

"I'm sure it's here somewhere," Rose answered, sitting down at the table.

"I'll help you find it," Wendy said, and the two of them went off in search of a drink. A few minutes later, they returned in a huff.

"You're not gonna believe this one." Sidney was livid.

"What?" Rose could care less.

"There is no bar." Sid was horrified. "I drove all the way from Queens and can't even get a lousy drink."

"So?" Rose said.

"Are you kidding me? What kind of affair do your chintzy relatives throw? No booze. I never heard of such a thing."

"They don't drink."

"Does that mean no one else does?"

"It's very inconsiderate," Wendy said, "especially for a Saturday night affair." She lit a cigarette, wondering if anyone would notice if she slipped out to the bar down the street for a half hour or so. Wendy was already dancing dangerously close with alcoholism.

A harried waiter, apparently the same one Sid and Wendy accosted minutes before, rushed over. "Please accept my apologies. There's been a mistake. We do have some white and red wines. I'll bring a bottle of each to your table right away."

"That'll do," Wendy said with a smile.

But Sidney wouldn't let it go so easily. "No vodka! What a bunch of cheapskates."

\* \* \*

Everyone gathered along a makeshift aisle and watched the wedding party make its way to the *chupah*. Wendy, the maid of honor, was three years older than Marcy, and it was a growing thorn in my father's side that his gorgeous daughter had not yet married. He continually harassed my sister about her single state at age twenty-two, and my mother always came to her defense.

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*"Everybody's youth is a dream, a form of chemical madness." F. Scott*

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In his darkest moments filled with unbridled fear he'd suggest to Rose, "Maybe she's queer?" but Rose was able to silence him. "Remember Joe?" She referred to the thirty-year-old bartender my sister once loved who caused Sidney to froth from the mouth more times than I'd like to remember. Their prized daughter must marry a professional, a man of substance and money, a man with expensive shoes. If not, what would their friends say? Worry permanently etched its way into my father's face.

The unremarkable hall gamely decorated with all things blue and white was packed with friends and family. Gefilte fish, matzo ball soup, chopped liver, herring, stuffed derma, sweet and sour meat balls, brisket with gravy, roast turkey, four kinds of potatoes including latkes, three kinds of noodle pudding, desserts that could choke a horse, it was like the Jewish holidays at the Concord Hotel.

Shortly after the ceremony, the emcee stood atop a raised platform in the dining area. "Now, folks, please take your seats. It is with the utmost pleasure that I present you with our happy couple, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Baumgarten!" He raised one arm dramatically to the ceiling and bowed.

They pranced onto the dance floor amidst clapping and cheering. Stewart, wiry hair slicked down and sweating profusely, took Marcy in his arms. When the strings of "Moon River" could be discerned, he spun the love of his life around with pride and great joy. Marcy's eyes glistened as she looked at Stewart like he was the only man in the world for her.

"I'll do much better than Stewart," Wendy mumbled, reaching for the bottle of red. But she watched the newlywed couple with a sadness I had never seen on her face before.

The band was awful but everyone got up and danced anyway, even Rose and Sid, who affected the appearance of a happily married couple for the occasion. They did a spirited mambo to a labored rendition of "Tequila." Rose's hips were aflame, Sid's

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*Fitzgerald ~§~ "Time misspent in youth is sometimes all the freedom*

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wing-tips were flying. To look at them you'd never believe they'd rather be smacking each other with frying pans.

Wendy seemed distant, or maybe it was the wine. Almost a year had passed since her boyfriend Harry, a man of substance and money who wore Cole Haan shoes, promised to leave his wife. "Any day now," she confided to me, as she whacked down the last of the red.

I felt grateful that I had a few years before my father would start in on me, though his expectations for my mate would be markedly lower. And watching Rose and Sid now in a heated argument near the chopped liver, it was clear marriage wasn't always the best alternative.

\* \* \*

Marcy wore a short blue dress and matching spring coat as she got ready to throw the bouquet; Stewart beamed at her side. Aunt Lily rushed over to Wendy and whispered in her ear, "Hurry, get up, go over there." She tugged on her arm.

My sister took her time walking over to the growing group of women in front of Marcy. She stood on the edge of the gathering feigning indifference. Marcy caught sight of Wendy and hurled the flowers in her direction. But our Aunt Rita, divorced for five years and with no current prospects, leapt across two other hopefuls and grabbed for the bouquet, causing it to ricochet to Table One and land with a soft plop in Rose's beige silk lap. My mother looked pleased; she'd been searching for a wealthy replacement for my father for years.

Some might question a wedding bouquet's ability to determine future nuptials, but it turned out that Harry never did leave his wife, and my sister never married. My mother, however, became a bride for the second time, leaving my father to marry their friend Sheldon, a wealthy Laundromat owner with a striking resemblance to a large Pillsbury Doughboy. As karma would have it, they did not live happily ever after.

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*one ever has." Anita Brookner ~S~ "What's a man's age? He must*

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## *Afternoon at Grandfather's House*

*Carol Ayer*

We drove past oil refineries  
in our usual state of discord,  
crossed the railroad tracks  
in an argument with no caboose.

When we arrived we had snacks—  
the cheese,  
like the conversation,  
too strong for me;  
the dip an octave too bitter.

The others ate rum ice cream  
while I watched *The Brady Bunch*  
in a room long-since abandoned.

I unwrapped a Hostess cupcake,  
its artificial taste a reminder  
that life, like this day, was only sweet  
in make-believe.

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*hurry more, that's all; Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to*

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## *A Dog Named Moshe*

*Barbara Darnall*

My brother and his wife had a dog named Moshe. I guess they thought it was funny that a Czech-Irish Baptist and an English-Canadian Episcopalian would have a German Shepherd named for a Jewish war hero. Moshe transcended both race and denomination, however. He was one of a kind. He had a beautiful head and a long sleek body, but his legs were kind of runty and his ears drooped like a spaniel's, or like he'd just been caught doing something he shouldn't on the carpet. My brother said he was a throwback to the old style German Shepherds who were built lower to the ground than today's breed, but the rest of us thought he had a generous dose of dachshund or basset hound in his less-than-purebred pedigree.

Moshe loved with a fierce love all family, kittens, fresh holes in the ground, babies, and big chewing bones, the dirtier the better. He hated with a fierce hate all sudden movements, stray cats, strangers, loud angry voices, and rattlesnakes – especially rattlesnakes. Whenever he met one of those dangerous reptiles he would bark a peculiar high, chirping bark – my sister-in-law, Regina, maintained he was saying “Snake! Mommy, come quick! Snake!” – and stand guard so that the snake would not escape before she arrived with the gun to dispatch it. Had he wanted to do so, Moshe could have worn many rattles on his collar; he was a great protector of his people and counted much coup.

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*hold.” Robert Browning ~§~ “Perhaps one has to be very old before one*

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My favorite Moshe story, and there were many, is the one which displayed at once his bravery and his extreme loyalty to his family. It was early spring, one of the first warm days, and Regina was outside with her mother-in-law and the baby, a toddler barely sixteen months old. As the women walked around the yard and talked about planting roses here, and digging a new flower bed there, baby Kirby tottered this way and that, examining the new grass and chortling back at the birds. Moshe watched the baby fondly. As she wandered near the foundation to an older part of the house, he suddenly jumped past her with a growl, knocking the toddler roughly to the ground. Hearing Kirby's indignant cries, Regina turned to reprimand the dog, only to see a huge rattlesnake dangling by its fangs from his lower jaw. The snake had evidently been sunning itself on the old foundation stones when it was disturbed by the baby's presence.

Stunned, Regina acted quickly, handing the unharmed baby to Mary and fetching the gun to shoot the now-retreating snake. Then, she said later, one of those superhuman things happened, the kind you read about where a man lifts a heavy car to free the person trapped underneath. Despite her permanently injured back and slight stature, she lifted the one-hundred-plus pound dog and placed him gently on the front seat of the pickup, and, leaving Kirby in Mary's capable care, raced the several miles into town to the vet, crooning words of love and encouragement to Moshe all the way.

It was touch and go for several days. Moshe's head, kept packed in ice to slow the absorption of the poison, swelled to an enormous size. He reacted sluggishly at first to the antivenom, heaving racking breaths and suffering uncontrollable seizures. Regina stayed with him until they made her go home, saying they would call with any news. The next morning he was still alive, but only just, and all that day and the next his condition

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*learns to be amused rather than shocked." Pearl S. Buck ~§~ "A*

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did not change. Regina visited him often, and despite his desperately weakened condition, he never failed to thump his tail feebly at the sound of her voice, and to lick at her hand if she came near. At last, the critical period passed, and it was evident that he would live, although he had to remain at the vet's for several more days of recuperation.

What a homecoming! There were balloons and crepe paper streamers, ice cream and tears. It was the very best kind of party for the very best kind of reason: the hero had returned, triumphant, from his ordeal at the hands of the foe. The fair maiden, whom he had risked his life to save, responded with hugs and giggles. Her parents, with choked-up voices, praised the brave dog, gave him new bones and ice cream, and fervently thanked God for his lightning-quick reflexes and unselfish spirit.

Moshe lived a good many years more, until the toddler was past eleven and he himself was old and arthritic. He played his part in the creation of many more Moshe stories, but he never topped this one, nor did he need to. In one blinding moment of action sprung from absolute love, he had secured his place forever in our hearts.

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*woman past forty should make up her mind to be young; not her face.*

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## *Spring Fever*

*Margaret Fieland*

Admiring the pattern the sunlight makes as it filters  
through the new leaves,  
sparkling on the green grass  
and on the sidewalk only recently free of snow,  
thoughts floating aimlessly through my head,  
I stare out the window beside my desk.

My head cupped in my hand, I sit and stare  
at the three-story brick building across the street  
curious if the tenants can see into my classroom  
just as I can see their living rooms  
as I make up stories about them.

I count the minutes until liberation  
from my uncomfortable wooden seat,  
able to play outside in the sun  
and smell the crisp spring air  
as I jump rope without my jacket.

My teacher's murmuring voice  
is something less compelling  
than the world outside my window  
as I drift and dream.

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*Billie Burke ~§~ "Sadly, freckles speak joy to everyone but the wearer."*

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## *Gathering by the River*

*Carole Creekmore*

Out here in the country where we live, the Eastern Prong Church is the center of all social life. In fact, it is our social life. Sundays, we go to Sunday school and church. Then Mamma talks outside the church until around one o'clock. It takes her that long to be seen by all the other ladies and let everyone just know how deep her Christian charity runs. And though she won't admit it, she also catches up on the latest gossip and shares a bit of her own.

I know when she's about to let some gossip fly about some neighbor or another when her voice gets all whispery and she says, "She's good as gold and I love her dearly, BUT...." That tells me right away that I am going to be standing around for another thirty minutes waiting for her to finish with this neighbor or that one.

Yes, all we do is wrapped around the church. When Mamma is going through one of her sick spells, it's the church ladies that bring us food and whisper about poor Mamma and what a noble saint she is to suffer so. It's pretty clear Mamma suffers a little louder and longer and nobler around them, probably because they bring pretty good food. She also seems to get a little too much pleasure out of lying around and getting me to go for something that's right there in the same room with her, even if I'm not. Of course, she can't go to church when she's sick, but

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*Ginny Greene ~S~ "I am not young enough to know everything." J. M.*

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Daddy and I have to go to let all the ladies know that she's in need of Christian charity, covered dishes, and attention.

She sure lets them know what the others have brought too. I think she likes to play them one against the other to see how much she can get them to compete in what they bring. One spell, she got them up to fresh coconut cakes and churns of homemade ice cream. Daddy was even torn up that time when she got tired of being sick, and usually he's really anxious for her to give up on a spell.

It's just easier most of the time for him to get his snacks at Miss Nora's store near the church. When he takes me, I usually get an ice cream cup with a little wooden spoon and a movie star's picture in the lid. Once in a while when I play with Annie on Sunday after church, Miss Nora even takes us to her store if she needs to count the money in her cash register. We don't have to buy stuff then, because it's Sunday and she's really not open. That way it doesn't count against her being a good Christian and all. It's always nice to play with Annie, even during the week, because we get to stay in the back room of the store while Miss Nora works. When Mamma went into the hospital with one spell, I wanted to stay with Miss Nora, but ended up at Miss Virginia's. It seems what I want doesn't usually matter to Mamma.

There was that time just before Aunt Bertha, Mamma's aunt who took her and her sister in and raised them after their own mamma died, came to live with us. Mamma was working up to a good spell; I can usually see them coming. Right after she realized she'd have to take Aunt Bertha in when she got out of the mental hospital, Mamma got real moody – the first sign. Then she took up sighing and rolling her eyes, the next sign. That Sunday, she sent us to church saying, “You both need the moral training even if I have to suffer alone.” I think she had a real dilemma to deal with. She wanted to go let all her buddies

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*Barrie ~§~ “Youth itself is a talent – a perishable talent.” Eric Hoffer*

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see her be a saint about taking Aunt Bertha in, and she wanted to take to her bed for a while. Taking to her bed won out. Guess she figured she might not have as many chances to do that when Aunt Bertha came, so she'd better do it up right while she could.

That was the Sunday I decided to be saved. Most of my friends had already been saved and even baptized, but I hadn't felt that "special call," as the preacher puts it. Joey and Annie had been saved and baptized for several weeks. Donnie June was too, though I wonder about how Christian she was from the way she acted, still pouting to get her way all the time. I was about the only one not saved, and I'm the smartest in the bunch.

I decided, sitting there next to Daddy, that I could work up that special feeling of being touched by the Lord if I put my mind to it, so I started working on it. I tried for that special feeling all through the sermon, the choir's special number, and the invitational hymn. I finally decided during the last verse of the hymn that I must have that feeling I needed to be saved. Tired of trying, I was determined to be saved that day, and I was running out of time. I stepped out of the pew to go down to the front of the church, and I felt Daddy watching me but not saying anything. Joey's dad cried when he went down, but Daddy just looked at me, almost sad. I tried to work up a tear or two all the way down to the front of the church, but all I could manage was a sad, but glad look. It was really solemn when the preacher took the vote to welcome me into the flock, but I was already wishing I'd waited for the real call. It was too late now; I had to go through with it.

After the invitation, I got to stand down at the front of the church with Daddy and get welcomed into the congregation. I felt like some kind of cheat, like God knew what I was doing just to keep up with Annie, Joey, and Donnie June. I wasn't having any trouble keeping that sad look now; I felt downright

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~§~ *"Age doesn't matter, unless you're cheese." Billie Burke* ~§~ *"You*

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awful. The more they shook my hand and hugged me, the worse I felt.

When we got home, Mamma was in a tizzy about all the people who would come over because of the combination of her being under the weather and my religious conversion. She had me cleaning and straightening like it wasn't even Sunday, the day of rest. Once I got the house to suit her, I decided to go out on the porch to think about being a Christian in name only.

I had just about justified my way out of it when Daddy came out and sat in the swing next to me. He asked me kind of quiet, "Did you feel a religious call or just think you should be like your friends?"

I know I looked shocked because it was like he was reading my mind. He's pretty good at that, a lot better than Mamma who doesn't even know what's on her own mind all the time. One thing I never do is lie to Daddy on purpose, so I told him, "I really wanted to be saved and tried real hard for a great revelation or sign...but I'm not sure I got one."

He said, "God doesn't always shout, even though the preacher might make you feel like he does. I feel God a lot more than hear him, and maybe you're the same way. The important thing is to want to be a good person."

I guess I should be shocked that Daddy hadn't felt a great revelation and was satisfied with that. He seemed happy enough for me to be the same way. It sure wasn't like Mamma liked to tell about him, how he used to drink and she and the church saved him. To hear her, you'd think she gave him a great revelation. Guess it goes to show what I really know – and what I don't. After Daddy's talk though, I felt like a Christian. I got to try out my new Christian attitude right away too when Miss Virginia and Miss Nettie drove up at the same time and got out of their cars carrying covered dishes.

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*can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old." George Burns*

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## *Education*

*J. J. Steinfeld*

You sit in the classroom  
tapping your fingers on the desk  
existential drumbeats  
the monotony of angst and despair  
and listening to yourself  
wondering if God is  
kind  
generous  
vindictive  
devious  
ethereal  
discernible  
indifferent  
preoccupied  
male  
female  
female-less  
male-less  
a listener to Mahalia Jackson's gospel singing  
or Glenn Gould's playing of Bach  
a reader of Iris Murdoch's books  
or the writings of Thomas Merton or Hannah Arendt  
a fan of Alfred Hitchcock films  
or a believer in Disney fantasies

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*~S~ "How beautifully leaves grow old. How full of light and color are*

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an admirer of Charles Lindbergh's or Amelia Earhart's solo  
 flights  
 or Jesse Owens' speed in front of Hitler.  
 You raise your hand  
 and God calls on you  
 and you ask your question  
 as usual  
 not wanting to make a mistake  
 adverbs and adjectives properly placed, deployed carefully,  
 that is what you do in the classroom  
 ask questions of God.  
 God is disappointed  
 you're told to stay after school  
 and write on the board  
 in your neatest hand  
 I will not pester the teacher  
 a hundred billion times.

## *Wishing Well*

*Dianna M. Raab*

Yesterday  
 I dropped a penny  
 in that deep orifice  
 of darkness  
 pleading for wellness.

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*their last days." John Burroughs ~§~ "Freckles...sugar warmed by the*

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## *Planting By The Signs*

*Blanche L. Ledford*

Daddy and Mama always planted by the signs. They handed the tradition down to me.

I grew up in the Trout Cove near Brasstown, North Carolina. We always had a vegetable garden. Daddy religiously followed the signs in *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.

He and Uncle Joe Lee competed to see which one could plant their Irish potatoes first. We lived on a hill above Uncle Joe and Aunt Clyde and Daddy kept an eye on their garden.

"Trease," Daddy called to Mama. "Where's the *Farmer's Almanac*? I want to see it: it's a good time to plant my Irish taters. You know a feller should never plant them in the foot sign. They would have knots all over them like little toes when you dig 'em up."

Daddy sat in a rocking chair beside the fireplace. Mama's cornbread was baking in the Dutch oven and the aroma filled our little house. Mama fetched the Irish potatoes from the root cellar and they were cooking in an iron pot over the fire.

Potatoes were a staple in our family. Mama prepared them various ways – baked, boiled or mashed. She made potato soup and sometimes fixed patties. We flavored the potatoes with butter, salt and pepper. They were served with deer, bear, squirrel, wild turkey or hog meat. Vegetables such as green beans or roasting-ears, along with cornbread and buttermilk completed our meal.

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*sun floated to the surface. The more you have, the sweeter you are!"*

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Since potatoes were Daddy's favorite food, he wanted to plant them early. Mama found the almanac where Daddy left it – in the kitchen cupboard. He flipped the pages of the almanac and peered over the top of his spectacles at the February planting and gardening calendar for 1933.

“Hot dog!” exclaimed Daddy with his deep voice. “Saturday is a good time to plant the taters. I'll disk harrow the garden on Friday and lay off the rows. Since school's out on Saturday, the younguns can help us put out the taters. This year I'll beat my brother Joe,” Daddy added with a chuckle.

Now some folks thought planting by the signs was just superstition, but Daddy lived by the signs of the zodiac and the moon. He was a Baptist preacher and saw no conflict with his religious beliefs. After all, the Bible said in Ecclesiastes 3:1 that there's a season to every purpose under heaven, a time to plant; and a time to pluck up that which is planted.

Ancient astronomers studied the stars and discovered the belt of planets and the moon were divided into twelve parts called “signs.” Each of these signs contained a constellation of stars, and each received a name. Since all the signs except Libra were named after living things, the belt was named the zodiac, or “zone of animas.”

The twelve signs of the zodiac are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Each sign is supposed to rule a certain part of the human body.

All good planting calendars label each day with a sign that rules it. The signs always appear in sequence, beginning with the ram or head, which is Aries and works the way down to Pisces, the fish or feet. The ram appears again and starts a new sequence.

Daddy studied the signs almost as much as he read the King James Version of the Bible. He planted all his crops – onions,

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*Anonymous ~§~ “What Youth deemed crystal, Age finds out was dew.”*

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sweet peas, cabbage, corn, green beans, squash and pumpkins – according to almanac. Just as he figured out how to outdo Uncle Joe, someone knocked on the door.

Daddy peeped out the window and there stood Uncle Joe on the front porch. Daddy handed Mama the almanac. “Hide this, Trease!” he whispered.

Daddy ambled to the front door. “Well, howdy. Didn’t expect to see you out on such a cold winter day. Come in and sit for a spell before the fire. Thaw out your toes and nose,” he added with a laugh.

“Don’t mind if I do, John. You got your taters planted yet?” asked Uncle Joe.

Daddy grinned and his blue eyes twinkled. “Why, they’re already leaping out of the ground. I dug ’em last week. Don’t you smell the taters cooking in the pot?”

Uncle Joe snorted and stared at Daddy. He took off his hat and swiped back his gray hair. Then my uncle pulled off his jacket, reached into his overall pocket and got a can of Insert tobacco. He poured the tobacco on a piece of thin paper and rolled a cigarette. He struck a match on the bottom of his boot and a ring of smoke blew into Daddy’s face.

Daddy coughed and gave Joe a hard look. Smoking and drinking were two subjects Daddy often covered when he preached at Copperhill Baptist Church.

Uncle Joe didn’t seem to notice Daddy frown. He asked again, “When are you aiming to plant your taters?”

“Don’t rightly know,” said Daddy. “It’s too cold for a man to do anything except stay by the fire.”

“Well, I got to go,” said Uncle Joe. “I expect Clyde has dinner on the table and she’ll be madder than a wet hen if she has to wait for me.”

“Just hang around here,” said Daddy. “We’ll have a bite to eat directly.”

“Can’t stay,” said Uncle Joe. “You all come see us,” he added and headed to the door with his usual, jerky, bowlegged walk.

Mama walked into the living room and looked at Daddy with raised eyebrows. “Joe didn’t stay long,” she said. “I was in the backyard feeding the chickens and didn’t get a chance to even speak to him.”

“I don’t think it was a social call,” said Daddy. “Brother Joe came for information and left empty handed.” Daddy slapped his knee and chuckled.

Mama told Daddy that the contest between him and Uncle Joe was foolish. She also thought telling little white lies was not a good example for the children. Daddy folded his arms and gazed at the flames flickering in the fireplace while Mama talked.

Early Saturday morning, Mama ran us out of bed. “Come eat breakfast,” she called. “We’re planting Irish potatoes today and will need a hearty meal.”

George, Oma, Frank, Mary Lou, Helen and I trudged to the table. It was loaded with food: cathead biscuits, gravy, sausage, scrambled eggs, sorghum syrup and fresh milk. While we were eating, someone knocked at the door. Daddy invited Uncle Joe and Aunt Clyde into the house and asked them to eat with us.

“No thanks,” said Uncle Joe. “We’ve already eaten. Clyde and I have come to help you all plant the taters. If everyone works together, you can get much more done.”

## *Expect Blessings; Expect Joy* *Linda Oatman High*

I was at the beach, in New Jersey, on my cell phone in a hotel room, talking to my daughter-in-law who wasn't yet exactly my daughter-in-law. She'd been my son's longtime love, his first Girl, and they'd recently moved in together. I'd just had a hysterectomy, ending forever my ability to have babies, and I was mourning the loss.

"I had to take off work today to get a blood test," said The Girl.

"A blood test? What's wrong? Are you sick? You never get blood tests. You hate needles! What's wrong? Are you sick?"

There was a pregnant pause.

"Um, I'm, um, we're going to have a baby," she said.

I gulped. I sat down. I closed my eyes. "Okay," I breathed. "I have to go now, and cry."

And cry I did. I cried for the loss of my own baby-making abilities; I cried for what I worried was the too-soon beginnings of my son's. I worried like crazy. I worried that they were too young. I worried that I was too young. I was only 45; my son was 21. The Girl was 22. Holy cow; I was going to be a grandmother. A grandmother! I knew that there'd be a need for child care, as both parents have to work these days. Should I volunteer? How much would I – could I – volunteer? As an author of books for children, I have a busy career. I write a lot; I travel often to teach writing workshops in schools. How could

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*future that can possibly console us for not being always twenty-five?"*

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I go back to changing diapers?! How would I manage my career and a baby? How would we all do this?

The worries continued as the first months passed. I worried about money. I worried about time. I worried about money and time, time and money, in a never-ending circle of concern.

Then one day the phone rang. “Mom?” said my son Justin. “Can you come over? Like right now?”

My heart dropped. “What’s wrong?”

“Um, Christine’s, uh, bleeding. Spotting. She’s hysterical. Can you come over, like now?”

I hung up the phone and once again I cried. I sobbed as I drove – as fast as safety allowed – the 15 miles to Justin and Christine’s apartment. I wailed and I prayed, and I prayed and I wailed. I begged God to let this baby – my grandchild – be okay. It was at that moment that I realized how much I already loved this tiny unseen person.

The baby was okay. The spotting stopped, and more months passed. My worries had dwindled, as I repeated my mantra: “This baby will be a blessing and a joy. I love it: the him or her that’s my grandchild.”

Then one day my cell phone rang again.

“They’re taking her in for emergency surgery,” my oldest son said.

Again, the familiar drop of the heart. “What’s wrong?”

“I... don’t really know. They’re just saying something about no fluid around the baby.”

“I’ll be right there,” I said.

The baby was born via cesarean section a short time later. He was beautiful, healthy, whole, 8 pounds, 9 ounces of gorgeous baby boy. He was my grandson, and he was perfect.

Connor is now three, and he’s a genius: the most spectacular toddler in the universe. I baby-sit him 2 or 3 days a week, and we are bonded beyond belief. We are best friends. He calls me

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*Lord Byron ~S~ “A man of eighty has outlived probably three new*

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M'Mere: a French version of grandmother. I'm not French, but I like the way it sounds.

Justin and Christine had a church wedding last April, and Connor wore a mini-tuxedo, just like his Daddy's. They married in my childhood church, and I had one of those stunning and surreal moments when I was struck by a thought: Here I sit, watching my first baby get married, with his first baby bearing the ring. Wow.

Connor has inspired my writing in new directions. I've created at least a dozen new picture books since his birth, and my first adult book was recently released. Titled "The Hip Grandma's Handbook," it's a quirky reference book slanted toward the active (and cool) Baby Boomer grandmother. Most of the tips in the book have come directly from my obsessive research resulting from Connor's birth, information gleaned by being a babysitting grandmother who wants to do the best for her grandchild.

Life really does come full circle, and every new life on this earth adds to the magic of humanity. My grandson Connor truly is a beautiful miracle, and this busy writer/mother/grandmother loves him more than words can express.

My lesson? Always expect blessings and joy.

## *Chemical Warfare*

*Suellen Wedmore*

My arsenal is point six milligrams  
conjugated estrogen, a steadfast hormone  
for any slowed soldier, and tretinoin,  
(Retin-A) acne's charm, now a truncheon  
against wrinkles. There's progesterone, patron  
of regular periods. Contact lenses to accent  
aging eyes, and who'd have thought zirconium  
in a lilac-scented cream a gallant  
ally? Miss Clairol keeps one youthfully fair;  
for alert eyes there's titanium oxide  
blue, and for afternoon slump: caffeine  
with Nutrasweet will kick ol' time broadside—  
just in time for my birthday dinner when  
another candle flames: red dye number #3 and paraffin.

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*dress." Joyce Carey ~§~ "Youth, large, lusty, loving - Youth, full of*

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## *Huxley at the Lobero*

*Al Carty*

The announcement appeared in the Ventura Star-Free Press that Aldous Huxley was to lecture, one night only, at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara. My brother read the article with interest, as he enjoyed the differing opinions of philosophy. The good gray philosopher and author would expound on the subject “The Reasons and Meanings of Dreams,” or “Why Are Valuable Gems Valuable?” My brother had circled the notice in red pencil.

He called me with this revelation, so I drove down for a visit. He handed me the newspaper, folded down to the small article that contained the glorious news about Huxley’s coming appearance.

If the article had promised Louie Armstrong was coming to town, or Buddy Rich, or Cab Callaway, or Benny Goodman, or Laurence Ferlinghetti or even Jack Kerouac, I would have been up for the occasion. But I had never been intrigued by philosophy, (except my own) or the Huxleys. I guess saying you had seen him would count for something, but I wasn’t sure just what. Since Bud was not attracted by tinsel and glitter I knew he really wanted to hear what the old boy had to say; evidently I had to hear it too. He said he’d buy the tickets and drinks.

When the time came, I took some time off and drove into Ventura and picked up my brother. We stopped at Swede’s place first and drank a few beers; that was all Swede served. It was a

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*grace, force, fascination. Do you know that Old Age may come after*

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small place down some side streets outside of town about a hundred feet from the beach. It was early evening and the fog came in on a little onshore breeze and we sat on hard stools. The Swede had a black-and-white television behind the bar, high up. He told us the fights would be on in a couple hours. His wife was going to bring in a big pot of beef stew and pans of cornbread and the people watching the fights were welcome to it, on the house. I was close to saying to hell with Huxley and the Lobero, but Bud was looking forward to it. We told Swede we were going to Santa Barbara to see a movie. We would try to be back for the main event.

We cruised on up the coast and into Santa Barbara and its narrow streets. I pulled my old truck into the parking lot. Very bright overhead lights made the parked cars glitter. I swore. Bud looked at me. "What! What's the matter?"

I smiled and swept my hand in front of us, at the parked cars. There were the finest and newest automobiles that money could buy. This was Santa Barbara, and Aldous Huxley was here, one night only! The Lobero Theatre was where these people gathered, and we were here, too, only not rich. "What the hell," Bud said, "screw'em! We have tickets! Park this ugly thing and let's go see Aldous!"

I pulled the Ford between a dark-green Rolls sedan and a very white Mercedes. My engine galumphed, galumphed. When I turned the key it died instantly, snap! Of all the cars in the lot I doubted if any engine had a tighter compression, but those creations didn't smell like petroleum, either. All the other vehicles smelled like money and leather, and their engines did not galumph, they purred.

We approached the beautiful white stucco theatre and walked through the arched entrance into the hum and warmth of power. The clean smell of the best of everything was in the air. Mingled somehow was the greasepaint and nervous sweat and hopeful

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*you with equal grace, force, fascination?" Walt Whitman ~§~ "Old*

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presentations of many performers, the dust of the riggings high above the stage, the electric charge that every quality theatre absorbs. On nights when the seats are full, the theatre exudes the magic presence.

The high ornate ceiling was lighted just enough, and the velvet plush and carpeting hushed the splendid atmosphere. We found our seats and settled in. We were already being entertained. We looked about and observed and absorbed because we would be talking about this night for a long time.

Soon the house-lights flickered and important people who were standing began shaking hands and promising to meet later. The Lobero Theatre was rich with history and endowments. Large ladies on spiked heels passed down the aisles, some chattering French loudly, as only certain women can when they want to put on a show of their own. They rolled their eyes and filled the aisles with importance and size and volume, Santa Barbara society at its best. Their names just might be in a column tomorrow.

Huxley knew his audience. If he had been here selling toilet brushes the women present would have exhausted his inventory, for the servants, you know. "Oh, my dear," they would say to their puzzled spouses, "these are from Aldous!"

Finally the great man ambled onstage, the audience exploding with applause and gushing acceptance. His white hair was unruly, his suit charcoal-gray, shoes black, socks white. I thought he looked like an elderly farmer who had wandered into the wrong room at a grange meeting. But this was his room and he knew exactly where he was. He might just as well have walked into a recording studio with a microphone and a few engineers and no audience and, when finished, simply walked off the stage. That was pretty much what he did.

But he did give a presentation. He held a script in his hands, inches from his nose, his sight a longtime weakness, and a

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*age is not a matter for sorrow. It is matter for thanks if we have left*

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monotone soliloquy ensued. The audience, for the most part, gave the appearance of being enthralled. With this audience appearance was everything. He rambled on about the dreams he experienced after ingesting cactus buttons in remote regions; the desert areas were not precise. But peyote was the subject and there was no doubt peyote was on his mind. I wondered several times if he might not have some buttons in his pocket.

It wasn't long before curtains parted behind the speaker and a screen appeared. Technicolor slides flashed on the screen showing the white-haired philosopher and others wandering around, going in and out of various tents with sullen-looking Indians watching warily. Huxley was narrating something or other. My mind began to wander and I looked around the room, observing the audience. I saw other eyes moving about. I wondered if some of these richly dressed folks were thinking as I was: "What the hell is this?" It began to feel like a double-feature in the local movie house, when neither film was worth watching. But appearances prevail, and Aldous Huxley was on the stage.

The slide show finally ended, the lecture was winding down, and the meaning of the Meanings of Dreams had not been revealed to me. Later, my brother told me he hadn't gotten the answer either. Evidently the white-haired philosopher had had the dream but decided to keep the meaning to himself. Maybe he just forgot to mention it.

The lecture ended, Aldous Huxley made his uncertain way offstage to thunderous applause. He did not reappear, no curtain-call. A nervous little man in a tuxedo walked out and said the good Doctor was tired and The Friends of the Lobero appreciated the support and please keep on contributing and next week some dance group from Equador or somewhere would be performing. The lights came up and my brother and I looked at each other. Behind us a man said to the woman next

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*our work done behind us." Thomas Carlyle ~\$~ "God forbid I should*

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to him, "What the hell was that about?" The woman shushed him. We all got up and went out of the theatre.

Bud and I stood just outside the entrance and had a smoke. We watched the dinner jackets and gowns pass by, ermines and sables and tuxedos and wonderful, intoxicating perfumes, all going to their gleaming cars. We saw the ermines and sables tighten their lips as they saw their Rolls was parked very near to a 1939 Ford, an uncertain shade of green, accented by several gray primer spots that covered recent body work.

The chauffeurs opened the doors and handed their people into the lighted interiors; the chauffeurs sneered too. The interior lights remained on as the plush machines whispered through the parking lot, the occupants evidently on display.

The engine of the Ford turned over reluctantly for a half-second, about one revolution, and then barked loudly, clearing its throat, settling into its cadence, ta-ta rump, ta-ta rump, galumph, galumph, getting the feel of itself, the special camshaft tickling the valves into their lop-sided rhythm, like Gene Krupa or Buddy Rich making the tentative beginning to a mad solo. Multiple carburetors gargled harshly and waited for action. I kept the baffles closed on the exhaust headers. I didn't want to give any of the remaining gentry in the parking lot heart attacks by blowing raw-fire noise from the side pipes.

We thought about going to the Top-Hat in Santa Barbara for a drink, but decided maybe a beer and beef stew at Swede's would be nearer our style. The old green Ford roared up the coast highway, headers open, screaming, startling and irritating the perfectly normal drivers we passed. We didn't see a cop. Finally I pulled into a space in front of the fog-bound Swede's Place and we went in.

A middle-weight fight was in progress on the black-and-white. A dozen or so people were drinking beer and talking and watching the fight. Swede's wife smiled at us and wiped off a

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*live long enough to ferment and rot and fall to the ground in a*

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place at the counter and we sat down. We ate the meaty stew and thick cornbread and drank cold beer and watched the next bout. It was the main event and they were heavyweights and it was a good fight. Swede told us he had once seen Marciano, in Chicago. It was the fight when Marciano had retained the title by whipping Walcott. He, Swede, had been about ten rows back, in person. He said he could hear Walcott grunt when Rocky hit him.

When Swede asked how the movie was that we had gone to Santa Barbara to see, we said it wasn't very good. I thought it sure as hell wasn't Marciano, but I kept it to myself.

## *Meet Frankenstein*

*James Penha*

Quickly  
 from the Drake Theater I just knew he followed —  
 black suit hanging like dead stingrays from his body  
 clodded boots shuffling with preposterous speed  
 hands outstretched unbalanced —  
 he was coming at me  
 the Frankenstein monster  
 not really  
 destroyed by Abbott or Costello or  
 how could after all I have seen him rise again for two bits paid  
 over and over for  
 the dark of Saturday matinees

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*squash.*” *Emily Carr* ~§~ “*An archaeologist is the best husband a*

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*Freckles to Wrinkles*

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dispatched again by Dracula  
who followed him  
who followed me home  
and when at night I heard the wind I saw  
him push the garage door  
down and when that settled  
down I knew he climbed  
up the stairs creaking  
when I came home from school  
I crept  
before I touched my house  
slowly on all fours to peek  
through the basement window to see if he waited there for me.

I lived in terror every day for years  
not a day without Frankenstein in my life  
patiently  
inexorably  
until  
one moment impossible to remember  
I forgot  
about Frankenstein  
perhaps when other monsters came by.

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*woman can have; the older she gets the more interested he is in her.*

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## *Underwater Somersaults*

*Eileen Malone*

At least we can do this, remember  
how we were in love with Esther Williams  
forcing ourselves to smile like she did  
in spite of our eyes burning  
from chlorine chops of splashed water

practicing turnovers that took us to the bottom  
of things, believing everything turns around  
at the end, our wispy hair popping out from under  
our caps in tufts and clumps, telling each other  
how pretty we were

after the whistle blew and everyone got out  
shivering in cold stall showers  
we dared ourselves to hide behind the lockers  
until the echoes of whistles and voices ricocheting  
from cement walls and the entire building cleared out

dared ourselves to slip just us into the lapis blue  
gelatin, bodies like mermaids, cause no ripples  
or splashes, red hibiscus in our loosened hair  
being lifted up and out of the underwater lights  
by a helicopter manned with movie cameras  
fountains erupting at our feet up to the orchid  
garlanded swing where we lean and point our toes

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*Agatha Christie ~§~ "Conversation of the old and young ends"*

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