

Jerry wanted to win the short story contest in the worst way. Moose, his father, would buy him the .22 rifle he had wanted ever since he had begun Junior High. His English teacher, Mr. Zellar, was the only person in the whole world who understood him. Maybe he would recognize Jerry's story and make him the winner. Something good had to happen in 9th grade. He hadn't made the football team, he hadn't made the basketball team, Donna Fisher sat on red-faced Henry Asher's shoulder but she wouldn't ask Jerry for a date. Every night his mother made him do the dishes. He stared at his face in the dark window above the sink and sang, "Oh Do-onna, Oh Da-nna,/ Oh Do-ona, Oh Do-ona,/ I had a girl, Donna was her name,/ Since she left me,/ I've never been the same,/ but I luuuuv miy girl,/ go-oone a-way,/ Oh Do-onna, Oh Da-ona." Enough of that shit. Zellar was gonna make him the short story winner. Moose was gonna come up with the .22. He was gonna poke a couple rounds into the back of Moose's brain while he sat reading The Saturday Evening Post in his overstuffed chair. He'd stop by school to thank Mr. Zellar and try to get off a couple of shots at the coaches before going to Donna's house. With motivation like that how could he not win the short story contest? He had finished the dishes. He looked at his image in the dark kitchen window and cracked a wicked grin.

-- Jim Klein

Rutherford NJ

CHOOSING THE CORNERSTONE

The day at the quarry is spent with whips and chains;
 Stones that the elephants cannot roll
 are forcibly dragged by the naked men.
 The sun at the quarry is always orange and hangs low
 in powdered air, smoking like a pepper
 curled on an iron grill.
 The faces of the slaves are folded brown rags
 on a kind of skin. Archers stand on the rim
 excited with bows and eagles of prey.
 There is no escape.

The quartermaster shouts through filed teeth;
 he waves his staff of thorns
 at a grey dog with a skinny tail.

They swallow poison water together at the well.

Ever dust of the hammers.

Spitting camels pull the carts

when the buffaloes fail.

A jade earring dangles from the elongated lobe

of a clubfooted soldier.

Sand dunes form in gasping lungs

while curious monkeys look up

at the men from the forest.

Wooden logs scrape over sleek granite.

I found the cornerstone. It was tilted, half-dressed

next to a basket of figs and melons

dehydrated in oceanic heat.

Tiny chips were still falling with drops of blood and water

because a creature without a nose was pounding

at it with a mallet of bronze.

No one noticed the blasphemous flaw,

so we called for the iron levels

and the infernal machines of loading.

We strapped the slab with rosettes of pink and green,

the twisted pelt of a diseased leopard,

on a high cart and pointed broken bones

Toward the valley.

Everyone took a hand at lashing with frayed ropes

heavy with the sweat of the day.

It was necessary to do this to make the first turn

of the gigantic wheels.

The passage to the site of the cathedral was filled

with broken vases, the usual polyhedrons

of waste and disgorge.

It was filled with cowering tigers

issuing mold in the darkness.

It was filled with abandoned pieces of armor

and men crying for water, huddled

behind piles of tortoise shells

and glassy beads of trade.

When we finally arrived at the level floor, much brutality

had settled down to the soles of leather

footwear. We presented the cornerstone raw

to the Master Mason for approval.

We found him sitting in the shade of a pavilion covered

with red wedges and pillars of smoke. He was a giant,

(He was an expert at lines going from point A to point B.)

His elegant moustache finally met somewhere below

his waist and was tied there with a thong

Of silk. (He kept a large spider for his muse and companion.

It was said the spider measured the spans

of the rafters. Anything is possible.)

Our cornerstone was summarily placed on a towering pile

previously selected by others for the honor.

(At least it is on the top of the heap.)

I see it shining there like a Moorish virgin in damask robes. It smiles behind its veil of delirium at the promise of sacred kisses and prayer. The configuration on the surface is subtle: it will only be recognized when the cathedral is finished, when a thousand thousand tons Of carefully laid stone crushes her shriveled breasts. To remove the abomination it will be necessary to unbuild the cathedral Stone by stone.

-- David A. Adams

Bird Island MN

CALLING THE MOON BY NAME

we said he was crazy,
'cause he looked through a telescope
at the moon
then howled,
and howled again.
and the dogs joined in,
the way they do
when the fire trucks
get their sirens going.
and we hear tell,
from a lady who knows,
that he had thirteen,
that's right, thirteen,
pictures and drawings
of the moon in his room,
and a book of black magic
dead in the center of the floor.
he called it his bible,
and cackled like a bundle
of kindling breaking.

he stayed up
all night one hot friday
with a pile of empty cans
in front of him,
and right before god
and everybody,
took a pair of tin shears,
cut those cans
into one-inch squares,
then stitched them bits
into the lining of his coat.