Editorial Message

I am proud to present the best art and literature received by us during 1985-86. Many hours of reading and selecting have boiled down to these 36 pages.

From the contrasting images of a young lady and an old woman, to those created in words, the authors invite you to join their imaginations and characters. From the "Big Bang" to our gentle "Bye," enjoy our Spring 1986 edition.

John Knowles
Editor
The Big Bang Theory

sunny cold day
perfect brightness radiant
melting drop condensing
off the awning
every fifteen seconds
a globe, a pearl of water
forming in just configuration
for prism illumination
like a diamond squeezed together
then released
before it goes, a moment
of refraction; can one drop
make a rainbow?
i didn't used to think so
but there it is, a new star
formed, four a minute, hanging
& falling in time
you have to be at the right
place to catch it
the hope diamond, new stars
gel every minute, sadness &
bad dreams collapse in supernova

Jon Hockenbury
Kitchen Window

The kitchen window of my childhood
faced the sun and was always a warm spot in
my life
cheap, aluminum, single-paned, winter window
coated with ice inside and out and
sun shining through
refracted into private rainbows to fall on
the kitchen floor and be walked over on the way to
the refrigerator or stood upon as I got a drink
of water at the sink
Flowers bloomed in Coke bottles in front
of the sunny ice and were warmed by the winter sun
while outside their less fortunate windowless
kin perished in the snow and cold
Stand at that window and stare at it
trapped in the ice — the window cousin to
the woolly mammoth found in the polar ice —
and love what the ice does to the light
and be glad that you’re inside
and be warm and cold at the same time
be warmed by the sun shining through the ice
be warmed by the ice itself
And want to never move

W. Joseph VanNess
You dream of a house with stairs that never creak and awake to a small hand pressing down on the blankets over your shoulder. Molly stands by the bed. She has on her gray churchgoing dress and her tenacious churchgoing face. In one hand she holds her white kidskin gloves and shiny black purse and her other hand presses down on the blankets again. She has just said something.

"Ugh?"

"Where are the car keys?" she is asking.

"Ugh?"

"I can't find the car keys."

You sit up, rub your eyelids, consult the clock-radio.

"Jesus Christ, Molly, you know I work all night."

She just lifts her eyebrows, nods.

"Son of a bitch." You throw back the blankets and get out of bed, cross the floor in your loose Fruit-of-the-Looms. Of course the keys are not on your dresser. They are not in your pants pockets. "They're not downstairs on the kitchen table?"

Molly stares at her shoes. She has clasped her hands. She shakes her head.

"Well, I don't know where the hell they could be."

You storm down the stairs, try not to think about all those unnecessary miles her weekly pilgrimages put on your tired car. But you think about them anyway. Saint Peter’s had been a short distance from home when home was the southside apartment, but then you bought this house near the lake and it
became a forty-five-minute drive. It is a forty-five-minute drive in a fragile, sputtering automobile, at a time when you can afford no other, and through weather that is sure to lure those worn snow-tires into a snow-bank somewhere. All this when there are countless churches within three blocks of your front door. Just up the street there are big churches and small churches, priests full of advice and altar boys with their hands out. On the topic of Saint Peter's your wife is deaf to reason.

The car keys are not on the kitchen table and they are not in your coat pockets. They are not on the counter but with the mess it is hard to be certain, so you brush an armful of bills, napkins and greasy butter knives onto the floor. "Does it occur to anyone that I need some sleep? Does anyone have an idea what it is like to work until two in the morning, every morning?"

Molly stares through cool, stubborn Sunday morning eyes. "Of course not. Nobody gives a shit!" You know that you are raving, that nothing is gained. Oh, but how infuriating is that steady gaze of hers! "Couldn't decide to pass up confession this once, Molly, or to take a walk up the street to a church that isn't hours away? To let me get a decent eight hours sleep like everyone else always manages to!"

The keys are not on the coffee table, nor on the television set. You pull the cushions from the couch, knowing that the keys will be there only if someone hid them there during the night.

"This is ridiculous, isn't it?" You had intended to have another set of keys made right after Molly lost hers in the parking lot at Saint Peter's.
In your mind you retrace your steps returning from work early this morning. You remember opening the front door before running down to the street to make sure the mail was brought in. Possibly you dropped them on the front step. Maybe they are outside on the driveway. On your way to the door the three-inch gouge in the new linoleum on the foyer floor takes your attention.

"Oh, will you look at that! Will you look at that!" you howl as though this is the first time you have noticed it. The truth is that you noticed it when you got home from work and now the events of earlier this morning come back to you.

Furious, you roused the boys and interrogated them at the bottom of the stairs. Your shouting brought Molly out of the bedroom and she arrived in the foyer, you know that she is convinced, just in time to stop you from killing both of the kids. You never touched them, which is not to say that it would have been a bad idea. One sharp slap apiece would have done more good than harm, but not nearly as much good as rubbing their reckless noses in that gouge in the linoleum. Instead you growled relentlessly, idle threats into their sleepy faces. You yelled and clenched your fists there in the foyer at two-thirty this morning, yelled anything that might create genuine terror in your boys. You did this not because you are a mean person or a father who hates his sons, but because they must understand that just because their yielding mother will sit back and allow them to destroy the house it cannot be so.

You say to Molly, "Do you see why we can never have anything nice?"
"Yes I do, Sammy," she answers flatly. "Now just find the fucking car keys."

You glare at her and know how a man feels right before he decks his wife but you are not that kind of man. You are the kind of man who does not want his house to look like a dump. What you want is not so radically different from what everybody wants. You want to have a place that is warm, dry, secure and without gouges in the new linoleum floor!

"Look, I know that you can't be any happier about this than I am," you say, shrugging, but Molly just walks back into the kitchen, out of sight. "Of course, you're not the one who has to get down on his hands and knees with that linoleum. And that's very nice language. Use it a lot around Saint Pete's?"

You pull open the front door and cold air reminds you that you are not well dressed for the elements. The keys do not appear to be on the step. The boys are out in the Buick but you cannot see them because their breath has fogged the car windows. As you step back to close the door your hand brushes against the ring of keys hanging from the outer doorknob.

"Ahh!" You grab them, march into the kitchen and slam them down on the table, leaving indentations in the wood.

Molly is in the family room looking at a framed photograph of her parents.

"They're not over there. They were in the front door."

You sigh and rub your eyelids with the heels of your hands as Molly takes the keys and leaves the house. Presently you hear the Buick's starter rumbling and you run to the front
door. Mark and Rhonda Simpson, your neighbors, unload boxes from their van and admire your Fruit-of-the-Looms as you lean out the door and scream to Molly.

"Don't flood it!"

She gets the Buick started and jams it into reverse.

"Hold on, goddamnit! Let it warm up!"

She cannot hear you. She backs over the same corner of the lawn that she always does and when the snow melts the yard will look like a construction site. Not waiting for the foggy windows to clear, she races away on the icy streets as if salvation is going out of style.

You feel tense. You close the door and pull your sagging underpants up to just below your navel. Tension narrows the space between your shoulder blades. From the back of your neck it lowers your skull. Each step on the staircase creaks because everybody goes up and down it like an elephant. You are exhausted but too tense to sleep. The constricting sensation extends to your chest, makes your breathing wheeze like to and from a man twice your age. You walk into the bathroom, where a puddle soaks into the rotting tiles at the corner of the tub and the wall. It is the simplest goddamned thing to seal the shower curtain to the tiles of the wall. You have said this thousands of times. The simplest thing. The first time you try, the curtain peels back and the hot water that splashes off your body reaches the floor. You wet the tiles and press the curtain to them again. On your third try you achieve a perfectly water-tight seal and at the same time realize that today is not Sunday. Now you wonder where the hell Molly is taking the kids.


Love's Litter

It's an ugly thing
Like some old console
T.V. that you might see along
Some country road with
Its busted cabinet and its
Picture tube hanging out
Like a dislodged eye
Left there at midnight
By someone who decided
That it was taking up too
Much space in the garage

But what else can you do?
The garbageman won't take it
And you can't get it fixed
'Cause they don't make the
parts anymore

W. Joseph Van Ness
"Why did you get an 'F'?"
"I got the answers wrong."

"Isn't this dress beautiful?"
"It's the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life."

"Why don't you ever call me?"
"I don't like you."

"So, you live here?"
"No, I'm visiting my furniture."

"Can I borrow these earrings?"
"Give me collateral."

"Do you want to do anything tonight?"
"Yes, avoid you."

"Can I have a bag for this?"
"Sure; I realize how awkward it is to carry a pack of cigarettes."

"How do I fill out this form?"
"Use a pen and write."

"Why did you break up with me?"
"You're a jerk."

Stupid questions people ask when they already know the answer:

"Were you sleeping?"
"Are these jeans too tight?"
"Do you think I flirt too much?"
"Are you tired?"
"Is it raining out?"
"Were you using that?"

Questions that are just a little difficult to answer:

"Is there really a Santa Claus?"
"Does God exist?"
"How did we get here?"
"What made the earth?"
"Why?"
At The Threshold Center

the guy in the poster
lies face down on the bed
clutching a pillow over
his head
"The Pits," it reads,
"and how to get out of them."

sure, i'll take a chance
i've lain in that rack
before in funk of tears
& knotted sheets

through the window
their faces could belong
to the kids i remember
from when i sat alone
in darkened rooms
whittling my ego
into a dagger to fall on

one looks up
i see his eyes are
whiter, clearer than mine
he turns away
when he sees i haven't got
the answer

Jon Hockenbury
Snowsuit

Six years old, sweating in the foyer
my feet in plastic bags, plastic
bread bags over my socks to keep my feet, inside my boots, dry and warm
The bags stick up over the tops of my green rubber boots from Sears and scrunch up at the bottoms of my snowsuit legs
The snowsuit goes on first—it takes mom a long time to zip me all into it—then bread bags, then boots, then hat, then scarf, then mittens and before she's through
I'm already sweating
My snowsuit is red with zippers and pockets
two on the sleeves for my maps
six year old navy pilot
I fly recon missions over the arctic in my red snowsuit
I hold mom's hand as I walk out to my plane but she doesn't know where we're going thinks we're just going to the mailbox and I don't tell her
The wind blows across the runway where my plane—a blue '64 chevy stationwagon—sits idle but it can't touch me
I can feel it pressing against me all around knocking at my door but I don't let it in my snowsuit protects me
the wind can only touch me where my hat leaves
off and my scarf doesn't yet begin
so I push down into my scarf as far as I
can and pull my hat down a little farther
on my head
My hat, my mittens, my scarf all match
my name is on my mittens
my name is Billy
my mittens say so
That's how I know

W. Joseph VanNess

Grokking On The Idea Of Death

Tiddely tat, Tiddely tat
Sounds and sights snap
Shut.
Air filters fumble — the winning hand dealt.
Correlaries and cogencies melt
Where the sky loves the sea.
Ladders and desks swirl into
The ebony clarity of the pupil
Exploding out through aged
Red capillaries to someday be
Rediscovered and recategorized.

Peter Duffy
Several waiters swerved as Yvonne Bellevous stormed violently out of the Masterville Ballroom. Her usually smooth movements were jerky, and her blonde hair was beginning to come uncoiffed.

"I don't think I should ever speak to that man again. Oh, that insufferable twit! That pompous know-it-all! With his suave manners, his ascot tie, his French cigarettes! His fancy cologne and riding boots! I don't know what I ever saw in him in the first place. Damn you, James Fitzsimmons!"

As if buffeted by the insolent spirit of James himself, Yvonne tripped on an upturned sidewalk edge and scuffed the toe of her expensive Gucci pumps. The ones she bought expressly for dancing at tonight's festivities. With young James. Who, at least Yvonne thought, spent a good deal of time with several of the other ladies present this evening. O these men. Worthless. Debonair twit, she thought.

The street lights in November cast a queer light that can, in happy times, make one feel secure and cozy, and in times of distress, sad and forlorn. Tiny beads of light reflected off the rainy street sparkled and winked like diamonds. Yvonne watched the street for a cab, and tried to ignore the brazed gems through dewy eyes. Just then a cab pulled up. It was yellow. She felt a little better. Yellow cabs were the best, she thought. They look more official.

"243 Simpson Boulevard," said Yvonne, her voice catching a little, betraying with a tremulous inflection her flustered condition.
"OK Miss, got it." The cabbie inspected his charge in the mirror. She's very pretty. But why so shook up, I wonder? Looks like she's coming from the ballroom. Leaving a little early though I'd say. "Been to the opening at the ballroom, Miss?" he asked.

"Yes." Yvonne averted the man's glance in the mirror. "The party for the opening of the Wickersham Art Gallery."

"Oh, yeah, I read about it in the paper. Swank party, eh?"

"Yes, rather."

Swank party indeed, thought Yvonne. Swank the way James was carrying on with that horrible Sarah Westfield. With her dress with the low-cut back. You could practically count the bones of her spine all the way down to her . . . .

Yvonne bit her lip, held out bravely for a second, and then began to cry.

"If only he didn't have to go outside with her," she sobbed. "And in front of all those people. Oh I was so furious! And right after we had been for a lovely walk in the garden. We were so happy!"

She went to dry her eyes with her gloves, which she clutched in her left hand. She scarcely noticed one was missing.

"Gee Miss, I'm sorry. Here, have a Kleenex." He held out a box for her to take one. She did. She looked at the man's picture on the back of the driver's seat. He had a nice face. His cab was clean. Most cabs smelled like cigars. His didn't. He was a nice man. Even his cab smelled nice, Yvonne thought. The cabbie spoke again. "Maybe he had a good reason to go outside —"
"James? Well it hardly matters now." Yvonne had recovered slightly and was somewhat embarrassed at having come unglued in the cab like that. "I'd had such high hopes about him. Such a nice young man, I'd thought at first. A gentleman. Knew how to treat a lady, I thought."

And quite a lady she is, thought the cabbie. Too bad he didn't treat this one right. Yvonne met his gaze this time as he glanced back.

"So what do you think went wrong, Miss— if I may be so bold— why do you think he—"

"Well he always seemed so wishy-washy, or well not really that; it's just that I could never get any kind of show of affection from him. No indication that he cared. That he wanted to be anything more than friends. And the way he was always chatting up that awful Sarah Westfield!"

As the car swished through the leaves in the rainy road, it gave off a monotonous whirr. Yvonne felt calmer.

She remembered meeting him at the University. Sarah had introduced them after his fencing class. I'll never forget how he looked while he was fencing, she thought. Tall, slim, graceful, adroit with the foil and quick to the thrust. His natural movements. His handsome face and sure manners. She winced at the thought of being swept off her feet by James, only to have him land in the lap of that dubious best friend of hers, Sarah. Some best friend. Yvonne settled back into the seat, resigned, albeit bitterly, to her fate. She breathed a long sigh.

"Awful sorry, Miss," said the cabbie who had watched her silently. "Who knows, maybe it's not as it seems."
"Yes perhaps you're right." Yvonne was subdued and vacant after her emotional outburst and confession. She was not normally given to such excesses.

The cab pulled slowly up to the familiar curb. Yvonne blinked out of her reverie.

"Six-fifty Miss." She handed him a ten. "Keep the change."

The cab drove off. Yvonne stood in front of her apartment building. The streets were strangely quiet. Occasionally she heard faint fragments of music, bits of conversation, James's voice. Finally they died off, leaving only the swishing of the cars, or the dogs barking at the ends of chains. She went inside.

Yvonne threw her coat over a chair in the foyer. She sat without turning on a light, just sat in the gloom, trying to decide whether to watch TV, eat, or just cry in the darkness. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. She hesitated a moment, then put first the hall light, then the porch light on, and answered it.

The tall, dark-haired young man looked surprised.

"So you did leave! Sarah and I looked everywhere for you. We went outside and you were gone."

James held up the missing glove.

"Isn't this yours? We went out to the spot in the garden where she saw you drop it..."
Once, she was a suntanned, long-legged girl. Her hair was the palest blonde, bleached almost white, by the sun. During the hot summer days, she ran along the ocean's edge, challenging the sandpipers. Her younger brother followed her. His hair was as black as hers was blonde and his legs where shorter so that he never quite caught up to her. On the days when she didn't go to the beach, she caught rides on the back of the horse-drawn ice wagon, or sold rides in her father's rowboat for 25¢ per ride. Winter was the time for ice skating and 'crack-the-whip,' screaming, pretending to be so scared. Oh! but that was so long ago.

Now, her only wagon is her wheelchair. Her legs that were so active are now almost useless and must be aided by a cumbersome walker and she hates pushing it ahead of her. The once blonde hair that was bleached by the sun is now whitened by age. Her once slender body is thickened and the hands that did so much for her family are puffy and hard to manage.

But her mind is still young and active. Imprisoned in her inactive body, it darts and sparkles through her eyes. She knows what is going on in the world and in her family. Her ears hear all the nuances of the words we use to fool her and she will have none of our evasions. Many times she calls one of her children to give an order, just to verify, once again, that she is the mother and we are the children, though we have grandchildren of our own.
Sometimes she tells us the stories of when she was a suntanned girl; stories that she never told us before because she didn't want us to be like her. She loved us and was afraid that we would get hurt.

Then, when the stories are done, her head falls forward on her chest and her eyes close as though in sleep. The young ones laugh behind their hands and whisper to each other, "Look at Grandma, she can't stay awake. She's like a baby." They giggle but feel sorry for her. That is because they are very young and have not been tried by life.

I don't laugh. I almost envy her because I know that she is, once again, a suntanned girl running windblown beside the ocean or riding down a steep hill, with no hands on the handlebars. She is carefree once more.

_Helen Fordham_
I am Joining
by Scott Cole

From the English 101 Journal of Paul Callens:

September 27

Greg, my older brother, says that if this journal really is just getting glanced over and checked off then I should scribble down a load of bullshit and leave it at that. He's a senior, and says he never had to keep a journal for Basic College Writing. But to tell the truth, this is about the only assignment so far from any of my classes that I can get through without a lot of trouble.

Greg says not to worry about that. According to him, classes are just one small part of what goes on here. Really important things can't be learned in lecture halls from uptight bookworms. Besides, he says, we both know dad will take us into the print shop with or without a degree, even though he always talks about the education he never got. And I know this is true.

Last night I got to meet some of the brothers in the fraternity Greg belongs to. I am joining. We sat in Courtney's drinking beers until I thought I was going to be sick right there, but I held it until later. This really cute girl in a sweater, peel-off jeans and tiny black boots with tall, slim heels walked over and told Greg one of the locals was bothering her friend, so we all headed over to her table. There were six of us circled around this mean-looking hick in a headband and leather coat and Greg stepped right up and asked him what his problem was. The guy shrugged his shoulders and stuck out his chest like he was going to be a problem, and that's when Cleavage (the brothers call him that because he's overweight and has breasts like a woman's) poked him from behind and we all closed in tighter to let the guy know what it was all about. Greg asked
him if he liked to bother girls, if that was how he got off. The
guy didn't say anything. He just stared at my brother real coolly
until Greg grabbed the headband and a handful of the guy's hair
and bent him over by jerking his head down enough to knee
him in the face. Then we all drove him right out of the bar. It
was like in a cowboy movie, which is a corny way to describe
it. The girl in the black boots gave Greg a kiss on the cheek.

Even though I didn't say a word and hardly did a thing,
just standing there between Greg and Cleavage made me feel
strong. I am glad that because I am what they call a legacy
there is no question that I will be accepted into the fraternity.
Greg tells me that even if there was no such thing as a legacy
I would have no problem. He says because I am his brother the
other guys already know I have certain qualities that improve
my chances of success.

October 2

3:45 a.m. Just came back to my room after a strange party
where everybody got very messed-up. It was at the Frat-house.
There was a keg of beer, Southern Comfort by the pitcher and
a guy everybody called 'Beads' kept passing around a bowl of
speeders, which is probably why I am up and writing this now.

Cleavage snuck into someone's room and made away with
a Dixie-cup of mushrooms that were in the process of being
chemically treated. He was dancing around the room, popping
the mushrooms into his mouth while some skinny kid in the
corner groaned, "Cleavage, man, don't." As he went past me
Cleavage shoved the Dixie-cup under my nose and said, "Have
one." So I did. It tasted like a regular mushroom.

Two girls were at the party. I don't know their names. One
of them was heavy, wore gold heart-shaped earrings, countless
plastic bracelets and a pink shirt that was tattered around the
bottom so that her navel was visible. The shirt advertised good
times on some beach in Florida. She also wore a denim skirt.
The other girl was short and kind of pretty, except she had weird lips that looked like they belonged on a guppy. She wore a black suitcoat and corduroys and let the heavy girl do most of the talking. She just nodded as they stood over by the stereo. They each had on a pair of those sharp-toed white sneakers that practically every girl on campus has been buying.

Greg calls those girls "House Hoggers" because they are always hanging around.

The heavier one seemed to like my brother. She stood real close to him while he was changing records and laughed hard at all his jokes, even the stupid ones. And all this was before they got her to try out the 'Beer Buster' contraption that allows a person to drink full beers without swallowing. They ran two beers into her that way and then tried to get the girl with the guppy lips to take that tube down her throat but she wouldn't, so they fed the heavy one two more. After that she got friendly.

They had me do the 'Beer Buster' too. It's like being fed beer intravenously, using your esophagus as a vein. Cleavage was downing double shots of Southern Comfort through it because he said it didn't burn on the way down that way. Along with the shots he was taking speeders from Beads' bowl. I was waiting for him to pass out comatose.

Our numbers thinned down by two-thirty and someone shut off the lights and brought out a mood lamp that was a candle beneath a glass cylinder of red wax and liquid. The candle's heat melted the wax and strands of it lifted into the liquid in twisting shapes. The light from the candle projected large shadows of the changing shapes onto the walls, and some of the brothers were just staring dumbly at the spectacle. Others were screaming along, far from in tune but with amazing accuracy of lyrics, to Mick and the boys on the stereo. Two of the brothers were helping Greg to convince the heavy girl to take her clothes off.
At first she didn’t want to. She just kept giggling and motioning Greg closer and whispering into his ear. Then she agreed to take just her shirt off and in no time she was naked. I am not sure who presented her with the pump-style toothpaste dispenser, but no one had to tell her what it resembled. She wet it with her mouth. She tried to look sassy. After a teetering, shuffle-stepped dance she squatted in the churning shadows of the mood lamp and pushed the vessel up between her loose pale thighs.

The brothers howled or continued to sing.

There was a rough edge on the dispenser, unless she simply pushed it in too hard or too far. One other possibility everyone dismisses as unbelievable. Blood dripped onto the bare wood floor. But the heavy girl just kept it up, to the music and the strange light while her bracelets shook and the puddle grew.

Greg put his hand on her freckled shoulder and she started to cry and many of the brothers looked away. She dropped the dispenser. Someone turned down the stereo and Greg began to speak to the girl. I couldn’t hear most of what he said, but I did hear him offer to drive her to the hospital. And even though he had just sent Cleavage out in our car to buy some film, I know he would have driven. Getting a car would not have been a problem, because the people in that room would give my brother most anything.

But she refused to go to the hospital. What she wanted was her friend, so we all searched the house for the girl with the guppy lips but we couldn’t find her. Then Cleavage came in blubbering about not being able to remember what he was supposed to buy, and the heavy girl ran into the bathroom and slammed the door and I came back here to my dormitory room.

I still don’t know what happened to her friend. Maybe she went back to some guy’s room who doesn’t live at the house. I suppose it’s even possible that she just left the party.
October 4

This morning I saw that girl again, the one with the Colgate smile. I was out rounding-up different forms of life for Biology Lab and I managed to slip away from the pack. Someone had noticed the field was full of red praying mantis, and everyone in the class was capturing them and poking them and debating about how so many of them got to be that color. The professor started to talk about all those strange red rocks on the edge of campus and about Peppered Moths in England and I made my break.

I was on my way to Greg's room when I saw her. I knew that there had been a meeting of the brothers last night to determine which of the freshmen belonged at their sides and which didn't. Of course, being a legacy, the meeting really didn't concern me, but I was interested to see how things turned out. Anyway, I came out of the woods near the stone bridge that leads over to the row of houses behind Main Street, and she was sitting on a bench with another girl.

It was a shock to see her. No one saw her yesterday and all kinds of rumors were going around. I had heard that she was locked in her room and was refusing both food and company, that she had withdrawn from the college and headed back to the farm, even that she had died. I guess I expected her to be still crying and bleeding there on the bench, and not reading lines of drama aloud with the girl next to her.

I doubt she would have recognized me. I'm a new face and usually so quiet that I don't think she would have realized I was there the other night even if she had looked up from her script, which she didn't. So I crossed the bridge unnoticed with my butterfly net and specimen jar while their voices rose and fell behind me.

I still think she should have gone to the hospital. It was stupid of her not to. I know Greg would have driven.
Maybe It Was Barrow Street

Under the Third Avenue el, city workers made a barricade with orange galvanized drums. And that made the street one way. There is something that comes on, almost like magic on a date in the city, although our words were unskilled, haphazard like most things in New York. We talked just like old movies: I preferred Ingrid Bergman, and you, Monroe with a sheer dress billowing over the subway grate. I asked if you liked Brando as a motorcycle hood?. You couldn't remember. You let your thoughts drift with the cold in New York, the kind of weather enough to ice the hands. After that nothing came easily. Chaplin was fashionable and boring and Garbo was too mannish and the day became airborne, carrying particles of heat like ash up in wind. Upstate, such wind could filch a branch or two, or fell a light tree into divining twigs. As light settled, we looked up at the Y's of the jet planes and you offered to sleep with me because it would keep us from further lying. I said kissing was nice and small enough to keep this life unaltered.

Harriet Susskind
Advisor to Cabbages & Kings
That Gone Dead Train
by Jon Hockenbury

"That gone dead train, I swear it even broke my heart."
— KING SOLOMON HILL, 1932

Jay met Phil Ratano at the corner of Clinton and Benton. He tooted the horn and Phil got in. Phil threw his horn into the back seat of Jay's Volkswagen which was already crowded with his guitar case and amp. They were headed for a club that jazz musicians frequented called "The After Hours." They drove off.

"Hey Jay, you got a joint?" Phil asked immediately, eyes searching furtively the open ashtray and the spaces above the visor flaps.

"Yeah . . . in the ashtray. Go ahead, light it," said Jay. Phil ran his fingers through his lion's mane pompadour, tugged at his beard a little, and then reached into the ashtray with surgical precision to remove the fragile bone of a joint. Just as Phil turned his face to Jay, the joint hanging dry and paper white from his lips, Jay reached above the visor flap and tossed him a book of matches.

Jay took a long glance at Phil and noticed again the peculiar shape of his lip. It had been badly cut somehow and the way it had healed caused it to stick to his teeth when Phil smiled. It seemed to fan out and gave Phil a grimacing sneer that corrupted the few moments when he did smile. "It figures," thought Jay, "a saxophonist with a split lip." He flexed his aching hands on the wheel, the fingertips of the left one sore, the knuckles tender from constant practice. Phil lit the joint, breathed deep, and passed it, pressing it into Jay's fingers. Jay drove, eyes still on the road. He took a big toke.

The smell of marijuana, the taste of it, the almost instantaneous reactivation of its sticky intoxication was to Jay a nourishment, a sacrament. He loved its rich herbal minty smell and the way it stuck to his hands when he broke it up. And when he smoked it, his mind whirred faster, blazing from
thought to unconnected thought as the synapses in his brain fired in nervous chemical irritation.

They smoked for a moment in silence. Jay spoke first: "So Phil, who do you think's gonna be down at the club tonight? You think Woody'll be there? Tommy Richardson? I've been practicing hard, Phil, working on lots of tunes. I hope I can sit in right away, you know Phil?"

"You shouldn't worry about when or whether or not you sit in Jay— when you're ready, the cats'll know it. I've been around jazz a long time. It takes more than just being able to play. You gotta have a feel for it, that's all. The guys'll all be there . . . you'll get your chance."

"I wanna get good so bad, Phil. I think I'm pretty good. I wanna learn to play jazz— it's the real music. It's the only way to play, like Bird."

Phil yawned and shifted around in the seat. He had had big dreams once too, but was still hanging around Rochester with beginners and part-timers at jam sessions. He was always talking about making it in New York, but spent most of his time getting drugs and trying to dodge people he owed money to. He liked to pound double scotches at the bar and smoke dope until his lungs burst. He liked pills too— percodans and valiums and anything else that sedated you, that acted like junk. Phil was usually real loaded and sick a lot, too. He wiped his nose. It ran with a perpetual cold.

Jay took one last hit off the joint and tossed the tiny roach out the window. They pulled into the parking lot, grabbed their gear, and went into the club. The music from the house band came at them in a warm air rush as they opened the door to go in.

"Let's set our stuff here and get a drink," suggested Jay. Phil had already dropped his horn case near the drum set and was greeting musicians waiting to sit in at the bar. Jay looked down at his feet, saw a piece of gum stuck to the floor, and kicked it. He watched it come unstuck and fly away. He took a seat facing the band.
"It must have looked just like this," thought Jay as he saw the men straining over their instruments. There was Charley on piano—small, stocky, thick and Bantu in appearance, sweating over the keys, pounding out sure-footed chords and bass notes that rumbled like freight trains into Kansas City. Willis on drums, his stroke a lean articulated snap, the stick rising just an inch off the cymbal before striking again, his face twisted in ecstatic sneer, yet with eyes calm and intelligent. And Woody on sax with his oak tree legs rising into his mighty chest clothed in epauletted military shirt, cheeks puffed, eyes looking up and to the left a little, finding sturdy broad-toned notes that jumped from car to car on Charley's freight train.

Then Charley looked up and nodded his head and the train ground to a grunting, screeching stop with crashing saxophone wails and crash cymbals. Willis dropped his sticks and they all left the stage at once.

Jay waited a minute, then made his way to the stand and set up his amp and tuned his guitar. He watched the crowd. A tall, elegant black man with white templed hair wearing open neck gold chains three piece suit was buying a lady a drink. Everybody was buying drinks and gobbling free pizza off the bar. The tables were filled with young jazz fans, college students, old timers who remembered the real days, musicians and their hangers-on. Sophisto middle aged Italian men were stalking attractive but aging women in evening gowns and smooth slacks and nice fitting sweaters. There was plenty of gold jewelry and the smell of cologne was detectable through the smoky haze.

Jay sat alone at a table near the stand staring at his fingertips, trying to concentrate. Insecure and worried, he sat quietly waiting for the music to start again, to go on. Finally the band came back and Charley announced the guests for that set. Jay took his place with the others after he heard Charley call his
name. Phil, who had reappeared, stood on the corner of the stand adjusting his mouthpiece. He blew a couple of scales, then a long cascading figure ending in a loud, low honk. He looked up, licked his mouthpiece. Everybody looked tense, ready. Charley called off the first tune, a blues.

Jay jumped in on the downbeat of the first measure, striking the chords with crisp precision, the bones of his fingers snapping hard against the fingerboard. He felt the band slide around him, became aware of the galvanizing presence of Charley and the tightness of Willis’s rhythm. The soloists began to fall in one at a time, each guy rocking the next. The crowd settled down now, began to pay close attention. Woody closed his eyes, bit the mouthpiece, then looked up into his mind and came down with a long, powerful run that almost shook the glasses off the bar. Charley lay back, feeding each player messages to be decoded any of a thousand meaningful ways. As they played, trumpets shouted hot and angry one minute, then bubbled with an intimate coo the next. The saxophones purred through long scales and arpeggios describing with wordless precision the personal histories of an endless, beginningless tradition of human events. Even Ratano’s droopy-eyed face achieved dignity, even as his torn lip wrapped around the mouthpiece, as he began to play. Fifteen years of practice forgotten and remembered each time he played— the riffs coming from a collective pool of memory as he blew fierce and ecstatic into the grandfather horn.

Then Jay— clicking off the notes sad then angry, the confused riffs trailing off into a diseased mutter, the lonely guitar notes telling in bad music the story of insecurity, of want and perilous need, of fifteen years of lonely after school milk and cookies with nobody home, the friends he was afraid to want anymore, the lost father, dead from drink and heartache— the notes trying to compensate for feeling little and scared and
weak and worthless. Bearing down, Jay squeezed out a startling run, long and hard and tough and fast that almost made it, almost told everything. But ten years of studying Bach and five years of listening to Bird could not tell Jay where to find the sounds to express those half forgotten feelings. At the end of the run, Jay's fingers slipped off the fingerboard, and he sounded four open strings in a shattering dissonance. Three older cats near the door, their faces dark and lined and sad, listened quietly for a second, blinking, then resumed their talk. The guys on the stand grunted and nodded, eyes down, arms folded in solemnity. Jay heard the end of a chorus roll around and tried to cap off his solo the best he could, closing down his last note with a twist of the volume knob.

The audience clapped politely and briefly as if they all understood the sad thing that had happened. Jay went back to rhythm. The head of the melody came finally, and for Jay mercifully, around and flowed smoothly into the coda and out.

That was his turn and now it was over. Relieved, Jay flipped off his amp, rested his guitar against the wall and slinked off to find a drink and someone to go out and smoke a joint with. Woody spotted him, left the stand, and cut him off on the way to the bar.

"Hey baby, you ready for a taste?"
"Yeah sure."

They ordered drinks. Jay looked at Woody, the big belly, the easy smile, the confidence, youth and age wrapped up together. The face that sparkled like a teenager's. The eyes that revealed a touch of sadness now and then. The fingers that popped the keys so fast, so sure. The strong jaw muscles that clamped the reed or broke the tension with a grin. That pleasing, creamed-coffee color to his face and the darker dots like freckles that slipped into wrinkles sometimes. Jay glanced at his own pale hands and slim wrists and felt his face fall a bit.
They sipped their drinks. On the stand Tommy Richardson was working over the ballad, "My Funny Valentine." The notes sounded pretty, rhapsodic, only to be broken up occasionally by a bluesy phrase or a bit of humor. Woody listened to Tommy, to the sound of the room, to Jay, as if they were all one orchestra. He looked at Jay and frowned.

"Nice kid," he thought. "Scared though. Sounds like he listened to a few good records. Hell, in a few years, maybe he might sound like something." He reached out and clasped Jay by the shoulder.


"I been around a long time. I know all the routines, all of 'em." The eyes grew sad and narrowed. Jay shuddered as Woody's fingers dug into his shoulder. "Don't mess with no drugs, hear?"

Jay recalled the slight discolorations he had noticed on the insides of Woody's elbows when the big man had worn a shortsleeved shirt one warm summer evening.

"I seen a lot of 'em go down that way. Dozens of guys you never even heard of, guys that came through to play, wanting to be somebody, just like you."

Woody looked at Jay again, his eyes puffy, hard and narrow. He saw Jay's slight frame with its bad posture and unsure movements. The jacket that hung drooping off one shoulder. The kid's face—earnest, serious, nervous, sad—the desperate, frightened look that came over it when the glancing eyes met his. And how little and young looking he was, except for that look in his eyes. "Damn," thought Woody.

"You got that look about you. Have a beer, but don't mess around, dig?"

"OK Woody," said Jay vacantly. Satisfied, he let his arm drop from Jay's shoulder, the hand sliding down Jay's arm. "Thanks for the beer," said Jay.
He watched Woody again take his position on the bandstand, heard again the ancient freight train notes, sensed how far the train had travelled. He thought about his own journey, how short it had been, but how far away it had already taken him from where he longed to be. He saw and heard the music flowing from the brains and souls and hearts and fingers of these men and saw them as specters on a train that had gone dead somehow but was still carrying them along on a timeless journey. And the conductor was admitting no more new passengers.

The candles on the bar flickered and cast their light on the men, making them jerk like old movie footage. Jay saw his own guitar leaning against the wall, an artifact from the 'forties. He could smell its ancient carved wood perfume on his hands. The f-holes of the guitar seemed to break into a tiny smile as the endless jazz flowed through it.

Silent as a ghost, Jay slipped out the back door into the parking lot where he found Ratano standing with two friends who had come to hear the music.

"So when you going down to New York, Phil?"

"I don't know. I just got off the road with the Glenn Miller Band. Supposed to be hearing about some gigs down there soon. My girlfriend's in town here, so I don't know if I want to be hitting the road again so soon . . . Hey, there's Jay!" Ratano said, noticing the unlit joint in his hand.

"Anybody got a light for this?"

They lit it. As the three of them toked on it, its point glowed silently in the dark. Without explanation or goodbye, Jay turned his back and walked away. He went directly to his car and drove off, leaving the bar a red neon shimmer in his mind.
Verano de España

Hot farenheit degrees
And glowing red warm lights
Control the Madrid night people;
Speaking of this not that
In the cafe
Dark hair and mustaches
Sprinkled with sweat.
And at the table a rose
Red, warm and old
And probably imported.
The table dirty and the patio cracked
And the red neon blinks blurrily on
And off 'til dawn
Red and hot.

Peter Duffy
I want you to hold me even though there is no time.

"I left a twenty on your dresser."

"Huh?"

"I feel like I should leave you some money or something."

"You what?"

"Oh boy, now I've done it! I am joking Matt, now you think I'm serious, right?"

"Well you said it so you must feel that way I guess."

"Matt, I was kidding. Great sense of humor, huh?"

"Come here a minute Ann."

"I just hate leaving right afterward—that's all, but I know—I know, I hafta go home. I'm sorry it came out the way it did, I didn't mean it to sound that way. Tell me if you believe I was kidding."

"Yea—I believe you, I do!"

"I'm serious, I was joking around . . . Well, I guess I'll see you tomorrow. Make sure you find out your days off, okay?"

"Yea, I will."

"Well, see ya later."

"Yep. Goodnight."

"Bye."

M.J. Federico
"The time has come," the walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing wax —
Of cabbages and kings —
And why the sea is boiling hot —
And whether pigs have wings."

Lewis Carroll