Spring 1981

The Canon, Spring 1981

Dordt College

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The Cannon is offered to you as evidence of the artistic talent at Dordt College. During the year the Cannon has dwindled in number of issues, pages and staff members. I urge you to cultivate your God-given talents. If those talents include the ability to write poetry, story or song or to produce artwork, use the Cannon next year as a means of sharing your talent and showing what the Lord has given to you!

The Editor
The sound of pans banging together and cupboard doors slamming shut woke Mitch up. His eyelids flickered and the sunlight streaming through the windows by his bed hit his eyes, nearly blinding him. He rolled over and stuck his face in his pillow, so that his eyes were covered.

The banging of metal on metal continued below. The sound was muffled by the ceiling, but still loud enough to be annoying. The clanging stopped. “One, two, three,” Mitch counted under his breath.

Below him someone began to hum. The humming was strong and boisterous, but carefully tuned. Right on schedule, Mitch thought, Gramp never misses a morning.

Mitch mouthed the words to the humming, with the words echoing in his head. “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.” The words rose and fell in tune with the humming and when it stopped, they stopped. “One, two, three, four, five,” Mitch counted.

The barely audible words to “When Morning Gilds the Skies” sneaked through the floor and reached his ears. Mitch rolled over, stretched and yawned. “That means coffee’s almost ready.”

He swung his legs from under the thin sheet and planted them on the floor, catapulting the rest of his body up, so that he stood in front of the windows. The sunshine covered and warmed his body. Almost too warm for this early on a July morning.

He moved over to his dresser and with lethargic motions pulled clothes from the various drawers and put them on his slightly sticky body. This done he stood silent, cocked his ear and listened. Barely the words came through. “Geez, he’s on the third verse, I better hurry.”

The thought of being late for breakfast sent life surging through his seemingly decrepit fifteen year-old body.

He quickly moved out of his room and down the hall to brush his teeth and dump his full bladder before descending for breakfast. Everyday started much the same for him. The only clock he had was his grandfather’s songs and after he’d mastered their usage he was never late. He was working for Gramp this summer and it was a vast change from the city, where his mother shook him awake to a leisurely day of doing what he pleased.

The coffee stopped perking and his grandfather ended the fourth verse as Mitch sat down at the table. He poured cornflakes and milk into a bowl and began to eat. Gramp stood at the sink looking out the south kitchen windows. “What are you looking at,” Mitch asked.

“Oh, the morning. There’s all kinds of bumblebees in the pasture here south of the house.”

Done looking, Gramp came over and sat opposite Mitch and poured the same, except stopping to pray before he began to eat.

The whole scene of an old-time country kitchen resembled a Rockwell painting. A refrigerator, stove, sink, and cabinets surrounded the outside wall, with a round table set in an alcove. The finishing touch was the juxtaposition of young and old across the table. The only exception was the small color television sitting on a cabinet in a corner of the alcove, with Willard Scott laughing out the weather.

Mitch looked up from his cereal. “Gramma still in bed?”

“Naw, she’s getting ready to go.”

“Go?”

“Yeah, we’re taking Vic to Omaha to the hospital. The doctors are going to decide to operate or not. Remember?”

With his last word out Gramp’s lips closed over his white dentures, with a force that sent a shock wave rolling up over his big rounded nose, past his clear blue eyes and into the sparse gray-white hair which partially covered his head. He resumed eating breakfast.

“So what am I going to do?”

Between bites his grandfather told him. “You can do the irrigating this morning, just check the wells and make sure the drippers
“Okay," Mitch said. Then take the day off, he hoped.

"Then . . . I guess that sweetcorn needs hoeing . . . and you could mow the weeds around here. We should be back by three. Vic’s appointment is at eleven and he said he’d be here by eight."

"Okay." Mitch tried to keep a smile on his face. Dang, he thought, every time they leave I get stuck doing nigger-work in the garden.

He could never understand how his grandfather could enjoy working in the garden or why he sang the same old hymns every morning. Or how he could stand being around Vic for more than a few minutes at a time. Vic was slowly dying of throat cancer and had a clear plastic tube that went up his nose and down into his stomach so he could be fed. He was only 59, yet looked closer to 85, a withered, dessicated body, with a low raspy whisper for a voice, which more often than not was used for cursing.

Mitch leaned back in his chair and looked at the clock over the sink. It was almost 7:30. Mitch set his chair down and stood up saying, "I'll go check number 3 now, that way I can get a jump on the rest."

His grandfather glanced up and nodded. Whew, Mitch thought, now I'll be gone when Vic gets here. He walked out of the kitchen, turned left and went down a short flight of stairs to where his boots sat by the door. He laced them on and stepped outside.

The sun was hot and the air was heavy and moist. Sweat beads began forming on Mitch's forehead. He was on his way to the pickup when Gramp stuck his head out the kitchen door and yelled, "There's a shovel down in the barn!"

Mitch turned and nodded, then started forward again. "Lookit all those bees," Gramp yelled again. "I wouldn't figure there was enough alfalfa in bloom amongst all that grass to attract any bees."

Mitch nodded once more and then continued walking. He got the shovel from the barn, climbed into the pickup and drove off.

It was a one-mile drive to well number 3 and Mitch took his time for once, instead of hot-rodning the blue Ford pickup along. Insects were drifting along in clouds, spattering the cracked windshield with their bodies. Mitch peered through the mess and saw a striped ground squirrel scurrying out of his way, and a chicken hawk circling overhead, like a feathered kite. He saw them because he was mostly concerned with taking time and going slow this morning, hoping that maybe he could even sneak in a short nap.

The field driveway suddenly leaped out from its hiding place in the tall brome grass and Mitch applied some brake to slow his blue snail even more. The pickup came to a stop before the driveway and then hesitated an instant before turning in, like a dog sniffing out new territory.

The pickup bounced through the ruts where water had flowed back from the irrigation pipe, and spun its wheels slightly when emerging on the opposite side. Usually Mitch would have gunned his way through, sliding and jolting from side to side, Gramp scolding, "Here now!" with a half-smile on his face. But this morning he was into slow and careful. Slow and careful coming before any fun and preoccupying his mind on the quarter-mile drive to the middle of the field where the well was pumping water.

The pickup continued down the road, the middle strip of green weeds in the road fitting nicely under the pickup and being powdered by dust from the churning rear wheels. On the left of the road lay an aluminum pipeline, glistening and sweating in the sun. It was fitted with plastic gates which were putting forth water into every other corn row. The corn rows flew past like frames in a motion picture, every frame the same.

To the right of the road one long continuous green row ran parallel to the road and acted as a fence, keeping the rest of the field behind it from crowding onto the road.

At the end of the road, where the pickup now was, squatted an elderly orange Case irrigation motor, running smoothly except for periodic sputterings and belches. It was flanked by the silver thousand-gallon propane tank, which this morning reflected the sun like a mirror. Behind the motor, and connected to it by a rusty red-brown spinning driveshaft was a newly painted gray gearhead which sat over the well-hole looking like some ancient idol or a snub-nose rocket preparing for lift-off.

At the bottom of the gearhead was an eight-inch opening with a pipe stuck into it. In this pipe gushed the water, and through a series of intricate turns, and by means of inventive valves and wedges, the water made its way to the long pipeline and then to the field.

Mitch pulled the pickup in alongside the propane tank and stopped. Behind him little
dust swirls rushed past. He opened the door and methodically swung one leg out after the other until both touched the ground, then gave a little hop and propelled himself from the cab.

It was a little game he played, seeing how far he could jump each time. He looked back to the cab, measuring the distance. Little better than usual, he thought and danced around to the back of the pickup to the loud throaty beat of the Case motor.

He stepped up on the back bumper, one hand holding the top of the tailgate and looked back over his shoulder to his grandfather's house. The house and farmyard sat on a slight hill and over the tassel tops he tried to distinguish whether or not Vic's blue 68 Impala station wagon was in the yard. He gave one last squint and then jumped down, unable to see if Vic was there yet.

His hands holding imaginary drumsticks, he boogied on over to the gearhead and accompanied the raucous guitar of the motor with a wild Buddy Rich impersonation. His arms finally got tired and he decided to proceed with the job at hand.

The gallon dripper oil tank sat opposite the driveshaft on the gearhead. Mitch first knelt down to look at the glass bubble in the small tubing which ran from underneath the tank down into the well. He wiped the oil and dust from the bubble and watched for a few seconds as first one drip and then another dropped down into the line.

Satisfied it was dripping correctly, he rose into a bent position over the tank, removed the cap, and looked inside. From the round reflection of the sky and his face on the oil inside, he estimated that there was about one-half inch left in the tank and that he was there just in time.

Leaving the cap off, he went over and climbed into the pickup box and walked to the front where sat the oil and dirt coated five-gallon can that had "dripper oil" nail-scratched in the top of it. He easily picked it up with one arm, which was a switch, as it usually took two arms to lift and carry it any distance. "This dang thing's near empty, I won't even need the funnel this time," he said out loud to himself, but nothing heard him as the motor drowned out all sound.

He took the can to the edge of the box and with a heave swung it over the side and then down to a hard landing on the ground beneath. Before jumping out himself, he stood on the edge of the box, and mimicking an old-time Indian scout, put the thumb and fore-finger of his left hand against his forehead and scanned the farmyard for a blue station wagon. "Dangit, he still ain't there. What's taking him so long?"

His mind went back to an earlier day when Vic wasn't yet dying and was just an alcoholic and lazy to boot. Mitch had only been six or seven at the time and was spending a two-week vacation with his grandparents. Vic was supposedly working for Gramp. He never seemed to get much done, but he sure talked about it a lot. And then there was that bright, hot sunny day, much like today, when Vic was working on painting the barn. Mitch and Gramp had gone out about the middle of the morning to check on his progress and had found not much progress, but Vic having a whole lot of fun and in a condition where he didn't much care.

He had painted on the old red barn in new red paint an idyllic Caribbean paradise, with sandy beaches full of people and waving palm trees. He was also dancing around, singing and laughing, trying to drink from a bottle, but spilling more than hit his mouth. Every so often he would stop, raise his hands and face to the sky and yell, "How do you like that God. Prettiest dang barn you've ever seen." Then he would continue in his jig.

It was the people on the beach that had captivated Mitch. They were all naked and in various poses. Mitch probably would have gawked forever if Gramp's stern voice hadn't scared him out of it. "What's going on, you're supposed to be working, like I told you to." Gramp had then advanced to Vic, taken the bottle from his lips and dashed it against the stone foundation of the barn. Then he had grabbed Vic, shook him and told him to get back to work.

Vic had stood for a moment angrily staring at Gramp and then his body shrunk inward and his shoulders and head hung down. His body began to shake and then came sobs and between the sobs was, "I'm... sorry, I... don't mean... to be... bad."

He had reminded Mitch of his little brother who was then three getting caught stealing cookies or not taking a nap. And Mitch remembered that as he and Gramp had walked away he'd glanced at the picture once more and then looked into Gramp's angry face and innocently said, "That sure is a nice picture."

Gramp's eyes had widened and the nostrils of his big nose had flared almost like wings spreading and then the anger had left and the regular Gramp was back saying, "Yeah, it sure is."

But that had been Vic in his heyday, now
he was little more than a bitchy old skeleton, whose protein-enriched Ensure came in tin cans.

Mitch looked across the horizon once more and saw nothing blue moving. He hopped off the side of the box and landed beside the oil can. "That old coot probably died last night and now I won't get no slack time today," Mitch crabbed. "Naw, he's gotten too mean to be that easy on the family."

He picked up the can by its metal handle and carried it over to the gearhead. He peered in the tank once more to see if the oil level had somehow changed in the past few minutes, but was only met by his own reflection on the little bit of oil left in the tank.

He reached down and unscrewed the small round cap from the spout and loosened the larger fill-cap slightly. He raised the can with one arm, put his right knee against the bottom, and then tilted the can down, until the spout rested on the mouth of the tank and blue-green oil began to flow out.

The oil came out, then hesitated and seemed to back up for an instant, then with a gulping sound, barely heard over the noise of the motor, came out again in full force. The can moved forward with the gulp and slipped off the edge of the mouth, spilling oil over the tank until it ran down the side of the gray gearhead in blue-green patterns.

Mitch jerked the can back, trying to direct it to the hole, but lost his precarious footing and fell backwards to the dirt, the can coming down on his leg and then falling to the side, spilling the rest of the oil. "You greasy bitch," Mitch yelled. Then a curse flew from his lips, directed at the can, as if that could somehow refill it.

Mitch kicked at the can and stood up, his hands going to his hips and his head hanging. Why didn't I use the funnel like Gramp always tells me to, he thought. "Dang." Now I have to go back home and probably explain what happened and see living death. "Dang!"

He kicked at the dirt with the toe of his workboot and then leaned over and lifted the empty can from its oily mess and carried it back to the pickup.

Like a condemned man he opened the driver's door and climbed in, making oily patches on the black rubber mat covering the floor. He started the pickup, threw it in reverse, backed around, then whipped it in drive and took off down the road in a cloud of dust. He hit the muddy ruts and slid and fish-tailed on through, but this time in anger and impatience. Turning onto the gravel road, he stomped the accelerator down, sending pebbles scattering everywhere as he headed for home.

The pickup sailed down the road like a faded blue HO scale racing car, bumping and bouncing on the track but never leaving it. Mitch slowed for the driveway, then gunned it as he made the turn. Up by the house he saw it, a dirty blue station wagon. Even worse, Gramp's light green Olds still sat at the end of the sidewalk from the house. Mitch groaned like a man who'd been speared.

At the end of the driveway, Mitch turned and went away from the house, down toward the machine shed where the oil was kept. In the rearview mirror he could see the haggard form of cousin Vic, leaning on a cane. Beside Vic stood Gramp and Gramma in their good clothes and slightly behind them was a rotund figure that Mitch didn't recognize, wearing what looked like a purple tent. Mitch stopped by the machine shed and got out.

He glanced toward the group of people and then headed for the shed. Before he got there Gramp yelled, "What's wrong?"

Mitch yelled back, "I ran out of dripper oil."

"Oh," came the reply. "Why don't you come up and say Hi and help me with some suitcases."

"Okay," Mitch half-yelled back. Yuck, yuck, yuck, he thought, now I've got to see that bum again. He headed for the house at a jog.

He slowed his steps and slid a little as he came to a halt in front of the group. "Hi, I'm Mitch."

Vic answered, "Hi," in a deep, rough whisper which sounded like gears clashing together. He had a white tape moustache holding his plastic tube in place.

"Mitch, this here's Mrs. Lumpkins, a widow neighbor lady of Vic's that brought him up this morning," Gramp said.

Mitch could now see that the lady was wearing a tight purple dress. She nodded and said, "Howdy."

She had a face like a horse, with big, loose lips, and stringy brown hair pulled back in a bun. Her body was rounded molded fat and in the tightness of her dress Mitch could see her long flat breasts, which hung down her chest and looked like rolls of salami someone had sat on and squished.

Her and Vic, what a pair, Mitch thought.

A bumblebee buzzed by Mitch's head and he brushed it away. "Hey, Bubba," Cramp cooed to the bee. The bee stopped in front of Gramp's face and seemed to be
staring him in the eye. It hovered there for a moment and then flew toward Vic who made a feeble attempt to swat it away. It continued on its course and joined the other bees in the pasture. Gramp’s eyes followed its entire flight, then jerked back to the group.

“Here Mitch, grab that blue one and the yellow one and I’ll throw the green one in,” Gramp ordered.

Mitch obeyed and took the two suitcases to the rear of the Olds, opened the trunk, and set them in. He was positioning them when Gramp swung his in and it smashed against Mitch’s finger. “Gaah-,” Mitch bit his lips before he could finish the phrase.

“Sorry. You okay?”

“Yeah.”

Mitch leaned back out of the trunk and went to get more bags. Another bee slowly buzzed his head. “Are there any more, Vic?”

Vic shook his head no. “Only a box with my food,” he rasped.

Mrs. Lumpkins went back to the car to get it. “Be careful. I dumped a couple cans in a glass jug, so that it would be easier to pour,” Vic warned.

She reached in and brought out his box of food. With one arm holding onto the box, she tried to quickly slam the door with the other, before losing her grip on the box. It didn’t work and the box fell to the ground, landing with a tinkling sound of breaking glass. The brown cardboard box turned wet as the liquid from the jug seeped through to the ground.

“I’m sorry . . .,” she began.

“Jovie curse you bitch,” Vic cut her off, “What am I supposed to eat?” His face turned red with rage and his body trembled as the words crawled out.

Gramp winced. Gramma winced and almost spoke. Mitch winced and little puffs of air came through his lips. Mrs. Lumpkins’ head hung in embarrassment.

That stupid old fool, Mitch thought, he’s almost dead and here he is cursing God. Mitch almost snickered at Vic’s ignorance. You don’t see me doing that, or Gramp either, and he’s a lot of closer to dead than I am.

A bumble bee appeared and swirled around Vic’s head, its yellow and black bands contrasting with Vic’s deep red face. He raised his cane and swung at it, but missed. The bee circled closer and landed on Vic’s forehead. His tired frail hand moved up to brush it off, but it was too slow. The bee stung and then the hand wiped it off. Vic groaned and danced around, while a darker red splotch grew on his forehead.

A laugh escaped Mitch and he covered his mouth with his hand, but couldn’t keep it in and burst out laughing, his whole body bending and contorting.

Gramp’s head snapped toward Mitch, a shocked look on his face. He said nothing and then he and Gramma moved over to Vic.

Mitch turned away and started walking back to the machine shed. Suddenly a buzzing was in his ear. He flailed at the side of his head, but to no avail. The droning in his ear got louder, as a bright yellow and black form became tangled in Mitch’s hair. He felt it stop near the front of his head, at the hairline, and then the stinger went in.

“AAH,” a short cry jumped from his body and his hand rubbed the bee from his head. He turned back to Gramp, but Vic’s eyes caught him first. They were cold and dead, staring into his own, measuring. Abruptly a small smile curled onto Vic’s lips and his head went back with an almost imperceptible snort. Then in his low whisper he spit out, “Aren’t you good!”, with all the anger left in him. Then his head bowed and his eyes released Mitch.

Mitch turned and started for the machine shed at a slow jog. He stumbled here and there because tears blurred his vision. His sweaty right palm rubbed the sting on his forehead, as he tried to remember the words to the song Gramp woke him with every morning.
Villanelle To My Best Friend

I'd like to share my thoughts with you outright;  
to pour my judgments and opinions out.  
But you're too sensitive to meet the bite.

My words, I think, are honest and forthright.  
Is love then maybe not so clear throughout?  
I'd like to share my thoughts with you outright.

For giving you advice I feel contrite.  
I know you're hurt because you shut me out;  
for you're too sensitive to meet the bite.

I know that we both ought to be polite;  
our words with others should be round-about.  
But can't I share my thoughts with you outright?

Can't we support each other, and ignite  
what's good or snuff what's bad and work it out?  
No - you're too sensitive to meet the bite.

Why do you pull away and get uptight?  
Don't you know rough-draft words are coming out?  
I'd like to share my thoughts with you outright.  
Must you be so sensitive to the bite?

Gioia Seerveld
A Sonnet of Unrequited Love

How is it when you hear my deepest sigh
That you can turn your back and walk away?
You leave me in the mire of my deep cry
Of love and pining for you every day.
You know my pangs of love are just for you,
That no one else can hold my deep desires.
I wish to me your hatred you'd construe.
Much better treatment love like mine requires.
I hope some day your heart aches for a one
Who'll spurn your love and treat you just like trash.
And you will be compelled to use a gun,
To mulch your worthless heart to useless mash.
Until that day I'll love you till I die!
Forget this crap, there's Sharon walking by.

Barry Crush

Secret Kingdom

In my childish recollections
It had stood proudly
Roots extended hungrily to grasp the soil.
Towering above me
Gnarled branches reached to etch the sky.

Ensconsed in this oaken refuge
I had felt like a monarch
Seated on a gilded throne.
I spent many hours
In my own special realm
Far above the earth.

Today
Looking through older eyes
All I perceive is a small tree
Humble in appearance.
But memories tell me
It hides in its leafy branches
A secret kingdom.

Priscilla Clark
The uneven voice in the background shouts vaguely. A kick in the side speeds up the molting of my cocoon. The drawstring is stuck and gives me a good excuse to stay in the down warmth.

"Good morning to you too," I mumble. The little man seems quite excited; I get the feeling that he doesn't feel like a leisurely chat over tea.

Eva is already rolling out of her sleeping bag. She doesn't look very cheerful—what do I expect, it was a little drafty last night. Train stations just aren't like the beds at home.

A regiment of janitors advances on us, pushing their sawdust ahead to surround the litter of cigarette butts, candy boxes, and drying fruit peels we slept in.

"If they get so upset that we spend a night on their soft floor, why don't they invite us over and give us a bed? Breakfast too, while they're at it," croaks Eva.

"Picked up a cold, eh? Let's get out of here and make some tea in the park."

"O.K., I need to cash a check sometime today if we can find an American Express office . . ."

"I feel so gross, my hair hasn't been washed since that fountain in Dijon and I'd hate to look at my eyebrows, they'll be like a jungle . . .!"

"The frenchies love it; maybe we can find decent water in the park."

We stuff our sleeping bags into our knapsacks, put on our shoes, shrug into our packs, and stroll to the entrance of the train station with all the dignity a back-fixing sleep can give you.

The church bells chime the quarter of the hour and we begin one of our favorite games—which direction to go when coming out of the train station. To ask a frenchman which direction the nearest park is would produce a variety of answers. Pitying glances, pats on the head, and philosophical discussions on why we'd want a park and what kind of park . . .

"Nan, I say we go straight ahead, the street has trees so there must be a park nearby."

"Hang on a sec, let's try and find one of those big street maps that are so well-lighted and placed in convenient spots so the tourist can easily find them. It's like they hide them on purpose just to curse tourists."

"O.K.? we have the map, but at which gare are we, nord or sud? It does make a diff . . . you'd think I'd be used to not knowing where I am, but it sure bugs me;—I wonder if Grandma would recognize it. Nice. The French Riviera—where she was married . . . ."

"I don't know, but I'll ask someone about the park."

I wait for a sympathetic looking middle-aged woman and rattle off my well-rehearsed lines. She asks my pardon and I repeat my sentences. She gives me a nice smile and says something unintelligible. One down. She didn't look severe enough to be French anyway. I look for someone who will cut me down to caterpillar size. I approach a stylish, chic woman, red hat and two baquettes under her arm, and miniature dog on the line. She carefully enunciates each syllable for me. Actually, that makes it twice as hard because most French people have a speeded-up dialect for foreigners.

"Nous sommes pres du la gare du nord."

Not bad for 6:30 in the morning, I'm still full-sized in dignity. I amble over to Eva who is standing by the pee-stained corner with our packs.

"Well?"

"Nord, so I guess we head that way," I say pointing behind the station. "I sure could go for some eggs—maybe we can find an epicerie that's open early, before we get to the park."

Our walks are perfected now. A lumbering stroll is the most comfortable. The idea is not to lift your knees up in front of you—that puts strain on the back. We have a sliding gait that is interrupted when stepping over piles of dog crap. We could make great footprints in the snow!

Eva obviously doesn't feel like talking, mornings just aren't made for her. This morning isn't anything great anyway, it looks like it is going to rain. If we hurry maybe we could get in a cup of tea, an egg boiled in the tea, and to a museum before it rains. "Don't move, I'll nip in here a sec, I'll get half a dozen, O.K.?"
"Yeah, O.K., hope they're not too expensive...."

Emerging from the "bonjour" of the old man I bet that every corner in France is pee-stained. "Got 'em, we'll discuss the price after we eat them."

I remember the first day we carried our packs; the metal bars felt like saws cutting our backs into strips. Our hip bones felt split open, but only shone a royal translucent colour of blue. I had felt that I qualified for a Jesus example in a short story.

Eva says, "Well at least we can walk under trees; remember that for the next time when it's hot sun or pouring rain and we've no shelter."

"You're so profound it kills me."

"O.K. O.K. just trying to be pleasant company."

The green, leafy trees that line the street struggle out of their earthy holes encased in cement. Everything looks so tired. The buildings are gray and in a straight line, attached. The shuttered windows are closed; one flutters open and listlessly falls back into place, shut. The street level is mostly shops, the bakery, butcher, shoe-repair, and people live on the first floor. More people live on top of them and on top of them are the atteliers—closets for the students, or others on that end of the economic scale.

Up ahead I see the black wrought iron of the gate and fence that always surround a park.

"Looks like we've found something," says Eva shrugging her shoulders up so she can loosen the belt from her pack.

"Yeah, I just hope we don't find too many bums practising as moriendi or those 65-and-plus whores. They sure know how to play on you... I mean, you give one a cup of tea—"

"—that was so funny! Remember, we had a whole line-up in front of our bench. I felt like a faith healer—that was great! We just sat and prayed that our fuel would run out."

I thrust the gate open trying not to see the body left-overs of the men lying or crouching in warped angles on the green wooden benches. Most support their brown liver-spotted scalps with an almost empty cider bottle. The cheapest liquid to drink is a vile cider that is wicked!

On the other side of the fountain is a free bench. We put on a purposeful stride like women who are too busy to look for trouble and silently agree on that bench. Our Canadian flags on our packs advertise our wrong place of birth but we try not to put in neon lights: "Two gullible girls. We are tourists, try and rip us off." There's nothing worse than a drunk with an inferiority or superiority complex; the one rants and raves, the other plays loving grandpa and if you don't love what they give, they both become violent.

We're five feet away from our bench and I see a shadow flit through the trees behind our bench. A grimy, canvas sack drops at one end of the bench and is followed by a little man whose blue eyes under his beret are ice-cold.

"I guess he wants to share, so long as he doesn't want company," Eva mutters as she holds my pack from behind so I can struggle out of it. I help her out of hers and we set them on the ground against the bench as a barrier between us and the old man. I open the zippers on the side pockets of my pack and the little man seems fascinated. His head is even with his knees, and his beret covers his face except for the one eye that follows every move.

"We've got this all worked out, eh Eva? I set the stove up, Eva puts in the fuel and lights it. She adjusts the wick and I have the pan ready for whatever we're making. "Oh rats, I forgot to get water, hang on," and I take off at a slow jog for the pump that's usually by the main gate. The loose gravel crunches as I lope along causing eyes to open.

The pump looks rusty and decrepit but I tell myself that we let the water boil hard before we drink it. My system is getting used to being in a permanent state of diarrhea anyhow. I set the pan on the grill under the spout and pump. Brown water fills the pan, can't get worse—dump it and pump again. It looks better—good enough to boil.

Walking back, trying not to spill too much water, I see Eva flitting around our packs and stove with agitated movements. She never does that—she's always so calm. Approaching, Eva almost runs me over, she bumps into the pan so my shoes get wet. "That guy's driving me nuts—he keeps breathing hard, and gasps, and he's watching all the time...."

"Listen, we've met more than our share of weirdos, don't worry about it. It's daytime and we have our knives...."

"You know I never, or hardly ever get nervous—but this guy gives me the creeps..." I set the pan on the burner and re-light it. The man edges
closer and bumps the pack nearest him. Chain reaction, Eva's pack knocks mine and mine would have knocked the burner over if it hadn't hit my shoulder first. "Hey—what are you trying to do, mister?!"

He puts his head on his knees and grunts. "D'you think he's sick?" I ask.

"I don't care. I hope he dies, at least he'd leave us alone!" Eva picks up both our mugs in one hand and they knock together.

"Hey, what's the matter, d'you want to leave, find a cafe or something?"

"He looks so evil, he's bent over with wickedness, it's the weight of the devil on his shoulders." The man's head rests on his knees, his chin works from side to side, and his eyes dart so quickly I think they will leap out of their sockets.

"You're giving me the creebles." The man just rocks back and forth quivering the bench boards so his presence can't be ignored. Eva and I sit shoulder to shoulder waiting for the water to boil. He doesn't have any socks on and one yellow toenail shows through a hole in his shoe.

"What time is it, Eva?"

Eva rolls up her cuff and whispers, "Almost eight."

The dampness of early morning is still heavy. There is a hazy stillness, then a hiss. The water boils over. "All set," I say, trying to be jovial. The boards sink at our end of the bench as the man gets up. Before we can sigh with relief he stands in front of us with his hands cupped and his mouth wide open showing no teeth and black gums. The grooves beside his nose tremble.

Eva snatches up the pan, splashes a few drops on his feet. He takes a step forward, his eyes pull Eva towards him, he makes no sound. I want to shake my head, but can't. Eva stands up slowly, the hand that clenches the pan spills more water which hisses into the dirt. Her other hand swings in front of her with her fingers spread wide open. I touch the dirt. Her other hand swings in front of her arm, it's rigid. I pull the pan out of her hand and drop it, it empties over the burner and the flame goes out. I take her elbow in my hands and shake her gently. "Eva, Eva, what are you doing? It's alright, come back!"

She shuts her eyes and opens them slowly, "What's going on?"

"I don't know!" I hastily throw the wet pan, the mugs, and the tea bag in my pack, pull the strings and pull it on. "C'mon, you take the eggs and I'll take the burner, let's get out of here!"

The little man stands with his hands cupped, fully extended like a statue. Behind him drift the other derelicts. One man with a rain coat that drags on the ground has a dark red spot stained into his chest. I grab Eva's free hand and pull, we break through the semi-circle of men, perverted druids waiting for the sacrifice. There is silence except for our crunching steps, kicking loose gravel.

"Don't run, that's the worst thing to do when you're scared!" gasps Eva. She clenches my hand so hard the blood stops flowing.

"Let's find a cafe, we'll be safe there."

We break through the gate to morning rush-hour traffic. The streets are in long, gray, straight rows lined with greenness. The clouds are even lower and the dog crap from last night has been washed down the gutter by the street cleaner.

"Hey, my fingers are going to fall off, can you ease up a bit?" She stares straight ahead and doesn't seem to hear. The only thing I know about treatment for shock is that victims are to rest and keep warm. She lets go of my hand and takes my arm instead. "I think it's going to rain, what say we find a cafe and check our maps. D'you want to go on, I mean after the Chagall Museum there's nothing holding us here, is there?" She pauses to catch her breath and then blurts, "Nan, do you know what happened there?"

We walk on, absently stepping over the brow-stained spots on the pavement. "This place looks kind of scuzzy but it's probably cheap. Let's go in."

Eva gives the door a heave and it almost comes off its hinges. She giggles and nearly crashes into a huge woman who must have been looking through the window in the door. The old woman lumbers to our table and we take a table far in the corner. The floor creaks with each step and I wince thinking how many splinters you'd catch if you walked here in your socks.

The woman waddles to our table and glances disapprovingly at our packs that hug the wall. She stands with her feet more than shoulder width apart and looks us over as we peer at the coffee-stained menu smeared on the table. Her mighty arms are covered by a stretching-flowered print, her faded red sweater is too small to cover her vast bosom. She gives a heaving cough, a rumble like the sea crashing on shore rocks. On her dress between a flower-blade and a flower-stem is a thread of slime; her handkerchief doesn't always reach her mouth in time. Her hair hangs in greasy strings where it escapes her hair pins. Her eyes don't smile. They are two dark beads lost in her puffy forehead. She
opens her mouth to show nicotine teeth and
tells us it is a nice day.

Eva wants hot chocolate, “deux chocolats chaud, s’il vous plait.” She
labouriously writes down our order and shuffles on her faded feathery pink slippers
behind the bar to heat our water.

“Wow, you meet all kinds, eh?” murmurs Eva, obviously trying not to offend the
woman by not speaking French.

The woman brings us our half, day old baquette in a wicker basket which is
probably still being used for coal for the kitchen oven. Our hot chocolate is the right
colour but it has a silty-sandy taste. She pours herself a cup at the bar, gives a sigh
that I think will crack the imitation tile counter top, and falls to slurping her brew.

“Nan, you know that man in the park—I want to find him again.”

“You’re crazy! What for?”

“This is going to sound stupid, even
dumb, but he reminded me of my grandpa . . . .”

“Something must have happened to
you, maybe we should go to a doctor—you
don’t have any grandpas.”

“D’you remember the story my Grandma
O. would tell if she had two glasses of
wine—the one about the man she married,
mom’s dad, and how she kicked him out of
the house because he drank too much. Mom
was born here. She and Grandma went to
Canada with Uncle Richard when mom was
two. I’ve seen pictures of him . . . .”

“Eva, be realistic. That was almost 50
years ago—”

“—closer to 40, and that man was old!
Why else would he have looked at me like
that?”

“Eva, he seemed possessed. Even if it is
your grandpa do you really want to talk to
him?”

The woman trudges over to clear away
our cups and basket, time to leave. We pay
and thank her courteously.

We shoulder our packs and I try to shake
off the heavy smell of Camembert as we head
up the street towards the park; the soft rain
drips a pattern on our faces.
MELODY IN D

Espressione

Cindy Ripperdan
The Chosen

Jim De Young

You walk with open eyes which have no sight,
Direct on all you see an angry glare,
And still your empty eyes reflect the night.

You speak with awe of your new gift of light,
Your sounding brass rings hollow in my ear.
You walk with open eyes which have no sight.

A Saul, you knew you walked the road of right;
Struck down and blinded you were not aware
Your empty eyes did now reflect the night.

Your cul-de-sac called Straight is your delight;
You want no Ananias to declare
"You walk with open eyes which have no sight."

And there you may, at your own ease, indict,
For badge of office on your sleeve you wear,
Though still your empty eyes reflect the night.

A Saul you still remain; though given light,
Your brass and cymbal ceaselessly declare
You walk with open eyes which have no sight,
Always your empty eyes reflect the night.