Spectrum, April 1983

Spectrum Contributors
Northwestern College, Iowa

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SPECTRUM
Northwestern College
Vol. 5, No. 2, April 1983
Memories of my past are little dolls to call my own, which I played with until my tired eyes closed. All the problems of the day disappearing after a good night's sleep, Picking dandelions, which always stained my lacy Sunday dress.

A new kitten, a cute boy saying, "hello," made my heart pump fast. I liked to ride my pink bike with the gang, on a warm fun-filled summer day. Ice cream made a drab day fun. The ice cream melted.

The problems aren't gone in the morning when I wake. An agenda meeting, scheduled work, appointments, I remember a yellow dandelion, my little doll. Responsibility.... When did it creep up on Me?

-Joan Burt
He sat directly in the middle of us. The dim light from the antique lamp shone solely upon him, illuminating his expression and casting shadows not only upon the dark wall behind him, but also upon the wrinkles of wisdom which formed his face. It was his day and his turn to delight and charm his beloved grandchildren. He was Grandpa Earl, from whom I received my middle name. And he was doing what he loved best -- reminding his grandchildren of his past. His body was all of 85 years, yet his stories and his eyes refused to allow him to grow old. Youthful optimism danced about his gaze as he began his final and favorite tale of the day. He began slowly, increasing his volume and velocity as he propelled us back into the early 1900's....

Why, when I was just a lad of 17 years, before I'd ever courted your grandma, God rest her soul, I met my first love. She was a big one, she was. With a reddish-brown coat and four well-muscled legs. She was a real beauty, all right. Best horse we ever had. She possessed lightning speed and was more graceful than a deer. A real prize, that horse. We named her 'Joy' for no other reason than that's what she gave us, and we kinda liked that name. She didn't seem to mind, so Joy it was and Joy it forever shall be."

"We trained her well, which wasn't hard since she was so smart, and Joy became part of the family. We rode her twice a day. Carefully, so as not to get her too tired nor too lazy. She responded well to me, so it became my job, or rather blessing, to care for the old girl. Well, I shouldn't say 'old,' for she was very young and will forever remain so. She was all of three years when she left, and that, my dear children, I shall never forget."

"It was one of them damp, hazy March days which so often plague Minnesota. She seemed especially nervous during our summer ride and to tell you the truth I was worried about her. I
guess I should have known something terrible was about to happen, but I neglected to listen to my fears, as we all so often do. So, after the usual preparations, we began our evening ride. The sky was especially threatening that night, but I'd seen my share of darkness to pay no heed to its warnings. But old Joy? Well, something was bothering her and to this day I'll swear that she knew what was to befall her. And befall her something did. We was about half-way through our two-mile trail when God decided it was time for some excitement. Them low clouds was just itchin' to reach out and grab us and, when God gave the o.k., they grabbed with all their might. Thunder such as I have never heard before or since, cut through to my very being as I witnessed the utter destruction of a tree standing so close to me I could reach out and touch it. Lightning ripped through the forest with such brilliance and splendor that only nature and the good Lord can create. Well, to put it bluntly, I was scared. And, apparently, so was Joy. She took off quicker than I could blink and we were in full gallop faster than a second could tick off the old grandfather clock. To make things worse, it began raining. Not your average, everyday rainfall either, but an all-out downpour that blinded one's vision and saturated one's farmland in no time. Well, this didn't stop Joy. Fear is all she felt and she was headin' in all directions at once. I guess there's comfort in motion. But what she didn't realize was that in the forest there is bound to be trees. And worse yet, trees are hard to run through, if not impossible. But, ya know what? That's just exactly what she tried to do. We hit a big ornery oak head-on. And in that battle, it was evident that Joy wasn't to be the victor. She crumbled to the ground, all strength drained and all thoughts gone. I, on the other hand, suffered not a scratch. Sure, I was thrown a ways, but managed to land in some bushes that broke my fall. I didn't see where Joy finally landed,
nor could I find her, so I just lit out for home to get help. But the rain and the darkness had a different idea in mind. They prevented a quick rescue and I was sure that by the time we returned, she'd be dead. With tearful eyes we searched every bit of that great forest. But Joy was never seen again. No bones, no hoofprints, no nothing. She was gone, and I was sure that the oak had stopped her. I believe to this day that God just reached down and placed her directly in Heaven where she belongs. I thank him for that because it probably would have killed me seein' her in such a way. Perhaps Grandma's with her now, caring for her till I can ride her again."

With his last words, tears began down his face and silence engulfed the room. But then the darkness seemed to life as my bright-eyed, youthful, five-year-old sister rose and wiped a tear from the old man's cheek. "Why?" she uttered almost in a whisper, "why?"

"Not for sorrow," the shaking voice of my grandfather slowly replied, "no, not for sorrow...but for Joy."

-Joey Earl Horstman
AUTUMN METAMORPHOSIS

Maple trees host butterflies
Multitudes of wing-tipped seeds
Floating to earth finishing
Their alpha and omega flight

Inspired by wind, they move
To their final course in life
Where they crackle under foot
Their death creates again new life

-Sue Brinkhuis

THE SWING

A child clamors into the swing like a Squirrel scrambling up a tree.
She swings harder and harder
Trying to fly.
She pushes, lifts, looks,
Seeing every mountain, every stream.
The swing slows down;
Her day slows to an end.

-Leigh Schlitter
Folks bubbled from the concrete blocks surrounding him. Quite strange, really, how herds of people had somewhere to congregate in mutual boredom. The hermit lifestyle just didn't appeal to most. In all honesty, it wasn't that alluring to the unhurried fellow in the raincoat either, but certain jobs necessitate individualistic lifestyles.

He appreciated the fluid strokes of light snaking along the puddled concrete walkway. Focusing on the water dripping from his hatbrim, he stumbled into a fellow human, nearly dropping his briefcase. With a muttered apology, he rolled around the obstruction and continued on his way, grip tightened upon the handle. Perhaps he should enter another line of work; he just couldn't keep his mind on the present, and dreaming could be hazardous.

The tainted beauty of a city in drizzle usually awakened the poet in him, and so it did now. Of course, it was only the stupid surrealism of this night that was causing him to consider quitting. What else could he do? At least with this job he could make enough money to survive. But the appearance of another world below the translucent street was beautiful and deserved to be shared. What was needed was a life where he could trust, develop friends. Yes, doubts were coming more frequently now.

Again, he noticed how the clouds at night reflected the city's sporadic light. The clouds tonight were red and turbulent, giving their last kicks of life and he was bathed in their blood. They had burst and were falling on man. His leather boots, as he continued toward his appointment, seemed to burst through the membrane of liquid (clouds upon the ground). Perhaps everything in life eventually had to be exploded and he was just helping one fellow in this
direction. But it was such a magical night, he didn't feel like working.

Now where was he? Lost because he couldn't concentrate. He'd have to ask directions but the crowds has found their comfortable pubs. The city was appearing empty. He sauntered to the other side of the pavement where a couple were necking, protected by the shadow of a citadel's corner.

"Excuse me please," he muttered, rather embarrassed, "but do you think you could direct me to Hannifin and One-hundred-and-thirty-third?"

"Uurdlmmph," the male replied, licking the girl's teeth one last time before peeling away the embrace, "just go straight five blocks and then turn left for two. You can't go wrong 'cause if you miss it and go straight or turn right you'll fall into the river in a couple a' blocks. Have a nice day and toddle along now." With that he returned to his exercise.

People were gross. He didn't really value one-nighters. Probably just getting old and mellow, desiring someone to hold to. Everyone desired some kind of permanence, he guessed. But he couldn't afford to trust mankind, let alone womankind, and they certainly didn't trust him.

He needed a new life.

Funny how the shock of cold water against his face could separate his nose from the rest of him. The residential cubicles had to be nearing, some inconsiderate master was forcing his stereo to vomit country western howling he had no desire to identify further.

It was foolish to stand in front of those "don't walk" signs, but he felt guilty when he disobeyed them. Anyway, tonight he felt good. The reflections of the damp always brought more than a regular day. Sound caressed his ears: rain dripped from roofs, blood fell from the sky, and people conversed on nothingness across the street. It was time he participated in humanity. He was tired of being alone and work was starting to drag. Perhaps if this was the last job he took and he
started opening doors and just talking to folks his life could change. But if he interacted with men he would have to put up with their petty little stupidities. Maybe it was worth it. Maybe it wasn't.

The tickle of a raindrop across his hand reminded him of the container he carried. Just a block and he'd be turning left to complete the transaction. Time to check his equipment. He stepped between streams falling from twenty feet above, into the opaque nonexistence of a doorway. He waited until his eyes could comprehend the needle-etched patterns of damp brick, then opened his case and examined the black 357 magnum and silencer. Not for the first time he felt fear as though beholding an alien who threatened to devour his life. He remained in the doorway, vaguely aware of his briefcase clicking when relatched. A bubble that burst: this occupation, and it seemed life in general, just brought enough to survive. He had to have more or he would lose what little he thought he had.

The subways, the cars, the voices, the rain, played an ambient music. Life could be aesthetic, beautiful; it would seem it could have worth as well. People had to be trusted. If he embraced them, they would return in kind. He might even join in their migration to the bars. That couple had been willing to help. Though perhaps a bit preoccupied, they hadn't turned on him. Tonight could not be allowed to escape without his illustrating his new life for the morning would bring the just-another-dayness so paralyzing to change. In a block he would turn right and walk until he found the river and then fling his overlord into its conglomerate rain. Drowning, drowning; it would be buried by the very thing that had spawned his decision for freedom.

He lunged from the doorway, pulling away from the shadows and moving down the last stretch to freedom. Not half a block away, an obese lady exited a door and attempted to struggle toward her
auto, obviously under the influence of the mammoth package she carried. It hooked into her bundled raingear, setting her ankles wobbling above spiked heels, threatening to sprawl the whole mess into the gutter. In newfound spirit he pounded up to her and reached out to lift the burden, only to find that he had upset her equilibrium and sent her plopping to the sidewalk underneath her package. As he stooped to right his blunder, he was shattered by her soprano scream:

"Help, police..."
"But lady..."
"Leave me alone, help!"
"Oh, shit," he muttered, fleeing mindlessly from the scene of his embarrassment and vanishing into the corridor between two buildings.

-Steve Boint
BEHIND ME NOW

Dollies who had names and life
Sit mute upon their chairs.
No more parties, no more hubs
Just changeless, empty stares.
Memories are all that's left
Of pail and sandbox play
Of frilly dresses, mud pie messes
Cartoons each Saturday.
Chalk, paint and broken crayons
Used by little artists
Learning how to tie those shoes
Was positively hardest!

Boys were creeps who pulled long hair
And shouted stupid names.
But they've grown up and all insist
On playing other games.
So much has changed and nothing
Stays the way it used to be.
When I'm old a fleeting glance
Of her I'll dare to see.
Somewhere deep inside of me
A little girl remains.
Time goes on and life's too short
To bring her back again.

-Jennifer Watson
SUNDAYS AND GROWING UP

Seven-thirty am. my three sisters and my brother and I are awakened by the zesty aroma of Dad's special scrambled-egg and ham combo. Mom baked homemade cinnamon rolls the night before. As they slowly warm, in the oven, their spicy scent scatters about the house. We find ourselves drawn to the pleasing smells and await anxiously in our places around the busy kitchen table.

Nine o'clock and we're all lined up in front of the front door in our best Sunday dress. Shades of tinted blues and pink pastels and soft and delicate floral prints make-up our dress and skirt outfits. White laced anklet-stockings hide in black, sassy, buckled-shoes. Our hair pulled back away from our shining noses, and tied in a feminine bow. Our faces how radiant, our smiles how glowing. Little brother fussing about in his blue plain suit and pants, his tie how grown up.

Three o'clock pm. our Sunday School papers scatter throughout the house, brother squirms out of his clothes. Everyone outside, a mid-spring day - shorts and blouses. A walk to the park for fun and games. A family drive and a treat - ice cream cones and rootbeer.

-Deb Jensen
AURORA

Somewhere
Under a gibbous moon
Prowlers stalk and babies cry;
Crickets chirp and roosters crow
A tacit, sempre frieze.
Dawn
Crawls over gray horizons
Swallowing dark fragments:
Vestiges culled from the
Ledge
Of time's mirador.
Anticipate hazy rainbows
And threatening clouds.
Bid farewell to yesterday's
Relics.
Embark to distant lands
Called tomorrows.
Journey long on arid deserts
Trodden
By myriads before.
Thirst for sweet sustaining exilir.
Swill!
Beware the mire of broken dreams
Those ambient snares of old.
Press on . . . Press on
But tend the path! The Rubicon
Awaits.

-Jennifer Watson
I was really beginning to hate college. It was my last class of the last day of the week, and I was desperately trying to stay awake as the prof expounded on the many virtues of socialized medicine. I finally decided to look over my syllabus, something I hadn't bothered to do in weeks, and as I inspected the sheet, I noticed that I had a ten page term paper due in only two weeks. I somehow had missed it the other time I had looked over the paper. Tears began to come to my eyes, and the pressure built up as I tried to hold them back. I really didn't want anyone to see me break down. It just wouldn't look very good for a grown man and college junior to cry in the middle of a 300 level sociology course. I was almost beyond caring though.

I managed to keep my feeling concealed, or so I thought, until class was over. As I was walking back to the dorm, I thought that I heard someone calling out my name, so I turned around to see Rhonda running in my general direction. It was a windy spring day, and I could tell that she was having problems trying to keep her papers from flying away. That's what I liked about Rhonda, she was always just a little bit off. Oh she was every bit a woman, don't get me wrong there, but you could always find something about her to remind you that she was every bit as human as most of the guys are. That may sound odd, but a lot of the girls seemed to set themselves just above the level of most of us guys, but Rhonda was more than a girl, she was a friend.

"Hi Chris", she said as she tried to catch her breath, "Wasn't Professor Gordon a total bore today? I really don't know why I'm even taking a sociology course at all. I mean, where in the world am I gonna use that kind of stuff anyway?"

I wasn't in the mood to talk, and when I didn't answer, she didn't seem to mind. That's another reason I liked her, she always seemed to
know when to leave things well enough alone, and that's more than you could say for most girls!

When we got back to the dorm, I invited her in so we could hash out the events of the day. We sat down on my bed, and it didn't take her very long to find out that I was depressed and more than just a little upset.

"Chris", she ventured. She was talking slowly, almost as if she were choosing each word with the same care she would use in choosing a dress for the senior prom.

"Chris", she ventured again, "I know that college life can get you down. I mean, well, I've been feeling the same way you have, but I know that it's got to get better. You know what I do when I get feeling that way?"

"No", I said, not really feeling up to any 'Dear Abby' or 'Ann Landers' advice at the moment. "I just lie down and go to sleep for sixteen hours or so, and when I wake up, I feel ready for just about anything!"

"Listen", I snapped, "something like that might work for you, but with the noise in this dorm, I don't think that I could even sleep if I wanted to". I wasn't overexaggerating either. It was almost impossible for me to hear myself think over the blaring radios, the 'football game' going on in the hall, and the showers sounding as if someone was dropping a bag of marbles on a porcelain floor.

"I'll help you", she said, "swing your legs up on to the bed and lie on your stomach". I did as I was told.

"Now close your eyes".

I did, and she turned on the radio and then she began massaging my back.

"There. Are you feeling any better now?" she whispered.

"I really am", I halfway mumbled. I really couldn't believe how drowsy I was becoming. The song on the radio washed over me. It was a Linda Ronstadt number, one of my favorites,
Images began to form. I tried to organize my thoughts, but something was definitely wrong. The last thing that I remembered was talking to Rhonda in my room, but this was definitely not my room, and Rhonda wasn't anywhere around.

I was lying on the ground, and for some reason, I couldn't get up enough strength to stand. I could smell the dusty ground, and I could hear the wind blowing, so I figured that it was safe to assume that I wasn't in my bed. I mean, my sheets may be a little overdue for a wash, but they sure weren't this bad! I raised my head a little to find that I was apparently outdoors, and the sun was either rising or setting, I couldn't tell which. I seemed to be in some kind of a desert with very little plant life, and very little other life besides that, that I could see, that is. There were stick-like plants scattered here and there, in fact, there was one right next to me. It looked sturdy enough, and the 'trunk' was just big enough for me to get both my hands around it, so I began pulling myself up. It took me quite awhile, and after a couple good falls, I managed to get into something that resembled an upright position.

I couldn't figure out why I was so weak, but my preoccupation with my physical condition quickly faded when I noticed a cloud of dust on the horizon. I couldn't tell just how far away it was, but I could tell that it might be a way out of this desert, and to some kind of help. It didn't matter anymore that I didn't know where I was, or even how I got there, the only thing that did matter was that I was rapidly losing my strength, and that if
I didn't get some sort of help soon, I would probably 'cash it in'. I've always hated the word 'die'. It's funny that just a little while ago I was almost in tears over a stupid term paper.

The figure on the horizon was drawing closer, and now I could almost be sure that it was a horse, with a rider! The horse was midnight black, and the rider seemed to be dressed in black too. He looked more like an extension of the horse than a rider, but he was still too far away for me to tell. The sun was rising. It had slowly been climbing in the sky. It hadn't struck me until now, but something seemed peculiar about it. Wait a second! The color wasn't red, or even orange like I had remembered the sun to be, instead, it glowed a deep green. The color reminded me of a movie I saw once about deep sea diving. The water in the movie looked just about the same color as the sun.

Suddenly, my legs began to give out, and no matter how long or hard I struggled to stay up, I found myself collapsing face down in the dirt. I was beginning to black out when I heard the hoofbeats. I wanted to yell out 'Hurry, hurry', but I couldn't seem to get up enough strength. I must not lose consciousness, I told myself. I tried to keep my mind alert by concentrating on things, how the gritty sand tasted, the ancient smell of the ground, and especially the rhythmic pounding of hooves as the horse drew ever nearer.

The pounding stopped, and I felt strong arms lifting me up. I opened my eyes to see who had come to my rescue, and there, holding me like a ragdoll, was what appeared to be a pitch black half-man, half-horse. He smiled, and deep resounding laughter echoed from within him. Darkness enveloped me. That same sweet nothingness that could so easily take away all my problems. No reality, nothing to confuse me, nothing...

Light, soft like a glowing candle, yet not quite. I opened my eyes, hoping to find myself
back in my noisy dorm, but this place didn't look anymore like my room than the desert had.

"doan ya be fer trian to mutch yet. ya ben havina purdy bad tim ov it kid"

I was once again in a bed (of sorts), only this time I was lying on my back, and the bed seemed to be made out of a pile of green ferns. I will have to say that it was the softest bed I had ever been in, and the best smelling too. The scent of vanilla (or something quite like it) permeated the whole room. I looked up to see where the voice was coming from, and I was gratified to see that it wasn't that half-man type creature that I had encountered earlier, but this thing still seemed to be a far cry from anything that I had ever seen before. He (I say he, because, for some reason, it seemed natural to call it a him) resembled something like a 'T' with bluish skin, an eye at each end of the crossbar, and bristles at the base. I presumed he used the bristles to move about.

"ay reuliz that them centaurs ar purdy fritenan, an ye may na' think thad ay'm a goot spesiman aythur, but we deid keep ya frum dyan owt thear!"

He could read my thoughts!

"dayrn rite i can reed yer mind!", he retorted, "ay'm wut ya mite caul an 'empath', a heeler. ya o ya lyf ta that so doan nok it!"

This was beginning to be too much of an overload for my already abused mind, and I desperately wanted out of this nightmare or wherever, or should I say whatever I was caught in. The little blue guy made a noise that sounded something like he might be clearing his throat. Heck, I didn't even know if these things had throats!

"ay realee doan no wut a 'throat' is, but if ya wuz wundrin wy ya iz heer, ay skaned ya mind wen ya wuz owt, an ay think ay mite hav an anser fer ye"

He waited for me to give some kind of consent, but I don't know why. If he could read my mind, he
knew that I did want an answer, unless he could also feel the resentment that I felt for the violation he had committed with my mind. I felt completely naked. I nodded my consent, and he began.

"It seems that wear yu cum frum tha kreeturs train tha new members ov their tribs bi edukatun them. frum wut ay cood tel, ya wanted owt purdy bad, so bad, infakt, that now yer heer! tha trip took kwite a bit owt a ye tho, so thats wy yer in my hom now"

It was an amazing story. One that I could hardly believe, but the proof was all around me. The fern bed that I was lying on, the plants in the corner that resembled something like an iris, only these glowed (I had figured out earlier that this was where the light was coming from), and even this strange 'T'-shaped creature. All seemed too real to be phony, but if I had gotten here by merely wishing to escape from our world, couldn't I get back in the same manner?

"Well", I said, "is it possible?"

"Kris, that iz wut yer cald ay beeliev, ay wish that ay cood tel u, but this haz never hapend befors, al ay can sa, iz u can try. By tha wa, ma nams Teropaq"

"Well, Teropaq, there is only one way to find out". I closed my eyes and concentrated as hard as I possibly could. I thought of my college, my family, my home, my studies, my grades, my term paper, my homework......... It wasn't working.

"It seems Kris, that u reayalee doan wnna go bak tu bad"

He was wrong. I knew he was. At least I think he was. I don't even know anymore. It almost seemed that the bad aspects of earth outweighed the good. Of course, if I had to stay here, I would miss Rhonda. The big question though was, could I be happy living out a dream, that is if this is a dream?

"ay ashur u Kris, this iz not a dreem"
I think that maybe someday I'll try to return to earth, but as long as I've been thrown into this reality, and as long as this 'dream' continues, I'll stay here and make the best of it.

"its yer desizhen, now ya bedder get up, cum on, get up, get up Kris, do you hear me?.............

The room suddenly went out of focus, patterns shifted, and I felt like I was caught in an upheaval of mother nature. When things shifted back into focus, I found myself in my old dorm room, and Rhonda was standing by the bed.

"Come on Chris, get up! You've been asleep for almost eighteen hours. Leave it to you to sleep through a Saturday!"

"I'll have to admit that I was a little disappointed, but it was nice to see a friend again. So I dreamed it all, what a crock! 

"Welcome back to reality", I mumbled to myself.

"What did you say?"

"Never mind. I've got a term paper to get started, want to help me out?" I asked.

"Sure!" she replied.

That's one thing that I liked about Rhonda, she was always there if you needed a hand. I got up off of the bed, brushed the sand off my pants, whisked the dirt out of my hair, and stopped by the wastebasket on the way out to deposit a fern branch that I found in my back pocket.

-Curtis Linhart
PHRENIC FRAZZLE

Clock droning,
Digits clicking,
Too aware
On edge.
Noisy haunts
Horizontal basketcase.
Try underscoring
Ironic phrases
In A Modest
Proposal
Still—no hint
Of the sandman.

Now, counting rows
In a knitted afghan.
Yet—undulant,
Fragmented obligations
From now
Until then
Whirling, turbulent.
Ah, distant peace
Shaded now
That fringe
Meets fringe.

-Jennifer Watson
THE BEAUTY OF A ROSE

The beauty of a rose is like that of love
It shines out right, not leaving any darkness
For the beauty of the rose will soon die
But the love of that rose shall live forever.

-Kevin Woodward
Steve Boint is a junior philosophy major from Bismark, North Dakota.

Sue Brinkhuis is a humanities major from Little Rock, Iowa. She is a senior and would like to go into mission work.

Joan Burt is a senior from Algona, Iowa. She is majoring in elementary education.

Joey Earl Horstman is from Fairmont, Minnesota and is a freshman. He has not declared a major, but says he wouldn't mind teaching.

Deb Jensen is a senior from Eagle Grove, Iowa. She is majoring in humanities and plans to pursue a career in communications.

Curtis Linhart is a freshman from New Virginia, Iowa. He is a religion major with a pre-seminary career concentration.

Leigh Schlitter is a communications/behavioral science major from Onawa, Iowa. She is a sophomore who plans a career in communications.

Jennifer Watson is a senior from Persia, Iowa. She is an English major and plans to pursue her education in graduate school.

Kevin Woodward is a senior from Omaha, Nebraska, majoring in business/economics and political science. He plans to pursue a career in law.
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