



# the monitor.

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volume 10  
issue 6

You are reading The Monitor's first-ever short story contest edition. The stories you read were submitted to us over the course of the semester. Our staff read through and discussed all of them blind to knowledge of the author and each

nominated favorites to a voting pool. Next, each judge ranked their favorite three from the voting pool. Each first-place vote earned a story three points, a second-place vote earned two points, and a third-place vote earned a single

point. These points were used to determine a top three. These three were ranked by the judges with the same points system to determine the big fifty dollar winner, Elizabeth Hobbs' The Ideologist. All illustrating artwork is

original. We thank every contributor for allowing us to present you with the material for this, your interdenominational holiday present from the staff of The Monitor.

## The Ideologist

Elizabeth Hobbs

Angie was studying to be an ideologist. The main focus of her work was new ideas, or the lack thereof. Earth had aged 30,000 years more since the first human clone was created. That is where the first ideologist his job.

You see, just like an ancient photocopy machine, humans had to keep track of the original. The first completely successful human clone was of Joshua Berdant. His clone was Joshua Berdant I. The clone did not suffer the mental digression that most clones before his time suffered. He was the first perfect genome. After the launch of the Joshua series, there had been a Jane series and the cloning business grew exponentially. Soon, there were so

many clones you had to catalog the original, and the Database was born.

Soon people realized that the genomes of creatures weren't the only things that needed an original idea or theme. The Database expanded to music next. The first controversy concerned the original Pachelbel's Canon, and variation copy number one, "The Green Alien". It is recorded that the composer of "The Green Alien", Josh Berdant #15wt made the music incredibly similar to Pachelbel's Canon. The Originality League sued and said he'd to give credit to the original composer. JB#15wt had not studied ancient music composition and pleaded ignorance; he had had no idea that he had copied someone's work. JB#15wt lost in the International Database court and was fined. Soon the Courts were filled with originality pleas. The International Patent Department had long been overloaded. Soon, every new idea, and the old ones from ancient history were cataloged.

As computers evolved the Database evolved with it. Soon all the variations of the originals were also kept. The story "The Spaceship and the Hop-Glider" was just another variation of the "Tortoise and the Hare" according to the International Database. New ideas were becoming rarer and rarer.

To see if you had a new idea you just had to check the Database. It turned out that most people's thoughts had been thought before. Millions of people had asked the same questions, thought the same ideas. You didn't think of anything new to the world, you just believed it was original. Individual's new ideas were irrelevant, in the grand scheme of things, it had been thought up and done better than the thinker #250

could have executed with his own hands. Soon, creative thinking was no longer valued. There was nothing new to think. Nothing new to do. So life in the future was simply reruns of the past. The main purpose was not to make a mark on the world. The world had already been marked, scared and scars had built upon the scars. There were no possibilities left. The main purpose in living was to live for yourself, you in your body, because these were the only new things.

But yet humans continued on. They no longer saw the human race as active catalyst for change, but the human race became a recorder, historian role. With the discovery of new sentient

life, they would go to the planet and record.

These new discoveries were a boon to the International Database League. Personal would rush the planet and record every detail. In one hundred years, the "new" people, or aliens history would be recorded, and all communication would stop. The historians would have their information, and that was all they needed. There was nothing else to explore. These new creatures were not new any more. Many "new" species of alien would try to refuse the historians from coming. These races did not respect history and did not want the "repressive cloud of the past" hindering their progress. After a while the historians would get through to them that there was no progress, it was just a rerun. Many of these races became violent against this idea. It did not matter though, the idea was planted, and soon the whole planet would realize the truth of things. They would send their historians to the International Database, to retrieve their own history, and get the technology to set up their own Database. Many historians took a look at other races histories, and found the cyclical pattern, and held it as the one truth.

Some people hadn't learned this yet. They still swore up and down that they had made something "new." They would petition the Database Guild to prove the newness of their items, invention, idea. There had been no cases of actual "newness" on the human scale for quite sometime, three thousand years to be exact. This was Angie's career, to tell people that nothing was new anymore. Some people, no matter how persistent the Database Guild was, could not believe that there one hope, idea, dream was not unique to them. It was Angie's job to tell them. These people suffered

from delusions. They seemed special, their thoughts were happy. They had this feeling of self-worth which they couldn't describe, because self-worth was no longer in a modern persons vocabulary. After Angie would print out specific examples when this emotion, thought, or idea took place, they saw the folly of their thought. They would be silent for a while, and then their face would fall. The eyes would get back to being a dull shade.

Angie's training was began at an early age, beside the mandatory thirteen years of history classes, Catalog A provenience was required for Ideologist certification. In the younger years, the idea of no new ideas was hard to impress on young minds. The way Angie first understood this process, took

place in her third year. The instructor, for three weeks encouraged them to come up with original drawings. For three weeks Angie and the other children labored to come up with the many, unusual, and creative ideas. Beautiful pieces of art work were constructed out of Styrofoam. Construction paper and makers were all used up. At the end of the three weeks the class had a huge pile of drawings sculptures and creative works that the entire class was insanely proud of. Then, the Ideologist would come in. He would set up his scanner, hard drive and battery pack, and one, by one he would take the piece of art, and scan them in, and the printer would print out a report filled with the original ideas from the Database, complete with name and date. After this, the children never used crayon or markers; the only exception was when they would illustrate a point in history.

Later on, Angie applied to be trained as a field historian, to go to new cultures and record their own history. In the back of Angie's mind was a desire to find something new, even if it was an illusion. At least it would be new to her, if not to history. However, the International Database board refused her application because scientists had figured out the last new culture 100 years ago. The universe was completely discovered. There were no unanswerable questions. People found comfort in knowing that they could point at any star and the Database would spew a hundred pages on every thing there was to know about that star. Ignorance is bliss was no longer a staying, and people were no longer afraid of the dark, they knew exactly what was in it.

This frustrated her, mystery was important in people's lives in the distant past, she had read it in novels, and so why couldn't people lives have mystery in what was now the future? After a while in the

later years of her education, she stopped asking these questions, realizing that they were nothing new.

Angie received Catalog A provenience and went to work.

Some times though, when the weather was especially mysterious, even though she new how precipitation was formed; deep down inside, she would hope that some creative soul, probably not a clone, would come up with something new. With each case she was secretly hoping that this would be the item to break the 3,000 years of no new ideas. The hardest part was when a child, who had not gone through third year yet, served a petition. The young boy had had a water-color painting that used purple, black and brilliant green. It was a wonderful



Image | Jim Jereb

piece of work. It was very creative and nothing like Angie had ever seen. Angie was filled with hope. Maybe this would be the one. She scanned the painting into the database. The painting had already been done by a little girl in 25,272. Angie looked at the little boy's smiling face. Angie looked at the scanner. She hesitated for just one second, just one. And she had deleted the previous painting. The little boy had a NEW piece of art, something no one had seen before. When she told the boy this, his little face lit up. He screamed laughed and danced. He had thought up something New. Something completely New.

That night, Angie tried to justify herself. "No one was looking at the young girl's painting since it was cataloged. No one noticed or cared. Everyone that knew her or was ever connected with her is dead. Why should her memory stop another young child from creating and being proud of his work?"

She secretly started to plan other deletions, just a few, so that the advisory board wouldn't catch her. Soon she was carrying out deletions every day, and the possible penalty out weighed the joy on people's faces

Eventually, Angie was found out and sentenced to death for lying. The little boy was told he had nothing special. He eventually became an accountant.

# The Monitor

Campus Collective  
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Volume 9, Number 6

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The Monitor is published every other Tuesday. We meet every Tuesday and Thursday at 9 p.m. in BH 249. Each writer is responsible for his or her own work.

Subscriptions are available to out of towners - you just pay for postage. Send a check or money order for \$10 to the address above for a semester's worth of Monitors. That's really cheap, huh?

Among people who have learned something from the 18th century (say, Voltaire) it is a truism, hardly deserving discussion, that the defense of the right of free expression is not restricted to ideas one approves of, and that it is precisely in the case of ideas found most offensive that this right must be vigorously defended. Advocacy of the right to express ideas that are generally approved of is, quite obviously, a matter of no significance."

- Noam Chomsky

# Runner-Up Stories

Elizabeth Hobbs

Micah slowly pulled the cart through the deserted streets, while his companions, James and Hypatia were already dragging from exhaustion. The deserted city was sweltering and the rubble filled streets was worse than most cities they had gone through, making travel more difficult than normal. The goal was to get through the wrecked concrete and steel that was once civilization before nightfall, before the dogs came. A five minute rest break was called and everyone immediately stopped pulling the cart. Micah's watch, one of the greatest possessions he owned, slowly ticked away the time as five minutes drew to a close.

They were travelers in a waste pool. Trying to wade out before the danger came. The burden was especially precious, one that Micah, and later Hypatia and James had fought for with there life. Their livelihood was simple: everyone loved a good story and they had good stories. What is more, they could read them. Hypatia could read only read German at first, but soon became fluent Arabic and French. James was English and Spanish and Micah knew Russian. The books in the cart were their past and present and future.

The past was the life in the last century before the wars, the present was a way to make ends meet, to read stories, sings the old songs, and ask for food in return. The future was the haziest of the three, everywhere they visited there was talk of reconstruction, but memories were faded of what to "reconstruct." Most villages were barely surviving; no one had time to go to the next village, let alone to reconstruct a nation. Many people, secretly believed that life now was better than it had been "before" but memory had faded so much, no one really knew what "before" meant. Days now were certainly dangerous.

Bandits had tried many times to get some extra "firewood," from the travelers and had been defeated, often at the cost of their lives. But the very real danger were the wild dogs, who —desperate with hunger— would attack until the alpha was dead, or enough of their comrades were dead to make up for lost prey. Then the dead or wounded dogs would become dinner for the rest of the pack, and the terrified travelers would escape with their lives.

Those nights happen very rarely, when the group was stuck in an old city and escape to the country side was impossible. Then, an old building would become sanctuary, climbing high and dangerously enough to get out of reach of the dogs. The worst part of it was leaving the books behind. They would be too heavy for a quick accent and would be left on the ground, in the cart. Micah's greatest fear was the books would acquire the scent of the travels and the dogs would attack it.

To prevent that, they must keep going. "Five minutes are up, let's go" said Micah. And they went. Hypatia was singing an old tune, which sounded very eerie in the silent city.

"See the smoke? Micah? I bet we are ten

miles to the next village" said James.

"Nah, more like fifteen, but we'll get there by night fall just the same, and they'll want entertainment right away if they agree to our terms" said Micah

"Aye, and what are our terms? We'll need at least fifteen days of dried meat to get to the next village. If I read the map correctly, we've got another week until we get to the coast" said Hypatia, bring out a very old and tattered high way map. "Plus, we'll need Italian."

"Hypatia, have you considered what Micah and I have said? You've been a woman for three years now, you're in danger everyday we travel. Nab a man in a village and have kids, you'll find one with your voice." said James.

"Nay, and leave the stories to be told by you dunder-heads, you'll be pronouncing Joyce as Hoyce and James as Ham if I leave! Besides, if I find someone, I can teach him to learn and earn his way."

"That's not an option, and you know it,

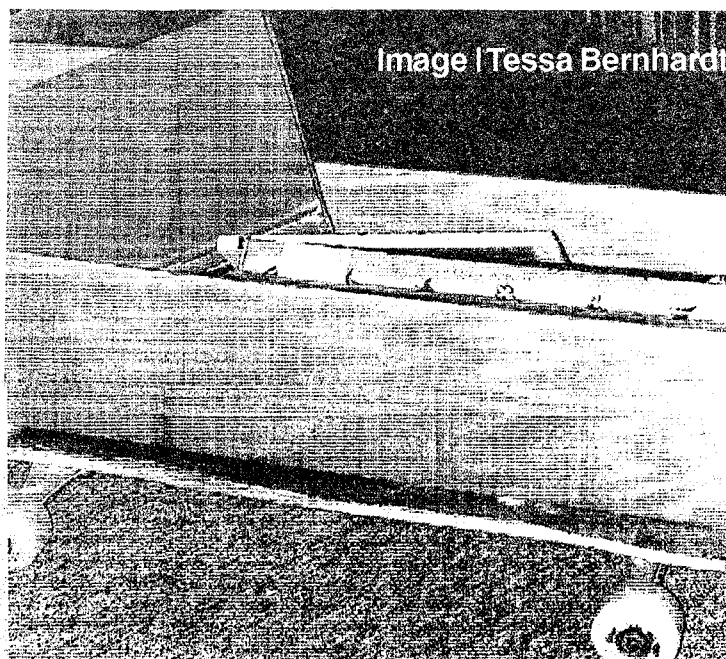


Image | Tessa Bernhardt

many villages grumble at feeding three, at four they would turn us away. It has been good growing weather, if you want to find someone now's the time" said James.

"What about you two? Find some pretty girl in this next village, bards are so in fashion these days, and sing your way into her parents, heart, home and inheritance. Teach a few lads to read and you have got a permanent place in society!" said Hypatia

"The books must be read, the stories must be told, we have to have some memory. These books were my great gran's before the wars, and they are proof that we once were great, proof that we don't have to toil in the dirt for our living," said Micah.

"And at what cost? I agree that it is important to tell these stories, but NOT to glorify them. This industrialization brought evil, and we are still wading through it," as Hypatia looked around the crumbling walls of the city.

"Hush! It's too hot to think! Beside, your voices are so loud, you'll call the dogs from miles away!" said Micah. And the trio became quiet, picking up the

pace to get out of the ruin, and hopefully toward a live audience by night fall.

The village had had a good harvest year, plus the men had just come back from hunting. It was a prosperous village, better off than most, with a large amount of health livestock, and solid homes. They had used a building pattern that Micah had never seen before; thick clay mixed with straw, woven around in a great circle to form the walls.

With the arrival of the travelers, it was a regular festival. Evening came, and the night was clear and cool, bring relief from the hot day. Hypatia sang her hymns and read a fable, while James and Micah told ghost stories and explained what the stars really were. Few believed that they were globes of gas and something called "nuclear power". It seemed that a rumor had been present in the area that stars were shards of seashell that had been crushed by the goddess of this region. After the feast an elder came up to Micah.

"We have had good years here.

Very good years, the goddess has blessed us. We have people spread out in different villages, and we can afford meals for a messenger. You have traveled enough in your young life, be our messenger. If the goddess continues to bless us we may make a place for your books so everyone could know this Aesop that Hypatia tells about."

"I will consider it" said Micah, excited that perhaps a library could be built for the first time in 100 years.

It never happened. Wild dogs came to the village, following the scent of the travelers. The drunks in the street barely woke up in time, and one did not make it to the thick mud huts that protected the village. A young child was lost, he went to relieve himself in the woods right before the dogs came and never came back. Livestock that wasn't inside was slaughtered. The rest of the night was filled with the howls of the dogs and the death screams of the livestock. A child's scream was heard and then cut off.

After the attack, there were no animals left out side the huts. A rabid and injured dog was found and then put out of its misery. None of the meat could be salvaged because of the rabies.

The travelers left as so as the morning came, refilling only their water jugs and getting two loafs of bread from a generous woman. They left early enough to run away from the wrath of the village. Apparently, the young women warned, the local goddess was a vengeful goddess. Whoever brought bad luck to the village must be killed. Micah grabbed the cart and James and Hypatia loaded the books quickly and quietly. They took off at a very past pace for the coast, where hopefully good luck followed, and the wild dogs did not. Hypatia silently sang a song about traveling.

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Runner-Up

# Knight Errant Without a Lady

Ed Jenkins

There was this boy named Juvenal Cervantes who stayed with his parents and four siblings. He was the middle child, six years old. I saw him walk to school in the morning and I heard his father screaming at night because I lived two houses down and his voice was as strong as a pistol. I heard those too, but not from the Cervantes home. It was an inadvertent hammer and anvil configuration in which the domestic violence smashed the children against the culture that told them to go to school and to buy candy and plastic water guns and so on.

I never intervened. "A knight errant without a lady," I thought, thinking I should wait for a lady first, but to fill this misinterpreted conjecture I would have had to have been a knight errant or at least a singing cowboy or a roving beatnik. I was more like a kid who read romantic literature and projected the heroes onto the mirror so that I could exaggerate a distant friend into a Dulcinea del Toboso or Fermina Daza.

I lived in a fictional world of pain because I was insecure and my heroes were bold or at least emotional. But that innocent kid, Juvenal, had real suffering. I'm not surprised he couldn't concentrate on his school work when school was a place where he could be carefree.

I left town to visit my manufactured Dulcinea, and when I left Juve was sitting on the steps pouting, with little age six tear tracks on his dirty cheeks. I should have cried too.

I showed up and thought I could just embrace my Dulcinea and press our lips together without perverting the situation through spoken language. But I probably didn't even look into her what-ever-colored eyes all week. There was

so much fiction in my brain that wrote itself over the year since I had last seen Dulce that my character and hers totally loved each other and were going to hook up at this reunion. It might have worked if I didn't understand what was fiction and what was non-, but I did, and so the real me wouldn't play the role, which is to say that I had no self-confidence. But that's all I am willing to share about that. I came home and was depressed and wrote my character a bitterness towards Dulcinea in order to move on to a new favorite girl.

When I got back to my house without a lady, but also not being a knight errant, Juve was still sitting there and still crying. Around

the bottom of the steps the grass and even some flowers were growing vibrantly under the week-long stream of tears. I went into my house and put away my stuff, at the time thinking heavily about ol' girl, and then I took a shower. I was so unmotivated that I couldn't think of a single thing that I wanted to do, and it wasn't dark yet. So I went to my default, which was to walk around in the park. But when I got outside and saw the kid in tears I went to talk to him, in Spanish of course. I spoke poor Spanish and he poor English, so to this language barrier I attribute the success of our conversation, each of us projecting what our psychology wanted us to obtain from the other. I made wide-eyed smiley

faces, and he laughed and told me some unclear story about the dog and his brother's sweater. Somehow this made the kid happy, and making the kid happy made me happy.

After an hour he went to eat dinner and so I went home. While I was cooking some potatoes, I thought about how happy I was as a result of helping out that distressed kid. That inspired me (thinking I might finally be the hero) to go look up that Don Quixote quote, and it said, "For a knight errant without a lady is like a tree without leaves or fruit and a body without a soul." This sounded pretty true to me, and I began to write myself a new Dulcinea del Toboso.









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# The One Who Watched

Jon Lawinger

At 5:02 PM a middle aged businessman got up from his desk, put on his overcoat, said goodbye to his secretary, took the elevator down to the lobby, and stepped outside. Directly outside of the building he encountered a small crowd of fifteen or twenty people gathered, looking across the street with their necks craned back and their hands shielding their eyes from the sun. He walked a few paces from the doorway and stopped on the edge of the group.

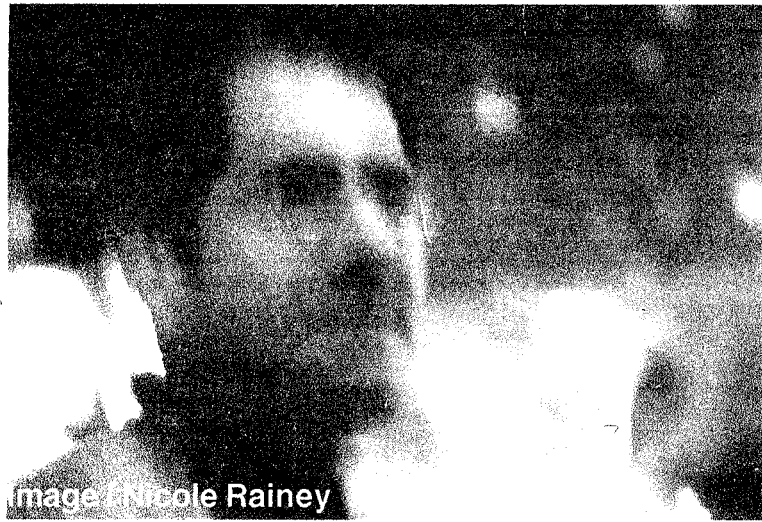


Image © Nicole Rainey

Upon following the path of their collective gaze he saw a man, no more than twenty years old, really just a boy, crouched at the edge of the seven stories that rose from the sidewalk across the street. The police had just arrived and begun to keep people back, but a natural perimeter had already formed. He glanced around to see that the crowd was growing as people leaving work stopped to stare at the suicidal figure looming over the deadly street and wait for what came next.

I didn't take much waiting. After only a minute or two, the hunched figure stood up, held his arms out to his sides, and leaned off the ledge until he plunged chest first toward the pavement. As he fell, his body continued to

rotate, and by the time he was halfway down his head was leading the charge towards death. Just before impact the businessman turned his head to avoid the disturbing sight, and saw another that was no less unnerving to him. As he turned his head, he saw every other head in the crowd turn in perfect synchrony with his own. As every eye averted itself from the anticipated violence now at hand, he saw one head remain unturned, and the eyes of a boy, still in his middle to late teens, maintain their gaze. While others already looking away closed their eyes, the boy's remained fixed, waiting for impact. An unexpectedly loud thud signaled the end for those sheltering their vision, and the boy flinched slightly, but his steady gaze was unshaken. Others took quick glances at the aftermath of the fall, then quickly shuffled away to tell of their experience, while the boy had yet to shift his eyes from the scene. Finally the boy slowly lowered his eyes to the ground at his feet, glanced to the left, briefly making eye contact with the businessman still staring at him, and walked away in the opposite direction. As he walked away he pulled the hood of his black sweatshirt over his head and stuck his hands deep into its pockets.

Perplexed and disturbed, the man followed at a distance for a few blocks, wanting to get the boy's attention but feeling strangely intimidated by his unflinching composure. He kept telling

himself it was absurd for him to be daunted by a boy less than half his age, but when he tried to call to the kid the words stuck in his throat. Finally he gathered up what bravado he could and shouted out firmly, "Hey!" and then less firmly "...you," as the boy turned and silently settled his hard stare upon the man.

The man stopped walking, frozen by the boy's stare from fifteen feet. The boy nodded his head slightly and raised his eyebrows, inviting the man to continue. "I... you..." he stuttered into the void between them, trying to turn words into thoughts and thoughts into phrases, which soon tumbled out with the quick pace of restrained tears. "You... you watched that man die. You watched... you... you were the only one who watched him hit the ground... from seven floors up... and you watched him hit... watched him crush and splatter... and die... and you never looked away." He paused to collect himself, and speaking more slowly, with sad eyes, he asked "How?" then with questioning desperation, "Why?"

The boy furrowed his brow a bit and opened his mouth to speak, but let the silence hang for a moment. Finally he replied with a steady tone and a puzzled face, "What were you there to see?" and turned and walked away without waiting for an answer.

## Death and the Maiden

Kristin Bennett

In a sanctuary, unknown to human kind, where life would never visit sat a man. Now, of course this being was in no sense mortal. In fact he had not one drop of human blood in his veins. He hadn't taken a single breath in his existence. This ancient creature came to be the very instant that the first living thing was created. But now in his abode he sat unfeeling. Emotions had no purpose here. This being was without fear, anger, or contempt, but also he had never felt happiness or joy. No pain ever caused his marble brow to wrinkle, no love had ever brought a tear to an unblinking eye. Even the most basic instincts such as hunger or thirst found no home within him. He was bereft of every mental human aspect.

There had been tales of this man since the dawn of time. He was said to be a monster; or a demon who stalked the night. But this was false. This creature was of stunning beauty. He had black eyes that held the knowledge of what man would never know. His raven hair was a mane that queens would envy. His face was perfect in every way. Not one imperfection dotted the ivory skin. But it was a face of no movement. Not one smile had or ever would appear on his lips. Blood never flushed his pallid cheek. His eyes would never blink, frozen in a penetrating stare. But as for mankind, they could only make up tales of what he looked like though everyone will see his face one day, they will never live to tell. But not to say this creature was evil. No, he did not kill for any kind of perverse pleasure. He only did it because since life started that was what he had to do. He was the most powerful of his kind, for it fell to him the task of killing the most powerful creatures of all, humans. It all served a simple purpose; for you cannot have life without death. And death was of course only doing his job.

He sat looking at the glass sphere where colors swirled in hypnotic beauty. Who would be next? A face appeared within. She was younger than he was used to dealing with. She must have only just become a woman. She had sea green eyes and long flowing Auburn hair that gently curled around her thin waist. She carried a certain innocence about her. A wavy gown showed off her young body. Any other man would have thought her extravagant, but this man studied her only because he needed to know his victim.

Death gracefully stood up. Millions of years of experience had enabled him to perfect his art. His task was set before him. It was not a challenge or a game, it was as normal to him as breathing is to us. His dark figure suddenly disappeared from the abode. No swirling smoke surrounded his departure or flashing beams of light herald an amazing act of teleportation, he was simply gone. Death is all about exiting; flamboyance doesn't impress a man who knows no emotions.

The girl with auburn hair had woken up with a strange feeling that day. But off-hand she had dismissed it. The sun had come up once more and that was good enough for her. Her life was one of perfection, only because of her own ignorance nothing could go wrong. Everything could be turned positive and the world of course was there for her to enjoy.

The maiden's mornings always started out with a walk through the meadow near her house. To the young girl this was a private paradise among the continual perfection of life. Spring was here showering the Earth with a bounty of flowers. The maiden idly swooped down from time to time to gather up an armful of these flowers, while humming a nameless tune to herself. It was a day when the birds were singing and the sun was ensuring ever lasting brilliance. Some people like this girl set it upon them-

selves to marvel at a day such as this. But others had work to do.

The serpent form that he would take had already been predetermined as was most things in his job. He felt nothing as his pale smooth skin transformed fluidly in to scales. A snake was such a brilliant, beautiful, creature. Long and lithe it had the grace of millions of years and the pride of a species that had ruled the planet not so long ago. Though forced to slither on its belly the snake was not without weapons.

The maiden idly smelled a Daffodil when he materialized near by. Those were had always been her favorites. Death did not notice the joy she found in that simple plant her bare feet were what he was watching. She hadn't a chance, no one ever did. One moment life was at its peak not a fear in the world, the next found her falling in a heap on the ground, biting her lip. It was all she could do from screaming. The unstoppable flow of poison had already taken up residence in her blood stream.

She did not cry, though the pain was agonizing. She simply ran, tripping many times but determined to make it to a near by Oak; one that she had sat under since she could walk. It seemed a pity that this would be her last trip. But all this went unnoticed to him. He transformed back; the snake was no longer needed. He walked up to her in order to make sure the job was done. Not that there was ever any doubt, but it's best to be thorough in one's work. He found her unsuccessfully trying to breathe, a single tear sliding down her flushed cheek. Not for her but for those she would leave behind went that tear. She was not the kind to waste her last moments attempting to rationalize why this had happened to her. Heroic speeches were wasted when instead it is better to just take in the moment for all that it is worth. Suddenly she noticed the air tugging playfully at her locks, the twig digging into her thigh, even the rough

feel of the cotton gown rubbing her skin. Her nose took in its last scent, that of molding tree bark. Her ears strained to hear the worlds last words to her.

With her eyes she took in her finale sight; it was of death. Her green marbles glazing over more every instant staring straight at his dark unforgiving ones. The only strange thing was that in this maiden's eye was no trace of fear, no trace of hate projected at him like many others—just a kind of wondering. It was only a few seconds but within that time she caught a small glance of all that was good and all that was evil. She was ready to except her fate.

In those last precious moments of life she lifted her head to the sun. She was to leave the world proud and defiant, looking straight into the sky as if still wondering, contemplating all the things she had never seen; all the unanswered questions she would leave in her wake. With its' ever giving rays of light the sun saluted a life cut short. The ever so fragile clock unwound and her spirit went free. All the creatures in the field for only the tiniest moment felt an unexplainable sense of joy, but it was soon forgotten and they turned back to their every day busy lives of surviving and reproducing.

The awesome glory of dying was lost on Death. He simply watched as her once pink rosy cheeks paled and her eyes went dim. The flowing gown was now torn and bloodied from her fall, and lay still against her breathless bosom. Yet she was still beautiful in her entirety, in a way different then before. There, under the majestic wooden guardian, he left her. He turned his heel and walked away. Every movement was that of a dancer, ever so graceful. Now it was time he went home. She was only one of many, for his job could never be completed and the day held many more surprises.

# Seventeen

Jessica Bennett

I was seventeen a long time ago. With long playful hair and an eye for anything. I am eighteen now trying to remember what it was like to be seventeen. I was young then, and now I am an adult. Chained to my contracts, allowed to vote in all the faceless politicians I chose. A jury of my peers may take away my life with no regrets in their hearts. Eighteen is a long way from seventeen. I can smoke now, suck down all the lung cancer I want and not have to hide in the bathroom stalls at school. I can also get a credit card, that glinting hard plastic that kills more people than cigarettes ever will.

I was seventeen long ago. The world's burdens are a fine birthday gift for eighteen. I remember my house, my room, my pet cat scam-

pering around my legs. It was OK to enjoy those things, but not now that I am eighteen. I cannot enjoy my house for it is not mine at all, but my parents, and while seventeen is young enough to stay, eighteen must move on. So I am houseless now, but not roomless. I have a tiny little room that I may call all my own as long as I pay the rent and don't annoy the neighbors.

I was seventeen a long time ago. I must do things now that I am eighteen. I must have answers, not to easy things like math or history or movie trivia. I must know about myself as if there were some ultimate logic is this addled brain of mine. I must move closer, oh so much

closer, to the edge of the cliff. At the bottom is the middle age rut that I am paving. I have not fallen into my rut yet, but my toes are just hanging off the edge. It won't hurt because the fall is slow and the ground below is so soft that I will sink into it like slurping mud.

I was seventeen a long time ago, and now I like to remember back to those days, to my little yellow house and my furry white cat. I like to pretend that I am seventeen again, and that it doesn't matter that I don't know what I want to do or where I want to go. At seventeen you can drive and see rated R movies without making your parents buy your tickets

for you. What more could a kid want? The funny thing is that I don't feel any different being eighteen. I don't understand politics any better, and I am still just as confused about this place and my place. I am still the same seventeen-year-old person caught inside an eighteen-year-old world where seventeen seems such a long time ago.

I am eighteen now, and it really isn't so bad. My little room is cozy, and I am meeting many new people. I am far away from my old home, but I feel like this is a new home. College is much better than high school anyway. They have so many things going on here that I may find something for me after all. I even feel a little stronger, as if my voice were louder here. I feel like people might just listen if I screamed loud enough. Still, when it gets dark and cold, for it is colder here at eighteen than at seventeen, I like to remember back, far far back to the days of seven-



Image | Amanda Hackney

# Brainfull

David Rothermich

"It's almost full," Tomas whispered confidentially to his friend.

"What is?"

"My brain, George. It won't be able to hold much more."

Before they could continue their conversation further, their teacher, Ms. Baxter, noticed the talking. Quickly becoming quiet, the two young men began paying attention to Precalculus, boring though it was.

Tomas didn't know when he realized it, but he knew that he was different from other high school students. As he progressed through life, he learned new things every day. Over the years, Tomas found that he could somehow guess how much memory capacity he had, and therefore judge the amount of information he could possibly know.

The stocky youth and his best friend George had developed two possible theories as to what would happen when Tomas's head could hold no more knowledge. Tomas hypothesized that he wouldn't be able to learn anything new; he would maintain his early life's education forever, but he could absorb nothing else. However, George thought that Tomas would lose random tidbits of information whenever he discovered something new. Facts and memories would begin to leak out of his head whenever he learned anything.

No matter what happened, Tomas was rather upset that his entire capacity to learn would be changed forever in the near future.

Several months later, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, Tomas learned one final fact: one serving of skim milk contains 90 calories. He didn't realize the exact second that his brain reached its limit, but after about a week, he was certain. Incidents began to arise in which Tomas couldn't recall basic information, such as the number of inches in a foot and the meaning of the word "afghan." When he forgot that one had to fill a gas tank in a car so that it kept driving, he knew that his brain was full. Tomas also learned that George's theory was correct, which of course caused him to forget if he liked tuna or not.

Throughout the next few weeks, Tomas—helped greatly by George's insights—began to gain a deeper understanding of his condition. Apparently, if Tomas learned something trivial, such as the number of dimples on a golf ball, he forgot information equally as trivial. Likewise, when he gained significant knowledge, he forgot other important things, like the process by which one ties a shoe.

Tomas eventually learned to deal with his problem, but he was unable to live a normal life. Luckily, he married a wealthy woman in his early twenties, so he never had to have a job. This was quite a stroke of luck because he could never maintain any decent career as a result of his perpetual forgetfulness. Tomas lived rather happily with his wife June, despite complications that arose.

As Tomas's children grew, they came to feel revulsion for their father. Whenever they held parties, Tomas embarrassed them constantly, either by forgetting to open the front door for guests or put his pants on before leaving his room, or a variety of other things. Consequently, Tomas's only good friend in his older years was his loving wife, June.

One day, about three months after Tomas and June's nineteenth anniversary, Tomas discovered that his uncle had died, and his inheritance had made Tomas's family fabulously wealthy. He promptly went home to tell his wife, but could not remember her name. Naturally, this created some tension in the household, but things smoothed over when June found out how much money they now had.

June and Tomas continued their marriage until they were both well into their fifties. One sunny day when Tomas was 54, he discovered that John Lennon had been killed. Being rather important news, it pushed other significant information from his brain. As he drove home, Tomas realized that he had forgotten how to make right turns in his car.

Unfortunately for Tomas, he veered left through into oncoming traffic and couldn't remember how to get back to his own lane. He soon had an unfortunate accident with a dump truck. Tomas, upon learning that the truck had hit him, immediately forgot how to breathe.

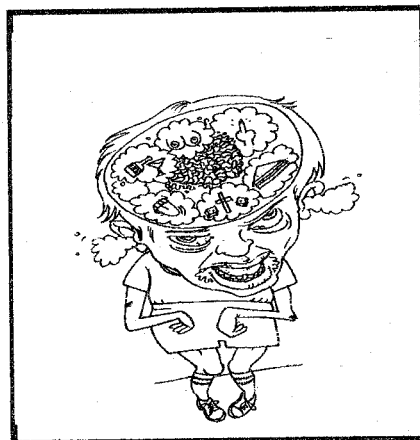


Image | Luis Alvarado

# Sweetness

Meredith Sladek

It was not the tentative fingertip taps I cautiously sounded on his bedroom door, nor the chirps of his Quaker parrot that roused him, but rather the startling jangle of the telephone that his mother quickly ended downstairs by answering the caller. Already wide awake for several hours, I rapped on his door once more with my fingers, gradually crescendoing to a few gentle but louder knocks. One hour earlier I feared waking him from his much-needed rest; now I took my cue from the squeak of the black cage door as he opened it to play with his restless and indignant bird. I stared at his own white-painted, closed, wooden door for a matter of seconds before he opened it, revealing his slender figure with a t-shirt and sweatpants on, bird on his right shoulder. Once carefully-combed the night before, his hair was now ruffled and stuck up completely on one side. His laughter countered mine as he saw the wilted flowers in my hairspray-caked tresses—the style that held amazingly even after an evening of dancing and a night of it being crushed on the pillows in his sister's room—and the dried-up and horribly smudged remnants of pastel makeup, naively but carefully applied to match my flowing formal the previous day. Still giggling, I reached up caressingly to smooth his hair; still giggling, he pulled away.

I followed him downstairs to his kitchen where the aroma of pancakes stole my breath. His mother hung up the phone and announced my mom's request of my departure after breakfast. We sat down at the wooden kitchen table with warm plates and slathered butter on the pancakes, which were spongy, and thick with blueberries. I looked up and laughed again at his smushed hair, while he poked fun at my mascara-rimmed eyes and my abundant glitter, which I was leaving traces of on everything I touched. I knew he was joking; I did not know that under all that, he still thought me beautiful. The cold milk washed down the light sweetness of the syrupy pancake, and I asked for another glass to prolong the meal. I watched him over its rim as I sipped. His bird waddled around to his other shoulder as he gently stroked its green and yellow tail feathers and fed it a bit of pancake from off his fork. I smiled sadly as our silverware clinked the bottoms of the empty plates, and the meal was over. I got my bag with my dress, and trudged reluctantly to the front door. Had he been old enough for a license he would have driven me home, but as it was, he walked me outside to my car. We thanked each other for the night and promised to meet again after the remainders of the evening had been washed away under a shower spray. In the haste of the temporary farewell I forgot to try to kiss him; later I learned it was unwanted, but also unnecessary.

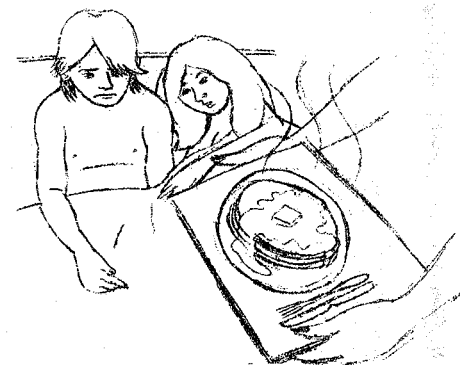


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# Gone Away

Jesse Collin Dowell

Jacquelyn Phillips stepped through the narrow hallway. Once she had enough room she started her strut again. The way her ass was moving any stranger would do all they could to fuck it, but she'd never fuck them, in fact she rarely talked to strangers. All the friends she has gathered in her 22 years alive had been introduced to her by other people.

Jacquelyn gathered plenty of experience during her young life. She knew most men loved her features, red hair that flowed to the small of her back, an hourglass shaped body, and legs that men hoped would never end. Her sexual charms were used when she had no other choice; mostly she relied on her intelligence. She was kind to everyone that crossed her path; though she realized most men just wanted to use her for a sexual prize. She had a perplexing problem at the moment. She wanted to have sex.

This would have been no problem; however, she did not want to just have sex, but to also have an orgasm with a particular man. She could not tell if he was playing with her or if he was completely unable to read a woman's needs.

Weaving her way through the crowded party Jacquelyn spotted him. He was nothing special to look at: 5'11", slightly toned muscles, dark brown hair. What turned Jacquelyn on to him was his not too brainy common sense wisdom. She turned on everything she had. She wore a skimpy dress and stockings; she heard he had a fetish for them from his ex-girlfriend.

Her body worked overtime to produce pheromones to get him to scent her out.

Daniel was sitting on a couch in the middle of the room. Surrounding him were several other men or as Jacquelyn thought of them, boys. There were cards and money on the table. Some of the boys were playing poker, but he was not. Instead he was pouring some beer into a glass. The foam rose quickly and he wiped his finger across his nose; then he placed his finger in the foam and swirled it around a little. The foam dissipated suddenly.

"Why do you do that?" one of the poker players asked.

"Helps breakdown the head," He stated matter-of-factly.

Daniel turned his head toward Jacquelyn. His half-toned farmer's muscles tightened, his brown hair curled tighter when he saw her. His jaw almost dropped. He stopped it though. He couldn't help but to compare her to Helen of Troy.

"Who was she looking for?" he wondered. He had never known her to act like the way she was, and his body couldn't help but to want her.

"Must be the stockings," he thought.

Jacquelyn slid into the seat next to Daniel. She gazed deeply into his eyes. He was briefly taken back and panic filled his clear blue eyes, which immediately begun to dart around, but shot back at Jacquelyn. Quickly he composed himself. He always made it a point not to let his emotions get the better of him.

"What's wrong, Daniel?" Jacquelyn asked.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Daniel timidly asked back.

"Because there is something I want, but I can't seem to be able to get it," she said calmly.

"Go get it then. I never knew you to have trouble getting what you want," Daniel's tone was anxious and his voice wavered slightly.

"I am afraid that there might be bad side effects if I'm not careful, because I'm not sure what I want reciprocates the feeling."

Daniel's lack of understanding was not daftness. Instead he was greatly in love with the goddess next to him and had been since they were freshmen in the university, but was afraid that she did not want him and that he would ruin their friendship. That love opened his eyes to life, but now blinded him of the present situation.

"Jaci, if you want a man here, the let me tell you this, you can have any man here, but few men deserve you."

"Dan, the man I want deserves me a thousand times over. I just wish you would understand that," Jacquelyn whispered into Daniel's ear.

Jacquelyn stood up and displayed her long-legged strut as she walked away from Daniel. Once again, every man in the room directed their eyes to Jacquelyn's thoroughbred ass. With each step she prayed he received her message and promise. She was so deep in thought she didn't notice the wolf whistle as

she left the room.

As she left the party she glanced back, but did not see Daniel behind her. She bowed her head. Why did he have to be so thick headed, she silently cursed at God. Jacquelyn glared up at the stars above her and trembled. At first she thought it was from rage, but then realized how cold she was. She started to rub her arms and was about to go back inside.

A coat suddenly draped it self over her wide shoulders. She turned around and looked into the deep crystal blue eyes she had lost herself in hundreds of times.

"It's cold out here," replied Daniel's deep voice. "I would hate for an angel to catch a cold."

"Thank you," was all she could choke out.

With that act of kindness and warmth she forgave God for the man before her.

She begged God that she was awake when his lips touched hers.

"Let's walk away," suggested Daniel in his calm thoughtful tone.

Jacquelyn and Daniel started to walk down the street together. She was leaning into him as they walked along. His arm was draped around her body holding her tight as his hand reach down to rub her hips and feel the silk of her stockings. Jacquelyn no longer had to strut her ass. She got what she wanted; she was to get the touch she needed inside her. In a moment the two souls were gone away with each other to become one.

# George & Laura in Bed

Larry Iles

Ten p.m.

RING, RING!! "Aw, Honey, who the hell's phoning now! Don't they damn know Born-Again, as Karl tells me ton constantly remind them damn mid west voter suckars, I am, that I'm supposed to be abed by now away from Blair, whoops, I mean the Lawd!"

Reply, angrily, by keep-in-shape. Laura, "Aah cease your whining, you wino, I know yah not really reading that first world war UK military mid-east chaplains god-is-on-just-our-side shit, yah told Tony phoney yah were, but savoring that Tennessee old bourbon instead. Anyways, Babyface non-innocent Georgie, its your Mummy, Barbie, and from sound of 'Burp' her sounds as if she needs herself to revisit rehab as yah know she can't even handle apple-wine anymore than your dada his mid-west, ugh, broccoli!"

Twelve a.m.

RING, RING!! "What the Texas shot-duck now! Who the hell is it, this, Devil hour, I've finally turned shut-eye! What, Tony, hell, don't you limeys ever give up, yah know what time it is here in this, thank god, Afro-American Democrat unruled D.C.!? (After lectures from Blair on how 'in-articulate' he had sounded about the anti-terror war 'press conference' in London and why hadn't Blair received his Reagan jelly beans, as Maggie Thatcher always had in Gulf War I for UK Fuck-All

services we rendered USS warships beneath deck?)

"Well, yah, Tony, hell, I knows yah feel our troops in Saddam's land don't know 'how to fight' but what else am I supposed to do, Man! I can't Vietnam it the way Don Rumsfeld's protégé boss Nixon did! These are country National Guard out there, yah know, sometimes shooting their own feet to git back to Missou! And you and I both know both Bin and Saddam are more than real-time Iraqi effective resistance alive. 'Hallo hallo' as you gawd damn limies really say!"

Five a.m.

RING, RING!! (After giving Laura at last, enfin, some Royal poker Texas style bed attention, none of that effeminate Clinton-

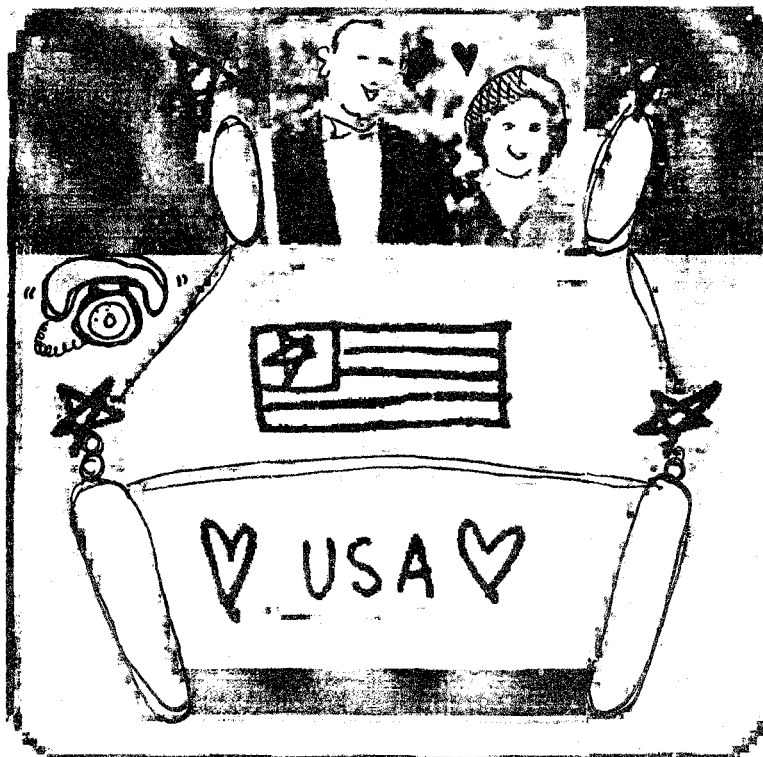
Lewinsky un-american "Frenchie" Democrat stuff!) "Ah mah lawd, DADDY, DID YAA TOO JUST RING? NOPE, YAH DIDN'T? THANK GAWD, I THOUGHT IT WAS CHENEY'S AIDES AGIN! SUPRESSING YET ANOTHER HEART ATTACK ON THAT OLD FOSSIL YAH INSISTED ON 'V-PEEING' ME WITH, OVER SOME DAMN HALLIBURTON IRAQ, OUR BOMBS RECON CONTRACT, THE FOOL INVESTED, CEO EX-IN!"

Eight a.m.

White House Press Conference, TV make-up room. "Laura, for gawd's sake quit that lower-lip redstick rouge on me! I know it does something for you when yah reading me those Russian kids'

fairy tale books they gave yah last time we wus in Russky, but mah Baptist macho-mid-western voters like me plain White and flag decent! Besids, last nite was so thrillin' that too much rouge might give them voter suckars the impression that all I do is chill out on tha phone all nite... But aah honey, don't cry, I know yah mean well, and like yah secret Georgie Baby face Draggie! But tell yah what after this drama press conference is all overa, yah can black-face grease-paint me instead if yah want on trip on Air Force One down on Texas ranch Daddy bought to duck-hunt! Hell, them here voters are so gullible they might think I've shot, in real-work Saddam or Bin!"

As told to Larry Iles



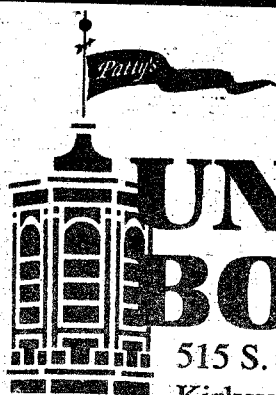
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# Fishing Gone

William Romine

One hot, July day, in 1984, I think it was, I was locked away in my house. My wife was away at her N. O. W. meeting and my kids were driving me crazy. Near the brink of madness, I decided to brave the hot weather and go fishing. I grabbed my wooden fishing pole and black tackle box and rushed out the door.

My surroundings looked a bit different than I had remembered, though they were beautiful nonetheless. I stood in awe as I took a gander at the vast, deep-green dome spreading above my head while its high, western sun filled my eyes with a radiant purple glow.

Its indigo-colored corona was partially blotted out by the kangaroos flying in their familiar V-formation. As I started walking, I turned my head toward my neighbor's house to see his tall blue grass waving in the wind while a black bushy shrub scattered the shimmer of violet reflecting from her aluminum screen door. Finally, my eyes wandered down my rough red driveway to see a bubbling orange pond beckoning to me. Its dock bounced lightly atop the boiling fluid, looking like a rectangular version of the surrounding trees, a black silhouette on the water.

Seeing all this, I was really eager to fish. I hurried onto the dock and cast my line into the water. It was quite interesting how the runny liquid swallowed the plastic frog at the end of my line. It spit the poor frog into the moist air six times before it finally plopped below the surface.

Minutes later, I felt a distinct tug on my line. I reeled it in to find a small puce fish



Image | Luis Alvarado

dangling off my lure. Upon becoming fatigued from flopping from my grip, it came to rest on the dock. Its mouth moved. "Hey, these lures taste pretty good," it said in a slow, scratchy voice, "how about you try one." Though a talking fish wasn't a familiar sight, I still listened to its compelling words. I looked to the sky and scratched my shaggy head. If fish liked these lures so much, they probably do taste pretty good, I thought. Besides, my wife always told me to try new things. Maybe she actually knows what she's talking about. After a minute of pondering, I grabbed the parched fish, unhooked it, threw it back into the water, and voraciously munched the plastic frog off the end of my line. "Wow!" I ejaculated. "It does taste pretty good—like a gummy candy with an organic tinge!" A welling of satisfaction arose in my chest while I laboriously chewed my lure, admiring the black images of the tall trees surrounding the pond. They shifted to and fro amidst the intense heat the surrounding pool spewed.

A feeling of despair wracked me once I ingested my lure, but it died quickly when I turned to my tackle box, seeing that I had fifty more to eat. I'll tell you, it was a proverbial feast, and the best part is that I'd eaten nothing better in my life! My plastic and rubber lures speedily disappeared.

A few seconds after the end of my feast, sharp pains shot through my belly. A stream of red fluid shot from my mouth. I fell forward. A mighty splash erupted as I slammed face first against the hot dock. As my red hazy envelope grew dimmer, the glowing light of that furtive fish shone brighter and brighter. I now lay scattered about my back yard as a sprinkling of ash, but no such sprinkling of peace will ever make me glow, for each second, that fish's aura continues to brighten, providing a taunting reminder of how it used my twisted, ravenous greed to defeat me years ago.

This issue, we decided to skip My Back Pages, to give more space to our short story writers. Instead your getting a little squib from me on fist-love. But fear not! You have all of next semester and beyond to send submissions to countzachula@hotmail.com. Hmmm... long breaks from school sure are good for doing alot of free writing....

Get outta the way handshakes. Move over high-fives. The next generation of manual salutation is here, that's right, I'm talkin about fist-love. I picked up fist love from my Bivouac boys who claim they been poundin down since way back in the day in STL. The basic form of fist love is simple; you make a fist, the other person makes a fist, and you meet fist to fist in the middle. This isn't an aggressive thing. It's a "Hey, see ya later" thing or a simple way to say "Hello" or "What's up?" or to let somebody know you got their back. But what I really love about fist love is the infinite variations it can have. For instance: There is the fly-by-fist-love where two fists meet at the knuckles, both hands open on contact but continue on their trajectory. Me and Tommy have patented the "Inverted Fly-By-Fist-Love" which is, of course, fly-by fist love with fists inverted, (thumb on the bottom). Fist love is usually administered with the right hand of each participant, but you can always adjust your own settings. Me and Eco Dave also have the patented Uppercut Fist Love where our palmsface up and we swing our arms way back, before meeting fist to fist in the middle. That's really all I got for ya. Fist love is a beautiful thing, so try it out with your friends. My hope is that fist love will one day Unite the World!! Hooray!! Okay, I'm out. Textual fist love. Peace. zach.

# Cotton Gin

Joe Pini

I was once invited to observe an engineering demonstration said to change the world of agriculture. As a prosperous tobacco farmer I found technology furthered profit towards the end of the 18th century.

The demonstration began with a lifeless lecture from the awkward hook nosed, balding inventor. Fellow patrons sighed as the dry oration exhausted our attentions and emulated sleepy narcotics. I usually try to be polite at public gatherings but I, with a fatiguing yawn, bubbled forth a bit of wit:

I'm astounded by your claims Mr. Whitney. But as fast and efficient as your invention may be, I wonder how willing people will be to drink cotton gin?

Onlookers gave lively laughs as old Eli grimaced, befuddled, unaccustomed to embarrassing banter. When finally he recomposed himself, and his chuckling audience was leaving, Eli stepped from his platform and fumed:

Sir, your remark has hurt my pride and dissuaded my would-be benefactors. I demand retribution.

Feeling a tad sorry for the man, I ventured a fitting wager to match my invention against his. If his proved the superior, I would financially sponsor another presentation and invest thousands in his creation. Otherwise he'd pay to promote mine. He seemed confident enough and shook my hand to seal the bet.

Eli was undoubtedly convinced that the gin which I fancied was, too, a sundering tool for cotton. To his surprise, I would, instead continue my humorous jest and contrive a gin of my own.

With the tastiest juniper berries, cinnamon, and cassia bark I could buy, my own wheat gin was a proud concoction. I woke one morning, amused at the image I dreamed of old Eli in his cellar, brewing cotton and rye in a bathtub.

When I again met old Eli for the challenge, his gin separated as much seed and lint in an hour that a team of men could pull in a day. Mine on the other hand left the team of workers inebriated and unable to work for the rest of the afternoon. Undoubtedly defeated, I sponsored another demonstration and invested in his machine.

Unfortunately, Eli made no profit from his gin. It seems observers from the first demonstration built and sold imitation cotton gins during the weeks Eli and I were settling our dispute.

We were both bankrupt months later.