

I say, "It looks like that in Nebraska, huh?"
Dave says, "Yeah" — that's where he's from.
I say, "The clouds look really neat
the way you can see them hanging in the sky
the way you can see the space above them
where they are and how they're hanging."
And Dave looks at me like I'm crazy.
"You usually see clouds mostly just from the bottom.
You don't see how they're in the sky."
He doesn't get it. Tim understands.
He's from Southern California too.

— Stephanie Hager

South Pasadena CA

OLD HABITS

Harry and Marley promised each other never to smoke again. "However nervous we're feeling," Harry said, "we won't light up!" "Even if we're in a party and everyone is smoking, we'll just refuse to join in!" "Even if they think we're rude." "Even if our hands are trembling."

They stopped overnight. With an immense effort, they got through the week, then the month. They put on weight, got irritable, but wouldn't give in.

One evening Harry called Marley. "Have you kept your promise so far?" "Course I have!" Marley snapped, then, trying not to sound hopeful, added: "Have you?" "Yeah. Sure."

The next day Marley's apartment went up in flames. The neighbors called the fire brigade, but they arrived too late for Marley.

When Harry heard the news, he said: "He must have started smoking!" and lit a cigarette.

The police have not ruled out the possibility of arson.

ASSEMBLE THESE BONES

For decades on end they dug; freed the vast skeleton, fossil by fossil, shifted whole hillsides with toothbrushes, piled valleys high with unfamiliar ribs and tibias.

"Assemble these bones!" the puzzled paleontologists said.

No dinosaur emerged — instead, a prehistoric replica of the Eiffel Tower, which they frantically dismantled and buried.

CONSPIRACY THEORY NUMBER 27

The villagers had caught the fox at last, just spitting out a mouthful of blood and feathers.

"I've eaten several chickens," he admitted. "Not as many as the wolves, of course, but there you go. Small thieves will pay for big ones. Fire away, brave villagers!"

Curiosity threw anger off balance: "Wolves? What wolves?"

"You never hear them naturally. Dozens come, some nights."

"But wolves are noisy animals!"

"Extremely noisy. If it wasn't for the racket those church bells make, you'd hear them coming miles away."

The villagers frowned. For several nights, it was true, the bells had rung like mad for minutes on end. They'd thought it was the wind.

"The ones to watch," the fox continued, swallowing awkwardly, "are the doves. They gather in the belfry, fan the bells with their wings. They get the leftovers, see."

And so the doves were shot and the fox went free.

TO BE BROKEN IS THE DESTINY OF GLASS

A colorless man travelled through bright continents, holding up an oblong face-shaped pane of glass before him as he walked. At every village, different colored people stopped him and politely asked him why.

"Is it to protect you from the dust?" they said. "The wind? Perhaps the glare of the sun?" Without lowering his frameless window, the traveller shook his head.

"Glass is transparent," he explained, "so I see everything perfectly clearly; but it also reflects, enabling me to see my own face as I walk, and never forget it's me who's seeing all these other faces."