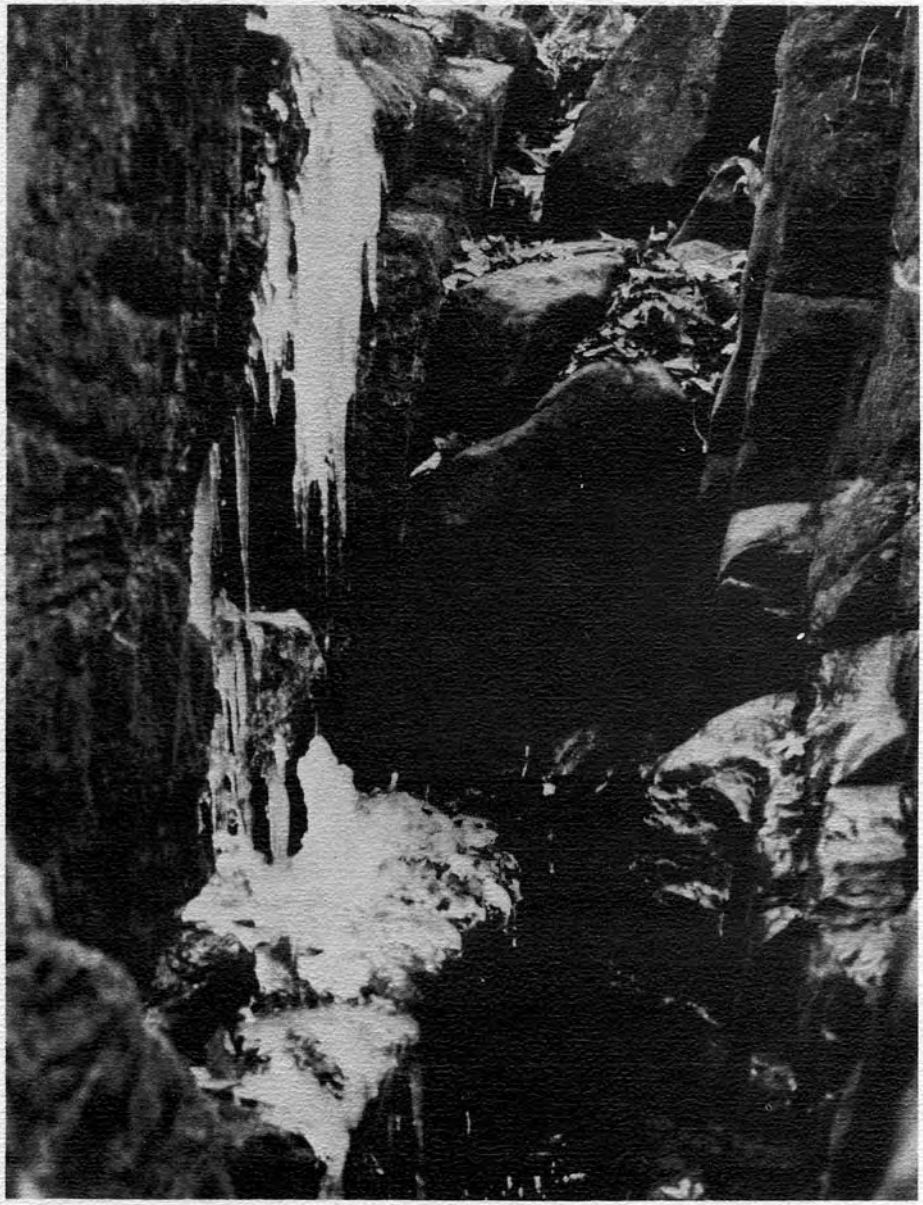
He shrugs again. "Then don't."
"Don't?"
"Leave."
"Leave?"
"Yes. Pack up. Scram. Get out."
"Is that what you want?" She sits tense.
"Shall I tell you what I really want?"
"Yes. Please do."
"I want to capture the bear."
"Oh."
"I want to save the old man's marlin from the sharks. And..."
"There's more?"
"Yes."
"Go on."
"And I want to fix it so Buck can get a good nights sleep."
"Is that all?"
"No. But it's a start."
"And me?"
"You?"
"Yes. Just where do i fit in?"
"You...you can come along; or not. Just as you like."
"Just as I like?"
"Yes." He smiles a thin smile.
She wavers. "I don't know what to tell you."
"Don't tell me anything," he says. "Show me."

The girl rises. It's time for another day's work. Her footfalls echo on the bare wood of the porch like cannon retorts. Heel pop, toe slap, she goes. The front door rattles and clicks, then shuts with a slam. On the drive there is a whispering crunch of gravel. Then nothing.

For a while the man sits listening. The grey mechanical pencil is poised in his hand. Then slowly, methodically, he begins to write:

... The air inside the little two bedroom house was very cool; almost arctic. Hum-thrumm went the conditioner, hum-thrumm, working on the thermo-regulated climate...

Photograph by Brenda Yarnell



Lorrie Farrington

STUDY OF PEOPLE IN AN ICE STORM

It's a morgue. No. The chests rise and fall. It's 10:30 PM and someone stirs, a baby cries, an old man snores.

It's a concentration camp. No. We are free to come and go. Go? Go where? To our cold, electricity-less homes? To our basement apartments where sump pumps no longer do their duty, and we dare not run any more water or flush the toilet?

It's a hospital. Yes, it feels like a hospital. A door bangs – someone is inconsiderate. Lights shine where you don't want them to. Someone says something to you when you'd rather they didn't. The heating system is relentless, blowing unfamiliar sounds and smells your way... and we're supposed to *sleep* here! There is suffering here, human hardship – mostly it's just terribly inconvenient. I haven't felt like this since the last time I was in the hospital.

No. It's Lanphier Gymnasium on Easter Eve, and we're here because there is a storm outside... a big one. It's an emergency shelter for Springfield and environs' residents, or travelers by, who either chose to, or need to, be here, or both. It may be two or three days, or more, they tell us before this town is restored to electrical power. No question that it will be even longer before our streets are cleared of fallen wires and tree branches – nature's pruning.

We'd rather be home dyeing Easter eggs or going on with plans for our "special" – three-day for some of us – weekend. But we're here instead – all in one room... basketball, Shakespeare, cribbage, civil and commercial radios playing, coffee clatches, tiny tots pushing around on the floor anything that will move, *True Love*, knitting, and gin rummy.

Diverse though our interests, our backgrounds and our destinies, there are some commonalities that bond us. We are together in this. We have to abide each other, albeit distasteful at times. We have to respect one another and one another's property and space. The "watch" police are here to insure that; they make their rounds.

It's an eerie feeling being so isolated together. Our only immediate contact with the outside is the prevalent sound of sirens, the sight of flashing red lights through the glass panels in the door at the far end of the gym, and the four walls that "secure" us. Though isolated, we are not generally isolates. We have in common our feelings about space, privacy, anonymity and "self" that bridge our uniqueness.

When I arrived here around 2 PM, Saturday, the fifteen to twenty people then sheltered were sitting or standing around drinking coffee, some talking, some staring into forever. The cots were arranged in neat rows in the center of the gym. By 3:30 PM, people began "staking out their claim" to a cot for a warm, though-not-anticipated-good night's sleep, and to a space to live in. That "space" was against the wall for most of us and within the hour, the cots were lined up in a row along the walls, reminiscent of the State Fair cattle barns. By 8:30 PM our numbers had swelled to nearly a hundred people, and only the latecomers had to sleep in the middle of the room.

The children here seem to be the only really social beings. The rest of us stick pretty much to our own private space. There's the "smoking room," of course, and the Salvation Army's never-ending coffee pot, but it's mostly small talk that goes down here... about the weather, what else? Mostly, we don't know each others' names and don't care to. There's something about a gathering like this that makes people want to remain anonymous, no matter how harmless being otherwise may seem. We are reluctant to walk away from our private space and what little property we have here, but we're just as hesitant to ask a stranger to watch our space when we leave for awhile. But we do anyway, "Would you keep an eye on my things while I go take a shower?" "Sure," comes the reply.

There are extremes here too: parenting is one of them. Some parents yell and scream at their kids continually and when they don't behave – they never do – it brings on more yelling and screaming (it's a vicious cycle). Others parent by example, saying hardly a word. Offspring of these entertain themselves admirably... and without gadgets. Others guard and protect their little ones, quietly keeping them close; and playing their own games, the children seem happy.

Age is another extreme. We've got the just-born and the unborn, and the 86 year old lady who came here in an ambulance at her request.

There are rich/poor, black/white, native/foreign, the vociferous/the silent ones who talk with their hands, loners, couples and lovers (sometimes the same pair), and families. Some bring in groceries to eat, others go out.

Sunday was "something else" in the "eats" department. We were served a most-welcomed breakfast and a lunch that could have been called dinner. It's hard to get a handle on who is doing all this – arranging all these good things for us. To my queries, I got answers ranging from "just people," to "civil defense," with radio hams, Red Cross, volunteers, and Salvation Army in between. I know for a fact that one of the ladies behind the food counter works at this cafeteria when school's in session, and she just came in to help out... "...leaving a warm house.", (to do it) as she put it. I went back after breakfast to thank them, and the same lady said, "We appreciate it." In all this inconvenience, there are a lot of good people, under whatever auspices, who made it as convenient as possible for us. Common is our appreciation for food and shelter and to those who provided it.

I awoke this AM to the big orange letters on the south wall of Lanphier gym, YOU'RE IN LION COUNTRY. I guess so... March is not going out like a lamb, for sure.

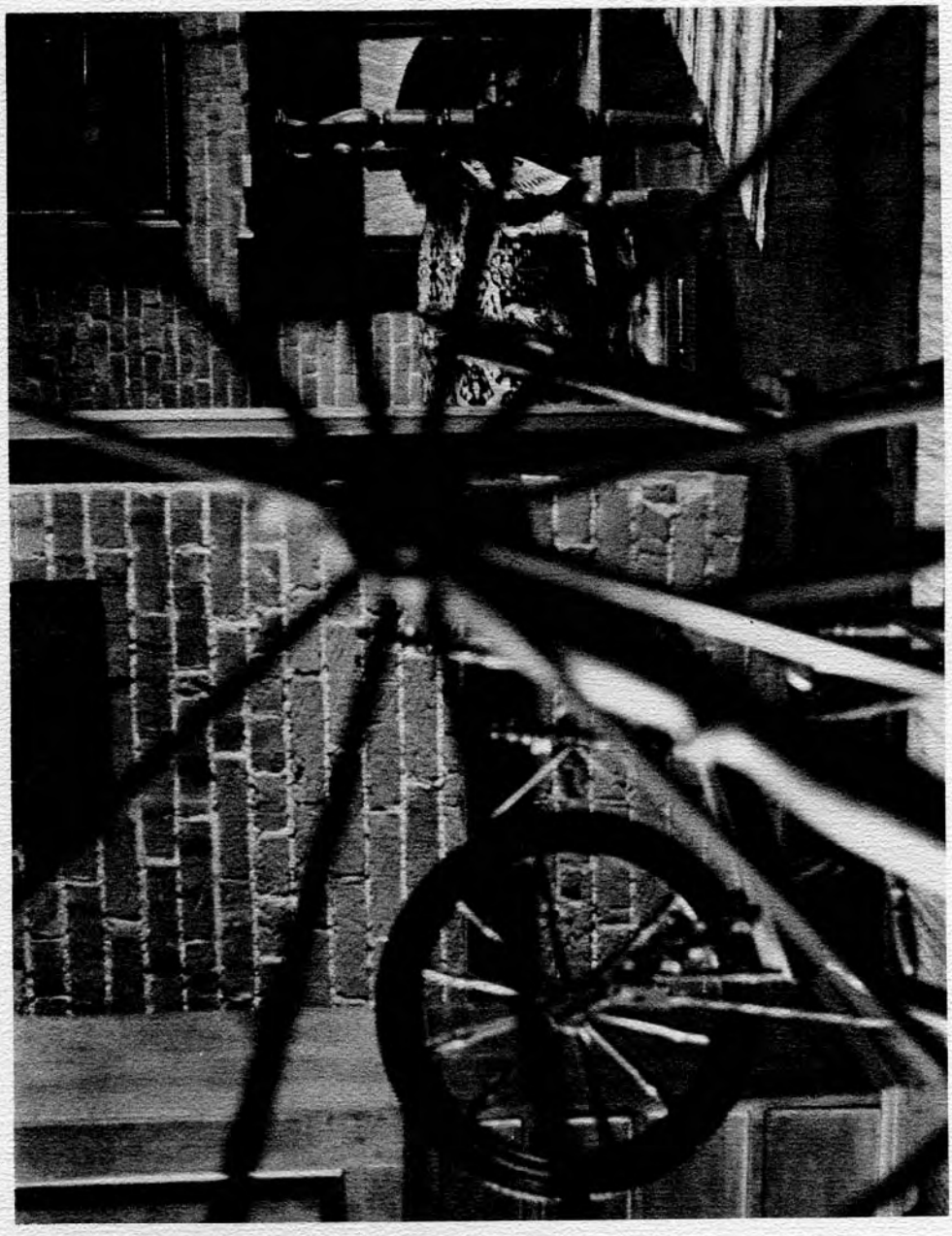
Ron Deverman

DROUGHT

standing by the kitchen sink window
he takes a nearly ripened strawberry
from the small wooden box,
examines closely its plump firmness,
then plucks the greenness out of its body.

looking across a dry, vacant field,
beyond where the garden vegetables have withered
and the parched corn is no longer poised
in the struggle, he thinks: i do not know

what makes me think my life is not real
or what makes me think i have to surrender
to it, and leave it alone
or why all my life i have felt tortured by
those i have tried to love, or why
all of a sudden
these things seem unimportant to me
yet leave me no room to breathe, or even why
more often, i do not catch myself thinking these things.



Photograph by David Edwards

Lorrie Farrington

SHE DIDN'T KNOW

When she awoke everything was quiet, and she had the feeling that she was the only one alive in the whole world. She was ravenously hungry, but what little food there was in her refrigerator didn't appeal to her now. She checked her pants' pocket for money – there was none. Finding the other two pair of pants she owned and neither one yielding any money, she thought of the jar in her kitchen cupboard, "If there isn't any money in the pants, it has to be in the jar." Keeping money in a jar among the canned goods had been a good idea, she knew, because when her apartment had been broken into the burglars had disheveled her bed looking for money under the mattress. She thought it strange that in this day of credit cards and easy money that burglars still thought people to keep money in their beds. They had missed her valuable emerald ring too – she did not keep it in the jewelry box. The jar yielded a twenty dollar bill. "That will do for starters", she mumbled in her mind. She'd use her Easy card to cash a check when she got to the store.

She headed for her car and when it started on the first try she was pleased and a little surprised, not sure how long it had sat there. There was no traffic as she pulled into the usually busy street. She wondered what time it was and reached for the radio. The voice on the radio confirmed her. Everything was all right! There was TIME yet, and it was 10 AM. She "...should buy Dannon yogurt," that was the "best," the voice on the radio said so too. "If it's good enough for the Abakoks – and they live to be over two hundred years old – it's good enough for you," the man said. She started making a list while she waited for the light to turn green. "Dannon yogurt" topped it. That was the main reason she shopped where she did – they carried it.

When she got to the supermarket, she noticed there weren't any cars in the parking lot. "Is it Sunday?" she didn't know, but remembering that was another reason she shopped where she did – "They are open on Sundays." – she dismissed the question. "How times have changed," she thought. Not only could she remember when stores were closed on Sunday, she flashed to her childhood on a farm where they hardly ever went to town and what groceries they bought were brought to them by a "country huckster." Clarence was his name, and he'd come once every two weeks in his old panel truck. "Here comes Clarence, Mom, can we get some candy?", she or her sister would always say. Clarence and her Mother did all the necessary exchanges before he'd open the candy box in the right front seat of the old truck, she and her sister drooling all the while.

Inside at the dairy products' aisle, she found no Dannon yogurt. She had to retreat to the meat section to push the buzzer for help. She waited. And waited. "Either the bell isn't working or they've all chopped each other up back there with meat cleavers." Her mind was taking its time. It made another important connection: "I don't remember seeing anyone when I walked in here, but I was just going about my own business. *I am the only one in the store.* How did I get in here anyway? I walked through the automatic doorway just like always."

Now everywhere she turned, she was aware that she was alone. Still, some things she did out of habit like inserting her Easy card in the computer before she remembered there was no one in the office to cash the check for her. She imagined once while she stood there that the "blonde with all the make-up and the plastic smile" said, "Hello, how are you today?" She didn't answer. She decided to ring up her own groceries. The twenty dollar bill would cover her purchases, she quickly computed. She had never operated a cash register before, but she found it easy and fascinating. The total was $14.69 and she took $5.31 from the register after she'd put her twenty dollar bill in its place. "This is really strange," she said out loud as she bagged her groceries.

On the way home she put in her favorite tape in the tape deck. She felt good just boppin' along and was anxious to get home to make some buckwheat pancakes. She would cover them with a good serving of cottage cheese for protein, then top it all with sorghum. Arriving at the apartment house, she was pleased to see no one had parked in her place. "Where is everyone?" She remembered.

While she was mixing up the pancake batter, she heard her next door neighbor's music playing. "He has really good musical taste.", she thought as she had ever since she'd moved in a year ago. Except that the first three weeks she was in the building, he played the same record continually and she had thought that rather strange. Now she realized how odd it was that they had never met in the entire year she'd lived there. In fact, they had never even run into each other in the hall. She put the batter on the grill and went to knock on his door. "It's about time we met," she thought.

She heard someone say, "Come in" over the sound of the music. She opened the door. The music didn't cut at all, yet a voice said, "Hi, I'm Martin. Who are you?"

She looked around... for a body... somebody... something... something to remind her of herself... her identity, "Who am I, anyway?" The name "Martin" matched that on the mailbox for Apartment 12, and she knew she wasn't crazy. But where was he, or she? "Hell, Martin could be a woman. Why did I ever assume Martin was a man? I'm right, though, the voice is masculine," forgetting to remember... she didn't know for sure. Forgetting it all, she remembered that her pancake was on the grill as she stood there in Martin's apartment. She hesitated another second, wondering if she was supposed to say, "Good-bye," to the recorded voice. "Isn't that clever," she thought, "...when you're away from home, your home can still be open to your friends and neighbors."

She decided not to say "Good-bye," and just as she turned to leave the voice said, "Lady, I think your pancake's burning."

She said, "Good-bye."

Delores Ele

THE LUCK OF THE CAROR

The story so far:

On the planet known as Earth III, a group known as Hitrlites, after a power struggle of more than a thousand years, finally gained the upper hand, destroying most of the planet in a nuclear war. Morla of the Caror had only one memory of the final battle: her pet "Dragon-Vlagon," a small reptile that looked like a dragon.

The battle affected other beings of the planet: a great race of winged humanoids who lived in a cloud-like land. Through the action of his people's council, suddenly and inexplicably the boy Lucriel was exiled.

We now join with Morla.

III

I don't know how long the Caror traveled through the Sick-land. The days and nights fused together in one bewildering mass of time. Because of the radiation, we all feared the sickness which would come and kill us, one by one.

We had been in the Sickland for some time, and the people began to sing the funeral dirges of all the peoples we had translated; some could be traced back to Earth I.

To this mournful chanting, my mind wandered from the Sickland to thoughts almost as bleak as the land that surrounded my body. How could the Hitrlites do this to us? Why? The Caror showed them nothing but kindness when the first group landed in their crippled ship thousands of years ago. True, we did not think too much of their religion. A group who worshipped Hit'r could only make trouble. Then, I remembered. It was not like that in the beginning. Pity touched my soul, the first emotion since my pet died.

My thoughts were interrupted by a shouting. "A light! A light!" The funeral songs ended. The slow death pace of the Caror became a run, everyone began to hurry toward the light. I saw it too, a glimmering over a ridge.

It took the whole Caror people only a few minutes to climb that hill. But we all stopped at the top, and not one word passed through the thousands who stood gazing down into the Valley. I had never seen such a beautiful, lush valley, even before the Hitrlites created the Sickland.

Gossmer spoke first. "We have indeed died, and this is Paradise. Our struggles are over."

The Caror cheered and ran down the side of the ridge into the Valley. I stood several moments, trying to remember going through the Death-trauma, as the doctors and priests had described it to us. I didn't remember any. I walked slowly down the side of the hill, following the descent of the rest of the Caror. The Valley did seem to be a paradise, even close up. There were a variety of fauna and flora, but no other people.

We walked several miles, basking in the sunlight. The terrain altered a bit, changing from meadowland to a slightly more wooded area. At first, we thought it was a natural woods, but it soon became apparent that it was landscaping, for we stepped through a row of trees and found ourselves facing a neat row of hedges. Someone had trimmed the shrubbery, and recently, too. Someone besides this little band of Caror still survived the onslaught of the Hitrlites.

The growth surrounded a large mansion with several outbuildings. Upon our approach, the main door to the house opened as if the occupants were expecting us. Three people stepped out. One was an ancient rotund black man with balding white hair, another was a white man of about thirty years of age. The woman appeared to be East Indian. To my surprise, Gossmer and the entire Caror nation, including Major Fernman, knelt before these three.

"We humble ourselves in the presence of the Trinity," exlaimed Gossmer.

I started, and looked around in confusion. No one besides myself stood. I felt foolish, so I sat down and bowed my head in respect, for, though I doubted the three were who Gossmer and the Caror thought they were, I did feel they were people worthy of respect. "Morla," someone hissed in my ear, "Do you not believe?"

I shrugged, not looking at the person who spoke. I got to my feet, bowed to the Three and hurried away. I wandered into the woods. When I thought I was out of earshot of any Caror, I spoke to myself. "Did the Caror all die, or did we just all go mad? These are the souls of the lost and frightened. Could it be that Gossmer is right, that we are all dead? The men threw away all their weapons, and not one objection was made. The Hitrlite threat, in their minds, is no more. This is Paradise, and who would try to storm Paradise?" I wept some tears for our Passing, and started to go back.

"Morla! Morla!" several voices shouted my name. I stopped crying and walked over to join the searchers.

Gossmer, leading the search party, admonished me, "Why did you rudefully leave the presence of the Trinity?"

"I did not," I stammered, "I thought I left respectfully."

"With the Trinity, you must ask permission to leave."

"I..." nothing else would come from my mouth.

Gossmer took me by the arm and led me gently back to the group of houses. "Morla," he said, "The Trinity has graciously granted us leave to remain."

"It's good not to have to spend years trying to find a spot to rest. Not like some of the Ancients of the other Earths, who spent centuries wandering around in fright and confusion," I answered after making a lengthy preparation.

The Caror moved into the outbuildings; some of our people stayed in the main house. I slept under the trees and stars, refusing all encouragement to go inside.

IV

I wandered the grounds to the home of the Godhead. Everyone else seemed content to accept the fact that they were dead, and had at last found their way into Paradise. Major Fernman was assured of that fact; he had the last troops throw away their weapons.

I was not as certain as the rest of my people. I knew we journeyed through the roughness of our times, and the ruin of this Earth, but to me it still seemed too easy to find Paradise. I stopped suddenly at an unfamiliar sight. Several feet in front of me, a youth huddled on the ground, sobbing. He was no Caror. I spoke, "Are you hurt?"

The boy raised his head. His touseled golden hair and features rivaled those of a statue of one of the earlier Earths. He seemed about nineteen years old, or slightly older. When he looked at me, I saw his eyes and started. There were no whites to his eyes; they were colored vivid blue. Those eyes reflected a land far more beautiful than that we stood upon. He took time to compose himself, then replied, "Hurt? A mortal asks if I'm hurt? Driven from my home for something I had no part in, and The Mortal asks if I'm hurt?" he broke into sobs again.

I reached for his hand. "I'm sorry. The Caror, the people living here, are exiles, too. They think they are dead, and in Paradise. I, myself, doubt the validity of that belief, but I have nowhere else to go. I don't feel there is an evil purpose in keeping us here, though."

The young man stood up, stretching his slender limbs. He was no Caror, but he was not a Hitrlite, either. The features of the Hitrlites were as twisted as their internal beings.

"My name is Lucriel."

"Luc..." I fumbled over the name. There was something else about him.... My eyes were drawn to the snake amulet around his neck.

"Morla!"

I turned to see Major Fernman approach. I waved slightly. Fernman stopped, staring at Lucriel. He turned to me, anger flushing his face. "He's a stranger. Why have you brought him here?"

"I..." His anger spread to me like a contagion. "This is 'Lucky.' I did not bring him here. He's an exile, like us."

"Bring him. We'll take him to our Hosts and find out what they have to say about him."

When we presented ourselves to the Three, they nodded and smiled at us, accepting Lucriel as they had the rest of us. Gossmer entered, as if summoned. He stopped to stare in wonder at the newcomer.

"Father Gossmer," Major Fernman said, "I'm glad you came. This young woman brought a stranger into our midst."

"What is your concern?"

"He's an agent of the Hitrlites, come to spy on us."

"But aren't we all supposed to be dead?" I asked.

"Silence!" ordered Major Fernman, whirling to glare at me.

I took a step back and stammered, "Even if we're not, would the Trinity allow an agent of the Hitrlites into the Garden of Safety?"

"You act as if this is not Paradise," accused Major Fernman. He glared at me. Gossmer stared in amazement; Lucriel, in curiousity.

"This is a nice place, but I don't think its the Afterlife," I replied. I turned to leave. Lucriel followed me.

Once we left the presence of the others, Lucriel took my arm. He pulled me to a stop. "I came from Above."

I grinned at him, "I knew you weren't from this planet..."

"You don't understand," Lucriel said, "This Garden is the last place with True Light on the whole planet. There are those who would do anything to douse it."

"The Hitrlites?"

"I am afraid of it."

"I heard that the Hitrlites are the descendants of the surviving crew of a disabled ship from beyond the stars."

"It's true. They looked much like your people, but the radiation caused their genes to mutate. They, barely unified in their study of the times the man Hit'r lived, shared this most devastating experience, and came to believe the Caror laughed at their pain."

A sudden, fearful cry caused us to leap back into the world. "The Sick-land!" someone shouted from the top of the ridge. "There's something wrong with the Sickland!" I joined the Caror in running toward the ridge. I lost Lucriel. At the top of the ridge we stopped. I stared down on the blackened and burnt land stretching toward the horizon. The plain was as dull and dead as an ember blown out by the winds of time. Nothing moved. I turned to look for Lucriel to tell him the criers were wrong when something caught my eye. I whirled my attention back to the Sickland. Out there, something glinted. A glint of life on a colorless, lifeless plain. A light in that darkness? As I watched, that one glint was joined by another. A third and fourth glint joined them. Soon a silver sea washed over the Sickland. I muttered, "Those lights are not the Shining of new Souls."

Gossmer, who at some time or another moved up without my notice, said, "Who are you, Skeptic, to know such things?" He turned to the other Caror, saying, "Let us go down and greet the new arrivals."

I stared in horror as Gossmer and several of the others moved farther down the hill. Someone tapped my arm. Turning, I saw Lucriel. I gestured for him to look at the silver lights. Terror and fear numbed my tongue. I grabbed Lucriel by the arm. A sudden surge of strength and power flowed through the hand that touched Lucriel's arm, and up the limb, into my very being, shoving the word out. "Panzers!" Like a meteor, the word ripped through the air.

The roar that followed rent my eardrums worse than any meteor's assault, causing me to scream. I released Lucriel's arm to cover my ears and wept at the thought that after all the trials of the War, the Caror would die in the agony of their mistake.

Another volley from the panzers. Great trenches scored the hill. Many of the Caror wavered, then vanished, as the blasts disrupted their cellular structures. The remaining Caror milled around in confusion, not daring to retreat into the waves of the unbearable cannon fire, not daring to go forward for fear of being run down by the panzers.

Then they came. Thousands of Hitrlite infantrymen, marching in precision formation. When they saw the confusion of the Caror, and that we were unarmed, they quickened the step to destroy us sooner. After thousands of years nursing and intermingling mutated cells, the Hitrlites' faces ginned at us in twisted demonic fashion. No, the Caror prayed. They would rather see real demons before they saw another disfigured Hitrlite face.

The panzers stopped firing. I heared the vague shouting of Major Fernman as he tried in vain to get a fighting force together. Over that, I heard the voice of Father Gossmer as he prayed for aid. Emotion strangled me. I rubbed my hands together and wept. The people who thought they had at last found Peace were going to be slaughtered as sacrifice to Hit'r. There is no Peace but anguish, no help but Death.

Something glided by me. I craned my neck to see what it was. Two giant serpents slid by me and made their way down the hill from the direction of the Caror camp. I could not understand how those snakes could move, knotted and entwined as they were. Yet, they reminded me of something... As I watched, the snakes made their way toward the Hitrlites. They made the first line, then coiled

and struck at the first wave. The Serpents wrapped themselves around several of the soldiers. The victims screamed and struggled. For the first time in centuries, the Hitrlites broke ranks. The front lines whirled and began jabbing at the following ranks with their bladed weapons to make them halt the march. On and on the rear ranks marched into the front lines that had stopped to battle the Serpents. When the forward lines turned on their own troops, the upcoming soldiers fought their fellows in order to save themselves. The Hitrlites began to flee in all directions, back into the wastes they had marched across.

The two Serpents, harmed little by the blades of the Hitrlites, released the bodies of the two soldiers they held. The men were dead, but not from the grasp of the snakes. They had been slashed and trampled by their own soldiers. The snakes slowly made their way back up the hill.

Gossmer appeared on the hill near me. He stepped between me and the Serpents, and held his arms wide as if to bar the path. "Devils! You shall not harm any Caror!"

As the Serpents attempted to pass, Gossmer jumped on them and began stomping them with his feet. I heard a human-like moan come from the snakes. Suddenly, I remembered Lucriel's amulet with the snake's head clasp. "Stop!" I yelled, "That's Lucriel!"

I held Gossmer back and the words struck him almost dumb with horror. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed.

He grabbed the twin snakes with great effort, and ran up the hill back to the house. Inside the house, he went into one of the bathrooms and filled a bathtub full of water. He dunked the twin Serpents in the water. When he brought them up again, the creatures had turned back into Lucriel, but with great wings hanging soggily from his back. Lucriel clasped Gossmer's arm and smiled faintly.

□□□

Ron Deverman

The darkening of the afternoon was like a
whisper, relieving some of the tension in the room
in which the boy, pale and weary, quietly rested.
When his mother entered as if in a dream
a glass quivered in the blue cabinet.
She felt how the room had given her away
and sat soundlessly in the chair beside the
bed, putting her hand to his forehead to feel
if the fever had passed.
Many evenings, she would tell him stories
or play him a song on her father's piano.
But when he would tire of this and look away
she would sit quite still, and gaze through the
window where the moon, now a distance in the sky,
hung like a white seed frozen above the ground.

Notes on the contributors

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