

# CREATIVE WRITING '59



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## Ghetto

The Tiber flows slowly in August. As always, it passes under the city gates, and then on past the Vatican. And then, just before a crook in its course and a brusque turn, it passes by a synagogue. And behind this synagogue, there is a short street with a thick wall and watchtower at either end.

Every evening, just as the orange sun blows its last kisses to the sloping hills of Rome, a hundred people carry crude wooden tables out onto the little street. They carry out long loaves of good bread and black pots of pasta and new wine. "Chaim," they all say, and tip their wine glasses.

On this evening there was a stranger among the people — an American of maybe twenty-five years, Michael by name. Michael had found the quarter quite by accident; he had lost his way while heading back to his hotel room from the Janiculum. But a handsome young man had greeted him with "shalom" and they had become friends. And so they had been sitting on the stoop in back of the synagogue, talking.

"Come, Michael," entreated Jacopo. "I see that my wife is outside now with our children. Surely you will dine with us, won't you?"

Michael hesitated. Everyone seemed to be going about his meal with such enthusiasm, as though meals never came quite often enough, nor were quite satisfying enough. God, he thought, they eat pasta 365 days a year. His eyes quickly scanned the leaning tenements, and the laughing people with their poor clothes and rotting teeth. "Funny thing," he said at length, "but I'm really not the least bit hungry. But you'll go eat, of course. And certainly I would love to meet your family."

Together, the two rose. They stretched and then crossed the place. Michael and Jacopo were strikingly similar: about the same age, showing the same dark features, the same rather thin build, the same intelligent expression.

All at once, Jacopo was surrounded by people. There was an elderly man, hiccupping and babbling to himself in unforgettable Italian. "That's Padre," Jacopo offered gently. "He's generally quite rational. It's just that for him, life becomes a grand scherzo after so much wine."

Jacopo turned around to find his wife standing silent, glancing first at her father-in-law and then bashfully at Michael. The children, a boy of eight and one little more than an infant, ran up to Jacopo, not in the least concerned about their grandfather's behavior.

"Everybody, I want you to meet my new friend Michael. Michael comes from America — New York. Michael, my wife Angelina." Angelina shook his hand graciously. The two boys' eyes were fixed upon the stranger. An American. New York. "This is Cesare," Jacopo continued. "Say 'shalom' to the gentleman, Cesare."

Cesare was the younger child. "We have named him

Cesare," Jacopo added. "because Cesare was good to our people." Cesare was far less impressed with this fact than he was with Michael. Americans, he kept thinking, weren't they the people who bought rosaries and cameos from his father?

Then Pietro came forward. He was so pompous for his eight years. "How do you do, sir," he said. And then with quick, squirrel-like motions, he darted over to the table, broke off a piece of bread, and approached Michael with it. Holding out the piece of bread he said, "Won't you



have something to eat with us, sir?" Michael checked himself from laughing at this unexpected hospitality.

"I have already invited him to eat with us," interceded Jacopo. "He says he is not hungry. You run on back with mother and eat by yourselves. I think I'll take a walk with Michael." He embraced Cesare, made a silly ceremony out of shaking hands with Pietro, and walked off laughing with Michael.

"You said you teach history, Michael?" asked Jacopo, as they walked freely through the gate of the terrible wall.

"Yes," said Michael absently; he was very much preoccupied with thoughts of what life must have been like when there were sentries and guns to preserve the wall's impenetrability.

"I have always been very interested in history." (Please stop looking at that wall! We have learned to forget what it once meant.) "When we were very little, my brothers and I would go quite often to the forum. There was a wonderful priest — he died during the war — who would always be there late Sunday afternoons. He read the Latin inscriptions to us, until we knew them so well we could chant a text of Roman life."

Now the two men were walking along the Tiber. A breeze had begun to blow. A black dog had chased a white dog into the water and the two made delicious splashing noises.

"It's a funny thing," said Jacopo. "When we were little, we didn't mind at all that we were poor. It seemed everything we wanted we could get free anyhow. We learned English and French from the priest; we heard beautiful music in our synagogues on Fridays and Saturdays, and in the cathedrals on Sundays; when we wanted to see new sights, the iceman would let us ride in his wagon. We never really thought about our having to eat pasta

every day, every meal. Our mother told us it was healthier to bathe always in cold water, and we believed her. Even when we . . ."

"Sometimes I think it's rotten to be this comfortable! How do you like us Americans, Jacopo? We track across Italy because your country amuses us, because it makes us think humans are great, now that we know there are still some who work the soil. We go into your cathedrals because we like the pretty mosaics. It costs us plenty, and it's fun to spend it."

"Michael! I haven't known you very long, — that's true. But I doubt very much that your travels have been that meaningless to you. Nor do I think your comforts can possibly have done you any harm. It makes me sick to see myself, and my neighbors — we ought to be moving away from our ghetto, and we deserve to be doing something better than selling trinkets. When a man has learned three languages and a sizeable chunk of the world's history, he has a right to earn a decent living. But you try investing your three languages in some property. You try writing the book you've been wanting to write when your kids haven't had milk or vegetables in a week. And then talk of luxuries — travel, opera tickets — you would willfully deprive yourself of such things?"

"If they're things men worthier than I can't have, I half think I would."

"You half think."

Michael didn't answer. Suddenly this argument seemed theoretical and unimportant. It wasn't theoretical that men starved their minds to feed their bodies. And that was important. The two men were standing on an ancient bridge. Both were studying some distant shadows laid across the still water. They had grown tired of conjuring Utopia long before meeting each other. The swaying shapes were restful to watch.



"Jacopo!" Jacopo turned to Michael very quickly. What could be so urgent? "Jacopo — your son — the big one Pietro? What on earth was troubling Michael, thought Jacopo. "Jacopo, I am leaving Rome tomorrow for a few days' stay in Sorrento. About Pietro: he has always lived in Rome, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"How do you . . . how do you suppose he would like a trip to Sorrento?"

"You mean —"

"I mean I would like to take Pietro to Sorrento with me."

Jacopo looked at him. He trusted him, but he did not understand him.

"No, I mean it. Listen, think what it would be to a child's imagination to have a chance to see the wild azuleos, and the bay, and purple Vesuvius against the sky. He's

## Sonnet

And when, upon its low and low-played theme,  
The lilt-call of your song begins to weave  
An affirmation of the way things seem,  
I cannot, I admit, know of belief  
But only of immerse and, thereby, know.  
Belief, I fear, would lead me but to thought;  
And life's too quick, and thinking is too slow,  
And faith where it should not, has often sought.  
So I must more than trust; and let that more  
Consume the ashes of a thought best dead.  
A life thus lived is best: for in its roar  
The murmurings of doubt need not be dread.  
Belief has perished then, but we go on,  
Now's love immersed in, known: bush! nothing's gone!

by Michael Schwartz

## A Simple Question

I seek the meaning of life in the sunken eyes of an old man, in the laugh of a young girl, in the tree spreading lifeless arms to the dead grey sky. Patterns of color shift and blend before my eyes, blue and red and black, hiding something which I see and forget, which I never see and forget, which I never see and want to remember. A half-eaten apple that he left turns brown and I will throw it away soon because life cannot be saved, love must be now, and the past does not exist. The music goes up and down in lines, in beauty that I cannot translate into thought, for words are only a pale reflection of

feelings. The image of me changes; the constant of my physical being is amazed as yesterday's soul leaves to make room for today's.

When I am old and shriveled, when my memories are more real than my present, when I love comfort more than adventure, even then will I know? Or will I, when youth looks at my face, hollowed by tears and passion, at my hands which twist and pull at my dress, will I then look back without knowledge, and will the searching eyes of youth see only the still-searching eyes of age? A whole life lived with the one question still left unanswered. Why?

by Barbara Milman

lived his whole life in Rome. Oh, I don't doubt that it has been a wonderful life, but he can't know that men grow tired of familiarity, poverty. But I would so love for him to swim, to pick flowers — to be a "paisano" for just a few days."

Jacopo was smiling broadly. Sorrento. He remembered all he had read about beautiful Sorrento. And Pietro, Pietro was so much a city boy. This could be wonderful. It was exciting!

"Yes!" Jacopo said. "Yes, I would love my son to see Sorrento!" The two men had already turned in their course, and were heading quickly back to the quarter. "Ah, and if he could have a chance to see the ruins of Pompeii! He could learn so much from such a trip; And this would be real vacation for Pietro — out in the sunshine, and away from the dust he lives in. Michael, I — I think I ought to feel guilty for wanting my son to share this trip — but to be very honest, I can feel nothing, but great joy."

Michael had started to protest, but they had already arrived back at the square, and Jacopo was running ahead to shout out the wonderful news. Just as Jacopo had hoped, he found Pietro and Mother together. "Pietro, fellow, you're going to Sorrento!" Pietro might not have believed him, and surely Angelina would not have believed him, if he had not announced this with such breathless enthusiasm. Then, too, Michael was running close behind. Americans are impossibly crazy at times, they had heard.

Pietro shrieked, he laughed, he danced, he tumbled, he chanted. Sorrento, Sorrento, Sorrento, So Ren To. To ho.

Angelina gently lay her hand on his shoulder, as if to say, "Stop being such a child, my child."

She bit her lip. "Go upstairs and see that your brother is not in trouble, won't you, Pietro?" Pietro smiled an elegant smile at Daddy and the American, and hop-hopped up the front steps.

Angelina wheeled about and turned her eyes on Jacopo.

"What is wrong with you? Jacopo, you are not a foolish man." Her speech was slow and measured, as though these words were painful to pronounce. "But Jacopo, how could you run to your son like that, and tell him that in the next minute, a magic carpet is going to sweep him up, and carry him to the pretty flowered cities of Italy?"

"That's just it, my pretty. This is true! Michael here has offered to take Pietro along with him on his trip to Sorrento — really!"

"No no no, Jacopo! Maybe your friend has made this offer. That can be true. But it is not reality. Can't you see the folly of it? Sorrento — sure, pretty Sorrento. Take your son there to see gleaming yachts, so he can come home to Rome, all asphalt and tar and dusty cathedrals. Go on, show him the red-roofed villas and exotic plants. That's right, we want him to come back imbued with a love for his crumbling ghetto buildings!"

"Ghetto, ghetto. You talk as though our children are going to live forever within these walls."

"And that is not reasonable to assume? Talk sense, Jacopo."

(Cont'd on page 5)



## The Best Medicine

It was a bad morning; the thought hit Ricky the moment she awoke. The air was cold, very cold, and it was the morning she was to leave home. All that night she had been half awake, ready to stop the alarm clock and pull herself out of bed, but now that the time had come she could not find the button to stop the harsh ringing. She shivered and fumbled for it until it finally rang itself out. It was funny that she should so much like sleeping this one morning; usually she could not bear to lounge in bed. She curled herself up, and buried her head beneath the pile of rough wool blankets.

In the next room father snored on, oblivious of his daughter and her alarm clock. Her mother half awoke at the sound and mumbled to herself, "Why so early? . . . Alex . . . Ricky? . . . Marcia?" Then she remembered, her oldest daughter had to leave this morning, and gratefully she sank back into early morning sleep. Thoughts of coffee, a luncheon date, and an orthodontist appointment made little patterns in her disturbed dreams.

Marcia, lying round and curvy and soft in the third bedroom drowsily opened her eyes at the sound of the ring, felt to see if all her curlers were in place, and fell back to sleep. The blankets were draped around her, hiding the rounded breasts of a fourteen year old girl, young and growing. A loose lock of brown hair fell out from the pink bandanna covering the metal clips, and lay in a silly curl on her forehead.



Downstairs, in a room adjoining the kitchen, Alex lay, too tall, too pointed, not lovable, not manly. He had heard nothing of the harsh alarm but slept shivering under a thin sheet, his blankets hanging half off the bed. In his sleep he rubbed a dirty arm across his nose and scratched his head; his rest was rough and itchy and boyish.

The sun climbed higher and a thin sliver of it crept in through the half closed blinds and shot across the linoleum in Ricky's room. "When the sun reaches the ninth crack," thought Ricky,

"my mother will be brushing her teeth and then going down to make breakfast; at the eleventh crack Daddy will stop snoring and Alex will run into the kitchen to sneak some chocolate cake, and when it passes above the window, Marcia will be putting on her lipstick, and I'll be gone, thank God." Perhaps they would talk about her at breakfast. She lay back and pondered the possibility. "Mother will ask if anyone knows why I had to leave so early, but no one will know though I've told them all in a thousand different ways. God, it's freezing!" she said aloud and slowly got out of bed.

Ricky's night gown hung loosely. It covered up her flabbiness, the rolls of fat, the plump figure. Her face could have been pretty but for the halo of kinky hair surrounding it. Relatives always said that Ricky had an "interesting" look about her. Goose pimples appeared like a rash on her body and she shivered in the cold morning air. Once again she began her daily ritual, the morning rites of a diabetic. This day there was a special meaning to it; Ricky tested carefully for the amount of insulin and filled a small glass syringe. She turned away and jabbed the needle into the fat of her thigh; her head jerked back and her lips pursed. "Oh it hurt all right! You don't get numb to that shining needle," she thought. People were always asking her if she still could stand it. She couldn't. Ricky looked toward her sister's room, smiled and walked into the bathroom with her dirty medical supplies. She dropped the empty syringe into a pan filled with her urine and with a smirk, left it on the toilet seat, washing nothing. She dressed quickly and went downstairs to make a sandwich. This done, she picked up a brown bag, placed it in her pocket-book and walked out the front door, forgetting to close it. She ran until the house disappeared behind a harsh red apartment building.

The sun had reached the top of the window in Ricky's room. Slowly and quietly the small house awoke; the mother rubbed off her night cream; the father dangled his feet over the side of his bed and mumbled something about winter; Alex dropped his chocolate cake on the floor and all the icing came off; Marcia opened her eyes.

"Take a chance on me . . . You may not know me well but take a chance on love."

The radio blared rock and roll and Alex choked with laughter watching his sister in her morning gyrations. Hot coffee smoked and gurgled in the percolator; the pungent odor drifted out of the kitchen and into the other rooms of the small house. The mother cursed as a can of frozen concentrated orange juice got stuck in the opener. The father came in and switched to the news. ". . . the boy was described as short and fair with blue eyes and close-cropped blond hair. He has been missing for two days now."

"Who the hell cares," mumbled Alex.

"Where did Ricky have to go so early this morning?" the mother asked.

The others shrugged their shoulders and went back to bowls of hot oatmeal drowned in cream, butter and sugar. "Who the hell cares!" yelled Alex.

"Alex, a little control."

"Yes, Alex!" Marcia echoed her mother's warning. The boy stretched his bony arms above his head and burped. All conversation at the breakfast table ceased; each wandered into his own thoughts or concentrated on eating. Slowly the family drifted away, to business, to school, to the laundry, a peck on the cheek, a reminder about dentists, a door slamming. The sun was high above the roof now, and Ricky's room was dark with morning shadows.

The grisly-chinned janitor asked the question a third time, and Ricky squirmed on the hard bench in the waiting room. "Sure ya want the bus to the city, girlic? Kind of a round-about way of going, I'd say." She nodded and read once again the damp bus schedule now almost soggy from the sweat of her hands.

(Cont'd on page 6)

## I Have Stopped Running

As he rides a bicycle past me, I see his hands tremble, and I see his face quiver from some disease peculiar to old age. And I watch him ride away, slipping between parked and moving cars.

"Old man," I think, "I am very much afraid for you."

Almost every day, the old man passes me coming home from school. He is alone, always, and tired . . . shaking.

And I think: "Old man, I am sorry for you."

And I have cried for him, for no reason at all.

"Why are you crying?" she had asked.

"I dunno." I said, "I feel sorry."

"For who?"

"I'm just . . . sorry," I said.

"I'm old, I grow old. I will wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

"Stop that crying!" she shouted.

(But I couldn't).

Each day I grow more afraid for the old man. Today, I heard them talk about scaring him with a car. And each time they taunt and threaten the old man, and they have hurt him. They have nearly killed him.

They laughed, and then the fat one picked up a rock, and he threw it at the spokes

of the bicycle. It hit the tire, and the whole bicycle turned toward the middle of the street. A horn screamed, and the boys stopped laughing. But the old man got his bicycle back on the side. Then they began shouting again, even louder than before.

"If that was me in the car, old man, I'd have gotten ya. You're worth twenty-five points when you're riding a bike."

And the old man looked around, smiled stupidly, and rode on.



The car shot by me, black and noisy, looking for him. They were in the car, laughing, waiting for him.

We saw the old man at about the same time.

The fat one raised the car's head moments later behind him. The other stuck his hand out the window, and as the car squeezed by at forty or fifty an hour, he tried to ring the bell on the old man's bicycle. He hit his shoulder instead.

The old man raised his head quite suddenly. He saw a black blur whip around the corner just in front of him, and he raised a shaking hand to feel his shoulder. Puzzled, he brought it back again to steer the bike.

The old man had passed me, and I could hear the unmuffled car turn the corner behind us. I started to run after him.

Tense I lay, sweating, forcing his image out of my mind. But the picture persists (and each time, a figure, blurred and hooded). The old man passes, riding his bicycle, and the figure climbs on behind. It wraps its arms about him, and the hood drops to the street. I see it gleaming, grinning . . .

"My God, a skull!" I have stopped running. The tears come fast now, easily, and for no reason. They have gone, he is safe. (And I have stopped running.)

by Albert Hutter

## Petals

. . . I am alone with the beating of my heart . . .

O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful! and yet again wonderful . . .  
Shakespeare

no longer we,  
be is be and i am me

be loves me, be loves me not, be loves me,  
but daisies lie;  
be loves me not, why? . . .

love to-day  
listen! i say  
love you,  
the

wind  
and  
stars  
and  
rain

drops on your brow,  
love him;  
love now.

by Peg Eliot

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## The Horizon

The war seemed remote to Martha because she was only 1 years old. To her it meant she could have no balloons, because they were made of rubber which was needed for tires and hard to obtain. It meant also that her father collected scrap metal on Saturday afternoons and could not play with her. Otherwise life was the same: war didn't touch her.

Her family went to Long Beach in the summer. Seated on the warm sand with a fortress about her, she dug foxholes and tunnels. She looked often at her father for approval. He was a giant — long, brown, and lean,



revealing his bright teeth constantly in a warm smile when their gazes met.

Bending down, he plucked her from her fortress and balanced her on his strong shoulders. He picked his way through the outstretched sunbathers toward the ocean. "Martha, this is the Atlantic Ocean," he said. "Do you know what's on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean?"

"No, Daddy."

"What's happening in Europe now?"

"A war is in Europe," Martha looked at the horizon. "Over the line where the sky meets the ocean, just behind that line is Europe," she thought. She listened for gunshots and bombs falling; she strained her eyes for a glimpse of Europe, but Europe was just over the horizon, and she heard nothing.

They waded into the water together, — tall, lean father, just a little too old for war, and little girl, just a little girl, just a little too young to understand what or where it was.

Martha's father held her wrists tightly while the waves tumbled over each other at his feet. He lifted Martha down and plunked her waist-deep into the surf. She kicked her legs and squealed delightedly. They went to the very edge where the salty tongues lick the shore and deposit treasures spit from the sea. Here they engineered swimming-holes for dixie-cup spoons. Often Martha squinted at the horizon. Perhaps Europe had come closer while she had her back turned. Sea planes passed overhead, and she watched to see if bombs were dropping from them. "Are those our planes, Daddy?" she asked urgently, always expecting and yet relieved by his affirmative reply.

Soon they picked their way back through the maze of prone bodies, blankets, and umbrellas to their own spot on the sand. Martha sat by her mother who rubbed

her back with lotion that smelled like shaving cream. "You shouldn't keep her in the sun so long, Ed."

"Why not? She's as brown as a coffee bean anyway."

"Just the same, there's always the chance of sunstroke or something."

He looked a little dubious as he scrutinized his energetic daughter. "I'm going in for a swim," he said finally. "Keep your eyes on me, Martha. I ought to get to Europe one of these days on my long distance swim."

Martha looked after him in dismay. She did not lose sight of him for a minute as he worked his way back to the beach. She saw him stop at the water and splash himself deliciously. Then he waded out, farther and farther. She watched the water level rise to his thighs, then waist, then flick around his rib cage. Heedlessly he let the waves roll over his body. Her father hardly flinched as he walked through them. Martha supposed that he did not even shut his eyes.

Martha could still single him out from the mob of bathers. He was past most of them now. The water reach-

ed his chest, seconds later, his burnt shoulders. Then she could only see his head.

A seaplane distracted her attention momentarily. Her mother, anticipating her question, assured her that it was an American plane.

She returned to follow her father's progress. Had he reached the horizon? Was he over in Europe? Dread snatched at her throat. A peculiar thought occurred to her. He had no clothes. No. He was still there. She could see his dark head bobbing in the gray-blue of the waves.

The bright yellow day had taken on a gray cast. The umbrellas no longer threw shadows, though there was an intense glare. A sharp stab of thunder interrupted her thoughts. Startled screams arose from the bathers, who began hurriedly to gather their things.

Martha sat paralyzed. She had lost sight of her father. Bombs! Bombs! *THEY WERE DROPPING BOMBS ON HER FATHER.* He was over the horizon. She could not see him. He would never return. He was in Europe . . . dead.

by Maddy Magzis

## The Forest For The Trees

"My darling," he said, "I hope I made it perfectly clear that so far as I am concerned, you are just another pick up."

We called it "Desire under the Elms" and laughed because they weren't alone and it didn't matter. The branches of the tree dropped over us and made a cave; we put our raincoats down on the damp dirt. The whines and croons of three drunks were ink spots on the night's blotter of stillness. A boy walked through the park, taking his dog out before he went to bed, and found himself an intruder in the world of boy-girl around him. It had rained and when our voices moved the leaves, drops fell, seasoning the delight on our mouths. The air, made us giddy with rediscovery — the kind of feeling you get on hot day, not when it's so hot that you have to take your shirt off, but when it's so hot that you want to take

it off, and feel the sun spreading through your back with the clothes being scrubbed on grey granite — I know where I'm going and I know who's going with me. In the joy of being so close, we forgot that a week before, we had ripped the relationship to shreds, examining motives, ulterior and not so ulterior:

"It's only fair for you to know. I'd feel like the biggest heel in the world if I didn't tell you. I just don't give a damn — but I must give a damn, otherwise I wouldn't even take the time to tell you in the first place. I just don't know what to do!"

"Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself. I'm a big girl. No emotional entanglements. Live modern:

The wind flattened the grass for a moment and then let it rise up again, tall and straight; the sky was so close that I could have reached up and taken a handful of cool, wet blue. I wanted to scream with joy and pain at the beauty of the day, and I stared at Jimmy, searching for that same pain and joy in his face, seeking a reflection of the magnificence that surrounded us in his eyes.

I did not see my own feelings mirrored in his face. The eyes of another do not always see the same things you see, and peoples' emo-

tions cannot always be read in their faces.

"Jimmy . . ." I wanted him to tell me that we saw the same thing, but my voice sounded harsh in the silence of the field. You cannot speak of the softness of the air.

Yet I had to tell him of the pain, to share the joy with him quickly, while I still felt them so intensely. And so I put my hand out to him and we shared the beauty of the green swaying leaves and the blue sky and the smells of the damp earth and the grass scratching our faces.

by Barbara Milman

## To Die A Poet

I am afraid to go to his grave. I am afraid to see his name on a chunk of stone when it should be graven in fine gold volumes of poems. I am afraid that I may see this same rotten thing happening all over again — three men in brown overalls come to put away a crude coffin, and nobody to watch. And I'm afraid to look up at the sky: I will see the arbi-

trary cruelty of God, and if I keep looking, I may see no God at all. And today I feel too weak to see that.

He's dead. Richard Stiles is dead. He's not starving now, and the landlady throws away without reading the polite letters that still come: "Dear Mr. Stiles, I see in your poetry some very effective writing. As for the most recent poem you submitted, however, we happen not to need . . ." Oh God, they "happen not to need"! Maybe that should read "Dear Mr. Stiles, We are specializing in tailfins and hydrogen bombs at present, and while there is much of literary merit in your work, you are, after all, a poet, and we happen not to need you this year. Love and kisses, Your universe. And I came to know, Sunday by Sunday, of the worlds of Harvard in '02, and of Spain

Jean Kerr

that's what the cigarette ad say. I understand. I hate

We became only subconscious of all that. With our bodies and our minds we stripped off the excuses of civilized people until we lay there sensually inchoate.

Finally, dizzy with the feel of ourselves and each other, we shivered and staggered back up the path to the car. We sat there for a while, smoking; I couldn't even feel how sick I was getting from inhaling. He took me home and I never saw him again.

But passion is not love. And that's why, now that the whole thing is over, I like to think I wasn't hurt.

by Judy Gozan

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during the Great War, and of the New York theater society that Mr. Stiles knew as a critic. One time Mr. Stiles even spoke of a son who, I surmise, had abandoned his father, preferring not to revisit the sordid third floor flat.

Me, I could bear it well enough. It sickened me to love as I did a man who wrote of the senses, and yet who was too poor to repair his growling deafness and blindness — who wrote of love and yet no longer had a family, had never bothered to have friends. This was, however, a bitter taste which I let choke me in my solitude. In his presence, I nourished him with my affection and energy; this was all I could offer a man who knew so much better than I everything but youth.

Richard Stiles died thinking I was going to be a poet. But oh God, I think I deceived him.

I think I am going to live my life for love, maybe even for science — rather than for a volume of posthumous poems.

I am wide awake. I am still filled with love for Mr. Stiles. But I am afraid to go to his grave.

by Ellen Faust



# The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

I had recently finished reading the deeply probing, religious poetry of the metaphysical poets, when I came upon a little book of pure music, Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Reading this verse after reading that of John Donne was to me like bathing in clear mountain water after a long, hard hike. The *Rubaiyat* bid me:

Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the wise To talking; one thing is certain, that life flies; one thing is certain, and the Rest is lies; The flower that once had blown forever dies.

This is not my philosophy; I would like to but cannot



follow Omar's advice to "... fill the cup Before life's liquor in its cup be dry." Yet, deep down within me, there are the same desires, the same thirsts that make up the *Rubaiyat's* entire philosophy; the essential music of the poetry has brought them to the top and changed them into profound and exquisite songs, exploring the problems of life and death. Fitzgerald himself wrote

that the meaning of the *Rubaiyat* lay in the old saying, "Let us drink, for tomorrow we die." Indeed he could not have come nearer to writing these words than in the lines:

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend, Before we too into the dust descend; Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to live, Sans wine, Sans Song Sans Singer, and sans end!"

I am profoundly happy that all men do not adhere to this advice, that there are many who believe in tomorrow and bother themselves about the meaning of life and the search for truth. But I am one of these, and when I read Omar Khayyam I am not glad of that. His invitation is so tempting; what is there to argue or fret about? I do not wish to be a philosopher king, I do not wish to search the unknown depths or the starry heights when I am offered

... A loaf of bread beneath the bough, A flask of wine, a book of verse and thou.

It is wrong, though, to say that the *Rubaiyat* is simply a lighthearted, sensual, eclogue filled with lovely metaphors about wine, women and song for that is only part of it. There is something beneath this verse that warns of morbid desperation and disappointment in this world of ours. At times this feeling overtakes the passion and

playfulness of the wine, and produces a rather ominous, contrasting quatrain:

One moment in Annihilation's waste, One moment, of the Well of life to taste— The stars are setting and the caravan Starts for the dawn of Nothing—Ob, make haste!

The most disturbing idea presented in Omar Khayyam's verse is the blind belief in man's predestination, for although the poem scorns all talk of ethereal beings, all discussion of God and after life, it seems to accept on faith the existence of some superior force which moves men. Let us drink and make merry, he suggests, and not look toward a better life somewhere else. He scorns those who prepare for today and those who look for tomorrow: "Fools, your Reward is neither here nor There." And in a very famous quatrain, he expresses the futility of the great philosophers and religious men, the futility of prayer and laughter and tears:

The moving finger writes; and, having writ, Moves on: nor all thy piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a line, Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

Life to Khayyam is a "... checker-board of night and day where Destiny with men for pieces plays." To me, men are both the pieces and the self jerked from beneath a cool tree, rudely taken from a jug of wine, and made to listen to the bitter note of a man who has been deceived and wishes to reject everything but the sensual:

Indeed the Idols I have held so long Have done my credit in Men's Eyes much wrong Have drown'd my honor in a shallow cup, And sold my reputation for a song.

When I read lines such as those above something moves within me and reminds me that wine is an escape, a bitter indulgence used to fight reality. I am not yet ready to escape. My search for truth has just begun and I wouldn't give it all up for a brimming bowl and soft lips; just a bit of it, just a bit. And there are times when I am tempted much by the wine, and times when I drink deeply of it, too deeply, my society tells me, too deeply. But it was wonderful, I answer, and I would not give it up for your gods or your promises or your dawns. Khayyam did not care about these things because he had ...

Divorced old Barren Reason from my Bed, And took the daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

I have not taken and probably will never take such a step, but I am watching carefully to see that Reason does not grip me too tightly and blind me to the ancient Rubies still clinging to the vine.

by Esta Diamond



Yesterday I doodled, but first I read the newspaper. I learned of the nursing student who hung herself in a closet for a reason nobody quite understood and of the movie star who got bruises on his ankles and lower legs when his taxi crashed into a telephone pole. He said he had a premonition before it happened. A five year old boy might not live till six, the newspaper told me. His parents are divorced, don't come to see him in the hospital. And a jet plane collided with a passenger train. Some photographer clicked his heart out and came up with a magnificent picture of a twisted iron railing sticking up from the tracks before the wrinkled, shiny, dying wreckage of man and superman. A sprightly caption summed it all up: "Some go by train because they fear plane crashes. Some

go by plane because they believe trains are no safer."

I was inspired, upset, confused, ready to write my novel. I picked up my pencil and drew a picture of wagon wheels and Santa Clauses and tousle-headed kiddies tucked in bed, and I scribbled lots of little spiders' webs all across the paper. Tomorrow I shall not read the newspapers. I shall seek my inspiration elsewhere: in small animals crawling in the soul of the earth, and in tall grass blowing, cuckoo clocks at twelve, drills rotating, silverware clinking. Today my cells are dead but tomorrow they will quiver with the smell of sweat and ginger bread and baby powder, damp earth, and fresh paint. I will write the truth ... always the truth ... for how often does a jet plane crash into a speeding train?

by Esta Diamond

## An Og Eclogue

A word about Ogden Gnash Whose poetry contains liberties with poetic license somewhat rash.

Anybody can From Slippery Rock to Tehran Like Gnash, produce a poem dealing with rabbits and their habits,

Or turtles and squirrels, If he isn't plagued by his conscience After writing unintelligible nonsense. For some of the words he makes rhyme Like promise and Mom is, exhausted and losted He just overubelms with rhyme schyme. If I had to go pickin' and choosin' Between readin' old Og or boozin', I can say with conviction I'd stick to his diction And endure orthographiconfusin'.

by Maddy Magzis

### GHETTO — (Cont'd from page 2)

Our people have lived here for centuries. It is our way of life. It is our station. And you're a goat-brained idealist if you think otherwise."

"My sons are not going to live forever in Rome's rottenest ruins."

"Well, my sons are, if you will stop one moment to be reasonable. And my sons are not going to lose their reality in any three-day fairy tales." She almost couldn't say the words, but with effort she managed, "I forbid this trip."

True, Jacopo knew only idealism. He knew his thoughts and actions echoed loudly the tenets of this most holy creed. "Reality"—bosh! A life that discards rainbow-chasing, the idylls,—how, for a human, can even "reality" do this?

And Jacopo knew too that Angelina's "I forbid it" meant more accurately "do what you wish" in a tone of voice that pleaded "do what I wish". She would forbid for her half. Her vigorous statements were her own defense against the tentative nature of her own sentiments—a kind of affirmation that Jacopo should grant her audience. But they both knew that Jacopo's word was the ultimate.

So it was up to him. It was

up to him, and yet while he listened to Angelina, he could not help wishing he were very little. Then he could kick and scream, and then he would feel much better. And it wouldn't be "up to him" in such a funny way. As it was, he stared, stunned, at his wife, and sometimes he shook his head "no".

For a moment, neither said anything. Then they were aware of a shuffling, scuffling, noise approaching them. It was Pietro. He was dragging a shopping bag, into which he had stuffed some overalls, a nightshirt, and a small wooden soldier. He was all packed. He walked up to Michael and looked at him expectantly.

"Come here, Pietro," said Jacopo. Pietro obeyed.

"Pietro. You can't go to Sorrento, Pietro. I'm sorry, son." Jacopo raised his eyes till they met Angelina's. Then he turned around in disgust and walked away.

Pietro picked up his bag. He walked across the square without making a sound. He climbed up the steps of the synagogue. He lay down on the cool granite. I'm sorry son. I'm sorry son. Daddy had said I'm sorry son. He cried the rainbow tears only little boys can cry, and soon he fell asleep. by Ellen Faust

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# Poem

Never  
Have I seen myself before  
As now I see myself:  
Lit  
In the thousand-faced  
Reflectors of my soul that are  
Your eyes.

by Michael Schwartz

## BEST MEDICINE (Cont'd from page 6)

"How many brothers and sisters do you have?" The woman with the happy voice spoke quickly trying to get away from talk of sickness.

"One of each," she said, "but they're both healthy. My little brother is twelve, and he hates all girls except me. He even hates my sister, just in fun of course. They fight all the time and it's up to me to make peace; but all the time they're worrying about me. . . I tell them not to, but it doesn't help." Ricky was suddenly breathless from her rare spurt of words. She smiled, pleased at the pictures she had painted. It was real enough wasn't it? She would like to see them at dinner, unable to eat because she was missing. They all had their spats but in the end the Kalicks stuck together.

The young woman smiled and looked away from Ricky without speaking. "Maybe you can't understand how it is for us . . . you know when a person is sick you love him even more. Haven't you ever felt that way?" she demanded a little too loudly.

"Yes, dear, of course: I'm sure you try not make your loved ones worry about you. My son is just too young to know better so he forgets to tell me when he goes outside, or he hides in a closet while I go frantically searching for

him. But you know, I'd be miserable if I didn't worry about someone."

"Yes," said Ricky. The bus lurched to a stop on the outskirts of the city, and the woman started toward the door. "Have a good time," Ricky said.

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Suddenly Ricky felt very hungry and the prospect of a thin sandwich did not help her any. The thin line of traffic widened and shouted loudly as the bus neared the heart of the city. A honk, a jolt, the blinking red and green, long lunch lines, the old fears returned . . . she mustn't eat too much, but the city smelled of chestnuts roasting and hamburgers and milkshakes. She would have her fling, greasy food fried on a hot skillet, rich creamy desserts. Ricky felt for the tag around her neck: *I am a Diabetic and must have medical care. Please call a doctor immediately. My life is in danger. No, if they found her in the city they'd carry her home on a stretcher . . . she'd have just a little fling. That would be enough punishment for her family. They'd*

be worried sick by the time she came in . . . no one would feel like eating while her place was empty. Perhaps the police would be called in . . . no, she would not stay away that long . . . just long enough, she thought.

Ricky reached for the cord and the buzz was lost in a thousand mumbled conversations. She pushed her way toward the door, and heard a hiss as it opened. "Air pressure," she thought. "A wonderful thing." And she blended into grey, black, blue coats, hurried footsteps in the impatient city.

It was past eight when the yellow cab pulled to a stop at the corner. She paid the driver, and walked slowly toward the house, bright with lights and worried, Ricky thought. "The whole house looks worried." The identical little boxes nestled against the night piercing the blackness with metallic television aerials. "Poor Alex." Ricky knew he'd like to crouch down before the T.V., but he wouldn't, not now. She quickened her steps . . . they're upset enough. She thought of her bed covers pulled back, pillows fluffed; the cold night sunk deeply into her, exhausting, aching.

She did not ring the bell but reached for the key inside the mailbox; Ricky laughed as the lock jammed. "As usual." No one heard her enter and slam shut the front door. She caught the smell of overcooked food drying out in the oven. "They must be starved," she thought and hurried toward the kitchen. The dirty supper dishes lay unwashed in a pan of greasy water, and in Alex's room the T.V. blared loud, rock and roll, and Ricky could see her sister dancing wildly, stamping, wiggling, shaking her young body. The brother choked with laughter watching. She stood in the hot kitchen, dizzy and stunned; Marcia saw her and yelled, "Ricky Kalick, just where were you?"

"Mother!" screamed Ricky. "Mother, Mother, where are you?"

"Stop screaming, and who the hell cares," called Alex. "She went to the movies with Dad, and you'd better watch it 'cause she's furious at you!"

Ricky's face was hot and her nose was running . . . she could scarcely breathe in the dried pot-roast air. She climbed the stairs to her bedroom; the bed clothes lay wrinkled on the unmade bed, everything as she had left it, and in the bathroom she found a little note: "When do you intend to grow up? Clean up this filthy mess right now. Your angry mother."

"I'm O.K., Ma," said Ricky. "Don't worry so much. I'm O.K."

— by Esto Diamond

# What Price Conformity?

She had been touchy about everything lately. When her father asked for the check in a restaurant too loudly, or her mother shouted at them in public, she automatically shut her eyes, clenched her fists, and asked them to keep their voices down or else she would just die of embarrassment. An expression of disgust appeared on her face every time she looked across the table and saw her sister eating. When she saw someone get too drunk and

"But Andrew, all these people are bound to notice. I don't think it looks too nice."

"Look, Baby, I don't give a damn what all those people think. It's what I think that counts and I don't think there's anything wrong with moving."

"All right. But Andrew please do keep your voice down," she whispered pleadingly.

Andrew got up, and waited for her to follow. He walked straight down the two flights to the fifth row center seats, while she trailed behind, glancing at everyone's face to see if she could discover all the nasty thoughts they were bound to be thinking.

As the curtain closed she poked him in the ribs and told him that she enjoyed the play as much as he did but she wasn't applauding so loudly. "Come, let's get some coffee," he said.

"Yes, and I know just the place. It's not too far. It's a coffee house on 56th Street."

"Oh one of those espresso joints."

"Yes, Andrew, but this one is not a 'joint'. It's quite crowded usually. That's because it's so small and a certain group of people is always there. But I'm sure we'll be able to get in. I know one of the waiters rather well."

"That's very nice, Jane, but it's pouring. Couldn't we just go in here, get some coffee, and go home? If the weather were different, I'd love to, but this isn't worth it."

They passed four or five adequate coffee shops as well as their car and went on to 56th Street. As they approached the place she noticed a group of prep school-looking types guarding their dates from the rain with big black umbrellas. She stuffed hers under her coat and held her head high as they walked up to the door. She stood there for a few seconds, shaking until Andrew opened the door for her. Inside the candle-lit room there were two other couples waiting to be seated. "It won't be long," Jane said

confidently as she handed Andrew her coat.

She waited patiently as Andrew glared and fidgeted. They were silent, watching and listening to the conversations around them. Jane concentrated intensely on a girl who was telling her escort that her ancestors were among the founders of Massachusetts Bay. They still owned the original property, she said.

Andrew and Jane were at the front of the line when the waiter spotted them. "Oh good, he's coming over to us. That wasn't so long was it, Andrew dear? This certainly is worth waiting for, isn't it?"

The waiter was looking at them. He smiled and then came over. "Ah, excuse me," he said. "I'm sorry, but you'll have to leave. We never allow anyone in here who is not properly dressed. And you, young man, are not wearing a tie."

"Oh yes, of course," Jane said and turned around quickly. They walked outside, through the prep school crowd, and she laughed and let Andrew take the red umbrella and hold it over her. He looked at her and was silent, for he wasn't sure they were raindrops streaming down her face."

by Enid Schildkrout



act distastefully in public she would turn scarlet with shame and anger. It was a personal insult to every decent, refined person! How absolutely crude they all were.

Tonight she and Andrew were going to the theater. They had decided at the last minute and she hadn't had enough time to get dressed properly. But she did put on her good shoes and coat and the long black kid gloves bought at Miss Bergdorf's yesterday.

Andrew had forgotten an umbrella. It was only because she found her little old red one — the one with "Jane" scribbled all over it — that she was saved from being completely soaked. But Andrew looked like a drowned rat.

"Andrew, don't you adore those big black umbrellas that two people can get under at once — the kind the man holds?"

"They're O.K., I guess. Here, give me," he said as he reached to take her red one. "I'll hold it if you like."

"No, thank you. Never mind. Anyway, Andrew, you'd look rather funny holding a little girl's umbrella." She turned and looked up at him as she said this, and then laughed until she slipped off the curb and just managed to escape falling into the river of water that was rushing down the street.

Their tickets were waiting at the box office and, as usual, their seats were in the balcony. It was a bad night for the theater and Andrew noticed two seats right in the orchestra — fifth row center — and suggested they grab them at intermission.

"Do you really think we ought to?" she asked. "I mean, after all, won't it look a bit — well, you know — cheap?"

"Of course not. And who cares anyway! We're not stealing someone else's seats."



him. But you know, I'd be miserable if I didn't worry about someone."

"Yes," said Ricky. The bus lurched to a stop on the outskirts of the city, and the woman started toward the door. "Have a good time," Ricky said.

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

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When the time came to put together the creative writing issue of 1959, our class made the happy discovery that several of its members could draw as well as write. For providing the art work this issue we thank Barbara Milman, Peggy Eliot, John Lobell and Sue Shatter.

Producing a literary magazine is not all very romantic. To those whose names are not in the issue but whose time and effort are very much a part of it, we offer our sincerest thanks: to Alicia de la Pena, Marion Lear, and Kathy Klein for wearing out their fingers typing our copy, and to Richard Gruen for running all over town collecting ads and for withstanding the continual nagging of the creative writing class. Our thanks to Judy Cozan, Barbara Milman, Esta Diamond, Albert Hutter and Mike Schwartz for selecting and editing the copy.

After a year as members of this class, we have discovered that it is not so easy to write vividly and well. Perhaps the hardest thing of all is to find the words to thank Mr. Jack Fields who fathered Great Neck North's creative class this year for the last time. We learned that the word is a wonderful tool but suddenly we find ourselves incapable of using it in a way which will tell the whole story, the encouragement, the discouragement, the satisfaction, and the sheer poetry of it all. There are times when words are not enough.

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