

the martlet literary magazine

volume 5 number 1

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This weeks contributors are: Ann Hodges, Marilyn McCormack, Mickey, Carol Reid, Sylvia Ridgely, and a young lady who would like her poem to stand on its own merit.

A Red Quilt

You never
saw my eyes

you bent down
to untie my shoes

your voice
soft as sunlight
can be thru a cage

You said
I had a nice mouth

I felt
I could sing then
a woman
with bitten apple lips

You covered me
with earth

I never suspected your body.

anonymous

The Boys at the Taphouse

With spears of straw
they hunt wild boar
in underground pubs
play warriors' games
with drunken words
wag paper tales
in front of the girls
boast long seduction
this one that one
between the rosebeds
at Butchart Gardens
compete for honours
pray for women
never say brother
never say sister
play follow the leader
to tower and tavern
the boys at the taphouse
wear empty crowns
are naked always
kings without kingdoms

by Sylvia Ridgely

Evening at Home

by Carol Reid

CHARACTERS

ELEANORA- In her late thirties.

CHARLIE- Her husband, early forties.

CORILLA- Girl in mid-twenties.

SETTING: A room dimly lit. Stairway visible stage left. CHARLIE sits in a large armchair, a bright reading lamp above his head, but he is not reading. ELEANORA sits in a chair stage right near the edge of the stage. She is painting her nails.

ELEANORA: *(Holding up the polish bottle.)* You don't mind the smell of this, do you?

CHARLIE: No. *(Eleanora giggles.)*

ELEANORA: You know, *(giggles again,)* some people used to say... When I was a kid, you know... they said you could get high on this stuff.

CHARLIE: *(Uninterested.)* Really.

ELEANORA: Yes, they did. Really.

CHARLIE: Oh. Well, people say things, you know.

ELEANORA: Yes, all the time. Seems that people are always saying things. Even when I was a kid, people were always saying things to me.

CHARLIE: Well, that's the way it goes sometimes. *(Eleanora finishes her nails, puts the cap back on the bottle.)*

ELEANORA: Did you do anything interesting today?

CHARLIE: Oh... *(He gives a forced laugh.)* She makes me pay twenty dollars. God, you just can't get it free anymore. *(loud laugh.)*

ELEANORA: Why do you tell me these things?

CHARLIE: You asked me... Anyway, I think that was yesterday. Took a walk today. Even got lost once. That was exciting. I thought I wouldn't be able to find my way back. But I did.

ELEANORA: I used to go for walks sometimes... *(She crosses to Charlie nail polish bottle in hand.)* Can I paint your face, Charlie?

continued inside

Random Error

by Marilyn McCormack

If I am sitting in the dark, and the door of the dark chamber opens slowly, I know I will show up in the light. The tips of my leaves will be gilt.

But then, my responses are good. I will be carried from this resting place, as soon as night falls, to sit at the back of the cathedral and exhale incense.

I am a cloistered nun, arthritic and afflicted with a skin disorder, turning me bright green. I am functionless, except for the consumption of one green host every twenty-four hours, and this talent for exuding incense.

Mary smiles on me. I am placed beneath her picture and when people pass me, my leaves flutter, my wimpel flutters across the feet of Mary, soothing, like a prayer.

She remembers me. She intercedes for me to the Father. I stand in good Grace, thanks to Mary.

My green colour attracts attention in Mass. Children sometimes stop beside me as they return to their seats from communion. They yank my leaves and point into my green face and ask, what is that, Mommy.

But my responses are good. My incense fills the chapel. Such an incense has never occurred before under heaven. It is my single, unique expression of the glory of God. I am alive, and there is no other creature in creation to take my place.

In the days before my arthritis and my great affliction, I believed that Mass was a lovely idea, and Mary was a window. Mary looked out into heaven and if I looked through Mary, I could see a stained glass infinity of adoring multitudes. All settled before Christ, they adored him, a gigantic, blue carving in ice, filling a galaxy. Like a mighty, weighty phantom, he was radiant throughout all time.

However, he was only a beautiful ornament; Mass was dull to me then. Those who came to communion all seemed to be afflicted in some way or another: hunchbacks, amputees, dwarfs, dotards, perverted, maimed, retarded people; wheelchairs rolled up on all sides, and a stretcher sometimes. The place was over-run with the handicapped. Shrivelled nuns filed in on feet of foam rubber. They knelt without bending the kneeling board. The pew did not creak when they sat on it.

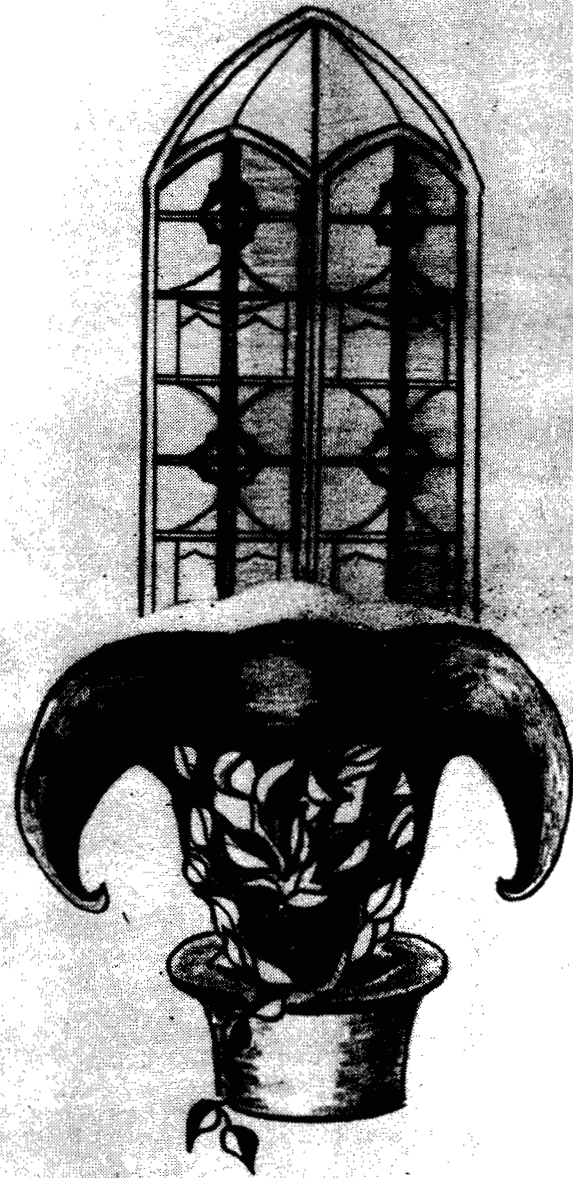
I was young then. My faith was solid. I knew God the Father watched everything I did. But the Mass was an enigma to me, and I was bored throughout the Homily. The music was nice, except the choir seemed to be a bunch of old biddies whose voices cracked on the high notes.

When God stayed at church after Mass, Mary followed me home. She loomed before me, sadly, when I stole from the A&P. She got in the way and prevented some of my wicked deeds, but mostly she was so quiet, I usually forgot about her. Then I would punch my sister and lie to my mother. Mary would pass me on the stairway and not look at me. In my room, I'd shut the door quickly so Mary couldn't get in. In those days, I had a private, golden calf to which I gave unwavering devotion. If I glanced out the window, there would be at least two devils waiting for me. Behind them, Mary watched me.

When dinner was onions, turnip or tomatoes, I would poke it around and think about cookies. Mother would scold about hungry millions, and I would imagine a starving child as a table centerpiece, right in front of my plate. There would be a lighted candle in the child's hands, dripping scalding wax on its little concave stomach.

There were times when I wasn't a sinner, though. At Christmas, when it was cold and snow laden and the stars hung down above all the tawdry lights, I was very holy. But, Mary never seemed pleased by my efforts to be good. In fact, if she showed up at all, I would have to look for her first. I even tried fasting for four hours instead of two before communion, to make sure I was pure for the Host.

Still, none of it worked. The Father always knew that I was wicked and that devils followed me: that sometimes I played with the devil in the green tent; that I wished to have wings and to be a movie star. I was never given a pair of wings, but I did begin to grow leaves. They hung down between my legs and my mother got worried. She took me to the doctor, who talked to her about it a long time. When we drove home, her mouth was tight, and she wouldn't look



graphics by Mickey

at me. It was something more that I had done wrong. I didn't tell her about the devil in the green tent. She'd have been mad. And when my skin started to turn green, she found out immediately, because of my laundry.

Mother never said anything, but I knew I'd have to be a nun. I could wear long, black habits to cover it all up.

When I went to Mary to see if God would take me, she couldn't be found. I looked all over: at Mass, in the woods, at school, at the doctor's office, uptown, everywhere. I decided to try at night.

In the back yard, I stood under the huge, silver maple. I looked up through the fluttering dark leaves to the sky, heavy with stars. I undressed so I could ask about the leaves. Mary appeared in the branches, lighting up the leaves around her, so that they waved like silver hands.

I asked her why I was growing leaves and turning green. The wind blew away her words, if there were any. I asked again, and she disappeared. Suddenly it was raining. The clouds blocked out the stars. I put on my clothes and hid in my room.

I began to stiffen the next day. This process advanced to my present state of immobility in a period of about six months. Eventually, for convenience, I was placed in a huge pot. My diet grew more and more restricted, until at last I could consume only the green host.

At first, I was bitter. The Father didn't want me. Mary ignored me. My parents were embarrassed. My aunt advised my mother to weed me out, but mother kept putting it off.

One day I laughed. The room filled with a strange and wonderful incense. My mother noticed it, and that gave her the idea. She offered my services to the rectory.

The priest there was startled to see me. He said that the plant looked rather like a girl. But, when he realized that the wonderful scent came from the plant, he agreed to take me on, immediately. Mother explained my peculiar diet. He placed me in this dark chamber where I wait now to be taken to Mass.

The longer I sit under Mary's picture, there, the more fortunate I feel. The people who attend the Mass look less like bedeviled fools, and more like people who have lost their wings. Even the cracking voices of the choir sound rather joyous. And with my incense permeating, I know I have a function.

Evening at Home ...continued

CHARLIE: I don't care.

ELEANORA: Come on, say yes.

CHARLIE: I don't care. *(She begins to paint stripes on his face with the nail polish.)*

ELEANORA: You know, you remind me of a guy I knew when I was a kid. You've got the same face.

CHARLIE: Do I?

ELEANORA: You must be the same guy.

CHARLIE: Maybe.

ELEANORA: No, I doubt it. *(She finishes painting. Puts the cap back on the bottle.)* Actually, *(she giggles,)* you look like a chorus girl. Some people think I was a chorus girl, once. *(Pause,)* But I wasn't. Ever. Never.

CHARLIE: Well, people think things, you know.

ELEANORA: Yes, they do, don't they? They used to think all kinds of things. They do it all the time. *(Pause.)* Why don't you sing me a song, Charlie?

CHARLIE: No.

ELEANORA: Well, I'll sing to you then.

CHARLIE: I don't care. *(Eleanora starts to sing Sunny Side Of The Street, or a similar song, affecting the gestures of a late thirties type singer.)*

ELEANORA: You like that Charlie? *(He does not answer. She goes back to her chair.)* Sometimes you make me laugh. You're a real clown, Charlie. *(Pause.)* Sometimes you...*(Charlie takes out his wallet and checks it.)*

CHARLIE: You got any money?

ELEANORA: No.

CHARLIE: Jesus! You think she'll do it for free?

ELEANORA: Nobody does, anymore. *(Charlie puts the wallet away and sits staring into space.)* Kind of quiet in here. Think so Charlie? *(Pause.)* Funny about the quiet, you know. It makes me want to fill it up. The space, I mean. The quiet. *(Pause.)* Do you know what I mean?

CHARLIE: Yeah, I guess so. *(There is a long silence.)*

ELEANORA: Remember, I told you I used to like going for walks, didn't I? It's been a long time, a long time. Used to be a park near where I lived when I was a kid. Trees and that. Fountains. Well, we used to walk in that park sometimes. Me, that is. By myself, usually. But there were other people there too, usually. "You've got to be careful," they told me, "you never know what people are going to do."

CHARLIE: Yeah. *(Takes a deep breath.)* Well, people do things, you know.

ELEANORA: Well, not me. I never did a goddamn thing! *(She stands and walks back to Charlie.)* What do you think, anyway? You think...well, I don't know what you think. *(Pause.)* It's all the same to you, isn't it? *(She walks back to her chair.)* Why don't you just go back to the street? *(She gives an embarrassed laugh.)*

CHARLIE: *(Coughing.)* Bit damp, in here, cold, too. Turn up the heat will you?

ELEANORA: It's as warm as ever.

CHARLIE: Well, I find it cold.

ELEANORA: It's as warm as ever. Just comfortable, I'd say.

CHARLIE: Well, that's the way it goes. *(Pause.)* Yep, that's the way it goes. Always. Never ending. A walk, sometimes. Sometimes. Then the walk home. *(Corilla is seen coming down the stairs. She walks as if she is not sure what she will step on next.)*

ELEANORA: *(Hums another old tune, probably "My Old Flame.")* Now, there's a song. Why don't you sing with me, Charlie?

CHARLIE: No. *(Corilla stands next to his chair.)*

ELEANORA: With all your abilities...talent...I would think you'd like to sing once in a while.

CHARLIE: No. *(Eleanora hums and sings bits of "My Old Flame," overlapping the conversation between Charlie and Corilla.)*

CORILLA: *(To Charlie.)* Anything I can do for you?

CHARLIE: Maybe. *(He stands and he and Corilla dance to Eleanora's singing.)* What do they call you?

CORILLA: Corilla, with two l's. Not Corinna. Unusual name, isn't it? I've never met anyone with the same name as me.

CHARLIE: Yeah.

CORILLA: Quite unique, I'd say.

CHARLIE: Yeah...Do you find it cold in here?

CORILLA: Nope. But, you see, I'm pretty used to it. Spent a lot of time in not-so-public washrooms. Not too warm in them. Or else too hot. Did some pretty unusual things sometimes...Like sometimes...well, mostly I just sat around smoking cigarettes. I never liked the look of a woman smoking on the street. Once in a while I'd do somebody a favor.

ELEANORA: *(Stops singing, speaks to Corilla.)* Have I seen you around here before? I think I have.

CORILLA: *(Ignores Eleanora.)* I didn't mind. I figured maybe someday someone would do me a favor, you know, *(Pause, then speaks to Charlie.)* Got something for me?

CHARLIE: Maybe.

CORILLA: *(To Eleanora)* Haven't you ever been in love?

ELEANORA: There are some things I don't like to discuss...

CORILLA: Well, I have.

ELEANORA: ...in front of company.

CORILLA: Jesus! Do you know that I don't read a book without falling in love with the author. I don't hear a song without falling in love with the singer. *(Pause)* If it's a good book, that is, or a good song.

ELEANORA: I get awfully tired sometimes. *(Pause)*

CORILLA: And for this, for nothing, you drag me down here, you bitches. *(She walks slowly away from Charlie, who returns to his chair as she goes up the stairs.)*

ELEANORA: Are we going out tonight?

CHARLIE: No.

ELEANORA: Then why did I paint my nails? *(Long silence.)* Charlie, why don't you ever touch me? *(He shrugs his shoulders slightly.)*

Blackout.



graphics by Mickey

THE DECLINE OF CLEO

Before her decline,
Cleo conducted an admirable life
(what else was she to do
when she was always on view?).

In her glass bottle
she could not hear,
but one day we mouthed the words,
"Why don't you break out of there?"

Clear breath steamed glass
when Cleo beamed back:
"No. I'm happy here."

Slit eyes, predator mouths
with the stench breath of kill,
perceived her;
we bent to the ground
for stones which lay there.
"Hurl one!" our leader yelled;
crystal cracked;
"Hurl two!" we missed - wild
in our vehemence;
"Hurl three!"
(good hurlsmanship lay
with the majority)
"Hurrah!";
the bottle lay in fragments.

In our foul air,
Cleo gasped...coughed, spat...
grimaced;
then eyes of a pup
slit to eyes of a cur.
Cleo was ready to rasp with us.
Cleo was first to spot
the fresh bottle, crystal and clear;
Cleo was first to mouth the words,
"Why don't you break out of there?"

Legacy

A walled-in house in Hong Kong -
that, too, your mother shared with a concubine;

yet I have envied your inherited wealth
and coveted
the ebony box with ivory pieces of Mah-Jongg.

My mother walked a welfare line,
felt cold pavement through a worn shoe;

yet your eyelines lengthened
when you were slighted and I was granted
"may I help you?"

because of my inherited skin.
One day, Wing Yin,

we'll dissect inherited fortunes
one by one
and in fortunes' place we will form one

legacy of humanity for all children.

WE MISFITS WHO MAR THE SCENE

Summer, maybe, but not now.
Now the north wind chops the sea
as it recedes
to leave sandbars
for refueling birds
on their flight from winter.
Now, stray dog in search of a scent,
you and I infringe upon this scene;
only in crunching complaint
does this sand and stone
give way to imprints.

You, out there by Seal Rock!
You, in search of a sound.
You, whose spray
is caught by the wind and spread
in whiffs
of gray,
neither are you
part of the accepted scene.
The locals say you are there to die,
"...why else
would a whale be so close to shore?"

Wary bird-eyes watch
and behind binoculars the locals wait
for time and tide to obliterate
we misfits
who mar the scene.

four

poems

by

Ann Hodges

An Inquiry from the Apprentices of Wrong and Right Limited

We have a question concerning our jobs -
branding people with sticky-backed labels.
We know one-only-per-person-permitted
so if a man graduated cum laude
in nineteen fifty-four, he should live on
Regal Road, earn twenty thousand or more
and his label be green; but if he
publicly supports an unpopular
cause, peel green label and stick with red.

(Of course, he will have exchanged labels
with the man next door who remained silent
even though he was in complete rapport.)

But eluding us is the answer to
a hypothetical case concerning
a woman whose garden grows weeds, whose
house is untidy and whose children run wild.
Now, if she tells (but doesn't tell us)
tear-drying tales to a crying child or
mends the bill of a mute and downbeaked duck,
won't our one-only-per-person-permitted
sticky-backed labels all be misstuck?

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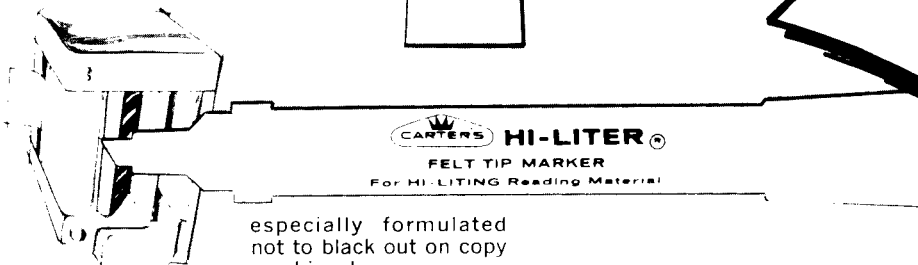
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