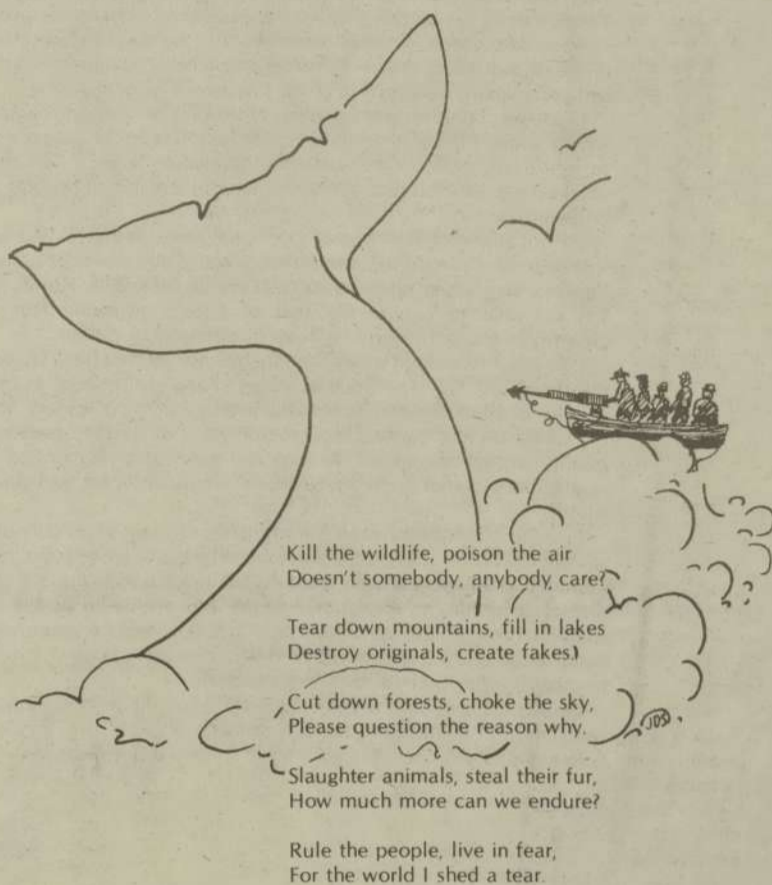


"Lost"

I look through a window and see the rain that comes splashing down on the wounds of my desperation and hostility. I seem to recall that once familiar pain again as I clutch to the walls of my heart. I ache at the thought of loving another when the love I thought had died is being rekindled by the soft words of his voice that pierce through my soul and take captive my heart. I deny the inner call from deep inside as I shake the pain and wipe the tears from my cheek. A fire consumes me as his presence enters a room, and a great warmth flows from my heart out through the ends of my hair, as my eyes wait for the glance that could release this hidden love buried so deep. I feel an excitement grip my stomach as he swiftly carries himself across the room to my trembling body where I stand and wait for his cutting words that could destroy me or his solemn words of hope that could unleash me from the chains of love. His words flow from his lips like a piano playing the tune to a romantic love song, in the back of my mind. I look into his eyes with a yearning, a yearning to understand the confusion that is hidden in his eyes by a wall that disillusion built. I struggle in the cry for help where help is not expected. Disappointment clouds my future as the fire dies and his eyes grow dark. He turns and walks away, numb to the world with only a concern of what attacks his being. A silence fills the air as my heart weeps and my destined love walks out the door holding my hope for the future in his hand. The door closes me off to the dream of stability and companionship and reality takes its place. I strive after the past and struggle to keep the feeling alive but frown at the pain of knowing it's lost. The weather is cold and haste encircles itself in the winds that wind around obstacles in life that are unprotected and need shelter. Now, when I look through a window and see the plants that die off to the fall, and dark colors that consume the once green earth; I smile at the thought of spring, when everything's new; the sun shines brighter and warmth fills the air... Another love may inhabit my heart once again.

by Lee Metoxen

"Does Anyone Care"



by Julia Singer

"H-M-M-M..."

Slowly, ever so slowly, Mary pushed open the door. She peered down the darkened basement steps. She could hear the steady humming noise. "H-M-M-M..."

"What is that?" her brain seemed to shout! Her thoughts were so loud that she was sure that if there was someone in the basement they would surely hear her.

"H-M-M-M..." She knew the light switch was only inches from her hand, and yet, she could not make herself move the muscles in her arm to reach for it. Whatever, or worse, whoever was making those noises down there might see her hand creeping forward and miraculously reach up the ten feet from the basement floor to grab her. In her mind's eye she could see her arm being enclosed within a huge hand with long dirty fingernails and crooked fingers sprouting long black hairs. The thought gave her goose-bumps and shivers.

She had heard the humming noise the minute she had entered the house, "H-M-M-M..." She knew the noises of her little two bedroom house and that was not one of them. When she and John had left the house this morning that noise had not been a part of its repertoire. The "plop, plop, plop" of the kitchen faucet, the "whur, thunk, whur" of the furnace; and the "tip, tip, erk" of her favorite oak tree as it scratched on the south window of the room that would soon belong to their expected newborn baby. Those were the noises she expected to hear in the house she and John had occupied since their marriage, five years ago. All of those noises, but not, "H-M-M-M..."

At first it had not frightened her. She thought it was John. Although she usually arrived home before him on weekdays, she supposed that for some reason or another, he may have come home early. As a private accountant, with his own little office, he could leave whenever he wished. "John," she called, "is that you?" Silence. Only the "H-M-M-M..." answered her greeting. Suddenly, she felt the hair on the back of her neck begin to reach upward toward the ceiling as the "H-M-M-M..." was joined by a new sound, "tick, tick, tick, clink" and then the "H-M-M-M..." again - alone.

Mary turned and retraced her steps to the front door, opened it and loudly banged it shut, hoping that the whatever or whoever it was would think she had left. Outside, she stomped as forcefully as she could across the porch - considering her tiny size of only about 110 pounds (with her clothes on), and down the steps. Once on the sidewalk in front of the house she turned and removing her shoes, tiptoed carefully back inside.

Once back inside the house, she had followed the sound as it led her out of the cheerful front entry hall, down the corridor

coming off it to the back of the house, and into the spotlessly clean pink-and-white kitchen. She crept stealthily across the rose-colored linoleum, following the "H-M-M-M..." all the way to the basement door.

"H-M-M-M-tick-tick-tick-fromp!" said the sound, and her heart skipped a beat and fell into her socks. When she recovered her composure, she reached for the handle of the white door with the small rose in the center of the porcelain handle.

"Wait! What are you doing?" her mind shouted suddenly, "Seven months pregnant, all alone, and you're about to go into that dark basement?! What are you going to do if you do happen to run into something down there? Ask it to come upstairs for tea?"

"Tea," she thought, "Of course. Why hadn't she thought of it before?" She let go of the door handle and moved silently across the kitchen to the cupboard where she stood on her tiptoes to reach the top shelf of the cabinets. She pulled down a very old tea box where she kept her small pearl-handled .45. She blew the dust off the box in disgust. "I should clean up here more often," she thought. After taking out the gun and replacing the tea box, she strode confidently back over to the door, grasped the handle firmly, and jerked open the door. Now, there was one last problem. The light was still off.

She stood there for a few moments before she even got up enough courage to look in the direction of the steps. She slowly opened her clear blue eyes and peered into the darkness. In the basement, near the far wall, she could see two beady red eyes glaring at her through the darkness. No, she suddenly realized, it was worse. She saw four beady red eyes glaring at her through the darkness. "H-M-M-M!" it shouted. Then, in one swift movement, Mary closed her eyes, shot out her hand, and flipped on the light switch. The creature screamed as the light slapped it in the face and so did Mary. "Z-Z-Z-Z! H-R-A-A-A!" the stairway filled with the sounds of terror. She impulsively pulled the trigger. "CLICK!" the gun, obviously, was not loaded. Panic gripped her as she pulled the trigger three more times "CLICK, CLICK, CLICK!" tears began to flow helplessly down her cheeks as she slowly opened her eyes to face her doom.

Mary never told John of her encounter that day. When he came home that afternoon she had been cheerfully knitting baby booties in the living room. She giggled slightly as she thanked him for the wonderful present he had bought her, and to this day, only she and her new Maytag washer and dryer know of their peculiar meeting.

by Joan Cartales

