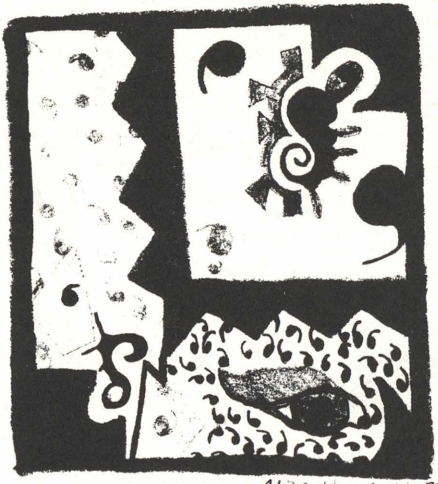

L M Kendall 89

genesis
FALL '89

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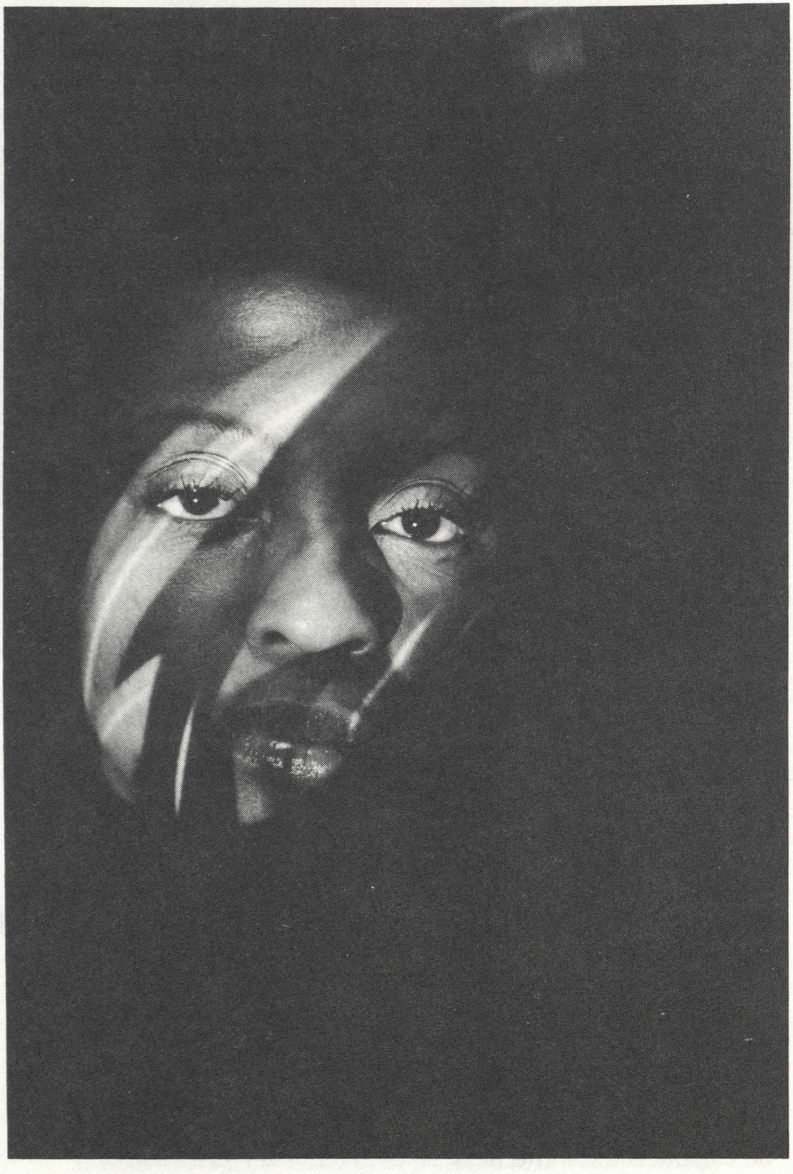
Invitation to Artists and Authors

Artwork is invited from all persons who have been students at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Any type of artwork may be submitted. All artwork will be reproduced in black-and-white. Artists are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue; artwork should not exceed 26 inches by 32 inches. Please identify each piece on the back with its title and your name. Enclose a cover sheet with your name, address, phone number, title(s) of your artwork *and* a 25-50 word bio. Submissions not accompanied by a bio will not be considered. Artists will be notified as to acceptance prior to publication; they will also be instructed as to how artwork will be returned. Submit work to GENESIS, Student Activities Office, University Library, 815 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

Manuscripts are invited from all persons who have been students at IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Manuscripts of essays, fiction, non-fiction or poetry, on any topic, may be submitted at any time to GENESIS, Student Activities Office, University Library, 815 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202. All manuscripts are considered by a student editorial board. Authorship is not revealed to the board until a manuscript has been accepted.

Manuscripts must be typed and submitted in duplicate; prose pieces should be double-spaced on a sixty-space line. Please classify prose pieces as either fiction or non-fiction. Poets are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue. All submissions must be accompanied by a separate title sheet containing the author's name, address, telephone number and a 25-50 word bio. Any manuscripts that do not follow the above guidelines will not be considered for publication.

Authors whose material has been accepted will be notified prior to publication. Authors who wish to be notified of rejection prior to publication date—and all authors who wish their manuscripts to be returned—must include a self-addressed stamped envelope with their submissions. Any manuscript submitted too late for the current deadline will be considered for the next issue. Honorary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the editors for the outstanding entry in each of the categories of art, essay, fiction and poetry. Members of the Editorial Board are ineligible to receive prizes.



Title

Tommy Lee

As he started the story Lenny wondered if it was going to be worth his time. He knew the writer would be trying to catch his attention with the first line. So far his attention had not been caught. He read on anyway, giving the writer the benefit of the doubt. 'What is this all about,' thought Lenny. Was he, Lenny, a character in the story . . . the reader . . . or maybe even the writer himself. If Lenny didn't know, who did?

The second paragraph did not begin with any type of explanation for that which preceded it and Lenny began to wonder if the writer was not crazy. But, Lenny observed, the sentence structure was orderly, coherent, and seemed to be the work of someone who was at least capable of placing the letters of the English language together into groups, which, when viewed as a whole, comprised actual words. The words themselves, he could see quite plainly on the page, were components of sentences beginning with a capitalized word and ending with a punctuation mark. And although the sentences had not yet related any information of value, they were, for the most part, grammatically correct and seemed to be the product of a logical mind.

Lenny flipped through the pages to a point later in the story to see if any sort of normalcy prevailed further on. He stopped at page three and saw printed boldly at the top, "Go back to where you were and read the story in the order in which it was presented." He complied, reluctantly.

Lenny was suspicious. He did not like having tricks played on him. All he wanted was a good, old-fashioned story containing pro- and an-tagonists and a situation causing conflict between them. He did not want to read a series of letter and word groups which made absolutely no sense and even had him wondering who he was.

Lenny did not think he was the writer. But he could not be certain. The writer, after all and sentence structure notwithstanding, seemed to be, at least in some way, insane. And if he, Lenny, was the writer and thereby insane, he, therefore, would not have the ability to discern sanity in himself. Lenny, resolving not to finish the "story," stopped reading and . . .

When Lenny continued reading he half-expected to see the next paragraph begin with, "The writer knew Lenny would be back." And when he read this sentence instead he was somewhat relieved. But then he realized that that was precisely what the paragraph did begin with after all. Lenny was now convinced that he was a character in the story. 'This story is about me,' he thought. 'There are no other people or events. And,' it suddenly occurred to him, 'there was that part on page one about me looking ahead to page five and seeing the order to return.' Lenny remembered that he had obeyed the order without question and had not as yet attempted to look ahead again. 'This would be enough to make anyone believe he was a character in a story,' thought Lenny. 'Apparently I have no will of my own; I do what I am told in the story and things happen which seem to have been planned for me.'

'If I am a character in the story,' Lenny thought, 'why am I not doing anything? There has been no real action.' Then Lenny realized that what he had been doing since the beginning was analyzing the writing, taking in printed information visually and evaluating it. This was, of course, reading. 'I am the reader,' Lenny concluded. Lenny wondered for a moment why he did not, as would be expected at this point, exclaim his conclusion triumphantly.

Lenny smiled to himself as he read on, now certain of who he was and proud that he was able to outwit the writer. He was not going to fall into any more of those ridiculous traps set by the obviously insane writer. 'And,' he thought, 'if I read one more sentence that I do not know what he would do if he was not reading. Lenny remembered the last time he had stopped reading, he was, after all, a careful reader if nothing else. As soon as Lenny had ceased to read, the writing ended and did not continue until he started up again. 'But that is insane,' thought Lenny. 'I must have done something after I stopped reading. I am certain I did something, I just cannot remember what.'

Then Lenny had an idea. He would simply stop reading again and see what happened next. It did not seem to work. He was still reading. Lenny felt like a runaway train. He could not stop reading, evaluating printed information. How could this be happening? The sentence echoed Lenny's thoughts and seemed to be mocking him. 'I can not simply be a reader, whether I am a character in a story who is a reader or not, it makes no difference. I must be something else too.' Lenny thought and thought but all he could think of was what was on the page in front of him. Lenny thought that if he could think of one thing, one aspect of his life which had nothing to do with reading he would be free of this insanity. But he just could not do it.

[Go back to where you were and read the]
[story in the order in which it is presented]

Lenny had a vision of himself, a vision supplied by the words on the page, sitting at a slanted table on a high stool stooped over a giant book of the minutest print opened to the middle, a dim light over his left shoulder illuminating only the words, his eyes, half-closed, red, watering, pushed themselves over the print. A dull, steady drum-beat drifting slowly through the warm room seemed to be keeping the time of an eternity of reading.

'This is never going to end,' thought Lenny. There has never even been a real beginning. There is only a conglomeration of letters making up a middle. I am the only solid, real thing in this story and I only exist as a reader. Existentialism,' thought Lenny suddenly. 'The philosophical doctrine that man exists and is free and responsible for his actions. This story has something to do with existentialism. I am a prisoner here because I am a reader and therefore I exist only when I am reading. If I cease to read I cease to exist. What an contemptible thing to do to someone even if he is only a character in a story.'

For the first time Lenny felt like he had had an original thought. And that what he had thought had projected itself on the page for him to read. 'Since,' Lenny thought, 'I am the character in the story and what I think must be written for me to read, anything I think must have been written beforehand or I would not have been able to think it.' With this realization came the depressing thought that this was an impossible situation for Lenny to get out of. 'How in the world can I think of a way to get myself out of this and have it projected on the page for me to read so I can think it in the first place?'

Lenny, because of the way things had developed thus far, knew the writer was pretty close to 100 percent responsible for Lenny's problem. Not only did the writer know all of Lenny's thoughts before Lenny did, he had the power to change the thoughts that had been put there previously. For example: Lenny was extremely happy to be a character in the story and wanted only to read.

Lenny thought to himself how happy he was to be a reader and absolutely certain that characters in other stories could not even be one-tenth as content as he. As he read, Lenny's happiness increased with each sentence until he thought he would just . . .

Things changed again, just that quickly, and were back to normal. Lenny had the thought again that he might be the writer himself. But why, he wondered, would he put himself in such a ridiculous situation? The only explanation

was insanity. He remembered mentioning this before, but now he was quite certain of it. 'Of all the writers in the world,' thought Lenny angrily, 'I had to get stuck with this crazy bastard. And I'm not even sure that I'm not him. Maybe that's the problem. I am the writer and the character and the reader all in one. I'm stuck in a loop. I, as the character, cannot come up with an original idea because I have to read it first. I cannot read an idea until the writer puts it down on paper and he cannot put it down on paper until the character thinks of it.'

Lenny was understandably depressed. 'What I have to do,' Lenny thought, 'is get someone else involved. The problem is: I am one mind and this story is like electricity spinning around from writer to character to reader. It keeps coming back to start, making a circle. If I could only get someone else inside the circle and send that spark of electricity out to them it would give me on split second of free time (before it returns) to put in an original thought and end this madness.

'This savior cannot be put between the writer and character, because that would actually amount to adding another writer and would only serve to confuse the present situation. Besides, he would quite likely be as crazy as the one I'm stuck with now and that certainly would not help matters. I cannot put the extra mind between the character and reader because that would, in effect, be creating another character, and that is all I need, another person stuck in here with me.'

At exactly the same instant that Lenny, in narrowing down his choices, realized what was needed, he again had the vision of himself in the reading room. It was as before: the tall stool, the slanted table, the massive book and the dim lamp over his left shoulder. There was only one minor difference. As he labored through the words, pushing his tired eyes across the page, he felt a presence over his right shoulder and realized the savior, the extra mind, the reader, had appeared. He, for the first time in his existence felt he could lift his eyes from the page. He turned to look.

Drunken Fuck

Ed Opus

Your earrings on the coffee table
the next morning
& the morning after that
they lie there still.

This one night stand
has toppled
all the way to monday morning
& now this reminder

like a stain
or a chalk drawing

    long after the body
    is gone.

    But no!

We must not let these drunken fucks
write metaphors on coffee tables
& trouble us
on sober mondays.

We must keep these things separate
& clean house on sunday.

The Normal Thing to do

Shar

Just about the time I thought I had my life together I ended up driving a dead man all around town. I had always considered myself normal, my friends always ask for my advice, and there's no enormous amount of insanity in my family. I kept listing these things in my head, but just about the time I'd have myself convinced I would hit a damn bump and Uncle Cledis would go flopping across the backseat.

I looked over at my little sister, Dorothy. She had her shiny blonde hair pulled back into a pony tail with my blue scarf. For a second I realized what an innocent sixteen-year-old she looked like wearing blue . . . I thought she'd better stick to red, her true color! She sat quietly for about three minutes (a true eternity for her) before trying to assure me that later we'd look back on this and laugh. It was one of those things she always said trying to soothe my nerves when she'd rattled them real good.

"Bertie? Bertie . . . it's ok. We're gonna get out of this and one day look back on it and laugh. I promise. Let me explain, I know you'll understand. I had to call you, Bertie, you're the only one who'll know what to do . . . Bertie, we'll get out of this mess ok!" She smiled and nodded her head like she was talking to a shock victim, which I must been acting like. Usually, when she calls me up in one of her screwed up situations, I am a ranting and raving by now. This time I really wasn't so sure I'd know what to do.

"Dorothy I have two things to say. First of all, who in the hell else would you call when you're dragging around the body of your dead uncle? You can't very well set him in a lawn chair out by the trash to be hauled off, can you?"

"No, you can't. And secondly, how in the hell did you get into this in the first place? You know what's going to happen, don't you? You're going to give me more freckles. In last month's Reader's Digest they showed how stress causes freckles. Mama said she already knew it cause I didn't have a one until you were born, then I broke out all over!" Dorothy giggled at this and I started to relax, but then I realized the most important thing of all . . . "Oh my Lord Dorothy, Mama's gonna let into us like never before. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she gets a switch and tries to whip us."

"Bertie you don't think so? Really? I mean, aren't we too big for that?" Her green eyes opened wider just thinking about this so I let it sink in for a minute.

"Dorothy Lee, the trouble we're in this time is serious."

"Bertie, come on it's not like the time we hid Kenneth in the oven," Dorothy cringed remembering how Mama chased her through the house with only one pump on and the other well aimed.

"You hid Kenneth in the oven," I corrected her, "he's your boyfriend." Being that Dorothy's blonde and I'm a redhead Mama always dressed her in red and pink whereas I only got blue or white and since red brings out the rosy in your cheeks Dorothy's always had more boyfriends than me. Not that I mind much, since I got the brains. "Dorothy, this isn't ovens! It's a dead man! And as we speak Mama's probably walking into his room. What is going to happen when she sees that he's gone? The man's been a vegetable for a month and half now. What's she going to think? That he got up to take a leak? Oh my word, Dorothy." I lit up a cigarette and didn't bother warning Dorothy not to tell. She shoved a loose lock of hair behind her ears and looked over at me with an annoyed face.

"Bertie, how stupid do you think I am? I laid the pillows out to look like Uncle Cledis sleeping! Besides, Mama's at bingo and won't be home for another hour. We still have time for my plan to work." She smiled.

"I don't want to know your plan, Dorothy Lee." I said real sharp after blowing a rod of smoke out the front vent window (which told her I was serious).

"Oh, just listen to me. I have this great plan which required Uncle Cledis' presence. Kenneth was going to help me with carrying him and all but Kenneth kinda pooped out on me. We're were going along fine with my plan, on our way to his house to get a camera, when we realized Uncle Cledis had passed on right there in the backseat of Kenneth's car. Kenneth pulled over to the side of the road and started vomiting! I couldn't believe it! Here we are right in the middle of Plan A and he gets a stomach upset. I asked him if something didn't settle right from supper then I realized it was Uncle Cledis making him sick. I told Kenneth to come on and get back in the car that Uncle didn't smell yet or anything, but Kenneth just kept throwing up in the weeds. Brother, what a sissy. Anyway, that's how I come to calling you to come rescue me and Uncle Cledis from Kenneth and his vomit." She shrugged her shoulders and looked over to me. "You could take Kenneth's place. You're a lot smarter anyway, and it's an important plan."

Her eyes were so wide and she just looked so excited that I thought about listening although I knew I shouldn't. "Ok listen, now don't get excited, if I'm to know what to do

to get us out of this, then I need to know what you did to get into this. Hop in back and prop up Uncle Cledis real nice and I'll pull into the A&W. We can have a couple of root beers and I'll listen to why you took him out of his sickbed in the first place . . . but I don't want to hear this plan." I'd barely gotten the words out before she had him leaning against the armrest with one of my cigarettes in his hand looking real . . . real.

I put my car in park, lit up a cigarette, and said, "Well, Dorothy Lee, let's hear it."

"Oh Bertie I'm so sorry, now, that I didn't tell you about all this sooner. This started last Friday night. Aunt Norene comes staggering down the sidewalk with one of those men friends of hers at about 10:00. Kenneth and I were on the porch swing. We didn't have on the porch light, as not to attract any bugs, so I guess she didn't see us. I would have thought she could hear the porch swing because we were swinging, swinging and smelling the honeysuckle. Well, here she comes . . . just a staggering and laughing and a whor—

"Dorothy! That's your aunt, and watch your mouth!"

"She's your aunt too and you and Mama are the ones who always go off saying she's whoring around on Uncle Cledis. Anyway, and she comes a whoring up the street hanging all over some drunk. I was so embarrassed for Kenneth to see this I liked to crawl under the porch! We all know she sleeps around on him but she's never let one of them men walk her home. Aunt Norene was just a rubbing up and down on him, making a complete fool of herself and our family. Now why would she do that? I mean, let one of those men walk her home?" Dorothy stopped her hands from flying through the air for the moment and looked at me for a real answer.

"Oh honey, I don't know. Maybe she figures since everybody knows and Uncle Cledis couldn't say anything anymore that it just doesn't matter."

"Even though he's a vegetable, was one I guess, they're still married."

"Dorothy, she whored around on him before he got sick. Mama said that's what made him sick. Now here comes the waitress. Just pretend Uncle's a, a cousin, in from out of town, and he's sleeping from his long trip. Say he's from Arkansas." I winked at her and rolled down my window.

"Hi! What can I get you? Oh hey Dorothy! What's cookin'? I didn't even see you in there." It was Jean Ann, one of Dorothy's loud-mouth friends.

"Oh hey Jean Ann. Get us a couple of root beers, would ya?"

"Two root beers coming up! Oh and who's that in the backseat? Woo-hoo I'm Jean Ann. I go to school with Dorothy." She leaned half-way across me and waved at Uncle Cledis like he was blind.

"That's our cousin in from out of town, Jean Ann. Get out of his face. He's sleeping. He's all the way from Arkansas." Dorothy scooted in between Jean Ann and her view of the backseat.

"Oh really wow. Does he want anything? If he's cute I might get him something special."

Dorothy put her hand on Jean Ann's forehead and pushed her face out of the car. "He's sleeping...deep, Jean Ann. Just get us some root beers." Dorothy just looked at me and said, "Brother, some people!" Then she went on with her story, "Where was I? Oh the rubbing part. Well, she was just a rubbing on him and giggling that stupid laugh of hers. Then, she makes a Ron-Day-Vu, "Dorothy rolled her eyes big and scooted closer," for tonight. Then this man friend of hers sticks a rose down the black hole valley of doom-her cleavage- and goes 'kiss me Buttercup' like he's some romeo! That made me just about vomit and I go 'aaugh' from pure disgust. I was beyond even worrying about what Kenneth thought. I wanted to tear that Flaming Amber wig right off her head and show her how far down that valley we could go!"

"Dorothy!" I choked out with some smoke.

Bertie I don't care if she's an elder. She don't act like one and I was P.O.ed. When I go 'aaugh' that's when she saw us on the porch." Dorothy scooted closer to me and lowered her voice, "And this is the part you won't believe. Aunt Norene looked up at me and I saw *fright* cross those evil eyes of hers." I shook my head no and Dorothy shook her head 'yes.' "Yes, I did. I think it was fear of me telling Mama, and Aunt Norene knowing if Mama found out she'd be out of our house and on the streets from here on out. In any case, just as quick, that look of fright turned to hate."

"Just cause you'd seen them neck?" I asked, not quite understanding.

Dorothy looked at me funny and goes, "Probably because I yelled 'That slut just give you the itch, Mister.' "

"Oh my Lord Dorothy, then what'd she do?!" Dorothy and I were sunk down in my car seat low by now, talking with our faces real close. My cigarette hovered in the air forgotten about just like the waitress, so when she banged on the window we both let out a start.

"Ya'll have to roll the window down some," Jean Ann said. She put the tray on the window when I rolled it down and tried to stick her head in, but the tray got in the way. "Can I talk to your cousin? I was in Arkansas once, you know. They filmed the Roller Derby from Little Rock and my cousin, Shakey Jane, skated in it. Of course, you only got to see her for two turns. Bricklaying Bernice knocked her out. What's his name?"

Dorothy put her face real close to Jean Ann's and goes, "His nickname's Veg, Jean Ann, passed down from my Uncle."

"Wow, people in Arkansas really have it made, what with Little Rock, nicknames, and all. Well, see ya later alligator."

"Afterwhile, Jean Ann," we said as she bobbed over to another car.

I handed Dorothy her root beer and said, "Come on, did you run from Aunt Norene?

"Not yet. Aunt Norene's eyeballs shot lightning bolts and she started to take off after me," Dorothy paused for a moment, "but then, all of a sudden, she straightened up, catching herself. She gave that guy one of her honey-dripping looks, kissed him on the neck and whispered something in his ear. Then he put those drunken eyes of his on me and goes, 'your auntie is just looking after you, darling.' He turns and starts tripping back down the sidewalk. Well I yell, 'you can take your darling and stick it where the sun don't shine' only when I get to the 'where' part Kenneth kicks me in the shin. This gives Aunt Norene time to cross the yard and get on the porch!" Dorothy paused to take a couple of drinks of root beer and I ask her why didn't she tell me about this sooner. Dorothy and I have our spats, but we're real close sisters especially when it comes to one of us getting a rotten deal and needing a little back up.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me this last week. You usually tell me everything she does to you as soon as you get out of earshot. She didn't bust you did she?"

"Oh Bertie, she didn't bust my hide, but she practically tore every hair I have out by the roots! I was taking off to run when she gets a hold of the back of my hair. She pulled me to her and told Kenneth to get home. Her teeth were clinched and she put her face up against mine and she snarls 'don't ever, ever mess in my affairs again.' Well, I go 'how could I? Being there's so many?' Then, Bertie, she jerked my hair hard whipping me down onto my knees. She shoved her teeth against my ear and said in the most, most evil voice I have ever heard, 'if you ever, ever pull a stunt like this again I'll tell your mama I caught you and Kenneth screwing. I'll tell her you got pregnant and got rid of the baby in Egypt County. She'll believe me. This whole town will believe me. I'm sick of your Uncle and of your pathetic family.' " Just hearing Dorothy tell the story made all my nerves on edge and my muscles tense. I had a tight hold of one of her hands while she gestured with the other. Dorothy took in a deep breath and let it out and said," So Bertie that's when I made my plan for tonight. I sat on my knees, where she'd put me on the porch floor, for a long while. I might have cried just a bit. Sitting there I couldn't smell the

honeysuckle anymore, just the leftovers of her penny perfume. I decided the best way to scare her like she'd scared me was for Uncle Cledis to be sitting in the hotel room where that whore and that man are going to meet tonight . . . but then—in the backseat of Kenneth's car—Uncle Cledis wasn't a vegetable anymore. He was dead."

We just sat there in silence, her seeing the porch and me seeing her. I took my last swallow of root beer and said, "Where's the hotel?"

Dorothy came back from her thoughts and smiled nicely. "I knew you'd know what to do, Bertie."

Facemaking

George Dunn

I saw myself once
very ugly
in your mirror

beady-eyed,
nostrils flaring

& I saw your fear
in my repugnance.

I saw you once
just a child
in a photograph

timid, coaxed
to a smile (

I could have put
my tongue out

& made
you laugh).

Talking In Your Sleep

George Dunn

Read my lips
Pressed against your cheek,

The glancing caress
Of less than a whisper.

Three:O'Clock Nap Time

Wyndi M. Skillrud

Forgive me
I can't rouse myself
Instead I succumb to the seduction
of your voicesong
caressing me, soothing my answering machine
while I indulge a stretch and a breath.
Like a cat with a toy
I fiddle with the phone cord
and contemplate calling you back.

Golgotha Blues

George Dunn

You want me
honest
as a wound

& you

chaste
but stylishly

costumed
in my stain.

I'm yours
little lamb

so if passion
is fashion

watch out!—

Thy wardrobe shall bleed
from me daily.

Papa Campbell the Writer

Richard Rominger

Foreword

This is the story of an amazing man. I regret that I didn't get to know my great-grandfather, Ledford "Papa" Campbell, before he died. My memories of him are very dim, but I remember being absolutely fascinated by him. It amazed me that anyone could be as ancient as he was. Papa Campbell was a thinker—he had a keen mind until the day he died.

Papa was born May 10, 1884 in Whitley County, Kentucky. His mother died within a few days, and as a result he was raised by his two sets of grandparents. At the age of 21 he enlisted in the army and spent 27 months in the Philippines. After getting out of the army, Papa worked as a boiler operator for the L & N railroad and then for Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, also as a boiler operator. After three years or so, one of Papa's friends convinced him to take the civil service examination to become a postman. He passed the exam and was hired to work a rural route in Berea.

Papa loved to talk about all that he'd seen and done in his lifetime. He was amazed that man had actually walked on the moon. He watched the technology that we take for granted grow and evolve—it must have been some sight to behold. One of his favorite stories involved how when he first began his rural route he rode a horse, then a wagon with a horse pulling it, then a Ford Model T, then a Model A, and finally a Jeep—all in 27 years.

Papa was married three times (four if you count that he married Mama Campbell twice) and sired six children, five daughters and one son, all six of them while married to Mama. They were instrumental in the writing of his biography, providing me with newspaper clippings and letters Papa wrote, as well as sharing their memories of their father openly and honestly with me. It is to them that I dedicate this biography of Papa.

I am not attempting to maintain chronological order. Papa was a writer, and my wish is for his writing to illustrate him. Papa's letters, both to his family and to politicians, do much to illustrate both his values and his sense of humor. In addition he was a published poet and his poems show a great deal about him. I have endeavored to reproduced his work exactly as he typed it, including spelling errors, but I have corrected spacing problems to facilitate comfortable reading.

Papa Campbell the Writer

Papa sat in his rocking chair on the wooden porch whittling spiral groves into what would soon be a walking stick. A far-off look dominated his eyes as he carved, his mind, keen as ever, barely cognizant of the thing of beauty his gnarled hands were producing. He had had a lot of time to think since retiring from being a postal carrier for 27 years. He thought of how the time had flown since spring. Here it was almost winter and it seemed like yesterday had been the first day of spring. A gust of wind swirled fallen leaves across the porch, the motion bringing Papa out of his reverie. He began to think of his children and wondered how they were. The onset of winter always made it seem they were farther away. Loneliness welled up inside Papa making him wish they could all be closer. Then his eyes brightened, a smile displacing the melancholy look on his face as the writer in Papa began to make himself heard.

He got up from his rocker, setting the partially finished cane to one side and carefully folded his knife and put it in his pocket. He chuckled to himself as he went into his house to write a letter. Assembling his writing paraphernalia "into battle array,—paper, typewriter, a big pumpkin (typewriter stool), two or three foam rubber pillows for back re-enforcement, three magnifying glasses and easy-to-reach twist of 'home made' to urge me on to the fray," Papa sat down to write. He crumbled a twist of homemade into his pipe, absently packing it with a thumb. Drawing heavily on the pipe while holding a lighted match over the bowl, Papa pondered how he would begin. Setting his pipe into the ashtray at his side he began:

Monday - Dec. 17 '56
(A letter to Santa Claus)

Dear Santa:-

Our business dealings having terminated many many years ago, I don't dare contact you directly but rather through and by the

Smiths at 28300 St Claire Shores Mich. Owing to the urgency of this request perhaps I should be more specific and designate as our intermediaries Phyl and Jan because of their youth and too, they are still on the receiving end of your benevolence; also the elder Smiths have probably been roughed up so badly by you during recent weeks, they too are not likely to be on speaking terms with you either.

Now Santa listen to me, old fellow, you were not at all generous with me in my youth, my first childhood; because of our extreme poverty you seemed to avoid us. I wrote many letters asking favors of you more than sixty years ago and to date very little has been forthcoming. Although you seem to be the jolliest of all jolly-boys you can't laugh off the fact that I never had a toy from your hand in my life as a youth. What about the Ice skates, air rifle, mittens, little wagons, red-top boots and oh yes, that overcoat so badly needed during those bitter-cold Tennessee winters? I was very resentful about your repeated oversight had not granddad applied his magic balm of explaintion (pointing to the big fireplace saying that you would get your whisters scorched if you should try to descend that old stick and clay chimney. That did it.

Having reached my second childhood it is imperative that you meet my present requirements. As you doubtless know, ones' second childhood is more demanding than their first. Now I am gradually getting over the anger generated by the above reminiscence leaving my request on the alter of your generosity, hoping to be lavishly supplied, to wit:

800 ten-ft-miles to St Clair Shores & return.
400 ten-ft-miles to Dayton Ohio & return.
170 ten-ft-miles to Maysville & return.
80 ten-ft-miles to Lexington Ky. & return.

1450 ten-ft-miles.

Perhaps I should explain the reason for this unusual request in order that you'll understand it's urgency. Those long country miles consisting of 5280 ft each which I've been using in transit to and from the above mentioned cities, are entirely too lengthy for my convenience, puts me too far away from home, makes me homesick to even think of the broad expanse of real estate lying in between, hence, the ten-ft-miles. I recall the time when I used those 5280-ft miles to detroit, a couple of little girls, tho sweet they were, began throwing old shoes at me while I slept. A portion of those same 5280-ft miles were used to lead me to Dayton Ohio a few memories ago and by golly one little girl sat upon my head while another one poked popcorn into my eyes as I slept. Bring the ten-ft miles Santa, and in the future if I run into a barrage of flying shoes, or awake from a snooze with my head sandwiched between the south end of a little girl and the arm of a couch, with my eyes stuffed with popcorn, I'll just haul off and walk right back home. Could do it easily using ten-ft miles. What's that you said? It will require more, many MORE of the ten-ft miles? NUTS. Just forget it.

Merry Christmas and bye bye.
Papa Campbell

Papa smiled to himself as he thought of his granddaughters' likely reactions to hearing his letter to Santa. Smoke curled around his head, framing his wise, wrinkled face with its sheath of white whiskers. His eyes twinkled behind his thick, black-framed glasses, yet there was profound sense of sadness in those wise old eyes, a look that told much about regret and hard experience. Inserting another sheet of paper into his battered old typewriter he began again.

209 Adams St.
Berea Ky. Jan. 29-'63 Dear Smiths :-

In the absence of a reason for this tardy letter, I shall not try to cloud the issue with excuses, believing that the Smiths want a letter,—not excuses. To tell you the truth, I had fully intended to write this very day but have been "into it" with our preacher, just a friendly discussion of course, and a portion was still in the typewriter at the moment I fished your letter from the mail box.

Another thing that prompted this immediate reply was finding this little blank sheet enclosed with the letter, indicative of your desire for punctuality.

Now a word about the weather. This has been the coldest winter on record, 24 below last Thu. night and has been around and below practically ever since, though its up around 30 today.

Because of my defective vision, letter writing has become quite a tedious, though not what one would call a laborious task. Oftimes while contemplating a letter, numerous ideas and thoughts occur by the dozen, then by the time I assemble my writing paraphernalia into battle array,—paper, typewriter, a big pumpkin (typewriter stool), two or three foam rubber pillows for back re-enforcement, three magnifying glasses and easy-to-reach twist of 'home made' to urge me on to the fray, beautiful ideas and brilliant thoughts seem to have folded their tents like the Arabs, and have silently stolen away by the hundreds. (How could that be, there were perhaps only three to begin with. You figure it out)

You perhaps want to know more about this little house. Well, it is situated near the lower end of Adams St. across the St., East oblique angle from where you were born back in or around nineteen hundred, or at least about the turn of the century, (am I right or nearly so?). Its a small structure, four small rooms and bath, a small concrete slab at each outside door, heated by natural gas furnace, insulated with blown-in rock wool, hardwood floors, knotty pine kitchen cabinets. The bath room is finished with a kind of material that will not soil under any condition (most conditions at least, exclusive of having eaten too many apples), extending from floor to ceiling. I built a car port and a small utility room since its acquirement, also a little additional concrete was poured, and of course a nice maple has been planted in the front lawn. We've scarcely known of the cold outside, except by radio. Gas bill last Mo. $8.86, far less than the price of a ton of coal, but the heck of it is, I have no big-mouthed grate to spit in, just have to let her fly upon the floor I guess.

We've been expecting Bill & family down for some time but seems that he is unable to arrange his work favorably for the trip. I'm anxious to see their new home but hoping that when I do visit them I won't have to endure a worm's-eye-view of a gillion air planes daily. I've heard nor seen anything from Lex. since Christmas so I can't tell you anything about them. Probably you know more about them than I anyway. Hilda and Bob were here shortly before the hollidays and ate supper with us, plenty cornbread, 'taters, beans, onions, and sorghum molases-(—you see, I should have a blond secretary, this typewriter cannot spell correctly at times) Herby & family were here briefly a short time ago. He has changed a great deal, so grown up and manly. But don't misunderstand me, I can't brag on grandchildren who drop croquet balls in the well or throw shoes at me while I'm sleeping deeply, continuously and peacefully.

You have probably heard of Aunt Mary's passing. She was buried Nov. 23-'62 at Pine Knot where uncle Milt was some ten years ago. She was eighty seven and the last of her immediate family which origionated 103 years ago. I am next in seniority so they'l all have to call me "Uncle Led".

Yes I received the picture of that grandson of yours and he appears to have doubled in size since I last saw him. Take care that his Grandpap doesn't misrepresent me to him. We're looking forward to your coming in the not too distant future/Be sure to take good care of that clock. Ask the man if it is not a valuable trophy. I traded the last weight clock to a West Minster chime eight day lady. It chimes on the quarter hour and strikes the hour. Now that I recaptured some of those supposed brilliant thoughts, I find that they are not nearly shining after all, before closing though I want to ask your husband if we are in — "Cold New Frontier" Kenedy style.

Love to all the gals and boys and good night to all.

Dad

Codicil to Letter.

While giving a description of the house I inadvertantly omitted it's furnishings.

The rear bedroom contains two half beds, chair, an old suit case, small table, radio and possibly some pipe ashes. The front bed room:—bed (full size), dresser, chest of drawers, old rocker (used on Rockingchair Lane), sixty Yr. old over seas trunk and two boxes homemade tobacco. Kitchen:—Gas range (small) dining table, four chairs, one half of Kelvinator with clock on top. Living room:—One half of Kelvinator, and the remainder filled with bookcase, hide-a-bed, two chairs, coffee table, end-tables, small desk, library table, tobacco smoke, and me.

Does not my candor in this matter merit a medal?

Author's note-—On the back of the letter to the Smiths Papa wrote a short piece of wisdom: "To whom it may concern:— By sharing one's happiness with another, may we not also fall heir to their sorrows?"

Papa put the letters into an envelope and took them out to the mailbox. The cold wind made him shiver as he pulled his collar closer around his neck. The setting sun glowed red on the western horizon as Papa made his way back inside. Sitting down in his favorite chair he reached out to turn on the radio. He tuned in to a gospel music station, leaned back, closed his eyes, and to the beautiful strains of his favorite hymns fell fast asleep.

* * *

Papa awoke to the sound of a radio newscaster talking about General Patton and how he had slapped a hysterical wounded soldier in a hospital in Europe. As he listened to the details of the incident he became more and more furious. General Patton had been on a routine visit to a field hospital in Europe during WW II when a wounded and very frightened young soldier began crying hysterically. Patton considered the soldier's reaction to be "cowardice in the face of the enemy," something he refused to tolerate, and, by way of "enforcing discipline," slapped the soldier in the face. Many people, military and civilian, were outraged and Patton was forced by his superiors to apologize for the incident to the entire third army en masse—an event unprecedented in history. Papa, whose only son was in the army at the time, was incensed at what he considered to be an inexcusable transgression and resolved to write a letter to Patton telling him exactly what he (Papa) thought. Sitting down at his typewriter and crumbling a twist of homemade into his corncob pipe, he pondered how to begin. Lighting his pipe and drawing gently, thoughtfully, upon it, Papa let his mind work on the question of how to approach this, very important letter. He finally decided to write the General a poem, perhaps because he was aware that Patton was an avid and active reader.

A Letter To
"Old Blood and Guts"

Sir:-
Let history fade into legend
within one thousand years or ten,
And bury within the grave of time
the dastard deeds of men;
But retain for posterity the noble
traits they possess,
Then perhaps the general's slapping
incident will vanish into
nothingness.
Now we don't object to giving
our sons in freedom's name,
We can endure their vacant chairs,
withstand the mantle strain
While they follow the flag, that grand
old flag, to earth's remotest bound,
Suffering and dying in the carnage of
war, from shell-shock, disease or
wound.

Though across foreign battle fields
you led our noble yanks
To victory against the enemy, in our
"Grant" and "Sherman" tanks,
No doubt the eagle on your cap, the
three stars on your shoulder
Screamed and dimmed in piteous shame
when you slapped the wounded soldier.

You're a daring, dashing officer
that, - - - you're credited for,
But any other brand of three-star chap
would be something new in war;
So bear in mind, don't forget,
remember long and well, - - - -
That you may acquire a degree of
fame, those boys went thru hell.

Was it a kink in your brain, a unique
twist of mind that prompted
such an act,
Or did you hide behind your three-star
rank to give that boy a smack?
Since Washington at Valley Forge
to McArthur at Bataan,
Congress has made no gentlemen
where God has failed on man.

We hope they'll rid the service
soon of all such men as you;
We're thankful though that even
now there are but very few
Who would out-Hitler, Hitler
Tojo or Mussolini
And cuff a wounded shell-shocked
soldier in the name of discipline.

You're rotten Mr. officer, we
don't care what's your name
Or the rank you hold in the service,
you're rotten just the same.
You're dirtier than a vulture
picking flesh from dead mens bones;
You possess a meaner principle
then the one that Hitler owns.

When this cruel war is over
and victory finally won
Go to the unknown soldier's tomb
in beautiful Arlington;
Kneel humbly down upon your knees,
bare that distorted head;
Atone to the sick and wounded
living, - - - Salute our honored dead.

Very Respectfully.

Pvt. Giva Hoot

Papa relaxed slightly, his anger at Patton still very much in evidence, but the initial rage which had prompted him to write had been poured into the poem. Papa nodded to himself as he reread the poem. It pleased him that writing allowed him to handle his emotions and stress—to channel them into creating something that people might someday read and from which they might benefit.

Papa thought of his son, Bill, in the Philippines so far away. Lonely and homesick. He uttered a silent prayer for Bill's safe return. It was ironic that Bill was in the same place that Papa had been so many years ago. Papa decided that the best way to deal with his fear for his son would be to write yet another poem.

FOOTSTEPS (ditto)

Oh, why does my spirit cry
out aloud
For the absent boy of whom
we are all so proud,
Because he has sought adventure
and dared to roam
Ten thousand miles away from home?

He's doing the same things that
I have done;
He's running the same race
which I have run
With worldly temptations and
alluring snares,
Having the same life problems,
the same youthful cares.

He's doing his bit in the army now
Under the same discipline,
eating the same army "chou".
Without a grumbling murmur,
boast or brag
He's loyally supporting the
same noble flag.

He's having the same thoughts
that often occurred to me
In the same foreign land
across the sea,
Of home, mother, sisters
and dad
As the truest friends he ever
had.

He's sailed the same seas that
I have crossed;
Has rode the same waves by
which I have been tossed.

Under the same starry canopy
of the tropical sky
He's pleasantly dreaming of
the sweet by and by.

Perhaps He's carrying the same
pack, the same army gun
Through drenching rains, under
the same scorching sun,
Or riding the same surf on the
tides ebb and flow,
Just like his dad has done
- - - some thirty years ago.

Oft-times I've reminded this boy
we adore,
Yea, - - - - - a thousand times
or more
That his five dandy sisters,
his mother and dad
Would have him live a life
that will make our hearts glad.

I have the same promise that
he gave to me
When only a lad upon my knee:
"I'll do the very best I can
When I Grow up, to be—— to be a man".

Then why should his mother,
his sisters and dad
Be despondent, blue, melancholy
and sad?
He's walking the same paths o'er
which I have trod;
He's keeping the same faith,
He's trusting the same God.

Then let our hearts revel in this
Yuletide cheer;
Breathe a silent wishing prayer
That world strife and wars
will speedily end,
And for - - - "Peace on Earth,
good will toward men".

Papa wiped a tear from his weathered cheek. "Dear Lord, Please return my boy safe and sound. Thy will be done. Amen."

* * *

Papa frequently spent his mornings working in his garden, a habit retained since childhood. A firm believer in

organic gardening, he raised two crops of mulch each year, soy beans in the summer and vetch in the winter. He then placed this mulch, along with any other leaves, dead grass, etc., on his crops. The best mulch to use, he believed, was damaged hay, although he said that any green growth was good as a soil builder. He dug down into the mulch to plant his tobacco, corn, potatoes, and other vegetables. The soil beneath the mulch hadn't been turned in years. His organic garden consistently paid off. His corn stood 14 feet, 6 inches tall, and the tobacco measured in at a whopping 8 feet tall. One morning, as he worked with a hoe, Papa marveled at the returns he got from his hard work. He loved his garden, finding that the effort he put into it was more than offset by the satisfaction he derived from eating the fresh vegetables and smoking and chewing the tobacco.

Papa believed that his longevity was to a large degree due to the fact that he had worked hard all of his life. He found that any time anxiety or stress began to take hold of him, hard work was a great way to relieve it. He wondered how coming generations would handle the stress of the fast-paced lives they would live. What would they think about the past—back when life was simpler, not easy mind you, but still simpler? Papa's thoughts drifted back to his own childhood, a youth that was by no means easy. Life was hard in the 1890s, but nevertheless Papa felt life was simpler then. Would that his grandchildren and their children could understand. The poem began to take shape in his head even before he fully realized that he could indeed show them what it was like to live in the "olden days." By the time he finished his gardening he was ready to write.

(A)Musing

In my youth I lived down on
the farm.
When the summer days were sunny
and warm
I worked with Sam, he worked
with me
At the plow handle-bars and
the singltree.

With Sam in front at the end of
a line,
I followed closely on behind.
To complete this one-man one-mule
team
A bull-tongue plow was in between.

"Sam", says I, "You're but a mule;
Just a stubborne, contrary farming
tool.
We plow the corn hitched up
together
But you work only in sunny weather;

I've begun to think, -you ornery
cuss
That you're one mule that I can't
trust.
If I build a fence high and wide
The grass looks better on the
other side.

When I corral you up, you bray
and paw;
Y o u, woulden't take orders from
your mother-in-law.
When the plowing is done your
work is through
Then I begin to work for you.

While you lounge at ease in a
cozy barn
Sheltered from the rigors of the
wintery storms
And the icy winds howl and moan
outside,
I groom your tough, ungrateful hide.

Each morning at the break of day
Your manger is filled with the
choicest hay;
Ten ears of corn placed in your
trough with care,
While you amuse yourself at Solitaire."

Memory still lingers and in fancy
I see
My old mule Sam, that worked with me
Around the hillside, all day long
As I merrily hummed a farmhands song.

Sam's growing old now, his labors
are over;
He's leisurely browsing through
fields rich with clover.
Having worked for his master from
youth to maturity
He's a mute example of social security.

Papa wondered to himself, as he prepared to go to sleep, if his great-grandchildren would understand his poem about Sam. He thought they probably would.

Papa loved listening to the radio. He spent many an hour sitting in his easy chair, chewing or smoking his home-grown tobacco, listening with rapt attention to whatever happened to be on. One afternoon as he listened to the news the topic of the day was whether a bill, introduced in congress, would be passed, granting people on federal retirement an increase in pay. Papa decided to write a letter to two of the senators that opposed the bill's passage, telling them — in no uncertain terms — his point of view as regarded their points of view.

Berea Ky. April 15 - '55

Senators
Albin W. Barkley
&
Earl C. Clements,
Washington D.C.

Gentlemen:-

Many bills have been introduced in the Senate and House to liberalize various features of the present retirement law, among them are H.R.3791, H.R.3792, and S.1153. I do not pretend to know nor will I venture a guess as to which of these bills or any others that might be introduced, is the best or fairest for all concerned, therefore I am appealing to your good judgement reenforced with a hunk of common sense and fortified by many years of experience, to make your own decision.

I am nearing seventy one years of age twenty eight of which I spent in the employ of the United States, military and civil; at no time have I sought refuge behind the Fifth Amendment, neither while in the armed forces nor as a civil employee; six members of my immediate family hold honorable discharges from the military (some of them have two); my government salary varied from $13.00 to slightly under $300.00 per month, so about all I have to show for it is a shock of grey hair, a trail of pleasant memories, a clear concience and an annuity check in the sum of $128.00 per month.

You gentlemen are quite capable of recognizing on sight a good, fair and equitable piece of legislation as is evidenced by your support of the one recently INCREASING your salaries some twenty dollars per day. If it appears to you that there might be lots of pull and go still left in an old seventy one year old hoss, just remember that we are not all Barkleys, Edisons, Hoovers and Churchills.

Allow me to assure you that this is not a sugar-coated missive with honeyed words to boost your ego and I must frankly admit that I have never supported either of you in any of your political campaigns during the fifty years that I have been a voter and regardless of how much you hate sin I feel confident that this transgression will be graciously forgiven.

In conclusion let me urge that before you vote additional millions for foreign aid, yes even one dollar, that you support legislation allowing us old codgers at least an additional one dollar

a day in order that some won't either go to bed at nite with an empty stomach or owe the grocer for a loaf of bread or a can of soup.

Thank you, and very respectfully.
Retired Rural Letter Carrier

Papa Campbell. In spite of his weaknesses, an amazing man. His flair of self expression, so obvious in everything he wrote has given me the chance I thought I had lost forever, to truly know him. I loved Papa because he was my great-grandfather; I never questioned that love — just took it for granted. I now can honestly say that I *know* Papa Campbell. I've met him; we've conversed in my mind; and above all, I love that old man.

Neighbor

Jennifer Bingham

She doesn't like the way
Her dark hair blows across her mouth
On a windy afternoon.
Or sun shining through
An open window.

She desires darkness.
Her eyes are a color that cannot be named,
And in April
She doesn't even step out the door.

The neighborhood children avoid her yard,
Only whisper "witch"
If they're sure she's not listening.
When young Tommy Lindsay
Threw a rock through her window last Autumn
He was hit by a black station wagon
As he scrambled away.

Mrs. Birch, down the block
Informs me that the old lady tells fortunes
But the price is such
That most people don't care to pay,
"And I don't mean money," she says with a look.

For myself
I am always relieved
To note her silver cross,
Her small pearly teeth.

On her infrequent visits
My cat stares with heavy eyes,
Purrs at her every word.
I don't really care
For the way that he looks when she leaves.

My daughter hides
When the old lady comes to sip tea
But my son emerges boldly to stare
Until a glance from those eyes
Sends him off to torment his sister.

"A beautiful boy," says she
With a smile that would certainly
Send Mabel Birch shrieking down the street.
But I look back coolly,
And I return her smile.

Beckoning the Fountain in an Attitude of Prayer

George Dunn

Dead alcohol drumming
behind my eyes—
bloody mess
& bloodless din.

When I was fourteen
inhaled some fumes
felt good & alive & I would die
to feel so blessed
again.

QUIET HYENAS

Keith Banner

1

A month after Jeannette, Tommy's wife, died, Tommy wrote a song about her. He wrote it in the apartment above the garage where Jeannette had started the car and breathed in deeply for almost twenty minutes behind the closed doors—until she blacked out, eventually choking to death. The song's title was "Another Piece of Heaven Goes to Hell."

He sang it at his father-in-law's bar on Highway 67 in Johnson City, Tennessee, five weeks after Jeannette's suicide. He continued his set with "Ring of Fire," "C.C. Ryder," and "Boy Named Sue," wrapping up with "Day after Summer," another song he composed about Jeannette. Written before her death, "Day after Summer" told the story of their courtship and eventual nuptials. September 23, 1978, the autumnal equinox, had been their wedding day, and the song lamented Fall, Jeannette's favorite season.

January 17, 1979, was the day Jeannette chose to kill herself.

Although Tommy loved singing, he didn't make his living at Howdy's, the bar his father-in-law, Lloyd, owned. Lloyd *allowed* Tommy to play here on Wednesday nights. Tommy worked days at Arvin's in Bristol; he was on the tailpipe assembly-line—cranking out muffler ends as he thought up new song ideas.

Tommy, 25, was short, lean and dark-haired (part Cherokee as he quietly told people). Stoic and organized, he wore the same kind of clothes everyday of the week—blue-denim work-shirts and blue jeans, black combat boots and a wallet on a chain. When he performed, he donned a suit he found at the bargain outlet in Knoxville—black vinyl fabric with thin lapels like a tuxedo, a rhinestone bull on the back. Also part of his stage attire was a white corduroy cowboy hat, clean and plain, cocked slightly above his forehead. His acoustic guitar was red, white, and blue; he painted it himself.

Wednesday night, after he sang "Day after Summer," Tommy sat down at the bar, his guitar at his knee. He soon was slumped over a beer, his mind blank. The bar was nearly empty now—one man and two women shared a maroon booth close to the back, laughing wheezily in the smoky dark. The small stage where Tommy performed, still lit siren-red, glowed out upon the three people and the empty tables. At times, Tommy would turn his head a little to get a glimpse of the trio, to see what they were giggling about. They appeared murky and florid in the stage-light's glare—like make-believe devils. He sipped his beer without picking up the mug from the counter, smelling the yeasty fuzz of it, feeling sleepy and alone.

Lloyd, 67, medium-tall and pot-bellied, ambled up to Tommy and patted him lovingly on the back. His thick, dark blonde mane combed back into its usual Elvis swoop, Lloyd smelled of cologne, the cowboy kind, spicy and oily, and approached Tommy in a self-conscious, strutting manner, as if he were trying to demonstrate how busy he was. Tonight, he wore swamp-colored slacks, an ocher-and-white striped dress-shirt, and a maroon neck-tie.

"Singing tonight was good," he said to Tommy. His voice was low-pitched and craggy from too many Kool cigarettes.

Now, in the air, was Tammy Wynette's voice crooning "Apartment Number Nine."

"Thank you," Tommy said.

Lloyd sat down beside Tommy. He told the bartender to fix him one of his drinks, something called the Red Rooster, with vodka and red-pop. He lit himself a cigarette. Tommy stared into his half-empty beer.

"Really good singing . . . 'Another Piece of Heaven Goes to Hell . . .' Got me. It got me," said Lloyd.

The bartender sat the tall glass of red-pop and vodka in front of Lloyd, and Lloyd gave his thanks. Tommy thanked Lloyd again for the compliment. He looked nervously at the giggling threesome, then at Lloyd's thick, maroon silk neck-tie, at Lloyd's red drink.

"Jeannie's got us all cracked up. Trudy can't even get out of bed sometimes in the morning. Just lays there staring. She can't get to sleep at night, see. Walks around and talks to herself. It's a goddamned shame," Lloyd said.

"Maybe she should see a doctor," said Tommy.

Lloyd, almost hysterically, shook his head no. Too loudly, he said: "She don't want to see no doctor. She's always been like that. She *likes* to suffer, I think. Hell, with me, I get the sniffles, I gotta go to the doctor . . . I'm probably one of them hypochondriacs . . ."

"Yeah," said Tommy.

They both became quiet. Lloyd finished his drink. He slid from the stool, placing his elbows on the bar behind him.

"Well . . Bout time to close," he said.

Tommy finished his beer, wiped his lips on his sleeve.

The juke box stopped, and the two women and one man stood and shuffled out drunkenly.

"Good music tonight, Tommy," Lloyd said again, winking his left eye. "I'll see you back at the house maybe."

He smiled and patted Tommy's shoulder again, strutted toward the back, to his office.

Tommy swallowed deep, feeling as though he were about to cry.

He drove to the apartment. It was bitter cold, snow and ice blowing into the fogged-up windshield. He smoked a Pall Mall, the heater purring, the surrounding black mountains sweeping past his vision in smeared jags. He drove past the cemeterty where Jeannette was buried, a small niche close to a Baptist church. He didn't look. He stared straight ahead at the bits of white penetrating the headlight's beam.

A few minutes later, Tommy pulled into Lloyd's driveway. He turned off the engine and sat still, thinking of how quiet it could be, listening to his blood.

Tommy and Jeannette had lived in the apartment above Lloyd's and Trudy's two-car garage for all three months of their marriage. Tommy stayed here after Jeannette's death because the rent Lloyd charged was cheap—and also because he didn't really feel like looking for a place.

All he really felt like doing was playing his guitar and writing down words to the music, and sitting and staring afterwards. Work had become drudgery. At Arvin's, he stood stupidly above the passing hardware, and every-once-in-a-while picked up one or two of the pieces of metal, examined them, sighed.

Soon, they would fire him.

He knew this. He let the thought slip past his consciousness like evaporating water.

He got out of the truck, stood on the gravel, breathed in the crisp cold. Trudy was standing behind the screendoor to the porch of the large white house. She flicked on the outside lights. Obese, pallid, and almost midget-like, she was dressed in her yellow housecoat, her hair beneath a lavender sleeping bonnet.

She was wide awake.

"Lloyd on his way?" she asked, her voice shrill.

"Yeah," said Tommy.

"You want something to eat, hon?"

"No thanks. I'm real tired."

"You sing good tonight?"

"Uh-huh. It went real good. Yeah."

Tommy began to walk toward the garage.

"The one about Jeannie?"

He stopped, turned toward her, said yes.

"And they liked it?" Trudy asked, caressing the flab under her arms, smiling nervously.

"Yes, they liked it, Trudy. They did. Well, I'll see you in the morning. Night."

"Good night, darling. If you get cold up there, there's always a bed in here for you, hear? We got kerosene heaters you know."

He ignored her, the gravel beneath his boots crackling.

Tommy walked up the outside staircase, let himself into the small apartment. After putting his guitar down on the bedroom floor, he went into the livingroom and flicked on the black-and-white television, pulled off his boots, and let the TV seduce his eyes.

On the small sofa, he curled into a ball and fell to sleep.

When he woke the next day, he looked at the digital clock that sat atop the TV. It was 11:30 a.m. He knew that he had finally lost his job—this was the latest he'd ever slept in. He didn't panic. Soon, fully awake, he sat up on the couch in his wrinkled, black shiny suit, lethargic and wide-eyed. He felt behind his back as he sat. Some of the rhinestones had fallen off in his sleep. He collected them in the palm of his hand.

Lloyd knocked at the door.

He said: "Hey, boy . . . Hey, boy . . ."

Tommy stood and let Lloyd in.

"Dave down at Arvin's was on the phone. He said you better get your ass in there to work or you'll be out of a job."

Lloyd's voice was very serious. His face, which was pale and flaccid and full of pocks, frowned. Tommy sat down on the sofa. He stared.

"I quit," said Tommy.

"You can't quit. That's a good goddamned job, Tommy. Now . . . Don't be stupid, now. Goddamnit. Get up and get yourself ready. Trudy'll make you something to eat. Dave said if you got in by one, you'd just get a write-up . . . Now."

"I quit," Tommy repeated.

Lloyd paced the floor, ending up at Tommy's feet.

"You can't quit," Lloyd said, enunciating each word carefully, as if he were speaking to a three-year-old. He then sat down beside Tommy, and breathily, like a manic parent, explained the situation to him.

"You have got to get off your duff, Tommy. Jeannette's been gone for five weeks now. Tommy. Me and your mother-in-law, well, Jeannie, she was our only goddamned child for Christ's sakes, and we're getting over it. . . Now. . . See: you gotta pull yourself together."

"I quit," Tommy murmured, looking at his hands tremble.

"You can't quit. . . Where, what are you gonna do for money?"

"I'll get another job. I hate working at Arvin's."

Tommy stood and walked toward the door, pulled back the curtains on the door's small windows. He peered out at Lloyd's land—to the right, the hard, red-clay earth peeled back for next season's planting, to the left, the naked lawn white in intermittant tundras. The sky was slate-gray, icy, yet fog was slowly blotting out the looming mountains. He closed his eyes tight against the landscape. He smelled the imagined odor of carbon monoxide gas, and his skin tingled. Running his fingers through his hair, he thought about the muffler-pipes, the fucking assembly-line, then laughed, then cried.

Tommy breathed in deeply, let his anger and his fear gush. His face was red with this fear, his nose streaming in clear mucus that dripped down his thin, almost purple lips.

Lloyd stood and guided Tommy back to the couch.

"You were just fine last night now, Tommy. Come on. Come on now."

Tommy cried on Lloyd's bosom, Lloyd patting his head as if he were petting a dog.

They remained together on the sofa until almost one o'clock; at this time, Tommy sat up slowly. Lloyd looked at him and shook his head.

"Well . . . You lost your job," he said, releasing a sigh.

"I know," Tommy replied.

"It'll be alright," Lloyd said matter-of-factly—as if he were supposed to say it. "Go take you a shower. Trudy will fix us something to eat. Something real good."

"Yeah."

"Maybe—um—maybe, uh." Lloyd stood from the couch, stuck his hands in his pockets, jingled his change. "Maybe it's where you live that's getting you down. Up here. In the garage."

Tommy stood and rubbed his eyes, ashamed.

"Yeah," he said, feeling vulnerable and uneasy—as though he should be protecting himself somehow.

"Why don't you move in with me and Trudy, in the house, for a little while—huh? That's a good idea."

"You already asked me, remember? I said no."

Lloyd sighed. In a loud, impatient voice, he said: "What I'm saying is that now, Tommy, you've had a taste of what it's like up here, and that maybe you've changed your mind. We ain't that bad, me and Trudy. I don't know why you didn't move in with us for a little while when we asked you the first time. Goddamn."

Tommy apologized. He hated Lloyd's voice when it got so low and scolding. It made him sadder, more frightened, and so to stop it, he said, "Yeah, okay," and smiled.

"Tonight then. You'll sleep in the house tonight?"

"Sure."

"And tomorrow, maybe, we'll call old Dave, I know Dave, and maybe we, I, whatever, can talk him into getting you back your job, huh?"

Lloyd smiled expansively. He hugged Tommy.

"That sounds good," Tommy said.

2

That night, after Lloyd left to check on Howdy's, about 7:30, Tommy lay on the couch in the living room of Lloyd's and Trudy's warm home. His head was pointed toward the TV screen: a technicolor image of circus elephants. Trudy was in the adjacent kitchen, putting vanilla ice-cream in a pink bowl for Tommy.

The living room was earth-tones, warm and without light (except for the television)—anonymously, incredibly comfortable. Tommy felt like a boy as he reclined on the couch, secure and uncomplicated. He sat up when Trudy brought the ice-cream to him. She smiled, gave him a spoon.

She sat down on Lloyd's big La-Z-Boy beside the sofa. She sighed, smoothed out her housecoat, fixed her sleeping bonnet. Tommy realized she was wearing the same exact oufit she'd worn last night when she spoke to him from the porch.

"Thanks," said Tommy.

"Don't you worry about it. I love getting things for you, honey."

She giggled softly.

"Elephants," she said.

"I like the circus, don't you?" he asked, feeling guilty about ignoring her last night.

"Well, yeah. I remember once, though, gosh, way back. Me and Lloyd took Jeannie to one, when she was two-years-old, and she just wouldn't stop crying. Cry and cry. Gosh. I thought maybe two was just too young for the circus, but . . . Anyways, Lloyd got so embarrassed from her bawling—it was ruining everybody's time—he spanked her on the butt—and that didn't help nothing. It turned out she was sick. She had some kind of stomach flu. We didn't know or nothing."

She giggled again, fidgeted with the fat around her left wrist, her small hazel eyes twitching.

"I like the circus," Tommy said cautiously. "Yeah, it's a good time."

Trudy lifted her leg and scratched herself just below her bottom, then smelled her fingers, smiled vacantly at the television.

Tommy watched the orange-and-gold-costumed elephants stand on their hind legs. He felt sleepy as the ice-cream slid smoothly down his throat. He also felt dreamily

apprehensive, gazing at Trudy from the corner of his eyes—afraid of what she would say next, that she might complicate his evening.

Trudy said: "We didn't know nothing about her, Tommy. Not a goshdarn thing."

She looked at him in the blue TV light. Her eyes seemed almost shell-shocked to him—as if she'd just witnessed some alarming brutality.

He didn't say anything. He spooned the vanilla into his mouth.

"Did we?"

He put the bowl down on the floor and straightened up against the back of the sofa.

"I don't know, Trudy."

Trudy pushed herself from the recliner. She sat on the edge of it, her face extended toward Tommy.

"She died right out there, Tommy," she said, pointing clumsily at the window beside the TV. "Out there in her daddy's good car. Oh my Lord. While you were at work and Lloyd was at the store and I was peeling turnips. I think I heard her start the car. I thought she was going to go get her cigarettes—she always did about one c'clock in the afternoon. I remember, she came in here, into the house, and got the keys to her daddy's good car off that plaque in the kitchen. She was smiling. It was just another stupid day."

Trudy's voice was sharp and warbly. She sat back after finishing. She froze.

Tommy picked up the bowl, ate another spoonful. He did not want to cry. But looking at Trudy sitting there as still as a wax figure, vague in the dimness, he could hardly find the clear, cool thoughts of just a moment ago. His eyes became steamy and his vision crooked.

Trudy remained tearless. She sat in the chair still as an invalid. She spoke quietly, almost inaudibly: "We don't know nothing about nobody. We're so stupid, Tommy. Just so stupid."

"I don't want to talk about it, Trudy. We've talked it to death."

She shook her head, laughed embarrassedly, placed her hands against her cheeks, as if feeling for fever.

"*Oh* . . . I'm so sorry, honey. I'm sorry. I forgot you had that fit today. Lord, I'm sorry.

Tommy looked at his naked feet.

"That's okay," he whispered.

"But don't you wonder, now, Tommy? I mean, don't you wonder why she did it? I mean, was she a happy person? I thought, I mean, I would have *sworn*, she was a happy person."

Tommy stood. He took the pink bowl into the kitchen—a large beige room with pine cabinets and artificial fruit and a cookie jar shaped like a fire hydrant—a room, without the

decoration, that would've appeared cold and institutional. He stood at the window that was above the stainless steel sink and gazed out at the open field, the black sky.

Trudy followed. Her house-slippers scooted across the linoleum floor. He looked at her reflection in the dark window. She was white as cream, her jowls dripping down to the frilly collar of her nightdress, her skin greasy and doughy. She smiled lifelessly now—as if she were half-asleep, or possibly insane.

"Was she happy?" pressed Trudy.

"I guess she wasn't, Trudy. No. If she was goddamned happy, I guess she wouldn't have fucking killed herself, would she?" Tommy turned around and faced Trudy, panting softly, afraid.

"Don't cuss, Tommy. I hate it when *anybody* cusses—"

"I don't want to talk about any of this."

Trudy walked over to the large ceramic key-holder on the wall next to the brown refrigerator.

"This was where the key was. When she picked it up. It was hanging right here."

Trudy walked to the kitchen counter then.

"And I was standing here. Some pots were hissing because I was cooking spaghetti for Lloyd's lunch, and if Jeannie wanted some spaghetti, well, she was welcome. And Jeannie came in. She said *Hi Momma.* Then she just grabbed the key like it was her car—she did it 'bout everyday. Like it was hers—which it was really, if she wanted to use it, anytime, really. And so I peeled the turnips, and I think, I *think*, I heard her start the car—I ain't sure, but then I just didn't pay any attention to it. I got busy with the turnips and I drained the spaghetti—turnips and spaghetti, I don't know, Lloyd said that's what he wanted. It was—"

Trudy was out of breath. She was barking almost—her voice a hot, laughing sound, extreme with the power of her recognition. Tommy moved back against the stove. He heard the circus music from the living room—lilting and ridiculous, then a lion's roar, snapping fingers, and a drum roll.

Trudy breathed heavily. She sat down at the kitchen nook in the corner, put her head on her folded arms, and nodded.

Tommy sat in front of her. His eyes were glazed hot—his mouth electric.

"She did it because she wanted to," he said peacefully, as if he were apologizing.

Trudy lifted her head. Her face was streaked with tears.

"Did she ever say anything to you?" she asked.

"No. Not about that, no."

Trudy's eyes turned to slits.

"She had to say something, Tommy, something. Somebody just don't do that and not tell nobody. She said something to me once. She said how much she hated living

in that apartment above the garage. She said how much she hated living in this one-horse town . . . "

Tommy rolled his eyes and nodded.

"She was always depressed, Trudy—that was her way."

The kitchen echoed the sound of the television as both Tommy and Trudy grew silent. Tommy's eyes again watched the window—the white, bald light above the nook was reflected in the glass, and below it, the red fire-hydrant-cookie-jar. Trudy sat up stiffly, wiped away the tears from her face, and pushed in on her cheeks in an eery display of forgetfulness, then insight. A few minutes later, she said:

"I remember how she used to like to pretend she was drowning when she was a little girl . . . "

Tommy stood and went back into the living room. He cursed below his breath.

Trudy followed, still talking. She told him, in her scattered, semi-schizophrenic way, about how Jeannette used to hold her breath and go underwater in the pond out back until Trudy would get upset. Then Jeannette would emerge, laughing and laughing, like some old dirty movie star.

"She did. Yup," said Tommy.

"I bet that was part of it . . . She was always acting like some big-wig. Acting—smoking her big old long cigarettes and brushing back her hair. How were we supposed to know anything?"

Tommy clenched his fist. Seated on the sofa, he began to shake, his anger surfacing.

"I don't fucking know, Trudy," he said sharply. "Just shut the hell up about it, will you? Goddamn, run it into the goddamned ground. *She's dead! Goddamn!*"

Trudy recoiled mildly. She was used to being yelled at. She reclined into the La-Z-Boy, exhaling and inhaling as if it were a game.

Tommy calmed down. He grunted and massaged his forehead, mumbled that he was sorry.

After she relaxed her breathing processes, Trudy sat up and looked at Tommy, her face concerned.

"I don't know what you're going to do for a job," she said.

"I'll find one," he said blankly.

His mind was clearing now, whitening. His thoughts were of Jeannette. She was smoking a cigarette in his mind-movie. She was laughing, brushing back her orange hair.

"I hope you do," said Trudy.

"I will."

"You will."

She leaned back, put her hands on her belly, softly tamped her womb.

Tommy gazed at Trudy's white, smooth fingers, the cartoon sunflowers of her housecoat. His mind wandered. He

thought of a time when Jeannette had been dead-set on going to some modeling school in Nashville, back before they were married. They were sitting in the pancake house in Johnson City, after he'd sung at Howdy's, and they were both dolled up. She had on her white, strapless evening gown, and he was in his black stage suit.

They sipped coffee and smoked cigarettes. She histrionically told him about her plans to be a big star, her blue prints.

"I'm gonna go to Nashville," she said. "Nashville is where it's at, Tommy. You can sing there too. In Nashville, goddamn. *We* can make it . . . I know . . . Big."

He laughed.

"I'd be happy just staying here in Johnson City," Tommy said. "I got me that job at Arvin's, and I get to sing once a week at Howdy's, and you like hearing my songs, and I like watching you in those plays at the church . . . I don't think—"

Her thin, strangely plastic face turned pink. Her eyes widened. She fumed.

"Fuck you," she said. "I'm going to Nashville, goddammit. It's where I belong."

She was amazingly pretty that night.

He remembered how much he loved Jeannette's foul mouth, her showy facial expressions, her over-reactions, her desperate attempts to be someone.

Tommy recalled how she would scream at him to shut up when he'd talk about Arvin's, how she wouldn't cook or clean up the apartment, just sit around and read magazines all day, how she ate oranges in the bed next to him while they watched Johnny Carson (smelling the teasing, pleasant odor of oranges until he fell to sleep). He thought of sex with her: hours of sweaty outbursts and laughter—the warmest laughter he'd ever heard.

He felt so alive when he was around her. Now he couldn't understand why he hadn't tried harder when he'd been with her—why he, in fact, had sometimes tried to make her forget how to live, how to be happy. All he'd wanted was to work at Arvin's and come home to her and to sing at Howdy's every Wednesday. But she wasn't like that. She wasn't like that at all.

Tommy allowed a tear to fall from each eye. They landed on top of his left hand. He licked them off, thought of the morning the day she did it. When he'd left for work, she'd been all smiles, fanning away the smell of burned toast. He kissed her good-bye after they finished their breakfast.

And she said, at the door, almost musically: "I'm going to Nashville."

"Today? Right now?"

He laughed, shook his head.

Jeannette looked at him seriously for a second or two, then broke into a lazy grin, pulled her long, coarse red hair back into a pony-tail and stood still, as if she'd practiced this gesture over and over in front of a mirror. She looked him straight in the eyes.

"This afternoon," she said.

"Well, you drop me a postcard, and, oh yeah, tell old George Jones howdy for me."

Then he walked down the stairs to his truck.

When he looked back, the apartment door was closed tight.

3

At almost one o'clock, Lloyd ambled in.

Trudy had already gone to bed. She'd kissed Tommy on the forehead, then said nervously that she hoped he didn't have any dreams tonight.

"I hope *I* don't either," she said.

Lloyd walked into the living room, sat down in his chair, pulled off his suede shoes carefully, and slipped his socks off as if they were a lady's nylons.

"My veins hurt," he said.

Tommy was watching a nature show. Wild hyenas were eating a wildebeast, with the sound off.

He was sleepy, yet could not find sleep—too afraid of the blackness once his lids closed, a sinking feeling, like being lost on an interstate.

"Trudy in bed?" Lloyd asked, lighting a cigarette.

"Yup."

"You two have a good evening?"

"Yeah."

Lloyd chuckled solemnly.

"I tell you, though, today, boy, you were a mess. I never seen a grown man act like that before."

"I'm sorry." Tommy stared at his fingernails, coughed.

"That's okay, buddy. But hell. You're gonna have to get off your duff."

Lloyd dragged off his cigarette, deep in thought for a second, then spoke again.

"I tell you. I think I can get your job back at Arvin's for you. I *know* I can. Old Dave and me are like this . . . And, we'll find you a nice trailor or apartment or something."

"Yeah," said Tommy, fear bleeding into his stomach—cold and glassy. Going to work was a horrifying thought. He visualized his red, white, and blue guitar. In his mind, it lay on his bed, gleaming. He thought of the bed, of Jeannette, Jeannette's mouth, her small, smooth fingers.

"I mean, we love you, Tommy, and all, but, uh, and you're welcome to stay here for a few days freeloading, but you're gonna have to go back to work—for your own good."

"I know that," he said, his voice quivering.

"And well, I don't think . . . "

Lloyd scooted in his big La-Z-Boy chair to get more comfortable.

"I don't think singing's doing you any good neither. And I know a few good singers that would like Wednesday nights, you know, at Howdy's. Maybe you can take a rest from that—till your mind gets better. I think that singing's what caused you to crack up like you did. Singing those songs about Jeannie. Or just singing."

Tommy winced. He looked at Lloyd—flabby, comfortable Lloyd, smoking his Kools, his head and neck slightly strained as he advised.

Tommy saw in his mind the shut door to the apartment as he walked to the truck the day Jeannette did it. That shut white door with its three dark windows. And he wanted to cry again, but knew crying would only make him look stupid and crazy, and so he gritted his teeth against the pain of not crying. He thought about Jeannette in her white evening gown. He saw the flaming oranges and reds of autumn, smelled the secret odor of oranges—and then again, envisioned the shut white door.

The door became a tombstone, and the tombstone became the door.

He tightened his lips together, then loosened them, swallowed and looked at Lloyd with a squint, said very quietly:

"Yeah. That sounds like a good idea."

Then he stared, dull-eyed, at the TV.

Lloyd smiled.

"As soon as we get rid of all this Jeannie bull shit, and, God bless her, I know, she was my only daughter, but as soon as we get over this stuff and start living again, everything'll be just fine. It's the way Jeannie would want it," said Lloyd, in his lowest voice—his paternal tone.

"Yeah, you're right," Tommy said, again very quietly, a hiss.

They sat in silence, watching the TV's silent picture. Tommy bit his finernails. Lloyd smoked and talked about his sore veins.

At 1:30, Lloyd stood, and said, "Well, I'm gonna go on up to bed now, son."

He scratched his belly and yawned.

Tommy nodded his head. He said good night in a whisper, thinking *just go, just fucking go.*

"You want me to leave the TV on?" asked Lloyd.

"Yeah . . . Please."

Lloyd walked out of the room.

Tommy had bitten his nails to the quick. They were pink, raw semi-circles, throbbing dully.

He heard Lloyd walk up the stairs, heard Lloyd's feet on the second-story floor, then Trudy's muffled, high-pitched voice, greeting Lloyd from the bedroom. Lloyd, a little after, flushed the commode, and then Trudy said something else, warbled and nervous and too loud; Lloyd replied angrily, telling her to shut up, and then the springs of the mattress squeaked as they accepted Lloyd's bulk.

The TV still showed the quiet hyenas. They had stopped eating and were now walking about a black wasteland, their long mouths spewing white steam. One hyena was ahead of the pack, lifting its snout up, howling, no sound.

Soundlessly Tommy hummed one of his songs, "Day after Summer." He hummed it until it became a chant that encircled his thinking—each verse bleeding into the other verse, until all that was left was jargon. He hummed the jargon lovingly, carefully, staring into the picture, and crying. He rocked back and forth, and soon began to look out the window beside the TV. Through the warm film of his tears, he could see the murky outline of trees in the yard and the garage doors, and the door to the apartment.

Lloyd's snores wheezed through the ceiling—a sound like an old machine clanking out fumes.

Tommy thought about the door again, the door—how white the door was. And how quiet the door was.

How quiet a door could be.

Silent Heart

George Dunn

I would rather be your scar
than your mirror.
Better to be
a ghastly seam that gathers
your flesh into memory

than to fade away
like the silent heart of an echo
or a mirror
without a crack.

Falling Sky

George Dunn

Falling sky,
collapsing in a hoarse command,
ushers the living underground.
Only essentials survive the passage,
only seeds.

§

So I speak to you now
in the voice I learned as a child,
no longer crowning my words
with bright carnations
& a suitor's allure,

but my stark offering does not stir you.

You say you are knitting
the whispered threads
of a dream.
You say I screech daylight,

my sobriety kills

& you miss the song
that could once charm you up
from your bed of reverie.

§

Pinioned
beneath the falling sky,
winter-bare we are turning away,
turning in need,
turning toward the earth.

After She Left

Jennifer Bingham

After she left
We rushed to take down
The paint-by-the-numbers Last Supper,
Mushroom clock,
And macrameed plant hangers.
The blaze exceeded our expectations.

After she left
We painted her name
Off the mailbox
Ran her cat through the dishwasher
(Just to see)
Stuck pins in the baby
Tossed guinea pigs back and forth
Like squealing, hairy footballs.

After she left
We sat naked in the living room
Ate out of pans
Scraped what was left of the guinea pigs
Down the garbage disposal.

When she comes back
We'll be ready for her.

Notes from a Divorced Man

David Beck

I am a sick man, a spiteful man. I am lonely and divorced. Previously I was lonely and married. Patty and I were married eleven years ago. Today we live on opposite sides of the city, opposite sides of the world. I am told by my therapist to make notes, a journal, if you will, so that I may discover what happened and what caused it to happen. (I thought that was his job.) So I write, more out of obeisance than hope.

I see Patty for the first time while attending the University of Chicago. I am a senior, she is a sophomore. In an era of opinionated-liberated women, Patty is shy and unsure of herself. So am I perhaps, but I manage to disguise it better. She and I have no classes together, but I often see her on campus.

Patty is a girl who will never look her age. She is a small, petite girl, who, to this day, walks with her head down, watching each step as if hoping to go unnoticed, or better yet, terrified at the idea of being noticed. She has dark eyes—sad eyes—and black shoulder length hair, which she usually wears pulled back. In short, she is pretty—cute perhaps, but you have to look for her to know she is there.

I want to meet her, but this is no easy task. After all, if she didn't look up, how would she notice me? But, as time goes by, I manage to catch her eye, smile, and eventually say 'hi,' but nothing more happens.

I graduate from college with hopes of becoming the next F. Scott Fitzgerald. I sit in a Denny's Restaurant, drinking coffee with a notebook spread out before me, pen in hand, looking as literary as possible. Who is waiting tables across the restaurant? The shy girl with black hair. She sees me. I smile. She nods and looks away. I try to remember when and if a girl ever nodded to me before.

Soon I am a regular customer. I have nothing better to do. It is late spring. I am hoping to get a job teaching high school English while penning away soon-to-be classics in my spare time. I sit on her side of the restaurant. She spends her breaks with me, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. I find that she has dropped out of school, but hopes someday—finances permitting—to go back. She is an Art History major.

"Big money in that," I joke.

"Big money in teaching high school English," she retorts with a smile. Little does she know that I am the new Fitzgerald just waiting for the literary world to take notice, or, better yet, to understand and appreciate my work for what it is. (What is it?)

Six months pass and I am standing at the altar with Patty. I am a high school teacher and a writer waiting to be noticed. A priest is giving us his blessing. The church is St. Michael's and it is beautiful and ornate. The music, the images, the incense, coupled with bliss, make me feel a part—a part of something new and wonderful. I'm even feeling less dread over my agreement to join St. Michael's, a promise I had made to Patty and her family.

It is hard to concentrate on what the priest is saying. I have other thoughts. I am waxing sentimental. I realize that the time has come to let go of my past, present, and future infatuations. I am happy. She is happy. Our parents are happy.

When the ceremony is over we drive to Cape Cod and stay in a cabin owned by my uncle. Everything is going great and continues to do so for the next year. We find a nice two-bedroom house just south of Chicago. I begin teaching Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Steinbeck to high school illiterates. They ask, "Are you sure they really meant all of that? How do you know that they weren't writing just to tell a story?"

I do manage to get a collection of stories published. The book is distributed mostly in the midwest. I think a hundred copies are sold. Relatives, I'm sure, with a few extra bucks and a lot of pity. But some doors open. Upon completion of my graduate work, I am offered a position at a small community college. I begin teaching Introduction to the Novel. A third rate college, full of third rate students taught by third rate instructors. I have them read Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Dickens, and Faulkner. (I purposely exclude Fitzgerald.) They ask, "Are you sure they really mean all of that? How do you know that they weren't writing just to tell a story?"

Patty and I still attend St. Michael's. I am allowed to partake of the eucharist, even though I never quite finished the catechism classes and have not been accepted into the Church. But our priest, Father O'Neil, is more of a Kierkegaardian than a Thomist. He seems uncomfortable if not bored with trying to explain theology in a systematic way. Better to leap than to understand.

Patty works as a teller at the bank. She doesn't like the job. She'd rather spend the day at the art museum, gazing at paintings from the Romantic era. I don't think she is happy. I think she sees herself as a person destined for tragedy. She

wants to see herself hand in hand with Lord Byron, facing the raging storm.

I come home one evening and the house is quiet. I call her name. No answer. Finally, I catch sight of her in the backyard. It is a cloudy, autumn day, and evening is quickly approaching. I start to go out the back door, but I stop and watch her instead. She is bundled in a dark blue sweater, walking, head down, through the fallen leaves which line the fence. Her arms are folded across her chest. Occasionally, she glances at the gray sky as if searching for something.

Suddenly I think, Who is this sad girl walking around in my backyard? And what is she thinking? Seven years of marriage. How have we changed? I am teaching, still writing, still waiting for recognition. And Patty is still quiet, maybe even more so than when we first met. She looks cold wrapped in that blue sweater. She is standing at the far end of the yard, leaning against the fence and facing the alley that runs between our backyard and an abandoned garage.

As I watch her I think of how we spend less time together, but the time we spend is not disagreeable by any means. But her "quietness" which once so attracted me now seems like a barrier. I recall the afternoon we were married, the leaving behind of past, present and future infatuations. More than once—several times in fact—I've wanted to go out with someone, someone I could know and . . . I don't know.

I sit down on the sofa. The room is silent and slowly growing dark. On the table before me lies one of Patty's art books. It is open. Staring up at me is a painting by Eugene Delacroix: *Greece Dying on the Ruins of Missolonghi.* I look at the sad, beautiful, and defenseless woman, pleading for help, while a proud Turk raises his flag.

I rise and go to the window. Patty is beginning to walk toward the house. I try to remember why we got married. What was I thinking? What was she thinking? I still want to be a writer, and she still loves art. But what else? Children? Not yet, no, definitely not yet. The truth is we never discussed what we wanted. But who does?

Patty walks in. She is surprised to see me sitting quietly in the dark. "What are you doing home so early?"

"I gave an exam today and got out a little early," I say. "What were you thinking about out there?"

She looks puzzled. "Nothing, really. Why?"

"You looked as if you were deep in thought."

She smiles, shakes her head and asks, "What do you want for supper?"

I ignore her. "Are you happy? I mean, you looked kind of sad out there."

"I'm okay. Really."

"Are you wanting to go back to school?"

"Yeah," she says slowly. "In a way." She walks toward the kitchen. I follow her.

"You can, you know. It's not like we're that financially strapped. In fact, you could go to art school, study art, and pick up the history part later. You said once that you'd like to learn to paint."

"I would like to," she says. "Now, what do you want for supper?"

"Will you consider it?"

"Yes," she says, opening the refrigerator and staring intently into it.

She still hasn't taken any classes. And we eat most of our meals in polite silence. I have less desire to push her toward anything. Let her do what she wants, I think. I tried but nothing worked. Besides, I have begun to see a former student of mind. Nothing perverse, just an occasional cup of coffee. Anyway, it allows me an opportunity to talk and be talked to.

It is Christmas break. I am at home, drinking coffee, relieved that another semester has ended. The head of the English Department likes my book of short stories, which is now out of print. He tells me that he has connections and might be able to get it reprinted. He also reminds me that next semester he wants me to teach an additional class: Introduction to Creative Writing. I agree to take the class. It means extra money and may lead to something better. Who knows? In the meantime I'll have to suffer through tons of amateur poetry, written about death and broken relationships. Oh well.

After turning on the Christmas lights, I decide to scribble down some thoughts, but I can't find my legal pad. I dig through my desk drawers and find none. I go to the end table and begin rummaging in search for paper. At the bottom of the drawer, under the Yellow Pages, lies a sketch book. I open it. The first few pages are sketches of dogs, cats, and so on. Half-way through the book are pictures of scenery and people—mostly old and down and out types. I come to a picture of Patty and me, drawn from one of our wedding pictures. It is excellent. Why didn't she tell me?

She has drawn other pictures, too. Some are self-portraits. I study them. In each picture her face appears sad and withdrawn. Her mouth is almost a straight line, not frowning but sure not smiling. I turn back to her sketch of our wedding picture. She has drawn my face with a smile as in our photograph, but she, she has the same withdrawn look.

I walk to the bedroom and look at our wedding picture, which sits on the dresser. She is right. She is not smiling. Why have I always thought she was smiling? Yet, a trace of

a smile is there, but her eyes, her eyes are sad, peering at the photographer like a puppy staring out of a pet shop window. At that time, the sadness in her face didn't bother me too much. After all, many people go through life with unexplainable sadness. And some are haunted by thoughts or memories that taint every pleasurable experience. But why hasn't she shared this part of her life with me?

The front door opens and Patty comes in. I wanted to put her sketch book back in the drawer before her return. Too late. Her book is lying on the table. She looks down at it as I walk into the room.

"Hello," I say carefully, not knowing how she will react to my discovery.

"Hi," she says slowly. She is sad, sadder than usual.

"Why didn't you show me these?" I ask, picking up the sketch pad. I open it and thumb through the pages, stopping at a landscape scene that I had missed the first time.

Saying nothing, she drops in the chair across from me.

"This, for example," I say, showing her the landscape, "is excellent. Why didn't you show these to me? Did you think I wouldn't be interested?"

Her eyes fill with tears. "Why didn't you tell me you were seeing someone else?"

I drop to the couch, feeling the blood rush to my face. No point in denying it, I think to myself. I say what first comes to mind, "I don't know."

"Why?" she asks again.

Rubbing my hand over my face, I collect my thoughts. Don't cry Patty, I'm thinking, just don't cry. "First of all, I don't know what you saw or who told you what, but, yes, I've seen a couple girls—"

"A couple!"

"Yes, a couple! Now would you let me finish."

"A couple," she repeats. "My God!"

"Let me explain, would you? They were nothing, believe me, nothing. Platonic, that's all. Nothing more. A cup of coffee or drink after class, but I never—"

She stands and turns toward the window. Shaking her head, she manages to say between sobs, "How could you? What have I done wrong?"

"What have you done wrong? Well, what have I done wrong? A few drinks with friends who just happen to be females. Is there anything wrong with that?" This was not quite true. But I can't stand seeing someone cry, especially Patty.

Turning to me, she says, "Why do you need to see them? Am I not enough? And if it were so 'platonic' as you say, why didn't you ever tell me about these little—get togethers?"

I am uncomfortable and becoming impatient. "Maybe I need someone who can talk to me. Sure, you're here, you listen, but why can't you let me know who you are?"

She stares at me, looking more resigned than angry.

"I don't know the woman who drew these pictures. I don't know her. I don't know what she thinks. But I want to—"

She slowly walks away, head down and silent. I am surprised. I start to stop her, but I don't. She whispers something, but I can't make it out. Was it 'I'm sorry'?

She goes to bed, and I go to the kitchen and make myself a drink, a strong one. Bourbon with a sprinkle of water. Turning out the lights, I sit on the couch and sip my drink. The lights on the Christmas tree blink on and off in the darkness. A dull light reflects off the ornaments. I am thinking about our fight.

If I were a lawyer, I would gloat. But I'm not. So I drink bourbon and try to forget what a louse I am.

When Patty and I argue—no matter what the issue—I win. Our disagreements don't last long: either she quits out of frustration or I quit for lack of challenge. I win by using the old "turn the table" trick. Tonight I don't feel like a winner. I get up and fix another drink.

The next few weeks are hell. Patty doesn't speak, except when she has to. She starts seeing a friend of hers named Terri, a girl who was in a few of her classes at the University of Chicago. I have never heard of this friend until after our argument. Terri has talked Patty into taking some art classes. Why didn't I think of that? I ask myself sarcastically, while drinking scotch on the rocks at some little bar not far from school.

Terri is the opinionated-liberated type. Her opinions are meaningless and what she has been liberated from is unclear to me. Whoever liberated her made a big mistake. But she hates me as much as I hate her. She sees me as an insensitive ogre, a throwback to the Paleolithic days. Regardless, she seldom makes an appearance at our place and if so, only for a few minutes. Patty usually meets her somewhere—the art museum, a coffee shop, or Terri's apartment.

I wonder what they talk about. I order another drink. Swirling the ice cubes in my glass, I try picturing Patty opening-up, sharing her thoughts with this resurrected friend.

Driving home—after too many drinks—I am recalling a phone call I received that morning from Patty. First, she asked if I would agree to see a marriage counselor. I agreed. Second, she asked if I would mind if she and Terri went out for a drink. Why would I mind? Well, it's like a nightclub. I tell her I don't mind, even though I do.

After arriving home, I go to the kitchen and fix me a drink. Patty is in the bedroom getting ready. A video cassette sits on top of the videoplayer. I stick it in, sit down and sip my drink. It's Oprah Winfrey! Some counterculture

religious group is on there. Lesbians for Christ, I think. I didn't rewind it to the beginning, so I'm not sure what's going on. Moreover, I don't know why this was taped to begin with, much less what it is doing here.

Patty walks into the room. Her hair is fixed differently. Instead of being pulled back in her usual manner, it has a blown back appearance. She has had a perm. I detect what I think is mousse in her hair. Her face is adorned with rouge, eye shadow, the whole bit.

"How do I look?" she asks.

"Fine," I say, wondering why she seldom took such care with her appearance back when we were still important to each other.

Oprah is signing off. The people applaud and Oprah shakes hands with the Lesbians for Christ.

"What is this crap?" I ask.

"Oh, that," she says indifferently while lightly running her fingers through her hair. "Terri gave it to me. Told me to watch it. I saw about half of it and got bored."

"I can see why," I say, taking another drink.

She starts to leave the room.

"Wait! Why the hell does she want you to watch this?"

"Oh, I don't know. We were talking about religion, God, and stuff, and she asked me to watch this. So I did, sort of."

I watch her as she goes through last-minute preparations. Is this the new Patty? Somehow she doesn't seem comfortable in her new role, for which she was cast, I'm sure, by Terri. Why is she going to a nightclub without me? Why has she taken so much time to look better than usual?

After she kisses me good-bye, she walks out the door. I go to the window and watch her walking to the car. Her head is down, I note, and she looks unsure of herself. I pity her. What has kept us together? Love? Pity? I can't seem to separate the two. I felt sorry for her from the first time I saw her. Why do I pity her? For being so quiet? so sad? So insecure? for being stuck with a jerk like me? But now that pity is intensified as I watch her drive away. Perhaps her Romantic paintings have got the best of her.

Standing by the window, I sigh and finish my drink. Maybe the alcohol has made me pity her more. Is her night out tonight an attempt to discover that world of Romanticism or the dream world she never could find? Or perhaps it is just plain vengeance, vengeance on a man who can no longer love but can only pity.

I lie down on the bed, while the room spins around and around. I must quit drinking. A thought of retribution occurs to me: why not call Anna, a former student of mine, with whom I might have been seen; or perhaps a call to Lisa, a colleague with whom I also might have been seen.

Anna, a bright girl of twenty-four, is my first choice. She sees me as the older, intellectual type, maybe a father figure. Sigmund and Anna, I laugh to myself. She seemed willing. So did Lisa. Yes, and it was Lisa...she was the one...we came so close...so close.

Now it is morning. I'm still dressed when I awake. My mouth is dry, my head aches, and Patty is lying next to me. Rising I groan and stumble to the shower. As the hot water hits my face, I'm trying to recall what day it is. My head clears enough to remember last night. What time did Patty come home?

When I get out of the shower, Patty is up and sitting at the breakfast table. Is it my imagination or does she have a look of repentance?

"Good morning," I say.

"Morning."

"Well, how was the nightlife?"

She smiles, "Okay, I guess. It was no big deal. No, no, I guess I really didn't like it."

"So what do you and your friend have planned today? A lecture? A protest? Maybe another night on the town?"

"That's not fair—"

I go to the bedroom and get ready to leave. Spring semester begins today. My first Creative Writing class is this afternoon. I am hung over and unprepared. Class will be short today.

Patty follows me into the room. I wish she wouldn't.

"Listen," she says softly, "nothing happened last night. If anything, it made me want to try harder. I want to start anew. Tonight we have our first appointment with Dr. Blake, remember?"

"Yes," I answer, but I had forgotten.

"So let's stay open, okay?" she says, adjusting my jacket.

"Okay."

We are in Dr. Blake's waiting room. I sit next to a table with magazines spread across it. Patty is on my other side. I thumb through an issue of *Psychology Today,* then *Sports Illustrated.* But I can't concentrate. I am thinking of my writing class, which has more students than I had expected. In fact, it is full. Looks like I'll be spending all my time grading papers.

Finally, we are called in. Dr. Blake is a middle-aged man. He is bald and has a close-cut beard that outlines his sharp features.

"Hello," he says, shaking my hand, then Patty's.

We sit on a nice early American couch, while he sits in a swivel recliner. This is the informal setting, to make us feel right at home. Behind his chair is a walnut desk with two plastic covered chairs in front of it: the formal setting. The three of us talk in a stilted manner. He tells us he

would like to see us once a week. He says that he seldom does individual counseling, but prefers talking to us as a couple, watching how we act and interact with each other.

We continue to see Dr. Blake for the next three or four weeks. He asks us if we had ever made a list of goals, individual and mutual, or if we had ever made a contract before getting married. We didn't, of course. We were busy making love, not contracts. He tells us that he sensed hostility in both of us and that he wanted to try something new next week: Bach's aggression therapy.

A week later, I am driving to Dr. Blake's, running late. A student wanted me to go over some poetry she had written for class. Now I'm rushing through evening traffic. Patty is supposed to meet me at Blake's office. I'm hoping this new therapy might work. I'm trying to be optimistic.

Each light turns red upon my arrival. Tapping my fingers on the steering wheel, waiting for a green light, I notice a disturbance on the corner. Two men—eighteen or nineteen years old—are pushing each other. A crowd begins to gather. Suddenly a barrage of fists starts flying. One man falls, the other jumps on top of him. I watch the man throwing punch after punch, each landing on the face of the man underneath. He then begins slamming the man's head upon the concrete. Blood flows from the fallen man's face. He is dazed and defenseless. The crowd stares, appalled, disgusted, and enjoying every minute of it. The light turns green, but I continue to watch. No horns blow from behind. They watch too, appalled and disgusted. My stomach tightens. Slowly I drive through the intersection, glancing back in my rearview mirror. The action continues. But I am hoping it will stop.

No longer am I optimistic.

Entering Dr. Blake's office, I am greeted by Patty. We exchange small talk, and I think of the man lying on the pavement. Finally, Dr. Blake opens the door and calls us from the waiting room. We enter hesitantly and shamefully.

Wasting no time Dr. Blake explains Bach's therapy. I can't believe my ears. Blake brings out two foam-padded paddles. They are no more than three or four feet long. The padding is soft and thick. They look like small canoe paddles. He begins explaining his plan, though it is all too clear. Patty and I are awkwardly holding the paddles.

"Many find this an excellent way of taking out hostility toward their spouse," he says, his teeth gleaming and head shining. His face then becomes serious, putting his fingers to his chin. "With you two, I'm not sure that your hostility is so much against each other, as perhaps against something else—job, unfulfilled goals, or whatever."

He takes a seat in the back of the room. "So just begin. Let out that hostility. I think you'll find it very rewarding. Oh, and pretend I'm not here."

Right.

He tells us to hold them like canoe paddles. So we are holding the paddles with one hand at each end, gripping just below the black pads. Seeing each other, standing with paddles in hand, we can't help but smile. What a scene. She begins tapping me on the shoulder. I tap her back. After a minute or so of this, Dr. Blake begins encouraging us. Still, he doesn't get the response he wants.

"Come on, Patty! You tell me you are frustrated because Dennis feels the need to have relationships with other women. And, Dennis, aren't you bothered by Patty's refusal to talk and share her desires?"

Suddenly, I swing and strike her in the face. She does the same. I retaliate—one, two, three—with quick, sharp shots. Not a bad idea, I'm thinking, as we continue striking each other like children in P.E. class.

My mind wanders: the silence, her friend Terri, and those feeble attempts to be like her—free, independent and an advocate of Lesbians for Christ. The end of my paddle gets between her and her paddle. As I pull back sharply, her paddle is ripped from her hands. I land several shots, not too many. No, I don't think it was more than two or three. I can't remember. I do remember, however, Dr. Blake running into the room.

"Whoa! Whoa," he says.

I stop. Patty is standing before me, head down and crying. Her face is red and tear-soaked, and her nose is running. She tries wiping her upper lip, but only make it worse. The paddle lies at her feet.

I come to my senses and reach for her, but she jerks away.

She is crying, "No, no. Just stay away."

Dr. Blake puts an arm around her shoulder. "Here, here. Let's sit down, now," he says as if talking to a child.

I am standing, still holding the paddle, embarrassed and frightened.

Patty is shaking her head and telling the doctor, "There is nothing to say, nothing to say."

I arrive at home before Patty. Pulling the suitcase out of the closet, I'm thinking of where I might stay. A motel. A cheap one. By the time I leave, she still hasn't come home. I find an inexpensive place, a dive, if you will, and the next day Patty files for divorce.

I am standing in St. Michael's, waiting to go forward and receive the Eucharist. If Father O'Neil knew I was divorced, would he let me partake? Maybe. If he knew what I was thinking, would he? No. Definitely not. I am thinking that Christ—Son of Man, Son of God—is no longer present in the host. For that matter, God is no longer present. He was at one time, I truly believe that. Like when Patty and I were married at the altar in front of me. But today I am

convinced—or at least inclined to believe—that God is neither in the bread, the wine, Chicago, nor anywhere in the good old U.S. He probably isn't anywhere in the world. But God is somewhere. Maybe he is in places of suffering, sickness, and turmoil. I don't know. Maybe he has turned his back from this world, this country, this city, this man. Perhaps he is fed up with our trite confessions and petty attempts at righteousness.

The words of the liturgy seem meaningless. The sacred images seem foreign. And the bread tastes like bread and the wine tastes like wine.

After the service, Father O'Neil approaches me."How are you, Dennis?"

"Fine."

"And Patty?"

"Well, Father, our divorce was just finalized. So I guess I don't know."

Father O'Neil drops his head, looking grave.

"I see," he says, rubbing his chin. He has heard it all before.

"Look, I know I shouldn't have partaken but—"

"No, no," he says, waving his hand.

"This will probably be my last time here. I'm moving back to the city."

"What part?"

"A small, cheap, one bedroom on the southside. Not ideal, of course, but—"

"And Patty."

"She and a friend moved to some suburb on the northwest side."

"Do you want the name of a good parish close to where you will be staying?"

"No, I don't think so. Not now, Father."

"I see." He put his hand on my arm as we walked toward the door. "Don't give up, Dennis. It's too easy to do in this day and age."

"I know."

"Do you want to know what scares me?"

"What?"

"Well," he stops and turns to me, "do you remember what Jesus said about the believers being the salt of the earth? And, as you know, salt is a preservative and keeps meat from spoiling. Well, how many believers do you know? I don't just mean those who believe, but those who are strongly convinced of their belief, so convinced that they would die for that belief. How many do you meet as you go through your daily routine? Your students, for example? Or the faculty? How many?"

"Few," I reply, "very few. None, perhaps."

"Suppose Christ was right in saying what he did. Can we then be too far away?"

From what exactly, I wanted to ask. Instead I agreed and went away with his blessing.

I am sitting in my one bedroom apartment, grading bad poetry and drinking Dark Eyes. It is a cloudy morning, cold and damp. A constant drizzle falls. I stand, stretch, and watch a cockroach scurry across the carpet. I'm too lazy to kill it. Besides, they won the war. I am outnumbered.

Pushing the window open, I watch people walking here and there. Across the city, somewhere behind the haze and smog, Patty is living a new life. A group of teen-agers, huddled on the corner, smokes cigarettes and talks loudly. A cockroach runs across the window sill. I flip it with my finger and it sails to the pavement below. One down.

The smell of garbage seems as thick as the smog that covers the city. A police car slows down as it approaches the teen-agers. They disband with resentful looks on their faces. But the smell, the smell is nauseating, more so than usual. I glance up and down the street and see neither a garbage truck, nor an overturned can. And the dumpster in the alley across the street is closed.

I close the window, take a drink of Dark Eyes, and continue grading bad poetry.

About the Artists and Authors

Keith Banner: "Quiet Hyenas" won the 1989 Rebecca Pitts Fiction award. Keith's poetry has appeared in a previous issue of *genesis*.

David Beck: A senior majoring in English and Sociology; David's fiction has appeared in *genesis* and the *Broad Ripple Review*.

Jennifer Bingham: "SWF 21, svelte, lycanthrope, social drinker, seeks plump charming gentleman for moonlight rendezvous. Send height, weight, blood type, and if possible, percentage of body fat. Please, no smokers, drug users."

George A. Dunn: ". . . has nothing left to say."

Timothy Hill: Tim is currently seeking maximum performance in visual arts.

Gary M. Kendall: ". . . currently attends Herron—under the direction of J. Carr. Enjoys traveling; has escorted tours to Yugoslavia. A member of the Writer's Center of Indianapolis. Collects first edition books. Has been known to be an autograph hound."

Tom Lee: Tom's stories "Title" and "Wheelie Master" won the English Department's Creative Writing Award for 1989.

Ed Opus: "Ed Opus is a pseudonym. Don't you wish you had one?"

Richard W. Rominger: A computer consultant for the Department of English, Richard is majoring in English.

Shar: "Instead of asking kids what (one thing) they are going to do when they grow up why don't we ask, 'What order are you going to do (many things) it in?'

I guess I'm doing this close to first . . . well, within my first six or so."

Wyndi M. Skillrud: "I am inspired to write while listening to Andreas Vollenweider. Listen to it, and you'll understand. This music has also accompanied some free-spirited dancing on more than one occasion."