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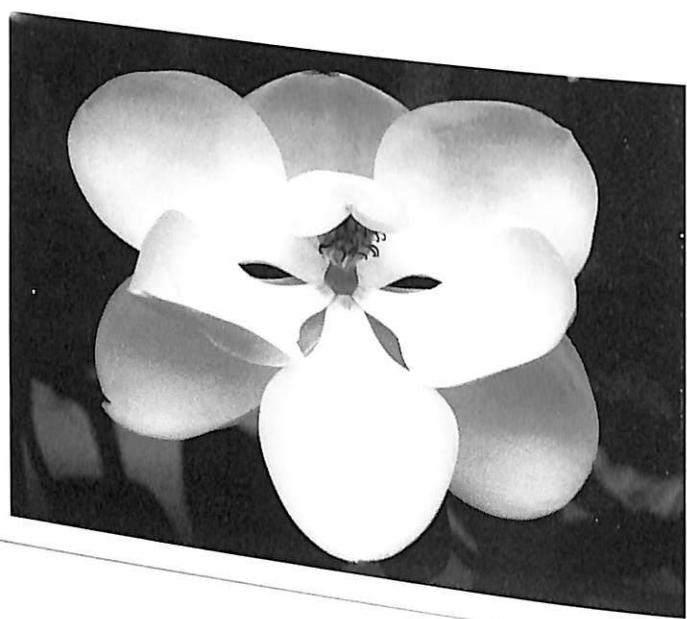
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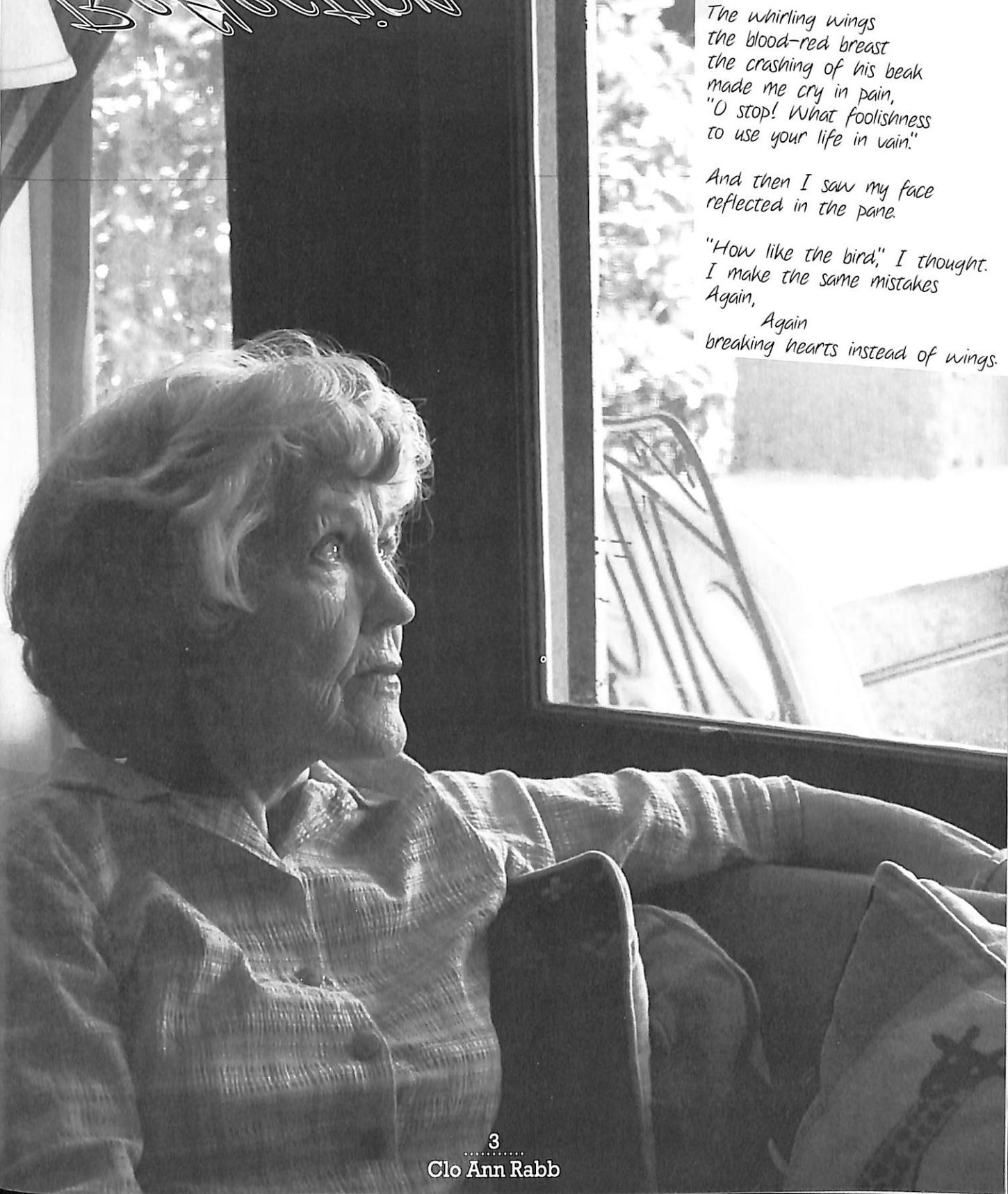
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Reflection

Refraction



Today I saw a Cardinal
Fly against my window pane
a hundred times or more,
a frantic, harried thing.

The whirling wings
the blood-red breast
the crashing of his beak
made me cry in pain,
"O stop! What foolishness
to use your life in vain."

And then I saw my face
reflected in the pane.

"How like the bird," I thought.
I make the same mistakes
Again,

Again
breaking hearts instead of wings.

Life

As I walk through the valley
Of the shadow of death

I have no certain distinctive path
I am not a drifter but I walk alone,
I fear no evil which every day I am shown.
I am set apart from all the others

Knowing deep inside my few true brothers.

As I walk along
This path before me.

I realize it is a
Written story

As I turn from page to page
I realize I am the same as everyone
in his eyes.

Although life is tough and it is of course a battle,
I have no choice but to hop on the saddle.
I shall not cower nor run and hide, but

Get ready for a thrilling ride.

Although this path I cannot see,
I know its beginning is right before me.

I shall accept life's challenges
The best I can and learn to accept a helping hand.

I shall seek the truth and my destiny.

As to not let my anger get the best of me.

Suns will set and suns will rise.

I will say hellos

As well as goodbyes.

My character will rise and will not melt.

As I play the cards that life has dealt.

I shall not wonder

And I shall not ponder

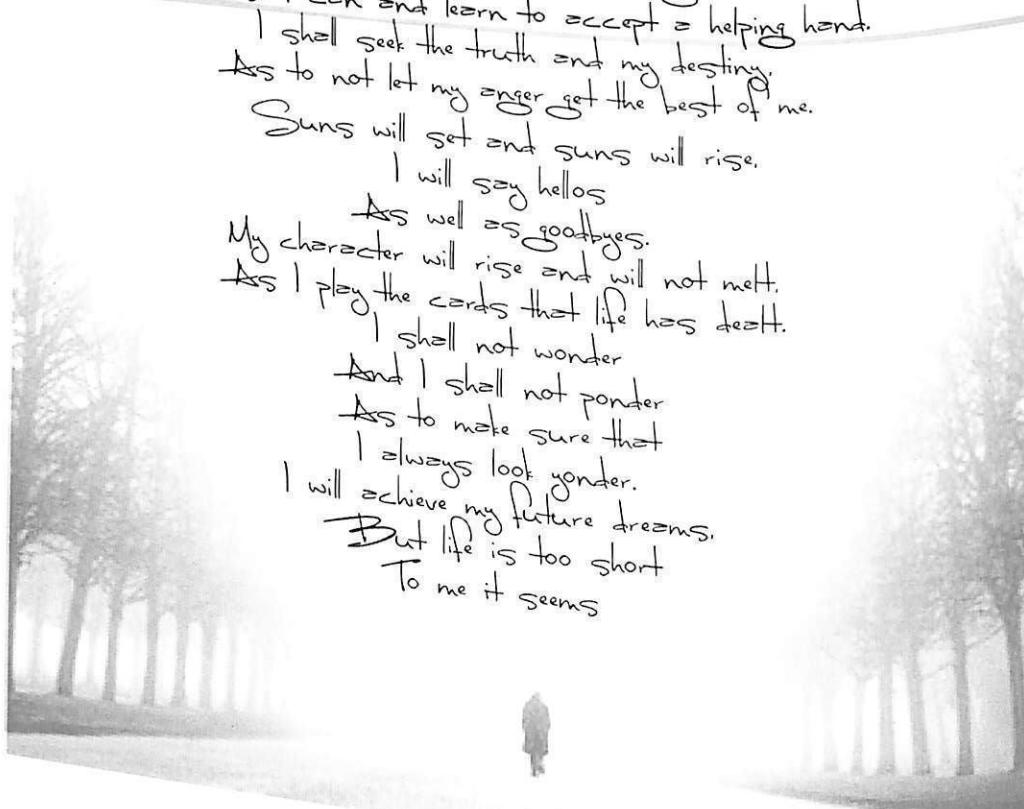
As to make sure that

I always look yonder.

I will achieve my future dreams.

But life is too short

To me it seems







Without Elysian Fields

*In praise we sing of you medulla oblongata.
In praise we sing of you for without you we are notta.
You make our rivers and our streams,
Our kings and queens and fairy dreams.
The octopus, the kangaroo.
The grass that's green, the ocean's blue.
Without you now what would we do?*

*Ubiquitous ubiquinone,
Solicitous is silicone.
Tramps so dear to the heart,
Round the pits in cherry tarts.
And always, always day and night
Drudging with us in our plight,
And water, water still's everywhere
Though Coleridge is no longer there.
And Poe's crow lives on in our mind,
Though he is in forgotten time.
And bells and bells in jubilation,
And tintinab in nabby nations.
And down and down went Ezra Pound
In St. Elizabeth's he was found.*

*Medulla Dulla Oblongotta
Without you there
Would be no notta.
Et cum spiritu tuo
The last event of the circus show.*

*Sarah, Sarah, Cerebellum
Without you there would be no heaven.
No little feet would pitter patter,
The world it simply would not matter.
And General Booth while oh so clever.
Would have no drum for his endeavor.
Now Carl is gone and passed this way;
Yet, "Pigeons" scarf mist is here to stay.
And Edwin's "Flood" has left a drought,
And Robert's "Two Roads" converge our doubts.*

*And when you lay me down to sleep
Trembling, trembling at my feet
And Gay's gay song repeats, repeats.
Now slumber, slumber, retreat, retreat
Into Puck's dreams and fairyslands,
Carbuncular my wasteland hands.*

*That too, too red rock, that Roc
That rises from desert devotion,
The ocean without motion,
Love's lost emotion,
Eros is Turnos,
Yet, "When half gods go,"
While the world remains round,
Life becomes again flat.*





My Conversations With George

Many, many years ago, I guess I was about 9 or 10 years old, my father came home from work with a small, black, furry ball in his pocket. He took the furry ball out of his pocket and put it on the floor. At first I thought it was the pair of black woolen gloves that my mother had knitted for him, but then I realized that it was too fuzzy for gloves. My father said, "He's all yours. You take good care of him or back he goes."

What was this strange thing? I got down on the floor and put my face close to it. That's when I saw the small black spot buried in the fur. The spot was even darker than the fuzzy ball. It looked like a tiny nose but I couldn't be sure. I decided that the only way to see if it was a nose was to touch it. I reached out my finger and very slowly moved it toward the small black spot. You had to be very careful with things that you didn't understand. For all you know it could be a bug or worse yet a snake's mouth.

Finally, I touched it. It was cold and wet and then I knew it had to be a nose. Suddenly two black eyes appeared in the fur. They were even blacker than the nose, if that was possible. We stared at each other for a while and then slowly a pink mouth appeared in what seemed to be a long yawn. Slowly the fuzzy black ball unrolled. First a small leg appeared. Then another. Two ears poked out of the fur and finally two more legs. Slowly the fuzz ball turned into the tiniest puppy that I had ever seen. The most amazing thing about the puppy was his tail. Now this was a black, black, black dog. The blackest dog I had ever seen. He had black eyes and a black nose. In fact the only thing about him that was not black was his small pink tongue. But when I looked closer I saw that at the very tip of his tail he had exactly five white hairs. So you couldn't really say that the dog was all black. But I said it anyway.

The little puppy and I stared at each other for a long, long time. Then the puppy, in an obvious attempt to make friends, stood up and waddled toward me. You couldn't call it a walk because his legs were so short. It was really more of a wobbly waddle. He put his nose against mine and sniffed three times. I guess I smelled OK because next he licked my nose. With that, I knew that we would be the best of friends.

First things first. I had to give the dog a name. You couldn't call a handsome pup like him Spot or Fido or Hey You Dog. His name had to be something special. Something that befit him. Now it just so happened that in school that very day we had been reading about the father of our country, George Washington. I thought that George Washington was a brave and good man. He led our country through a war that set us free and then became the first president. I called, "Hey George Washington" but the dog just lay there. Finally I called George and that pup got to his feet and nodding his head he came to me. I knew that this was the perfect name for him and from that day forward pup became George.

Raising that little guy was a snap. He knew from the very first day what he was allowed to do and what he was not allowed to do. He always went outside whenever he had to go to the bathroom. He never jumped on the couch when my mother or father was around and he only barked if he heard a stranger coming or if he wanted to go out.

Yes, that little dog and I grew up together.

One hot and lazy summer day when I was about 12, George and I lay in the backyard under a shady tree. I was daydreaming about what I would do that summer vacation. George seemed to be dreaming too. Then I heard a voice, it said, "Let's go swimming." I opened my eyes and looked around. I thought one of my friends had come into the yard but there was no one there except of course George. Then the voice said again, "Let's go swimming." It was George. He was the one who said let's go swimming. I stared at him for a long time not believing my ears. Then George said, "What's the matter? Didn't you ever hear a dog talk before?"

I just couldn't believe what I was hearing. My dog George was talking to me. When I got over my amazement I asked George where he had learned to talk. That's when he told me that all dogs could talk but that people just never gave them a chance to. He said that he had learned to talk by watching TV. He said he especially liked the cooking shows but that they always made him hungry.

Hey, I have a talking dog. I wanted to call all my friends and tell them but George said no, he would not talk to anyone but me. I paid no attention and called my best friend Henry and told him to come right over and that I had a surprise to show him. A few minutes later Henry came into my yard. I said, "Listen to this, George can talk. Come on George say something for Henry." George just lay there with a hurt look in his eyes. He said nothing. I tried a few more times to coax George to say something but he wouldn't. Finally Henry went back home and I was again alone with George.



*"Slowly the
fuzz ball
turned into the
tiniest puppy
that I had ever seen."*



"Why wouldn't you talk to Henry," I asked. George said that he only talked to his very best friend, me, and that he would not talk to anyone else. This was terrible. I had a talking dog that would only talk to me. "It's not fair," I told George. George said, "Would you rather I just stop talking to you too? I can if you want me to." Well George had me there. I sure didn't want him to talk to any of my friends.

That's how I learned that George could talk and after that George and I would often talk but only when we were alone. I never let on to my parents that George could talk and they never caught on to it.

As I said before, George loved to watch the cooking shows. He would tell me about the wonderful dishes that they cooked and how he wished that he could taste them. That's when we cooked up a plan of our own. I would tell my mother that I would love for her to cook some special dish for me. Then when it was ready, I would always give George a big helping when my mother wasn't looking. George and I agreed that mother was the best cook ever.

George and I talked a lot about school. I didn't care much for school but George said that I should go every day and tell him what I had learned. In this way George would end up as smart as me. I couldn't let George down so I went every day and listened carefully to Mrs. Newmeyer, my teacher, so I could tell George all that I had learned. George and I would study together and little by little I found that I really liked to learn new things. George smiled when I told him this and then I knew that he was really studying with me so that I would understand the lessons better.

Every summer we went to visit my grandparents who lived on a farm. I had great fun running through the fields chasing the cows. George called me aside and said that he had been talking to the cows and they did not like being chased. It was hot and all that running around made them too tired to give milk. I was surprised to hear that George could talk cow. George told me that he had picked up the language on his last visit to the farm. I asked if he could speak any other languages and he said yes he could talk a little pig and also some sheep. I asked if he could talk chicken and he said no, "Chickens don't really talk they just squawk at each other."

One day my friend Henry and I had a big fight. Well not really a fight, we didn't hit each other we just yelled a lot. Henry went home and I vowed never to speak to him again. That night George asked how my day was. I told him about the fight with Henry and how I was sorry that we were no longer friends. George said, "Why don't you call him, I bet he is as sorry as you are." But I said, "No way, let him call me first." This fight went on for two days. Each evening George would say, "Call Henry, you will feel a lot better if you make friends with him again." Finally George pulled me over to the phone and said, "Call him now, we are not going to bed until you talk with him." Finally I dialed his number. His mother answered and I asked if I could speak to Henry. She told me that Henry was very sad that we had argued and that he very much wanted to speak to me too. Henry came to the phone and I said I was sorry that we had fought and that I wanted to be his friend again. Henry said he was sorry too. We again became the best of friends and never argued again. George said, "See, all it takes is a little phone call to make everyone feel better again."

One cold winter day my mother got a phone call. She started to cry and told me that my grandmother had died. I really didn't understand death but I felt very sad because I saw that my mother was sad. I asked George what he knew about death. He told me that my grandmother, who he liked very much, was old and that parts of her just wore out. He told me that everything had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Grandmother was at the end of her life. I was at the beginning of my life and he was somewhere in between. "I'm older than you," I said, "how can I be at the beginning and you in the middle of life." He explained that dogs age much quicker than people and that for every year I lived, he lived seven years. He pointed out that most dogs only lived to about twelve which was really 84 in people years. "Not to worry though," he said, "we still have a lot of good years ahead of us."

I could go on and on about my conversations with George. We talked every day about everything that you can imagine. As we both grew older I knew that George would not be with me for much longer. He had a hard time moving around and spent most of his days sleeping in the sun. We talked about what I would do without George to confide in. George explained that as I grew older I would someday meet someone who I would feel right at home with and if I were really lucky that person would marry me. He hoped that my children would be lucky enough to have their own conversations with a dog. He said that I should always leave the TV on for the dog and always tuned to the cooking shows. Maybe, just maybe, another dog would come into their lives.

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"Redheads - A Dying Breed"





I'm a redhead. This fact makes me part of a dying breed. I always knew that red hair was not the norm, rather rare actually, but I never realized that we were heading for extinction. That is, until I spotted an article in National Geographic entitled "Red Alert" that was illustrated with a photo of long, frizzy red curls cascading across the glossy page. Apparently, "true redheads will be extinct by 2100, since carriers of the carrot-top gene are less and less likely to pair up in an age of global intermingling (a child usually needs a copy from each parent to get the red result)."

I liken people to cows for a solution. You breed selectively to get the traits you want in a bovine, and the same must be true for people. So, I can add the requirement of having red hair to the long list of must-haves in a husband. Looks like my prospects of getting married and producing any children at all, much less redheaded kiddos, just went down another notch. And since most people marry for love instead of hair color, can't count on the rest of the world either.

Why worry about preserving the red? I believe there are definite advantages to being a redhead. Red is a shade that is bold, eye catching, hot, beautiful. It stands out.

They say that blonds have more fun, but do blonds never turn gray until they're ten years from death or until a natural disaster that takes the equivalent of fifty years off their life strikes? I think not. Plus, we redheads are smart. Bright red hair equals bright brains. You never hear about dumb redheads. Who cares if we're said to have a temper to match our hair. If all your kind were predicted to be dead in less than one hundred years, you'd need to stand up for yourself and be tough too.

Red hair also comes in handy when you're in a crowded area or hurrying through the mall. When someone calls out "Hey, redhead!" you can be pretty sure they're talking to you, and it won't be stupid for you to turn around and see what they want.

Being a redhead is obviously quite fashionable as well. The National Geographic article stated that \$123 million was spent last year in the United States on—guess what—red hair dye.

Selective breeding, toughness—who knows....maybe we stand a chance. If not, the other fact from that article proves that redheads will last—redheads with blond, brunette, black, or gray roots, that is.

DAWN BOOK

This life you have recently learned to live is taken from you
Or more or less, ratified

Actually, that life was never here to begin with
Life is never real, neither hope, neither love, neither joy
Will you miss it?

Will you miss something you never had?

Your dreams are now your life,

and your life will never get the chance to live

Your dreams are the reality in your virtually lifeless world
The people you think you know now
will soon become merely images

created obviously by your own mind

These people, rather images,

will have no significant meaning to you

You repeatedly try to remember,

but it just isn't there -

the memories they say you should have

the good times you all shared

You thought you were normal,

but looking around,

you now think otherwise

But why couldn't you be normal

And everyone else be the crazy ones?

For who actually has the power

to say exactly what normal is?

You look at all the unrecognizable hurting faces

and wonder what the cause

You couldn't have done it,

since you have no memory of ever doing anything

You don't recall this room,

or for that matter, this house,

even though you feel as you should

But your only memory,

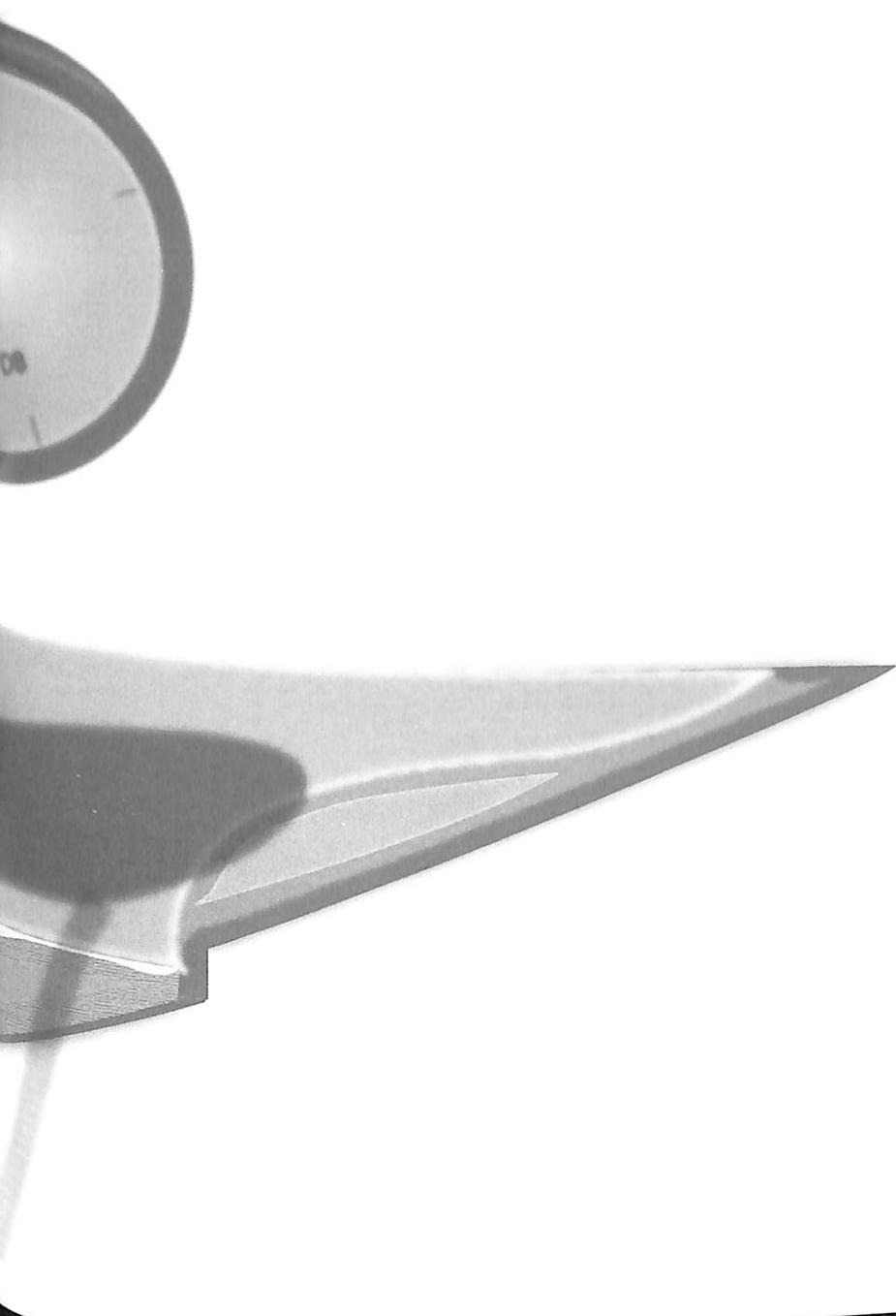
is the second you walked in this room

But why did you stagger into this room?

There must have been something you wanted...

Ah, yes, this best seller book-

"How to Lose Bad Memories by Hypnosis"





Overalls

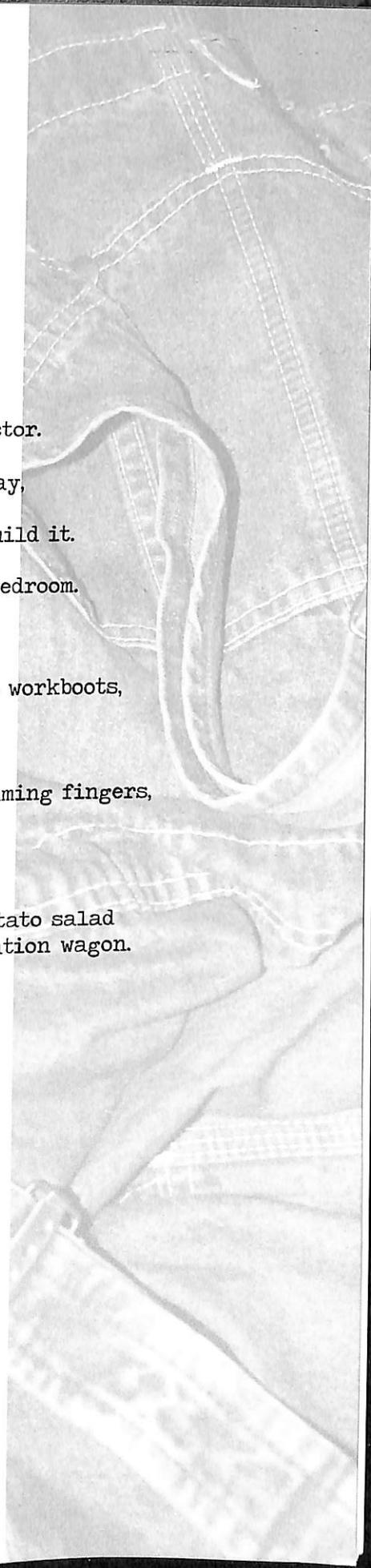
I sit cross-legged on the carpet
One by one, pair by pair,
I am folding the faded, barbed-wire chewed overalls
that Grandaddy had walked through the summer grass in.

I smooth a hand over a grass stain
not even Granny's Clorox could scour.
These overalls were a sacrifice
to his struggles with the rake, the baler, and the Deutz tractor.
Perhaps he wore these when he patched something
with haystring or duct tape well enough to get by for the day,
unconcerned about the fact that later,
Dad or my uncle, swearing, would be forced to replace or rebuild it.

Suddenly it seems the honey-colored smell of hay fills the bedroom.
I remember Grandaddy walking without his canes
through fields of hay in windrows like
skeins of gold twisted by Rumplestiltskin's magic wheel.
A man tougher than the sun-dried, mud-covered leather of his workboots,
as tied to the land as the spreading oak
out in the pasture where grumbling bees make honey.

In days when the sound tried to touch the hayhands with flaming fingers,
they built a pyramid as proud as Kufu's
on the unsteady backs of orange metal trailers.
They were summer days
when men sat under the shade of creek-bank beeches,
drank beer and complimented my mother and Granny on the potato salad
and the baked beans they served from the back of a Chevy station wagon.
They were haymaking days,
when my cousins and I played in shallow, cool water
watching the mirage of a tractor pull the mountain of hay.
He would be supervising it all,
driving the rake as it made bahaia-grass tornadoes
that calmed into neat sun-golden trails
the slower New Holland baler could travel.

The scent fades with the memory
and I stare at the pile of oil-stained denim before me.
As I reach for another pair,
I think of the cast-off smell of the chambered nautilus
who leaves its rigidity for roomier spaces.
I suppose he simply outgrew these.
Maybe he walks the gold-green of a late summer evening
when the sun kisses the drying grass.



RESCUING BEN

I'd wanted to go east, but was traveling west. For six months three friends and I plotted our "girls only" jaunt to Savannah. We made reservations at a wonderful historical Country Inn, just down the street from the park bench where Forrest Gump became famous.

"I don't believe it! What do you mean, you can't go?"

Angie's reaction was exactly what I expected. I couldn't face the truth with her.

"My brother, you know, he lives in Louisiana. He's sick. It's an emergency; I have to go see about him. Will you call the others? I'm so sorry."

I lied. Oh yes, my brother was sick. He'd vomited on Melissa's new Persian rug, after he got drunk and crashed her red corvette.

So I pulled into the west bound lane of Interstate 59, heading in the opposite direction of Forrest Gump's park bench. How many times had I scrapped all my plans to run and rescue Ben? It started the day he turned fourteen, when Mamma caught him sharing a six-pack with his friends. From that day on Ben was my charge. She'd say, "Come straight home from school; keep an eye on your brother." As he grew older, there was always some kind of episode. At Christmas time his place at the table would be empty and we'd visit him in jail. On New Year's Eve all plans would be canceled if Ben was home smelling like Jack Daniels.

The years passed this way until Ben married and moved away. Mom and I hoped Melissa would be his savior. She took my charming brother into her world—a house in perfect order with books alphabetically arranged on the shelves and immaculate closets. Each spring she discarded everything that no longer proved useful and called the Salvation Army to pick it up. She tried desperately for nine years to fit Ben into her orderly world—it didn't work. Now I was summoned like the Salvation Army.

My thoughts wandered back to the little red-faced, squinty-eyed baby that Mamma brought home from the hospital. My observation had been, "Mamma, he cries too much, maybe you better take him back." But I found myself peering into his crib, just watching him sleep. Sometimes I'd wake my little brother and pull him out of bed to play, pretending he was my doll. He grew into a little ball of energy, dancing on the kitchen table, falling off and breaking his collarbone. I can still see the grin on his face the day he first rode my bicycle—his sandy hair flying in the wind, his legs so short he could barely reach the pedals.

A sign warning of roadwork ahead pulled me back into the present. As traffic slowed to a crawl, I looked ahead toward the edge of the road where movement engaged my eye. Someone lay sprawled across the grassy slope, bare feet protruding from ragged jeans. As my car inched closer the man shifted to a sitting position, revealing a bushy gray beard and stringy hair falling across bare, sun-burned shoulders. A quick glint of sunlight bounced off a bottle as he lifted it to his mouth. After taking a long



swallow of a golden liquid, he wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and as I eased past, he threw me a bleary-eyed grin. I looked back at a pathetic, lone man clinging to a bottle. He had no shoes, no shirt, no companions, nothing. His attention was focused upon one thing—a bottle that would soon be empty. I gripped the steering wheel tightly as tears blurred my vision. I had just seen a snapshot of my brother's life.

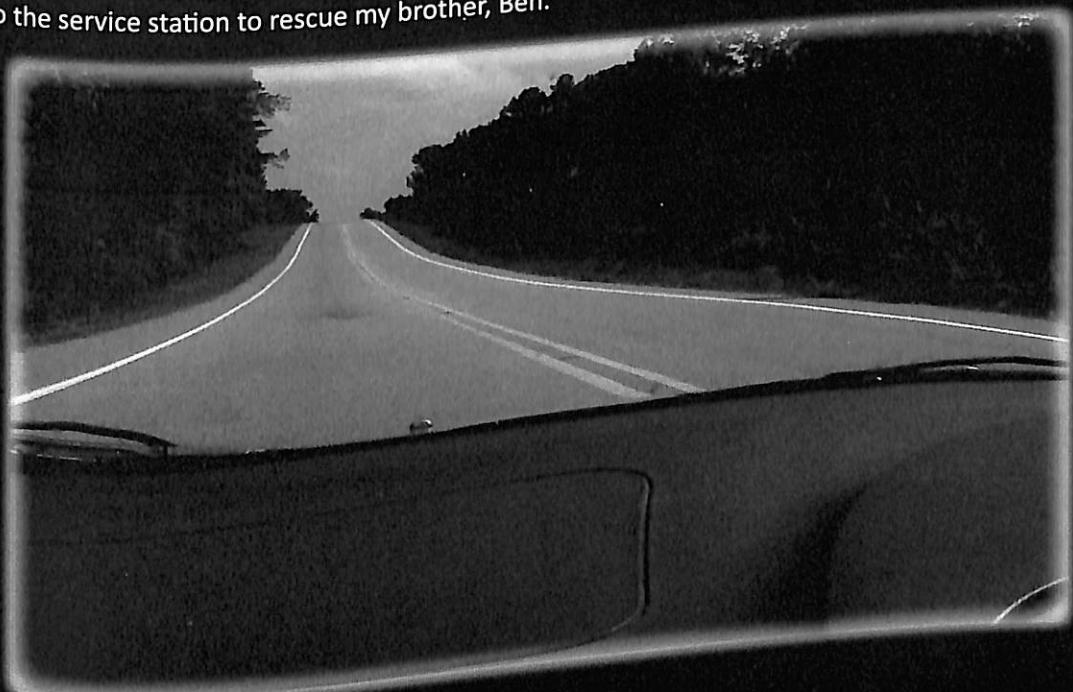
As the sun was setting, I drove the flat roads, looking out at cane fields, marshlands and tall oaks wrapped in gray moss. As darkness surrounded me, I longed to be anywhere but here on this lonely stretch of highway. What would I do when I got there? What would I say to a suicidal alcoholic?

Finally I found my exit, drove down a narrow street, past the Seven Eleven, the Piggly Wiggly, and over the wooden bridge crossing the bayou. Then I was in a subdivision, passing red brick houses, each one like the other. One, two, three, four, five, and there was Ben's house, looking so normal, his car in the driveway, lights on in the house.

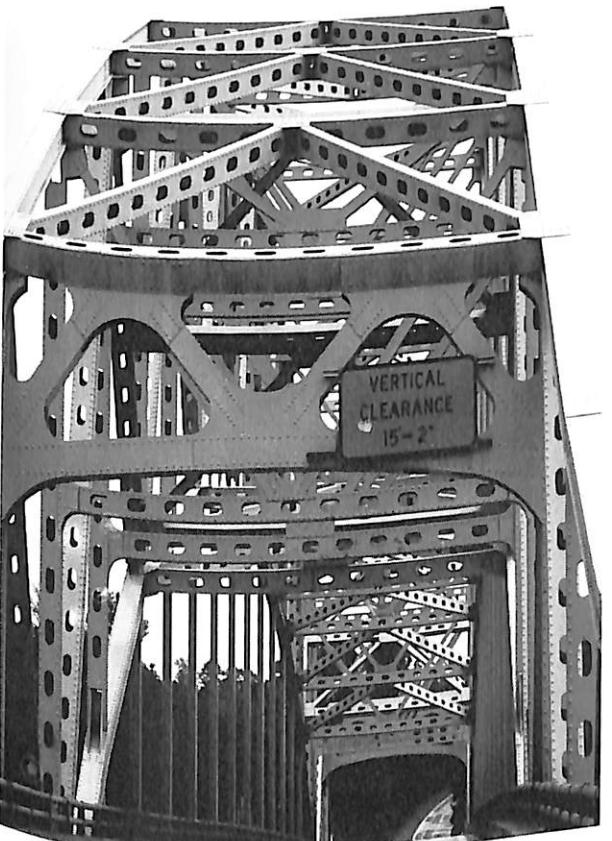
I called out. No answer. The knob turned easily in my hand. I tip-toed in and called Ben's name again. The only reply was the dull rotation of the ceiling fan above me. I eased down the lighted hallway and peered into the bedroom. Ben's boots sat beside the bed and a shirt hung crookedly from the doorknob. I eased from room to room searching, finding no sign of struggle, no evidence of tragedy. On completing my investigation, I crumpled into a trembling heap on Melissa's new rug and sobbed.

The Gator Stop was a storm-washed shack, perched high upon stilts at the edge of the bayou. I parked between two pick-up trucks, locked the car and walked through the shadowy parking lot and up creaky stairs. A dozen male faces turned toward me as I entered a dimly-lit room. I stood like an alien, inhaling a heavy cloud of smoke as my eyes searched the small, crowded room. I cleared my throat, but my words came out like timid bird-chirps: "Has any one seen Ben Matthews?" The twang of country music drowned my effort. Once again I cleared my throat and tried desperately to assert myself. A stocky man with gray side-burns leaned out from his barstool and shook his head, giving me a mute "no." I made my way out and hurried down the steps. As I reached the bottom, the door reopened behind me sending a set of heavy feet creaking after me. I broke into a run, fumbling for my keys. Then a raspy, female voice turned me around, "Ben Matthews—he ain't been here tonight."

I fell into the driver's seat, locked my doors, and sat until my legs stopped trembling. Then I drove slowly through the streets searching. At midnight I gave up and turned back toward the subdivision. As I passed a darkened gas station, a figure staggered out from behind the building. I saw a stumbling man—a street bum, like the homeless men who sleep under bridges on rainy nights. I turned my car around and pulled into the service station to rescue my brother, Ben.



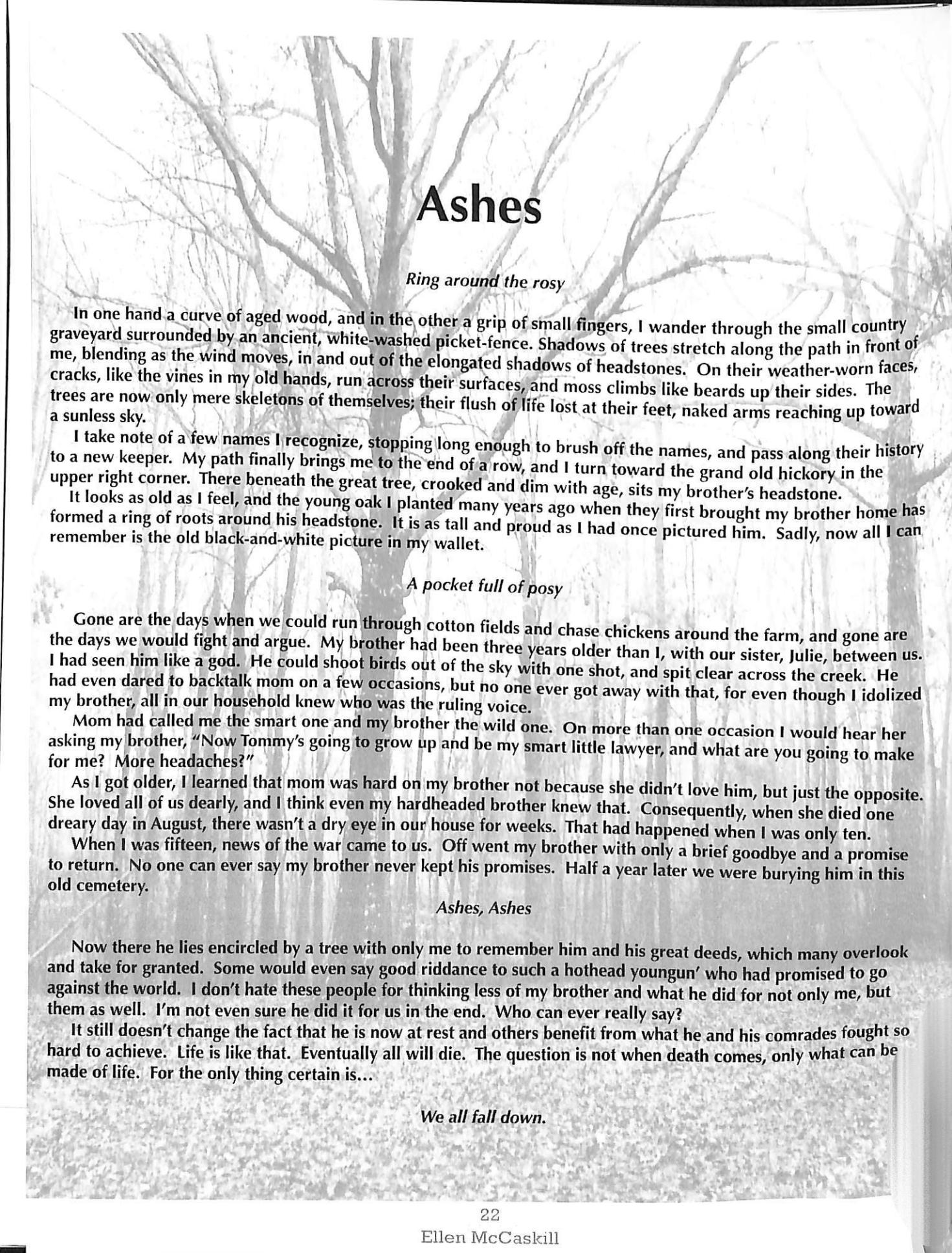




From Tippah to Leflore, three Mississippi voices, Sisters Yalobusha, Yazoo, and you, move through the red clay, foothills, piney woods, and fields of sweet clover where cattle graze in sultry southern heat. Morning Glories praise you. Springtime prepares its pallet of pink lousewort, yellow stargrass, and blue celestial lilies, tattoos winter's naked limbs. Come summer, Queen Anne's Lace, hemlock, and king cotton clothe your borders in summer snow. Long before the white man drove his fist into your chest, you, Rock of Waters, quenched the thirst of Choctaws and Chickasaws, gave up your bream and Buffalo Fish to fill their bellies, guided their canoes upon your winding watery spine.

Called shallow and insignificant, you proved us all wrong by rising up, washing away what man had tried to destroy. You even made Mattie Delaney sing the blues. Still, man shackled you to his sins. The Staple Singers sang of Freedom Highway and the dead beneath your depths. How many bodies did bigotry force you to hide? How many tears did you cry for the black boy wrapped in barbed wire and a cotton gin fan, hurled into your waters like a fishing line? For you, Billie Joe forsook his lover on Cry Baby Bridge just to be cradled in your arms. To this day, no one knows why. Only you, Tallahatchie, settle the stories within your bosom. You are worthy of song.

And you never once stopped singing, never ceased your journey, regardless of man's desecration to your sacred creation. You ran through blood stained terrain, loss or gain, mindless of pain. *Run, run you prodigal son.* Seep into the rich black soil, tickle the toes of mighty magnolias, maples, and oaks, because Tallahatchie, you are worthy of song.



Ashes

Ring around the rosy

In one hand a curve of aged wood, and in the other a grip of small fingers, I wander through the small country graveyard surrounded by an ancient, white-washed picket-fence. Shadows of trees stretch along the path in front of me, blending as the wind moves, in and out of the elongated shadows of headstones. On their weather-worn faces, cracks, like the vines in my old hands, run across their surfaces, and moss climbs like beards up their sides. The trees are now only mere skeletons of themselves; their flush of life lost at their feet, naked arms reaching up toward a sunless sky.

I take note of a few names I recognize, stopping long enough to brush off the names, and pass along their history to a new keeper. My path finally brings me to the end of a row, and I turn toward the grand old hickory in the upper right corner. There beneath the great tree, crooked and dim with age, sits my brother's headstone.

It looks as old as I feel, and the young oak I planted many years ago when they first brought my brother home has formed a ring of roots around his headstone. It is as tall and proud as I had once pictured him. Sadly, now all I can remember is the old black-and-white picture in my wallet.

A pocket full of posy

Gone are the days when we could run through cotton fields and chase chickens around the farm, and gone are the days we would fight and argue. My brother had been three years older than I, with our sister, Julie, between us. I had seen him like a god. He could shoot birds out of the sky with one shot, and spit clear across the creek. He had even dared to backtalk mom on a few occasions, but no one ever got away with that, for even though I idolized my brother, all in our household knew who was the ruling voice.

Mom had called me the smart one and my brother the wild one. On more than one occasion I would hear her asking my brother, "Now Tommy's going to grow up and be my smart little lawyer, and what are you going to make for me? More headaches?"

As I got older, I learned that mom was hard on my brother not because she didn't love him, but just the opposite. She loved all of us dearly, and I think even my hardheaded brother knew that. Consequently, when she died one dreary day in August, there wasn't a dry eye in our house for weeks. That had happened when I was only ten.

When I was fifteen, news of the war came to us. Off went my brother with only a brief goodbye and a promise to return. No one can ever say my brother never kept his promises. Half a year later we were burying him in this old cemetery.

Ashes, Ashes

Now there he lies encircled by a tree with only me to remember him and his great deeds, which many overlook and take for granted. Some would even say good riddance to such a hothead young'un' who had promised to go against the world. I don't hate these people for thinking less of my brother and what he did for not only me, but them as well. I'm not even sure he did it for us in the end. Who can ever really say?

It still doesn't change the fact that he is now at rest and others benefit from what he and his comrades fought so hard to achieve. Life is like that. Eventually all will die. The question is not when death comes, only what can be made of life. For the only thing certain is...

We all fall down.



MISSISSIPPI SIGNPOSTS

There is something like magic in a good book. Some are like living, breathing voices with the capacity to change the reader's life. Good books can crack open a door to let you see a tiny bit of someone else's soul and help you to understand people in another place and time. The reading of a book somehow causes words to turn into faces and places as they tattoo themselves inside the reader's mind.

It's a mystery how this happens, but I know that skillful writers have drawn pictures in my head. Years after I've read their stories and the pages are yellowed and frayed, images are still etched in my mind. There's also something like a map with signposts inside my brain. When I read a story, I have to connect it with some place I've been. Since I've lived in Mississippi most of my life, I suppose it's natural to have lots of Mississippi signposts standing inside my head. For instance, when I read A Time To Kill by John Grisham, maybe I was thinking about the author and a story I'd heard about him writing while sitting on the courthouse steps? Nevertheless, a picture placed itself in my head of a man aiming a gun at his daughter's rapist on the stairs of the courthouse at Oxford, Mississippi. Now when I visit the old-fashioned square in Oxford, I find myself looking up, trying to see inside the second story window of the courthouse on the square.

Union Station in Meridian, Mississippi, is one of those signposts. I can't pass those train tracks without remembering the story of a young woman stepping from a train, searching through the terminal, and then darting into the woods. Helene lives within a tiny corner of my mind because Toni Morrison put her there. When I read Sula some years ago, I became, for a moment, a young woman with skin not white enough to enter a public restroom in a train station governed by white folks. I could almost experience pressure upon my bladder and feel the panic of having no place to go for relief. So now when I drive up Front Street in Meridian, I search for trees and tall grass. I see only buildings and train tracks today, but my eyes will always search for a safe place for Helene to rest. And I will question again why it was that kind of world back then. It's funny I don't remember the rest of the story or the other characters in Morrison's novel, just Helene and her urgent need for a rest stop.

When I drive along The Natchez Trace, a signpost pops up in my head with a voice that says, "Look out there in the woods. Can you see Phoenix Jackson?" And I'll find myself searching for a little black woman with a red rag tied around her head. I'll think about the dress she wore and her shoes that needed to be tied because she couldn't bend down to tie them herself. I can even see her walking down that Worn Path the way Eudora Welty described her, "moving

A Time To Kill

Old Man

a little from side to side, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock." I want to stop the car right there and go searching for that little grandmother so that I can tie her shoes. And if I could find her, I would follow Phoenix Jackson home and tell her that she was very brave and that people should have respected her. I would go inside her shack and try to comfort her little grandson who swallowed lye.

I'm acquainted with William Faulkner's novels. But it's his short stories that have impressed me most. One could never forget "A Rose for Emily" or his story about the Mississippi Flood of 1927, a tale to ponder forever. From "Old Man" these words etched indelible images in my head: "...chained ankle to ankle and herded by armed guards...they had plowed and planted and eaten and slept beneath the shadow of the levee itself...but many of them have never seen the Mississippi River until the flood of 1927." When I visit the Delta and see the levee against the river, I recall those men in leg-chains, their eyes staring at the ground, never looking up because their minds were bound in strong chains too.

Sula

A Rose For Emily

I have read stories that made me hear and feel and see more clearly. My mind now contains a rich treasury of characters and ideas set in courtrooms and cotton fields, train stations and riverboats, mansions and shacks. Mississippi is the place where writers have drawn pictures in my head and tattooed their words inside my heart.

photography & graphic art credits

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LITERARY CONTEST

Sponsored by Meridian Community College

Prizes

There is a \$60 award for each first place; \$40 for each second place; \$25 for each third place winner. Prizes are furnished by the MCC Foundation.



Eligibility

High School Division: All high school students—
Sophomores, Juniors & Seniors.

***Community &
MCC Division:**

Any MCC student enrolled in one or more classes / non-high school & non-MCC students / members of the community 18 years or older.

***Area students attending other colleges are ineligible except for MSU-Meridian.**

Entry Deadline—Feb. 27, 2009

Categories

Short Story

Limit, two entries. Must not exceed 10 typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

Informal Essay

Limit, two entries. Must not exceed five typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

Poetry

Limit, three entries. Each poem must not exceed 50 typewritten lines.

Submission

Each contestant can enter one or all categories. Put your name on the entry blank, NOT on the entries. Entries will only be used for the 2009 contest.

You will be notified by mail as soon as the judges return the entries.

Format

Each contestant should use this rule sheet for a title page. Be sure to fill out all necessary information. All manuscripts must be original and typed on white 8 1/2 x 11" paper. Entries will NOT be returned. **Be sure to include TWO copies of each entry.**

MCC LITERARY REVIEW ENTRY FORM

(Please clearly print or type on this entry form.)

Name: _____
Street/Apt/P.O. Box _____
City/State/Zip Code: _____
Phone: Home _____ Work _____
Check one: Soph. Jr. Sr. High School you attend: _____
 Community Member

Short Story MCC student Community Member

Essay Title(s): _____

Poetry Title(s): _____

Please give a brief biography of yourself _____

IMPORTANT: Must be signed! By signing you agree to allow the *REVIEW* to publish your work if the staff votes to print it. For MCC entrants, we also reserve the right to submit your entry to the state competition. Not all contest winners and/or entries can be published due to printing expenses. Also, by signing you guarantee each submission is original and has not been previously published.

Signed _____
Date _____

Deadline for Entries!

Entries must be submitted no later than
Feb. 27, 2009

Mail entries to
The Review
Literary Contest
Attn: Morgan Boothe
910 Hwy 19 North
Meridian, MS 39307



about

literary review 2008



The Language and Literature division of Meridian Community College is pleased to sponsor the Literary Review contest each year as a method of encouraging writers to submit poetry, short stories, and essays. Our entries are always outstanding, and we are fortunate to have so much creative writing talent in Meridian and surrounding areas. Therefore, the Literary Review contest and magazine seeks to showcase some of the best writers of our area.

The contest is open to any high school sophomore, junior, or senior from any school in our area. We are pleased each year to receive so many outstanding entries from the local high schools. Furthermore, we welcome entries from anyone in our community. At MCC, we strive to meet the needs of our community, and this is just one more way we reach out to any creative writers who write for the simple pleasure of putting their ideas on paper.

At the conclusion of our contest each year, the entries are divided into two categories, high school and community. Then, the entries are further divided by genre. Outside judges evaluate the works and award first, second, and third places in both high school and community poetry, short story, and essay. The Language and Literature division is grateful for the support of the MCC Foundation in funding our monetary prizes.

Finally, Meridian Community College publishes the Literary Review magazine. This magazine is a compilation of the best creative works we received that year, both high school and community. The magazine is developed by our graphic design students, and they are responsible for the layout and art work found in each year's magazine. We then use the magazine as a showcase for the following year's competition.

If you would like information on our Literary Review contest, please call Meridian Community College and ask for Morgan Boothe or Katharine Stewart, Language and Literature division coordinators of the contest. We would be pleased to talk with you about submitting your work and answer any questions you might have.

**Meridian Community College Library
910 Highway 19 North
Meridian, MS 39307**

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MERIDIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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