

Summer Rain

by Nava Etshalom

Summer rain, the cold-on-hot, backwards-hot-fudge kind, that falls in driving winds from the sky, erodes the edges of California and never touches Israel, sends up waves of pavement-scent in New York and earth-scent in Idaho and brushes your mountain with tears that cut holes in your cheeks and expose your bones to the wind. You dance in it, your hair falls even longer down your back, reaches for the ground; your white shirt has given up all pretense of modesty and your bra-lines are non-existent this summer. You are still eleven. You push out your skirt, looking for hips, wiggling your waist in the air and shedding drops like cat fur for the sun to clean up. Running down the drain in swirls and yowls, the cat fur is a foreshadowing. Like Nair, the rain drives your leg hair from your skin to clog the sewers. Razors call you a teenager and intro-



duce you to a self-absorption that is contained within walls of glass-shards-in-cement to keep everyone out. You try to climb out but your skirt and legs are torn; a rip sears up your leg and your crotch is dripping blood. You cry but don't feel clean, think you'll never feel clean again. Your thoughts are dirty, your holes are dirty, and you're still dirty behind the ears. Your fingers are dirty and sticky from the rain and your tears aren't freshwater; they're the salt of a syrupy dead sea. ★

[Other works by Nava Etshalom appear on pages 9 and 85.]

A Summer of Regret

by Jacob Rosenstein

Deep in the Pocono Mountains, the small circle of poorly built cabins followed Karl's lead and awoke without a sound, their shadows drawn into hiding by the rising of the sun. It was early enough that birdsong was the only noise breaking the silence to welcome the new day; in less than an hour the spell would be broken by the chattering of waking teens. For the moment, however, the serenity of early morning reigned.

A small, barely noticeable creaking sound accompanied the birds as Karl quietly jumped down from the top bunk, put on his shoes, and left the cabin, his mind filled with thoughts that he had yet to understand. So many things had happened since he arrived at camp at the beginning of the month, and the cramped cabin, smelling of sawdust and sweat socks, was no place to decipher them. Karl felt that he needed to be alone—to get some time to think, unbothered by his fellow campers.

Silent as the air around him, Karl left the cabins' vicinity and allowed the image of a girl he had admired all month—though he had yet to learn her name—to enter his mind: long, flowing, chestnut-colored hair; beautiful figure, and—

“Ow!” Karl hit the ground with a thud as he slipped on flat, moss-covered rocks that he hadn't seen. He



brushed himself off and hurried past the sports field, where he had not found the courage to approach her during the Independence Day Dance. He passed the dining hall, where, three times a day, she had been directly in his line of sight as he chewed the pig swill that just barely passed for food. Next along the path was the adventure-training shack, home to camping supplies and memories of her as she walked, just paces ahead of him, with their hiking group.

In fact, not a day had gone by that she was not in Karl's view, just beyond his invisibly outstretched arms. But not once had he been able to overcome his fear of rejection, the pessimistic expectation that was always foremost in his mind. Her “stranger status” tormented him, yet there was no way to solve the problem other than by the obvious approach that Karl had so far failed to try.

He quickened his pace along the well-worn path, the pitter-patter of morning showers in sync with his footsteps. Soon he would reach his destination, the place where nobody would be at this hour, the one area that would be utterly silent.

The lake at daybreak was an intense royal blue, rimmed by majestic pines. Their long reflections shimmered on the crystal-clear water, and the mass of liquid seemed to possess a luminescence of its own as Karl neared it, though he did not notice: early morning weariness and his single-minded focus were a blindfold to the world.

There she was! Nothing could have surprised Karl more than seeing her at that moment. Fewer than ten yards separated them, though only one person was aware of it. More than once had he imagined that they would cross paths on this sunrise expedition, though these were only fleeting notions. Never had he seriously expected *this* to happen . . . but there she was!

The gray boulder that she was sitting on must have reposed at the water's edge for thousands of years, and Karl felt that this time must have at least been matched in the few seconds that he stood, paralyzed by the angelic being who was only a few strides away. Images of lost opportunities flashed through his mind as he remembered