

HELICON

1956

THE HELICON

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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"From *Helicon's* harmonious springs a thousand
rills their mazy progress take."

Gray: *The Progress of Poesy*

Helicon 1956

A Note from the Editor

The editor wishes to thank the editorial board and the contributors for their assistance in preparing this issue of the *Helicon*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
The Sea and I <i>Joan Le Blanc</i>	5
Out of Doors <i>Elizabeth Heslin</i>	6
Symphony <i>Peggy Bargamian</i>	6
The Dinner Party <i>Marilyn Geise</i>	7
City at Night <i>Joan Barrett Dooley</i>	9
Sailor Everywhere <i>Lois Chabot</i>	9
No Great Difference <i>Harold John Sipples</i>	10
Bend or Be Damned <i>John Staknis</i>	12
Sonnet in Still Life <i>Jerry Dilorio</i>	13
Along a Country Lane <i>Elizabeth Heslin</i>	13
False Dawn <i>Elaine Richard</i>	14
Reflections After a Storm <i>Lois Chabot</i>	14
A Dancer's World <i>Robert Frappier</i>	15
Memory <i>Peggy Bargamian</i>	16
The Portrait <i>David Dillon</i>	17

The Sea and I

I saw a long gray shadow on the horizon of the sea.
And my girlish heart did ache—
For there I longed to be.
But I'm destined to a petticoat,
A parasol and a life
Of being sweet and shy
As some fine fellow's wife.
As I go from day to day
Through duties large and small,
I'll keep stored up inside of me
The best dream of them all—
I'll be a Captain of a ship—
A massive hulk of gray,
Commanding all her mighty guns
From dawn to break of day—
I'll love to roam her mighty decks
And watch her roll the sea;
A captain of a mighty ship—
Oh, this I long to be.
If I were brave and daring
I'd rewind the strings of fate—
If maybe not a Captain,
I'd at least be a Captain's mate.
But I'm destined to a petticoat,
And fans of dainty lace—
To playing a woman's part,
And keeping a woman's place.
But how I'll love the rolling sea
The roaring, crashing tide—
And though I keep a woman's place,
I'll love the sea inside.

JOAN LE BLANC

Out of Doors

I know — I promised all week long
To mend your socks,
And the parlor rug needs vacuuming . . .
But oh today's a day for being out of doors!
There's something in the air that
Smacks of purging mind and soul.
What a clean day (as only Autumn ever is),
Yet, without a trace of bitterness and corners sharp.
I have a mind to think that June's returned.
And as I gave your socks an extra squeeze,
And hung them where the sun felt warmest,
Some speckled starlings whistled from that leafless elm
In Hunter's yard — with no respect.
I think
They mocked my industry.
But — I know — I promised all week long
To mend your socks,
And the parlor rug needs vacuuming.

ELIZABETH HESLIN

Symphony

Sounds of years
have stopped . . .
Where voices sang,
there is but calm.
Yet now I would
that symphonies ring
to tell of love.

PEGGY BARGAMIAN

The Dinner Party

"I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

T. S. Eliot

Amid four glowing forks on the left, three shining spoons on the right.

"Isn't this a divine dinner party, Sara, and you're looking so lovely. You've gotten so much wear out of that dress, haven't you, dear? Oh, it's new! Well . . . Doesn't Margo always have such plushy parties. And such divine people! There's that new novelist, Kevin O'Connor . . . no Connor . . . McConnell. Well, anyway, darling, he's right from Ireland. Probably of genuine peasant stock! He seems to be fairly civilized, but my Charles says you can always bet there's a crude streak somewhere."

"Pass the salt, will you, Sara?"

"Well, anyway, darling, his book is on Reader's Digest 'Pick of the Month'. I subscribe, of course . . . well, I mean everyone does here, don't they? Of course I don't have much time to read them, with the Garden Club and the Junior League and now the PTA. Oh, yes, that too, my dear. Well, you know, Merrill wasn't doing awfully well."

"Another roll, please, Sara."

"Oh, no, she's a bright child, but with her transfer, and piano lessons, and of course, she's young for her grade. Well, Charles thinks it's a good idea to stick pretty close to those teachers. Next year she's going to Lanier, you know. Yes, really! It's dreadfully expensive but then a girl really needs to mingle with those kind of people."

"Oh, divine people, Sara. All from Newton and Belmont—just right for our Merrill. And, of course, Brad is doing fine at Crown. No, not the President's List, but Charles always says a boy should go fraternity, and not take the hardest course. After all, you only have to say you're a Crown man . . . you're in! Why, look at my Charles. Third vice president, you know. Oh, yes, we enrolled Brad when he was still a baby."

"This dessert is simply divine, n'est ce pas? Ha, ha, I love to say that, you know."

"Look, Sara, that's Milton Steiner next to Margo. He'll probably play after dinner. Now isn't that divine? Of course, he's Jewish, but I'm not anti-semitic at all. I just adore music. Favorites? Oh, darling, I don't

have any. Charles says that's not democratic at all. It's a shame you missed Elvira's party last week, because just everyone that's anyone was there. And Elvira invited this divine artist from the Village, of all places, Sara, to exhibit some pictures. I think he called it duelism or cubism or something. Well, no matter, he certainly impressed me. Art is so cultural anyway."

"Margo's cook makes such divine 'cafe au lait'. Oh, Sara, everybody says that now; it's so cosmopolitan! And Charles says it helps diplomatic relations, too. Lord knows we have to be careful nowadays, with those awful Russians running around."

"Why, darling, those dreadful bombs could spoil everything! But Charles says, business is terribly good, and the government has a huge stockpile, or something. Anyway, those crude foreigners wouldn't dare touch us, Sara. We've progressed so, and we're so divinely civilized!"

MARILYN GIESE

City at Night

The night like a leaking pen
Drops pools of blackness on the city.
They nestle in obscure corners and
Trickle down narrow alleys.
Hiding from the noise and brightness
They lurk in fear of the
Glaring neon signs,
And the laughs that emerge from
Cavernous throats through
Scarlet doors.
Yes, the blackness fears the
Acid irradiators of the city.
It twists in pain.
Then dreams, perhaps,
Of a solitary countryside.

JOAN BARRETT DOOLEY

Sailor Everywhere

A sailor sitting on a bar stool
Thinks of life—
Not here but home,
As ifs of youth trouble him
To dreams he might have had.
The soon and somedays
Struggle against loneliness.
A sailor far from everywhere.

LOIS CHABOT

No Great Difference

The American soldier lay on the bleak yellow earth. He was conscious of the cold that had begun to seep through his emaciated body and of the pain that hammered within his head every few seconds. It had been hours since the pain was inflicted; what had seemed like a bomb shattering his head into a multitude of pieces, each having the power to inflict pain, was now a mere throbbing along the temple.

With the coming of consciousness came a new realization of the cold and of the darkness that seemed to thicken the air into a solid that was impenetrable to the eyes of the fallen soldier. Yet he tried to force his eyes to penetrate the obscurity of the night, but to no avail. After a minute of staring into the black night, the muscles of his face began to relax. He began to remember what had happened before he lost consciousness. He felt sure that he was lying on the ground directly where he had fallen after the Japanese sergeant had clubbed him with his rifle.

The soldier saw himself standing by the barbed wire that surrounded the camp, waiting for the old women to come from the town with their bags of food to sell to the prisoners while the guards were not watching. He saw the dirty peasant woman with a black shawl coming toward him with a wide smile across her toothless mouth. In her outstretched hand he saw the bundle of food, a half dozen small fish and a loaf of peasant bread. Eagerly he pulled the few silver coins from his pocket and watched the old woman's face to see if she was pleased by what he had to offer. He heard the peasant gasp, saw her turn to flee, and then felt the thrust of the Japanese guard's rifle upon his head.

Strange that on gaining his senses he should wonder what had happened to the dirty peasant; yet the realization came to him that he did not really care; life was no longer as important as it once had been. Dead or alive, there was not a great deal of difference. The central force that guided both was the same—pain, the undisputed root of fate.

From the distance came the familiar gasp of a tortured soldier, unwilling to cry out his agony into the teeth of the Japanese who had set themselves up as his God. The gasp caused the fallen soldier to wince and to swear at the men who enjoyed torturing mortal men like themselves. At that moment he felt that all men were better off dead than alive—all the Japanese soldiers caged with their prisoners until enough men had been killed on both sides of the battlefield to warrant an ending of the war.

Suddenly the sound of a ringing bell shattered the silence that had surrounded the fallen soldier like a shroud. The sound of feet tramping across hard ground came to his ears, and he was puzzled. A bell that rang in the middle of the night? The men rising to follow the sound of the bell as if in expectation of a measly handful of rice? How could the prisoners see where they were going in the blackness?

The prisoner lying on the ground realized that someone was standing over him.

"Kural Lakas. Lakas." The Japanese sergeant who had clubbed the fallen man shouted for him to rise and come with him. The fallen soldier tried to force his arms to support his body so that he could rise. He managed to pull himself to a sitting position, but by then his energy had reached its breaking point. The fallen soldier waited for another thrust from a rifle or for a kick in the side from the sergeant's boot, but the sergeant just stood there perplexed. Then he bent over and brushed his fat yellow hand over the prisoner's face. He turned and walked away.

After the sergeant left, a sigh of relief crossed the soldier's face, even though he realized that he must be blind and that he would soon be killed. Then a new realization of the cold caused his body to quiver as it fell back to the ground. The soldier's mind began to be convinced that he could die in peace if only he could find warmth.

Slowly and painfully the fallen soldier began to drag his tired, aching body over the hard earth. The barbed wire was now closer, closer to the crawling man. Finally he reached it, and ran his fingers over the sharp edges. Then, gathering together what little strength remained in his body, he thrust his hands on the wire, grasping it in the palms of his hands, and felt the sharp pain ripping into his skin. The hot blood began to trickle down his hands. He made an effort to tear his hands away from the wire, but he could not. A warm pain that caused his blood to flow freely through his body drove away the cold that he had lived with for so long. He had told himself that now he could die in peace; yet even now there were questions in his mind. He thought, "Christ died with blood on His hands. I wonder what he thought about before He died? I wonder how He felt?"

The air exploded with two rifle shots that came from the area behind the bleeding soldier. No time to find the answers. None at all.

HAROLD JOHN SIPPLES

Bend or Be Damned

He pulled a shade of clouds
With a mighty, muscled arm,
Exhaling deeply from iron chest
Bent on destruction, preparing for harm.

Majestic waters of the sea
Saluted grimly his command;
The smallest grass blade on the ground
Kissed the earth to escape his hand.

He came to a forest of peaceful green
And shattered the peace with a roar;
The trees bowed gently at his wish
Protesting — but bending with their chore.

The two stood alone yet with their kind
And blocked his ravaging wake;
"Bow to me, fools!" he thundered,
"Bend like the rest or be damned to break!"

"I will not bend," one tree replied,
"I hear but heed not your rules;
I am your master — not you mine
The ones who obey you are only fools."

The other tree in silence stood
But never yielding to the weight;
Her leaves all tangled about her head
But trunk determined, rigid, and straight.

The wind is gone, the night is still
As trees spread their arms to stars overhead;
The brother and sister are still side by side
Admired, respected, but broken — and dead.

JOHN STAKNIS

Sonnet in Still Life

(AVE MARIA)

I see the solemn figure of a mother
Standing in her orchard, silently,
While to her heart she holds with gentle care
A tiny handful of eternity.
Her blue dress though dull and rent through years
Is touched with amber in the setting sun.
Obscured by falling shadow, she stands in tears,
Her gaze forever fixed toward far horizon.
As momentary muteness quells the wind,
A hush descends upon each flower and leaf;
Soft hands of evening from their task rescind,
And tongueless trees above her pause in grief.
Who are you, lady? Pray, tell me why
God's earth in tribute should before you lie?

JERRY DI IORIO

Along a Country Lane

If you ever walk along a country lane,
You'll see not only brier rose running on the ground
And smell the honeysuckle's August bloom,
But — if you listen for an urgent sound
Though half distinct, you'll find
Among the grass or in the creeping vine
A slender garter working there
Within his jaws a struggling life
Whose last cry barely grazed the air.
If you ever walk along a country lane,
Let all your senses have their way,
But you may not wish to take that walk again.

ELIZABETH HESLIN

False Dawn

Cold dawn flew up, up, up
To coax the splendor from indifferent skies;
Upbraiding, teasing out of hiding
The blood-warm radiance of the sun.

We looked upon a world, new spun
In threads of red and gold,
Vestmented, adoring and incensing
The first white glow of day.

My soul turned quietly to yours
To share a silent, swift communion
With the skies,
And felt, instead, the chill creep of despair
When it beheld
The dying wonder in your eyes

ELAINE RICHARD

Reflections after a Storm

New snow clinging to the edge of things
defying gravity—for a time—
makes the stark reality of branches
not quite what they are.
And pale blue skies
welcome the pink and gray
of a white daylight.
Tombstones resting
unselfconsciously
in a field of final oneness
speak silently—if one listens—
of the unindividuality
of yet to come.
And birds sitting on the frozen wires
watch
as the shadowed whiteness turns from calm
and the sun makes the glare hurt one's eyes.

LOIS CHABOT

A Dancer's World

It is a good thing the night is long,
For gaiety finally has to succumb.
The dance floor is at last abandoned,
And the sounds of mirth have ceased.

The lanterns have lost their glow,
And cool themselves in stale air;
Not drawing the creatures of the night,
But returning shadows to their true tones.

The rustling of silks and laces
Has followed the laughter into silence;
And smiling faces are ghosts of the past,
As the wandering dust finds a place to rest.

Now footfalls call to one another,
And moving brushes are not tools of rhythm.
Lost to the air are the dance's melodies,
And the orchestra primeval is heard in the hall.

All that in this world is false,
Slumbers with the dancers,
Until another day.

ROBERT FRAPPIER

Memory

Do you remember?
Covering our world, a dismal
Cloak of rain, stifling hope and love.

It was a crying time,
Wake of the dying flower

But slowly, sweetly the miracle
Revealed itself!
Rains stopped

From the heavens, born the image of love.

PEGGY BARGAMIAN

The Portrait

When we were younger we used to go up to the old house on the top of the hill to visit with Miss Malloway every Saturday. Not because we wanted to, but because mother insisted that we must. Ma felt sorry for the old woman of whom people in town said had never married because there wasn't anyone around who had as much money as she had, and then there were the others who said no one had ever asked her. I realize now we were what father would have called mercenary little beggars, because we mainly went to get the candy and cake Miss Malloway had the servants give us.

On those long ago Saturday afternoons Miss Malloway used to sit imperiously in her wheelchair calling me Jonathan, and Jonathan me. She didn't bother to call Jenny anything and only tolerated her because she was our sister. Jenny didn't mind though, because she didn't have to sit around and listen to Miss Malloway talk about the old days. Instead, Jenny used to wander around the big old house searching for secret passages and such things and never finding them. But she did find the portrait.

On one of those Saturday visits, Miss Malloway had sent us up to the attic to play, while she entertained someone who had just stopped by. But we didn't go. Instead, Jenny took Jonathan and me into a room where we had never been before. It was what in those days they called the library, and what we nowadays call the study.

The portrait dominated the room. It was of a woman in a blue dress. Jenny said it was Miss Malloway. But even as a child I knew Jenny was wrong. Miss Malloway was ugly.

* * * * *

Until recently I had forgotten all about that. We moved away and we grew up and then the war came. Somehow nothing was ever right after that. Jonathan was killed and Jenny was married and moved away. I had only just been discharged from the service when I received the letter.

Miss Malloway was dead and the big old house was empty. And it now belonged to Jonathan, Jenny, and me.

So I went back to Evansville. I didn't bother to stop at our old house; instead I went directly to Miss Malloway's.

Walking up the drive I could almost imagine that Jonathan and Jenny were with me, and I expected any moment to see Miss Malloway beckoning us on from the French windows.

Perhaps that is why I found it difficult to get to sleep that night. I wandered about the old house like an intruder. Always aware of Miss Malloway's presence in the vast emptiness of dark passages and shrouded chairs only dimly lighted by the candle I was forced to use because the electricity was turned off.

I came at last to the library. I had feared that the portrait might not be there, but it still hung over the fireplace dominating the room.

Someone had gone to the trouble of taking all the books from the shelves and packing them away in boxes stacked by the fireplace. I was irritated that this had been done without my orders. Then I realized there might have been some provision in the will regarding the books. My irritation subsided as I started looking through the boxes.

They were in one of the first boxes I examined. A small packet of letters in an inconspicuous cardboard file resembling a book. What I did next was wrong, but I don't regret it. At the time I justified myself by saying if the letters hadn't been meant to be read, they would have been destroyed. Sometimes we are too clever for our own good.

The letters had been carefully arranged by dates. The first were hesitant and stylized, but as I read them there seemed to be a barely perceptible change so that in the last letters there were passages too personal to be read by anyone but the person to whom they were written.

It was in the last letter that the portrait was mentioned.

April, 1916

Dearest,

Such a long time to wait. I fear it is too long. I have done as you asked. The portrait has been painted and now hangs in the library. I wore your favorite color, blue. I know you will like the house when you see it. And I hope you will like me. It is difficult for two people such as we to really know whether we love each other never having seen each other. I know it is wrong to say this but it is necessary because it will make our meeting so much easier. And always remember that no matter what happens I shall always remain.

As ever,
Regina

Each letter had borne that delicately written reminder... As ever,
Regina.

April, 1916, so long ago. The candle was almost out and I had become aware of the chill on the room. I set a match to some wood that had been left in the fireplace. Ignoring the dustcover on the chair I sat down and for a long time stared at the portrait. I cursed the inadequacy of the firelight to do it justice.

I knew in the morning that I shouldn't have returned to Evansville. I had originally come with the idea of selling the house, but now I wasn't so sure. And so for the rest of the week I went through the motions of selling the house. I saw Mr. Bainbridge at the bank to check the title to the deed. I ran an ad in the paper but there were no prospective customers. Somehow it didn't matter. And all the time I hesitated in doing what I had to. I knew I must ask someone about Regina. And when I did I received a shock. No one had ever heard of her. So I was back where I started, with a packet of letters and a portrait and an intriguing phrase. "As ever, Regina."

I thought that if I inquired long enough, someone would know. But there was no one. Somehow it didn't seem possible that in such a little town a life had existed of which no one knew.

I reread the letters hoping to find some clue. But there was nothing in them to go by; so I found myself more and more thinking of the portrait. I took to sleeping in the library, lying on the sofa and watching the firelight play on the portrait.

In the end, it was Mr. Bainbridge who gave me the first clue. He reminded me of Mrs. Blackburn, the old woman who used to take care of Miss Malloway.

I often wondered afterwards how I could have forgotten Mrs. Blackburn. She'd been Miss Malloway's nurse since nobody knew when. I thought she must be ancient now, because in the old days when Jenny, Jonathan, and I went visiting at the old house, she'd been gray-haired and wrinkled-faced.

Mr. Bainbridge informed me that she lived with her granddaughter out on the Post Road. At that moment when I was sure I would at last speak to someone who had known Regina, I hesitated. Sometimes we believe what we want to believe. I was sure truth would somehow destroy my image of Regina. But even while hesitating I knew what I must do; so in the end I went to see Mrs. Blackburn.

Her granddaughter met me at the door. The granddaughter didn't seem in the least surprised to see me. She said she had heard of the inquiries I'd been making about the town.

Mrs. Blackburn sat near the front window, occupied with watching her neighbors and the movement along the Post Road.

I led up to the subject of Regina, testing the accuracy of the old woman's memory. She remembered Jonathan and was sorry to hear that he had been killed. She spoke of Jenny as the little girl who had always been peeking around corners of the house, scaring Mrs. Blackburn half to death.

Finally I could wait no longer. I asked directly.

"Do you remember a Miss Regina?"

"Oh, there weren't no Miss Regina. Miss Malloway made her up."

I felt I had confused the old lady so I continued.

"But there were letters. I've seen them."

"I know. It made Miss Malloway happy. She never had nobody, you know."

"I don't understand."

"I didn't at first either, sir. She used to be getting all those letters addressed to Miss Regina. I never knew till he came."

So I left Mrs. Blackburn's and headed back to the old house. I was aware now of the deception Miss Malloway had carried on. Only when it seemed she would be found out she'd conveniently disposed of Regina and asked for the return of the letters. I felt sorry for Miss Malloway forced to stand by a grave watching the man that she loved grieve for someone who had never existed.

I have decided against selling the old house. It would be wrong to do so.

Last night I gathered all the letters and going down to the library I burned them in the fireplace. The afterglow dimly outlined the portrait. It was a beautiful thing Miss Malloway had created and beauty shouldn't be destroyed.

DAVID DILLON

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