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# SOWER



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**Norman Bansen**

Sower

Sower of inland plains:  
fling the whistling seed  
against lusty spring winds;  
thrusting it  
into the humid earth-womb.

Sower of winged words:  
rising before dawn,  
swinging your arm over the world,  
release your thought  
into the lash and roar of winds,  
send your seed singing  
into the westering night.

**Sower 1994**  
**Volume XLIX**

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**Accident on 23rd Street**

dizzy whirling spinning through oceans of blacktop asphalt  
crouched down in expectation of impact nerves  
in shock a cheek bitten through  
bitter-sweet taste  
of nausea as muscles tighten, fists clench in fear, nails  
dig into tender, numbing palm.  
speed increasing; adrenaline rush of a sudden heart pounding  
the beat to the eardrums  
deafening roar of friction: a thunderous crash as a thousand  
bolts of electricity  
shoot up through the spine, then suddenly all is quiet  
and steam rises to meet the clouds.  
a red-stained glass window succeeded by a loss of consciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shortly after six in the morning, a small, thin, bearded man in a worn-out oversized jacket— who had been sleeping in the alley nearby when the accident occurred—after concluding he was the only witness to the scene, decided to investigate. Near the crushed automobile he found something which captured his attention. He bent down and opened the brown leather billfold and removed three small bills from within. Then he carefully placed the item back exactly as he had discovered it, and quickly—but calmly—walked on across the street.

**Julie Koziel**

**Bashed**

Jainy stood on a grassy hill looking out over Austria. The sweet breeze blew her gauzy white dress around her bare legs and her long dark hair streamed out behind her. She flung her arms wide, spinning round and round, feeling the cool grass under her feet.

“Edelweiss, edelweiss,” sang Christopher Plummer as he grasped her waist, sweeping her into his strong embrace.

She sat straight up when the phone rang. She squinted at the clock on the nightstand. “Georg?” she asked the darkness. There was no answer from Captain Von Trapp, but the phone continued to ring.

Jainy snatched up the receiver.

“Hello?” she croaked. “Hello?”

“It happened again,” answered a sobbing voice. “He swore he’d never do it again, but he did! Oh, Jainy, can we come?”

Jainy was awake at once. She kicked her feet at the tangled mess of sheets and fought to sit up, snapping on the lamp.

“Alex, where are you? Are you OK? Did he hurt the baby? God, it’s 3:30.”

“I’m so sorry. We—the boys and I—are at a Kwik Trip in Des Moines. Oh, God, Jain. I’m in my nightgown.”

“What happened? Are the kids OK? Do you want me to come get you guys? Are you OK?”

“We’re OK, I mean, we’re not OK. I mean, I don’t have any money, I didn’t even bring my purse. And he’s got the checkbook anyway. I think he broke my nose, Jainy.” Alex started crying harder. “He’s screwing her!”

“He’s screwing who? Can you drive? Do you need me to come get you?”

“No,” Alex sniffed. “I can make it. Can we stay? I can’t make my kids go to another shelter. I just can’t.”

“Of course you can stay. I’ll make up the beds. Just—shit! Just drive carefully, OK?”

“OK. I’ll see you in a couple of hours.”

Jainy replaced the receiver and fell back on the bed staring up at the ceiling. She thought about Stanley and about how she wished she would have killed him when she had had the chance.

She had visited Alex and Stanley a year ago, a month or so after they had reconciled from one of his little episodes. Their sleepy little farmhouse had looked so warm and inviting but had felt so empty, so tense. Stanley was too jovial during Jainy's visit, laughing loudly, hovering about, and always making certain Alex wasn't left alone with Jainy.

When Alex had gone to pick up the boys at daycare that afternoon, Stanley had insisted Jainy stay behind and had drug her out into some sort of field or another—she supposed it had been beans, maybe soybeans—to show off his new \$100,000 tractor.

"You gotta sit in it, honey, to get the full effect," he'd said. She had reluctantly crawled up into the cab of the beast, and he had assisted her by placing both of his hands on her ass.

As she settled into the surprisingly comfortable seat of the cab, he had hoisted his bulk in next to her and closed the hatch. He then started the monster up so she could feel the engine purr.

"Ain't she sweet?" he asked. "She's the love of my life."

"I don't doubt it," Jainy quipped.

As he showed her the air conditioner and stereo system—Christ! A stereo system in a tractor—his hand had snaked over and grasped her breast, and the chase was on. Jainy tried to jump up, slamming her knee into a crucial lever of some sort. As the tractor spun crazy circles over Stanley's bean crop, she successfully fought him off and broke two of his fingers in the process.

She ran all the way back to the farmhouse, some mile and a half as the crow flies she imagined Stan would say, and before Alex came back with the boys, Jainy was tearing a dusty path up the gravel road toward the city.

She pulled herself from her reverie and her bed, reaching for the phone. She'd call that bastard and give him hell! But then he would know where Alex was, and he might come after her, leaving Jainy no alternative than to twist his goddamn fingers clean off. No; best not to call him. Best to let him sit alone drunk in the empty farmhouse and simply make sure that Alex never went back.

She went to work making up beds in the spare bedrooms for the boys and telling herself she'd never marry a man like Stanley.

Alex had known the moment she drove into the dooryard that there would be trouble. Stan's pick-up wasn't home yet, which meant he was at the bar with his no-account hired man, which meant he would come home stewed at closing time and start in on Alex for everything that had gone wrong in his life from the moment he had been given it.

According to Stan, his life had begun going down hill the minute he had married Alex, but from her vantage point, (and she had spent more than a few nights tottering on this particular precipice of their marriage) his descent from being a strong and capable partner coincided with his descent into a seemingly bottomless fifth of Jack Daniels. Yes, Jack and Stan were the best of friends. Theirs was a relationship Alex could not fathom and one that she was incapable of ending, but not from lack of trying.

She drug herself from the car, toting two-year-old Noah, two bags of groceries, a diaper bag, and her book bag, urging six-year-old Marshall to open the door for them.

After feeding, bathing, and putting the boys to bed, she busied herself in the kitchen doing dishes, fixing Stan a plate of food, and starting a load of laundry, her pregnant belly leading her around. It was nine before she put the kitchen to bed and was able to begin to study for her organic chemistry final.

She looked up from her lab report after a few moments to find that it was 11:45. Her feet were numb as she started toward the kitchen. Whoever said that pregnant women are beautiful have never seen me, she thought as she put the kettle on for tea. She looked awkwardly around at her feet, which didn't look as much like feet to her as they did over-stuffed sausages threatening to burst from their casings.

She shuffled to the laundry room to throw the clothes into the dryer, taking a habitual peek out the back window. What am I looking for? she chided herself. The bars don't close for another two hours.

The tea kettle started its low-pitched trill as she pulled Stan's wet farm clothes from the washer. Damn! She hadn't checked his pockets first, and several books of matches had shredded themselves during the wash cycle, clinging to his clothes like hungry leeches.

Twisting into an unlikely position because of her bulk, she swept the barnacles of ruined matchbooks from the walls of the washer. A large envelope, letter intact, was at the bottom of the

drum, and she strained impossibly to nab it.

The tea kettle screamed for attention as she carefully unfolded the wet pink letter from the woman whom her husband would leave her for.

\* \* \*

Of course it had begun to rain. Women always left their husbands on dark, stormy nights. Or killed them, she thought dully.

Of course he had twisted this mess around until it was all her fault, her fault, her fault.

When he had come home at 2:15, (how predictable, she thought wildly; the bars did close and home they run) she had confronted him with the wet letter, but he had swiftly turned the tables on her. If she would have stayed at home baking bread and sewing curtains like a real wife instead of pursuing some idiotic life-long notion of becoming a doctor, for Christ's sake, he wouldn't have had to fall into the arms of his hometown sweetheart for comfort. Some fall, Alex had thought; 150 miles north the hussy lived.

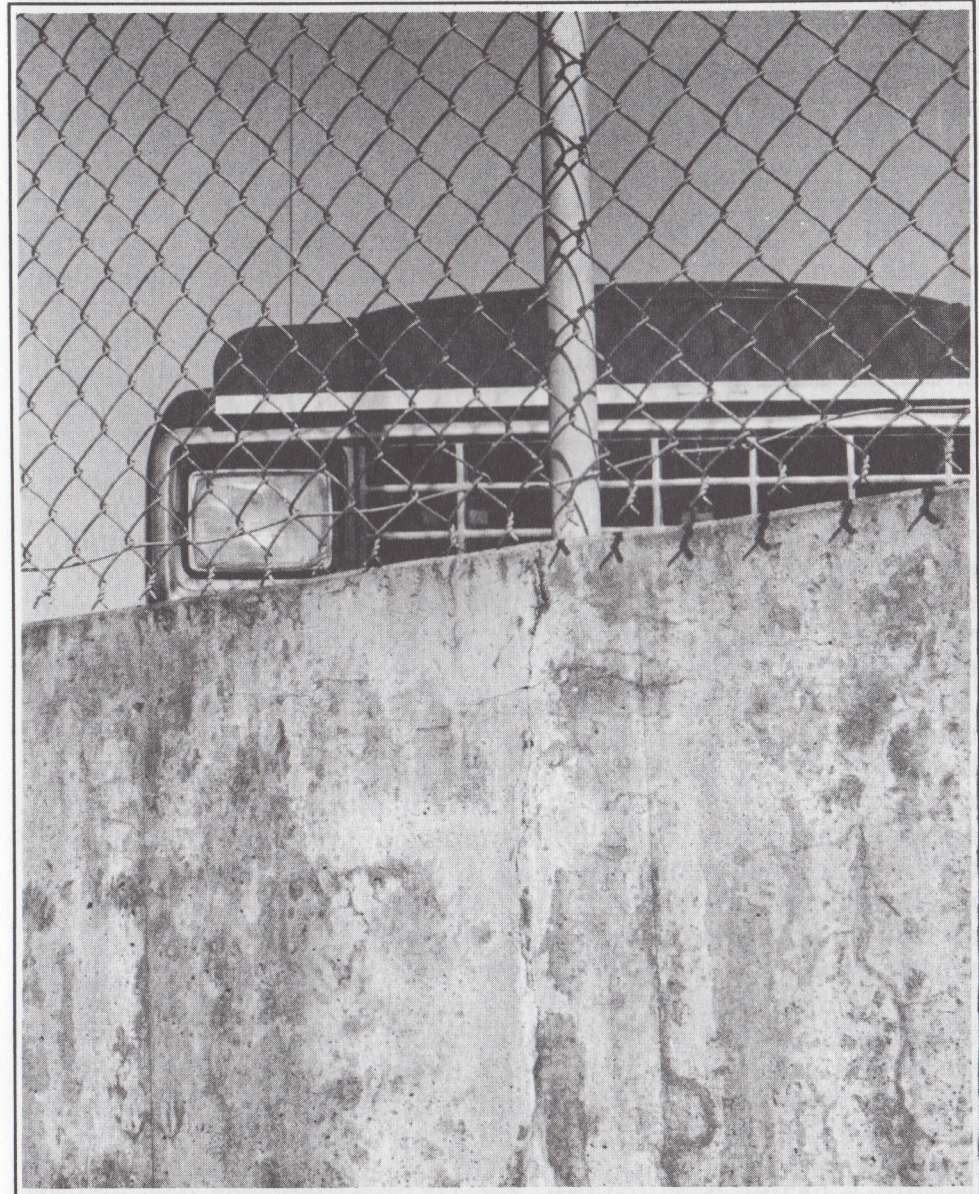
Of course if Alex hadn't have been snooping and prying into his private life none of this would have happened. Well, she thought, at least not the being found-out part.

And of course if she hadn't nagged and nagged him all of the time he wouldn't have had to drag her around the kitchen by her hair. And he wouldn't have had to kick her in the stomach, or to rub her nose into the letter that had fallen at his feet.

And certainly the boys wouldn't have been woken up by her screams and stood clutching each other in silent horror at the kitchen door, their eyes like small trapped beasts in their heads watching as their father beat the living shit out of their mother and soon-to-be baby brother.

\* \* \*

She reached over to the boys now as they lay sleeping on the front seat next to her. As she drove to Jainy's she prayed aloud for her babies who had been through so much, for the baby kicking and stretching within her, and for herself.



Jeff Rademacher

## Sandy Smith

### In Search of the Real Man

I wish I was a dog. I came to this strange conclusion after a recent fight with my boyfriend. When the argument concluded, I found myself wishing to be a dog or to think more like a man. I accused him of having multiple personalities and not trusting me enough to show me his true self. I felt neglected because he would not share his problems and frustrations with me. I didn't think that we were communicating with each other on the same level. After much thought and consideration, I am beginning to wonder if any two people can communicate with each other being truly and completely honest. I am starting to believe that men can only be honest and open with their dogs.

Take, for example, the way men carry themselves when they are around other males. From my observations, men by themselves have a damn good time. I will honestly admit however, that I rarely get the opportunity to observe men alone without them detecting the presence of a female. They usually sit around with bottles of beer in their hands and have a good ol' conversation about one of three things: sex, who's getting it and who's not; the size of their bodies, who can bench press the most; or, who has the most money and therefore drives the best car. They are always competing against one another, sizing each other up. On occasion, they may sit and talk about life's problems and hardships. However, these types of conversations are usually few and far between. I think it's just a guy thing; talk about it, laugh and forget it. A man would not want to appear overly concerned about anything in front of his friends, this might degrade his masculinity. Men like to dominate mentally, as well as physically. No man wants to be called a cry baby, a mama's boy, or worst of all modern adjectives—pussy-whipped.

Females handle problems and stress much differently than males, which is where my personal problem may lie. When we have a problem, we ponder it for a while, talk about it with a friend or two, ponder it some more, and maybe shed a few tears before we feel content. The ironic thing about our long, painstaking approach is that we will still remember the problem and pain years down the road. We talk about how we are being treated by the members of the opposite sex, fitting them under one of two categories; sweethearts or assholes. We talk about the sizes of our waists, thighs and butts. What new diets work

and don't work. We talk about preserving our youthfulness and assuring one another of our appearances; yet, constantly taking mental notes on how one's own body compares to those around her. We gossip. We bitch. A typical woman-to-woman talk will usually end in a stream of tears or an assuring, "it's going to be all right." Women have this need to have a solution for every problem and they often feel neglected when they try to talk about it with a member of the male gender. We want to sort things out and work things through. Our male counterparts, on the other hand, want to recognize the problem, possibly change a little and forget it. Life would be a lot less stressful if I could just think like a man. Instead of being so emotionally involved in everything, worrying about this and that, I could exert this time and energy into something else, perhaps watching Monday Night Football. Then again, I also realize that there is probably some purpose in all these womanly thoughts and actions; at least the toilet bowl is clean. Granted, men do get worked up over things once in a while: their blood boils, their hands get sweaty, and their fists clench. They have the ability to release feelings physically (testosterone comes into play here). They may yell out loud, hit a wall, or bury the speedometer in their car. Females don't take this form of action. We sit and stew. And, we may stew for a long time before we finally boil over. Finally, after our whistles have hissed and screamed, we feel better.

The most interesting and funny things happen when a man and a woman converse during their first dinner date. The man wants to appear kind, gentle, and poised; completely contrary to his actions when he is with the guys. He can no longer belch out loud, guzzle down his beer, or make suggestive comments about the woman in the red dress that just walked in the door. Women also act differently in this situation. We are constantly worried about how our hair, skin and nails look. The most ridiculous thing about the way women act on a dinner date is the process we go through in selecting what we want to eat. We consider the price, the amount of fat and calories in the particular food, as well as how easily the food item can be eaten. Spaghetti is definitely out of the picture. She wants to appear in control, self-confident and strong. A misplaced hair or a chipped nail may indicate carelessness to her date. This concern about appearance often takes the enjoyment out of a dinner date, for both parties. Each is so concerned about their own appearances that they forget to enjoy the other person. The conversation

during this time is usually superficial, nothing too deep. It's after the initial where-do-you-live's and what-do-you-like-to-do's that the relationship either grows or falls apart.

After the first few dates, they usually both have the desire to get to know one another better. One of the first ways men and women go about this process is to introduce their partner to their friends. In front of his friends, he wants to show her off, making the other guys squirm with envy just looking at his recent catch. Yet, he doesn't want to appear overly involved with her. If he appears too attached to her in front of his friends, he runs the risk of losing his masculinity. Women will often times pick up on these intentions and feel neglected, used, or like a toy. The same situation arises in front of her friends, but with a little added twist. This time she wants to show him off. She wants to show her friends that she has finally found the perfect gentleman. Of course, he will act very friendly toward her friends; maybe too friendly. He wants to appear like a kind, caring fellow; yet, not too committed. He may want to leave the door open for a future date with one of her friends. This becomes a problem when the woman he is with detects these intentions. The result is usually getting a ticket out the door, or having a few degrading adjectives added on to the end of his name. In both situations, with his friends or hers, he must be extremely careful, female neglection detectors are on full power during these critical times.

After thinking about all of this, I have come to the conclusion that in order to really know my boyfriend, I need to turn into a dog. A dog places no expectations on the man except a daily bowl of food and water. The saying, a dog is a man's best friend, has been proven true in my mind once again. I believe that a man is truly himself when he is alone with his dog. His dog is always happy and excited to see him no matter what he did or didn't do the night before. His dog listens to his problems and doesn't place judgment upon him. A man can express his fears, frustrations, and weaknesses to his dog. He can expose himself completely without the fear of losing his masculinity. This fear that is constantly with him whether he be with the guys or his girl is erased in the presence of his dog. I find myself constantly wishing that he would trust me enough to let his wall down in front of me once in a while. If he can admit his fears and shortcomings in front of me, I feel a sense of need. Women have a natural need to be needed. How does one become a dog anyway?

### Ivy Nielsen

#### Saying Good-bye

I had a dream  
A dream we'd be together forever.  
You took that dream with you when you left.  
Was it so hard for you to leave me?  
Was it difficult for you to say good-bye?

We had so many good times together,  
joking around, sitting up late talking for hours.  
You were special to me.  
You listened to my problems, helped deal with my fears.  
In return, I was there for you through good and bad.

When you come back,  
will it be the same?  
Can we start from where we left off?  
Will we still be friends?  
Or will that end?

### Mira Stultz

#### AIC

As I wander on  
I often wonder how God  
created such beauty.

## Jeremy Christiansen

### The Window

I have been here for three weeks, lying in my bed and trying to keep up with my school work. I don't mind being here, too much. Sometimes I go crazy thinking about leaving this room, but then Mom comes in and puts my head next to her warm chest and tells me I'll be well soon. I get real bad headaches and nose bleeds, too, but I try not to let them bother me. Other than that, I'm okay.

I have a window in my room. It's pretty big for such a small wall. I always keep the curtains open so the sun comes in during the morning, and so I can see what goes on outside during the day. My mom made the curtains. Their pattern looks like my chessboard, but the sun has faded the edges.

There's not much to do in this room, except stare out my window. I do work on my school assignments and read some, but mostly I just look out my window. Mom and Dad say I shouldn't strain myself, that I should just get plenty of rest. By "rest," I sure hope they didn't mean sleep, because it's just too hard. I try and try. I shut my eyes, clear my thoughts, and even sing lullabies to myself, but I just won't go to sleep. It's not my fault, that's just the way I am. Besides, I can't help but think about my window. I just love to gaze out of it.

I hear Mom at the door; I had better put this diary under my bed and open up my math book.

\* \* \*

It's been two days since I wrote last. I'm on some new medicine that makes me sleep a lot. I saw Nick the other day—from my window. Nick is my best friend, at least he was. I don't know anymore. Since I became ill he stopped coming over. But he was outside under the big oak tree that we always used to climb. I remember us sneaking into my dad's workshop and borrowing one of his tools so we could carve our names into that tree. Then I got caught putting it back. I was grounded for two weeks! Nick hid under the workbench so my dad couldn't see him. I sort of wish I would have told on him.

It's amazing, the things you see if you stare at something for a long time.

I never noticed that Ms. Gretchem's house has gold trimming only around the upstairs windows, and that her front door is a brighter yellow than the rest of the house. I used to like

going to her house, it's right across the street. She's a nice old lady. She has a lot of antique furniture filling the house's huge rooms. She always invited me over to play her piano and talk about school. I didn't much like talking about school, but I loved to pretend that I was the world's greatest composer with her piano. It was a real big one too, and black as her cat, Violet. I'm really not too fond of cats, but I've always liked Violet. She used to run real fast, like all cats do, and jump up in my lap, rubbing her cheek against my shirt. She would purr, showing that she loved me, and I would purr right back.

Then there's that bully Donnie's house. I never saw what a dump it was before. The privacy fence is leaning over real crookedly, the front screen door is off in a corner of the yard in a mangled mess, and there's a bunch of junked cars and parts strewn all over. Of course, I already knew the cars were there. On a rare occasion when I did go to Donnie's to play, we used to pretend we drove them. Actually, only Donnie could drive, he said I was still too young. Now those old cars don't look like too much fun. I mean, gee, they're just debris. Debris—I just learned that word in last week's spelling lesson.

\* \* \*

There are a lot of trees on our street. Nick and I tried to make a tree fort once, but it didn't work out. I fell out and almost broke my arm. We tried to get my dad to build us one, but he said they were too dangerous. I think he just said that because he was still mad at me for taking that tool without asking.

The street itself is pretty narrow; I never noticed that before. I thought mom was just a bad driver when she always complained about the neighbors parking in the street, making it hard for her to pull into our driveway.

I can't wait to go outside again. I haven't had a breath of fresh air for a long time. It will be great to run around again, and to eat ice cream cones with Nick out on the front steps. Gosh, I feel all of this energy in me. I really don't feel that sick. I tell Mom and Dad this, but they won't listen. They just say I should feel lucky because I don't have to go to school. All I know is that I sure don't feel too lucky.

\* \* \*

The sun is very bright today, there must not be a cloud in the sky. I just noticed that my window is starting to get cobwebs in the corner, covering the blue sill. I should ask Mom to dust them away, but I think I could do that.

Look! There's Estella. She's the only girl that doesn't





Jennifer Johnson

## Carrie L. Larkins

### One of Those Days

The white overcast sky made the day seem bright, but the sun was no where to be seen. I sighed as I realized I had been living in the same sort of overcast lately. It was my senior year of high school. Each day I struggled to make it "the best time of my life" like everyone told me it should be. They expected me to get over it. Everyone thought I had succeeded in putting it behind me.

My crutches quietly crunched the new fallen snow as I made my way toward her. Today was Terri's birthday, her eighteenth birthday. She always complained that her birthday was too close to Christmas. She thought she missed out on getting her share of presents. Today I brought her a single yellow rose. I knew it wouldn't last long in the bitter Nebraska wind but it was a symbol of friendship and a peace offering of sorts. I hadn't spoken to her since the day last March when we went out roadtripping.

\* \* \*

It was one of "those" days. The spring-like Nebraska sun tried to melt away the last signs of winter. The thermometer climbed to near 60 degrees, a heat wave after endless days of subzero wind and ice. Thoughts of tanning by the pool and softball games in the setting sun seemed not far away.

Terri met me between classes with a big smile. She pointed to the cloudless sky and said, "It's definitely one of those."

With that simple statement, our plans for the afternoon were set. I struggled to listen to Mr. Johnson drone on about the laws of physics during seventh hour. My eyes kept drifting to the sunlight playing on the jungle gym. Finally the last bell rang. I was out of the classroom before it stopped signalling our dismissal. Terri and I met at my 1976 candy apple red Camaro in the parking lot to embark on an afternoon of our favorite pastime, roadtripping.

We slammed the car doors shut and rolled the windows down. I tore past the line of school buses and screaming kids en route to the bar where we would find a buyer.

The Corner Bar in Redson was usually the easiest place for an underaged kid to get a hold of some alcohol. A lot of Redson citizens made the Corner their permanent home. Usu-

ally I could find a drunken skidder to buy a case of Bud Light with no questions asked.

I walked up the wooden steps to the bar as Terri waited in the car. The smoke filled bar was dark even though it was bright outside. One dusty window let in a hint of light across the gray tiled floor.

I slowly scanned the room as my eyes adjusted to the light and found Butch sitting in his booth alone, an array of beer cans on the table in front of him. He waved at me when I caught his gaze. Butch was a regular buyer of mine. He had worked with my dad at the lumber yard until he was fired last year.

When I reached the table Butch stood and put his arm around my waist. He pulled me closer and planted a scratchy, wet kiss on my cheek. His breath reeked of alcohol but the scent of old man's sweat was stronger. I wiggled away and struggled to smile. "Hey, Butch. Can you do a pretty girl a favor?"

"Sure, sweetheart. Anything for you."

"We need a case of Bud Light bottles and a bag of ice," I whispered and discreetly placed a wad of dollar bills on the beer stained table.

"Okay, sweetheart. I meet you on the road by the old Harms place in just a few."

I skipped out of the bar with a huge smile on my face. "Ten minutes 'til we rock and roll," I said as I opened the car door.

"It's already half past beer," Terri replied and took off her shoes to let her bare feet dangle out the window.

It took only two minutes to get to the old Harms place. I popped the trunk and cleaned out my cooler. I threw the old beer carcasses and ice bags into the ditch where they joined dozens of sun faded beer cans. The echo of Butch's truck muffler could be heard when he left Redson.

"Two minutes, Terri," I yelled over the blasting stereo.

"Two minutes," she replied.

Butch pulled up alongside of us but didn't get out of his truck. A case of beer sat in his pickup bed with the ice melting along side of it. Butch never got out of his truck when he delivered the beer. I guess he thought he might get caught if he did. It didn't bother me a bit, just as long as he delivered.

I lifted the beer out and carried it to my trunk. I raised my hand in a wave to Butch and he pulled away. I found my change neatly tucked between the cardboard flaps of the beer carton. I pocketed it and quickly packed the cooler.

I grabbed two icy bottles and ran back to the driver's seat. I put the Camaro in gear and snapped AC/DC's Highway to Hell into the tape player. With the first scream of the guitar, Terri and I simultaneously cracked open our bottles of Bud Light. After I took the first long drink, I slipped my bottle cap into the front pocket of my new pair of Lawmans. We always kept a count of how many beers we had to determine who had the strongest drunken bragging rights the next day.

"This is awesome," I said. "There's never been a better day."

"No, shit," Terri replied. "I wonder where the guys are. Jason said they were going out after Tom gets done with his chores."

"I bet we'll run into them somewhere. Hopefully Jason has his parent's LTD out."

"Yeah. That way we can all go together."

Terri was always concerned about where the guys were at. She didn't date any one of them exclusively but she had flings with all of our friends. She was a really beautiful girl with blond hair and the brightest blue eyes. Terri could have any guy she wanted and depending on what week it was she wanted them all.

"Beer stop!" Terri shouted.

"Already?? I still have half of mine."

"Well quick talkin' and start drinkin'."

I downed the last of my bottle and heaved it at the bridge railing as we passed. It hit the sign and shattered. "Score!!" we shouted.

"That's three for five for me," I bragged. It was a ritual to see who could shatter the most empty bottles. It seemed as though we got more accurate the more we drank.

I stopped at the top of the next hill to retrieve another beer from the trunk. "You need one?" I asked.

"That's what I said. Make it two. You better get three for yourself. Aren't you one behind?"

We each pulled a handful of bottle caps from the front pocket of our jeans and held them out to compare. Terri was right. I was one beer behind. "Come on, you wimp," she teased. "I'm drinking you under the table." I gave her a playful shove before I went out to retrieve five more icy bottles.

Our high school ritual continued on. Drinking games and reminiscing followed.

"Ann, now don't think this is cheesy or anything but I'd

**Ivy Nielsen**

**Pray**

We heard the bad news.  
We wish it wasn't true.  
Our world was so peaceful!  
It was so perfect!  
Now another world had to destroy that fantasy.  
Why, we may ask, why?  
People learning to fight,  
People dying,  
People crying,  
People scared,  
People mourning,  
There is so much that could be done!  
If only someone would listen  
But, who listens?  
Certainly not the one who could make a difference  
Times will change,  
One day it will be peaceful.  
But still, it will be different..  
If only I could do something, anything,  
But what is there to do?  
No one will listen!  
So, I just sit back and pray.  
Pray for people's safety.  
Pray that the ones we love come back from fighting.  
Pray that we can live in peaceful harmony.  
Pray!

**Roisin Bell**

**Weekend Visitor**

The old wind-up clock in the chilly bedroom ticked rhythmically all night. When my grandmother's snoring kept me awake, I used to try to make tunes to the perpetual tick. I would huddle under the blankets, one arm around my grandmother's waist, and the other gripping my pink elephant.

I would think about a lot of things as I lay next to my Gran. I wondered why she kept her wallet under her pillow when she didn't lock the side door. I tried to figure out why once she took out her magic ear, she couldn't hear me any more. I wondered if she loved me as much as I loved her, and I would grip her a little tighter.

I didn't live with my Gran, but I often spent weekends with her. I sometimes wished I lived with her because she let me have soda and chocolate cookies before I went to bed. I would arrive on Saturday afternoon, when my parents dropped me off before they went shopping, and I'd run down to the corner shop to pick up her paper. Often times she'd slip me 10 pence to buy some sweets to satisfy my sweet tooth and hers-although she always had a box of chocolates hidden in the cupboard.

I'd run down the steep steps, paper in one hand and sweets in the other, to her small grey-pebbled house. She stood at the door, arms folded across her chest, shouting at me to slow down. I think she was afraid she'd be bandaging my knees again, although that wasn't unusual. As I ran to greet her, I would pass her glorious garden. My Gran loved her garden, and she filled it with whatever she thought would grow in the mild, damp and rainy, Scottish climate. In the spring the garden came to life with gleaming yellow daffodils and regal purple crocuses; the grass was speckled with tiny daisies, that I often picked and linked together to make a crown. The summer saw the birth of the roses. They were large red and pink blossoms that surrounded the garden with its sweet perfume; it was easy to see why they were Gran's favorite. Her roses bloomed bigger and brighter than anyone else on Rothesay Road, but she never admitted it; modesty was the key to her charm.

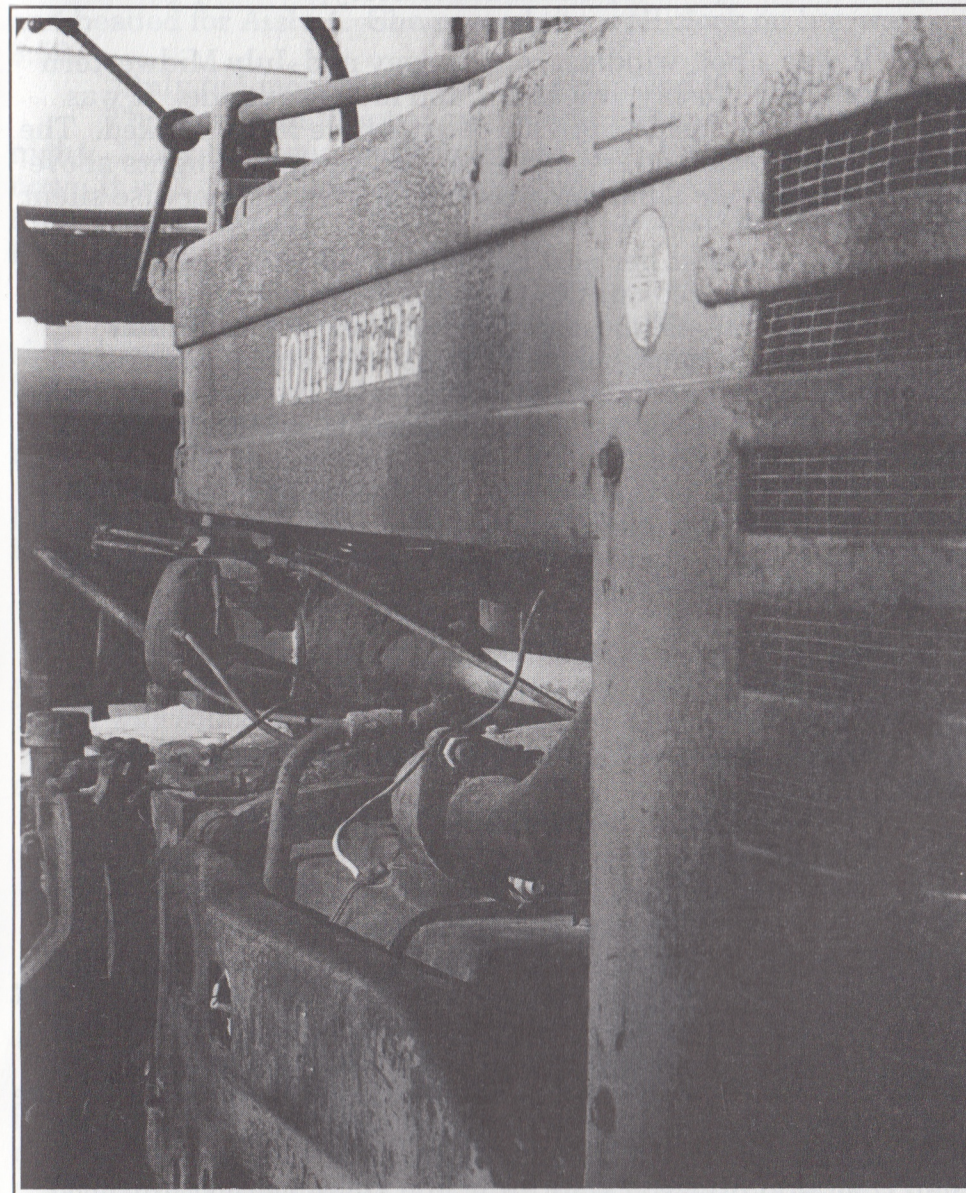
She wasn't a very tall woman, and she was even a little stout. Dresses were reserved for special occasions, so dark pants coupled with a blouse and a warm cardigan comprised her daily wardrobe. She always had tightly permed hair; it was thinning

and white. Her eyes were a soft, soothing grey. Her hands had a certain roughness about them; she had worked hard all her life to provide for her children, who's father had died when they were young.

She used to smile and call me a chatter box when I rambled on about school, and I knew she was just as happy to see me as I was to see her; we enjoyed each other's company. I would take a quick bath after dinner. My Gran would come up and remind me to wash behind my ears, and then she would scrub my hair as I squeezed my eyes shut to block out the shampoo. I would sit by the small electric fire to dry off, while my Gran tugged at my tangled, wet hair with a big yellow comb.

She'd make tea, and I would have orange drink. We'd bring a plate of cookies out into the living room and settle down to watch "3 2 1", "TJ Hooker", and the grand finale "Dallas" and "Dynasty". My Gran loved "Dallas" and "Dynasty"; it was the only reason I think she stayed awake past 10 p.m. As soon as the credits rolled, the fire was unplugged, the doors all closed and the lights switched off. I would grab my pink elephant, and run up stairs just before her; I was hoping to make the bed warmer for her when she got there. With a kiss goodnight, she would roll over and drift off to sleep.

I was still in grade school the last time I stayed the weekend with my Gran, but I still visited her every weekend. I got her paper, and I was still rewarded by extra change for sweets. When I left Scotland I hoped that someone else would get the paper for her, and that she wouldn't be alone watching "Dallas" on Saturday night. She passed away nine months later, but my Dad told me she seemed content, she saw us all grow up. I often gaze at the simple, silver ring on my finger, it was her engagement ring. In the center of the ring is a small diamond, and I sometimes notice the delicate way it sparkles in the sunlight; I think of my Gran, the person she was, and the person I'd like to be.



Carrie L. Larkins

## Jesse Render

### A Rather Short Story

It was a hot, windless, and muggy mid-July Midwestern evening. That's to say, it was hot and muggy outside. It was comfortably cool inside the Valu-Mart where Mary worked. The hum of the frozen-food freezers and the fluorescent lights above mingled to provide a numbing soundtrack to an otherwise silent atmosphere.

Mary stood at her post behind the check-out counter, waiting. She glanced out the store-front windows toward the world outside, but all she could see was her own reflection against the dark, empty night without. She stood alone beside her register staring stupidly at herself with the cigarettes looming dangerously overhead, stacked neatly in rows behind their own protective smoked-glass shell.

The screech of unoiled cart-wheels grabbed back at her attention. She swung back around to face toward the bright, artificially lit fruit stand over which a large yellow and orange sign proclaimed, "Produce."

"Hi."

"Humph."

"Is this everything for you?"

"Uh-huh."

"That comes to twenty-three dollars and seventy-four cents."

The woman handed her a twenty and a five.

"Out of twenty-five?"

Mary had learned in her first week at the Valu-Mart that you always repeat the amount someone hands you before you tuck the money away inside the drawer, or some asshole might try to argue with you and say he handed you something different and act like he was the one being taken advantage of, and then start yelling and cursing at you and making a big scene in front of a crowded store; it'd make you feel like you were an idiot—like you were nothing—and you shouldn't have to take that kind of shit from a greedy little asshole because you deserved better than that, and it wasn't your fault that there weren't any good summer jobs left in this little piss-ant, two-horse town; and if you had a gun right then, you'd just shoot him right between his greedy-fucking-beady eyes for making you want to cry right there.

"A dollar twenty-six is your change. Thank you."

The woman left.

Mary picked up the bright yellow plastic price-sticker gun and headed for Aisle 4. She passed the wall clock on her way: 9:50.

"Only ten more minutes," she grumbled to herself.

The store was empty again as it had been most of the night. Mary had been working at the Valu-Mart two months now. It was the only job she could find this year, and she needed the money for college. The fact that she *needed* this job made her hate it even more.

—*not to mention my boss is a jerk....*

The tin bell above the front door jingled merrily. Mary sighed deeply, rolled her eyes, and slowly trudged back to the front.

A young man had walked in. She recognized him. Tall and thin, with short-cropped hair; and, he was always wearing greasy mechanic's overalls. He came in a lot, but he didn't ever talk much. He came up to her register with a quart of Blue Bunny 1% Homogenized Milk.

"Marlboro reds, hard pack."

"Sure."

As Mary reached up she looked at him for the first time since he'd come in. His red name tag was embroidered, TOM. There was something strange about his...eyes. Mary shivered.

She punched in the total on her machine. He handed her a five, and then:

"You're working pretty late tonight, huh?"

"I've got to close the shop."

"Closing at ten?"

"Uh-huh."

Pause.

"What's your name?"

She hesitated, (*his eyes are really red*) then mumbled, "Mary."

She held out his change for him. As he received it, he let his dirty, blackened fingers slide along her hand for just a moment too long. Mary recoiled. TOM didn't appear to notice.

"Pretty name...Mary. Pretty name for a pretty girl."

Mary tried to smile politely, but it came out a sneer. Again TOM didn't see. Mary supposed that perhaps he wasn't looking directly at her face.

"You know, I could stick around for a few minutes. Maybe

give you a ride home or whatever. I mean—”

“No, that’s all right.”

“I mean, well, I know you probably get this all the time, but I’m in this store a lot and I noticed....”

“My boyfriend’s going to pick me up,” she lied.

“Who’s your boyfriend?”

“I don’t think you’d know him.”

“I know everybody.”

The doorbell jingled. It was Mary’s boss, Hank. He looked coldly at TOM. TOM picked up his things and left. Mary breathed in deeply. Hank came over to her. She hadn’t been expecting him to come into the store tonight. But this time at least he was good for something, she thought.

“What’s up? I wasn’t expecting you to come in tonight,” she said trying to act cheerful.

“I may as well tell you now, Mary. I’m going to be coming in evenings now to count down the drawers and lock up the safe. Someone’s been stealing cash, and, well, I’ll be locking up nights with you.”

Mary had been in charge of the store at night for six weeks now without any problems.

“Why? Do you think that it’s—”

“I don’t know what to think. I don’t know who it is.”

Her fists clenched unconsciously. This had been the worst night. This was not what she needed to be hearing right now.

“Did you finish pricing the items in Aisle 4?”

“No, not yet.”

“Well, goddamn it, Mary. What the hell have you been doing all night? What do you think I’m paying you for?”

She thought she was going to cry. Instead, she found her hand gripping tightly around the sticker gun which lay nearby on the counter. Then, everything in her just broke. She flung her hands at Hank’s face. The edge of the gun hit him in the forehead, and he fell back. His right temple smacked hard against the sharp corner of the register, and he fell to the floor, motionless.

Mary wanted to run, but she couldn’t. She waited for Hank to get up and fire her, but he didn’t. He didn’t blink either.

Then, her thoughts returned.

“Oh, my god.”

She ran and shut off all the lights. Now for the first time, she noticed the drawer of the cash register hanging open. She

ran into the back room and grabbed her jacket. She came back up front and stuffed all the money in her pockets. Then she remembered the safe.

The door bell jingled merrily behind her when she left.

## Nathan Denbrough

### The Fog

I was the fog, an eerie vapor,  
Who rolled across the mountain sides—  
Through the trees and o’er the streams,  
Wandering across the autumn fields  
And prairies of rustling reeds.  
Going about one dreary day,  
I met this child with many tears.  
Looking up and seeing me,  
Tremulous he spoke of such tragedy.  
He had just heard death’s loathsome knell  
Strike the hour of ceasing innocence,  
Waking the reaper and his sharp, sharp sickle,  
Drawing him nigh to the poor little one.  
Such melancholy the child instilled in me,  
As he cried and cried, begging to hide in me.  
He pleaded that I be his truth, his cloud;  
Rather than tell,  
And be his shroud.  
So the tale goes, at least my side,  
Of how in I, does all ambiguity abide.

**Dana Holz**

**Song for the Burdened**

**"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28**

The Pro	and	Con forces
	wage war	
	with Words and Guns.	
	Calling each other	
Murderers	and	Terrorists
	They are Protectors of	
The Constitution	and	The Bible
	Unseen, caught in the center	
	A young wisp of a Girl	
	Yearns for Peace	
	While each side	
	Vies for her	
	<b>Soul:</b>	

With calm logic,  
Begging her to remember  
Her Rights . . .

With hysterical faces,  
Yelling that she is going  
To Hell . . .

**In their fight  
She  
Is  
Forgotten.  
She  
Is  
Alone.**

† † † † †

*A gentle voice beckons her away  
From the protests-  
From the clinic-  
From the alley-*

*She clings to His Softness-  
The Softness of Understanding.*

*He is her song of Freedom:  
The Freedom from being a  
Trinket  
With which  
Differing Principles play.*

*His song is as ancient as the Cross  
As comforting as His Grace  
"I will give you rest."*

*He does not yell.  
He does not beg.  
He does not preach.  
He does not judge.*

*He listens.*

**Robert Mendoza**

**A Smiling Place**

As long as the wind blows, the grass grows,  
and the sky is blue, there is a place where  
you can see forever. The wildflowers blow  
carelessly in the wind. A wild place where  
the eagle soars and searches; he is the quiet  
king. The warm breeze brings the smell of sweet  
clover and sage, an aroma that reddest rose does  
not compare. On cold winter nights you can see the  
Northern Lights. It is like a bright Night-time rainbow.  
God must be smiling.



Jeff Rademacher

## Audra Kobs

### Deepest Love

She held her tiny infant son in her arms. She looked at every inch of his five-pound frame and held her finger out to him. He found the finger and grasped it with all the might his miniature hand could muster. She felt for the rocking chair behind her as she carefully lifted the cords to the heart monitor and feeding tube over the arm of the chair.

His little bassinet was next to her and she ran her hand over the satin lining as she began to sing his Nathan lullaby she had written for him shortly after he was born. He started to quiver as if he were going to have one of his seizures, but calmed and settled into his mother's arms knowing the comfort of her touch. When she had finished the song she lifted the baby to her nose to inhale his scent. She felt the softness of his cheek as she held the pillow to his face.

He did not struggle; he went peacefully unto our Lord.

Ed and Beth Morrow had always wanted children. They battled the financial and emotional cost of infertility for eight years before they were blessed. Beth had given up on the idea of becoming pregnant. All the artificial means of conception had failed them and that is when nature took its course.

Beth had collapsed at school and had been taken to the emergency room. Ed had joined her there and tests revealed an iron deficiency brought on by the early stages of pregnancy. The Morrrows were elated at the news.

Beth did everything in her power to insure a safe pregnancy. She avoided caffeine, alcohol, and all other dangerous foods and activities. She exercised lightly, got plenty of rest and even went to teaching half-time. This baby would be the healthiest baby ever born, they thought.

At the twelve week visit to their obstetrician, the Morrrows heard their baby's heartbeat for the first time. They were moved to tears right there in the doctor's office. At the next visit they would have an ultrasound performed. Meanwhile, they read poetry and played music for the fetus, taking in every minute of this pregnancy. Their dream of being parents would finally be fulfilled.

The day came for the ultrasound and Ed Morrow brought his wife breakfast in bed. Under the napkin Ed had placed a



## Jon Rademacher

### The Wall

The big black ball continued to punch at the insides of my gut until I couldn't stand it anymore. It was as if a volcano had suddenly erupted inside my stomach and the white-hot lava was now set to unleash its destructive heat on everything in its path. Too bad for Jeremy.

I used to think people said they "saw red" because they couldn't think of anything else to describe how pissed-off they really were. That's the only color I can remember as I lunged at my little brother, hell-bent on hurting him in the worst way I could imagine. The green-and-white wallpaper outlined the fire red lenses I was now looking through, and it almost seemed sort of Christmassy. Almost. The only thing I was in the mood for giving was intense pain, and Jeremy was about to feel several excruciating stockingsful.

My arms were fully extended as I drove my clenched fists as hard as I could into his chest. The force of the blow was so powerful that it lifted him completely off his feet. A look of surprise, then horror, crossed his pale face as he was propelled backwards at high speed. He was suspended in mid-air for what seemed like minutes, and I felt a sudden pang of fear. He hurtled toward the wall, and instantly I regretted what I had done. Too late.

He landed harder than if he'd been driven by a hammer. His ass absorbed most of the shock but the sickening CRACK! of his head meeting the plaster just above the floorboard is a sound I will never forget. The wall collapsed inward behind his blond head, and I cringed as visions of an ambulance and a hospital room rushed through my mind. I knew I was in deep trouble.

I rushed over to see how badly he was hurt, praying desperately that he was somehow all right. Before I could get to him though, his face began to break out in a huge grin. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. He began to laugh out loud as I became even more bewildered. I stopped dead in my tracks, not knowing where or how to proceed.

Still confused, I knelt over his outstretched body and put my hand on his shoulder, and asked, "Are you OK?" He just looked up at me with that stupid grin, and continued chuckling to himself. I didn't know whether to hug him or smack him again, so I offered my hand to help him to his feet.

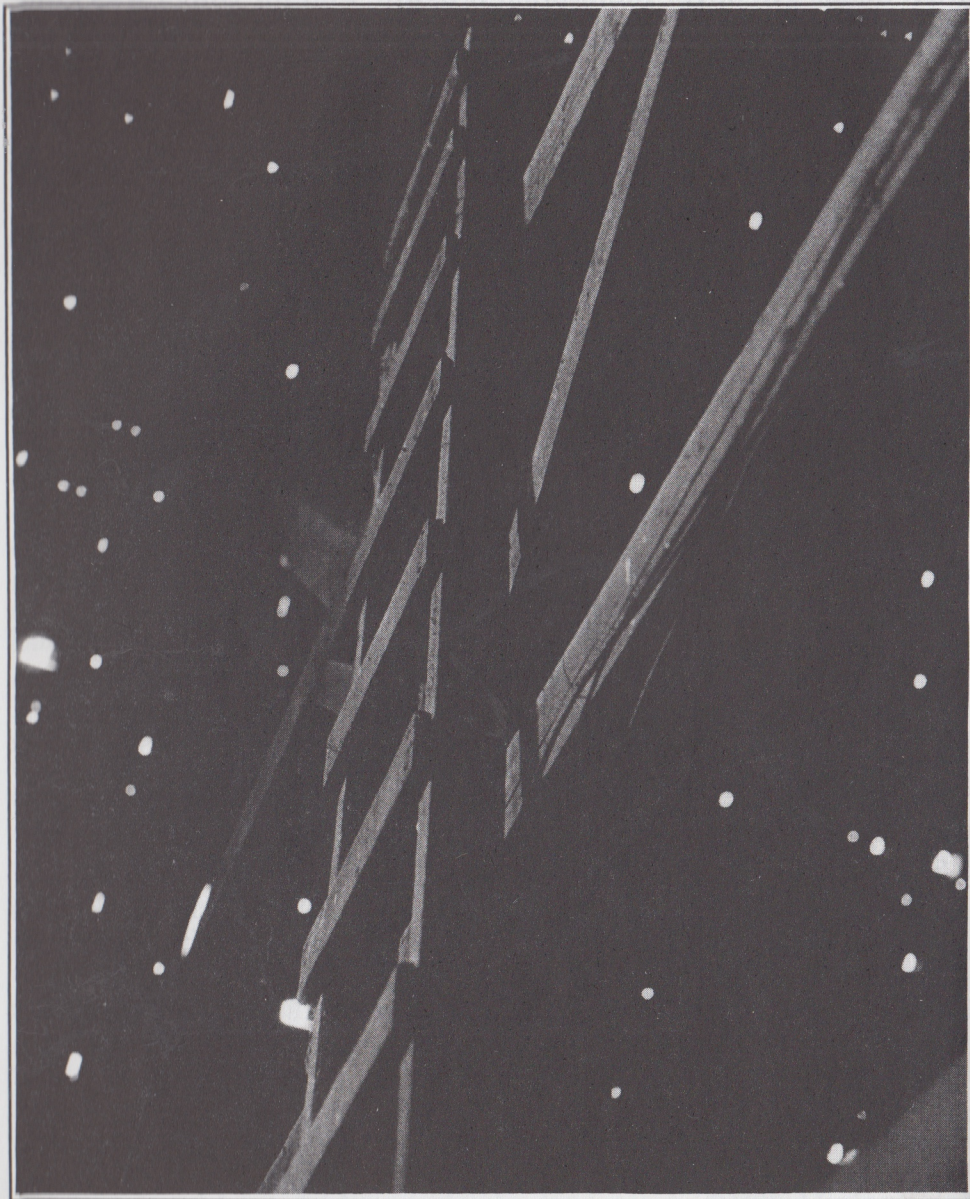
His head had cracked the plaster just above the baseboard, which is probably what kept him from any serious injury. We never did get around to fixing the hole, which was at least an inch deep. He never mentioned it again, and for that I was glad. He didn't need to.

## Luis Navarro

### Rosie Park

(Dedicated to M.M.H.)

Color Crackling Brilliance  
Teases her Pupils.  
Behind Them a  
Chaos Carnival  
Manic Roller Coasters.  
Random Sounds and Sighs.  
Delicate.  
A Climb to the Cross on the Hill.  
A Cool Chill  
Silence  
Thoughts  
Prayers  
Then...  
In a Cloud  
She Escapes.



Carrie L. Larkins