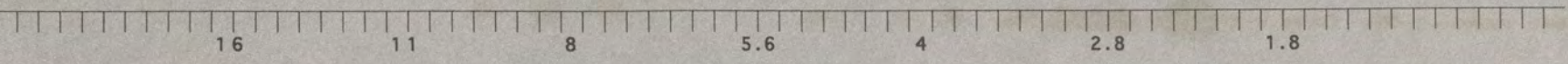
GENESIS



TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

[ANNUAL ISSUE] 8

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In the beginning, one dedicated professor listened and responded to the growing need for a literary publication at the IUPUI campus. This professor was Rebecca E. Pitts, whose inspiration and assistance made the creation of *genesis*, by the English Club—Sigma Tau Delta and the Philosophy Club—Phi Sigma Tau, a reality. The founders of *genesis* began with the ideal of providing a forum for self-expression and the arts. In the spring of 1973, the premiere issue appeared, marking the first time that students could see their creative and scholarly works in print. For twenty-five years, *genesis* has been edited and produced solely by students, and it continues to this day to respond to the energy and talents of this urban campus.

Interesting patterns have emerged in the art and writing that spans nearly three decades of publication. These patterns not only trace the growth of IUPUI, but also the growth of the community, of society, and of technology. When *genesis* was first published, it accepted only written work (later admitting black-and-white photographs and drawing only). But by the fall issue in 1987, color had found its way onto the pages of *genesis*, and that issue was printed entirely in green ink. The first full-color cover appeared in the fall of 1993, and today's readers would find it difficult to imagine a colorless copy. In addition to photography and drawing, current publications include portfolios of printmaking, sculpture, and furniture design.

The literary content has ranged from an early emphasis on philosophical essays and critiques, to more short fiction and poetry in later issues. A theme that stands out through the years is the concentration of many writers on "place"—and the unique landscape of Indiana. Whether portrayed as bland or pleasantly familiar, the small town often functions for authors as a foundation from which characters rise to conflicts that are more universal.

It is our hope that this, the 25th Anniversary issue, will showcase the art and literary talent of Herron and IUPUI. Just as our cover photograph shows a "box of thoughts," this is truly a compilation of some of the creative and introspective student writing produced in our collaborative "world of perfect realms."

EDITORS

'72-'97

GENESIS
ART & LITERARY JOURNAL

Staff

Acknowledgements

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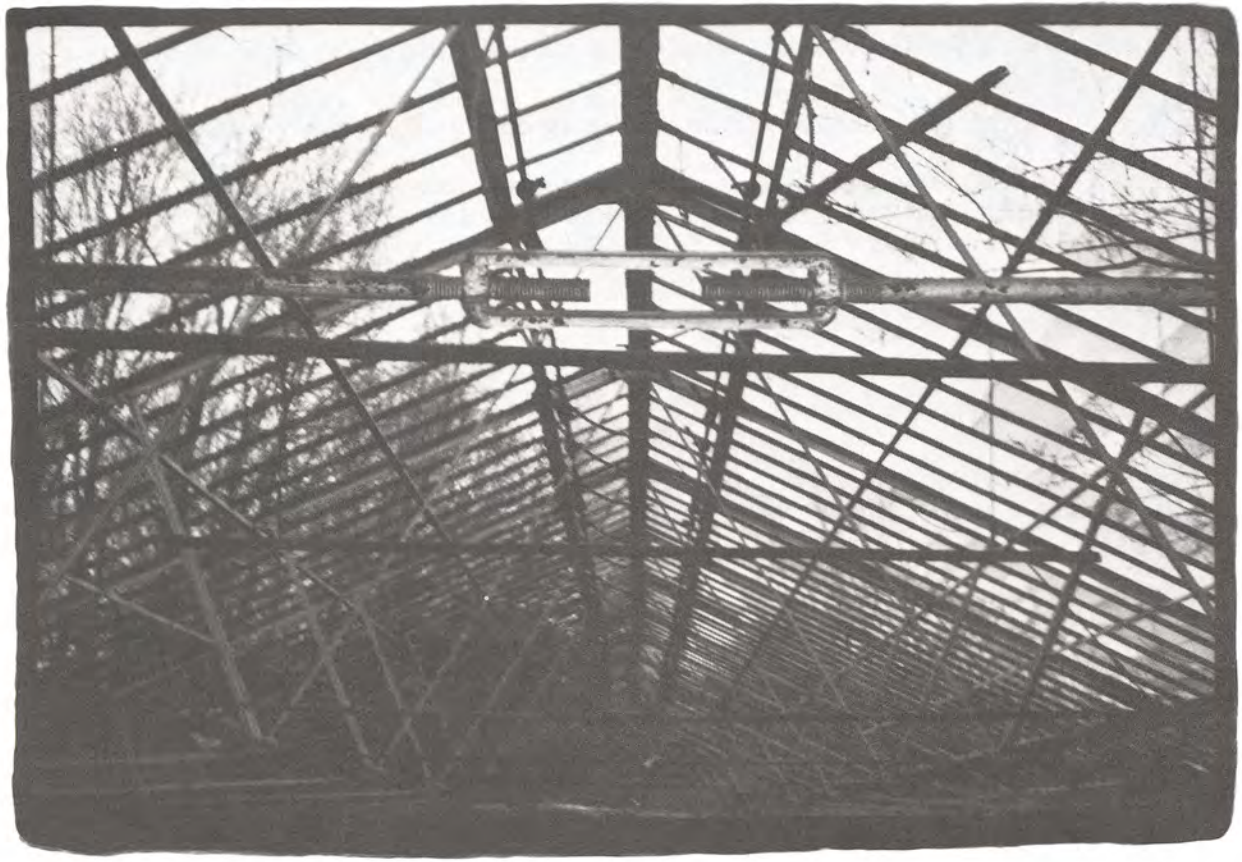
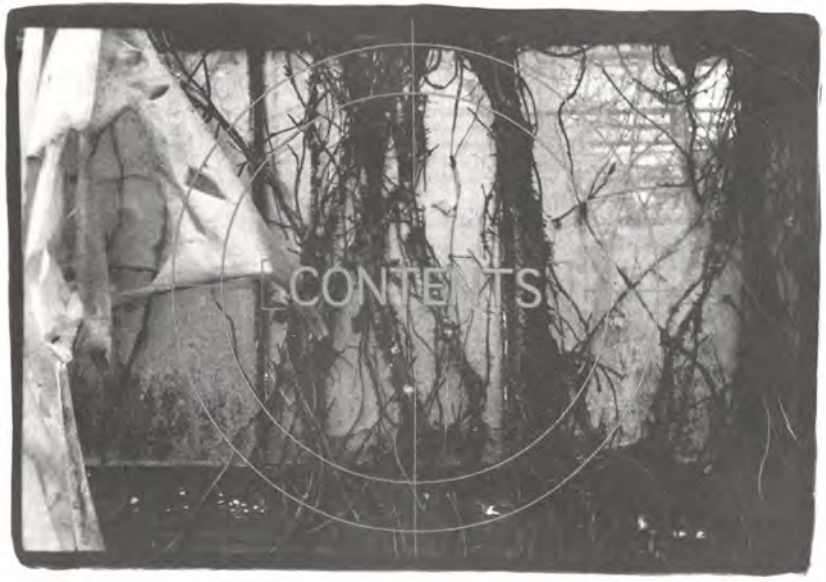


Portfolio



Cover Photography:
silver gelatin prints,
Larry Endicott

When she pulled the trigger,
pieces of poetry hit the wall.

Poetry Prose Essay

Returning Bottles His Lips Never Kissed

Edward K. Dorris

'73

Returning bottles his lips never kissed
Wondering why he has failed
Not wondering if he has failed
Only one answer for failure
Wrong place, wrong time.

Wine tastes better now
That he can't afford it
Although he never could
He can't even less,
Already four months late with the rent
Almost time to move at midnight
No reason to take chances
Like last time when he waited six months.

Dirty bastard landlord deserved what he left him
A five day clogged toilet.
Wish he was there.
Mice aren't so bad
it's rats he can't stand
He wouldn't even set the traps
If they'd stop eating so much
And so loud
While he's trying to recover
From the black heat sickness.

Rented houses never have a shower

Baths are degrading
Like lying down in a grave
Afraid to relax
He might never get out
Besides, he's too dirty to get clean
With only a bath.

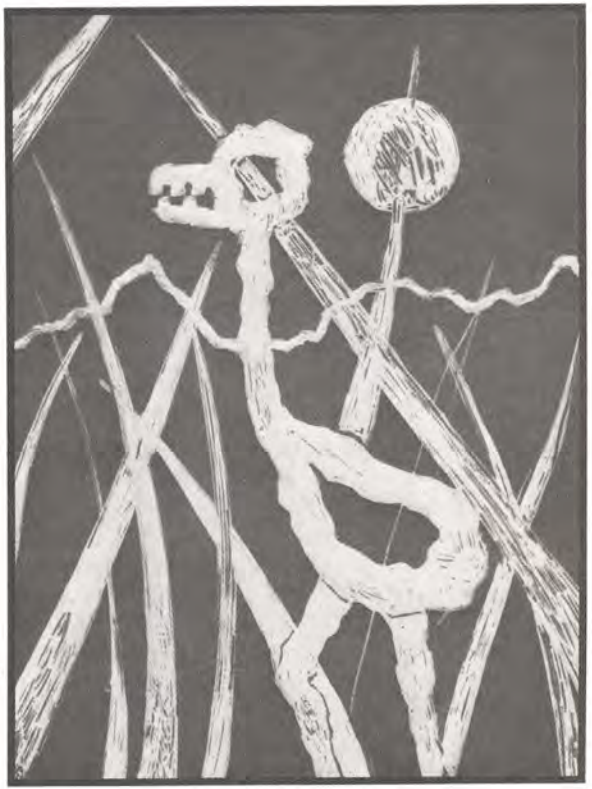
Wondering why the bushes are dying
Not his problem
He's no doctor for failing ferns.
Three tires bald
Fourth wears a toupee,
Rainy days he holds his breath
Never last through winter
Without a tune-up
Neither will he.

Refrigerator freezes up every Saturday
Spring floods when he defrosts
Always smells funny
And never happy.
Tiles falling off the bathroom walls
Brown glue all that's left
Always thankful for a gas war,

Oil Spill

Edmund Byrne

On the beach at Santa Barbara
A white girl, fat and freckly, glows with Joy of black girl friend,
whose animated gestures distract attention from emerging nipple
buds that brother's tee shirt was not meant to hide.
Three generations of Japanese on a picnic—cutleried children
and parents at table; grandparents,
shoeless and with chopsticks in hand, sit upright on a bamboo
mat spread even over the sand.
Young boys arm In arm come walking smartly along the ebbing mix
of land and wave, where
A gull
wings spread broadly in the speckled sand,
pain eased by peaceful bursts of breakers,
Lies dying.
"Throw him in the ocean."
"Let him be."
"We can take him home with us."
"You'd better leave him where he is."
"He'll die."
"He'll die anyway."
WHAT DO CHILDREN KNOW OF DYING GULLS?
From beyond the breakers, beyond the eyes, comes a dull thump-thump
of ever-pounding drills.
From a beachside bench one lonely, crying flute responds.
Another gentle breaker washes speckled froth upon the gull.
Oily patches on my feet, I lunch on cheese and bread.



Untitled, Julie Bossinger, 1991

Silent Night

Allen Simmonds

Sam didn't like to work Christmas Eve; people should be with their families Christmas Eve. But he always did. Christmas Eve and almost every other holiday or holiday eve. He really couldn't understand his partner who said it wasn't that important to be open those few extra hours. So, either he worked, or the store was closed. After all, a drug store, and, more importantly, a pharmacy, has an obligation, a duty, to the community it serves. Besides, there was plenty of traffic on Christmas Eve, and a good opportunity to realize a profit from the more expensive items he was forced to stock, but seldom sold.

Sam had worked, as he always did. Now it was getting late, late for Christmas Eve. From all the previous years he knew that most people were now wherever they were going to spend Christmas Eve. He knew he would probably only sell a few packs of cigarettes, and, at best, a bottle of perfume or some other last minute gift to a forgetful husband. But just as he had been reluctant to work that evening, he was now reluctant to leave. He had closed the fountain much earlier and sent Grace home. As soon as the traffic slowed down, he had also allowed Helen to leave, and Bob too after he had swept the store. Now he was alone in the store, and, as always, that was a pleasant feeling. He had checked out the cash registers, carefully leaving twenty-five dollars worth of change and small bills in each so they would be ready for his partner when he opened at nine on December twenty-sixth. As he checked the money against the cash register tapes and entered the figures on the checkout sheet, he felt, as he did every year, justified in his decision and his sacrifice to stay open that evening. And, as he did every year, he pondered uncomprehendingly his partner's reluctance to cooperate on such occasions.

Now he could leave any time he wanted and still he hesitated. Finally he decided to wait until the supermarket, which took the larger portion of the low, plain building in which he spent so much time, closed at ten. It was only about a half an hour more. He stood behind the cash register at the pharmacy counter and thought about many things—the work involved in taking down and storing the Christmas decorations, which seasonal items to sell at a loss, which to store until next year, and, of course, the one-cent sale which artificially filled the time between selling Christmas decorations and Easter baskets.

He was awakened from these thoughts by the door opening. "Hi Doc, I'm glad you're still open."

Being called "Doc," especially by perfect strangers like this one, was one of the constant irritations of his profession. It was a reminder of what he was not. He particularly resented the young pharmacists he saw everywhere who unsnapped their tunics like that TV doctor. He felt this only compounded the whole problem and was sloppy besides. But, as always, he ignored it and asked with a certain professional dignity and gravity, "Could I help you?"

"Yes, I have to get lots of things. I got carried away and still haven't bought stuff for Christmas. Where are the toys and things? And do you have any clothes, I really need to get the girl a nice sweater?"

"No, no, this a drug store, we don't stock clothing." Sam was always amazed at the things people expected to find in the drugstore. He wasn't exactly certain about the relationship to the non-professional items in the store, the "sundries," as he preferred to call them. Grass seed and fertilizer in the summer, antifreeze and rock salt in the winter. Somehow it wasn't quite right to sell them. They, in some vague manner, reduced his status, made him into a shopkeeper and he was a professional.

But it was providing a service, a convenience. Combined with the supermarket and its line of sundries (they probably stocked clothes next door), he could truly say Shady Acres Shopping Center provided one-stop shopping. It was a service, and, after all, that is what his profession was all about, serving the public. And these items turned over much quicker than the bed pans, trusses, and elastic bandages he sold or the crutches he rented and were much less depressing to handle.

"The toys are on both sides of aisle nine and also just across the aisle, at the end of the fountain. Here, I'll show you."

As they walked to the rear of the store, the man continued to talk rapidly and cheerfully, totally ignoring the subtle reprimand in Sam's remark about the clothes. "Well, if you don't have any sweaters, I'll have to find something else real nice for the girl. She's getting real big now and turning into a real doll. Fourteen—no maybe fifteen. Yes, fifteen, and there's probably boys around and all that. My boys are easy, the baby, hardly a baby any more, probably knows the names of all those TV animals and bothering his Ma for this or that he seen on TV. He'll be happy with some trucks and cars, anything on wheels. You got any little trucks or one of those airplanes that the engine sparks?"

But he really wasn't asking a question, and even before Sam could show him the section containing wheeled toys, he was off again.

"And the other boy, you got any toy guns? Or toy swords or helmets? Or soldiers? That boy, got lots of energy, always running around like wild Indian, a real little man."

By this time, the man had picked up a toy tractor, a dump truck, a plastic tommy gun and was still looking for more. Sam was anxious to explain why there were no swords in stock; he had just read in a merchandising magazine that all retailers had an obligation to be certain their toys were appropriate and safe for children. So, there were no more swords or even those hard rubber knives he had enjoyed so much as a boy. But somehow he sensed the man wouldn't be interested, so he tried something else, "Here are the games. Sound about right for your boy. Channel a portion of that undirected energy into potentially productive areas, help him learn to interact socially and anticipate life's situations." Sam often spoke like this for he was aware of his responsibility and made an effort to remember the things he read in the various trade journals. He had read a long article on the usefulness of games in some merchandising magazine, and most of his regular customers were quite interested in the whole concept and deferred to his judgment. This man seemed uninterested.

"That boy won't sit still long enough for any games."

Sam didn't understand these people. He knew the man was somehow connected with the trailer court across the highway. That was the one disadvantage in his new location. He knew moving to a shopping center was the right decision: good parking, more room, all of the advantages. But he didn't understand these people. Didn't their children ever have names? After all, he always referred to his children by name. But with these people it was always "the boy" or "the oldest girl" or "the middle one." Never any names. No, he couldn't understand these people, and found it somewhat discomforting to serve them. But what could he do?

"This is enough for the boys. Where's the perfume? I always get the wife some fancy perfume for Christmas. Something real sexy. This will all be a surprise to her, she's not even sure I'm coming out Christmas. Oh, we got our problems, especially this year. Don't suppose I lived in the trailer with her half the time last year. But this time I think we'll get it straightened out. Oh, we really fight sometimes, suppose I drink too much and she's real high strung. Yes, we really have some fights but she's a good woman and makin' up is always nice if you know what I mean." The man grinned and winked and would actually have nudged Sam with his elbow if he had not maintained a discreet distance as they walked up the aisle toward the cosmetic section.

Sam had mixed emotions about these revelations people were constantly giving him. If they were from his regular customers, quiet and dignified and ostensibly centered around some family health problem, Sam listened solemnly and offered appropriate advice or sympathy. It made

him feel good and secure in his position in the community. Sort of like a minister or a doctor but much more accessible and much less intimidating. It vindicated the little slogan he liked so well in the *Independent Retail Druggist Journal*, "You can trust your local pharmacist, part of the community health team and part of the community." But it was different with these people. Their revelations seemed uncalled for, certainly unprompted by any discussion of health problems. Their confessions seemed so sordid and their openness somehow frightened Sam. Those things were best kept secret—or at least discussed in the most veiled terms. Far from making Sam feel secure and professional, they made him feel somehow unclean.

Sam really didn't understand cosmetics and was momentarily regretful that he had let Helen go home earlier. But he was willing to guide the man as best he could, drawing from what he had read. Again, the man seemed to ignore Sam and rapidly picked several items. judging apparently by price and size—on both counts, the bigger the better.

As they walked to the cash register, the man continued to talk: "Well, that's everything for them, but it's too bad about that sweater. I really wanted to get the girl something nice."

Suddenly the man stopped, "Hey, how much is that record player, that looks real good."

"Twenty-nine, ninety-eight."

"Oh, I remember her always mooning around the house, 'How come we can't have a stereo—everyone else has a stereo and I never have anything.' Yes, that girl would be really happy with a stereo. Is that one a stereo?"

"Yes. Yes, it's a stereo." Sam had always wondered about that record player. He had a stereo, had bought it several years ago at Daryl and Diane's insistence. He had let them pick it out at a store then he had bought what they had specified from the wholesaler. He knew little about stereos, but knew his was complex and imposing and expensive. This one was small, plain and cheap. He somehow suspected this one could only be included in the same genre by the most elastic definition of terms. But he had read the label carefully; he trusted labels, and knew about the laws against false advertising. "Yes, it features genuine stereophonic sound."

"Hey, that's really great. That's better than a sweater any day. Her always complaining about not having a stereo. She'll really be happy when she sees that." The man was genuinely excited now. "Where'd you say those records are, and Doc, you got a box for that stereo?"

The man walked hurriedly to the record counter and Sam began to put the stereo in its box. Sam understood it all. Of course, it was a stereo, but it wasn't what the girl meant by a stereo. And she wouldn't be happy when she saw it. She certainly wouldn't be pleased by the records the man laid on the counter with the other items. She would appreciate much more one record by Elvis than all of the twenty original hits as sung by the Hollywood Voices he had in the store.

Sam suddenly understood this. He understood that this man wasn't going to make anyone happy. She wanted a stereo like his children, Daryl and Diane, had. Not some $29.28 record player from the drugstore across the highway. And the boy, if he wanted guns, knew exactly what he wanted. Some versatile, massive gun he had seen on TV, not some crummy tommy gun from the drugstore. And the baby boy, if he knew the names of the animals on TV, also knew his tractor and dump truck never had and would never have any hope of receiving the blessing of appearing on the screen before his wondering eyes.

Sam had learned this years ago. His children knew what they wanted, and their gifts had not come from the drugstore. He was even willing to pay retail prices for certain important items if absolutely necessary—if his wholesalers could not provide exactly what was needed. He wasn't quite sure what his children were getting for Christmas this year; he trusted Madge in that area. But he was secure in the knowledge that the boxes she had wrapped so carefully and they would together place under the tree tonight were appropriate and genuine and would please everyone, especially himself.

And he never felt guilty selling his items to his regular customers. They were like him and they knew the same things he knew. If they bought his products there was some good reason, and it was better for him not to interfere. They understood these things and understood the old saying, "buyer beware." No, there was no guilt involved in that. He was helping them save money.

But how could he explain that to this man? Could he explain anything to this excited man, excited with the happiness he thinks he will create? Would the man's bewilderment at his children's lack of excitement, their failure to make his excitement and happiness over his gifts their own, be the cause of yet another fight between the man and his wife? Would their failure to relieve him of his excitement make him find another outlet for it? Would the cologne and bubble bath end smashed on the trailer floor? Somehow in Sam's mind, fights in the trailer court always ended with broken glass.

He automatically rang up the price of each item as he thought of these things. Sixty-three dollars and forty-seven cents. The man was not surprised by this and carefully placed two twenties, two tens and four ones on the counter.

Would the man understand if he refused to take the money? How could he explain all of this to the man? How could he persuade him to return to the bar where he had conceived this insane idea of surprising his family on Christmas Eve? That it would be less sad to spend $63.47 drinking alone than to go to that trailer with these expectations?

Sam looked at the man, but he was smiling and thinking of the moments ahead and no longer thinking of Sam or the drugstore. Sam slowly picked up the money and laboriously counted out the change.

"Sixty-three forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty and fifty makes sixty-four."

The man put the box with the "stereo" under one arm and carried the sack with the rest in the other. He walked to the door, paused, turned to Sam, smiled and said, "Thanks a lot, Doc, for everything, and Merry Christmas."

Sam gently closed the cash register drawer and said, "Thank you, and Merry Christmas." He walked to the back and turned off the lights. As he walked back to the front through the dark aisles, he noticed the empty spot where the record player had been. He forgot his recent sadness and confusion and smiled to himself. He was glad the record player was gone. He had always been a little ashamed of it. He had felt it was somehow out of place in a drugstore and resolved not to reorder that particular item. He stepped through the front door and began to lock it. Suddenly, he reentered the store, walked purposefully to the candy counter and selected the largest box of Fanny May Christmas candy as a special surprise for Madge and his family.

He locked the front door, feeling satisfied and again justified in his decision and sacrifice to remain open Christmas Eve.

Some versatile, massive gun he had seen on TV, not some crummy tommy gun from the drugstore.

Gringo

Daniel Lucy

'74

I need my umbrella,
necesito mi paraguas;
for it would not do
to be wet and out
on the avenue in the summer
with a hole in my old
shoe, or an old hat,
un sombrero viejo, that
works no better than the old
barns I have seen in the countryside—
cuando viene la lluvia, when
it rains they are full
of wet pigs and roosters,
gallos mojados, and mud.

I will need my money,
necesitaré mi dinero;
I can buy sandwiches
in american restaurants
on the avenue, en la avenida,
and I could buy wine, vino,
red wine, vino rojo, like
that I have seen in the bars,
en los bares, where ceiling fans
spin through the hot afternoons
and women with purses
look out through their dark eyes,
puffing on long cigarettes,
cigarillos largos—

I can buy them, too,
las puedo comprar, también . . .

The Beachmaster

Daniel Lucy

My shelves were bookoorpulent; those
too are fatted words as I
might use, a Traherne or
a saint: all faces, nonetheless
are painted up
for nights along the avenue in Panama
beneath its beery bleary shore
of sky
(we shall never know how far, nor
in what fury that one galaxy presumed to go).

Somehow He is ours, and will
belong to us, our genealogy,
snorting in sleep about
some gutted shell of nautilitic
time small *t*

We moved through a vulturic
scenery of streets, preparations
for feasts sat on stoops,
watched the shocked xipilotes
It is all here in these
sessile volumes, I am sure,
full of gifts, of
interpretation, prophecy, tongues,
and begin to believe
the arguments that walls of buildings
breed by just their balance

Perhaps the infallible
EEG has fallen, a trick
of space or time a slight slip
of astronomy: a gamma where
should be an alpha, omega where
should be a mu, a verbal-scale where
there should be a searing arc
of graphite read and translated:
the wave-lengths on the beach bend
sinoidally toward Heaven.

What, Beachmaster, shall we tell
our friends? when they have seen
your flippers tight around me
whiskers crushed against my temples?
no defense, marine or entological
can save us now
for yes we are too far from land
too far from land;
Floating on a flotsam sea
amid the volvox kelp debris, the waves
tight-timed and synchronized turn
blond out toward the sun:
its shaftless light turns
the jetsam molten gleaming silvery
bombs of chic brilliance detonating
in the afternoon awash—

The Beachmaster laughs at
laughing matter, drifting off
with special ease
among the orangecrate carcasses
the army-issue corpses, barking
irreligious laughter that
explodes above the sea, bursting
in romancandle peals.

From Him I learned how it must feel,
learned: There is Time to play:
I cupped handfuls of wave
and wet His fur, played
steam boat
raft
dog
submarine
gull
turtle
barge,
porpoise, diving bell;

And when the sun erupts
in bloody evening and light
begins to crumble east to west
into a ruin of stars—

it starts to paint our faces up
for nights along the avenue in
Panama.

Snow Fell on the Parsley

Jane Tilford

Matthew woke up wondering if today they would come for breakfast. He scooted over the side of the bed to see. His toes touched icy-cold water under the open window. The outside world was shaken up, snowflakes falling and yawing in early white daylight. Now he knew. Today would be the day they came for breakfast.

He must get the orange juice out, and the peanut butter. And the pretzels and the pepper. What else to remember? Oh yes, parsley. Certainly, parsley. Because when snow fell on the parsley they came to breakfast. In the kitchen where snow never fell, of course, parsley grew in little pots. Matthew knew why they came to his house for breakfast when it snowed outside. Hurry, hurry!

"Peanut butter in plastic spoons, pepper on the pretzels.
Orange juice for everyone and
parsley parsley parsley."

He heard hungry whispering near the kitchen. Just in time he climbed a chair to undo the chain and let them in. The left tenant, because that's who came in first, nodded to Matthew. The others followed two and two, and the left tenant closed the door quickly to shut out the snow. The left tenant had a gold bar in his sleeve. It made his arm stick straight down. He was tall, not the very tallest, but they passed the parsley to him first because he was the left tenant.

"Is the orange juice all right?" Matthew asked.

"I want mine squeezed."

"Me too, please, no ulpy pulp."

"Bottled stuff, neat. Don't shake it."

"Frozen kind with pepper. I can stir it myself with my pretzel."

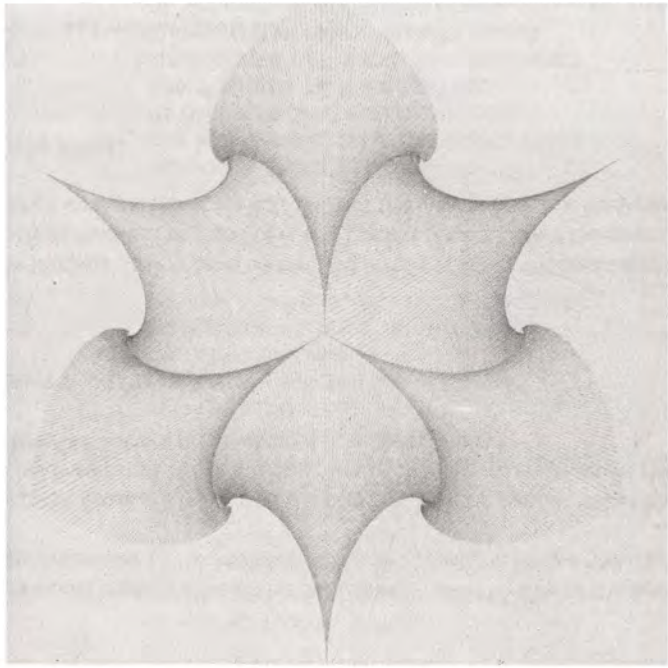
The left tenant didn't speak, he was staring across the kitchen with a churning look on his face. Matthew saw what he saw, and his cold toes stumbled as he hurried to rescue his oil truck, parked last night by the toaster. He hid it quickly in back of boxes by the hot air register.

"Sorry about that," he said sincerely, because he knew from last time they couldn't stand to look at anything with wheels. Wheels made their stomachs turn, they said.

The last crunchies of peanut butter stuck on the plastic spoons. They peppered them black, messed them in pretzel crumbs and put them in their pockets for a snack lunch. The parsley pots were passed around for one last sprig. The left tenant opened the door. They all saluted Matthew and went out, singing very softly.

"Peanut butter in plastic spoons, pepper on the pretzels.
Orange juice for everyone and
parsley parsley parsley."

Matthew fastened the door chain. He towed his oil truck from behind the boxes; it was warm from the hot air register. In bed he snuggled his cold toes around his warm oil truck and listened to the quiet snowstorm.

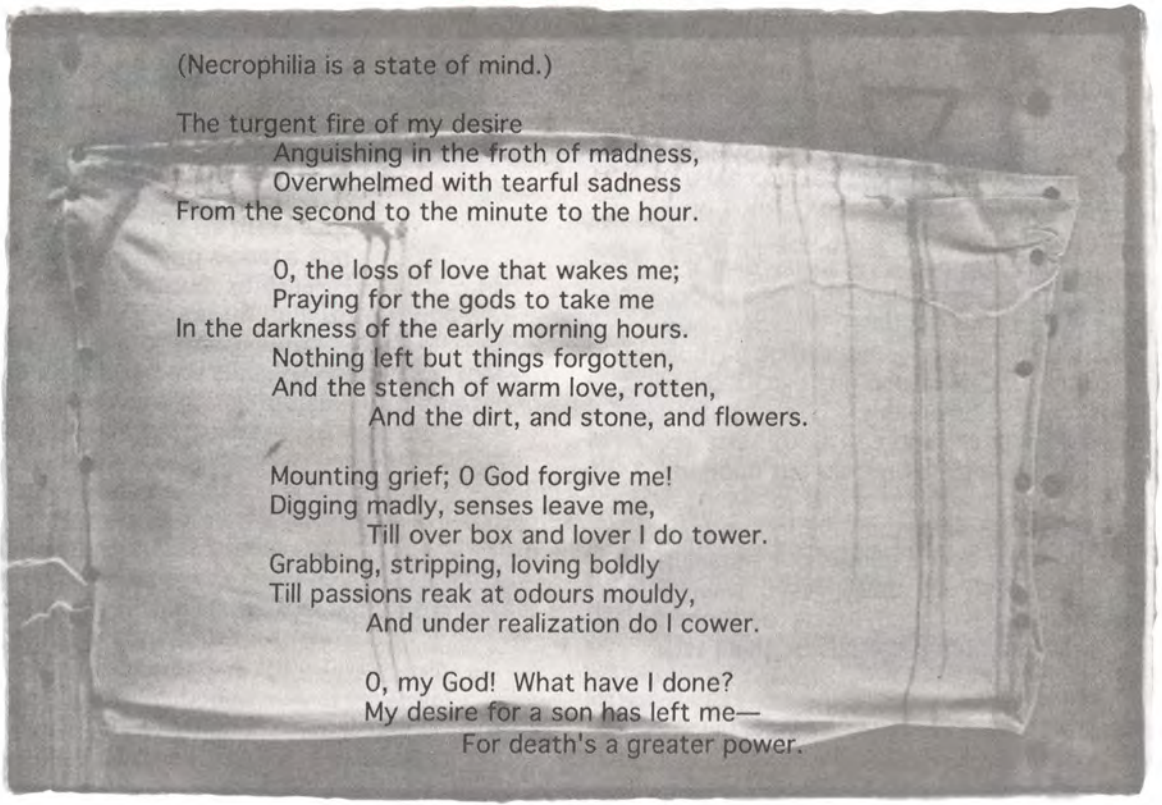


Crest, Michael Xue, 1987

In the Darkness of the Early Morning Hours

Dennis Sweet

'75



(Necrophilia is a state of mind.)

The turgent fire of my desire
Anguishing in the froth of madness,
Overwhelmed with tearful sadness
From the second to the minute to the hour.

0, the loss of love that wakes me;
Praying for the gods to take me
In the darkness of the early morning hours.
Nothing left but things forgotten,
And the stench of warm love, rotten,
And the dirt, and stone, and flowers.

Mounting grief; 0 God forgive me!
Digging madly, senses leave me,
Till over box and lover I do tower.
Grabbing, stripping, loving boldly
Till passions reak at odours mouldy,
And under realization do I cower.

0, my God! What have I done?
My desire for a son has left me—
For death's a greater power.

The Last Watch

Christy Austin

My stead they keep, though
I, not ready, bid them go.
Besides, public translations,
accompanied by shakes and howls,
beg greater justifications.
Instead they stand in my private time,
nodding, and shushing life as if
the solemn performance death plays is not
to be rehearsed, encored.
I, longer than they, can tolerate this closing.
They think me deal to the scratching in the earth.
The cakes have arrived. I smell the bouquets, too.
Soon I must forfeit or they'll state.
Someone said it is like sailing on a riftless tide.
Another that it is soaring, so glide.
Ignoble I say. Spittle and wheeze and
folkeyes to see it, wipe its brow and
suffer vicariouslies.
Away with you!—or me?
Irreducibility I seek: the I
stands alone and whole before the
void or throne, Cares the sky
that I sniffle, snicker, sound or bellow?
I doubt so. Maker/creature, come I to the
gallows, nest? Where the gate of
Universe and swings it side to side?
Face me, Christ, and show me your palms!
Retrieve, or suffer me not. Shy?
Too long the discourse, too short the doing.
Far away there is a quiet chatter growing small.
Restless watchers see distance in disease,
or age. Tulle and gossamer stretch their
lengths across me, wedding gown style:
while because I step unsoiled out, waiting
nervous as a girl's first kiss and blush:
is It also easier after the first time?
Come, groom, ravenous in your appetite.
Mine equals yours. Whether last or new
(I have charted moons and rivers)
this breath anticipates implosion, holy shattering.

Henry James in Indianapolis

Suzanne Perozzi

Henry James stepped off the train from Chicago at Indianapolis's Union Station. It was 5:00 PM, March 16, 1905. Charles W. Moores, president of the Contemporary Club, and H. H. Howland, editor of *The Reader* magazine, waited on the platform for him. James, an American expatriate for twenty-five years, was to be their guest at a small dinner party that evening at the University Club, and the next evening he was to lecture on Honore'de Balzac at the Propylaeum.

As Moores and Howland hurried James to the University Club (where he would stay while in Indianapolis), they noticed that James was surprised by the skyscrapers and impressed with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, which James Whitcomb Riley had dedicated three years earlier. But compared with centuries-old London, where James had lived a part of every year for the past twenty-five years, Indianapolis was still "a'borning," a large proportion of its population of nearly 200,000 inhabitants having moved from the farm to the city.

Arriving at the University Club, Moores and Howland introduced their renowned guest to the anxious staff gathered at the door and then watched James's stout frame advance to his quarters on the second floor. Probably the evening *Indianapolis News* awaited him, and there he read of himself:

> [James] is a person of large affairs . . . who has made a long, careful and sympathetic study of the great French master [Balzac] . . . and no one [but James], at least no English-speaking person, can give more interesting or valuable information.
>
> Mr. James has been a "great producer". . . and the Indianapolis Public Library contains of his works a greater list than any other living writer.

But also, some servant may have inadvertently left the *Indianapolis Morning Star* by James's bed. There he would have found an arresting editorial which advised those attending his lecture "to use a little reserve when speaking to him about his productions," because the highly self-esteemed author on touring Chicago, had been quite insulted when he found apparently few people there had read his books.

However, after thirty-five years, adverse comments rarely bothered James. He was making this trip for one purpose—money. He had lectured in Baltimore, St. Louis, and Chicago, and he was bound for California, receiving an honorarium with each stop. Alone in his room at the University Club, he must have smiled. Here in Indianapolis he was collecting a handsome figure: $400—which was $150 more than usual. It could have been still another hundred, $500 being the original figure offered him, but James, feeling flattered and magnanimous, declared, "Bloated Indianapolis!" and indicated the lower sum was quite adequate.

The one person who most probably influenced James' decision to come to Indianapolis was Booth Tarkington, whom James had met in New York in the fall of 1904 at a publisher's party. Booth Tarkington—James said the name aloud. He wouldn't be in this strange town if it weren't for their chance meeting in New York. Although Tarkington was in his mid-thirties and James was sixty-one, both men enjoyed traveling in Europe and writing about their impressions. The summer before they met, Tarkington had been in Europe and upon returning home had written an article about the Vatican for *Harper's Monthly*. After that article, he wrote a two-part story, "Beautiful Lady," portraying Americans in Paris. James was flattered. Was not this a young disciple?

The minutes passed quickly. James came steadily down the stairs to greet his host, Mr. Howland, and a "coterie of literary people," who were to honor him at dinner. On the next night, he would give his lecture and attend a more elaborate party. However, tonight the company was intimate, and James realized he must be cautious—and not respond as he had in St. Louis. There forty or so people had cornered him and asked his opinion of Lew Wallace, the Indiana author of *Ben Hur.* With growing impatience, James had said that he could not account for *Ben Hur's* success "except there are multitudes of people who have little taste; or upon the ground that religious sentiment is more prevalent here than elsewhere." This time he would be less hasty.

His caution caught the attention of the *Morning Star* reporter:

> It was immediately after dinner, and evidently the celebrity was engaged in some psychical activity foreign to the subject at hand. He finally managed to say:
>
> "I am delighted with it all."
>
> "How long were you in England, Mr. James?"
>
> "A very long time. Yes, a very long time' s the reply." Then by apparent heroic psychic effort, he continued. "I was there more than 22 years."

By evening, the *News'* report also contained his impressions which seemed to begin with light flattery, but still his thoughts seemed slow and ponderous, as if he tried to pick a careful path between truth and commendation.

> "I am not in the habit of giving impressions extempore so that I may not be able to say anything of importance . . . the total impression is more interesting especially in the West, which is all new to me. [St. Louis was, at this juncture, as far west as James had been.] I am struck with the enormous increase in material civilization . . . the multiplication of the arts; living is more convenient . . . it is a more interesting country to move about in . . . [I may find more beauties [in the far west] that are perhaps wanting in the middle part of the country. Meanwhile I find . . . in Indianapolis a little touch of the South. I was . . . [there] a few weeks ago and was sorry to come out of the comparative blandness and softness of those regions . . . . I met a snowstorm in Chicago. Now in Indianapolis, I come again into a more golden light."

Regardless of the feeling of the press, all Indianapolis was curious about James the man. The next evening, March 18, 1905,—the great lecture evening—the News announced: "Probably no more intellectual audience than that comprised in the membership of the three clubs, the Contemporary, Irvington Athenaeum, and Gentleman's Literary, assembled . . . to hear Henry James" and to judge him "well-fed, . . . anglicized in appearance, manner, and speech and with the look of the substantial investor."

Obviously, the audience was intrigued with James's personality rather than his lecture. Furthermore, the social notes of the March 18, 1905, *Morning Star* added, "The affair was chiefly interesting because of the list of guests, which included the literary men of the city." The one literary gentleman whom James wished for was missing—Booth Tarkington. Living in New York and writing articles for Harper's, Tarkington was working on a dramatization of *The Gentleman from Indiana.* Tarkington, among all the Indiana literati, would have appreciated James' lecture most: that the novel should be always a representation, and that Balzac coordinated character development with events and kept an effective treatment of the passage of time.

Ironically, James, the master of psychological insight, asked more than one hundred people on that March evening, perhaps only a handful of whom were half as well-read or as well-traveled as he, to recognize Balzac as the most inspiring of novelists. It was no wonder the next day's newspaper reviews would find James amusing and somewhat presumptuous. An Indiana winter found most readers snug before their fires with exciting adventure tales, such as *The Island Princess*, a serialized

novel currently running in the Morning Star, or with a romantic novel such as Alice of Old Vincennes. The day after James's lecture, the Indianapolis News criticized him, saying, "He apparently assumed that all of the brilliant assemblage were authors, novelists or about to become so."

One interesting anecdote regarding James's lecture concerns the dinner party following his speech and his dinner partner—James Whitcomb Riley. In Those Innocent Years, Richard Crowder, Riley's biographer, relates that Riley sat next to

> James, with whom he did not hit it off any better than he had with Matthew Arnold years before. Riley said later that this experience had made reading of James's novels easier because they were simpler than conversation with their author. As the halting talk turned to novels of Hardy, James remarked that he thought Hardy was gifted at finding suitable titles for his works—"A Pair of Blue Eyes", for example. When Riley commented that eyes generally came in sets, everyone burst into laughter, in release from the increasing tension of forced conversation and in delight at Riley's drollery. No smile flickered on the imposing face of James. Riley said nothing further. James simply wasn't a Hoosier . . . .

Riley's tone at the party seemed to foreshadow the next day's newspaper reviews of James's lecture, because the March 18th News called "The Lesson of Balzac" "monotonous." The same day's Morning Star allowed that "'The Lesson of Balzac' was thoroughly enjoyed and understood . . . but not by the common herd."

But the Morning Star's March 18th coverage of James's lecture was merely a warm-up to its editorial on the 19th: "People who read books tend to arrogate to themselves a certain superiority over the considerable element of respectable society which confines its reading to newspapers." The editorial then explained these same literary elect seemed to be humorless in their "arrogation"!

Two days earlier, on March 17th, the Indianapolis Sentinel, with provincial sensitivity, headlined James as "a former American" (when, in fact, James was not yet a British subject), and said he must have been pleasantly surprised to find an advanced civilization in the United States. The Sentinel petulantly added, "It should be said that the progress made is not due to reading Mr. James's inane books . . . evidently the middle country doesn't impress Mr. James."

If the Indianapolis newspapers carped about his intellectualizing, and if they showed poor manners to a distinguished visitor, they judged James no more sternly than other area journalists. The Reader magazine, a month before he arrived in Indianapolis, compared James "to the man . . . so refined that it was a wonder he could endure himself." The Reader explained, "Mr. James is not an easy talker. He finds difficulty expressing the simplest ideas and leaves many sentences unfinished . . . the bachelor life he had led has made him . . . finical and difficult."

But finical or kind, erudite or bewildering, James probably left more impressions than he gathered. On both sides, however, the impressions were certainly contradictory. James was "interesting to his audience," and "felicitous" or "monotonous," and had "a coldness to his eyes." Indianapolis was "in a golden light" or "bloated." In any case, a somewhat travel-weary, talk-tired James sat himself heavily in the cab that took him past the budding skyscrapers, the new post office on Meridian and Pennsylvania Streets, and between the streetcars to the bustling, red-stoned Union Station. There, with almost the entire $1,350 he was to earn lecturing before he traveled west, James said goodbye to a developing and changing young American city. A figure diametrically opposite to his Christopher Newman, James had become the old man to the new world.

In the Stick-wood

Mary Hirsch

In the stick-wood
the blackbirds came to roost
on your birth day, Rosalee
Shrieking down the sun
from bitten branches.

Born in a bitter time
of a love like a black wood box
clapping empty.

Little sister, I loved you for this:
that you dared drop living—
a heavy bead in thick water.

Even in my childhood
I felt the weight
and ran to the hill of witches
where the farmer's cat lay dead—
skeleton half buried—
to pray for a gentler omen.

Atlantis

Christopher A. Crocket

Surfaced madness strikes heart
with pounding fury
that breaks on rounded Shore
Capped by jagged ledge.

Silence. echo. Silence.
Wind calms to whispers.

Lapping on empty Beach:
intellect sifts
through loose Sand
to find one Grain
that is touched by Water.

The Boy

J.C. Starker

It was a cold winter and hard, biting naked trees and cows and people.The black and white one, the one with the full udders, was caught by the snowstorm which the wind turned to ice. She froze, udders full, froze and turned to ice.

They were living back in the woods then, back ten miles from the nearest neighbors There were only three children still alive and the woman was carrying again, her stomach swollen full. The man, nearing forty years, was bent like a tree thrown out of shape by the weight of young children hanging onto its limbs too early in its growing. They had had a bad harvest that fall and the bringing in of the crops had been easy because there hadn't been much to bring in. They'd done their best, the man had said, they'd done the best they could and the rest was up to God. The middle child, a boy turning eleven, thought it was a lot to put on God. He'd decided when they'd hauled in the last bit of corn that men shouldn't put so much on God, but try to do better themselves.

He was a mountain child, but strange though, even for the hills. His mother was Indian—full blood—her face brown and deeply etched with the secrets of long, cold winters and dry, rainless summers. His father was Irish. Now the man was sick and bitter with whatever it was that had invaded his body so early in the cold. He had drawn closer to the enemy within him and farther away from his family. No, the boy knew it was all too much to put on God. His Indian blood called out to the mountains to help them through the winter and his Irish blood apologized to God for man's helplessness. He was like all the children of the mountains for he knew more at ten about life than most men know at eighty. He had transcended age, soaking up the harshness of it as soon as he felt its wombless air, recognizing its goodness when the harshness became strength in him. The man had named him Bradley after a famous general, but the woman knew him as Wovoka. "A great man," she had whispered to him once, who had given the Indians much hope long ago. He was like the woman, stiff black hair and dark eyes close above high cheek bones. The other children were not. It was he she called as the sun peeked through winter clouds. It was he who was sent out to look for the cow.

She shook him in the dimness of the early morning, gently shook him, so that his wandering spirit would ease back into his body.

"Wake now," she urged softly. " Wake now, my Wovoka."

He opened his eyes slowly and saw her face—dark—above him. Her braids were bound in the morning, bound tight around her head. The loose dress she wore to cover the newness of life growing in her hung limp over him, weaving against his arms as he stretched them out to meet the day. He sat up quickly so that he might surprise the coldness in the morning with the warmth that sleep had given him, but as always it was he who was suprised, left shivering in the half-loft of their cabin. Below him he could see the room: the table hewn from oak, the long bench by its side; the fireplace, a few embers still living; the two chairs sitting before the fire. He knew if he leaned over he would be able to see the two beds directly below him.

"You go find the cow," she said. "She got out."

She held the lighted candle over him, and her face looked stiff and unsmiling, broken in the shadows flung onto it by the flickering light. But the boy knew her, knew her deeper than the outward shadows and loved her for the comfort he found within.

His sixteen-year-old sister Ida put a log onto the fire and turned to look up at him, her blonde hair swinging in the firelight.

"She's gone down in the pasture, Bradley. Looking for something to eat, I'd reckon. Didn't have sense enough to smell the snow coming."

He hurried down the swaying ladder as he rushed to the door and cracked it enough to look out across the yard. The snow which had come in the night to steal away the cow and the milk she would have given them was piled deep and high against the shed.

His mother followed him down the ladder and handed him his father's ragged coat, and the girl brought him his father's shoes which were the only pair in the house still solid enough to hold back the cold for awhile. He took a handful of parched corn—the last kind of food they had left—and then touched the pocket of the old coat. The hunting knife lay near his heart where his mother had thought to put it, and he knew without her saying what must be done if the cow could not come back with him.

"She'll be in the lower pasture," the girl called out as he opened the door. "She'll be there alright."

The shoes slipped along the snow, sometimes failing into loose places where the night had forgotten to freeze the white crust. He pulled the coat around his ears and chin, digging down into it for protection against the wind. He was lost in the coat, his skinny arms and legs lost in it, but he was strong. Whatever there was left hanging on his bones was muscle, ready to work for him if he called. He watched the sun break through the clouds, his eyes glancing upward for a moment out of the wind, finding a piece of sun coming down to him. That was enough for the boy in him, and more than enough to please the man that had started to grow out of the boy. His eyes did not speak to people, but saved their messages for the sun and the stars and lonely evening fires. What he said to them was still warm and full of wonder. They were more his brothers and sisters than those who claimed the same blood. He felt a ray of the sun touch his head as if someone had laid a hand upon him through the winter wind, and he hurried on no longer by himself. The sun came in and out again between the clouds, leading him, keeping him company.

He found the cow on her side, her legs already stiff in the snow. There would be no more milk, or cream for churning butter. The wolves had been at her meat. Their tracks were heavy and the cow's redness was spilled and frozen on her bed of white. He looked at her for a moment and then reached into his pocket for the knife to cut away as much as he could carry. There seemed to be an echo of a low as he remembered it from early mornings when he had milked her in the shed, and he lay a hand between her horns and rubbed the black spot upon her forehead as a farewell. He did not mourn her going as some young boys would. His memories did not gush and wash away, but remained steady and sure for all things that went beyond his comprehension and knowledge to follow. That she had been and had provided them with some comfort was enough to earn remembrance.

He slung the meat across his shoulder and started homeward, his footsteps deeper with the weight of his burden. The ice covering the small creek at the edge of the lower pasture broke, and the water ran like fire onto the soles of his feet, but he did not stop or show any sign that he felt the pain. That, too, was how he loved all that was on the earth. The pain was what he must bear to know the pleasure. The warmness would not be without the cold. Life was not without death.

They waited for him in the cabin, huddled about the fireplace, their eyes watching at the door as he came in. His father rose from the chair, a blanket thrown about his hunched shoulders.

"She be dead, then, Bradley?"

"The wolves got most of her," the boy answered, handing the meat to his mother, "down in the lower pasture."

His sister was holding the youngest child in her lap, feeding the baby spoonfuls of corn mush.

"I knew she'd head there," she said. "She ain't had but a handful of corn the last two days. Knew she'd head there, that stupid old cow."

His mother's face moved with a flicker of muscle and he knew she was thanking the cow for what she had left of herself for them. The

others could not understand.

His father shuffled back to his seat beside the fireplace and sighed as he sat down.

"There'll be no more milk and butter now."

The girl shrugged. "Wouldn't a been none much longer no how with no feed for her. She'd a starved to death."

His mother sliced off a small piece of meat and laid it to one side. Then she took the coat from him and opened the door to go out, but his father spoke from the shadows.

"That ain't all the meat you aiming to give us, is it, Sue?"

She stood, her back to them.

"Little meat today. Some tomorrow."

"We ain't had meat since the shells run out, woman. Can't we at least have a bite now?"

She closed the door and came back to slice off another small piece, but her hands seemed to hold back from the doing of it. The boy watched her bending over the task, her back protecting what was left of the food he had brought home.

"There ain't much there, Pa," he said.

"You'll git more, Bradley. You're a fine son; you'll git more from somewhere. Set the snares and pray. God knows, I wish I'd git rid of this sickness. You got to help, son."

From the corner of his eye the boy could see his mother slip outside, the rest of the meat hugged to her beneath the old coat. He could hear the weight of her body breaking through the snow as she went toward the shed.

The meat from the cow lasted a week. After that the boy continued to set his snares, bringing home an occasional rabbit, but game had gone away from them, looking for food where the ground had yielded better harvests, and they depended more and more on the corn. Near the end of December a traveler stopped by their place for the night and offered to take the boy's father into the town thirty miles away to get medicine and look for work when he was well enough. The sick man promised he wouldn't be gone for more than a week or two, but he came down with pneumonia on the trip and they heard he couldn't come back to them for a while. He sent enough corn to last until he could. He sent little else, for there wasn't much else where he was. The woman Sue showed no sign of concern. She had lived through such winters before. Her labor with birth did not begin until the second week in January.

The boy was the first to know her time had come. He watched her in silence while she busied her hands in the work of the day. She did her hair in long braids—fresh—and knotted the braids tight and smooth against her head. She sent him out to gather wood and kept sending him out until there was a huge pile beside the fireplace. She set the girl to shucking corn. The woman could not find enough to do. She swept the dirt floor and walked aimlessly back and forth, checking and rechecking items about the room. He watched her and knew that what she did was a sign that her time was close.

Night banked around them, a cloudless night, the snow outside glowing day when he went into it to breathe. He could see across the near pasture to where the woods began, where the darkness settled in like a sleeping child beneath the blankets. He could even see his mother's footsteps carved into the snow from her wanderings during the past week, and he bent to touch them, to put his hand inside their walls. He felt a belonging to them, as much a feeling of belonging as there was to the woman inside.

When he went back into the cabin, he saw that she had laid down at last, still restless and unrooted in her task. The girl was sitting by the fire, her foot swinging in slow, rhythmic arcs toward the flames. There had been seven children born in the room and there were no secrets to the birth of another. The woman would let them know if she needed help.

They waited through the night, the boy falling asleep and waking suddenly many times. He could hear the quick short gasps for air that his mother drew, but other than these she gave no cause for wonder. It was a

natural thing, coming into the world. He knew it was as natural going out, for three of his brothers and one sister had already gone, dying when they were still too young to have their names lodged tightly in his memory. Only the shapes of their fragile, limber bodies being laid in the small boxes his father made were all that remained of them for him.

Near dawn he heard the cry of a baby coming out into the room. Then there was another cry floating up into the loft. He slipped from the covers and leaned over to look beneath him. His sister heard him moving and looked up.

"We have two new sisters," she called. "Two of them."

He climbed down the ladder and ran to see the small pink skinned girls wiggling on the blankets. He looked at them coolly, studying the way they moved, the way their mouths opened in small dark circles when they cried. He thought babies ugly, their faces mashed and bitter at first. He had always thought new-born faces much uglier than those of the new-dead, and had decided that whatever surprises death had for a person, they weren't as harsh as what life handed out right from the beginning. They couldn't be or the face would show it. All the faces of death he had seen told him there weren't so many surprises waiting—perhaps none.

The babies were sticky with birth and his sister washed them and wrapped them away from the air. His mother watched, her eyes showing neither pleasure with their cries nor pain with the loss of their fullness in her belly. They had already become people outside of her. She watched him too and closed her eyes when she was satisfied with seeing enough.

His sister wiped the hair from her face. "Bradley, throw on some more wood. We're gonna need some kind of meat for her too. Something to keep her strength up. All we got is corn. That rabbit's done gone you brought home a couple days back."

He set his snares that day and the next, but caught nothing. Each time the skins he had wrapped around his feet for shoes loosened and he grew cold. On the third day his mother came down with child-birth fever, her dark eyes growing larger and deeper into her head. Corn was parched and fed to her while the boy was gone. He would have known that a person with fever should not be given corn. The woman's milk dried up and there was nothing to feed the new-born. They cried into the night, they cried before dawn, and they could almost be heard when the woman died, but they were weak and did not cry too loudly through it all. One had already followed its mother by the time the boy left to seek help from the nearest farm ten miles away.

He crossed the upper pasture toward the woods, his feet feeling heavy with the skins bound tight and he did not think about the quiet he had left behind. It would be there when he returned. He watched the clouds instead, changing in the sky, finding him, leaving him, giving him shapes of beasts and angels, feeding him with the secrets of the long winter. He did not think past the clouds, but thought into them, filling them with himself while he was being filled. There was a silence with them, like the silence in the cabin, and he began to see that it was not sound which moved either, but a wind that blew too high for him to feel against his skin, a wind that moved them into different shapes until he knew not one from another but knew them all as shapes beneath one sky.

He was three hours getting to the Stidham's farm and found them sitting down to the noon meal. His eyes rested on the food which called out to him and the woman, seeing his eyes there, offered him something to eat. The table was only a little better provided for than his own, but the man had a gun and shells left, and meat steamed on the cookstove. Their cow had provided them with milk and the woman had butter, cool and gold, waiting for him. He ate until his greediness made him ashamed, and he sat before their fire while the man made ready to leave. The woman's heart felt deeply for the boy and she sent back some of the meat for his two sisters and a gallon jug of milk for the baby. She offered to take the new-born child and the boy said yes, he would send it back to her, if it was living. She hurried up as he began to leave, an old pair of shoes and coat held out to him. He thanked her with a nod of his head and put them on.

"You got a saw over at your place, boy?" the man asked.

"We got one, but we ain't got nails."

The man took some from his own supply and shoved them deep into the pocket of his coat. They stopped on the way back and cut the trees to make the coffin. It would be simple, the man said. It would have to be simple. The boy told him that was all they needed, something simple to bury her in. The man watched him, waiting for some sign of grief, but none came and the man told his wife later that the Barger boy was mostly Injun.

His mother was buried the next day in the rough coffin the Stidham's man had built during the night. They wrapped feedsacks about her and placed the baby on her breast. The coffin had been crowded with the two of them leaving, filled with them, but the boy had kept looking at the clouds and had only once looked into his mother's face. The quiet had been there. There had been no ugliness about the face, but a stillness that settles over things at peace with the earth. His sister Ida sang a few lines from a hymn she had heard once and then she cried a few tears. The younger girl cried too because the older one did, while the boy hid behind his eyes and helped shovel dirt into the grave.

They thanked the man while he knocked frozen dirt from the shovel and asked if they could make do until their Pa got back. The girl said she'd appreciate it if he'd send word over to her Pa about the burying. That was all they had to say to one another. The man took the new-born with him, but returned every two weeks with meat for their table. He always stood uneasy when he brought it, eager to go back to his own place and his talkative wife. The Barger youngens were too quiet, he told her, too quiet for being youngens.

The snow had melted in a few places, leaving black holes reaching through to the ground, when their father came back to them. The boy heard the low of a cow and the stomping of a horse's hoofs before he heard his father call out. He heard the voice of a stranger, too, a woman's voice, as he opened the door. They were together, turning toward him, his father and the woman, and he moved back into the room as they came in sweating through their winter clothes. The sun was at their backs, warming them, working at their footsteps in the melting snow. His father clapped his shoulder, hugging the boy to him with his rough hand.

"This here's Bradley, my boy," he said proudly. "Near like his Ma as you'll find a youngen' to be, but Barger blood through and through all the same."

The woman smiled, her face flushed, her blue eyes wide open to him, exposing the person that danced on their surface. The boy shielded himself from their nakedness and ducked his head to escape for a moment in an embarrassed silence. The woman took no notice but went on, grabbing up the youngest girl and setting down with a swift smile toward his older sister. The man walked over to her and laid a hand upon her head.

"Youngen's, this is Stellie, the Widder Durham, your new Ma."

The girl's eyes opened with a flicker of surprise, jumping toward her father who grinned helplessly.

"Ma?" she asked.

The woman loosened her coat, juggling the youngest on her knee.

"Well, I'm aiming to give it a try," she said. She took in the cabin with a look. "Yancy Barger, you didn't tell me you didn't have no flooring. Ain't it a wonder these youngens don't have whooping cough or worse!" She held the small girl's face in her hands and peered closely at her. "Seem to be alright, too skinny though. A floor's to be laid as soon's it's possible, Ain't no need for the dirt floor, Yancy."

"Now, Stellie, I been aiming . . ."

"Aiming ain't doing," she said cheerfully. They laughed then—together—and the sound filled the room. It filled his sisters until they smiled. His father sat down and was still for a moment and spoke quietly, his eyes staring down at a piece of wood falling loose from the fire.

"I been laid up over at Stellie's for the past months. I reckon I' be dead if she hadn't took care of me . . ."

"Now, Yancy, you just needed a bite, that's all twas to it, and a

little tonic . . ."

"Well, maybe, maybe not. Anyways, I was so sick that I couldn't make it back here. Then Stidham sent word about yer Ma. Stellie was all fer setting out herself—I was still too bad off to travel. I said you youngens was able to do fer a few weeks." He looked over at the boy. "I knowed you'd see the girls got through, Bradley . . . then, just seemed natural to bring Stellie on back here with me." He paused again. "I was heartsick about yer Ma, Bradley. That I was. She was a good woman and a good wife. Ain't nobody that'll ever say different."

The boy was leaning by the door, the light from the low fire just touching his face. There was a draft coming in through the door facing, cool, but bringing in a piece of the sun to mingle with the warmth from the fire. It blew against his feet, bare on the dirt floor. The air was good, touching him.

The woman stood up, setting the child beside her while she took off her coat.

"Lord, it's warm in here, ain't it. We're aiming to bring yer sister back over here from the Stidhams." She spoke to no one in particular, but to all of them, filling the room with herself and her voice. "Yancy, we'd best git them animals up and the supplies on in."

The boy grabbed at the door, jerking it open before his father could rise from the chair.

"I'll look to them, Pa," he said, rushing out into the day, his feet splattering the melted snow in front of the cabin. He had to see, he needed to see once more. He ran across the yard toward the shadow of the shed where the snow was more solid. His mother's footprints were still there, although broadened by the air blowing forth the coming spring. They were changing shape, no longer carved smoothly, but loose and soft. He could see the ground at their base and he placed his hand onto the bottom of a wide print, the movement disturbing the walls of snow until they tumbled onto his fingers. He could feel the dampness of the earth and the wetness of the snow, and he was between them with her and belonged. There was a changing in the wind and the cow called out to him. He pressed his hand hard against the ground and withdrew it to rub the mud across his forehead and around his face. It dried on him while he led the cow to the shed, and later the covers dusted it from him while he slept, but the memory of it was never washed away. There remained upon his face, for the rest of his life, a look of belonging more to the earth than to those who roamed its surface.

Untitled, Rick Callahan, 1985

To Our Next Hundred Years—With Wisdom

Patricia Watson Grande

Bicentennial Essay Competition
The Indiana American Revolution Bicentennial Commission
$500 Essay Prize

In the past two hundred years our nation, the United States, has grown from thirteen beleaguered colonies to fifty sovereign states united into an international power. But our next hundred years will be the hardest: we must take time to consolidate and refine the progress of our past. We must examine where we are and plan where we wish to go. The moon, Mars, even Alpha Centauri are not our true frontiers; our frontiers are of the intellect. What good to colonize space if we take with us the problems we have failed to solve on Earth? Such problems as overpopulation, destruction of the environment, and exhaustion of Earth's resources must be solved. We cannot allow ourselves to spread through the universe like a plague of locusts. It is essential that we learn to conserve what we have not yet destroyed. It is essential that we learn to cope with our technological age. It is essential that we achieve wisdom.

In our third century, we will explore planets as yet uncharted, but, if we do not explore ourselves, we will not have the wisdom we need to cope with our newly acquired knowledge. Old ideals are crumbling and ancient laws seem no longer valid; with the advent of space travel, what goes up no longer must come down. We must search within ourselves for tools with which to deal with the future. As we face our next hundred years, it will be essential for us to explore ourselves and arm ourselves with wisdom born of self-awareness. Must we curse our knowledge because we lack wisdom?

Wisdom is never based on expediency. Collectively, we must take time to assimilate all that is within our reach. Peering over the horizon is the genie of genetic manipulation. Whether this genie is good or evil will depend on wise judgment. Our scientists are capable of DNA tinkering as the mysteries of genetics are being laid bare. We can create new forms of plant and animal life; we may develop a plant to feed starving millions or we may unleash a new virus that would make a food shortage immaterial. These potentials must be comprehended fully before we advance again. We have had a flowering of creative technology and it is now mandatory for our psychology and philosophy to keep pace. Let us take care: we are playing with the tools of God.

Man the destroyer is still multiplying at awesome rates throughout the world. With the advent of modern medicine, our numbers are growing in geometrical progression. With overcrowding comes mental stagnation, a resignation to one's fate: consider the mental lethargy and emotional hopelessness of India, and weep. We do not yet have solutions for these griefs, but we must find answers soon.

We must examine our ethics and search our consciences to determine how we shall limit our numbers. Perhaps the future medical ethic will be not to immunize against the killer diseases, only the cripplers. If, by immunization, we prevent a measles epidemic from wiping out half the children of a primitive tribe, we must educate the tribe to increase their crops to feed not only these children but also their progeny. The medical miracles of immunization, sanitation, and antibiotics have led to problems of population undreamed of by Jenner, Lister, and Fleming, who thought they were saving mankind. What value to escape smallpox only to face starvation?

The hypothetical mother who no longer must lose five children to

diphtheria and four to typhoid can also no longer have ten children in the hope of raising one to maturity. The ancient ideal of having many children to save the tribe must give way to the new ethic of fewer children to save the world; or, as an alternative, we will be limited by the natural factors of famine, pestilence and war.

In our crowded cities, we are faced with increased violence on the part of not only criminals but also police. Indianapolis police were recently issued .357 Magnum handguns with dum-dum bullets, a weapon outlawed in World War I because it was too inhumane.

Violence is increasing everywhere. Let's not waste time criticizing our folklore or popular entertainment. We thrive on violence but do not cope with it. Perhaps a new philosophy of child rearing will change the pattern or Transcendental Meditation will fulfill its promise to reduce crime. We have a mandate to either reduce violence or learn to live with it.

Anyone who has been in military service, a crowded dormitory, or a poorly constructed apartment building knows that lack of privacy is an ever-increasing human problem. The territorial imperative is deeply ingrained in our psyches and sometimes, without knowing why, we lash out at others who intrude. What will our streets be like when we have rush-hour traffic all day long? It will be necessary for us to resolve our inner conflicts regarding interaction with others before we can live in close harmony with each other. Imagine the nerve-shredding togetherness of lengthy space travel!

As we will always have among us the adventurers, the explorers, so shall we also have the inadequate, the non-producers. More mechanization, more technology, mean less manual labor and less economic opportunity for persons on the lower end of the intelligence or motivation scale. Is our only alternative to do as the Chinese do: plan labor for uniformed masses who toil as robots at mindless tasks? Who wants to exist in a navy blue anthill? Having useful work to do is a foundation of happiness, a base for the architecture of self-esteem. With all our mechanization, we should yet have the wisdom to leave meaningful tasks for those who cannot aspire to loftier dreams.

As we are all, further, inheritors of the earth, we must preserve our environment or perish as we destroy it. Yet, this cannot be the concern of one nation alone. When Brazil started to bulldoze and pave the oxygen-producing Green Hell of the Amazon jungle, a few scientists voiced concern that this would cause far-reaching climate changes. England suffered its greatest drought in history this year. Not until after the Caribbean islands were denuded of their trees to make way for sugar cane was the relationship of forests and rain comprehended. One nation—the United States—no longer stands alone and will be even less alone in the future. How can we continue to consume the high percentage of Earth's resources that we do when multitudes lack even survival necessities? Our oceans no longer shield us from the world's realities and we must confront the world's problems as our own. We cannot continue as consumers of plenty in the midst of want; we cannot continue to destroy the earth in our search for fuel and other riches.

Even land-building involves destruction. It is only in 1976 that we have become aware of the value of our wetlands, those strange half-sea, half-land marshes that nurture marine life. For decades we patted ourselves on our collective backs for "building land" by dredging swamps. Florida is now infamous for destroying the mangroves, those nurseries of the sea, to build condominiums. In the future, we must learn all the infinite values of a particular type of land before changing it. We must learn to build without destroying. It is a part of wisdom to determine the best use of land and sea.

We have the power not only to move mountains, but to plumb the depths of the seas. We had hoped to find a treasure trove of food hidden in the sea, but the watery cupboard is rapidly becoming bare. There are a few "sea farms" producing oysters and shrimp; in the Caribbean is an experimental facility raising green turtles. But farming the sea appears to be a dream for the future. In our next hundred years, hopefully, we will at least stop polluting our oceans and learn how to breed and herd fish rather

than hunting the wild ones to extinction.

In our frantic search for food, oil, coal, gas, gold, diamonds, we are, with a vengeance, wielding our dominion over the earth. It is for us and our young people to replenish the ravaged strip mines, the polluted waters, the decimated wildlife. We must do this with courage, vision, and wisdom. We have preserved the last of several species of wildlife in zoos or other protected areas. We have helped increase their numbers and returned them to their natural habitats, or to some similar areas that did not block a valuable mineral deposit or the way of progress. The Hawaiian nene geese are an example of this replenishment, as is our salmon restocking program; for whooping cranes and the great sea turtles, it is too soon to judge the outcome. As our youth become more interested in preserving the beauty of the earth, they can develop more sophisticated ways of preserving endangered species. Operation Noah's Ark employed rowboats to save animals drowning in the dammed Nile. It will be essential to save as many diverse forms of wildlife as possible, simply because our land is diverse and in diversity lies survival. The relationship of mercury-poisoned tuna to people is only slightly more distant than that of the caged canary to the old coal miner: if they go, we go. Let us dedicate ourselves and our young people to replenishing the earth and protecting it from further damage. We have the technology for such preservation; do we have the wisdom?

Evaluating our priorities will become ever more necessary. When environmentalists wanted to forbid killing passenger pigeons, the pigeon killers responded that this would destroy their livelihood. Now environmentalists want to regulate the fluorocarbon industry because fluorocarbons destroy the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, causing unmeasured damage by allowing more dangerous ultraviolet radiation to reach the earth. The fluorocarbon industry protests that it generates eight billion dollars a year and employs over a million Americans and regulation would destroy their livelihood. Our government has decided to wait two more years for further evaluation of the problem before recommending regulations. Where are our values?

Our idealistic young are developing greater social consciences than ever before in history. They, who will carry this nation forward, organize peace marches, work on food lifts, suffer beatings for other people's civil rights and give their hearts to presidential candidates they believe will save the world. Their dedication is symbolized in dress: not the cashmere sweater, strand of pearls and tweed skirt of the forties, but blue jeans for all, a unisex uniform that speaks of non-materialistic values. They do not envision Huxley's *Brave New World*, nor does *1984* darken their horizon. They are civilly disobedient and their religion is psychology.

Psychology and philosophy are keys to the mysteries of the mind. The wisdom of understanding ourselves enables us to understand others and, thereby, the world. We have not yet resolved our old problems and there are ever-new and more complex questions springing up as from dragon's teeth. Defining our values, setting our priorities, knowing ourselves and our needs are steps along the way to dealing effectively with our future.

Our present task is to prepare our youth to face and solve the problems of growth, ecology, economy, population, dwindling resources, future shock, culture shock, the technological explosion. It will be their task to bring order to this chaos. They, who will live in the next hundred years, must deal with problems that are not yet even in our nightmares. But we can and must show them where to find their tools.

Psychology offers salvation of the mind if not the soul. The positive emphasis of humanistic psychology may be the saving of mankind; for every person to fulfill his potential and give his best to society may lead us through our technological wilderness. The future is fast upon us and without self-knowledge we are lost. We must learn to cope with rapid change, with ethics necessitated by new technology: When is someone dead? Does each person have to ask for death? Will doctors become modern Torquemadas, snatching people back from the welcoming black wings of death,foiling the failing heart, the insensate brain? It is not death who has

the sting; it is life. Will the cloth, water, and fire be replaced by the heart pump, breathing machine, and temperature regulator? Do we have the philosophies necessary to cope with these questions? Where, then, can we learn? In short, will technology require a new theology?

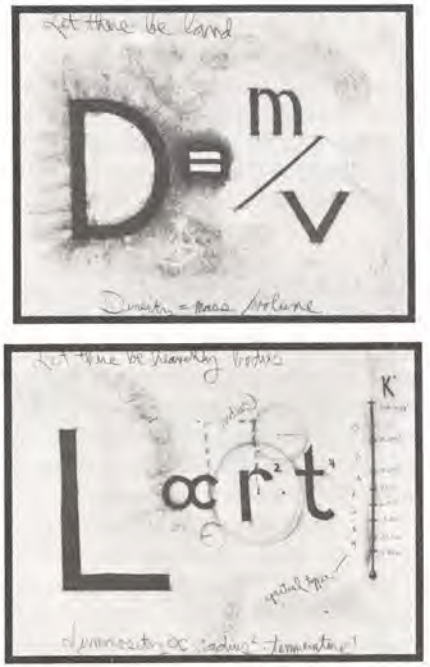
Therapists are the father confessors of the new theology. The petition, "Father forgive me for I have sinned," has become, "Therapist understand me for I am distressed." Surely no priest in the confessional has guarded more secrets than therapist in the clinic. Is it that we cannot face ourselves alone, that we must have a confessor hold the mirror that reflects our feelings? Fortified with acceptance or absolution, we explore inner space and find the origins of wisdom with which to know and understand ourselves. After we have vanquished our private demons, we can start toward new horizons. We need to achieve the wisdom of knowing ourselves. We need to achieve self-acceptance in order to accept others. We need to achieve self-confidence in order to have confidence in others.

We need wisdom to live with one another. Our society is a rich, yeasty mix of cultures—a source of its strength. Successive waves of immigrants have added to the blend, sharing bits of culture, absorbing parts from others, yet each group has maintained its identity. The Irish cop, Jewish intellectual, Italian restaurateur, German engineer, Chinese laundry man, Japanese gardener, Swedish lumberjack, Mexican bracero, English shopkeeper, Portuguese fisherman, all have joined to make this nation great, yet retained their individualities. We must learn to live in this hearty brew, utilizing one another's strengths, bracing one another's weaknesses. It will be a part of our wisdom to enhance all contributions.

Our vision leaps from exploring the seas to exploring space. We bend the rivers to our will and harness the winds and the tides. Ours is the earth and everything in it, yet we have not wisdom. Let us pause in our headlong rush of conquering technology to reassess ourselves and our values. We must ever return to the fundamental questions: Who are we? What do we want? Where are we going? Why don't we understand ourselves? When will we acquire wisdom? How shall we prepare our youth for the future?

Those are questions that must be answered in the future. Before us lie the challenges of the next hundred years. Let us meet those challenges with wisdom.

Wisdom—that harvest of knowledge which permits sound judgment, that depth and breadth of mind, that mental poise, that quality more rare than rubies—wisdom we must have.



Untitled, Mark Simmons, 1982

An Investment

Ruth Rogers Streeter

I string my words
Like Mary's necklace.
Unrighteous Mary, whose
Hot-house grandmother
Sends one sound pearl
Supine in cotton and silver paper
Each birthday.
She would have had twenty-five
This year
Had she not glued them all
To the soap dishes
She sells in her shop
Along with inlaid
Chairs stolen
From her great-aunt's
Basement storage.
Twenty-five, she said,
Are not enough
To close my loud throat
Or even bind a wrist.

Bloody Morning

Brad Frost George

There's star blood all over the grass.
Doves wail amid a ragged weave of
shadow light and limbs,
as morning, gloating, dances
across the steaming fields,
his feet sticky with crystalline gore.

The Keeper of the Sun

Thomas R. Hesselgrave

Early dawn on an east coast beach. But the faintest of light touching a cloudless, moonless sky. The air has a fresh dampness, and it is quiet, excepting of course the comforting, omnipresent slapping and washing of the busy sea. Such power.

Low tide. The beach is strewn with treasures which have been swept ashore and deposited by the receding waves. But is okay. Later, when the sun is at one third, the tides shall return and reclaim them. Simple.

A man emerges from over a dune, which has been pleasantly arranged near a row of tall stately palms, where the darkness has yet to be compromised. He grows by degrees, from a wide-brimmed hat, then face, featureless in the dim, followed predictably by shoulders, wide and thin, then much narrowness, more narrowness, until finally bare feet plod to the sandy crest. He is whole. His clothing is light of color, sun-bleached and jaggedly torn off at the elbows and knees, ragged and poor-seeming. But the man's stature belies any hints of raggedness or of poverty. He is kingly. He walks surefootedly, in complete body control, like a moccasined mountain man of times long past.

He pads across dry, loosely piled sand, which stretches perhaps thirty yards from the dune, then he is out onto the glistening plate of wet, solidly packed beach; and finally to the water's edge. Gentle, spent waves play over his toes. It is cool.

Boldly, with lithe, rope—like arms resting familiarly on hips, he faces and intently surveys the seaward skyline. He is motionless. A thin pink ribbon of light magically builds along the entire breadth of horizon.

His tongue clucks softly, contentedly. "Yes," he says quietly, but not without pride, "we will do for ourselves nicely today."

He doubles over, the hands moving from hips to knees, and he begins searching the water. He dips one square, sun-browned hand into the sea to come up with an unusually shaped and colored half-shell. Bringing it closely to his pale eyes, he examines it minutely, expertly, rolling and rubbing it between a callused thumb and forefinger, grunting appreciatively, admiringly.

Arising finally, he automatically checks eastward, while unconsciously dropping his find into a breast pocket, patting it once, for safety. The east is resolutely growing brighter. Pleased at the progression, the man begins methodically walking along the beach, frequently stopping to pick among the stranded prizes. Many he fingers; most he painstakingly replaces; some he files in a shirt or pants pocket. Later, when there was time, he would check over them all more precisely. Gulls glide effortlessly into the wind, like so many white paper cut outs. The man notices each of them.

But it is late: There is a redness aglow where before there had only been pink. Fire on the horizon!

The keeper of the sun unhurriedly turns obliquely towards land, stopping now, bending, fielding a shiny quarter, filing it in a pants pocket. There is time, as he of course must know. A short walk. He defiantly, wastefully bends once more, to feel the smooth of a small ocher tinted shellfish, and he fleetingly glances behind. There are but moments to spare. The east bespeaks a grand urgency.

He seats himself into a practiced, welcoming pose—a lotus position of sorts, with arms laid openly at his sides. Facing into the colorful ablaze, the rugged man—texture of the lone figure becomes bronzed, but not coldly so. Rather than refracting, he seemingly absorbs the warmth as

well as the light, and the resultant glow appears inwardly generated instead of a mere reflection. There is a peacefulness.

The sun, of course, arises gloriously, as is its way. It bounds from the sea, as though attached on an end of rope being hoisted like a splendid anchor. In minutes it is sky-born. Complete.

The man is filled. He stirs, gaining his feet, swiftly, easily, effortlessly, and begins walking back to where the waves busily cleansed on the littered beach.

And he wondered but just a fleeting wonder whether the sun, like the sound of the proverbial tree falling in an unmatched forest, would surface if there were no one to witness. But such wondering was idleness, of course, because he, the keeper of the sun, would never allow for such a preposterous chance.

Cover, 1975

Shooting Baskets

H. John Schafer

In this green world glowing
between sunset and storm-break,
a shirtless farmboy shoots baskets
against the wall
of the faded barn.

Caught up in the hollow bounce
assured in motion
in the muscle of his youth;
he pivots and shoots,
the magic line: desire,
through heavy air
the sure arc
from fingertips to hoop.

Nearer, thunder booms
like impacting boulders;
his heart taps beneath his skin,
he jumps
flinging a rainbow of sweat
a crown of dreams from his brow;
sectionals, regionals, sweet Jesus
the State, all in one shot.
His grace is in striving.

The dirty rain begins
and he rubs the chill
from his smooth arms
as summer light fades;
though his hands cling
to the dark ball
he knows he is born to the line
of the land and the arc
of the plow.

Generation '78

Natalie Nicholls

We could not force that sperm and egg to meet,
tangle and split the chromosomes,
select boy, girl, hair, chin or nose
or specify a certain temperament.

We feed him, clothe him, teach him right from wrong,
take pride in his intelligence,
presume to chart his life, advise,
though we could not choose the color of his eyes.

Won't You Please Buy an Organ from this Man?

David Mick

Fresh out of place, a dangling proposition I was, newly crowned Master of Arts in English Literature by the Hook. Em Horns Oil Conglomerate—more commonly known as the University of Texas: employable as hell. So I put all those words to work and penned a letter to my old childhood chum, the inimitable Herbert Erdy; surely, he could use an extra hand and foot. He replied:

Dear Dave,
We need another organ salesman—the job's yours!
As soon as you get back to Muncie, stop in and see me.
Herb Erdy, Manager
Music Wonderland
Muncie, Indiana

I scotchtaped Herb's letter to my bathroom mirror, near where I often meditated my plight. Those five years of prepubescent piano lessons were finally paying off. I was now being blessed with the opportunity to charm make-up-caked spinsters and schizoid housewives by playing on the organ "Somewhere My Love" indefinitely. But only until the d.p. (down payment) was thick in my fist.

As a fledgling organ salesman I was eager to learn the art of musical manipulation. My first week on the job I climbed aboard the various organs, caressed the grain. twisted the knobs, and struggled to learn the smooth slide from "Yellow Bird" into easy installment plans plus six weeks of free group lessons. Herb tutored me; he was the Socrates of Sales Pitches.

"One of the best lines you'll ever use," Herb instructed, "is when you've finished your demo songs and hyped up the hoopla of owning an organ. Now you've got em in your office and you've drawn up the papers, but the old man doesn't want to part with part of his stash. So you turn to the wife and say 'Bonnie, would this organ make you happy?' She stares straight ahead and says 'Yeah.' And you turn to the husband, that stingy bum, and say 'Bob, you wanna make Bonnie happy. Don't you?' "

Herb shrugged his shoulders rhetorically. "What's he gonna say," Herb asked, "no?" Herbs cheeks fattened into a grin as he emphasized, "it works every time."

Frequently those first weeks Herb and I would stand toward the back of the showroom and watch as people entered the store and wandered about the pianos or organs or both, like nervous, curious chickens.

"Fish?" I asked hungrily. Fish was what Herb called customers who looked like probable buyers. Herb could smell them one-hundred feet away.

"Not fish," he answered, "better!" He glared at the prey. "Not fish . . . whales!"

golumpf.

golumpf.

In walks a stout woman of fifty with a beehive hairdo and legs like a gladiator. Behind her tags along a gaunt, lonely looking man in a gas station attendant's shirt, chain smoking Camels.

"Whales." Herb whispered. "Now watch."

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I was silent, abashed at this revelation. Forty-two minutes later Mr. and Mrs. Earl Ueker were the overwhelmed owners of a $2,600 Tone-

O-Sizer organ. Mrs. Ueker preferred an out-of-stock model, the Spanish Sierra Oak, but Herb convinced her that her husband, a mechanic by trade, could easily refinish a white French Provincial by stripping the paint and brushing on some speckled lacquer. I told Herb later he ought to patent his idea on speckled lacquer before someone else invents it. Still, I never saw a more or less euphoric man and woman as Earl and Beatrice Ueker as they left Herb's office clutching colorful brochures and a small stack of Herb's business cards. What had they heard that so mesmerized them? I had much to learn.

Three weeks on the job, not even a whale to my credit. Herb called me into his office for a pep talk. It was early August and the annual county fair was rapidly approaching. Music Wonderland always had a tent of organs at the fair and Herb frequently bragged of how many organs he sold at last year's fair: twenty-three in nine days. To Herb the fair was a salesman's Eldorado. People would wait all year for the fair and some would drive many miles to endure the heavy August heat, to walk circles ceaselessly around the midway, to be barked at, taunted, and tempted to open their wallets and purses just one more last time—all in the name of Fun. Herb gurgled with enthusiasm.

"Time for Big Bucks, Dave. You'd better brush up on all your demo songs, especially "Petticoat Junction"; that train whistle at the end never fails. I want you to be prepared at the fair because there'll be hundreds of people walking past our tent. All you gotta do is hook their attention with a couple of songs—let 'em stand in the sun while you're playing—and then invite 'em into the air conditioned trailer. Tell 'em you got more organs in the trailer where they can cool off and relax. You can demo your songs in cooooooool comfort and they'll buy . . . they won't wanna go back into that hot sun . . . they'll buy . . . the temperature's gonna be over ninety-five . . . be cool . . . they'll buy . . . they'll buy."

Opening day of the fair I planned an early, ambitious start. The temperature was seventy-nine degrees at 8:00 AM and the country road fog had a viscous smell of ripened sweet corn. I arrived at our tent around 10:00. Beside the tent was a long, white trailer, complete with air conditioning, perspiring thermoses of icy lemonade, and three of our most expensive organs. Herb introduced me to Mindy, a young girl Herb hired to play the organs under the tent. The game plan called for Mindy to attract and entertain the crowds while Herb and I mulled about, extolling the pleasures of music, and trying to hook fish. But Mindy was no minnow, She claimed to be sixteen, looked like she was twenty-three, and had that pubescent propensity to talk like the proverbial trucker.

My initial inclination was a fascinated observation of this peculiar fantasy event called the county fair. Most amusing were the men who were unmysteriously drawn to our Circe organist, those husbands with their tugging children and frizzy wives. Those guys weren't listening to Mindy's "Moon River." They had paid the admission fee—admittedly or not—to browse about and glimpse not only Mindy, but all the other proud-breasted high school girls who populate such fairs. But there, under our tent, the wives became envious of Mindy's musical endowments and some threatened revenge by pulling checkbooks from their handbags. Yet, some mothers were sincere; they envisioned their children as suburban Stravinskys. So, at least for Herb, it was "into the trailer we go."

Herb sold three organs by 2:00 PM that afternoon and I was still fishless. As I came back from the Coke booth I noticed a family of five huddled around Mindy. I heard Herb: "Go get 'em, Ahab." I tucked in my shirt and rambled up and announced, "Hi! I'm Mindy . . . (er) . . . She's Mindy . . . (pointing to the virginal nymphet). I'm Dave. Do any of you folks play the organ?"

The husband did not smile.

"Yeah, I did once," the wife drawled in between chomps on her gum, "but, you know, once you got kids, you know, you don't have time anymore to be playing with organs."

The husband was expressionless and the sweat glimmered on the nape of his neck.

"How about if you folks come on in the trailer over here where I

can show you a beautiful inexpensive organ just delivered to us last week. It's air conditioned . . . the trailer, that thirteen . . . and plenty of cold lemonade too."

Single file up the thin iron steps. I play just one song—"Don't you folks love organ Music; I sure do"—and the ten-year-old brat shoves me off the bench and insists I teach him "Stairway to Heaven" immediately. My underwear feels like a soggy, bunched-up wash cloth. Dad slurps lemonade loudly until Mom plops six-month-old Katy on Dad's thigh and proclaims: "Now it's my turn."

I graphically explain our color-coded note system and Mom keeps repeating her interruption: "I wanna hear that breezy Hawaii sound." We start with a South Pacific rendition of "When The Saints Go Marching In" and end four bars from the bottom when I notice Dad's wet pant leg—not lemonade.

"God Damn it," the husband hisses. "We can't even spend a couple of hours at the fair without this kid peeing all over the place."

Then he apologizes. "Look, I'm sorry about this. You know . . . kids—you know."

I was desperate: "But wouldn't you like to own an organ?"

"Sure, but I just filed for bankruptcy. The meat packing plant shut down last year and my unemployment comp ran out three weeks ago, you know."

I nodded my surrender. The wife laid the baby on top of the organ and sorted through the diaper tote bag that read "I go where baby goes." Then Herb opened the trailer door, probably to see if I needed help in making the sale. He saw the naked baby sprawling on our Mediterranean Pecan, and slowly shut the door.

Untitled, Jill Haycraft, 1994

Yet, some mothers were sincere; they envisioned their children as suburban Stravinskys. So, at least for Herb, it was "into the trailer we go."

The Basement

Susan J. Ferrer

Walls . . . institution green
and a cold cement floor.
Framed in dust, a way station
for misfits, the unwanted, and forgotten.

Sacked clothes wore out their welcome
But a desk stocked with crayons and coloring books
waits patiently for its child.

A fold-up bed, used only on occasion,
yearns for a constant companion.
And a garden love seat is broken
like the promises of the heart.

Toys, tricycle, and training wheels
have outlived their purpose
And a steam engine track,
tacked to a plywood landscape,
stands on end . . .
the painted lake splashes over its banks.

Dreams of being a family room fade
as the light of a bare bulb
slaps the potential into a cobwebbed corner.
And memories of the growing years compete to be heard
over the drone of a washer and dryer.

Beaches

Linda J. Collins

Idealism wears away at the
beaches of reality
until only a thin strip of land
links what is fantasy to
what can be changed.
Reality is unavoidable
and even the best beaches
are soon overrun
with the litter of wasted lives.

The Book Dick

Daniel Lucy

In the summer of the year that I turned sixteen, a goodly amount of undue bad luck befell all of us in the frame house on Clamper Street. Some of us, like me, were brought closer to the world; some of us were taken out of it for good. Uncle Jake got himself killed in an all-out to-do at the Red Pheasant Bar. Like as not it was his fault, since he was the sort to get all liquored up and look for trouble, but Aunt Carrie cried, and moaned, and whined, and carried on for weeks anyway, like her heart was broken, even though everyone in the house knew for a fact that it wasn't. God knows the entire household went to work the day after he was in the ground, trying to pacify her. It was the hottest part of August, when the bugs were so thick you couldn't breathe without sucking one in, before she finally came to what senses remained with her and so restored to us a spell of relative peace—a peace which, as it turned out, wasn't long for this world. In less time than it takes to grow a radish, Papa came down with consumption, and before long he lost his job on the paper. Doctor Willsy told him he had to stay in bed, so Pa griped, and hollered, and called him a son of a bitch, and said he couldn't tell the difference between pregnancy and the gout; Ma eventually calmed him down and made him mind his manners as much as you could expect him to, and then she went about the business of wearing herself down to a frazzle looking after him, Baby Dwayne, and all the rest of us, too. It was a bad time for all of us. So when Mick Marby came into the picture, looking like he did and acting like he did, and took a fancy to my sister Lylanne, it occurred to all of us that maybe the worst was over and better times were on the way.

Mama says to this day that Mick Marby was the best looking man she'd ever seen, and maybe she was right. I don't know. He was big, no doubt about that—like a big league linebacker—and when he grinned—it seemed like he never stopped—he looked about as friendly as a body his size could. Needless to say, when Lylanne saw him striding through the front gate that day, I knew there would be no talking to her after that. She was twenty-three, seven years older than I, and that summer she had made up her mind that as a wedding prospect she was all washed up. She was certain that she was unmarriageable; she had taken up reading, and embroidery, and all those other pastimes that unmarriageable types are supposed to wrap themselves up in.

I saw the beginning from the porch swing, since I was sitting there where it was halfway cool, waiting for Pincher Lewis to come by with his Ford pickup. Pincher was eighteen and had his license, and since he was my best friend, I got to go around in his truck almost any time I said, except when he had Candy Barber with him. And then he always told me to get lost, and I knew why. Pincher had told me one time, when we were taking a swim down at the creek, that he was getting it any time he pleased. I asked him what was he talking about, and he filled me in on the details. After that, I thought about it for a whole week. I decided that Pincher was a pretty important fellow who knew what he was talking about. I was glad that he was around to help me figure out the world. And that's why when Mick Marby came walking through the gate, I looked at Lylanne, and saw that her eyes were as big as turnips, and I put it all together. It seemed like all of a sudden she was somebody else, and I felt like I ought to go over and introduce myself all over again.

"Afternoon, ma'am. My name's Mick Marby." He was wearing a Stetson hat, and he reached up one huge hand and tipped it back when he spoke to Lylanne. She was sitting in the aluminum lawnchair next to the rose trellis, like she always did in the afternoons, reading a book.

"Afternoon," she said. I thought she would split her face smiling. "What can I do for you?"

He stood there for a minute or two, just kind of looking around.

"I'm looking for a book," he finally said. "I work for the library. Detective—you know, tracking down books that have gotten themselves lost, you might say." He looked her straight in the eyes. "Are you Lylanne Stranger?"

Lylanne's mouth fell open like an oven door.

"Yes." She finally got it out.

"You take out a book called Green Mansions?"

"Yes," she confessed.

"By one W.H. Hudson?"

"I think so," she answered. With both hands she lifted the book which lay in her lap and extended it toward him, like she was turning it over to him and waiting for the handcuffs at the same time. He reached out and took it from her and began to thumb through it.

"Pretty good book, this one," he said. "Don't you think?" He was grinning.

Lylanne realized that her arms were still held out toward him, and she quickly jerked them back to her sides and tried to compose herself.

"Yes. I've read it four times. It's lovely."

"Me too," he said. He sat back on his haunches next to her.

"I'm sorry I didn't renew it like I was supposed to. I know I should have," she blurted out, but he was reading and didn't appear to hear her.

"Right here," he said, "on page one, thirty-two's my favorite part," and, with the tip of his finger still marking the place, he passed the book over to Lylanne. They started talking about this bird-girl named Rima, or something like that, and how she was flying around in the jungle all the time with these Indians and making funny noises like birds do, and how this other man was falling in love with her, and how terribly sad it all was. I didn't hear it all, because Pincher Lewis drove up in front, and I had to leave. But when we pulled away they were both right there, still talking; and when I came home that evening it seemed like all the lights in the house were on, and even Papa was up.

I knew, without even asking what was going on, that Lylanne had a date with a man.

Mick Marby became almost a part of the family, you might say. He met Mama and Baby Dwayne, and even went up to the bedroom to meet Papa. Before long he was coming over for dinner almost every Sunday, and sometimes in between as well. Everybody liked him, even Aunt Carrie. Mama didn't say anything at all when he and Lylanne kissed each other right in front of all of us. We took it for granted that they would be getting married before long, as soon as Mick popped the question.

Mick worked as a car salesman, too, we found out. He only worked as a library detective on the side, he said, because he liked books, and it made him feel good just being around them. He had his own car, and it was almost new. It was about the nicest, biggest one around, and I took plenty of rides in it, mostly on Sundays. Mama and Baby Dwayne even rode along once, and we all drove out to the park, and took a big picnic lunch, and sat out on the grass eating fried chicken and wilted lettuce salad, and drinking iced tea out of a big thermos jug.

Papa started to get a little better, and Doctor Willsy finally said he could get out of bed for a while each day. And Uncle Jake's tragedy was less and less a topic of conversation and more and more something out of the distant past.

Things were looking up.

I got to know Mick pretty well, probably better than anyone except Lylanne. He lived in a large apartment above a flower shop on the other side of town, and the stairway that led up to it always smelled like roses, or carnations, or some other kind of fancy flower like the ones they wear at the high-school prom. He took me over to his place once and showed me his picture album of old cars like the ones gangsters and movie stars used to ride in. Another time he drove me out to the car lot where he worked, and we just walked around, and he let me sit in any one I wanted.

And one week when Lylanne was sick in bed with the flu, he took me to the drive-in twice. He was okay by me.

And that's why I don't understand the whole affair, about all those things that happened last summer, and the way they happened, and what they mean. I asked Pincher, but he laughed at me. I would have asked Lylanne, but she doesn't live here anymore. I would have asked Mick Marby to help me figure out this crazy world. But I couldn't ever bring myself to talk to him again.

In September the weather changed, and the wind blew away the heat and the insects. Pincher told me that he and Candy had had a big fight, and that he had told her to go fly a kite. He got a job at the Standard filling station on Main Street and moved out of his parents' house into a rooming house. School had started up again by then, and I wished I didn't have to go back, that I could be like Pincher, and Lylanne, and Mick Marby. Well, that has changed now.

One Friday night Pincher drove up in front of my house and honked. He wanted to go out riding around, and I told him it was fine with me. He had changed a lot that summer. His shoulders were wider, and he had taken up drinking beer. When I got into the truck there were two six-packs on the seat beside him. He wanted me to drink one; I said I didn't think I should. But he kept insisting, and I finally did. It tasted bitter, like potato peelings, but I acted like it was a milkshake.

The windows in the truck were rolled down, and the wind had a bite in it as we drove. Pincher turned on the radio and opened two more beers. We just drove without going anywhere in mind. From time to time he stopped the truck to whistle at a girl or pee against one of the tires. Before I knew it, it was getting late, and Pincher was talking crazy and slurring his words. He pulled the truck over on a dimly lighted street and went to sleep, right there, hunched over the wheel.

I got out.

I wasn't sure at first where we were. The beer made me feel strange. I squinted in the feeble light and realized that Mick's apartment was only a couple of blocks away. I left Pincher there, snoring soundly in the truck, and walked to Mick's place.

The stairway was dark and smelled like flowers. I didn't know what I was going to do, even if he was home. I thought that maybe he could call Mama and say that Pincher's truck had broken down and that he would bring me home. When I reached the landing, I rang the bell and waited, but nobody answered. As I stood there, I noticed. that the door had been left slightly open. I could hear faint music coming from inside. For some reason I walked in, although I knew I shouldn't. There was no one in the living room. The only light came from a lamp by the window. I walked across the room to the bedroom door. It was open, and Mick Marby and MY sister were lying on the bed. They were asleep and as naked as Adam.

I left and walked and walked until I came to MY house.

I saw the end of it all, too, from the porch swing. At the tail-end of September there was a week when summer came back, and it didn't rain, and it seemed like everything stopped dying temporarily. Papa was well enough to get a job, so he started working at the printing shop downtown. The strain of all that summer lifted itself for a while from Mama's face. Pincher Lewis up and got married all of a sudden, to a woman from Sumner who was old enough to be his mother. He still stopped by once in a while, but we didn't go out driving any more. We would talk through the truck window for a spell, and then he would say he had to be going home for dinner with the wife. He always called her "the wife," and it sounded important and adult-like when he said it.

One afternoon Mick Marby drove up with Lylanne. I guess they didn't see me in the swing, since they didn't act like it. Mick was still coming over to dinner on Sundays, and it was everything I could do to sit at the table with him and Lylanne like I hadn't seen what I had. They sat in the car for quite a long time, and although I couldn't hear what they were saying, I could tell they were arguing. Mick was throwing his big arms around, and then Lylanne started crying. Before long she got out, and slammed the car door, and ran past me into the house. She had makeup splotched all over

her face, and she was about the sorriest looking I'd ever seen her. She slammed the screen door, too.

Mick Marby got out of the car then, and stood there looking at the house.

He waved at me when he saw me sitting there.

Mama came to the door, and then she opened the screen and looked out. He waved at her, too, and she waved back.

"Afternoon, ma'am," he said, and he tipped his hat just like the first time I set eyes on him. He looked so big then, standing there with his hands on his waist, that it seemed he would never fit back into the car. But he did, and he drove away, and none of us ever saw him again.

Lylanne was beside herself for a good long time, but she finally stopped crying around the house. About a month after it happened she went to the library and took out that same book, the one about the bird-girl and the Indians. And just before winter set in, she moved to the city, and got herself a job, and started in at night school to be a beautician.

It was just too bad, Mama said. And I guess she was right. I don't know. But the way I looked at it, there were a lot of bad things that went on that summer, and Mick Marby turned out just to be one of them.

I won't forget any of it, that's a sure thing, not till the day I die—even though I still get confused about it, and there's no one left to ask.

Brail, silver gelatin print, Larry Endicott, 1997

"I'm looking for a book," he finally said. "I work for the library. Detective—you know, tracking down books that have gotten themselves lost . . ."

Thoughts on Feminism

Leota Hall

Feminism, to me, means full sexual equality and the organized movement to attain this goal. The purpose of feminism is to remove all the legal, intellectual, and emotional barriers to sexual equality in the social, economic, and political realms so that woman is no longer denied equal rights because she is supposedly man's inferior (i.e., not rational enough or strong enough to survive out in the dog-eat-dog world) or his superior (i.e., in Hilde Hem's words, "too refined, too sensitive, too spiritual to be sullied by the crass demands of the common world of commerce and politics").

Feminists emphasize the stifling of one-half of the potential of the human race as a result of the oppressed status of women in modern society. Woman is presented as indeed inferior, though not so innately or even by choice, but rather because society has oppressed her to the point of dehumanization by robbing her of the chance to develop her unique potential as, above all, a human being.

Specifically, Germaine Greer equates woman's dehumanization with her castration by trying to conform to the stereotype of the Eternally Feminine (such women she labels "female eunuchs"). The stereotype is woman as a totally passive (and thus morally neutral, for morality implies choice of action) Sex Object. "She is an idol." "She need achieve nothing." "[S]he is the emblem of spending ability and the chief spender" she can sell to men and to "female eunuchs" striving to be like her just by her totally passive presence. (Quotes from *The Female Eunuch.*) However, her passivity means that in reality she is only an object, an object of neither sex, for only an active being is a sexual being.

Greer believes the feminist goal will be attained when the violence of the macho male is no longer rewarded; as more people refuse to enter marriage, the institution that legally defines woman in a subservient role; when women have become earners rather than just the chief consumers in capitalist society; and finally, when people learn that doing what they want to, not merely what they think they ought to, is the only way to be moral (the "pleasure principle"). Her book is essentially a declaration of independence from the stereotype: "I am a woman, not a castrate." However, Greer does not simultaneously declare war on men; she recognizes that "slaves enslave their masters" and male liberation must be a partner to female liberation.

Betty Friedan, likewise, takes this moderate feminist view of men as co-victims of society's oppression. The liberation of women is a prerequisite to love between the sexes, according to Friedan, because genuine love is possible only between true equals. Until such liberation, men are not only the cause of women's suppressed resentment of their exploitation, but are also saddled with a concept of masculinity that precludes any show of tenderness.

In Friedan's view, the false notion of woman's total fulfillment as wife and mother (the "feminine mystique") perpetuates the smothering of a woman's individual identity, not only as a rationalization man can use to keep her in her place, but also to seduce her into passively accepting her denigration by society. Such a delusion leaves many women believing they do not want equality, and Friedan stresses the need for a "revolution for all, not for an exceptional few." Friedan thinks every woman should be free to conform to Greer's stereotype if she so chooses, but she should also be free to move out of the stereotype if she wants. To accomplish this mobility, Friedan accepts the male career paradigm as the superior life and foists a paternalistic role on society in order to institutionalize child care

and childbearing functions as "time out" rather than elevating the value of traditional "women's work." Further, Friedan pleads with feminists to "deal with the world of reality"; she accuses radical feminists of merely rationalizing their inaction by dwelling on goals such as test-tube babies which are not feasible in this society in the foreseeable future.

In contrast, Ti-Grace Atkinson undertakes a radical feminist analysis which leads her to the conclusion that women cannot be liberated without such extreme changes as test-tube babies, the abolition of marriage, and heterosexual sex. Woman's childbearing function was the main factor enabling man, "diseased" by "meta-physical cannibalism," to meet his needs of gaining power and venting his frustration by robbing women of their humanity. This original political rape begot the class system. Atkinson asserts that women's status as the original oppressed class can be overturned only when women realize man is the enemy; to say society is the oppressor is only a fainthearted way of saying man is the oppressor, for society, is man. To admit this is nearly impossible for woman, due to her "fantasy" of love "in which the victim transforms her oppressor into her redeemer." Yet, Atkinson insists this delusion must be thrown off in order to abolish the female role and thus, to cure woman of her self-destructive tendencies (brought on by the same latent disorganization causing man's metaphysical cannibalism), to turn the tables on the oppressor, and then, to help him cure his disease by abolishing the male role.

Finally, Hilde Hem should be mentioned among the feminists because she questions why men in general (and philosophical inquiry in particular) accept without doubt, and arrange whole societies in accordance with, an assumption of female inferiority. After debunking the physical strength theory (at best a "shaky foundation" for male self-esteem), the female dependence theory (males also depend on females for procreation of their kind, and protection during childbearing could be provided by other women, with men required for nothing but fertilization), Christian doctrine (which forgets *Genesis I* and assumes that what social custom has caused to appear "natural" is necessarily right, a defense appropriate for the divine right of kings, racial segregation, etc.), and the myth of "otherness" (woman as "being for another" merely rationalizes male domination and ignores the fact that she has not been allowed to be a being for herself), Hem concludes: "It is easier to put woman on a pedestal than to consider her as a human equal." The effect has been detrimental to both sexes: "Women have been denied consciousness; but men, incomprehensibly perverse and self deceptive, have denied themselves consciousness." (Quotes from "Woman—A Philosophical Analysis," *The Holy Cross Quarterly*.)

Thus, all these writers share with the antifeminists the view that men are oppressed. As to woman's situation, however, anti-feminists claim woman has freely chosen her role in society. Man never forced her to be a sex object; that is a status she wants and uses in manipulating man, whom she has enslaved as her provider.

For example, Esther Vilar presents an antifeminist view that although males and females are born with equal intellect, females deliberately let their intellectual capacity "disintegrate" because they have a choice males do not have: They are free to live like a man or to prostitute themselves by "choosing a man and letting him do all the work." Most choose the latter and live out their days as "a dim-witted, parasitic luxury item." Men, however, fail to recognize that woman is not equal, that "women entirely lack ambition, desire for knowledge, and need to prove themselves, all things which, to him, are a matter of course. They allow men to live in a world apart because they do not want to join them." (Quotes from *The Manipulated Man*.) So man makes constant, futile efforts to free woman from menial tasks, adorn her, educate her, and draw her into public life.

Vilar sees man as an innocent victim of guilt over a mistaken notion that he is oppressing woman when in reality woman is not even subject to man's will. Vilar concludes that if, after all the chances for independence man has given woman, she has still not liberated herself, then "there are no shackles to throw off" (ibid). In contrast to feminist views of

man having forced woman's destiny on her, Vilar asserts: "Man is not even powerful enough to revolt against" (ibid). In Vilar's view, if anyone is an oppressor, it is woman.

Norman Mailer holds a similar view of woman as the imprisoner of men. To him, sex is a battle in which woman always succeeds just being passive, whereas man, to achieve humanness, must demonstrate his virility through fertile sexual intercourse. Thus, since there is no possibility of failure for women, they are actually in power over men. The primary duty of those in power in Mailer's society again relates only to biology: A woman must find a good mate and conceive (male) children who will improve the species.

Midge Decter, as well, believes that it is woman who is in power in this society, that man merely assents to her wishes, that great freedoms have been granted her by society with no effort on her part, and that woman has grossly misused these freedoms:

> The freedom she truly seeks is . . . a freedom demanded by children and enjoyed by no one: the freedom from all difficulty. If in the end her society is at fault for anything, it is for allowing her to grow up with the impression that this is something possible to ask. (*The Liberated Woman and Other Americans*)

In addition, Decter denies feminist assertions that woman is debased by an involuntary role as sex object. According to Decter, "If she wishes not to be a sexual object, she may refrain from being one." That choice is merely another of the freedoms lavished on her by society.

In conclusion, I side with the feminists. I concur with both Greer and Friedan that woman's definition as sex object is the basis of her unequal status and that sexual equality constitutes her emergence from thingness to full humanity. Friedan makes some valid points about how this emergence must come about: feminists need to draw all women into their cause and, to do so, some feminists must change their own three—sexes mentality and deal with immediate issues such as abortion laws, rather than merely talking about goals too remote to act on in our present society.

On the other hand, Atkinson's radical feminist analysis indicates to me that, although I call myself a feminist and a radical, I am not a radical feminist. I balk at calling men my enemy, even though I can view society, whose institutions I want reformed but whose human parts I wish no more harm than a changed mind, as the enemy. I also question whether a mere turning-of-the-tables, even if intended as temporary, would ever evolve into a balanced sexual scale.

However, all these feminists present a view I believe much closer to reality than that of Mailer, Decter, or Vilar. I do not disagree that women often manipulate men, that womens' mental capacity goes to waste, or that men are oppressed in our society. I do take exception to the antifeminist description of men as bending over backwards to make women equal (then why are schools and employers still convicted of sex discrimination?), and of women as free to choose equal status with a man as easily as choosing inferior status (again, discrimination plus socialization into sex-specific roles), and as free to choose not to be a sex object (i.e., a rape victim living behind triple locks and afraid to go out after dark chose to be a sex object?).

Mailer draws a male caricature that ignores all aspects of humanness except sexual potency. Further, Vilar and Decter both draw female caricatures that totally distort the real-world balance of power. Men have profited—economically and in terms of masculinity as they have defined it—by exploiting women. Men will not voluntarily give up their privileged status. Throughout history the oppressed have had to drum into the heads of their oppressors the basics of human decency. I see as central to feminism the issue of power, not only with regard to the oppression of women, but also with regard to all class oppression. Thus, feminism need not stand alone, but can be part of a larger coalition of the oppressed working to redistribute power equally.

Miscarriage
Faith F. Vahle

oh, sweet, sweet nothing
i would have loved you had i known
i would have cried and
beat upon my husband's chest
i would have cursed my body for
its lack of strength

the softened purple doorway
was your mark of life, of death
how easily you slipped from me
without a breath, without a cry
a fetus hidden
in a dark pool of pain
and i only knew when it was
too late to grieve.

Final Exam
Faith F. Vahle

The final question
was to be answered in essay form.

I fought the space allotted,
and tried to group my ideas,
as would a good sheepdog tighten his flock
into a manageable unit,
but my words tumbled over into the margins
and ran up the side of the paper,
like an errant weed,
reaching skyward,
hoping to be mistaken for a flower.

"Those Who Know No Evil..."

Peggy D. Smith

Tom drove the car; he always did. His wife sat in the seat next to him. The radio was turned so low that it was hardly audible over the hiss of the air conditioner. Tom thought he heard a song he liked come on. He reached over to inch up the volume.

"Oh, for Pete's sakes," his wife Shirley yelled, and snapped off the radio. "My head is about to burst and you go turning up that darned radio." She looked over at him with thinly veiled disgust. "Inconsiderate old man," she thought. "Any other husband would have asked first."

Tom said nothing. The song had been one they'd listened to long ago—when they'd first met. Tom cast a cautious, side-long glance at the figure next to him as though he were in a crowded bus terminal, thinking, but not quite sure, that she was somehow familiar to him. His wife's wide figure covered much of the seat, and between her fingers she held a smoking cigarette. Its smell sickened him.

"I don't know why you couldn't have gotten everything on the first trip," Shirley began. "Mother only asks you to do this once a week, so you'd think that you could do it without any trouble."

"Tom's getting lazier each day," she mused, ignoring the late summer scenery flashing by outside the car's closed windows. The only time he ever seemed to have any energy was at night when she couldn't fall asleep or at least feign sleep before he came to bed. He'd always been that way. She remembered suddenly how he used to read poetry to her. She could never understand it, and she knew what he really wanted.

Tom could tell that he was in for a bad time. Her headache would last for days, and he would be to blame. Why did her mother have to have her lawn done every week? He wanted to play tennis with Ann and her boyfriend, Richard. Tom loved their company. The three of them could always find a willing fourth player for doubles. But, that would be impossible today. His mother-in-law would not rest until the grass was short and even and every flower stood in regimented straight lines. Sometimes, what she called a weed looked better than the flowers, so he was constantly pulling up the wrong plant. Tom knew he would have to dig up all the brave sprouts which had sprung up between the cracks in her smooth regular sidewalk. Then, as hot as it was, he would have to burn everything. If only he hadn't forgotten his grass shears! He could have been half finished by now.

"It's really too hot to do any lawn work today," he told his wife without taking his eyes off the road ahead.

"Really? I've seen you play tennis with Ann and Richard when it was much hotter than this." Shirley sent him her half-sneered smile.

"Of course it's not hot to you," Tom thought. "All you do is sit in that air conditioned kitchen and drink that syrupy iced tea from those stained Tupperware glasses." But, he said nothing as he turned into the wide concrete driveway which ran parallel to the house. He parked the big sedan behind the sports car belonging to his daughter's boyfriend.

"I told Ann that I didn't want him here when we're not around." Shirley began angrily raising up in her seat trying to see into the windows of the house.

"Oh, they're both nice kids, and besides, they've been going together for years. He'll probably be our son-in-law someday."

"Well, I know how men are. They never marry the girls who let them . . . you know. It's up to the woman to put them off, and . . . . Don't turn off the car. I want to run the air conditioner."

Tom shook his head slightly as he got out of the car. The still,

hot air washed over him and broke out a light sweat over his body. It felt good after the stale air conditioner air of the car. He wiped his forehead and ambled over to the garage. The forgotten grass shears were not there. Ann would know where they were. Tom shot a glance at the car and smiled at the thought of his daughter.

"Ann certainly wouldn't make her husband mow your damned lawn," he said to his unhearing wife. Tom opened the back door and stepped up into the kitchen. From the living room he heard laughter and walked toward it. Rounding the corner into the room, be took a quick silent look and ducked back behind the door. His daughter and Richard were there.

Reclining on the sofa, their naked bodies glowed with dark tans and firm muscles. The boy held the girl close to him, and her head rested on his chest. They looked like two healthy, young animals. Without chancing a second look, Tom slunk back into the kitchen and stood staring at a bowl of plastic fruit on the counter. He swallowed hard trying to muster the righteous anger he knew he should feel. It did not come. He felt embarrassed and sad, but he was not angry.

Tom blinked and tried to focus his eyes but the images of what he had seen swam before him like a long forgotten dream. He'd always hoped, but there had never been a time like that for him.

To Tom, Shirley had once seemed like a Medieval heroine from the books he loved to read. He wanted to make everything beautiful for them. He remembered looking at Shirley's placid face as she repeated the marriage vows and thinking that this was the beginning of his dream. Now, twenty years later, that day and the feeling were as distant as the toys of his boyhood. Leaning against the counter, Tom felt old and drained.

There had always been lukewarm indulgence from Shirley. Now, in later years, there was only indifference. At night, if he were persistent, she would yield to him, but afterward she would leap up from the bed and head to the bathroom where water would run for a long time. When she returned, she would fall into an open-mouthed sleep with her back to him, leaving Tom staring into the semi-darkness. Now, he had even stopped feeling grateful.

Standing in the clean, well-equipped kitchen, Tom could neither go towards the living room where Richard and Ann lay, nor back outside to the stuffy, air conditioned car, and Shirley. He remained frozen, absently fingering the plastic fruit on the counter.

The sounds of confusion brought Tom back to himself. He followed the noise back into the living room. Shirley stood in the half opened door gaping at the two now only half-naked young people. Ann buried her eyes in her lover's shoulder. With one arm around her, Richard stared directly into Shirley's contorted face. She looked away and caught sight of Tom. The panic in her eyes irritated him and he felt himself recoil as she walked heavily towards him.

"Tom, oh my God. If you could have seen . . ."

Shirley saw only that the two had been disgustingly naked seconds before. She noted the wide, sparsely haired chest of the boy, and the ugly way her daughters breasts hung under her lover's shirt. The young man started to speak. Shirley looked him up and down and, seeing that his belt hung loose and unbuckled, burst into loud, hysterical tears.

"I'd be ashamed, Ann. Ashamed. Oh, Tom . . ." Shirley cried into her husband's shirt.

"Ann, you'd better go upstairs," Tom said. She and Richard exchanged a deeply frightened look before the girl dashed upstairs in a flash of cotton gauze and flesh. In a moment, the shirt fluttered down the steps like a shot bird. Richard slipped it on and with shaking hands buttoned it crooked.

"I'm sorry. I do love her . . ." he began.

Shirley looked up. "You'd better be sorry. You don't know what love is. If you loved her, you should have waited." Shirley fell into crying again at the thought of her daughter—one of those girls she had snubbed and talked about in school. "What can I tell my friends?" she thought and sobbed even harder.

The woman leaning against him irritated Tom. Forcing himself to be gentle, he led her to a chair and deposited her. Shirley was fairly screaming as Tom took the young man's arm and guided him outside.

"I do love her. I do . . ."

"I know," Tom said. "Don't worry, but I think you'd better go for now."

The confusion and concern in the face of the young man touched Tom. He watched Richard pause at the door of his car and look back over his shoulder. Tom tried to smile reassuringly before he turned and strode back into the house, where Shirley had recovered from her tears.

"You should have beaten him to death. Oh, my poor little girl." She looked up the steps while running down in her mind a list of lies to explain the awful rumors which that boy was bound to spread about her daughter.

"What are we going to do . . ." she began.

Tom saw another fit of tears on the way. Then, his anger finally came. He grabbed his wife's arm. The look in his face first delighted Shirley, then frightened her.

"Why the hell didn't you stay in the car?" he yelled. This time he was not gentle; he pushed her aside and walked upstairs to his daughter.

Shirley saw only that the two had been disgustingly naked seconds before. She noted the wide, sparsely haired chest of the boy, and the ugly way her daughters breasts hung under her lover's shirt.

What You Look At, silver gelatin print, Laura Siddons, 1997

the apple story
L.M. Jones

she was a top-of-the-stack apple,
tapering red from an eye-level perch
on her brothers. she fell in my pocket:
apples will when they can. she followed me home.
a crimson raven nested my window
for seven days; i carved and consumed her,
anticipating seeds. seven seeds i planted
round a pot of stunted ivy—three of them grew
and the ivy died. i still dream the apple's
flesh, remember snappy skin bursting juice,
pulp cooling teeth. my apple trees
have eight leaves now, though two came quick,
with greed in the blooded-meadow green,
and one came slow and went far: taller,
but looks a bit thin. may become
the better tree some day. probably
they'll all do well. stolen apples do.

Untitled, silver gelatin print, Kelly Diane Kramer, 1985

No No Anatomy
Jane Tilford

Hickory dickory
Moral Majority
Frowned on the Gingerbread
Females and males.

Squeaky-clean serious
Humdrumdamentalist
Found how to skyrocket
Bakery sales.

No Itty-Bitty Ones

Richard Russell

The screen door rang a tiny, bronze bell every time someone opened it. Hot, crowded, the drugstore shelves surrounded the August heat, intensifying it. A slow ceiling fan waved hot air over the soda-fountain counter; flies buzzed the sticky catch basin beneath the Coke dispenser undisturbed. An entire rack of pet rocks gathered dust next to the counter. The portable radio behind the counter played a country hit from the '60s.

The owner emerged from the back room buckling his pants. Large, dark, sweat stains flourished in the armpits of his light blue smock as beads of perspiration rolled down his flushed beefy face. He scowled with bloodshot eyes.

"What'll it be?"

"Hamburger and Coke," Andy said.

The owner waited until Andy produced a soiled dollar bill and laid it on the counter.

"Good enough?" Andy asked.

The owner shrugged and switched on the square grill on the back bar. "Off the bus?" he asked.

"Yeah, only got thirty minutes."

The hamburger sizzled on the grill. It smelled better than the rest of the drugstore.

"Pretty goddamn thin burger, ain't it?" Andy said.

"You want it or not?"

"Yeah," Andy said. "Just pretty Goddamn thin."

The owner pulled a chipped plate off a stack beneath the grill and set a bun on it. He filled one side of the plate with potato chips, the small broken ones from the bottom of the bag.

"Those stale?" Andy asked.

"Hell no. I don't serve stale chips."

Andy lit a cigarette with a kitchen match. The smoke fouled the hamburger smell. "Don't want no stale chips."

The owner garnished the bun with pickle slices and took two steps to draw the Coke. The flies whirled in a cloud until the owner finished.

"Where ya headed?" The owner set the Coke down. "Ain't got no ice."

Andy ignored it. "West."

"Got a brother in California. Works on a fishing boat." The owner shooed some flies away from the Coke. "Lives like shit."

An old, old woman shuffled through the door; the bell tinkled. The owner drifted back to the drug counter. Despite the heat the woman wore a sweater over her baggy, print dress. Her clothes must have fit once, but now they dropped like hand-me-downs from some larger, older sister. She clutched her purse to her shriveled bosom and waited as the owner filled a brown plastic bottle with small green pills and typed out the dosage directions on a plain label.

"There you are, Mrs. Knesovitch," the owner said, handing over the bottle.

The old woman placed the bottle in her purse as if it were glass, signed the state voucher, and shuffled out. The owner rang up the sale on a brand new, electronic NCR cash register and dropped in the voucher before returning to the grill.

"Damn welfare," the owner said, laying the hamburger on the bun. "Can't make a dime on 'em."

He slid the plate in front of Andy and grabbed the five.

"Ya make money on these paper hamburgers," Andy said.

The owner slammed the change on the counter. "I wish to God I made money in this forgotten hole. Hell, my wife spends as if I made it. Had to have a microwave oven last month, a goddam five-hundred-dollar microwave. And ya know how she uses it? To store bread. Keeps the damn bread in it. A five-hundred-dollar bread box. Goddamn."

The chips were stale, but Andy didn't say anything.

The owner stepped back to the grill and scraped the grease into the catcher. "Now she wants a diamond watch," he said. "No itty-bitty diamonds either."

Andy ate the hamburger slowly, trying to make it last.

"The guy who sold me this lemon made money. How come I don't?" The flies buzzed the grease catcher. "Hell, he got out while it was good, before Harvester pulled out and the town started dyin'. Nobody's got any money now except the miners, and they go across the line to gamble and whore."

Andy raked in his change and placed it in his shirt pocket.

"Want another?" the owner asked.

"Sure," Andy said. "If you're buyin'."

"I ain't no charity."

"Hell no, but I figure I already paid for three of them wafer burgers."

The owner scowled and scraped. "Ya ain't paid for nothin'."

The pale teenager jittered his way into the store like a puppet on short strings. Lean, narrow, nervous, he wore faded blue jeans with a Budweiser beer patch sewn on his left hip pocket. His t-shirt had "Ball U" lettered on the front. He glanced once at Andy and stuttered to the drug counter. He waited as if waiting was the most difficult thing in the world.

Dropping the scraper, the owner hurried to the counter. The brown bottle the owner handed to the teenager had no label; the teenager paid in cash. Shoving the bottle deep into his pocket, the teenager jerked past Andy and out the door as if the heat wasn't murder. The owner pocketed the cash without ringing it up on the cash register and wiped his brow on his sleeve.

"What're ya starin' at?!" the owner demanded.

"Nothin'," said Andy.

The owner returned to the grill and began to scrape again. Sweat dripped from his nose to hiss on the grill. "No itty-bitty diamonds either," he mumbled.

Andy finished the last of the chips and lit another cigarette. It tasted good despite the heat. "The chips were stale," Andy said.

The owner turned from the grill and cleared away Andy's plate. "Can't keep nothin' in this heat," he said. "Everything goes stale."

Andy stood to leave.

"Wait," the owner said. He opened a sack and began shoving in cold sandwiches from a small refrigerator. "They're already made. Ham and cheese and roast beef. They'll keep a few hours."

Andy accepted the bag.

"Not itty-bitty ones either," the owner repeated.

"Ya oughta leave this burg if ya hate it so much."

"Can't. Lose my shirt if I left now."

Andy nodded and walked to the door.

Outside the heat rose in long, distorting waves that made everything seem unreal.

Keeps the damn bread in it. A five-hundred-dollar bread box.

Innovative Packaging

Phyllis Adkins

Onions have skins of
Translucent waxed paper.
Colorful peels seal in
Fruit's savory flavors.
Eggs come in sanitary
Single-serving shells.
Oranges advertise their goodness
With clean citrus smells.
Bananas come in bunches,
Individually wrapped,
Perfect for lunches.
Peas and beans are sewn
Into crisp, snap-open pods,
But peanuts grow their own
Little cardboard cartons.
Watermelons come giant economy size,
Guaranteed to feed a crowd.

Nature wins the prize
For innovative packaging!
No pull-tabs nor twist-ties,
No aluminum cans,
No styrofoam cups,
To clutter earth's sands.
Nothing to throw away,
Nothing to burn.
All are no deposit, no return,
And bio-degradeable.

Petrified Momma

Donna Shelby

Momma drinks Kahlua straight
That's not enough, she says
As she downs a couple shots of vodka
Yes, that's better
She does the wash
My muddy dungarees
Keeps a bottle handy
Through the dishes
Peers out the kitchen window
As the sun makes a touchdown on the horizon
And taps the bottle dry
Momma is stone now
As the TV blares
And the newspaper drops to her lap
The words play a broken record
In her petrified mind

Walker Flood's Farewell Party

Madge Stiefel

Walker Flood was a drinking man from Kentucky and "by God . . . didn't give a tinker's damn who know'd it." He'd tell you to your face when he got a chance, his unshaven pointed chin jutting forward, and icy-blue eyes sparking through a frown. He loved to talk; his favorite subject was Walker Flood, and he turned any conversation to that subject. Without an audience he was content to talk with himself, muttering proverbs and replying with profanities, punctuated by spittings over his left shoulder.

"Good riddance, I say." Raising his voice over the creaking wagon and the clanging of empty barrels inside, he repeated, "I say, goo-ed riddance."

"An' to hell with 'em all," he responded, slapping the reins across his mule's rump and pulling his short frame to its full height as he always did when he cussed.

A softness eased into his wrinkled face when he twisted around, contemplating the shack near the banks of White River, where his belongings were packed, stacked, and ready to go. He shook his head, "Don't know what all the fuss is 'bout."

"It's 'bout Goddamn politics, that's what it's 'bout," spat back Walker Flood.

A familiar sight to Indianapolis residents since before the turn of the century, Walker's dilapidated wagon and mule were part of their daily scenery. In fact, they welcomed his long-winded gruffness because there was no other professional man in the city—doctor, lawyer, preacher, or even bartender—whom people could talk with the way they could with him.

Most called him "ol' Walker, the trashman" but he introduced himself to a stranger as Walker T. Flood, "odds and ends" man. Nobody remained a stranger long to one who placed such importance on conversation; and he was a good listener too. Chewing and listening intently, he waited for the opportunity to change the subject to himself and his theories and he had many.

His theory on Hoosiers was that they were limited to four topics of conversation which they usually discussed in their order of importance: work, religion, drinking, and Kentuckians. Now Walker said he rated them in the exact opposite order, but on all four he could talk down any man, or woman.

He was his orneriest on the topic of Kentuckians, though it wasn't the jokes and insults that angered him most. There was the misconceived notion, to anybody who wasn't from the Blue Grass state, that Kentuckians were tall. When someone laughingly told Walker he wasn't tall enough to be a real Kentuckian, he'd get spitting mad. Pulling his shoulders up and jutting out his chin, he'd say, "By God, I reckon I'm as tall as any Kentuckian needs to be."

"I reckon they won't be seeing this short Kentuckian again after today."

"Them damn politicians can have their city ordinances and more," threatened Walker, spitting into one of the garbage barrels after his first pick-up, and then heaving the pail he had emptied to the ground.

"How much time are they giving you, Walker?" asked the cook, who worked days at The Nest, retrieving his garbage pails from behind Walker's wagon.

"Just enuff time, by God," retorted the old man as his wagon jerked away. He wasn't in the mood to talk with anyone but himself.

The cook laughed aloud, watching the wagon disappear around

the corner while its driver mumbled and swore alternately. "Boy, they've made ol' Walker mad this time; he forgot to collect his fee."

City officials had been warning the Kentuckian for months. They told him to quit driving his mule and wagon on city streets, for reasons of safety and "san-ee-tay-shun" as Walker mimicked. Yesterday he had received final notice; legal papers were served prohibiting him from driving his wagon on city streets after this week. They threatened jail and confiscation of his mule and wagon if he disobeyed the order. The man who delivered the papers had the gall to imply that everybody knew he had been hoarding his money for more than thirty years. According to them, he could afford a motorized truck if he wanted to continue as trash collector.

"How'd they know how much money I got?" demanded Walker of himself.

"Ain't none of the'r damn business, anyway."

On his last day in Indianapolis, Walker Flood wasn't concerned with money. He covered in one day most of the territory which normally took him a week. Such industrious behavior puzzled his patrons who all knew Walker's theory on work.

Walker felt his business had every advantage a man wanted. He worked when he felt like it; he worked outside; he was his own boss; and he could talk, his favorite pastime. "All work, some say, is noble," he'd drawl as he rubbed his amber-stained chin. "Others say hard work has its rewards. I say the'r damn liars. Ther' ain't nothin' noble or rewardin' 'bout breakin' your back workin'!" With that he'd spit an exclamation mark over his left shoulder.

But when residents heard his noisy wagon approaching on his last day in town, by the time they gathered their money or whatever "odds and ends" they planned to barter with over his fee, they were surprised to see the rear of his wagon wobbling on down the street. A few tried to follow to the next stop, hoping to engage him in conversation, and were even more shocked by his rudeness. All day long this continued.

Then about an hour before supper time, he pulled up to the front door of The Nest and strutted in. The owner/bartender started to tell him to move his stinking garbage before all the customers ran away, when Walker pounded on a table, climbed on a chair, and threw a wad of bills on the counter. "This oughta buy drinks for everybody for the rest of the day." Pulling his shoulders back and standing erect, he added, "An' if anybody asks, it was a tall Kentuckian who paid for 'em." He had one drink with the noisy group before driving his wagon across the Washington Street bridge and up to the state house.

His slow-moving wagon caused such a commotion in the downtown area that traffic came to a standstill. Having timed his demonstration perfectly, Walker attracted a crowd of people leaving work or coming into town for dinner. Turning his wagon around in front of the Hoosier rotunda in spite of honking horns, shouting motorists, and bewildered pedestrians, he stopped in the middle of the block. Calmly he climbed down, sauntered around to the back of the wagon, climbed up on the bed, and began dumping the contents on the street, throwing the empty barrels on top of the garbage along with any other "odds and ends" he had picked up that day.

When his wagon was cleared of its debris, he bowed slightly and waved to the crowd. "A farewell party for Walker T. Flood, former 'odds and ends' man of Indianapolis, is goin' on right now at The Nest. Drinks are free." Scattered cheers accompanied his quick descent from the bed and even faster ascent onto the seat. His wagon rolled a few feet then halted; he stood and added, "An' after the'r city ordinances have cleared this up," he pointed to the garbage on the street, "Then the Goddamn politicians can have a drink to 'ol Walker." He spat the quotation marks.

Long before baffled officials decided how to remove the garbage, before the traffic jam cleared, or before the wad of bills was drunk, Walker Flood went back to his shack, loaded his belongings in the wagon, and left Indianapolis—heading west on US 40.

It

Rick Callahan

Over the East River
The rising sun breaks the night
And reassembles day

In the forever shadow of an ancient tenement
A wino screams at no one in particular
He stumbles, falling onto the cool, grey sidewalk
Lying there, he laughs at a joke
He has suddenly remembered hearing
Many decades ago

Mrs. Martinez, survivor of 97 revolutions
Around the blazing sun
Recalls the Victorian earth
When the sky was braided with telephone wires
And machines and brass design chugged full of steam
Along brick rivers illuminated by flaming gas
Moon and stars

But now we bury our voices deep in the earth
And we travel in fiberglass shells fueled with dinosaur breath
The streets are white concrete lit by phosphorescent zaps
And you never see the stars, and rarely is the moon to be found
But this is all right for most of us
We never felt the real past
So sit-coms are adequate entertainment

And feeling wonder or awe is not necessary
Or even desirable

But did you ever wonder what an autumn leaf
Smelled like?
Did you ever drive out of the blinding city
Into the dark green night
And watch the invisible universe
Pulse warmth and vitality through the
Milky Way
Like a heart

Remember the person who said
"I found it"
Well, he didn't even know what "it" was
And come to think of it
Neither do we

...and everything nice

Jan Michelson

rip a heart to shreds
tat lace edges
onto kiddie-sculpting sex;

drown dream rights
in sugared oatmeal slush,
bury them among the gerbered bibs;

cast a smile that isn't
a mouth
that vomits Redbook quotes;

we an I to pieces,
bittered bits of ironed deepness;

fill a mind with empty
and die it pretty pink.

Untitled, Marsha Bilbrey, 1982

The Rat's Christmas

R.F. Russell

Casey, Dutch, Left-to-Right Thompson, and Buck Thorp played teamgin rummy across a long table flanked by benches blistered with peeling paint. Warm and echoing, the basement locker room smelled of smoke, whiskey, and the coffee I delivered every hour. Between runs, I watched the games and listened to the four men curse and joke. Had Mom heard their talk she would not have insisted I go to the golf course with Dad.

It was 11:30 in the morning of my twelfth Christmas Eve. I had been downstairs watching the card games for about an hour. There wasn't anything else to do. Outside, two inches of snow covered the fairways. Dad stayed upstairs in the pro shop reading, making coffee, and selling the occasional last minute shopper a gift box of Titleists for under the tree.

I wanted to be at home, snooping through closets for presents to shake, but Mom had nixed that by packing me off to the golf course with Dad. Dad and I had kissed her good-bye in the kitchen about 8:00 AM. She was making turkey dressing and smelled like oysters; she told us four times to drive carefully in the snow. After four reminders, Dad wasn't about to drive carefully.

It took Dad fifteen minutes to slide the Olds through the unplowed Indianapolis streets to the Pines, the municipal golf course where Dad was pro. We opened the club house; Dad fried eggs and hamburgers on the grill for breakfast, and I waited for some of the Dirty Thirty to arrive.

The Dirty Thirty. My sister Annie christened the group of men who played the Pines every weekend for money. "They're so grubby," she said one afternoon. "Dirty. The Dirty Thirty." We both laughed.

The Dirty Thirty bet each other seven ways from Sunday, so whoever won took everyone else's money, and dollar signs decorated their souls. Given the rough characters in the Dirty Thirty and the ease with which golf clubs can double as weapons, it was lucky no one was ever murdered at the Pines. Dad called the Dirty Thirty "those jokers." Mom called them "club members." I guess Dad never told her how Shanks Wilson rode with a motorcycle gang and broke his shafts in drunken fights, or that Mr. Crossfield, who was always so polite, disappeared one June to build the first miniature golf course inside the Michigan City State Prison. If Mom had known the Dirty Thirty caused more trouble than my neighborhood friends, she would have chained me to my bed at home, despite the fact Dad like having me around.

This being Christmas Eve and snowy, only four of the Dirty Thirty regulars came to play cards. By noon, I was thinking about going upstairs to ask Dad for a cheeseburger. Then, the Rat rushed in, more excited than I had ever seen him. They called him the Rat because he was very small with a long, shrewish nose and darty eyes. No one in the Dirty Thirty ever called him Bob, his real name, even though the Rat disliked his nickname more than a little.

The Rat was excited because he had just won $1,000 in the pool—a local moniker for the numbers game.This was very good news because the Rat's wallet had seen more moths than money, and it was Christmas. The Rat worked construction during the summer but he squandered his earnings on beer and new golf balls. During the winter he suffered chronic short pockets disease; he couldn't even play cards. He had to watch, like me.

The Rat still lived at home, and every Christmas he hustled around hitting up his friends for enough bucks to buy his mother a bottle of cologne. He used half his borrowings to buy the cheapest drugstore

cologne and decorated it with the red bow he stole from the wreath on the clubhouse door. The other half he donated to the Blue Note Lounge for Christmas cheer, eighty proof cheer.

"No cologne this year," the Rat declared. "This Christmas, Mom gets what she really wants."

The Rat explained that his mother had cataracts so thick she couldn't tell pepper from salt—which solved the mystery of her oddly flavored meals. A student optometrist at the free University Eye Clinic had assured the Rat a real eye doctor could fix his mother's eyes for a thousand bucks, "five hundred a peeper."

"Mom's gonna see as good as Tarzan," the Rat said. He refused Dutch's very warm invitation to play poker and scurried away.

I left the locker room soon after the Rat and went upstairs for lunch. With two cheeseburgers warming me I braved the outside. For an hour I labored over a skinny snowman on the first tee, but it wasn't much fun. I didn't even bother giving the snowman a face. I spent another thirty minutes stalking imaginary spies through the yews east of the clubhouse. When my teeth started chattering, I shot my last make-believe foe and hurried inside. Dad saw my blue lips and sat me down in the pro shop while he fixed me a cup of coffee, which I hated. Dad made me drink it anyway. "Pretend it's hot chocolate," he said. I knew right away Dad didn't drink much hot chocolate.

When my lips had returned to normal pink, Dad released me and I wandered downstairs to the card game. Whiskey made a fine catalyst. The men used words I hadn't heard before, and they didn't bother diluting the Jack Daniels with coffee any more.

The hospital called around 4:00 PM. Dad walked down with the message.

"The Rat's in Wishard Hospital," Dad said. "Someone mugged him."

"Did they get all the money?" Dutch asked.

Dad shrugged. "They're keeping him for observation."

After Dad returned upstairs, the others discussed the Rat for some minutes. Everyone agreed the Rat had the luck of a turkey on Thanksgiving Day, and the mugging had been a set-up to steal the pool money. Dutch was genuinely subdued because he had planned to win some pool money in a poker game. Besides, he claimed the Rat owned him twenty bucks. Dutch suggested they visit the hospital and cheer up the Rat. The truth was, Dutch wanted to know if the Rat had stashed a few hundred in his shoes, or in some other hiding place the mugger had overlooked.

I piled into the back seat of Dutch's old Chevy between Buck and Left-to-Right. Dutch had promised Dad he would drop me at home on the way to the hospital. Dad claimed he had to wait for a late customer. He really wanted to stop at the Blue Note Lounge on the way home for a Christmas shooter. Since my beard wasn't heavy enough to let me pass for twenty-one, I had to go with Dutch.

A half mile west of the Pines, Dutch slid into the small parking lot of the White River liquor store. He went inside and emerged with two bottles in a brown paper sack. He squeezed behind the steering wheel and held up the sack. "Boys," he said, "I want to introduce you to the Scotch Twins."

When Left-to-Right saw the "Twins" he issued the opinion that my house lay off the direct route to the hospital, and that the Rat undoubtedly needed to see a friendly face—mine.

The others praised his sensitivity and insight, so I became a member of the welcoming committee. I scrunched down in the seat to enjoy the ride.

The hospital receptionist, a bitter old maid who hated working Christmas Eve, "informed" Dutch that visiting hours didn't start until seven. Dutch pulled all his putts to the left, but he was by no means a stupid guy.

"This is the Rat's little brother," Dutch said, pointing to me. "We brought him because the doctor says it's touch and go, and maybe this is

the Rat's last nine—Christmas Eve too."

The old maid and Dutch went around and around for some minutes while I screwed up my face to look like a rat. I don't think I did too good a job because the old maid folded her arms across her small bosom as if she faced a well known rapist.

Left-to-Right's mouth was slightly open and his eyes glassy as he watched Dutch play the old maid for sympathy. When she refused us entry for the third time, Left-to-Right started trembling and slurred something about "honoring a dying man's request." He was loud and threatening; he scowled fiercely. He didn't look directly at the old maid, but he got her attention. Left-to-Right actually believed Dutch and thought the Rat was dying. He would have ripped the reception area apart in another five minutes.

The old maid glanced at Left-to-Right, licked her lips, and waved the five of us and the Scotch Twins to the elevator. Of course, she hadn't been introduced to the Twins.

The Rat lay propped in bed, staring at a blank TV. "Take five bucks, in advance," the Rat said, pointing, to the TV.

"There's no trust in the world," Dutch answered.

The Rat appeared unmarked except for a large bandage on the back of his head. Left-to-Right stared quizzically. "He ain't dyin'," Left-to-Right said.

I was the only one who laughed.

"Did he get it all?" Dutch asked

"Even the extra hun from my shoe," the Rat wailed.

Dutch wailed along with the Rat; a stranger wouldn't have known who hurt worse. The Rat told us how he had stopped at the Blue Note Lounge for a bit of cheer before going home with his gold mine. After a lot of cheer and some loose talk about winning the pool, the Rat snuck out the back door. Someone hiding in the shadows whacked him on the head and knocked him out. The Rat never saw his attacker, but he had noticed as he finished his last drink, the exit of a small, bearded man. Buck remarked that maybe waving the money around hadn't been too good an idea, which was probably the brightest notion Buck had had in a year.

I rode in the front seat between Casey and Dutch. The Rat, minus the topcoat Buck had politely reclaimed as soon as we hit fresh air, rode in the back. The men argued about whose house was closer, mine or the Rat's. Finally, Dutch decided the Rat's was closer because the Rat didn't have an overcoat. This fact silenced the others, and Dutch started humming "Jingle Bells" as he made a U-turn to go south.

Halfway to the Rat's house it began to snow again. I closed my eyes because Dutch kept aiming for parked cars and missing them. I opened them real fast, though, when the Rat started blubbering like a baby. The loss of the money, his Christmas present for his mother, hit him very hard. Real tears rolled down his cheeks. The others didn't pay much attention, as they had seen the Rat weep twice as hard over a missed four-foot putt. The tears affected me, however. I wanted to help.

"Stop at a drug store," I said, "and I'll steal a bottle of cologne."

"Can't," Dutch said. "It's after six. They're closed." The Rat sobbed hard enough to warm a witch's heart. "I've got a dozen brand new Titleists," Left-to-Right offered.

The Rat complained of a headache, so Buck passed him one of the Scotch Twins. Soon that twin made everyone's acquaintance except mine. A half hour later, everyone felt better, even the Rat. He threw off his covers and sat up, saying, "I feel fine. Let's get out of here."

Everyone agreed, as a hospital was no place to spend Christmas Eve. Left-to-Right discovered the Rat's clothes in the closet, and the Rat dressed in a minute. The only problems were the Rat's lost overcoat and the patch on his head that flashed "Patient" like a neon sign.

Buck Thorpe generously offered his overcoat to the Rat, once Dutch pointed out how gentlemanly such an offer would be. Buck was a tall, angular Kentuckian who fervently admired good manners. His overcoat polished the tops of the Rat's shoes—the only polishing those shoes ever saw. Left-to Right's straw Sam Snead hat covered the bandage. The

Rat looked like a fugitive from a Goodwill store, but he was ready to escape.

The four nurses on duty averted their eyes, as the six of us crept past. I realize now they let us go, probably sighing with relief as we tiptoed out of the ward. At the time, though, I thought our makeshift disguise had fooled them. The others thought so too, but then their heads had been turned by the Scotch Twins.

"What the hell is an old lady going to do with a dozen golf balls?" Dutch interrupted before the Rat could accept.

The snow fell prettily through the yellow headlights as everyone tried to think of a gift for the Rat's mother. I was tired and hungry. Suddenly I wanted to go home and said so. No one listened.

"Pink champagne," Buck said. "We could buy a big bottle at Kroger."

"Cigars," Casey suggested. This was a speech for Casey; he usually communicated in grunts. His comment upset the group. If Casey, who moaned over every departing quarter like it was a son, wanted to give something, they had to give something. Offers flew around the car after that.

The Rat would have accepted everything, given it all to his mother, and then used it himself; but Dutch vetoed all the gift ideas, calling them "inappropriate."

"What does your mother really want for Christmas?" Buck asked.

"Besides her eyesight," the Rat answered, "the only thing she ever asks for is my brother Paul."

"What brother?" Dutch asked.

The Rat told the story of how his brother had blown town. It seemed that Paul had worked in a bank, and the bank had lost some money. Since, in his teens, Paul had matriculated at the state boys school, he was the logical suspect. The Rat swore Pauly was innocent, but he never explained how Pauly knew about the missing cash the Sunday before Monday's trial balance. This inconsistency bothered no one but me.

"Pauly's coming home for Christmas," Dutch said.

"Like hell," the Rat answered. "There's still a warrant out."

Dutch pursed his lips. "Your mom's got bad eyes, don't she?"

"So?"

"How long's Pauly been gone?"

"Ten years."

"Well, he's come home."

Dutch stopped at another liquor store to refill the Scotch Twins and outlined his plan. Frankly, young as I was, I didn't think it had a snowflake's chance in a hot skillet, but I was out-voted. The red-faced men agreed they could pull off the charade.

The Rat's house was small, dark, and smelled of cabbage. His mother waited for us in the kitchen doorway, the only lit room, her enormous eyes blinking behind the thick lenses, her house dress misbuttoned.

Dutch motioned Casey forward. Dutch had decided Casey would play Paul. Casey Fulmer stood six-foot-six with mammoth shoulders and a wasp waist. Casey worked on a loading dock, sometimes doubling as a fork lift. He looked as much like the Rat as Marilyn Monroe. In fact, Marilyn probably looked a whole lot more like the Rat.

"Ma," the Rat said as Casey stepped forward, "I brung Pauly home for Christmas."

The Rat's mom took one look at Casey and fainted. Maybe she could see better than the Rat thought.

Right away Left-to Right yelled, "Call an ambulance!" He thought the old lady had had a heart attack. The Rat bent over his mom and asked for water. Casey stepped back, not knowing what to do. It was the first time he had knocked anyone down without a punch.

Buck sprinted for the door because an ambulance would bring the police, and Buck was wanted for questioning by a certain precinct captain. Buck hated to lie. Dutch took a long pull at one of the Scotch Twins. He thought he had done too good a job this time. I watched and waited.

Then a bearded guy walked in.

The Rat took one look at the bearded guy and dropped his mom like she was on fire. Her head clunked on the floor, knocking her out for good, but the Rat didn't notice. He stood, yelled something about the Blue Note, and threw himself at the bearded guy.

The bearded guy was small, but he stood his ground as the Rat attacked. No one knew why they were fighting, but since the Rat and the Beard seemed evenly matched, no one intervened. Dutch even gave odds the Beard would handle the Rat inside ten minutes. Not a bad bet considering the Rat had been clobbered earlier in the afternoon.

Five minutes later the Rat was sitting on the Beard's chest, ready to severely damage the Beard's face. Dutch stopped cheering for the Beard and looked remorseful. He had bet four dollars at five-to-one on the Beard.

"Don't ya recognize me?" the Beard gasped.

The Rat stopped gritting his teeth, and, with a strange expression, bent down to study the Beard's face. Then the Rat straightened and frowned.

"Pauly?" the Rat asked softly.

The Beard grinned bloodily. "How ya doin', Rat?"

The Rat punched the Beard again. Casey pulled the Rat off.

Pauly rose shakily and explained he had been living across town for five years. He had a job, a wife, two children, and a mortgage. He had never revealed his whereabouts to his family because he feared the FBI still watched his mother's house. Earlier, at the Blue Note Lounge, he had overheard the Rat bragging about paying for his mom's cataract operation. He didn't trust the Rat to hold onto the thousand bucks; so, to keep the money safe, he had rolled his own brother. Pauly pulled a wad of bills out of his shirt. Dutch's eyes almost popped out of his head. Of course no one asked Pauly why he hadn't just introduced himself at the bar, or why he hadn't come to see the Rat at the hospital. Pauly had come home with the money. Nothing else mattered.

Right then Dutch passed the Scotch Twins around to celebrate, and Dad arrived. Dad was very unhappy because Mom had rousted him from the Blue Note to find me. We were both late for a turkey dinner. But as Dad introduced himself to the Scotch Twins, he lost his temper and wished everyone "Merry Christmas." Suddenly, everyone was grinning and feeling good. The Twins circled the room like Sputnik satellites. Everyone sampled the Twins except me and the Rat's mom, who still lay on the floor, unaware Pauly had really come home for Christmas.

Movement of the Streets, silver gelatin print, Chris Roller, 1997

. . . only problems were the Rat's lost overcoat and the patch on his head that flashed "Patient" like a neon sign.

Happy On The Coast of Florida

Selene Wyatt

'84

Crumbling, painted-pink flamingos
dressed the peeling, cracked stucco of
Marlene's Passe-A-Grille Motel and Efficiency Apartments.
Emphysemic Granny welcomed us,
puffing on a Raleigh,
fingering a cordless telephone pinned to her blouse
as if to imply more than proprietor.
"So you're a doctor,"
grazed off her tongue to Michael
as she led us to our room.

Unpacked, I stepped out for air.
Two bald-headed, beer-bellied, retired Chrysler workers
sat out front on borrowed lawn-chairs arguing
over cards and the economy and whether or not the Jews
were overtaking the country—until—
I thought
the tiny, red veins netting their cheeks
and holding their noses
would
let go.

Sand in my thongs reminded me
of the public beach across the street.
The Gulf of Mexico
carried another conversation
of stoic couples sipping amaretto,
too tired, too tense, too afraid,
to break away the brittle stretched taffy
that pulled them back into talk
of interns at code blues,
patients, nurses, and hospital politics.

Most mornings we lay in bed with Phil Donahue
and made love on two Hollywood beds pushed together.
Days we walked the beach,
dodging skipping waves of green,
dizzying plans to avoid jellyfish.
Nights we bet on the doggies,
played Space Invaders at Peninsula Point arcade,
and dined at the Hurricane
with Casablanca fans, beer, tender scrod sandwiches
and hidden jazz musicians.

One day we sunned behind a clump of reeds
to block the sixty-five-degree breeze.
Listening to rushing ocean massaging sand
I watched Michael
half-concentrating on the same
life-saving article he carried everywhere.
How delicate he looked,
how fragile his bones,
soft the cartilage,
thin his flesh.

Sometimes he spoke
of quitting medicine to open a bait shop.
Just a little place in Minnesota maybe,
with worms and minnows and big, fat chubs
all in tanks lining the walls.
I laughed . . . but could picture it.
Long nights without Michael "managing"
dying Mrs. Harris by phone,
without the pain when he sat up on one elbow
to tell Mr. Harris it was over.

At four o'clock we left balmy, palmy Passe-A-Grill
At six we stopped for a ten-pound bag of oranges.
At eleven the next morning we fell into bed
in our brown house in the winter city of the north.

Nights were going fast.
Gulf spray tousled our hair
and filled our chests
with salty particles of dreams
from times we didn't know.
We'd have a country farm house,
children to fill the house and love us all day long,
thirty years in one place,
enough money to fly to Europe
and see the world.

There we were, happy on the coast of Florida,
pretending we didn't have to go back.
The last day we sat in the sun too long
and burned the tops of our feet.
We loaded the Datsun in a hurry
and lingered once more on the beach.

Remembering The Uterus

Rick Callahan

I found my sister's Rosary Beads in the womb.
She is always leaving things behind
To mark her existence.
After eight months of quiet-anxious boredom
I ground mirrors and built a Newtonian opera glass
Peering out into the world through the navel.
I liked what I saw and waited to ripen.
Later, my brother found my optical device
And sketched it on his pad along with
The ovaries, his feet and the imagined world.
He left nothing behind: a pack rat.
Little is known of our younger almost-sister.
But I imagine her as sentimental, timid,
Perhaps a librarian, nun or collector of things.
Something went wrong. She could not leave
The warmth and security of the uterus.
She hung herself on her umbilical cord
And was born sleeping-blue.

Horse, Brenda K. Hale, 1992

Paternity

R.F. Russell

As quitting time approached, Wilson Traub began to sweat. He loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar. He tried to concentrate on the cathode screen in front of him. The green cursor pulsed like an accusing eye. His fingers quivered over the keyboard; his back muscles knotted with tension. He felt as if he had just consumed a gallon of hot, strong coffee.

"Ok, Traub?"

Wilson looked up. Jack Banks, Wilson's supervisor, grinned like the sadistic overseer he was. Wilson snatched back his hands, as if he had been caught reaching for a forbidden cookie.

"Seems a little warm." Wilson was surprised by the steady quality of his voice.

"Does it? I'll check." Jack slapped Wilson's shoulder. "Can't have these terminals overheating. Why don't you break for ten minutes?"

Wilson shook his head. To take an unscheduled break was a sign of instability; instability indicated a need for attitude-adjustment training.

"It's nearly quitting time," Wilson said. "I want to compile this program."

"Suit yourself." Jack moved away from Wilson's work station.

Wilson let out a long, low breath. "Concentrate," he whispered. "Concentrate!" His fingers began to tap keys. For five minutes he managed to create a bit of worthwhile code.

"Wilson!" someone hissed.

Wilson looked around. At the work station to Wilson's right, Falen Oaks winked wickedly.

"Brewski after work?" Falen asked.

Wilson shook his head. "It's my drive day."

"One beer ain't gonna hurt."

"You know the law. Anyone caught driving with an inflated blood alcohol level sobers up in jail—for a year."

"Who's gonna know?" Falen grinned. "You can handle one beer, can't you?"

Wilson shook his head. "Have you heard about the Litzu test? It's accurate to within a tenth of an ounce."

Falen frowned. "Gonna let them tell you when to eat and crap too?"

"I don't want to go to Joliet."

"Joliet's a vacation compared to this place."

Wilson spotted Banks several stations over. "Shhh," Wilson hushed. "Banks."

Falen turned back to his terminal and pretended to be busy. Wilson wiped his palms on his pants and began typing again. A minute later, a message appeared on his screen.

TWO MINUTES TILL SIGNOFF

Wilson stopped creating and instructed the computer to compile his program. As he waited for the computer, Wilson mentally examined the drunk driving statute.

Some people considered the law overly harsh, but no one disputed the huge reduction in fatal traffic accidents. Critics of the intoxication law pointed to the road access regulations which limited individual driving to one day per week. The access regulations had cut traffic by two-thirds, and those few drivers left were frightened by the prospect of a year in jail. Not that prison was bad. Since prisons had become co-ed, they portrayed a decidedly pleasant atmosphere. Still, most people couldn't afford to lose a year. Wilson couldn't afford to lose a year. Companies

weren't required to hold slots open or rehire inmates. Starting over often proved harder than starting fresh.

The computer acknowledged Wilson's compilation just before it signaled for signoff. Wilson signed off and rolled down his sleeves. Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead. Wilson suspected his body stank. Luckily, his car wasn't equipped with a nervous-disorder detector. In his present state, the detector might automatically lock the controls. Wilson wouldn't be able to see . . . .

Billy.

Denise Sharard waved from across the room. Wilson waved back. He liked Denise. Prettier than average, she wrote elegant little search routines for Internal Revenue. She had been hinting at a child. More than hinting, she had been squeezing Wilson like a boa constrictor. "Let's get a permit," she had urged just the previous week. "Then, we can be ready whenever the notion hits. You know, no time for second thoughts."

Wilson had managed to fend off her argument, but he couldn't thwart her forever. Denise had qualified in the "optimum" category, as had Wilson. They could acquire a conception permit the minute they stepped into the population assessor's office.

Wilson had never fully understood why women wanted to give birth. He understood how someone could love children, but childbirth was reportedly excruciatingly painful. Yet every woman Wilson ever dated wanted to have a child. Wilson had resisted most of them. At times, he wished he had resisted all.

Denise waited by the exit. "Dinner tonight?" She asked.

Wilson shook his head. "I'm busy."

"I'll fix your favorite, noodles and eggs." She leaned close and whispered. "Real eggs."

Wilson understood. Denise had offered to share her quarterly egg ration. He hadn't eaten an egg in two months.

"Sorry," Wilson said. "I have an engagement."

"I hope she's optimum," Denise said sharply and turned away.

Wilson watched Denise leave. He felt sad. He wished he could tell her where he was going, what he was going to do; but he couldn't. If he told her, Denise would have to report to the police or face imprisonment along with him. Wilson couldn't ask her to take the risk. Hell, he shouldn't take the risk. Why did he? For what?

For Billy.

Wilson shrugged and started toward his Toyota. "Hey, Denise," he called. "Want a ride?"

She turned, and her anger dissolved into a small smile.

"That'd be nice."

Wilson walked up to her. "Maybe I can stop by later, just before curfew," he suggested, taking her arm.

Denise giggled. "You'd have to spend the night. You can't go out after curfew."

"Have you ever eaten eggs for breakfast?" Wilson asked.

"Don't be silly. Who eats eggs for breakfast?"

Wilson opened the car door. "My grandfather ate eggs for breakfast."

"Your grandfather needed honesty training."

Wilson started the car. "He claimed he had eggs every morning. Said he got sick of eggs and insisted on pancakes once a week. His favorite breakfast was a sausage and cheese omelet."

"Omelet?"

Wilson laughed. "Look it up in a dictionary, an old dictionary."

She laughed and squeezed his shoulder. "You're tense she said. "You need a good rub."

"Maybe later."

Denise smiled. "Yes, later. We'll rub and save the egg for breakfast."

Wilson felt the serpentine squeeze again. Served with breakfast would be the suggestion of a conception permit. He could feel it, an egg and permit omelet.

"Sure," Wilson said. "We'll be crazy. For breakfast."

He pulled away into the light traffic and past the teeming bus stop.

Wilson relaxed on the park bench and smiled at the evening sun. Summer was a good time, he thought. The long evenings allowed use of the swings and slides and paths. The park was more fun than the skating rink or the video theaters where Wilson whiled away the winter evenings. Wilson could smell in the park. He could touch and hear and run in the park. He could even hide in the park, walk off into the trees and hide. A girl in the security section had once told him the parks were "clean," no microphones. The thought pleased him.

"Fine evening, isn't it?"

Wilson half turned. A portly, red-faced stranger smile from the walk. Wilson touched the brown sack by his side protectively.

"Yes it is," Wilson agreed.

"My father used to help me catch fireflies on such evenings." The stranger frowned. "That's a violation, isn't it? I guess you could report me if you wished."

Fear knotted Wilson's stomach. "You . . . you hardly seem old enough to have had a father," Wilson stammered "We lived in the country. My father was the last independent farmer in the state." The stranger stared into the sun. "We lost the place after he died. The courts took it. Dear me, another violation. I'm just full of them this evening."

Too afraid to speak, Wilson simply watched the stranger who turned and grinned. "Sound old, don't I?" he chuckled, then saluted Wilson. "Good night, sir. Enjoy you evening."

Wilson watched the stranger stroll down the path. Wilson didn't notice the blonde eight-year-old sprinting across the grass. The boy slid to a stop and plopped o the bench.

"Hi," the boy said.

Wilson grinned. "How ya doin', sport?"

"Fine." The boy looked around Wilson and spotted brown sack. "Did you bring something for me?"

"It's not polite to ask, Billy. You're supposed to wait just in case the person doesn't have a gift for you."

"Oh."

"But for you."

Billy's face lit up. "Great. What is it?"

Wilson handed over the sack. "Open it and find out." Billy grabbed the sack and tore it hurriedly. "Easy," Wilson cautioned. "Don't break it." Billy tore the sack more gently, finally exposing a simple single-masted toy boat.

"What is it?" Billy asked.

"A boat."

"Doesn't look like a boat."

"It's an old boat, a sailing ship. They used them years ago. Used the wind to move."

Billy turned the boat as if trying to figure out how the wind could possibly move it.

"Come on," Wilson said. "Let's find some water. I'll show you."

They started down the asphalt path.

"Where'd you get it?" Billy asked.

"Made it," Wilson answered. "Carved it by hand. It's real wood, very precious. Fathers do that for their sons."

Billy stared bard at the boat. Wilson tousled Billy's blonde hair. "Like it?" Wilson asked.

Billy nodded.

Wilson grinned. He and Billy drifted down the path in the evening sun. Wilson felt strong, proud. Yet he glance over his shoulder to see who might be watching. Across a small meadow, the fat man Wilson had spoken to earlier watched. Wilson's stomach tightened. Not every violator was trustworthy.

"Over there?" Billy pointed to a small wading pond.

"Sure," Wilson said.

Billy ran across the grass to the water's edge. He dropped the boat into the water and watched it.

"It won't go," Billy said when Wilson reached him.

"You have to make some wind." Wilson dropped to his knees and blew at the sail. The boat scooted across the water. Billy laughed.

"See?"

"Sure, do it again," Billy answered.

"Tell you what," Wilson began. "Take off your shoes and wade after it. Just blow into the sail."

"We're not supposed to wade."

"Nonsense. Try it."

Billy glanced at Wilson doubtfully, but the boy sat and removed his shoes. Soon, he was knee-deep in the water blowing the boat across the ripples and laughing. Wilson surveyed the area, searching for the fat man, but the fat man wasn't in sight. That didn't mean the fat man wasn't close by. The government had people everywhere.

Wilson sat down on the grass and watched Billy play. "Like it?" Wilson asked.

"Yeah," Billy tipped the boat over and laughed.

"Can you say 'thanks, Dad'?" Wilson asked.

"Thanks."

"Thanks what?"

Billy shrugged. He wouldn't look at Wilson.

"You can't thank your father any more?"

Billy squirmed, as if he had to use a restroom. Wilson thought a moment.

"Something bothering you, sport?" Wilson asked.

Billy shrugged. Wilson waited.

"The other kids don't have fathers," Billy finally said.

"They all have fathers. It's just that most of them have no idea who their fathers are."

"Some of the older kids say it's wrong to have a father."

"Wrong?" Wilson mused. "Unlawful—but not wrong."

"Some don't even have mothers." Billy stared at Wilson.

"But you have a mother," Wilson offered.

"Two nights a week."

Wilson nodded. "And Mom lets me have one of her nights, right?"

Billy nodded.

Wilson felt a huge weight in his chest. He didn't want to ask, but he had no choice. "You don't want to spend one evening with me?"

"Yes, I mean no. I mean, I want to be with you."

"You just don't want to call me 'Dad'. Billy nodded. "Yeah. Can I call you 'Wilson'?"

"Like you call Mom's boyfriends?"

"Yeah."

Wilson smiled sadly. "That can be arranged." Billy grinned. "I can be like everybody else."

Wilson felt helpless as tears filled his eyes. "So can I," he said.

Billy splashed the boat, trying to swamp it.

Wilson smiled through the tears. He was no longer a father, no longer a criminal. He had joined the ranks of the boyfriends, and the law didn't restrict boyfriends. Boyfriends could hang around any time a mother had custody—as long as the "boyfriend" didn't claim to be the "father." No one was allowed to have a "father."

Wilson wiped away the tears. He would never feel like a father again. He would be "Wilson." He wanted to scream.

"Can you get some ice cream?" Billy asked.

"Saved my ration for you."

"Oh boy!" Billy splashed out of the pond, hauling his boat with him.

Wilson remembered Denise and her ration of eggs. She would be waiting after he dropped off Billy, and Wilson would owe her a conception permit for the eggs. Two eggs, a conception, and Wilson could be a father

again.

And there were many women like Denise just waiting for an "optimum" mate to happen along.

Wilson watched Billy slip running shoes over wet, muddy feet. Wilson grinned, knowing Billy's mother would be angry.

"I have to drop you off early," Wilson said.

"That's OK," Billy said. He grabbed his boat. "Ready to go . . . Wilson?" Wilson nodded. Billy tore off across the grass.

"Let's run," Billy called.

Wilson watched Billy grow steadily smaller in the dusk.

Wilson wiped his palms on his pants and began typing again. A minute later, a message appeared on his screen.

TWO MINUTES TILL SIGNOFF

Hands and Soles

Rick Callahan

My feet are cold
And I'm thinking of
Your Florida beaches.
On those shores we would
Pick up some of the strangest
Debris. Shells, crab-toes,
Bits of whales and ships.
The sand was still warm at
Midnight and we would take the risk
Of walking through it on
Bare feet. Who knows what
Creatures were afoot (afin)
At that hour? Things would
Occasionally move coldly
Beneath our foot-soles
And we would shriek and
Jump apart to save our
Individual skins. Your hair
Would fly up indecisively
Into the night air and pat
Your back like a
Grandmother

"'Neath the Willer Tray"

Rick Callahan

A giant plastic chicken is sprouting
Up through a cornfield somewhere
South of Jim Dean's grave.
You have probably seen it,
Since you've been through
That area once or twice.
Two blocks over from the Post Office and a few
Footsteps from Ellie Drexel's Family
Restaurant is the Fairmount City Bank. A sign on
Its facade says it was
Built in 1888. It looks like it was.
The day we were in Fairmount a Catfish
Fry banner was draped between it and the Post
Office. There was no shadow below it.
The sky was overcast. No wind.
We ate at Ellie's, but all I had was ice tea,
And a cucumber someone had picked from their
Garden, drowned in juices and tried to call a pickle.
A church sale of some obscure, summer type
Was being held nearby and you could hear children
Screaming and fighting. Women haggling.
We visited the museum. Then we went looking
For Jim among the cornfields and dust.
He is hard to find. The graveyard is too large
For such a small town—there were at least
3,000 granite tributes stuck there.
Finally, I had to ask a woman living in a mobile
Home to show us where they had put him. She pointed
And said "'Neath the willer tray." And we found him
There. A new tombstone had just been installed.
Birds had roosted on it
And left their long white tears behind. We ate
A picnic lunch beside
Him and plucked a bouquet of dandelions to add to
His collection.
On the way home we saw the plastic chicken.

The Purple Poodle

Barbara Koons

Her coat was mohair, soft and curly, a deep Parisian wood-violet hue. Thick and warm and pliant, it flowed from her shoulders and encouraged her body in luxurious splendor. On her head, a matching beret tilted coquettishly over one eye. Wrapped in her provocative finery, she exuded an aura of glamour as rich and sensuous as French perfume. Her companion was a country-gentleman type, with a heavy thatch of white hair, hand-carved pipe, Harris tweed sport coat. She was considerably younger than he. Salon-groomed and coiffed, with impeccable manners to match, she was clearly best of show and best of breed, his blue-ribbon prize to parade and display. As they entered a country inn for breakfast, he led her to the center table.

He heartily consumed ham and eggs and hot cakes, while she sat beside him quietly, obedient, daintily nibbling a muffin, a dropped crumb. She divided it into small morsels, displaying flawlessly manicured nails, glossy and smooth. They did not talk. He propped his newspaper and forked his food, while she sat wrapped in purple curls. A discreet yawn revealed her small, pink tongue and polished, perfect teeth. When he finished his food, they rose to leave, and she gave her shoulders a tiny shake, realigning her coat.

She stood a moment at the door, waiting for him to open it. Then she moved ahead of him into the sunlight, mincing along on high heels, taking small stiff-legged steps, her coat gleaming, shoulders back, head up, inhaling the freshness of the morning. Bending to a flowering shrub, she sniffed the aroma of a blossom. He strolled along a few steps behind, hands in pockets, pipe in jaw, puffing contentedly. He said nothing, but he held her on a gaze as short and taut as a leather leash.

Domesticated Animals, Cindy Mohr, 1990

The Search

Jackie Schmidt

'86

Bent fingers
search trouser creases
smoothing each fold.
Nothing.
He flips off slippers
probes them with his toes
lets them lay
slips from his shirt
shakes it
drops it to the floor
and peers below his chair
between the wheels.
Just dust.

Then the labor of inching
along the dim corridor
in evening light
wheeling past the nursing station
unnoticed
examining each picture frame
ransacking laundry tubs
pulling plants apart
sifting soil
emptying ashtrays
running fingers
along sills.

The hall ends.

Sweat drips
to cheeks encrusted
with dried gravy.
He pushes with short
insistent
jerks
into the corner
straining against restraints
stretching out thin arms
hot palms against cool wallpaper
peeling loose ends
feeling for clues
stopping to smear away tears
and cobwebs.
Just dust.

The Committee

J.B. Straw

AGENDA

I. Allusions & Illusions
II. Minutes & Tenets
III. Alliteration & Titillation
IV. Reports:

A. Meter Sub-Committee
B. Task Force on the Right Word
C. Free Verse Study Group

MINUTES

This poem is now called to order.
We will be ruled by the laws of participatory poetry here.
I will not inflict any out-dated authori-tarian ideas on this group.
Why should I make all the decisions when this affects your understanding?

Before commencing with today's agenda, there is some
old business to settle:
What rhymes with orange?

The floor is now open for discussion.

ADDENDUM

Since this is a participatory poem,
please feel free to include your own comments:

Mrs. Fenstermaker

R.F. Russell

Chet-the-Jet Ireland caused my trouble with Lillian Fenstermaker. Chet-the-Jet and Mrs. Ireland were pitted against Sydney and Mrs. Fenstermaker in the finals of the Parkview Country Club's mixed twosome tournament. I caddied for Chet-the-Jet, a handsome, curly-headed man who traveled faster than gossip. Since the Jet cruised onehundred yards ahead of the rest of his foursome, he always reached his ball first. Some members complained that Chet-the-Jet helped himself with his foot under such circumstances. No one ever caught the Jet cheating, but the Jet rarely found a bad lie in the rough.

That sunny August afternoon, the Jet had shut down his afterburners and actually lagged behind the group. At first, I thought the Jet might be keeping tabs on Sydney, the "Grasshopper," a spindly man with exceedingly long legs and a penchant for long-billed caps. Sydney had been known to miscount his strokes on occásion, a condition attributed to his public school education. After the first nine, though, I knew the Jet wasn't auditing the Grasshopper's score. The Grasshopper had shaved a shot on number nine, and the Jet hadn't asked for a recount.

The Jet had targeted on Mrs. Fenstermaker.

Lillian Fenstermaker was no Marsha Boring, but Lillian possessed a good figure, shiny blonde hair, and a knack for makeup. Easily the second or third best-looking woman at the Club, her marriage to Sydney bespoke of her intelligence or poverty. I hoped she had married the Grasshopper for the red Corvette and new golf clubs he gave her every Christmas.

That afternoon, the Jet started the back nine two-up and cruising at sub-bogey speed. He and "Lil" chattered like teenagers. The Grasshopper stared at the ground and muttered under his breath. Mrs. Ireland, a dumpy woman who liked babies better than birdies, toiled along, hoping for an early end to the match.

The Jet stood four-up on the 14th tee. He smiled at Lil just before he sliced his ball deep into the thick woods on the right, fifty yards from the fairway. I groaned. The last time I had searched for a ball in those woods, I had contracted a poison ivy rash over seventy percent of my body—minimum.

As I trudged into the woods, I kept a lookout for anything resembling ivy or snakes. I heard other people tromping about, but I was certain the Jet's ball had been sacrificed to the forest gremlins and would never be seen again. Still, I searched, and as I carefully skirted a suspect bush, I stopped in my tracks.

In the middle of a small clearing, the Jet and Lil were locked in a passionate kiss. The Jet's hands slid over Lil's body like busy flies searching for a place to light. She had one leg wrapped around him, and her hands cupped his buttocks squeezing at a rumba rhythm. He turned her until his back was to me. As I started to back away they broke the kiss.

Lil spotted me and smiled as the Jet nuzzled her neck. For a moment, I thought she might speak. Instead, she winked and returned to kissing the Jet. I slipped out of the clearing and pretended to hunt for the ball until the Jet appeared—flushed and smiling. No one would have suspected the Jet had just lost a $1.25 golf ball.

The match ended on the 16th hole. I collected my fee and left the club as fast as I could. I believed people as old as the Jet and Lil couldn't act like teenagers.

I forgot about the incident until Thursday, Ladies' Day. Coincidence placed Lil's bag upon my shoulder as I stood by the first tee with Wild Man Wilts. Lil walked out of the locker room in pastel pink shorts and

a white polo shirt. She smiled at me.

"Good morning," Lil said as she pulled several golf balls out of her bag.

"Good morning," I answered.

"Hold this for me." She pressed a golf ball into my hand.

"Sure."

She smiled again, patted my arm, accepted her driver, and stepped onto the tee with the other ladies.

"Hold this," Wild Man snickered and patted my arm.

"Shove it," I told Wild Man.

Wild Man laughed.

Frederick C. Wilts was a year older and half a head shorter than I. We called him "Wild Man" because Fred operated at the edges of sanity and stability. Wild Man embraced hilarity or despair, love or hatred. He enjoyed perfect days—perfectly happy or perfectly horrible. Wild either punched people or kissed them. A handshake remained the greeting of the mediocre.

All the caddies admired Wild Man. His emotional extravagance played well to teenagers beset with anxieties and pimples. While the rest of us battled the powerful feelings exploding inside us, Wild Man loosed his emotions. He rose higher and sank lower than the rest of us combined.

During the first nine holes that morning, Lil patted my arm, my hand, my shoulder, and rubbed her hip against me. When she wasn't touching me, she stood very close and smiled. I could smell her perfume and so could bees which seemed to cloud around us. By the end of nine, I felt like a snowman in July; Lil touched me just to see if I were real.

"Hey, hey, hey," Wild Man said as we sat by the 10th tee. "How'd you get so chummy with Mrs. Grasshopper?"

"Can it," I answered.

'If I were you," Wild said, "I'd watch my step on the back nine. He laughed."

"Take a leap!"

Wild Man laughed harder.

When the 14th hole rolled around, I started to sweat. I half expected Lil to slice her ball into the Jet's forest hangar and force me to hunt with her. Luckily, Lil hit a good tee shot, a better fairway iron, and parred the hole. We finished the round with her touching my arm only once more. As I handed her clubs to the rack-room boy, she handed me my fee.

"Thank you." Lil smiled and squeezed my hand.

"You're welcome."

I watched her disappear before I discovered she had tipped me an extra $5.00. I stared at the money as I walked back to the caddy shack. The extra money was a bribe, cash to help me forget what I had seen in the woods, unnecessary but not unwelcome.

"Hey!" Wild Man called as I approached. "Mrs. Grasshopper offer to take you home with her?"

I laughed. "She knows how to treat a super looper."

Wild laughed.

"Goin' home?" I asked.

Wild shook his head. "Gotta pick up Mom."

I nodded. Wild Man's mother worked; his father had disappeared when Wild was four.

"I'll hitchhike," I said. "See you tomorrow."

"Yeah, super looper." Wild laughed.

I had been hitchhiking since I was thirteen, so I walked down the road without fear. Several cars passed before a red Corvette zipped past, stopped, and backed toward me. I ran to the car and climbed inside.

"Where to?" Mrs. Fenstermaker asked.

"West," I answered.

The car leaped forward. "I'll take you."

"Thanks."

She smiled at me. She hadn't changed clothes. Her legs were tan and long. "Going home?"

"To the Pines Golf Course. My Dad's pro."

"Are you?"

"What?" I was confused.

"A pro."

I laughed. "Hardly."

She reached over and placed her hand on my thigh. "I want to thank you again."

"I know," I said quickly. "Don't worry. I won't tell anyone."

Lil glanced at me and half laughed. "Oh, Chet. I'd almost forgotten." She reached over, grabbed my hand, and laid it on her thigh. Her skin felt soft and warm. "Forget Chet," she said. "I want to make you happy." She held my hand on her thigh.

"S . . . Sure," I stammered.

I had felt Tammy Wysock's bra through her blouse during a hay ride and felt guilty and ecstatic for two weeks. Lil felt like late night, dirty novel reading when everyone was asleep. Lil's warm flesh frightened me more than a two-hundred-yard carry over water.

"Don't be afraid," she said softly.

"I'm not," I lied.

She laughed again.

Sweat was streaming down my spine by the time we reached the Pines. She held my hand on her thigh and touched my cheek.

"Think about it," she said. "Let the idea grow. It's very pleasant."

"Yes, Ma'am," I answered.

Lil released my hand, and I scrambled out of the car. She laughed and waved, and the shiny, red Corvette shot away. As I watched the car disappear, my hands started shaking.

At 15, I no longer told Dad everything that happened, like the time Wild Man backed his car over a mail box—just to do it. So, Mrs. Fenstermaker's advances lay buried inside me. Yet, I couldn't solve the problem by myself. My limited experience had not equipped me with an escape. Accepting Mrs. Fenstermaker's overture didn't seem like the thing to do, but how could I turn her down? Stuck, I decided to consult an expert: Wild Man.

I told Wild the whole story the next morning. He grinned and leaned against the caddy shack wall as I finished.

"Whooee," Wild said. "Got the knack, don't you?"

"Yeah, but what do I do about it?"

"Take the offer. Mrs. Grasshopper ain't half bad."

I shook my head. "No way. What if she's got a disease or something."

Wild laughed. "Ain't no rich, married woman with any disease. They're as safe as Fort Knox."

"Still don't want to mess with her," I said.

"Afraid of the Grasshopper?" Wild laughed again. "OK, OK, I understand. There's an easy way out."

"There is?"

"Yeah, tell her you're queer."

"What?"

"Tell her you don't like girls, like boys better. Women don't mess with queers. Queers can't get it up for women."

I doubted Wild at that moment, but I had no better idea.

"Look," Wild continued. "We know it ain't true, but she don't. She'll leave you alone."

"Sure?"

Wild nodded. "Last thing a woman wants is a queer."

I accepted Wild Man's advice and dreamed up some lines to convince Lil I had the hots for guys. If Wild was right, a few sincere words would rescue me.

By Saturday afternoon, I had rehearsed a short conversation between Lil and myself. I'd tell her I liked boys. She'd frown, act surprised, admit her mistake, and tell me to forget about our previous conversation. I had almost convinced myself the scene had already occurred by the time I finished caddying. I handed Hawkeye Kroner's clubs to the rack-room boy

and waited for my money. Hawkeye always spent ten minutes at the bar before he paid his caddy. Hawkeye usually tipped a couple extra dollars and liked to blame his extravagance on an alcoholic whim.

"Are you available?" Someone asked.

I turned. Lil stood behind me in tight, white shorts and a sleeveless, peach colored blouse.

"I'm just going nine," she added.

"Just finished," I said quickly.

"Oh." She stepped closer and spoke softly. "We could play some other game."

"I'm pretty tired."

She smiled at me.

"Actually," I stammered, "that's an excuse. You see." I swallowed hard. "The fact is I'm not so sure I like girls that much, if you know what I mean." I tried to look straight into her blue eyes, to prove I told the truth. "I think I might like boys better." I could feel blood flushing my face.

"Think?"

"Practically sure."

She smiled. "I know how to be absolutely sure."

"Ask a priest?" I offered.

She laughed. "When we're finished, you can judge for yourself."

"I . . . I . . . can't today."

"Why not?"

"It's that time of the month. You understand." I had heard the line in a movie once.

"I don't mind." Her blue eyes twinkled.

I had run out of lines. My face grew hotter and hotter. Luckily, Hawkeye emerged from the locker room at that moment.

"Excuse me," I said quickly and stepped past Lil.

Hawkeye's breath smelled of bourbon, and his nose shone red, the right color for paying out money.

"Thank you," Hawkeye said.

"Thank you," I mumbled with sincerity and turned away.

I waved to Lil and hurried toward the parking lot. "I'll get it right away," I called to Hawkeye, who simply stared after me. I started to run, and I was out of earshot before anyone could yell at me.

Hitchhiking home, I watched for a red Corvette. Any red blob in the distance sent me scurrying off the road into the bushes. By the time I reached the Pines, I had torn my shirt in two places.

"Accident," I replied to Dad's inquiring look.

He nodded.

I spent Saturday evening trying to concoct a reason to avoid caddying on Sunday.

I failed.

"Well?" Wild Man asked Sunday morning. "Lady Grasshopper gonna leave you alone?"

I shook my head. "She wants to cure me."

"Christ!" Wild hissed. "Woman's got it bad."

"What am I gonna do?"

"Been thinkin' about that." Wild grinned. "You gotta explain you're queer on account of the accident."

"Accident?"

"Yeah, you're always hearin' about guys who had it blown off durn' the war."

"I've never been in a war."

"Say you were in a car crash or fell on a rake or something."

I shook my head. "She's never gonna believe that."

"Trust me. You're queer on account you can't perform like a real man."

I thought a moment. "Kind of thing would turn anyone queer," I noted.

"Precisely."

"And if she wants to check?" I asked.

"You're too embarrassed to show anyone. Your own mother ain't

seen it since the accident."

I held out my hand, and Wild Man shook. "Thanks," I said.

He grinned. "We loopers gotta stick together."

Armed with a new excuse, I caddied fearlessly for Cigar Lou Henson, a man who chewed cigars—constantly. I half expected to find Lil waiting for me at the end of the round, but she didn't materialize. Wild Man gave me a ride to the Pines. I was certain I had escaped.

When I entered the pro shop, Dad was showing a set of clubs to a woman. I waved and started toward the back room.

"Here he is now," Dad said.

"Sure." I had heard all the high school propaganda on how alcohol dampened the spirit and inhibited performance. Passing out in the middle of the act seemed appropriate.

"Scotch?"

"Why not?" I had never tasted scotch, but everyone on TV drank it.

She filled two tumblers at a black-padded bar in the corner.

"Let me slip into something comfortable," she said as she handed me the drink.

I nodded as if I had heard the line a hundred times before.

The scotch tasted terrible, but I forced the burning liquid down my throat. As heat expanded from my stomach I walked to the bar and refilled my glass. I had no idea how much I would have to drink to hinder my performance, but I figured half a bottle would suffice.

Halfway through my third glass, Lil reappeared. She wore a filmy robe as transparent as a fly's wing. Lil sat down on the couch and removed any misconceptions I had concerning the female anatomy.

"Here." She patted the sofa next to her.

"Sure." My tongue felt syrupy and slow. Lil drifted in and out of focus. My stomach felt on fire.

I managed to find the couch before the room began to teeter. I felt I was floating. Lil reached out and squeezed my thigh.

"You're so strong," she said.

"Sure." I grinned. "Regular Samson." She kissed my neck.

I closed my eyes to stop the room from spinning, but I couldn't shake the floating feeling, like a Genie on a magic carpet.

Lil started screaming before anything more happened. I opened my eyes just as a flash bulb popped, blinding me. Lil screamed and scrambled off the couch. Flash bulbs continued to pop. Someone laughed.

"Don't!" Lil yelled.

The flashes stopped. Someone grabbed my arm.

"Come on," a voice hissed.

"What?" Blue spots clouded my vision. "Wild Man?"

"Who the hell else? Come on."

I struggled to my feet. The room whirled. I was on a ferris wheel going very fast.

"What's wrong with you?" Wild asked.

"Scotch," I mumbled.

"Christ!" Wild Man tucked his head under my arm, and we struggled out of the room.

"Gotta hurry," Wild said. "Don't know what she's doin'." We lurched through the house and out the front door. Wild managed to haul me to his car and dump me in the back seat. As the car backed down the drive, my stomach began to flip-flop; the scotch sloshed back and forth. My head hit the door as Wild screeched to a stop and started forward.

"Whooee!" Wild yelled as the car rolled. "My, my, my, old Mrs. Grasshopper's quite an eyeful."

I couldn't answer.

"For a minute," Wild continued, "I didn't know whether to let you run with it or not. Damn, she wouldn't be half bad." Wild laughed. "Why the hell were you so dead against it? Really queer or something?"

"Stop!" I ordered.

"What?"

"STOP!"

Wild pulled to the side. I managed to open the back door before the vomit rose in my throat. As I retched out the back door, I could hear Wild Man laugh.

"Finished?" Wild Man asked when I pulled myself inside the car. "Yeah," I muttered.

Wild hit the accelerator, and the car lurched into motion. I managed to work myself to a sitting position.

"Feeling better?" Wild asked. "Yeah."

"I followed you," Wild said. "Thought you might need help."

"Thanks." I belched. My throat burned. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't think of it until the last minute." Wild laughed. "The look on her face makes me wish there'd been film in the camera."

"No film?"

Wild shook his head. "She won't know that. She'll never bother you again."

"Yeah, never again." Wild zipped around a corner, and my stomach flip-flopped again. "Don't," I gasped.

"Sorry," Wild muttered, but he didn't slow.

My condition improved as the afternoon progressed. By evening, my stomach felt almost normal.

I saw Lil on Sunday. I had just finished caddying for Buckeroo Crumb when she drifted out of the pro shop. Fear tightened my stomach. She smiled as she approached.

"I want the photographs," Lil said softly. I shook my head.

"I'll pay."

"I don't want money," I said. "I just want to be left alone."

She frowned. "I want the pictures."

"There aren't any. Wild Man didn't load the camera."

She studied my face a moment and laughed. "You're telling the truth, aren't you?"

I nodded.

"No wonder you didn't call."

"Just leave me alone," I said

Her smile faded. "You really are queer, aren't you?"

"No, I'm really not."

"Oh my!" Shock widened her face. "You father's such a nice man. Does he know?"

"No, he doesn't," I answered.

"That other nasty boy talked you into being that way, didn't he?"

"No!" I said loudly.

She patted my arm matronly. "I'll help," she said. "You and I . . ."

"I have the photos," I hissed. "I'll use them if you do anything!" She stared at me.

"I lied before," I said and smiled. "I lie very well." Horror filled her face.

"Don't bother me," I continued. "I won't bother you."

"You're a dirty, little fag, aren't you?"

I grinned. "Stay away from the other caddies too. They're mine." She backed away, her face twisted with disgust. I watched her disappear inside the clubhouse. I had a feeling she wouldn't bother me again.

Two days later, Wild Man pulled me aside at the caddy shack. "What the hell did you do to Lady Grasshopper?' Wild asked. "I started makin' up to her today, and she treated me like a leper. Quit at nine and didn't tip."

I laughed. "Don't look at me."

"Damn," Wild hissed. "I didn't even get the pictures."

I never caddied for Lil again. She never stopped by the Pines again. Dad never mentioned her. Wild Man spoke of her often that summer and the next. We laughed about the scene in her house, my puking out the back door of Wild Man's car. We laughed until I was seventeen and started dating Carrie O'Hara, and the Army drafted Wild Man.

"I want the photographs . . . I'll pay . . ."

Northside Peddler

Jackie Schmidt

'87

"Yesterday Herbie Wirth was buried in Crown Hill Cemetery."—*The Indianapolis Star* , 4 February, 1971

Again and again
he made his rounds,
potholders and washcloths,
door-to-door,
until every housewife
and child
and evening-shift husband
knew his simple approach.
At times they bought.
At times they chatted.

He shuffled along,
naming stray dogs,
praising flower gardens,
and marking the children's new growth.
A little girl once said,
"Your clothes make you look poor."
He tugged her ponytail.
"My friends make me look rich."

One winter morning the grocer asked,
"Did you hear
the peddler died?"

A customer shook her head:
"Poor old thing,
no money, no family.
I never knew his name."
She turned:
"Did you hear
the peddler died?"

A pauper's casket paused above the grave.
The morning snow paid deep respects.

So did the grocer
and his customers
and young mothers
and their husbands
and old folks
and men and women in business suits
and soldiers
and clergy
a teacher with his class
and school kids cutting class
and a few
dignitaries
and reporters

and photographers
cracked bells
tolled
tears.

Thousands pressed together
hushed
strangers
in common
sharing
whispers
and hugs
and tissue.

A groundskeeper asked,
"Did somebody rich die?"
An old lady nodded.

Faith, silver gelatin print, Paweena Leelasathaporn, 1997

Discarding the Corpse

Cecil Sayre

1
clean the bones
2
he is heavy
heavier in death
almost can't carry him
this time
to his toilet
he droops
like a proud vulture
across my broken shoulders
3
unbutton the clothes
fast
not knowing
when to stop
unbutton the ribcage
4
the still heart
5
a black lump of coal
6
he coughs and spits
upon
my back
7
a baby
unwanted
gets ripped
from
his womb
an old man—
pushed
into his grave
8
he misses
the pot
and dirties
the floor
i am too old
for this
older than him
i had my last
child
thirty-one
years ago
9
his good eye
admits
vacantly
that he is not
even here
he stares
directly past me
and i feel
i am a dust storm
10
dust to dust
ashes to ashes
11
clean the bones
12
his skin
is too soft
softer
than the work
he did
i remember
hands like leather
slapping
my bare bottom
13
remove
accessories:
chalk-white teeth
left eye
both ears
second heart
14
this
is only
the framework
there was once
more
much more
the pieces
that matter
die early
and all that's left
is what
cannot die
the roots
buried too deeply
in the earth's core
to be extracted
15
he is a broken
music box
playing
all his tunes
out of sync
snatches
of this melody
pieces of that
memory
16
i always wanted
to marry
a man
like father
17
a gentle smile
a sweet rain
a pleasant ceremony
18
clean the bones
clean the bones
19
i must
20
clean the bones

How I Met My Wife and Became a Methodist

James W. Kirk

Mom was sipping coffee when I swaggered into the kitchen, and her eyes lit up when she saw me, her favorite child. Never mind that I'm an only child.

"Lyle, do you know what I would like for my birthday," Mom said.

"Just name it, Mom, and it's yours," I said magnanimously.

"Would you go to church with me tonight?" Mom said so sweetly that fish would jump from the water for her.

Me and my big mouth. I should have known right then and there that somewhere behind her sly blue eyes and crafty Mona Lisa smile lay a well conceived trap. After sixteen years she could still trick me every time. The one time I attended Mom's church the highlight of the evening had been a rock album bonfire. I almost wept when the Ozzy and ZZ Top masterpieces were hurled shamelessly by the howling mob into the lusty flames of the pyre. The visiting evangelist mistakenly interpreted my anguish for zealousness; he slapped me on the back, handed me a precious Deep Purple record, and shouted "Have to it, little brother! Hallelujah!!"

"Well, Son?" Mom said innocently. She knew she had me.

"Sure, Mom."

"You don't know how happy this makes me, son."

I could tell she was truly happy by the shine in her eyes. She walked across the room, arms open, and gave me a hug.

Mom is still a looker—probably always will be—tall, with shoulder length hair reminiscent of late afternoon sunshine, a patrician nose and a chin that is soft, yet strong. Some women her age are in the throes of "grandma-osis"—that is, the strange transformation that can afflict a woman in her mid-to-late fifties. The hair turns blue and forms a bun on top of the head. There is weight that would look terrible on a young woman but seems perfectly suited for the stricken. A nice smile, but not too toothy and, of course, the billowy dress of nice lime-green or psychedelic blue. My mom will never suffer from "grandma-osis."

Dad died two years ago and shortly after, Mom found religion. Mom wants very much for me to become a Christian and there's nothing wrong with being one, but the Pentecostal faith is a bit extreme for one of my tender and sensitive psyche.

"There's a nice girl who attends my church and I want you to meet her," Mom said, dragging me from my reverie in a big way.

"Oh Mom," I said. I can see her now—brown hair down to her butt, buck teeth and no knockers. Of course, when a guy has a nose like Cyrano's and ears like Clark Gable's, he can't afford to be too choosy. At least I have blonde hair and blue eyes, and I'm small and cuddly (or at least I like to tell myself I'm cuddly, having never been cuddled by anyone except Mom when I was little, and that just isn't the same). "I have to go now, Mom," I said.

"Be back by four." And don't be late, Buster, her eyes telegraphed.

Time passed, as it is inclined to do, and before I was really ready, Mom and I were strolling along the sidewalk that leads to the small white and unassuming Pentecostal church. The air was clear and crisp, and the stars shone brightly overhead. A perfect night for a bonfire.

Reverend Kipper and his wife were standing at the entrance, ready to greet the faithful. I stood across from Mrs. Kipper while Mom and the Reverend exchanged pleasantries. Mrs. Kipper has brown hair that would have fallen to her behind if she didn't wear it in a beehive hair style. And of course, she has buck teeth and no boobies. Mrs. Kipper has a holier-

than-thou attitude and I certainly wish people wouldn't look down their noses at other people. But then she said that I was certainly a fine looking young man and I forgave her. The Reverend just looked at me, nodded his head, and looked hungry, like I had "sinner" written across my forehead. There were souls to save tonight!

With that out of the way, Mom and I entered the church. Immediately, an elderly couple pounced on us (the woman was suffering from terminal "grandma-osis"). "Praise the Lord," they said in unison.

"Praise the Lord," Mom said.

"The Holy Spirit is with us tonight, Sister Conrad," the man said gleefully to my mom.

"Hallelujah!!!" thundered the Reverend from somewhere behind us. Things were really starting to heat up now.

"Excuse us, please," Mom said, bless her heart. "There's someone I want Lyle to meet." Uh-oh, I thought. Time for Mrs. Kipper junior. Suck it in, Lyle. Mom has only one birthday a year.

"Follow me Lyle," Mom said, and I obediently did like the good son that I am. We entered the main part of the church, where the pews and pulpit are. My heart was beating irregular and I know my ears were bright red, because they always are when I'm flustered.

"Lyle, this is Sara Ambers. Sara, this is my son, Lyle," said Mom.

Sara Ambers is beautiful. Her hair was the color of the sun when it is rising; red with promise of good things to come. Eyes the color of the sky when the sun has fulfilled its promise. She even had breasts.

Sara makes me tingle, like I do when I have to pee real bad and finally get to let it out.

"Hello, Lyle. It's nice to meet you," Sara said huskily.

"Charmed, I'm sure," I said. I'm so stupid.

"Sara, would you like to sit with us tonight during the sermon?" Mom said. God bless my Mom; again, and again, and again.

"I would enjoy that very much, Mrs. Conrad. That is, if Lyle doesn't mind," Sara said.

"I would consider it an honor," I said. Better, but still stupid. So there we sat, Mom on my left and Sara on my right, with the evening's entertainment about to begin. Pass the popcorn, please.

Paintings of Christ on the Cross clung to the walls offering redemption. The overhead lights were bright searchlights for lost souls.

The organ sounded.

All eyes pivoted toward the pulpit as silence filled the room, an entity demanding obedience, which was fine by me until someone's belly rumbled ferociously. I had to bite my tongue to stop the peals of laughter that would surely have branded me an imp of Satan and resulted in my being banished from the church, forever. Mom would have been furious and Sara would probably deny my existence for all eternity.

Suddenly, an unknown force descended into the room, filling the air with crackling electricity that seemed to feed on the available oxygen in the abruptly hot room. I wasn't breathing; I was gasping.

Well, it wasn't quite that dramatic, but there was a certain amount of hushed anticipation, of expectation; even I could feel it. I wonder if Sara felt it too, so I glanced at her from the corner of my eye. She did—she was breathing heavily and acting fidgety, same as me.

The reverend approached the pulpit and switched on the amplifier for his microphone, which I knew he wasn't going to need. He looked directly at me and the threat of hellfire flared in his red, beady eyes.

"Brothers and sisters, my sermon this evening will come from The Great Book Of Revelations, chapter eleven," Reverend Kipper announced, his voice calm, like the sea before a storm.

The reverend's sermon started out slowly and articulately enough, but each "Praise The Lord!" and "Hallelujah!!" from the congregation was kindling for his fire. Soon enough it was a raging conflagration. His sentences began running together. He was shouting into his amplified microphone and the pews were vibrating from the tumultuous river of words flowing from the mountainous speakers standing sentinel on each side of the pulpit, allowing me the perfect opportunity to jitter over next to Sara

so that our arms were touching.

The reverend's sermon was becoming a chant, becoming hypnotic, and the effect was working grandly.

My first clue that events were reaching a climax came from a young couple brave enough to sit in the first row of pews. They began to jerk. That's right, jerk. And then they were standing and jerking. This frightened me, so I jittered back over next to Mom.

"What's goin' down, Mom," I whispered.

"They're dancing in the spirit of God, son," said Mom.

Well, that explained that, so I vibrated back over to Sara. Yes, the reverend was still going strong and showing no sign of wearing down.

A man sitting in the pew directly in front of mine let out a moan that would have been at home in a haunted house, and I bet I turned white as a ghost. Except for my ears, of course. They were burning out of control, because by this time I was quite disturbed.

And then the reverend stopped chanting.

The organist began playing "The Old Rugged Cross."

Sara tugged my shirt sleeve and Mom slid over and put her arm around me. Everyone else was speaking in tongues, dancing in the spirit of the Lord, crying or praying. A few were doing it all at the same time.

"It's time to accept Jesus into your heart and life, Son." Mom said.

"Jesus loves you, Lyle. Will you accept him into your life?" Sara said.

You know, I almost did it. The sincerity of Mom's eyes and Sara's voice was real and it moved me. I wanted to make Mom happy—I love her so much—and, to be totally honest, seeing Sara on a regular basis would be an added bonus. But then the reverend started towards me. A man with a mission.

A sixteen-year-old has to do what a sixteen-year-old has to do. I bolted. I ran out of the church, down the sidewalk, and home.

I had time to ponder the situation while I waited in the kitchen for Mom to arrive. If I know my mom, she won't say a word about my cowardice; but, that's not the issue. I want to go to church, but I simply can't attend Mom's—it isn't me.

I was sitting at the kitchen table eating a bologna sandwich when Mom walked in. She didn't say a word, just looked at me.

"Mom," I said, "tonight I decided I want to be like you and Sara. I want to become a Christian." I truly meant what I said, and Mom knew it.

"I know," Mom said.

"There's this nice Methodist church down the street," I said, hoping she would understand.

"I understand, I think . . . . Anyway, that's where Sara's parents attend church, so I'm sure it is a fine one," Mom said.

"Why doesn't she go to the same church as her parents?"

"I guest she's a lot like you, Son. By the way, Sara's coming to dinner tomorrow night." I sure love my mom.

Paintings of Christ on the Cross clung to the walls offering redemption. The overhead lights were bright searchlights for lost souls.

The organ sounded.

Nancy's Hand...

Linda D. Lewis

"lizard skin," the boys called it,
and avoided her like fruit gone bad—
Nancy, awkward in her long, home-sewn skirt
and heavy woven braid, that tied her up
like a rope of twisted taffy.

Spring afternoons of playground—
her troubled eyes sought mine,
and I would choose her first for my team,
force a smile, and link her to me.

Twenty years later . . . a Red Rover reunion,
Nancy parked her Continental and spoke of real estate.
She stood tall and slender in clinging rich blue silk;
her thick golden curls accentuated gestures
of flawless arms and hands.

The men clustered round her like ripening grapes,
each bursting to be picked and anxious for a chance
to hold Nancy's hand.

'88

Grandpa

Cecil L. Sayre

Untitled, Laura Hildreth, 1980

sitting in his chair
with only one eye
half-opened
he tries rocking me
to sleep
in the oval cradle
of his brown vision
slightly worn
slightly faded

free as a tear
lost amid
his wrinkles

i escape
into his mouth
and sleep
within his talk

The Failing of Phillip's Heart

Timothy J. O'Conner

Phillip Razeack paced back and forth in the psychiatrist's office. He wrung his hands and his body was bent forward with worry.

"Look, doctor, there's got to be some kind of medicine, some treatment, something that can help. I mean, it's happening all of the time now, I can't control it." He sat down across from the elderly doctor and looked at him desperately. His jet black hair was streaked with newly acquired gray, and damp with perspiration. His face was pale and drawn; his lips moved nervously and his eyes darted rapidly about.

"Last night, my wife caught me listening to the refrigerator. Jesus Christ, I was listening to the motor of the refrigerator with a stethoscope! At 2:00 AM! My son hates me because I burnt out the motor of his Acro-Bird flying doll. I spent two hours at work sharpening pencils with an electric sharpener. Two hours! My boss is convinced that I'm crazy. So is my wife."

It had been nearly three months since Phillip had undergone the operation. He had been admitted to the hospital with chest pains. Being athletic and only 32 years old, he was shocked when tests showed massive heart disease. The doctors told him that he needed surgery. They didn't mention, however, that an artificial implant might be necessary. In fact, they had not anticipated that he might need one. As it turned out, though, his heart was too badly damaged for repair, and the chief surgeon immediately called for the prosthetic implant.

It was called the ultimate artificial heart. Its design was relatively simple. The prosthetic itself was little more than a four-chambered rubber container that acted much like a real heart. The power for the unit came from a chemical battery which strained chemicals, mostly acids, from the digestive tract and reacted them with metals obtained from the blood. While the concept was fairly simple, the plumbing was a bit complicated. The end result, however, was a perfectly reasonable blood pump. It sped up and slowed down when cued by the brain. It was a self-contained unit, and functioned much like a real heart.

The only difference between a prosthetic and a real heart is in the sound that they make. While a real heart makes little audible noise, a prosthetic heart hums loudly enough to be heard and, at higher activity levels, whirs and clicks as alloy valves open and close. This is where Phillip's problem began.

"I can't even go to sleep," he told the psychiatrist. "I try, but I just end up listening to this damn motor. I keep expecting it to stop. Last week, I took my son to a football game. When the crowd started cheering, I couldn't hear the heart. I was sure that it had stopped. I got so panicked that I left Phil there alone. He's six years old and I left him so I could run out to the parking lot to listen to the damn thing hum.

"That's when you started carrying the stethoscope," the doctor said.

"Yes. It gives me peace of mind," Phillip said. "People look at me funny, but I don't care. They don't understand."

Phillip left the small office and went down the green tiled corridor to the elevator. He entered the car and pushed the first floor button. But, when the doors opened, he didn't get off. Instead he pushed the button for the sub-basement. The car moved downward, and when the doors opened this time, he stepped out.

Phillip found himself in a large open area. The combination of dim lights and the low ceiling made the room he was in appear to go on forever. Dust hung lazily in the air and the floor was damp and mildewed. He

heard a low hum and followed electrical conduit and ductwork to find the source of the noise. After a brief hunt, he found what he was looking for.

The source of the noise was two huge generators which provided power to the building. They sat on concrete platforms and were surrounded by a chain-link fence. Each was as large as a truck and they emitted an unsettling blue glow from their innards. Phillip stood for a moment, cocked his head and listened. The hum from the power units was loud in his ears and he was transfixed by it.

After a moment, he shook himself from the trance-like state and set his attention on finding a way around the protective fence. There was a small gate, and he tried this first, but it was locked securely. He noticed a small gap at the bottom of the fence, and he attempted to pull it in such a way that he might slide under it, but it wouldn't budge. Now frustrated, he set his sights on the top of the fence. There was a two-foot space between the top of the fence and the concrete ceiling. The top of the fence was slightly barbed, and this gave him pause, but he decided to chance the points. He began to climb the fence, but he couldn't fit the toes of his shoes through the links. He sat down quickly and took off the shoes. This time, he made it to the top and hardly noticed when he cut his ankle on one of the barbs. He climbed down the outside and turned to look at the generators.

Now closer to them, he could tell that each unit was about fifteen feet long and eight feet tall. They were covered with dull gray paint and surrounded by the acrid odor of ozone being emitted by the high voltage transformers. Phillip took a cautious step toward the closest generator and laid a hand on it. The heavy vibration sent chills through his spine. After a moment, he dug out the stethoscope hidden in his coat pocket, put the earpieces in his ears and gently placed the amplifier on the generator. The already loud hum of the units, now amplified, thundered in his head, and the shock caused him to bite his lip, but he didn't stop listening.

He began to imagine that the noise was filling his whole body and then overflowing, flooding the entire building with its smooth, even, eternal hum. For a brief moment, he wasn't afraid. He stayed there for a long time, his head resting on the generator, his mind, like his heart, filled with mechanical sound.

Back in the psychiatrist's office, Phillip was again trying to explain his feelings.

"Look, doctor," he said angrily, "this is not an obsession. I have good reason to be upset. Hell, I've burnt out six pencil sharpeners in three days. The motors are so cheap, you wouldn't believe it. I've burnt out two more Acro-Birds since my son's birthday. This mechanical crap, it wears out," he pounded his chest significantly. "I can hear it, it's wearing out." He turned away disgusted, tears of frustration in his eyes.

"Look, Phil, can't you and your wife take a few weeks and get away?" he asked. "Sometimes it takes a while to recover from the type of surgery you've had."

Phillip slid back in his chair and looked out the window.

"No, that's no good," he said. "This damn thing makes too much noise." He thumped his chest again. "We haven't even made love since before the operation. With my luck, this thing would stop humming while we're doing it." He ran a hand over his completely gray hair. "I've got to do something, doctor. It's wearing out."

Phillip left the doctor's office and began driving. He drove for three hours before reaching his destination. He stepped out of the car and walked toward the huge dam that he had heard about. The enormous concrete structure was surrounded by a breathtaking mountainous landscape. Trees of every variety populated the forest, birds danced in the air, and water trickled through the dark limestone of the foothills. The scenery, however, escaped Phillip. He scarcely looked about as he walked to the entrance of the dam's hydro-power plant, which was contained within the dam itself. He walked quickly, animated with purpose. Occasionally, though, he stopped and pulled the stethoscope from his pocket, listened briefly to his chest and then continued onward.

He stopped at the maintenance desk and obtained a visitor's

pass which would allow him to wander freely within the dam. He had no desire to sightsee, however. He headed directly for the hydro-generators deep within the dam. He got lost several times within the massive structure, but finally found what he was looking for.

There were twenty generators, each as big as a house, in the cavernous bowels of the dam, and Phillip stood in awe. Though he was aware of the enormity of the units, he was struck not by their size, but their sound. The hum they made was almost tangible. He was buffetted by the waves of sound and he felt as if he might be shaken apart by the power of them. His teeth chattered together and his bones literally rattled. The outrageous hum surrounded and permeated him. He shouted as loud as he could and laughed gleefully when he couldn't hear himself. He ran among and between the generators, laughing and shouting. This was real power that could last forever, and he reveled in it. His puny battery operated heart was forgotten as he danced about, inundated by the sound that made him live.

When he had fully exhausted himself, he began to make his way out of the dam. He walked lightly and smiled at the few people that he passed. He didn't stop once to listen to his heart. He left his visitor's pass at the desk and was almost out of the dam when he heard two men talking. He caught part of their conversation and slowed his stride to hear more.

"Jeff," said the taller of the two, "I've got twenty generators down here. One or another of them is always on the blink."

The shorter man said something that Phillip didn't hear, and the taller man responded angrily.

"You kidding me?," he said. "None of those units run longer than four months without breaking down. They're running constantly, they wear out quick. Anything would, that kind of constant use."

The men continued talking, but Phillip did not hear them. He fumbled nervously for his stethoscope as he rushed away from the dam. Phillip held his breath and gripped the arm of his seat as the plane began to take off. Once in the air, he relaxed a bit and laid his head on a pillow, listening to the steady hum of the plane's engines. Often, he put the stethoscope to his chest and listened intently, which earned him strange looks from other passengers. He dozed off once, with the listening device still in his ears, and had a dream that some villainous force had stolen his heart and replaced it with a clock, the mainspring winding rapidly down. He woke suddenly and clutched at the stethoscope.

He hadn't told anyone the reason for his trip. They wouldn't have understood. He could have gone to one of the atomic power plants in the United States but he found out that the ones in France were larger, and he hoped, louder. Phillip stared out the window of the plane and hummed.

. . . a dream that some villainous force had stolen his heart and replaced it with a clock, the mainspring winding rapidly down.

Hoosier Centenarian: A Collection of Profiles

Jackie Schmidt

INTERVIEW WITH CENTENARIAN BLANCHE

"I'm a little off today," Blanche warned me as we began the interview. "I can tell when I'm off, but I think the sunshine will help. I love to wake up in the morning and see the sun shining."

Anticipating my first question, Blanche volunteered, "I was born February 13, 1886. I was 100 on Friday the thirteenth. That was last year. I'm 101 now."

She glanced at an old photo. "That's not me," she insisted. "It's my sister." She looked back at me. "I've lived so long, lost so many of them, outlived them all."

I asked how many brothers and sisters she'd had. "Seven. There were eight of us. We lost two. My mother had the sweetest little baby girl. I just loved her. Took care of her. She was still a baby when brain fever took her. Oh, I cried and cried when that happened, but I was always close to God."

"When I was just big enough to walk, the minister would come to our house for dinner. I remember pulling my little rocking chair into the parlor and setting it right next to him after dinner. He'd laugh and say, 'Here comes Blanche. I know what she's after.' I wanted to ask him questions. He said I could ask more questions that he didn't know the answers to of anyone he knew."

Blanche remembers being close to death as a child herself. "I had membrance croup. Oh, I was bad. They thought I was going to die. The doctor came out and asked my daddy if he had any lime. There was some in the barn. He told daddy to boil some in water and make me drink it. I was just starting to talk. I said, 'I'm a little boosing baby.' They all laughed. 'I'm a little boosing baby!'

"And the lime helped?" I asked.

"Well, I'm still here a hundred years later!"

She remembers being a healthy child after that. "My brothers and sisters and cousins always called me 'Fatty.' During recess at school, I always wanted to play ball on one of the teams, but they never wanted 'Fatty' to play. I went to a one room school house. Just one teacher—a big man. During the week, I lived with my Grandma Coffee, because she lived near the school. On the weekends I went back home. My grandpa was an invalid, and grandma and grandpa had my aunt who was a mute living with us, and the school teacher roomed at their house, too. I can't remember his name."

It was Blanche's job to bring breakfast to her grandpa. "He loved berries. But I got so mad, because if he got a seed, he'd just spit it out. I learned to climb trees in the orchard to get cherries and other fruit for grandpa. People would come by and call me a little bird in the tree top. Fruit is my favorite food. Maybe that had something to do with me living so long. We lived on a farm and ate good fresh food all the time."

Blanche had a boyfriend who was going to be a teacher, but he "took sick and had to drop out of school." Later she married a young man, Steve, who worked on her brother's farm. "He just fell in love with me. Course, he wasn't my first choice."

Steve was a druggist. He owned his own drug store. Blanche cooked and served lunches there. "I worked behind the register, too."

"Sometimes we thought employees were putting money in their pockets, so I worked the cash register and put a stop to that."

But the most important thing Blanche recalls doing in her life was

Montage Series, silver gelatin prints, DeeDee Davis, 1997

teaching the Bible. "I was always teaching Bible classes. Once when we lived in Texas, I taught a whole class of little Mexican children. And I was in Bible clubs and church groups and church choirs. I sang alto. There were four of us that visited and sang at different churches."

Her daughter, June, remembers her mother being very strict. "I wasn't allowed to go to movies or dances or bowling allies or skating rinks. In those days there were traveling skating rinks. People brought the floors in sections and set it up under a tent. When I got older, she let me do a little, but she was pretty strict."

When June decided to marry, Blanche tried to stop her. "I called the minister and told him not to marry them, because he didn't have his divorce from his first wife."

June interrupted, "Oh now, Mother, he did, too. You just didn't like him."

Blanche hesitated. "Well, he's always been so good to me, but he was a stranger in a way then. You never know."

"Now Mom," June persisted, "It's worked out pretty good. How long we been married?" Before Blanche could respond, June answered emphatically, "Forty-one years!"

"Well," Blanche conceded, "they had their lives and I had mine. That's just the way it was."

The screen door flew open, and one of Blanche's great-granddaughters came running in from school. As she posed for a picture, Blanche laughed. "They don't call me great-grandma. They call me grandma-the-great."

I asked Blanche who she considered the greatest influence in her life. "I'd have to say my two children, Kenny and June." She began to cry. "The hardest thing that I ever had to do was to give up my boy."

June explained, "Kenny never married. He and mom had always lived together, and when he died three years ago, Mom took it hard."

Blanche relived the still-fresh pain. "It was a terrible heartbreak. He was such a good person. It was just so hard to lose him."

Blanche's favorite Bible verse is "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." She recited it for me, but thought she had transposed some words. After the second try, she nodded her approval.

"You know, I never thought I'd live to be over a hundred. God just put me here and left me."

INTERVIEW WITH EMERY

"Emery," I began, "you must have done something right in order to be a hundred and still look so young."

Sensing the implication that he must have made some deliberate decision to endure a century, he replied sharply, "I'm not sure I ever wanted to! I'm not gonna live forever, you know. It might seem like it, but I'm not. I'm gonna die; that's all there is to it. I'm just subject to die. The longer I live, the more subject I am to die." There was a long pause. The topic was too serious to interrupt; I remained silent. Finally he took a deep breath as if to resolve that he had said all he cared to say about that, then establishing his control, he asked the first question of the interview: "Did you know I was an auctioneer most my life?"

Before I could respond, he began the details of his chosen profession. "I had checked it all out before I asked my dad. He was easy to convince. He took me to Farmersburg, Indiana and put me on a train to Chicago. I got off on State Street and caught the Interurban headed west. Got off at the school's office, signed up, and paid my dues. Five weeks later I graduated."

"First thing I did when I got home was go see my friend J. D.. He took the course back in 1910 and 11. He said, 'I think we're gonna make a team.' He was right; we worked together for years. He got out of it before me. He worried too much, finally died."

"I was nearly eighty when I retired. I was lost when I quit, wasn't satisfied, just wasn't satisfied. I always enjoyed being in front of the

crowd, pulling my pranks, making them remember me. I was lost when I quit. But I was afraid they would just expect too much of me in my elderly years. I just had to give it up."

He speculated on the importance of his profession. "Joining up with Harrison was good for me. We worked hard and had fun at the same time. We always tried to make it enjoyable for the crowds. Helping ourselves while we enjoyed life."

I asked him if he had married. "I lost my second wife. You know, it's been so long I can't even tell you what happened to my first wife. I must have made her mad or something. We stopped living together. Weren't married too long. I had two children by my second wife—a girl and a boy."

The person that most influenced his life was his grandfather, Gaston. One vivid memory of his childhood causes him to recall the importance of his grandfather's praise. "My dad usually did the farming, but he had signed a contract to work as superintendent on a road construction job. I had to take over the farming, and I was just a boy. I was in the barn hitching up the team of horses and my grandpa came in. He said, 'You're doing a fine job. Do you know that?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'You've been paying close attention to the way your Pa hitches up those horses. He does a good job at it and you do too.' I was so proud. Boy, he was a grand old man. He was a grand old man. Yes, he was!"

Emery especially enjoyed going into Sullivan with his gramps on business. "Everybody knew him. They'd say, 'Howdy, Gaston. He'd always just answer, 'Do.' If there were two people that greeted him, he'd answer, 'Do, do.' Oh, I loved him. One time he took me in the carriage to the Democratic rally. I'll never forget it. He was a strong Democrat. I got my happy way from my grandpa."

As a boy Emery was also close to his older brother, Homer. "Mom and dad were always afraid that we'd go back by the pond. They warned us never to go back there because the water was over our heads. One time Homer talked me into it, and when we finally came back up to the house mom wanted to know where we'd been. We told her we were at the pond. 'Take down your pants,' she said. Boy she gave us a good one. 'When your dad gets home you'll get another one,' she said. We never got spanked often, and that was the most memorable."

"We lost . . ." He paused and squinted.

"Lost what?" I prodded.

"Lost Homer. It came on real quick. Membrance croup. Dad tried everything to keep him from doubling up. Couldn't get the doctor there quick enough. We didn't have no automobiles then, and we lived two and a half miles from Fairbanks. He was just nine. It was awful I had to lose him. Just awful. My little cousin died of it about a year later. Those were hard times. Dad tried everything."

"My dad was a good man. A smart man. One thing I was real proud of was a well my dad designed. He dug a well in the horse lot, and had a pump put in where he put the windmill. When the windmill started blowing, the mill moved and pumped the water to the house. When the water got up so high, there was another pipe to take it to the milk house to cool the milk we milked from the cows. When that water got so high, another pipe took it to the horse tank for the horses. It was real fancy. Dad came up with that idea. For those days, it was real fancy."

The family's first car is also a sharp memory, though the year is a bit fuzzy. Emery's dad and two other townsfolk ordered cars exactly alike. There were E.M.F.'s. Emery joked that it meant "Every Morning Fix-it." "When we went to pick them up, there was one poor man the company sent along to teach all of us how to drive them. I was just big enough to sit up behind the wheel."

"Was that the most exciting thing you remember as a child?" I asked.

His reply seemed to sum it all up very well: "It just all was so much—my whole life. So much has come and gone. I can't decide now what was so important at the time. Or what mattered the most."

I assured him that was understandable and that I could hardly

imagine what it must be like to sift through a hundred years of memories.

He smiled, "Ain't many ever will find out what it's like either."

INTERVIEW WITH CENTENARIAN LENA

The tiny room at the nursing home held few belongings, so the small leather chair was easily sighted under the nightstand. "May I sit on this stool during our interview?" I began. She nodded.

As I drew the small piece near her, she explained, "That was momma's little stool. She lived to be 94. We were always very close."

Lena's momma had set an example that had shaped this centenarian's life. She taught Lena at an early age that family and friends stick together. "I was an only child, but when I was barely a year, momma's mom died, and momma took her little baby brother to raise. She raised us like twins. I called him my uncle/brother. Momma use to say I was the first baby she ever loved, but she had to find room in her heart for little Clarence, too. And she did. Her heart was big enough for both of us and more. Momma's dad moved in, too. I called him Grandpoppy. There was just always room."

All of her life has been spent in Indiana. "Six or seven years ago, I had to sell the house and move here to the Manor. I was thinking just this morning how I sold my seven-room house and moved here in this little "two-by-twice," as I call it. But I like it. These are my friends here. Oh, you'll find one or two silly wits, like you might find anywhere, but all in all it's very nice, and you have to take life all in all, don't you? It's all made up of pieces—like that quilt."

She pointed to a quilt at the foot of her bed. "I wonder a lot about who took all my quilts." Lena and her mother had spent many hours of their lives together piecing quilts to give as gifts for weddings, anniversaries, and graduations, but they had also kept several favorites for themselves.

"My cousin—God rest her soul—when I was in the hospital, darned if she didn't sell all my quilts! Kept the money, too! She's dead and gone now, but I can't help but—and she kept the money! Momma and I worked years on those quilting frames." She paused. "I never will forget it, even if she is dead and gone. Dirty trick. They were mine. Mine and momma's. They were important to us."

It was not just Lena and her mother that had passed the days on those frames. Lena had taken in a neighbor lady who had been left penniless after her husband's death. "She had to stay someplace. Poor thing was nearly as old as mamma—and no money."

Lena's spirit was obviously a nurturing and caring one; that led me to my next question. "Did you and your husband have any children?"

"We had one daughter. She died in infancy. Well, actually there never was any life there. She was born dead at home. The doctor never even let me see her. He felt it was best for me. He thought it would make too many memories. Momma told me she was so tiny, a little round head just like I'd had when I was born, and dark hair."

Despite the loss of a child, Lena always seemed to have others to care for. "We raised my husband's niece. Her dad died in a fire. He was a fireman and breathed poisonous fumes fighting a fire. His wife worked in a little store and couldn't care for both the children, so we took the little girl to raise. I had 'em all some of the time-off and on when the mom was having a hard time. When things would get real tough on them, they'd just all stay with us 'til she'd get back on her feet. Little Mildred always lived with us though, just like our own. I lost two of them together. My husband died in 1956, and one week later, I lost Mildred. Right after that, Mildred's husband died. They just been married a short while. So close together! Momma and I buried 'em all."

"I'll never forget momma standing in the cemetery. She stood there real quiet for a long time then said, 'Now look, there's Art (Mildred's father) right under those trees. Then Mildred and her mother right over there, and Mildred's husband just across the way in the young soldiers section. They're just right together where they can all stay in touch.' My

Montage Series, silver gelatin print, DeeDee Davis, 1997

momma was just standing there in that sad cemetery using her imagination, thinking. I'll never forget that."

Lena and her mother remained together until her mother's death. Even after burying her mother, she continued to live alone for years. "Then I went into a coma one day. Nobody at the hospital seemed to know what to do to help me. Someone called on a new doctor, right out of school. They thought he might know some new fancy stuff the rest of them didn't. He sat down next to me and traced his hand over my face and arms, and I just opened my eyes. I guess he had the right touch. I was his first patient—Dr. Gardener. Last time I saw him he said, 'Lena, I'm pushin' you. You're gonna reach 101.'

"It's wonderful that you have lived so long and done so well," I responded.

"Oh, if I can keep well, I want to go on, but if not, I'm ready when the Lord calls me." She concluded our interview with the life's philosophy that was not only professed, but lived out for more than a century: "I've always tried to live right, to treat folks the best I know how, to be good to everyone, to live like a Christian woman."

INTERVIEW WITH CENTENARIAN ADELE

One of Adeles' earliest memories is the tapping of her grandfather's cane as he felt for the slop bucket that was kept under the kitchen table. That recollection is ninety-nine years old; she was only three at the time. Now Adele is 102, and her mind is inundated with memories. During our interview, she sifted through more than a century of experiences, sometimes considering the questions for several moments before answering, sometimes firing pointed questions back in response to the ones I had asked.

Adele's father fought in the Civil War, and her uncle died in it. They were "Northerners, of course." She was born on January 11, 1885, in Nebraska, and her family moved to Kansas before she started school. She made two more moves—one to Tennessee and one to Indiana—where she completed eighth grade, her final year of schooling.

She remembers puzzling a teacher in the one-room schoolhouse. "She'd say she could always tell who knew the answers by the expression on their faces, because they'd smile and look at her or just look down. But I puzzled her. She could never tell by my face." She was also a "poker face" during the spelling bees that were held at the church.

Spelling is still important to her. Because she is nearly deaf, it is sometimes necessary to spell the word slowly as she watches lip movement. "Adele, what makes you happy?" I asked.

She squinted; I repeated; she quessed, "Did you ask me what happened?"

"No." She shook her head. "Happy."

"Spell it," her daughter, Helen, suggested.

"Adele." I touched her arm. "Happy. H-A-P-P-Y." "Lemon pie! Got any?" She laughed heartily. I was determined, "What else makes you happy?"

"Custard." She laughed again, knowing she had gotten the best of me.

"My mother made me be happy about things." She became suddenly serious. "She was a good woman, a friendly person, I know that. Everybody liked her. I remember when she was on her death bed, all the neighbors took turns sitting with her. Everybody liked her."

Helen appeared with a slice of lemon pie. "We spoil mom," she confessed as she handed the treat to Adele. "And we worry to death about her. She's always been in such great shape until lately. She keeps falling. We've sent her to the hospital a couple times, but I don't like it. Just confuses her. She wants to die at home, and I want to let her."

Adele looked up. "My daddy never let me get away with stuff I shouldn't. Once I picked up a little pan down the street and brought it home, and when my daddy found out it belonged to the neighbor-lady, he got mad and made me take it back to her. The lady felt sorry for me and

said I could have it, so daddy let me keep it then."

One of her grown grand-daughters interrupted with a kiss. She shouted into the small amplifier attached to Adele's hearing aid, "Tell her the story about the two boys and the arrow."

After hearing the request repeated several times, Adele understood. "I used to tell the kids about two boys I saw one time. They were riding double on a horse, and an Indian shot an arrow at them. The arrow went through both their shirts and pinned them together. Didn't even graze them; just pinned their shirts together. I remember Indians when we was living out West. One time one came to the door and asked for a piece of bread. My mother made the best bread. It tasted like cake. That Indian wanted a piece of momma's bread."

She recalls another Indian experience that occurred when she was older. "I was working as an assistant in a hospital. There was an Indian there. They don't believe in God, you know. They worship the moon or something. I decided I'd try to tell him about God. He got mad and shoved me into the wall. I shut up. Shut my big mouth, huh? Wouldn't you? I did."

Hospital work wasn't her only employment. She also worked in a canning factory and as a wallpaper hanger. Her daughter, Helen, explained that her mother hung wallpaper until she was ninety years old. Adele understood and added, "The men would come watch me. Wanted to see how I did it. I used a long-handled brush. I worked all my life. When my children were small, I just worked at home. But I worked all my life."

Adele had seven children. Two died when they were young. She now has twenty-six grandchildren, sixty-five great-grandchildren, and nineteen great-great-grandchildren. "She's just always had a good attitude," Helen reflected. "Looked on the positive side of things. After dad died she did a little traveling. Kind of enjoyed herself then, but life wasn't easy for her. It was her attitude that got her by."

That attitude was apparent when I asked Adele what she had worried most about during her long life. "I never had much to complain about. I worried about not having a million dollars." She turned the question to me, "Do you know what a million is?"

"A lot of money," I hedged.

She smiled again, held up her fingers and began to recite, closing each finger accordingly, "Units, tens, hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, trillions." She looked back at me. "NOW do you know what a million is?" she asked again. We both laughed.

I have saved the most obvious question for last: "Adele, how did you live to be 102 years old?"

Her answer was short and quick. "God alone knows that."

Nursing Home Series, silver gelatin print, Ginny Taylor Rosner, 1989

"Adele. Happy. H-A-P-P-Y."
"Lemon pie! Got any?"
"What else makes you happy?"
"Custard."

Chameleon

James W. Kirk

I am
an actor
in a play
about nothing.
A black cat
in the dark
under attack
by a rat
that sulks
and talks
only to me
of misery.
I flicker
like an old movie.

Help
give me substance.
I want to be
like you.
Hard.
But
I blend in
a chameleon.
Paint me
and
I have no
beginning.
A clock not
about to stop
ticking.

Fantasy Series, ilfochrome, Jack Hartigan, 1997

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.

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 some day, 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 as much 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 Missolonghl. 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?"

"Yóu 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. Halfway 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!"

It's Oprah Winfrey! Some counterculture religious group is on there. Lesbians for Christ, I think.

"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 a drink. Patty is in the bedroom getting ready. A video cassette sits on top of the video player. 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 fresh. 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 PE 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.A. 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."

She has drawn other pictures, too. Some are self-portraits.

"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. Looking out the window, I observe a group of teenagers, huddled on the corner, smoking cigarettes and talking 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 teenagers. 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.

Untitled, Patricia F. Keane, 1986

PORTFOLIO

Alice Sigmund, 1958-1995

type c color print

type c color print

Gary M. Kendall, 1957-1996

Snake Eye, mixed media

Wing Song, mixed media

Coins on the Railroad Tracks

Anonymous

We went to bed with dirt
at the corners of our mouths,
and pressed our faces
to the second story window screen,
waiting for the 9 PM Pennsylvania.

It rolled and rumbled
through the blackness,
cutting the distant
stillness in two.

We pulled our blankets
from the bed, nailed our elbows
to the window sill, and held
the laughter in our throats.

It carved through our town,
barked louder than stray dogs,
pressed down on those rails,
its one eye blinked at us
while rest of Dustland slept.

The next morning we ran,
jumped the porch steps,
and flew
like spit
to haul in our prey.

Those copper pancakes
rattled in our pockets
the rest of the day; we rubbed
them for luck, and

that night
decided to
try rocks.

'90

On Sleeping Alone In the Woods

Mark R. Page

In the woods of Dante's imagination,
i listen to the lamentation
of the trees.

i understand the anguished crying;
it's eternally autumn, and the trees are forever dying;
and the birds have come to feast.

The screams rise in pitch
as the birds start to flitch
the autumnal trees.

i lounge in the morning shade
and enjoy the song of the mourning glade;
i will not allow this "warning" to move me.

With only a hint of a frown,
i measure my head for the crown
of crimson and gold leaves i will wear.

In the woods of Hell's creation,
a new "dreamer" listens to the lamentation:
"i should have listened . . ."

The Assurance Salesman

R. J. Sullivan

The shadows flicker across the walls of the train, visiting spirits that peek in on the doings of the living. All is silent except for the steady churning of the train wheels, the grinding rhythm echoing in the ears of the five travelers seated in the car.

The five insomniacs stare at each other indifferently, comfortable in their own space. The newlyweds, Janet and Kevin McConnell. He stares at some fixed point on the wall while cradling her in his arms. She is the only one who has found comfort enough to actually doze, her young blond-haired head nestled against his shoulder.

The other couple, seated on the same side, sit farther apart. Sir Stewart Collins and his wife, Lucy. He's dressed in black formal wear, even on the train, she with her smock on, the bow tucked oh-so-perfectly under her chin. They sit with their backs straightened in perfect upper-class grace.

The fifth passenger sits across from them, alone, his young face stares out the window even though it's too dark to see anything.

Gary Finn clinches a heavy jacket in his arms, but long ago found it an inadequate pillow to assist in sleeping.

Or perhaps it's simply impossible for some people to sleep on a train.

He looks over at Kevin, acknowledging him with a slight nod. He certainly has the perfect opportunity for comfort with Janet. He sees that she has no qualms about making herself comfortable, her chest moving slowly with her even breathing, in, out, in . . .

He catches himself staring and glances back over to Kevin. He doesn't seem to notice.

A stirring, and Sir Stewart reaches for his pocket watch, solid gold, as Gary remembers hearing him brag back when it was still daylight and they were still talking.

A click, the lid opens, a groan, and a snap as Stewart closes the watch, rubs his tired eyes and shakes his head. Gary dares a whisper.

"What time is it?"

"Three. We should be in London in another two hours."

Two hours, Gary thinks. Two hours of shadows, of being lulled by the chugging of the train, of small dozes, but never really falling asleep, as the train calls out the steady rhythm of a false lullaby.

A wince, and Janet's head jerks, her eyes snap open, fully awake.

Gary smiles. "I hate it when that happens. I can never really sleep on these damn things, either." Gary's voice seems a hollow, distant whisper. Kevin's arm tightens on her shoulder. She grips his other hand, her eyes close in ecstasy.

Gary's hand pulls out the picture again. He can't really see the image anymore, the soft brunette curls, pouting lips, the pink chiffon dress she wore especially for the picture. His fingers trace the edge, anyway. His own wife, April, waiting for him in London.

"Nothing like returning to the woman you love," the older voice, Stewart, smiling at him from across the room. He places his hand on his wife's knee.

"I remember when I'd have to be gone, sometimes two months at a time, there'd be my Lucy, standing in the doorway with a martini and a smile, and that was all."

"Stewart!" She tries to sound shocked, but she's too tired. His laughter tightens up the dreary mood of the train.

Gary, embarrassed, slides the picture back into his pocket.

"It's not the going home I mind, it's the wait. I almost wish—"

To everyone's shock, the outside door opens, and the passengers are all treated to a wild gust of wind. Lucy starts, grabs at her hat.

Janet sits upright. All wonder who dares intrude on them.

The mass of blackness jumps into the room, turns, struggles with the door behind him. Gary grabs his coat, indignant. Gloved hands grip the handle and pull.

A protest of metal, the door slams shut. The mass of black clothes stands in the middle of the room, looking around, realizing for the first time he is an intruder.

His breathing is harsh, and every feature of his face is covered by the shadow of a large hat. All is still once again, and the others wait expectantly.

"Excuse me." When he speaks, it is with a deep rumble, a sound that bounces off the walls. The shadow spirits seem to flee for an instant, returning only reluctantly to eye this newcomer.

His hand reaches up, removes the hat. His hair is also dark, as are his eyes, but they seem to stare about the room piercingly, at each passenger in turn. Janet even jumps a little as he eyes her.

"My apologies. I hope I did not wake anyone. I tried to sleep on the cots, but . . ." he trails off.

A quick toss and the hat is in the upper compartments. Slowly, he turns and takes the empty space next to Gary. He smiles at each in turn, but they are all grudgingly silent.

It is an unwritten law that cliques formed at the beginning of long trips are sacred for the duration. This group has formed such a comradeship and this man is an intruder.

For a long time, nothing is said, and the shadows dominate the room, flickering, gliding from corner to corner, across the weary faces of the travelers. To Gary, the pulse of the train is louder now, weighing him down, pounding in his head.

Or maybe it's the way the stranger keeps looking at him, a queer half-smile on his face, the gaze traveling from one, to the other, to the other . . . .

"Yes, Mister Stewart—" Gary's voice is shaky, a weak imitation of the mere drowsed stupor he felt moments before. Now there is a whiny hint of anxiety in it, desperation to clear the chill. "I—I'm sure April will be waiting for me when I get home, though at—" his voice fails entirely, then starts back up again, "a—at six, I doubt she'll have any ideas like that."

Stewart seems confused, he has forgotten the previous conversation. Then it all comes back to him and he smiles again. "Yep, I suspect you'll have to wait 'til this evening for the REAL welcome home."

"Oh, I don't think so," Gary cradles the jacket in his arms, the trembling already gone, the intrusion forgotten with the silence of the intruder. "Right now, the best welcome home I could get would be her arms around me in bed, body next to mine, whispering 'I love yous' till we drift off to sleep together. That's what I want right now."

"Those are always nice, too," Stewart says. "Gets the strength back up for the next time we can—"

"Stewart!" Lucy elbows her husband, which seems to be about the only thing she's done the entire trip, Gary notices.

"You like the tender moments, too?" Janet's voice speaks timidly from her comer of the room. Her eyes are half open, her head once again nestled against the warmth of her husband. "Have you ever noticed, people don't talk about tenderness anymore." She grips Kevin's hand as she says this. "It doesn't even seem to be a part of love anymore. Even in the so-called 'Romances'—" She stops, giggles, and her mind wanders, then seems to come back again. "You know those books. You get detail after detail of all the romping and heavy breathing parts, but the other moments . . ."

Her hand strokes Kevin's fingers and his face seems to come to life. He pulls back, attentive to her expression, her words, everything about her, now.

"Moments like this, him, and me, just being with him, and I'm in

heaven."

Gary feels himself flush at this public proclamation of love. Kevin seems just as stunned, and leans down towards her. Gary averts his eyes and lets them have their moment.

His gaze meets that of the stranger's, and he feels anger. What right did he have to be here, to witness this display with the others, those who had talked with Kevin and Janet and developed a respect for their relationship he did not share? And yet he continues to watch, unmoving, with no regard for the invasion he is responsible for.

"Still," Janet's voice starts up once again, "no book I've ever read really tries to describe it. Or movie or tellie show. And yet, they'll go to great lengths to show the sex, something just as private. Do you wonder if some people just don't know what real love is?"

"Sex does seem to be all some people have, doesn't it?" Gary sits up in his seat, intrigued with the conversation. It makes the shadows go away, both the ethereal ones and the solid one still seated next to him.

"I've often wondered why there seems to be such an emphasis on it, with the manuals, the portrayals, has simple sharing become that boring for some?"

He poses the question as a statement into the air, not really expecting an answer. He tries to tell himself that this is why he jumps when the deep voice speaks from his comer.

"Perhaps you are the one deluded."

Nobody moves. The moment lingers. Gary shifts uneasily and turns to the stranger, looking back at him, the same smirk on his face. I—I beg your pardon?"

"I said, perhaps you are the deluded one. I mean no offense, merely a speculation."

Gary could feel himself blinking rapidly in the dark, floundering.

"Your speculation confuses me. You have me at a disadvantage."

"I merely suggest that perhaps the portrayals you see around you ARE true love. You simply have never experienced it."

"What?!" He feels a sudden, intense anger at this stranger. He had some nerve!

The smile remains on his face as he leans forward on the bench. All eyes are on him, and he places his elbows on his knees and folds his gloved hands together. He is relaxed, comfortable in the spotlight.

"I don't think that you—"

"I'm merely trying to come up with an answer to your confusion. You were wondering why you've never seen love portrayed the way you experience it. I'm suggesting that its possible you've never experienced love. True love."

"I think you'd better leave." This is Janet's voice, harsh, cutting, the words hang in the air, trapped in the confines of the car. The man does not move, so she continues. "Your suggestion that love is nothing but hot sex and paying the electric bill is insulting."

"And maybe you spend so much time doing nothing because you can't get excited enough in bed to know what I'm talking about."

"You bastard!"

Kevin is on his feet, and Gary is on his, throwing his body in front of Kevin's.

"He has no right to say that to my wife. He's just talked himself into a free trip right out the door." His eyes glare. "Out of my way, Gary."

"Hold it, hold it!" Gary feels a lumpy bag pushed against his head and realizes he has been pushed all the way back, into the overhead luggage compartments. Kevin's breath is harsh in his ears, and his heart is beating wildly in his chest.

"Let's not have any trouble here. There's no need for that." Gary turns, looking down on the stranger. He feels that he has the strength of everybody in the car behind him, and this makes the black-dressed man seem small, indeed.

"You're not wanted here. I suggest you leave."

"Now, hold on a second. Let me explain myself before you get a posse out on me." He settles back in his chair, not quite as confident as he

was before.

"Like I said before, I was only speculating, and I wasn't trying to insult anybody. Not only that, but I was wrong, but can you hear me out? I have an important point in all this. And you should all find it very interesting." Gary freezes in his stance, caught between two very intense and conflicting actions. He wants to throw this man off the train, and yet his words are so intriguing . . . .

"Please, sit down and hear me out." Reluctantly, Gary retreats to his corner and reseats himself, waiting.

"Yes, that was a stupid thing to say, and you're quite right in being insulted, Janet." Her eyes widen at the use of her familiar name.

"I happen to agree with you. Only a very foolish man would say that there is nothing more to love than sex. A very foolish, and unloved man. Without those tender moments, love would be nothing more than . . ." he struggles to find a word, "stress-relieving."

There is a chuckle from Stewart's corner, and a giggle from Janet.

"It is that too, my good man." Stewart calls out.

The smile reappears on the stranger's face, pleased to have gotten back on their good side, or at least to be considered tolerable, again.

"Quite right, so it is. My point, then, in debating you, good sir, was to make another point entirely. If you were walking down the street and everybody was pointing at a spot on an alley wall, and laughing his bloody fool head off, what would you do?"

The question is aimed directly at Gary, who starts at the sudden attention. "Why, er, I'd look at the wall."

'Quite right, you would. And what would you do if you saw nothing there?"

"Um, you mean if it was just a blank wall?"

"The dullest shade of gray you'd ever seen. What would you do?"

"I, uh, guess I'd ask them what was so interesting."

"Yes, but it's more basic than that. Why would you ask?"

"Uh, I don't—"

Janet speaks. "I'd assume I was missing something. Obviously, I was missing the joke and would want to know. That's what I'd ask. Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. You'd assume that it was your fault you weren't laughing. You'd think that you were missing something."

"Okay," says Stewart, "We're with you so far. What's that got to do with anything?"

"Why, that was it." His eyes flash to everyone, they are glued to his every word, baited, waiting.

He turns toward Janet, facing her fully now, a question shoots across the room at the speed of light.

"Janet, do you love Kevin?"

She jumps, startled. "Uh, what? Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, absolutely!" Kevin's arm tightens around her.

"Does he love you?"

"I know he does."

"Do you? You know this for a fact?"

"Yes. This is ridiculous."

"I see. So you've felt true love before, and obviously you were loved just as strongly back before."

Janet's eyes are wide with shock. The stranger is now on his knees in front of her seat, their gazes lock together.

"Oh, but that can't be, can it, or you wouldn't be here with Kevin now."

"I . . . know he loves me. He doesn't need to convince me of that." Both of her hands grip her husband's tightly, the knuckles turning white from the strain.

"How? Have you developed some way to get inside his head?"

"I feel . . . " She stops, groping for the words. "Different with him,

than with anyone else. Unlike I've ever felt before."

"Ah, so that automatically makes it true love."

"Well . . . yes. I know my feelings."

"Perhaps you only THINK its true love, because it feels different. Perhaps it is only a more intense infatuation than with anybody else."

"No, I know what it is."

He pauses, the air becomes thick, stifling, everybody in the car is hanging on his every word. He says a single sentence.

"How do you REALLY know?"

Janet trembles, stumbles over a couple of syllables, and stops, eyes tearing up. Kevin glares at the stranger, tenses up. Gary is afraid that he's going to jump again, but he doesn't.

He pulls her close to him. "I think you've said more than enough."

"Why?" Are you afraid of what I'm proposing? Think about it for just a second. Maybe Janet only thinks she loves you."

"I think her reaction here proves herself to me. Not that she ever had to. And if it weren't for her interest, I'd've thrown you out of here."

"Yes, she is awfully upset. Maybe because she realizes I could be right. Maybe she knows that—" he turns to Gary now, who had been clutching his jacket for the last couple minutes. "There is absolutely no way of ever knowing how you REALLY feel about her. She can never get so close to you that she'll know beyond the tiniest fraction of a doubt that you love her as much as she loves you. Or that she really loves you in the first place."

"I know I love her!"

"A lot of divorced couples started out that way. Do you ever wonder what happened to their love? Did they feel the same way you did? Maybe they never shared the same tenderness." He sits back up, pauses for many seconds, letting them hang on every word. "Maybe they shared more."

The train pounds out its rhythm in the dead silence, and the shadows seem to sneak back timidly, wondering what happened to the drowsy existence that overtook the room minutes earlier.

The stranger speaks again, turning to the young man next to him. And you, Gary, what about the young woman waiting for you?"

"Don't start on April. I know she loves me,"

"Do you?"

"Yes."

The stranger smiles again. "So sure of yourself?"

"Yes, I am. Damned sure. And I don't need you or your word games to try to confuse the issue. Okay, so love is no guarantee. Love is based on faith and trust alone. You know when you have it, you simply know. What more do you want?"

"And yet, weren't you the one who seemed confused earlier?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Why, the conversation that started it all. You and Janet said that you were confused by the way you've seen love portrayed. Maybe you can't see the section of the wall that's so obvious to everyone else. Maybe you're missing the whole picture, that's why you can't join in."

"All right, damn you, I get your point. No, I'm not April, I can't get into her head. I don't know with absolute, one hundred percent certainty that she's as madly in love with me as I am with her. But she shows all the signs to me, she tells me she loves me, she acts as if she loves me, I have faith in that."

"Ah. Well, that may be good enough for you, but I'd rather put my faith in something more certain."

He reaches into his coat pocket, and withdraws a small object. Janet and Gary are particularly anxious, their eyes following his every move, locking onto the glittering object in his hand.

It is a blue colored rose, sculpted of transparent crystal. The petals are arranged to surround a glowing blue sphere that inexplicably glimmers. The rose itself would be enough to capture anyone's attention, but the sphere within glows with an inner beauty that makes the entire car bright, the shadows dissolve in favor of the overpowering light.

". . . and present you with an image of yourself. . . from that person's frame of mind."

"Wh-what's that?" Janet's voice whispers, awestruck, as the stranger's hand extends the crystal in front of her pale face. The object dominates with its radiance. Lucy Collins also turns her head.

"Ah, it glitters," says the stranger. "You see how we suddenly have the girls' attention? 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend,' as the saying goes, and this object does seem to bring out the best in them."

The stranger leans back, allowing the fist-sized object to remain exposed in his hand, gripping it by its curved off stem so that all in the car can see it. The center, Gary thinks, at first seemed completely transparent, but he can see now that it is quite clouded.

"This little beauty," he shrugs, "diamond, pendant, crystal, charm, I don't really know what, is very special. It took away all my doubts in love." His eyes harden as he speaks next. "It is why I'm currently without companionship."

They are all waiting, knowing he will explain himself sooner or later. But he is delighting in the moment, and he lets it linger before continuing.

"You see, this rose is magical. I don't know how it works, I only know that it does. I found it on a train very similar to this one, under a seat, and I was ready to give it to the stationmaster, when I quite accidentally discovered its powers."

"A charlatan." Stewart speaks. "You're a con artist. I should've known better."

"Oh, no, no gimmick here. Although, I'm sure you'll think so at first. You see, the crystal center can, somehow, tap into the mind's eye of another person. I don't pretend to understand magic. Imagine, though, an object that can read your mind, find out who you love, and present you with an image of yourself . . . from that person's frame of mind."

He holds the glowing blue rose out, tantalizingly, in front of Janet's widened eyes. She bites her lips as it inches nearer.

There is a loud chuckle from Stewart's corner. "Of course. And how much do you ask for this miracle."

"Fifty pounds for one gaze."

"That's ridiculous," Gary says, not quite convincingly. "For a silly parlor trick?"

"I'm sure it makes you feel better to keep insisting that, and I can even see where you're coming from, which is why," he spaces his words carefully, aiming them directly at the transfixed woman, "Janet can have the free look, and once you've taken her word for it. I'll take your fifty pounds each in turn."

"Really?" Gary keeps saying, feebly. "And what makes you think it's really worth fifty pounds?"

"Fifty pounds to know the unknowable? To make faith fact? Isn't that worth fifty pounds to you?" As they speak, Janet's hands are already clasped around the curled stem, the folded petals directing the light to make her face an eerie blue. She looks at the stranger uncertainly.

"What do I do?"

"Close one eye, and peek directly into the center of it. Don't worry about light, it works even in total darkness. The image will be perfect."

Janet holds the rose close. It seems to burn in her trembling fingers, and she needs both hands to steady herself. The center, she can see, is not simply clouded, but filled with smoky, animated, swirling, mist. The blue is caused by an actual glowing light within.

She hardly has time to reflect on this when the mist suddenly clears completely, and she finds herself staring at an image . . . of herself.

She is seated in the train, as she was, moments earlier, leaning against her husband's shoulder. Only Kevin is not in the picture, at least not his face.

Her breath leaves her body as she realizes that she is seeing through Kevin's eyes, looking down on his own face from his viewpoint.

She remembers the daily routine of seeing her own face in a mirror, angry at the extra chubbiness in her cheeks, at the way her hair would never settle just right.

In the rose, it is all there, but it isn't there. She sees herself, all the features are the same, but there is, superimposed, an image, a glow over her face and body that is almost angelic. A finger caresses her cheek, and it feels to her the softest, smoothest, most beautiful silk she has ever touched.

Images superimpose themselves rapidly over her body. She can see herself in her nightgown on their wedding night, a sense of pleasure mixed perfectly with tenderness. Purity and passion somehow become one and the same, and she is the source of it. She tries to force the flaws she sees in herself, the hair, the weight, the temper tantrums. They don't exist in this image. She sees herself, but now she is the perfect woman, sexy, funny, beautiful, giving.

Perfect.

Everything.

The rose drops from her hands, into the stranger's, and she buries herself in Kevin's arms, the joy in her sobs tearing from her.

"iloveyouiloveyouohgodhowiloveyou . . ." She continues in a blissful monotone. Her arms squeeze her husband's shoulders as she continues to cry. There's no shame left, nothing to hold back, not now and not ever again.

Her cries eventually reduce themselves to gentle sobs. The rest wait in an uneasy silence. Gary feels himself choke up, both over her own delirious happiness, and at the degradation that is paired with it.

"I'm sorry," Janet's voice is barely a whisper in Kevin's shoulder.

"I should never, ever have doubted you. I just got so confused, I knew you loved me, I did, and I love you so much—"

"Shh!" Kevin hushes her softly. "It's okay. I know, honey, it's okay." He continues to mumble to her until she quiets down.

"Well," says the stranger, his fingers stroking the petals like a pet, I trust there's no doubt as to the authenticity of the view. He looks over at Stewart, whose face is still pale from Janet's display.

"Do you still doubt the powers of this crystal, Sir Stewart?"

"It's a—a trick, it has to be." His eyes are still on Janet, her shaken frame, cradled in Kevin's arms.

"Perhaps you would suggest that the young lady and myself planned this ahead of time to sucker you. Do you believe her capable of that?"

"No, I didn't!" Janet explodes then. "I've never seen this man before in my life, I swear."

"Its okay," Stewart says. He feels very much the comforting grandfather then, wishing he could be stable and strong, not shocked and unsure of himself as he is now.

"It's a trick. Maybe with mirrors." His hand reaches out, but the stranger pulls the object away.

"Cost you fifty pounds to find out." The stranger's eyes light up, as dark as they are, they seem to reflect more light than Janet's own blue. Glowing with greed.

"This is not a charity, Mister Stewart. I give out one free demonstration, and I sure won't make an exception to somebody I know damn well can afford it."

Grudgingly, Stewart reaches into his pocket and begins shuffling through some bills. Lucy watches his actions, wide-eyed.

"What do you think you're doing?" It's little more than a whisper, but more powerful than the loudest scream.

"You get this conditionally," Stewart says, his mouth curls up in a scowl. "Only if I am unable to find a sign of deception."

The stranger nods. "You are an educated man. Your word should have more than a little power on the others." He glares at Gary, then back.

"Perhaps Mister Finn can hold the money. He can be trusted."

"Agreed." He extends the bills in Gary's direction. Lucy continues staring. She speaks frantically.

"Stewart, wait. This is silly."

The rose is already in his hands, glowing brightly. When he turns to look at her, his face is a blue sheen of light.

"What's silly about it, my dear?"

I'm just saying, its a stunt. I didn't want you spending your money foolishly."

Stewart shrugs. "It's already done, dearest one. A gentleman's word is his honor."

"Stewart, don't!"

He focuses his eye on the blue-glowing center.

"Stewart, Stewart, stop!"

The mist parts, and Stewart faces an old man, slightly resembling himself, but stooped, with sad brown eyes. He hobbles across a large, roomy living room, money is hanging out of his pocket. As he watches, a ravaging young woman dances across the floor, brown hair flailing. A hand snatches a fifty as she waltzes by. The old man keeps walking, he doesn't seem to notice.

The image dissolves to another room. Stewart recognizes their bedroom. The old man is adjusting his tie in the mirror, the startlingly-beautiful woman that bears little resemblance to Lucy is in the bed, talking about Tupperware parties. A ghost image is superimposed over his face as the scene continues.

Now the tie becomes a blindfold, completely covers the old man's eyes. Stewart can see the young woman in bed. Somebody else is with her. He had red hair, dark eyes. They are under the covers, kissing, laughing. She pulls him on top of her, and the laughter stops. There are other sounds, of a more primitive nature.

The figures are locked in an embrace, she rolls on top of him, but he now has a different face, blond hair, blue eyes. She points at the blind old fool and laughs, a hoarse, cackling sound of mockery. The man fingers a string of beads around the woman's neck, a birthday gift from the old man, she says, and worth a lot of money, too.

He throws her against the mattress, ready to finish the job, but now he has a beard and a tattoo on his left shoulder—

"Mister Stewart?"

He jumps. The stranger is directly in front of him, the dark eyes register concern, compassion. Stewart realizes that everyone is staring at him, the sound of the train beats through the walls as the seconds tick by. A hand is gripping his arm on the other side, nails cutting.

"You've been staring into space for nearly thirty seconds," the stranger whispers, his face glows from the rose, now back in his hand.

"What did you see, darling?" Stewart hears the voice of the woman who talked of a Tupperware party.

"Stewart? D—darling, what's wrong? What did you—"

His arm jerks, pulls away from her. He stabs a finger at her. She shrinks back. "Shut up!" She tries to speak, but with a look, he stops her. He swallows, stands.

The stranger steps back, anxious, waiting. Stewart rises to his full height, straight and tall. Blinks away tears. He has never stooped, he is not old yet, but he WAS blind.

He takes a couple of steps toward the door. He will not stoop now, either.

"Mister Stewart" Gary is also on his feet, arm on his shoulder, concern registers on his face as he watches the life drain out of this admirable gentleman.

"I thought—I could help you to the cot."

"No." Stewart's voice is soft, but still powerful. "No, I have to do this myself for awhile at least, I AM going to be alone." His hand clasps Gary's arm. "But only for a little while."

"Stewart!" Lucy, from the comer. "I—it was a trick, remember? You were going to prove it was wrong." Tears are welling up in her eyes. "It was wrong, it had to be."

Stewart releases Gary's arm, twists the handle of the door loose. His eyes travel the room one last time, and linger for a few moments on

the stranger.

"Gary, pay the man."

The wind is cold and harsh, cutting to the soul. Stewart hardly notices.

A woman cries, standing against the now closed door as the shadows take inventory, unnoticed. The missing person is noticed by all, and no none dares to look at the sniffing figure standing by the window.

No one, save the stranger.

Lucy feels his gaze drilling into her back. She turns to him in fury.

"Damn you! Damn you and your magic! You had no right to come here, and ruin my life like you have! How dare you!"

She screams, her clawed hand cuts the air, toward his face.

He catches her wrist in mid-swing, holds in there. His gaze never wavers as he speaks, the words fly at her venomously like daggers.

"No, how dare you! You wanted any rich man who's looking for a sick woman just like you to bury in diamonds and furs for the rest of his life, as long as you share your bed with him. Why did you have to pick one that actually loved you?"

Her mouth is open in outrage. "He . . ."

"I only hope after this is over, that your husband Stewart doesn't give up on love—as those men have."

She pulls her hand free, adjusts her hat and pretends to gather up her imagined dignity. "I have to go talk to him."

"Yes, you do." The stranger turns, crosses the room to his space next to Gary. "Perhaps you can convince him to let you keep the Mercedes."

She opens the door in a huff. The wind cuts in. Nobody bothers to move. Nobody looks in her direction.

When it stops, each person gathers their own thoughts, and even the stranger is at a loss for words. Gary pulls at a loose string on his jacket, waiting. A hand come down on the pile of bills in his lap. He lets the stranger take it without comment. Well-earned blood money. When Gary looks up, he sees that Janet and Kevin are staring at him.

He shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

There is movement, and he knows the stranger is near. He does not turn to face him.

"Mister Finn—"

"No." Gary is shaking his head, trembling. He looks back towards the closed door. He draws his knees up, and continues to shake his head.

"I—I don't want to know. I don't. Just leave me alone." He waits. The light is in his face, pulsing.

Gary is shivering, but it is not from the cold. Janet sits up straight, Kevin's hand weaves through her hair. He sees a tear trickling down her face.

It's even brighter now. The stranger says nothing. Why won't he say something? Why won't he agree? Or disagree? Or talk about something else?

Gary's hand is already in his pocket. He withdraws the money with trembling fingers. The picture is accidentally pulled out with it. He realizes with both anger and relief that he is short on the needed money.

He puts the money in his lap, and strokes the picture timidly.

"April," He speaks out loud. "You love me. I know you do." He can see the outline of her smiling face, pink chiffon—

His eyes lock with the stranger's defiantly. "Well, she does!"

Defensively. "She does."

Desperately. "Doesn't she?"

He HAS to know now, but—

"I—I only have thirty pounds," he says. The stranger's eyes harden at the news, his gaze falls back upon the rose in his hand, and Gary wonders if he will in fact slip it back into his pocket.

Making his decision, the stranger takes the money from Gary's lap.

"Thirty pounds will suffice, Mister Finn. Even for a prize such as this, I cannot take what you cannot give."

He extends the rose, and one bill. "The bargain is scaled . . . at twenty pounds, should you decide you would rather eat alone this morning after you've seen the truth."

Gary feels mixed emotions at this action. Is it a gift, but he thought behind it is a pessimistic one. The stranger already feels sorry for him.

The money is in the stranger's hand and the rose is in Gary's.

His breath comes in sharp jerks. He licks his lips, looks around the room.

Janet averts her eyes, buries her face in Kevin's shoulder. Kevin shrugs helplessly. The stranger nods. The shadows wait.

The petals surround a center that now burns brightly in his eyes, the mist parts.

There is nothing, only solid blue, for many seconds. Then the light dims to complete darkness, almost . . . except . . .

The room is lit by a single candle only. The flames flicker from a slight wind. There is a woman. Sitting, no, lying across cushions.

Pillows. It is a bed, their bedroom.

The image closes in, and he sees her, his wife, April, lying on the bed, eyes wide awake and staring at the flame. The clock on the night-desk reads 4:00.

Gary knows his bedroom is well-lit during the day. This is the early morning.

She reaches under the pillow and pulls out a framed picture, looks at it. Gary can make out a white wedding dress, another tall figure with his face.

Her arms fold around the surface and she embraces it close to her chest, lying back on the pillows. A sigh lingers in the air as she holds the picture close, stroking his image.

Suddenly, his view wavers, blinking out in a swirl of kaleidoscopic colors and images. Gary, in a tuxedo, April, a white dress, somewhere, an orchestra is playing and he's grabbed her around the waist, swinging her around the dance floor in mad passion. He drops her to her feet, kissing her. Her arms wrap around his waist, pulling him tightly to her. He can see her head resting on his shoulder, eyes closed, a smile of joy crosses her face. April, as her name, is filled with new life.

The colors fade, and the image re-forms to the bed. The woman gets up, crosses the room, looks at herself in the mirror.

Gary watches in stunned fascination as she combs her hair, poses in her negligee, her hand rests on her hip, she smiles at the image, runs the brush back through her hair. She picks the clock up. He'll be coming home soon . . . .

The rose drops in his lap. He senses that the others, his companions, are on the edge of their seats. He blinks away tears (realizes for the first time that he is crying). Janet is watching, biting her lip. Gary tries to smile, laugh, but he is drained. The best he accomplishes is a slight upward curling of his lip.

It is enough. Janet squeals with joy, Kevin laughs, and the stranger's hand clasps against his shoulder in congratulations.

"I am happy for you," he says, slips the rose into his breast jacket pocket as he speaks. Gary nods, says nothing, so the stranger prompts him. "Please speak. I am curious to know what is going through your mind."

Gary shakes his head rapidly, as is waking from a dream. He rubs his eyes and blinks. He looks at the stranger.

"I know what love is," he says. "I always did."

The stranger nods. "Yes, I suppose you did."

Gary chuckles, thinks back to when it all started. It seems years ago.

"And I can support what I said earlier. Love is based on faith. I didn't need that rose. Without it, I'd still be in love, I'd still be happy."

The stranger says nothing for a moment. Then ,his head flings back and he laughs, loudly, madly. Gary shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

The stranger stands, still shaking his head. "Faith? You think

what you're feeling now is based on faith?"

"Before you ever stepped in here, I had faith in April." Gary yells. "If I had never met you, it would still be just as strong with or without the rose."

"Of course you had faith." The stranger's head nods in agreement, and then his finger raises with the word "but!"

"You had faith because that was all you COULD have. When I entered, it was the first time you were aware that love could be proven."

His hand reaches up, over the railing, and he retrieves his hat. "Now, you answer me this. Was there any one couple here that refused a look at the rose? Did anybody here say 'no thank you, sir, I have no need for your magic. I know the truth without it'?"

Gary opens his mouth to speak, the stranger cuts in. "With conviction, Mister Finn." Gary stops, his train of thought broken off.

The stranger's hand is now on the door. "I've seen this over and over again. Janet was offered a free look. She took it without hesitation. Mister Stewart discovered firsthand the negative side of trading faith for fact. And I even got twenty pounds from YOU, Mister Finn."

The latch clicks noisily as it comes loose. "Is that your definition of faith?"

And he is gone, off to the next car, leaving the three remaining passengers to the mercy of the flickering shadows and the privacy of their own thoughts.

Paris Flea Market, silver gelatin print, Jennifer Baynes, 1995

Images superimpose themselves rapidly over her body. She tries to force the flaws she sees in herself, the hair, the weight, the temper tantrums. They don't exist in this image. She sees herself, but now she is the perfect woman, sexy, funny, beautiful, giving.

Perfect.

The Silence

Mark R. Page

In silence
she screams
across the void
of the breakfast table.
A wall
of newspaper
surrounds him.
The rock and mortar
of the sports column
rises above her like a colossus,
with ramparts manned
by cold indifference.
Lordly,
he peers over
his paper
battlements
to engage her
eyes;
she retreats
meekly
into her coffee cup.

White Mom

Kirk Lanzone Terry

Anitra, Casey Eskridge, 1996

Atop a hill, far below the clouds
With a panoramic view of cul-de-sacs
white moms in yellow aprons
bags of white bread in their hands
twirling them
faster and faster
smiling like angels they are
toss these bags skyward
where they become babies
somersaulting genes
dot the hazy blue afternoon
still.

The Monk

Sheila Ahlbrand

He looked like a monk sitting on the beach, his head wrapped in a rough brown blanket as the sun shone through the cold ocean air onto his face. Well, maybe not a monk, but some sort of ancient prophet or holy man. Lucy smiled as she thought this and decided not to tell him, but on a whim that bypassed her brain and came straight out of her mouth, she blurted out her observation.

He turned from his musings to look at her, and the spell was broken. He was no longer George the holy man, but simply George the man, which was by no means an ordinary thing, but nonetheless the vision was gone. He looked bewildered and asked what she meant by it, but she just smiled and shrugged. She often found words to be inadequate with George, perhaps because he so seldom spoke. He was definitely what would be called the strong silent type, the Gary Cooper of the nineties, but even that wasn't accurate, for he wasn't a man of the nineties, but rather a throwback to an earlier gentler era.

The day had been a fiasco so far, as the too well planned romantic liaison tends to be. The unseasonably warm March weather was turning colder by the minute, and they had quarreled in the car on the drive to the beach. It wasn't actually a quarrel, but her feelings had been hurt. They had been listening to big band music on the radio and George had broken the silence to say how much he liked the pure lyrical quality of the clarinet. He turned to Lucy and asked, "Which instrument do you like the best?"

Without hesitation Lucy put on a husky voice and said, "The saxophone."

"That's Fitz's favorite too," he replied gravely. "Personally, I think it sounds too vulgar. It makes me think of sex and cheap motels."

The countryside sped past outside, beautiful and pure and she suddenly felt cheap and dirty, where she never had before, and they rode on in silence . . . his silence, his religion. She said she loved his silence, told him so, but they were his silences, not theirs. He didn't share them, and she felt impelled to attach some deep hidden meaning to them.

His remark had made her defensive. She didn't want to think, and the day was supposed to be romantic, so she just sat there and inhaled the smell of him, which was always wonderful. He had an air of mysterious hair tonics, ancient musky after-shave, old tweed, cigarette smoke and peppermint. He smelled Eke an old man. Once again she became lost in him and her wounded feelings nearly were forgotten.

"Lucy?"

The sound of his voice brought her back to the present, and she looked at him. He was wearing the look of George the perplexed, and she inwardly triumphed for a moment, realizing that he had been left out of her silence. A short, violent gust of wind made her remember how cold it was and she moved over to sit close to him. His well-toned body was hard and unyielding, yet as he put his arms around her she felt warm and protected.

The sun was nearly down, and they sat in silence watching it disappear behind the horizon of the ice-capped water. Then with no warning he kissed her, and immediately afterward began singing some silly nineteen-twenties ditty; his voice was thin and reedy, yet somehow it suited the songs he chose to sing. This time it was something about being alone under the moon, not inherently romantic, but considering the landscape it was enough and they made love there on the beach . . . .

Lucy told herself it was wonderful. It was so romantic and adventurous making love in the open air, with the ever present risk of discovery,

but as romantic as she could make it sound to the rest of the world, she knew what it was really like. The beach was rocky and uncomfortable, the blankets scratchy and full of sand and no matter how much body heat they generated, it was still freezing. Lucy sighed in the aftermath and what little mood was still there was broken by a sudden cloudburst, which sent them scrambling to gather their things together and run to the car. They had their picnic there and laughed and fed each other grapes, enjoyed George's newfound discovery of the sensuality of food. The joy of tongues, tastes, textures, and fingers mingling into a single sensation. She suddenly realized that this was better than the lovemaking, but she didn't want to break the moment so she forced the thought out of her mind.

On the drive home, enveloped by the darkness, her thoughts drifted again. She remembered when she first met George. It was at a Christmas party at the apartment he shared with Fitz. The small rooms were dimly lit, a victrola played in the background and the air was full of the hum of voices punctuated with tinkling laughter. The people were all young, bright and beautiful, glasses full of champagne, eggnog, or manhattans in their hands, a faint fog from the smoke of cloves and foreign cigarettes hanging over their heads. Lucy had been invited by Fitz's girlfriend, Vera, a loud, theatrical type, who always wore bright red lipstick and a black beret. Vera saw life as one big adventure and for some reason decided to take Lucy along for the ride. Lucy didn't mind and she was rather enjoying the party. And then she saw George. He was standing in a comer, aloofly smoking a cigarette and talking to a pretty blond girl in a low-cut dress. He was tall and lanky, dressed in a tuxedo, with his hair slicked back, but the thing she really noticed was his eyes, the palest green eyes she had ever seen. She stood watching him for a moment, until she realized he was watching her too. She had given him an embarrassed smile and walked away. An attractive architect struck up a conversation with her and she tried to dismiss the young man with the intense green eyes, but somehow she couldn't. It hadn't helped any that the architect, named Steve, was droning on about zoning laws and that she still sensed she was being watched. Those eyes seemed to bum a hole right through her.

He had finally come over with Vera, who introduced them. His voice sounded just like his eyes looked-pale and intense, and she had been intimidated, yet intrigued. He had asked her to dance and she bad declined, claiming two left feet, but he insisted.

Tommy Dorsey was playing and they were transported back into another time. They danced with one body, like they were the music. It was dancing like she had never experienced before, Lucy had never felt so sensual in her whole life. She felt almost embarrassed to have other people in the room. Suddenly she saw the blonde with the red dress who had been talking to George earlier, eyeing her with cool disdain. Lucy realized that the girl must have been George's date and excused herself from the party. George, not sensing her reason for going had insisted on walking her to her car. She had tried to get away, feeling like Cinderella trying to get away before the spell was broken, but her handsome Prince followed her out the door and caught her arm.

Outside, with the music gone she felt suddenly shy and uncomfortable. He gave her his hand to help her over a snowdrift, but an she could do was say thank you, as she quickly withdrew her hand as if he had burned her. He told her good night and for some reason she expected him to kiss her as she drove away. But he had already started walking back through the snow to the apartment.

A few days later he had called her. His voice sounded odd, as if he was talking to the telephone instead of to her. She and Vera were invited over for a night of dancing. As Lucy hung up the phone she had glanced down and suddenly felt strange in her blue jeans and sweatshirt.

The next few months had been a blur of taffetas and velvets, champagne, music and dancing. They had danced into the wee hours of the morning until she would have to go home, where she would crawl into bed, her feet aching, hardly able to sleep because she was still so giddy. They danced with such joy, fox-trots and waltzes, but mostly they just

danced with their hearts. He would lead and she would effortlessly follow wherever her went.

She looked over at him now and wondered what had happened. This sombre man sitting next to her didn't seem like the same funloving man she used to know. Somewhere in the midst of all this dancing, something had happened. He had kissed her for the first time on Valentine's day. It sounded corny, but for George it could have been no other way. After that things became more complicated. The simplicity of the music and the dance had evolved into something else.

They stopped and she was surprised to see that they were at his apartment already. They ascended the stairs, and went inside. Lucy marveled at how commonplace, even sparse, it all looked. He took her coat and started the victrola. Doris Day was singing "Sentimental Journey," and they danced, not with joy, but rather with a slow and silent eurhythmic motion. He kissed her and then took her by the hand and led her back to his bedroom.

Lucy remembered the first time she had been invited to his room. She had felt like she was being allowed to see a sacred shrine. She entered expecting a room full of wonderful, mysterious things that would help her to piece together the puzzle of George, only to be disappointed. It was practically bare, almost monastical. He had hung a picture on the wall of a ship, that seemed to hold no personal significance, there was a faded floral rug on the floor and a massive art deco bedroom suite she knew he had spent most of his money on. The room looked like it was from another age, just as George would have wanted it to, but other than that it seemed to say nothing about him. Looking at the room again, Lucy wondered if maybe George was silent because he didn't have anything to say.

He started kissing her again and began to gently pull her down onto the old bed, but Lucy drew away. "It's late, George. I really should be going. Would you get my coat please?"

Without a word George went and got her coat. Lucy followed him down the shadowy hallway. As he took the coat out of the closet she was

Untitled, Timothy Hill, 1989

beginning to think he wasn't going to speak at all, but then he said, "Are you all right?" His voice still had the ability to startle her and she stammered for a minute, not knowing what to say.

"I don't know," was all she could manage. George started to get his own coat out of the closet, but Lucy stopped him. "I'll walk myself out. Thank you." George looked at her for a moment then hung up his coat. Lucy reached up and gave him a soft kiss on the mouth, but he was unresponsive. She walked away without looking back. On the drive home it occurred to her that the lovemaking on the beach wasn't bad because of the cold or the sand, but because of George. He was silent in love, just as he was silent in life. She suddenly wished that she had never seen the monk on the beach.

Down in the basement, after the bombing

Kyle Barnett

'92

Down in the basement, after the bombing
you're on your back dead, halfway between the cement blocks
and yellowed newspaper clipping of Mrs. Filbert's Soft Margarine
displayed next to cherry tomatoes in a Thanksgiving ad.

You didn't make it to your hiding place,
and you don't run across the floor like a dirty thought
when I hit the basement light.
Was it a relative that was stepped on upstairs,
crunched with bare feet between the alarm clock and the bed?

It's how your body is segmented and twisted,
the iridescent evil on your brown-shell back,
those pseudo-legs that carried you so fats,
that scared us so. Those legs don't move you anymore,
dead after the little bomb, not the big one.

Grandma Bitsy

Linda Bredensteiner

The last time I saw Grandma Bitsy she was sitting in a chair by the window eating a Danish butter cookie. My father had brought her a round blue tin of them separated by shapes into little ruffled white sleeves. Half of the cookie fell on the floor.

Grandma Bitsy's bed was closest to the window.

The other bed was neatly made and had a note written and taped to the wall above it that said:

"No Diapers for Bertie."

There was no place for my brother and I to sit.

In the hall a happy, bouncy song had played while my father told us about a woman who had fallen out of bed and broken her hip—or was it her arm?

My brother and I tried not to laugh at the song. It was inappropriate.

Nursing Home Series , silver gelatin print, Ginny Taylor Rosner, 1989

June 18, 1977

Jeffrey Beebe

That morning
I had set up the sprinkler
in the backyard to escape
the indolent heat . . .
under the web of the stock oak,
my grandfather's tree;
But tumbled mightily inside
upon the first tearing roil of thunder and
the touch of cool breezy tendrils.
Through the fly-smeared bay window,
and with a green-glass
bottle of rootbeer—my opiate
of summer curled in my fist,
(my grandfather's drink)
I watched the cold pewter clouds oil
across the sky
distended with the rain.
The old oak went
down with whipcrack cough
under the first violent slap
and agony of wind

The leaves
sighed as it's tired
bent barrel was jarringly
caught in the crotch of the pail rain-slick beech
leaning over the garage.

(It saved our
car and
the garage
from the fall.)
My father ran out into the rain,
swearing through a sad face.

That afternoon,
when the flinty heat and mosquitos doubled,
I played out back around the
gasping roots of the old oak.
(a narrow-chested child)
—sprinting through the rainbowing
mist of green lawn sprinkler,
leaves and twigs and bark and beetles
pulped beneath my numb feet.

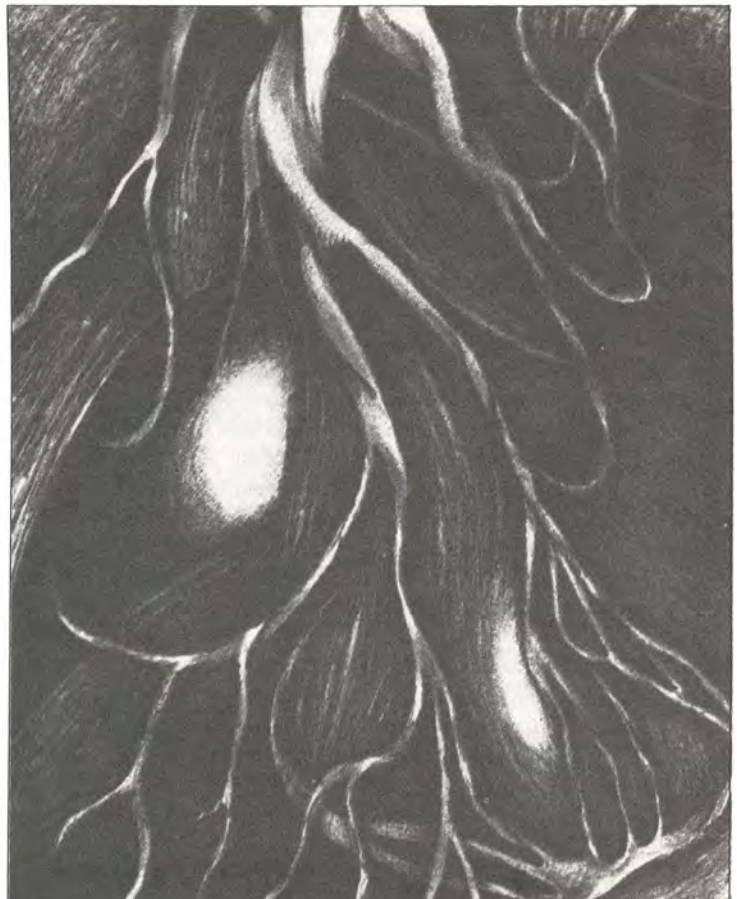
(water cold
like an electric shock;
grass clippings
plastered to feet, ankles, and shins;
toes purple from clumsy stubbings and
knees clotted with brown scabs and new pink flesh—)
—tugging with raisin-fingers
on the wet curls of my hair,
trying to straighten them out
before they frizzly dried in the sun.

Surrender

Sean Jessup

Below the algae growing soft and green
at water's edge, down into deep marine
of pink anemone and tiger shark,
where narrow barracuda pierce the dark
and placid wings of manta rays are spread
with upturned tips, above the oyster bed,
there rests a solitary band of gold
oblivious to currents quick and cold,
a trinket settling down through silt and clay—
the wedding ring that splashed into the bay.

It seems that ring belongs there in the brine.
Its golden facets always used to shine
the brightest when immersed in salty tears.
That wicked ring which blazed for ceaseless years,
demanding sorrow's purifying flood,
now drowns in dense, asphyxiating mud
and decomposing fungus scarred by trails
of passing worms and hermit crabs and snails
all groping through the murky deep marine
below the algae growing thick and green.



Untitled, Angela Stewart, 1996

Lipstick Kids

Peter S. Monn

"Ruby darling!" In my dream, it was my mother who was calling for me. Her see-through white dress swam around her feet in the currents of a rippling stream. "Ruby! Time to get up!" Actually it was just Rose, screaming, not calling for me, over crackling bacon and her Jesus music.

Reaching for my glasses, I knocked over a glass of water, and then stepped in the puddle as my feet stepped out from under the sheets onto the wood floor. It was only seven. Usually I slept in until ten or eleven on Saturdays.

"Ruby! Time to get up. Don't make me come up there and drag your bum out of bed."

"I comin', I'm comin'." I muttered under my breath before sticking my four day old gum into my mouth, trying to grasp for any flavor left in the tiny piece of Juicy Fruit.

Rose tossed two pieces of bacon, and a slice of buttered toast on my plate before I had even sat down. Rose had already showered and dressed. Her hair was perfectly set, and her make-up, although almost unsightly colors, was perfectly placed on her face. Her left hand was flipping the bacon while her right hand was wiping the crumbs from the counter into the sink. I sighed and ran my fingers through my choppy short hair.

"Now Ruby, I told you to go and get ready. Try to make yourself look nice. Do something, for God's sake, with your hair."

"Grandma . . ."

"Never Grandma darling, always Rose, you know that."

"Why the hell are we up so early?"

"Do NOT use that language in my house. You are though, going to see your mother today. She's in town and she wants to see you."

Momma had come to pick us up! For nine years I had been waiting to show everyone she really loved us, and now she was here!

I ran up the stairs before Rose could say another thing. Turning the corner to my room, I fell over something in the dark hall.

"Oh, it's you." I said, staring down at my little sister.

"See Lippy," she said, staring down at a tube of lipstick, "She's excited about seeing Momma too." She skipped down the hall and into her room.

Rummaging through my closet, I found a shirt of my father's and a new pair of cords to wear. Looking into the chipped mirror, I tried brushing my hair down, but decided to just slick it back. I fell into the seat, depressed that I couldn't be better looking. It was my curse in life to be a woman, yet representative of the male gender.

"Oh, Daddy." I sighed, looking at his picture under the mirror. I could remember one seriously happy moment about my father. He had taken me to the fair. He put me on some kind of ride, a carousel, and just let me keep riding and riding. Every time I'd go around I'd wave to him, and say "One more time, please, one more time," After about five more times, I raised my arm to wave, but he wasn't there. I took the picture out of the frame and slipped it into my pocket. In the new town where Momma was taking us, I would show all of the kids that I really did have a daddy. The picture was my way of living with him every day, not just remembering how he left without saying goodbye.

Momma was another story. She just packed all of her things, told Rose she was never meant to be a mother and drove off in her red pick up truck. Red had always been her favorite color. That's why she named me Ruby. And also because that had been the song on the radio when she believed I was conceived.

Momma didn't name my sister. She was gone before she had time. Rose started calling her Mary. "Blessed Mary," she'd say, but I knew my sister was a fool. She was nine years old, never wore anything except for pink, and she would only talk to this tube of lipstick. I guess that's why she goes to a special school. The lipstick is the only thing Momma left behind.

"Ruby, come on, it's time for you to go and meet your mother!"

Rose didn't have time to drive us to the bar where we were meeting Momma. So we had to walk to the bus station in front of Judy Acres's house. There's something about living on a street for so long that everybody knows everything about you even when you don't want them to. Sometimes, when school's been really bad, you jump off the bus, excited to be home, but the stupid street reminds you that no matter how hard you try, you'll always be the same person, always.

" Where y'all going?" It was Judy, in her new rabbit fur coat, although it was the middle of August.

"Nowhere!" I shouted. "Why dontcha go and mind your own business?"

'Well, I never. You know Ruby, that's your problem. You're never nice to anyone. Well that, and your mother is a whore.' She shouted and ran in the house.

"Well, she's come to get us!" I shouted, but Judy had already slammed the door.

I guess the bus is even worse than your own street, If you have somewhere to go, then you can't get off whenever you want. Most kids my age buy cigarettes and magazines. At least that's what most kids at fifteen do. When I have extra money from working at the Frosty Banana, I like to get on the bus, and when it gets too hot, or too noisy, I just get off at the next stop.

Today though, we had to stay on the bus. Mary just sat there and talked to the stupid tube of lipstick, attracting stares from everyone. "Can you please stop that, God!"

"See, Lippy, she's embarrassed too." Hello, my sister is nine years old and talks to lipstick. Hello, I'm fifteen and just because I look like James Dean everyone calls me a butch dyke. The fact is I wish I could look prettier. I wish I looked like Momma. Well, I wish I looked like what Momma looks like in the picture I have of her.

The only picture we have is the one I rescued before Rose burnt them all. It's a picture of Momma wrapped around a pole, dressed in a bikini. She's a topless dancer. That's what she does in the carnival. The newspaper did a story about five years back called "Residents of Loaka County Gone Bad." That's how everyone found out about Momma, but she isn't a whore, she just isn't. She's just developed, the way I wish I was.

My head hit the seat in front of me and my glasses slid off as the bus came to a halt. I got myself back together and grabbed my sister's arm.

"Come on, we're here."

"Why couldn't Rose bring us?"

"I don't know. I think she had to go to church or something."

"Come on."

I had known my Daddy, at least for a little while. But Mary never had. I don't even think Momma knew for certain who her father was. Everybody said it was his fault that Mary was the way she was. What way? I'd ask, but everyone would just say the Mary was a gift from God. A gift from God! Pimples frosting her face. The worst shade of red hair possible, and she talks to lipstick. She may be a gift from God, but she is my personal hell.

"Come on." I said, smiling, trying to be a little nicer. She was all I had. Mary looked up and smiled back at me.

"Come on, Lippy, Momma's come to get us."

We sat in front of Bailey's Bar, which was where we were meeting Momma for almost an hour before some man in an apron come out and shouted at us.

"Hey! Hey you kids, are you looking for Arleen?"

"Yeah."

"Well, dammit kid, she's in here waiting for you. Been waiting for you.' He slammed the door and left us alone in the dusty parking lot.

The bar was a poop color brown, with no windows. After fifteen minutes more, I decided she wasn't going to come out and get us, so I held Mary's hand and together we walked in.

I wasn't sure why Momma hadn't come to see us at the house, especially since she would have to go back there to pick up our things. I was sure that she had changed her mind and was back to pick us up. It had been nine years, and maybe she was ready to be our mother again.

The inside of the bar was dark with blue and red lights. The man who had shouted at us pointed to a corner away from the bar. I clenched Mary's hand tighter and walked over to the corner booth. She was there.

Her hair fell past her breasts in curling clouds of powdery snow. She had on a black leather tank top exposing the size of her breasts, but hid her eyes behind mirrored sunglasses.

The lady before us began to laugh harder than anyone I had ever seen laugh. "Gift from God?!" She hissed again, blowing smoke all over the table. "She's a God damned retard." Mary just kept on smiling. If she didn't understand, I sure did. "Let me tell you something, Ruby. Her father got me drunk, and then took advantage of me."

"I thought you didn't know who . . ."

"Yeah well anyway, let me get a look at you girls," she said softer, putting her sunglasses back on while lighting another cigarette. I looked at the brand, Eves, and decided I would only smoke that brand when I got older.

Mary could stay with Rose. I would go with Arleen, and we would smoke and do our nails together. We would be a team.

"Now the reason I wanted to see you girls today, well really I only need to see you Ruby." I knew it. She had decided to take me and leave stupid old Mary behind.

"The reason is that I need you to sign these papers to prove that I really am your momma. See, I got some money I need to get, and well, you don't need to know the specifics." She reached for her glass, but realized it was empty. "Hey Bailey, how about another Jack and Coke, and uhh . . ." She looked over at us, "And two sodas."

"Sign some papers. But don't you want to take me with you, I mean . . ."

"What? Hey, wait a minute.' She began to adjust her breasts, pulling them up, pushing them over.

"Well, isn't that what you're, I mean, you can leave her, just take me, don't you want me?"

The drinks came, and Arleen finished hers without a breath. "Just one more, please." She said, showing her stained teeth while smiling at Bailey.

Some music came on, and for a while we sat and just listened, drinking our drinks. It was Gloria Gayner's "I Will Survive." The music was playing over the sound of pool balls striking each other and Arleen was blowing smoke in my face, taking me in under her sunglasses. I vowed I would never forget this moment.

I noticed that she wasn't wearing any red, not a stitch. And then I noticed she was looking at Mary.

"So what's with the lipstick biz?"

Mary held out the tube to Arleen. She took it from her hand, careful not to touch Mary, and unwound the tube, looking at the color, testing it in the light.

"It was the only thing you left behind. I guess it's her way of remembering you."

"Well, now. Isn't that precious," she said, still examining the tube. "But it isn't my color. It wouldn't go with my act, or my uniform." She kept staring at the lipstick. "I do kind of remember wearing this color though. But that was a long time ago." She handed, almost threw, the lipstick back to Mary.

"Don't you even want it? She wants you to have it!" I was almost

screaming. Mary just sat there, holding the tube out to Arleen, who was just chugging down her drink with one hand, and motioning to the bartender with the other hand. Her hand, holding the glass, flew down on the table, taking Mary's arm with it.

'I said I don't want the God damn lipstick. Give it to Rose. It's more her color anyway. She likes red, doesn't she? But make sure you don't wear it. You hear me?"

I nodded.

"It'll just mess up your life. Once you put it on, you're a different person, and everyone thinks you are, so just don't put it on." She reached into her purse and grabbed some legal looking papers.

"OK, I don't really want to rush things, but I got a show in Chalkat county tonight, so I really gotta go."

She handed me a pen which, when turned upside down, showed a man with no clothes on. If you held it up again, the man had on bikini underwear. I signed where she pointed and handed the pen back to her.

Mary held out the tube again.

"What's her name again?"

I couldn't believe she didn't remember her name. "Mary."

"Oh yeah, well Mary honey, I don't like that color. It's not my shade, OK?"

Mary continued to hold out the lipstick.

"It's time for us to go," I said.

"Oh yeah?" She hissed looking at her watch. "Well, you girls stay good, y'all hear."

Standing up, I took Mary's hand and walked out of the bar.

When we got off of the bus, I looked over at Judy's house. I wasn't sure that everyone on the street didn't know everything about me. I looked over at Mary.

"Where's your tube of lipstick?" She just looked at me and smiled. Maybe she wasn't as stupid as I thought. We walked down the street, and I stepped on the same cracks that I stepped on every day. I felt some comfort knowing they were still there, and probably always would be.

When we got home, Mary ran upstairs and slammed her door. Rose came running from the kitchen at the sound of the slammed door. She brought the smell of Tollhouse cookies and coffee into the room with her.

"What's wrong? How is your mother?"

I just stared at her and didn't know what to say.

"Ruby? What's wrong? I made some cookies. Do you want some? They're warm."

I kept staring at her.

"Ruby?" she said.

She smelled like Charlie perfume. The perfume I had given her last Christmas.

"Yeah, cookies would be real nice," I said. Rose smiled and walked into the kitchen.

As I started up the stairs to my bedroom, I started to cry, but why, I wasn't entirely sure. I was mad, not just because of my mother, but because I looked like a boy.

I would probably never look good in lipstick.

"Well, now. Isn't that precious," she said, still examining the tube. "But it isn't my color. It wouldn't go with my act, or my uniform."

It's All in a Perfect Saxophone Dream Moment

Deborah Evans

Dust these days
in cigarette fumes.

Fly coasts the rim
of a vodka glass.

The city simmers
behind the steam
heaving off my kitchen
stove.

Markle Street

Sean Monkhouse

The Maple is still here
standing like an old man with no cane
with bark black and wrinkled
the survivor of a nuclear blast.

The base wears a pan
of tan petrified clay
no grass
after so many shoes
so many circles
and so many falls.

I kick the ground
and dust rolls into a cloud
and I remember
two little kids
trying to hang themselves
one hot summer day.

Kenny Beachum
helped me tie a rope
to the lowest brown arm
and fashion a noose
just like they had in the movies.

And I stuck my head in
and spun around and around
In circles on the tan pan clay
looking up and watching the hemp
do spirals and braids and candy cane strips
as the rope cut into my neck
and the world turned red
then black.

And for just a second or two
as I groped around on the grass
one arm reaching for nothing
my mouth open and lips shaking
Kenny laughing down a pointed finger
and my neighbors staring across the yard
just for a second
I knew who I was.

'94

The Doll

Becky Vasko

It would be a good day for picking cotton. Kate was sure of that. There wasn't any light at three-thirty in the morning, but she had examined the dark sky on her way to the privy, and millions of stars twinkled back at her. Not a cloud to be seen, and the air was dry and cool. The day would get hot, but she was used to hot. You didn't live in Texas and not get used to hot weather. Yes, hot was fine. Just as long as it didn't rain. You couldn't pick wet cotton.

She had milked Sadie by lantern light, pouring the warm milk into a big, tight-sealing can which she lowered by a rope into the well, holding out just enough for Lilly's breakfast and for making biscuits. Now she sprinkled some flour on a cloth and kneaded her dough briskly, took out her rolling pin and sprinkled more flour on it. *Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves*, she sang softly, as she rolled the dough with firm, fast strokes, cut out the biscuits and plopped them into the waiting greased pan. Grabbing the handle of the old cookstove's oven door with the end of her apron, she opened it and thrust the pan in quickly, taking care not to touch the sides of the oven. After closing it, she turned the bacon she had been frying in an iron skillet on top of the stove. *We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves . . .* It was time to wake up Lilly.

"Lilly?" She stepped into the small bedroom she shared with her eight year old daughter. "Lilly, it's time to be getting up so's you can eat before we go to Pritchard's." Lilly bounded up like she always did. Kate never could figure out how the child could be sleeping so soundly one minute and be wide awake the next, just as soon as she was called.

"Okay, Mama. I'm up." She rubbed her eyes with her small fists, then climbed off the big bed.

"I laid you out some clothes there on the rocking chair," Kate said, on her way back to see about the bacon. It was done, nice and crisp. She took it out and laid it on a piece of folded newspaper, then cracked two eggs into the skillet of hot bacon fat. By the time Lilly was dressed and back from her trip to the privy, Kate had their breakfast on the table.

"Don't dawdle, Lilly," Kate said, as soon as the two of them were sitting down. "We need to start walking soon if we're going to get to Pritchard's by sun-up. I feel like I can pick me a hunnert today."

"Yes, ma'am," Lilly said, spreading some of Kate's peach preserves on one of the big, hot biscuits.

Kate wasted no time eating her own breakfast, then washed it down with a couple of gulps of her now cooled coffee. She took three of the biscuits that were left in the pan and placed them, along with what remained of the bacon, in an empty syrup can for their noon meal. She put the last of the biscuits in the stove's keeper. Lilly finished eating and went outside to feed the chickens.

Singing again, now loud and clear, Kate quickly tidied up the kitchen area, putting their plates and cups into her big wash basin. She took off her apron and hung it on a nail, then gathered up a bundle of burlap feedsacks she'd tied together the night before, her sunbonnet and Lilly's smaller one, the syrup can, and a big Mason jar she'd filled with water. She turned down the wick on the kerosene lantern and stepped out the back door to see if Lilly was ready. It was a long walk to Pritchard's, but she believed they'd make it by daylight.

"Mama, when's Daddy coming home?" Kate and Lilly were sitting on the grass, under Pritchard's old liveoak tree, eating their cold biscuits

and bacon. The day was hot, all right. Pritchard told her his thermometer read ninety-six degrees at 10:00 AM that morning after they got the last of their cotton in, just like he'd always done. He'd taken their cotton to the gin in town, been paid for it, and caught the bus for Fort Worth, probably. She really didn't know when he might be back. Not today, that was sure. Today was Saturday. Cal wouldn't miss a Saturday night in Fort Worth with money in his pocket. By now he probably had him a bottle and a gal.

She smiled at her daughter. "I don't know for sure, Lilly. Your Daddy had some business to see to. It might be Monday before he gets back."

He'd be back. He always came back, although she sometimes wondered why. They hadn't been a man and wife in the real sense of what that meant since after Lilly was born. She wasn't taking the chance of getting in the family way again; it was all they could do to keep the three of them clothed and fed. Besides, she was forty-five, almost forty-six years old. She was too old now, she thought, for foolishness. Cal kept on letting her know how he felt about it, but she couldn't help it. Life was just too chancy. So he told her about this gal and that one, and how he knew how to "make 'em happy." That intrigued Kate. From her experience of him, he didn't know any too much, but she reckoned as long as he had a dollar in his pocket to spend on them, they let him think he was making them happy.

She looked over at her daughter, who had fallen asleep in the grass under the big tree. That was another of Lilly's mysteries. She fell soundly asleep as easily as she woke up. Kate reached down and tenderly smoothed several strands of the child's reddish-brown hair off her warm forehead. Just like his, that hair. But that's where the resemblance ended; all Lilly's other features belonged to Kate. Cal once told her she ought to be glad of Lilly's hair, otherwise . . . what had he said? Otherwise, he'd "swear somebody had been messing where they shouldn't." Kate had laughed to herself, not at his crude comment, but at the notion of herself with another man. What opportunity did he think she could possibly have had for that, out in the middle of nowhere? Their nearest neighbor was Pritchard, and his place was a good two hours' walk. She couldn't imagine when Cal thought she'd have had the time for such, even if she'd wanted to. When they first married, Cal was a widower with five children. Two of them had still needed raising, and she'd done that; cared for them and loved them like they was hers. The youngest boy, C.W., had just got out on his own the year before. Now he had hisself a good job driving a bus on the Cleburne to Waco run.

Kate sighed. It's just as well if the child sleeps an hour or two, she thought, I can pick faster without her. She put back on her sunbonnet, picked up one of her feedsacks, and walked back out to the cotton field. She would make a hunnert today, she was sure, and when she took what Pritchard paid her and put it with her egg and cream money, and then added to that the money she hoped to make selling pecans, she would have more than enough to buy the doll for Lilly's Christmas they'd seen at Hogan's store in town. That was her plan. To buy that doll. She was the prettiest little thing, with blue eyes and gold hair that could be combed, all dressed up in a fancy blue organdy gown and black satin slippers. She even came with a little comb for that gold hair. Lilly had stared at the doll the entire time they were in the store, but said nothing. It was too much to hope for, let alone talk about. But Kate knew.

So far, all Lilly's Christmases had amounted to each year was new colorbooks and boxes of Crayolas. That was all Kate had ever been able to afford. What few dolls Lilly had were homemade. They were sweet, and Lilly loved them, but even Kate had to admit they weren't very pretty, There was only so much you could do with sack cloth, a little embroidery thread, and old buttons. She wanted Lilly to have a pretty doll just once before she got too old to play with them. So she asked Hogan, the last time she was in his store by herself, to hold the little gold-haired doll back for her. He knew she'd come back for it if she said she would.

As she crawled along the crusted earth on her knees, swatting at gnats with one hand and pulling bolls as carefully but quickly as she could

with the other, Kate wondered why Cal couldn't see Lilly having the doll for Christmas. She had told him about it, describing the gold hair that could be combed, and of her plan to buy it. He'd snorted. It wasn't that he didn't love their daughter, because he did. In fact, he doted on her. It was most likely because of Lilly that he always came back, if the truth be known. And Lilly rewarded him with her adoration. But Cal wasn't going to pick any neighbor's cotton so's she could have a nice Christmas. He couldn't see spending the money for the doll, but it didn't bother him to spend it on liquor. Or some gal. He just couldn't see how much pleasure it would give Lilly, she guessed. As a child, Kate never had a real store-bought doll herself, and never thought about wanting one, but that didn't mean she couldn't see the joy it would bring to Lilly.

She paused to wipe the sweat that dripped from her forehead into her eyes, arched her back to ease the dull ache that grew steadily there, then bent back down to her work. A hundred pounds of cotton by sundown meant a doll with gold hair.

By the time they got home that night, Sadie was standing by the house, bawling indignantly to be milked. Kate told Lilly to wait on the porch while she felt her way into the house to find her matches and light the lantern.

"Come on honey, we've got to get you washed off and fed, then you can go on to bed." They made their way to the backyard where the hand pump was, and Kate worked it until there was a steam steady enough to wash the chalky road dust from their bare feet and legs. Then she filled a water bucket while she still had the pump going. "You carry the lantern, Lilly, but mind your step and don't fall with it." Kate hoisted up the bucket and they went into the house.

"I think we'll just have them leftover biscuits with a little jam for our supper, Lilly," said Kate, pouring some of the water into the basin they used for washing themselves. "It'd take too long to get the stove going again." She lit a small candle from the lantern's wick and set it on a dish, which she handed to Lilly. "You finish washing up, then go ahead and change into your nightdress while I go out and milk Sadie. We'll have us some good fresh milk with our biscuits."

As she went through the familiar motions of milking Sadie, Kate, tired as she was, looked forward to the moment when Lilly was asleep and she could go down into the root cellar to add what she and Lilly made that day to her hidden coffee can. She loved her root cellar. Lined up in rows on its shelves were the fruits of her summer's labor. It sure had been a good year. She'd canned peas, beans, squash, corn and tomatoes, and put up all manner of pickles and relishes, fruit preserves, jams and jellies. It gave her great pleasure just to look at all those rows of jars. They had a small fall garden planted, too; there would be more. And there would be enough money from their cotton and feed crops to buy a hog for slaughter come November. The small amount of bacon they'd eaten today was store-bought bacon, a gift from C.W. During hot weather, their meat consisted mostly of rabbit and squirrel, although sometimes she and Lilly would spend an afternoon fishing from the banks of the Brazos. All that was good, but she did look forward to hog-killing time when once again they would have bacon, ham, and pork chops.

Tired, but feeling satisfied, she finished up the milking and walked back to the house. In the kitchen she found Lilly, sitting with her head down on top of the table, sound asleep. The child had laid out plates, cups, and knives for both of them. The little candle flickered nearby. Kate's heart ached for her small daughter who was evidently more tired than hungry. She set the milk bucket and the lantern on the table, then gathered Lilly in her strong arms and carried her into the bedroom where she laid her gently on the old iron bed. Lilly nestled down into the feather pillow. Kate smiled to herself. If ever a little girl deserved a pretty doll, it was this one.

She went back to the kitchen and dipped one of the cups into the bucket of milk. She took three of the biscuits out of the keeper and threw the ones that were left into a small scrap bucket she kept by the door for chicken feed.

After she had eaten, she cleared off the table and put her dishes in the basin with the others. Them dishes would just have to wait until morning. If she was too tired to fire up the stove for a meal, she was surely too tired to fire it up for heating water to wash dishes. She took the lantern and the milk bucket out to the well, hoisted up the big can, added the new milk, and lowered the can back down. She went to the hand pump and rinsed out the milk bucket, then turned it upside down on the back porch. She'd scald it tomorrow. Now she was ready to go down in the cellar.

She held the lantern up high as she eased down the familiar steps in to the cool dankness. Light from the lantern gleamed off the rows and rows of jars. Kate sighed. She counted twelve jars of tomatoes from the left end of one shelf, then reached behind the twelfth jar for her coffee can.

She knew right away something was wrong. The can was way too light, so she held the lantern up high and peered into the can, giving it a good shake. A couple of pennies rattled around in the bottom. Kate sucked in her breath. She knew what had happened, but why? Wasn't there nothing of hers she could call her own? She sat down slowly on the floor of the cellar, setting the lantern beside her. She shook the can again. It was true; all her scrimping, saving, and planning, and it was gone. All she had left was the money Pritchard had paid her. For a moment, she thought she might cry. She wanted to cry. Not ten seconds ago, every muscle in her body had been taut as a bow; now she felt limp as a wet rag. But she didn't cry. Crying never helped nothing, never changed nothing, never made no difference.

She sat awhile, watching the lantern light flicker over the dirt floor of the cellar. She noticed an old brown centipede slither out of a dark corner in her direction, and for a minute or two she just sat there, watching it progress across the hard-packed dirt. She hated the things, and normally would have moved quickly to find something to smash it with, but now she just sat. Get up, fool, she told herself. Finally, she found her numbed legs and leaped out of the way, just as the centipede made its way across the spot where she'd been sitting and off into another corner. She picked up the lantern from the floor and set it on a shelf, removed Pritchard's coins from a handkerchief tied to the inside of her dress, and dropped them into the coffee can. She put it back in its place behind the jar of tomatoes. She'd have to remember to tell Hogan he could put the little doll back in his storefront window.

When she woke up Sunday morning with a fly tickling her nose, sun was already streaming into the open window. It was late. She was always up before the first rooster crow; she realized suddenly she'd never even heard the rooster. Sadie bawled from the backyard. Poor Sadie. She must wonder what had happened to their usual routine. Kate sat up stiffly, her back and neck muscles protesting yesterday's work. She looked down at her reddened, sore fingers and rubbed them a minute or two, then slowly climbed out of bed. Lilly was already up. Kate could hear her out back, talking in soothing tones to Sadie. She pulled an old dress over her head and tied on a clean apron, then stepped out of the bedroom and through the kitchen to the back door.

"Mornin', Mama. Sadie's just havin' a fit out here to be milked. I was trying to keep her quiet so's you could sleep, but she won't listen to me. Ornery old cow."

"How long have you been up, Miss Ladybird?' said Kate, beginning to unravel and redo her two long braids.

"Not too long. Sadie's bawling woke me up."

Kate walked out on the porch and sat down to finish braiding her hair. She looked up at the sky, already a blistering blue. It'd be another hot, dry day. Sadie walked right up and nudged her knees with her big nose.

"Sorry, Sadie. You're just going to have to wait a little longer. Lilly, fetch me my water bucket and then see how much wood's left in the woodbox. I got to scald out that milk bucket."

By the time she got the stove going, the water boiling, the cow milked, and the dishes washed, it seemed to Kate like midday. But it was only eight-thirty. She was just used to having her early morning work done

by sun-up. She mixed up her biscuit dough and was just beginning to knead it with a vigorous rhythm when she heard the rattle of a harness and Cal's familiar "Whoaaa, mules, whoaaa, there now," out front. She heard Lilly come running from around back.

"Daddy! Daddy, you're home, you're home!"

Kate wiped her hands on her apron. He must've come back from Fort Worth yesterday evening and spent the night at Clifton to be getting out here this morning. Maybe he had him a gal at Clifton, too. It wouldn't surprise her none. He might've spent the night at the wagon-yard or over by the gin but she doubted it. Cal did like hisself a bed for sleep in .

She wanted to run out the door and attack him with all her might, demanding to know why he'd taken her money. But she didn't. She'd learned not to pick a fight she couldn't win, and it seemed like she was always on the losing end of most of their fights. Cal was mean when he was drunk, and strong when he was sober.

She made her way slowly to the front door. Cal and Lilly were coming up the steps, Lilly fairly dancing around him.

"What is it, Daddy? What is it? What's in that big old package?"

Cal held something with both hands behind his back.

You just be patient, Lil. "Good things come to them that waits, 'ain't you never heard that?" He sat the box on the porch, then tipped his hat grandly to Kate. "Good morning, Miss Kate. And how're you today?"

"I'm fine, Cal, just fine. How was Fort Worth?"

"Oh, mighty fine, mighty fine indeed. Step out here on the porch, I got something I want you to see."

Kate stepped hesitantly through the doorway. They had themselves a couple of old cane chairs on the porch, and Cal seated himself in one.

"All right, Lil. You can open that box now," he said.

Lilly's nimble little fingers set to work.

"Oh Daddy, oh Daddy, she's the most beautiful thing I ever did see," Lilly exclaimed. "Look, Mama, look!"

Kate was stunned. The box held a little red-haired doll in a splendid get-up of dark green velvet. On the doll's head was a matching velvet hat with a bright blue feather; on her feet were little leather shoes with a high, soft shine. And there was another, plainer dress and a pink nightdress with matching slippers in the box, too. She was fancier than the little gold-haired doll at Hogan's.

"She's got hair just like yours and mine, Lil," Cal said pointedly.

"Oh, yes! She does, Daddy, she does," said Lilly, leaping onto Cal's lap and throwing her small arms around his neck.

Cal looked at Kate over Lilly's shoulder, and the look in his eyes sent a shiver down Kate's spine. So that was it. Kate felt her legs go weak, and for a minute she thought they might fold up on her. Slowly she turned and went back in the house. The heat inside the small room almost overtook her; its heaviness bore down on her. She wanted to run, all the way to the banks of the Brazos, and jump in. She wanted to feel its deep, cool waters surround her, would welcome its swift current sweeping her down, down, down. She reached for the edge of the table.

There was another feeling as strong as love, sometimes stronger. She'd seen that feeling just now in Cal's eyes. She'd known right then it was what made him come back, ever bit as much as the love he felt for Lilly. What had she done? What had she ever done to deserve that? She believed she would rather take a beating. But there wouldn't be a fight; Cal didn't need one.

She walked slowly around the table and sprinkled some flour on her rolling pin. A single tear slid down her face and landed, with a little pouf, in a small pile of flour. Kate stared at it as if disbelieving it had fallen from her eye. Then she wiped it away with the end of her apron, and with firm, exacting strokes, began to roll out her dough for the day's bread.

. . . she held the lantern up high and peered into the can, giving it a good shake.

The Suburbs

Kelly K. Jones

'95

Plastic-metal clone houses
squares of perfect green carpet
devoid
of those lovely yellow dandelion flowers
you once clutched in chubby fists
stepping over cracks
on the way home to Mother
who put them in a Dixie cup on the kitchen sill.

Pizza delivery Chinese takeout
children dash to ballet and piano and soccer and swimming
instead
of observing ants and frogs and sunflowers and mud cracks
and lying in soft fragrant clover beds making shapes out of clouds
while Mother baked chocolate chip cookies
and let you lick the bowl.

Concrete slabs
Styrofoam and brick fake fronts
wanting
porches with rails and steps and rockers and grandparents
and parents
who waited up for you as your boyfriend left you kissed on the stoop
and listened for the slam of the wooden screen door.

Wally World
Sam makes and owns everything we buy all the same stuff
obliterating
the corner grocery and penny candy store where you bought Dots
and an occasional chocolate ice cream cone
while Mother got the supper
and you wheeled the packages hometogether
in your red Radio Flyer.

Heartsick
longing for children now as children were
yet
finding that children and parents and people and places
and things
have been hopelessly, irreversibly changed—
and none of them wants to go back.

You Don't Ever Want to Cry

Sharolyn Herring

He's getting more ice cubes, I hear them clinking into his big glass. It makes my skin get all funny feeling, then it goes up in goose bumps and makes my arm hairs stick up. Maybe he's too tired tonight. Maybe he won't yell at her.

Brady asks from the bottom bunk is Daddy mad at Mamma, and I know it's probably a lie but I tell him no. So like almost every night anymore he whines "Can I come on top with you, Dunkie?" and I say he can if he'll be quiet and go to sleep and not pee in my bed again.

Brady's almost four and it's my place to take care of him. He's a big sissy sometimes, dragging that dumb, purple Barney around. And he hangs on me all the time begging me to pitch to him, but the little shrimp can't even pick up my bat. He wants to be in Little League like me when he grows up. When I was little I used to want to be a cop, like Dad is. Coach says I'm the best nine-and-a-half-year-old hitter he ever saw, even if I can't make practice a lot of time. But it's pretty cool he said that in front of all the guys. The whole team.

There he goes again. More ice clinking. I hate that sound. He's fixed a lot of drinks real fast so pretty soon Mom'll tell him he's had enough, then they'll yell it each other 'till I have to sneak in the bathroom for toilet paper to stuff in our ears. Or we mash the pillows around our heads. That way they get far away.

Brady's all sticky. I fixed him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a Coke with no ice the way he likes it when I got home from school, 'cause Mom was having a sleeping day, which she mostly is, and Brady was hungry. I should've made him wash his face. Sometimes he's not such a geek. Even all sticky. He crowds up next to me real still when he worries, but his hands are squeezing so I know he's awake. It's like we have to get like rocks and not move. No way can anybody sleep around here when they holler like they're starting to. I knew they would.

It scares Brady bad, even when did just hollers and doesn't punch Mom. It just makes me real mad. He's way bigger that her, and anyway, everybody knows you're not supposed to hit girls. I like my Mom. I never would tell that to the other guys, but I tell her sometimes, then she smiles or even gives me a noogie like Dad used to do, which is okay that he doesn't anymore. I don't like him to touch me. He used to be different before he got suspended off the force that time. He'd play with us and come see my games and stuff. Now he just yells. It's not fair. I wish me and Brady Mom could live here by ourselves. Mom says we can't. Even if I quit Little League and get me the paper route to help buy us food and stuff.

I can't get one with Dad here, because of Brady, me watching out for him and all. I have to keep him quiet and tell him it's okay and everything when Dad starts like tonight. If I got seared, Brady'd cry too loud and Did would come after us. I tell Brady he makes me brave that that makes his skinny ribs puff out. I try to teach him you have to be quiet. You don't want to cry.

He likes to play Ninja Turtles. I bet that's what he's squeezing in his hand. Mom got him these plastic ones at Hardees, and he likes to take his Raphael and wipe out the toy soldiers, which I'm in charge of because they used to be mine when I was a little kid. He gets this weirdo look on his face and spits ill over making fighting noises. It's pretty gross, but he thinks it's fun so I do it. But lie likes to play catch more thin anything. I fixed up a little diamond for him out of tape on our bedroom rug so he can run the bases. His favorite thing is to slide in home, so he always gets these rug burns on his legs and butt. He wants to play with my baseball trophy,

but no way.

I wish I could just lie here and look at it on the shelf over by the window as I like to do when everybody's asleep. But then, they won't be quiet. The street light comes off it at night. It makes it light up our room a little bit so I can go to sleep. It's a really cool trophy. And I like to wake up and there it is, and it makes me think about how great it was to have all those people in the stands clapping and cheering for me, "little Dunkie" Overton. That's what happened four times so far. I like the clapping and cheering, but no way the "Dunkie" part. And I'm not little anymore. Dad is Duncan two and his dad was the first Duncan, but he died when I was little. I wish I wasn't the third and I wish I had my own name. Joe or Brad, maybe. Better than Duncan and especially "Dunkie." I only let Brady call me "Dunkie." I hate it when Mom calls me that. Then Dad yells at her and says she's turning me into a big wuss, which I'm not. Last year some kids at school called me "Duncan Donuts." I about smacked Jason Fuller up side the head 'cause he's the one who started it, but I don't ever want to hit anybody. But I'm not a wuss, though.

Now they're really at it and Brady is biting on his arm again. At least I got him to stop sucking his thumb, the big baby. He'll pee in my bed for sure now. He just does it 'cause of all the noise, and then they get mad and whip him for it. It's not fair. They cause him to do it.

Mom's cryin'. That awful noise she does that sounds like that catfish I caught that one time, with its mouth going open and shut. It didn't really make a noise, but it looked like it, and my arm hairs stuck up so I threw it back in. If she just wouldn't cry. All it does is get him madder. My throat feels like it pinches off when she cries like that, so I have to put the blanket over my head and cough with my mouth closed.

"Hey, Brade, big slugger guy." If I get him thinking about something else maybe it'll keep him quiet. "Your turn at bat in the morning." My voice sounds funny and my breath stinks under the blanket.

Dad is gonna give Mom something to cry about, he's telling her. I can just see his eyebrows bending down over his eyes and his lips getting all wet and stuff like they do, and his hair all messed up and ratty. Even when I squinch my eyes shut I can see it.

He shouldn't say that. He calls Mom real awful names when he gets loaded. He'd beat me half to death if I ever talked like that. Brady won't hear if I put my arms around his head so his ears are covered up.

Last time he started in on her she cried so hard he asked her did she want him to just put her out of her misery if she's so sorry she married him, and it made me get to thinking about his gun. Cops are supposed to be good guys. Not my Dad. I snuck out of bed and into his closet and snuck his gun back in here and hid it under my mattress. My skin got awful. It got so stickey it seemed like my hair stood up straight on my head. Then I had to stay awake all night in case I didn't wake up in time to get it back in his closet before he went to work.

Brady used to like to play cops and robbers, but I won't let him anymore. I took his toy guns and threw them in Mrs. Bartlett's garbage can out back.

I knew it, there he goes hitting her. It's the slap sound, not the fists, but he'd better stop it. You better, Dad. If you don't stop beating on her you'll be sorry, I'll make you, you just wait. I think he threw something. What was that? I hope he didn't knock Mom down. It got Brady up and I have to make him keep quiet but I don't know if Mom is okay. I wish she'd say something. Mom, are you all right, Mamma, I want to yell out but I can't. I can't hear her cry or anything. My breathing sounds like some kind of a tornado or something, and Brady is squirming around and sniffing. Dad's yelling worse, nobody appreciates him around here, not even those damn kids, he says. Shit. There he goes on us and I don't want him to, he might come in here. "Brady don't," I whisper, cause he's getting too loud, "Keep your mouth shut. Just be quiet and it'll be okay."

She went in the bathroom. Maybe it's over. I think she's washing her face. I bet he hurt her face again. It makes me feel sick when she wears those sunglasses. And it makes me mad that she acts like nothing's wrong, like I'm stupid. He's quieted down. Maybe now he'll start to blubber

and cry and get all disgusting and tell her how sorry he is and how he'll never do it again. Yeah, right, Dad. Once he even told me and Brady he was sorry, but he never means it. Maybe if he got in some kind of trouble for it he'd stop. She can't call the police or anything or he'll get suspended again.

"Brady, stop it. Mom's all right. Okay, shhh, I'm moving, okay?" I had my arms too tight around him and it was smashing his nose and he won't stop crying. "Don't make me put 'em back, Brady, you hear? I'm gonna put my hand over your mouth. You gotta stop or Dad'll hear. Stop or I'll have to use my hand. Brady, listen. Shut up and I'll rub your back. Turn over, put your face down hard on the mattress. And don't suck your thumb. I said she's okay, I promise. Wipe your eyes on the sheet." My throat is scratchy from whispering and it's hot under here and Brady is all snotty.

I don't want Dad to come in here and jerk him up by the hair again. I don't know why he's meaner to Brady than me. Maybe 'cause Brady doesn't go to school or anything. Maybe Dad thinks I'll tell if he comes after me. One time Brady wouldn't eat his dinner and Dad made him eat on the floor out of a pan like a dog till his knees were ill red and his eyes so swelled I had to put ice on them. Dad wouldn't let Mom so I put a cold rag on them. He'd better never do that again.

There he is again, just when I got Brady calmed down some. Now he's yelling at her about his uniform, he always starts on that. How's he ever supposed to make detective if she can't keep his goddamn uniforms ironed right. His stupid uniforms look okay, it's him that's garbage. She's crying, real soft, but I can hear her saying "please, please" over and over again, so he must be doing something to hurt her. I hate her when she says please to him. And I hate you, Dad. I hate you worse than anything. Brady keeps shivering, I know he's gonna start squalling all over the place till he can't get his breath if they don't be quiet out there. I can't tell what they're doing. The noises are bad, I want to see what it is he's doing, but I don't either, but maybe if I get up, he'll stop. But I can't leave Brady.

She's screaming and he says he'll knock some sense into her. He just won't stop this time. I wish he would quit it and leave everybody alone. He never used to get drunk like this very much. I wish Brady and me could just crawl out the window and run away forever. But we can't leave Mom here.

"You mouthy bitch, shut your mouth or I'll kill you." He's never said stuff this bad before. You're the sonofabitch, Dad, it's you. My skin is all crawling, but I won't get scared, I won't, I have to think of something. "Brady, just be quiet I said, shut up, listen to me you little butt-head, you got to shut up and fast."

I better go get his gun. "Brady, you stay here and don't make a single noise, not one, you hear? No, let go, lay down. I'm not going anywhere, just over to the door and check on Mom. You get back down under the covers and stay here." I gotta get him to shut up. "I'll let you hold my mitt if you'll be quiet. Here, lay your head down on it like that. I won't come back if you don't stop it, Brady, I mean it. I'll let you look at my baseball cards tomorrow if you stop right now."

Brady's making the whole bed shake. I have to slide down off here so they don't hear me hit the floor. My knees feel funny. If you don't open my bedroom door real slow it squeaks. I'll only need to open it a little bit. Real slow. My hands won't move right.

They're still stomping around in the kitchen. If I can scoot across the floor fast they won't see me and I can make it under their bed. Please, God, don't let the door squeak. If you just let me get under the bed I'll do anything you want, promise to God. I can get to the closet easy from there.

Thank you God, but you gotta keep him out there in the kitchen 'til I get it. I'm gonna sneeze or choke it's so dusty under here. Maybe if I hold my breath. I can see his legs, he's stumbling around the kitchen like a big, loud ox. Just a few feet to the closet. My ears hurt 'cause my teeth are clamped too tight. Hurry. Just crawl out the other side and stay down low over to the closet. No, wait. Brady, you jerk, no Brade, don't cry now,

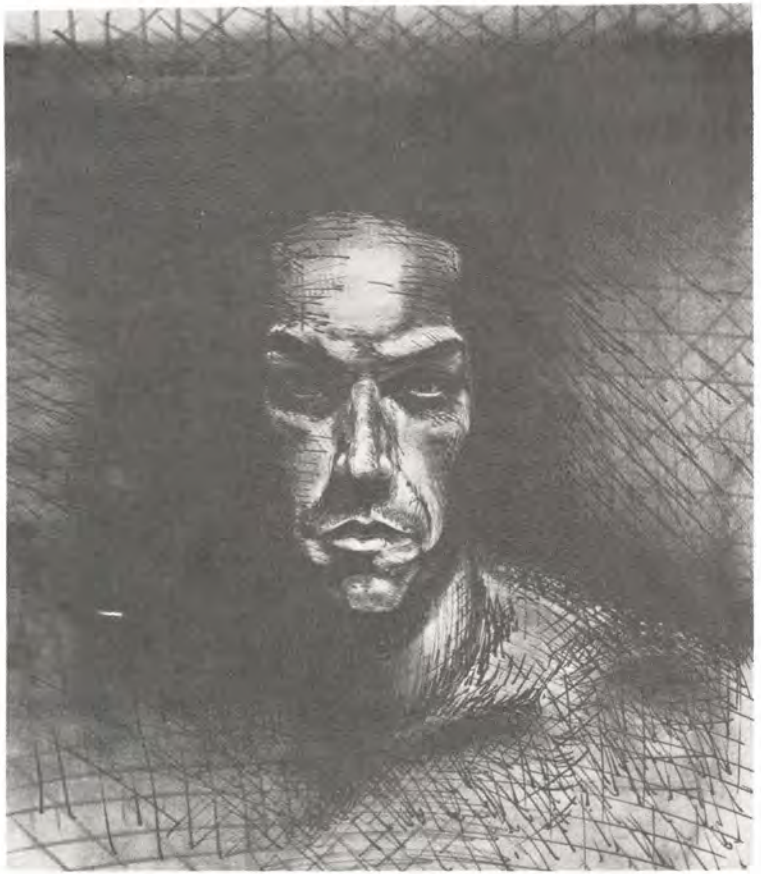
I can hear you clear in here. I close my eyes and don't move and try to send Brady a message with my mind to stop it, but my heart is so fast and jumping around it sounds like I can hear it all over the room louder than Brady crying.

He's pulling Mom in here. I can't get out. I can see her red toenails dragging across the floor and he's yelling at her to shut her sniveling mouth. Mom, if you'd stop crying and I got to get to the closet, I got to get the gun fast. Ow, he threw her on the bed so hard the mattress hit my head and I bit my tongue. I taste it bleeding. He's hitting her real bad, he must be sitting on top of her and the whole bed might fall down on me. He'll kill me if he finds me under here. Fuck you, fuck all of you, I don't need any of you, he's bellering.

Brady you stupid little shit, shut up, he hears you, now you've done it. Oh god, he's going after you, Brady. Mom's screaming, no come back. Shut up, Brady, I'm coming, I'm running, my face all screwed up and my eyes feel like fire, but I won't cry. I won't.

"You stop it, Dad," I'm yelling, 'cause he's got a hold of Brady, pulling him down off the bed, so I grab my bat and swing hard. It makes the worst sound as it hits him on the back of his head, I let go and the bat flies over and knocks my trophy off the shelf and Brady is screaming and Mom is screaming down over Dad lying quietly on the floor and blood all over his uniform. No, Brady, don't look. My skin hurts and that sound the bat made on his head is smashing my ears, and I wish it was people clapping and cheering for me but Mom keeps crying and I go under the covers for Brady and curl us up little with my face in my mitt and hold Brady tight.

. . . play cops and robbers, but I won't let him anymore. I took his toy guns and threw them in Mrs. Bartlett's garbage can out back.



Untitled, Jeremy McDonnell, 1992

Costume Girls

Katherine Ellison

'96

We've arrived,
the solid and the smooth,
edging into harnessed moves
like dances
steady trances
still, unblinking
through our newborn eyes.

Pretty things
in pretty shoes,
wearing satin
greens and blues.
20 sterile gloves in pockets,
laughing back behind the sockets
of our newborn eyes.

Pages left
with blotted ink
crack our lips
our mouths of pink,
chapters chewed in pointless bites
don't reflect the sour sights
before our newborn eyes.

Slender hips
and slender fingers
sense the musky smell
that lingers
in the sheets and in the pillows,
in the driveway weeping willows
above our newborn eyes.

We've arrived,
the costume girls,
flashing red cheeks, nails,
and curls.
speaking only in the pauses,
drowning out the voice that causes
us to shut our newborn eyes.

Hyperbole on a Grand Scale

Jeff Ridenour

I'm a vegan
Not really, but bear in mind,
I'm a vegan, and you can be too.
Hard core.
All the way
No exceptions.
No ifs, ands, buts, or meat.
I don't eat meat cause—

I'm a vegan, and you can be too.
No meat.
No chicken
No pork.
(meat is murder, dial *V* for vegan)
No ball park franks.
No dairy.
No fries with the chili burger 'cause—
(say it along with me)
diary + fries = fat = dead dairy cow from whence the fat came.

I'm a "vegan."
Not really, because bear in mind, plants are alive, too.
Hard core.
All the way.
No exceptions.
No way, no how, no thing alive.
I don't eat plants 'cause—

Plants are alive, and that's murder too.

No apples.
No oranges.
No carrots.
(Baked potato is murder, dial V for vegan)
No sprouts.
No beans.
No Ceasar side salad 'cause—
(everybody join in)
growth + green = photosynthesis = live plant that is of limits.

I'm hungry.
Yes, really, but bear in mind, I'm pure, and you should be too.
Hard core.
All the way.
No exceptions.
No cholesterol no lipids no love handles no bad breath no breath at all
cause I eat nothing no carbohydrates no protein no vitamins no minerals
cause rocks may possess a consciousness we don't know of no
fruit no fruit punch no punch 'cause no strength 'cause no food no water
cause water is from the mother ocean that has microorganisms that are
sentient living things and therefore forbidden no nothing no nothing no
nothing no nothing no nothing no nothing no nothing no nothing no no no.

I'm no eater of living things,
yeah, really, and keep this in mind,
it's fun.

You and Hannah

Katherine Ellison

You are in the peach and turquoise bathroom and you are trying to shave. The mirror is fogged up and you have to keep wiping it off with your forearm. Hannah is wasting water, trying to get it the perfect temperature so as to not burn her little toe, which she keeps dipping in periodically. She has to stretch out her leg to do this, because the toilet is some two feet away from the ceramic rim and she doesn't want to get up. She is reading.

"Have you ever heard of Phineas Gage?" She is staring down at a magazine in her lap and her legs are now crossed. You are shaving right above your top lip so she continues.

"You know, he's that guy who worked on the railroad. There was an explosion and a rod went through his brain."

You look at her in the mirror, a dab of lotion by the side of your nose. "I can't say that I have. What channel was it on?" You know this is a meaningless question because Hannah doesn't watch television. She gets all of her facts out of the magazines that are sent to the house in trucks.

"No," she looks at you quickly through a squiggly strand of hair. "It's here, in this article." She uncrosses her legs, checks the water, and then looks back down. "Listen to this: 'The inch-thick tamping rod rocketed through his cheek, obliterating his left eye on its way through his brain and out the top of his skull. The rod landed several yards away, and Gage fell back in a convulsive heap. "What do you make of that?"

"Sounds like upbeat Monday reading to me." You swish the razor in the sink and stubbly whiskers float about like ants. "That reminds me, did we get a paper this morning?"

Hannah is nibbling on her thumbnail. "I don't know, I haven't looked outside. So anyway, this guy has—"

"Don't change the subject, you always hear the paper come because it hits the screen door. So did you hear it yet this morning?"

She looks up impatiently. "Yes, it's here. Now can I finish my story?"

You raise the razor up to your right ear, careful to bend your left hand just so as not to slice sideways. "I'm listening."

"OK, so a rod has just shot through this guy's head and you know what he does?"

You take a wild guess. "He dies?"

"No! And that's the beauty of it. His brain is Swiss cheese and what does he do? He stands up, shakes himself off, and walks around. So they rush him to the hospital of course and I mean, you could totally stick a finger in his cheek and a finger in the top of his head and they would meet, and when he's in the hospital, the guy says, 'so when can I go back to work?' Isn't that amazing?" She looks up, the magazine flat on her lap, her drawers around her ankles, her eyes so wide they could plop out onto the turquoise rug.

"Was that the punchline? Because it's not very funny. I mean, there are a million punchlines better than that, like—so this guy has a hole in his head and he says 'doc, . . . well, I don't know, but there's gotta be something funnier than yours."

Her eyebrows do a dive and she tilts her lips a bit like she always does when she's trying to act like she's upset. "It wasn't a joke. This really happened."

"What is your source, *Ladies Home Journal*? *Mad*? *3-2-1 Contact*?"

"No, this is the January issue of *Discover*."

"Hmm. So what else has *Discover* discovered about this Finnish character?"

"It's Phineas."

"Whatever."

Hannah checks the water, is satisfied, and turns off the knob with her foot. Then she unrolls the toilet paper, stands up, flushes, and lays the magazine down on the seat.

"So? What happened? Does he live?"

She doesn't look at you but instead kicks off her jeans. The belt buckle scrapes against the side of the tub. She mumbles as her back is turned. "I'm not telling you."

'What?"

She turns around. Her bra is white and that little flower is in the middle, slightly bent and folded from the wash. "I said I'm not telling you the rest of the story because you're obviously not interested."

"Fine."

"Fine."

You finish shaving, pat your face dry, and go into the bedroom to find some clean clothes. Hannah is splashing and singing in her wretched Julie Andrews voice: "I'm picking out a thermos for youuu. No ordinary thermos will dooo." There are two piles of clothes at the foot of the bed. On each is a yellow post-it note, and scrawled in fat high-school-girl writing is "clean" and "dirty.' The "i" is dotted with a big fat round smiley face. You look at the area in between the piles and sure enough, there's the shirt you wanted to wear today. It is right in the middle, as if it is undecided as to which pile it would like to be in.

"So is this shirt clean or dirty?" You raise your voice so your wife can hear you over Mr. Bubbles.

"Huh?"

"My favorite blue shirt, is it clean or dirty?"

"I don't know, which pile is it in?"

"It isn't in a pile."

"What?" She sounds surprised. Her foolproof laundry method couldn't possibly have a flaw after the hours she had exhausted perfecting it. You hear her get out of the tub and open the drain. Her wet feet slap against the floor as she walks into the bedroom to clear up the misunderstanding.

She stoops down, picks up the shirt, and smells it. "Hmm, this is a toss up. I'd say it's clean. What do you think?"

You smell it. Can't tell. "Hannah, come on. Can't a guy just wear his favorite shirt feeling secure that it's clean?"

"Wearing clean clothes makes you feel more secure? That's odd." She unwraps her towel, lets it drop near the dirty pile, and walks over to the chest of drawers. You look at her, not in a perverted peeper way but in the way that a husband looks at his wife of three trillion years. She is tiny, energetic; she walks on the balls of her feet and her hair swish-swishes from side to side. She has two perfect dimples where the small of her back eases into a slope, and the backs of her knees are pale and turned slightly inwards. You have always noticed the oblique angles of her body, the subtle changes of shadow into light, of a hue of pink into a hue of olive. You have never seen her naked. You have only seen her nude.

"What color panties should I wear today?"

You have decided to wear a different shirt. "I don't care. It's not like anybody's gonna see them."

"Oh, you know what mother always says, 'Make sure you've always got clean underwear on, just in case you're in an accident."

"That's stupid. Everybody has dirty underwear after they're in an accident."

"That's only if you die, and besides, we're talking about a woman who takes a cooler full of food when she goes across the street to get a pack of cigarettes. 'You should always be prepared, you never know what's going to happen."

Hannah has chosen a burgundy ensemble with more lace than an eighties prom dress. You dig out a clean pair of crinkled khaki pants and roll

up the legs a bit.

She looks over at you. "Geez, I'll go get my fishin' pole, Huck."

"Did I roll them up too high?"

"Um, a little, here—" She bends to straighten them out and you look down at the top of her head. The part is crooked in her hair.

"We've got to hurry up, I can't be late anymore. Mr. Hobbs said, "Mrs. Quinlan, when I say 9:00, I mean exactly that, 9:00. That doesn't mean 9:01 and it doesn't mean 9:02. One more time and we switch the office radio back to AM. He's on an ego trip because he's having an affair with some girl in the photocopying department." She emphasizes her O's in mockery. Hannah doesn't like her new boss; she says he has earthworm lips, whatever those are.

As you're pulling out of the driveway, Hannah yells and you slam on the brakes.

"Wait a second, my shoestring's caught in the door." She leans out and yanks it back into the car.

"Why didn't you tie your shoes?"

"I forgot."

"Oh." Hannah has a habit of forgetting the little petty details, like turning off the stove.

You lean to turn on the radio, but the knob comes off in your hand, leaving the little metal rod sticking out. "Damn't, piece of crap. Hannah could you put this back on?" You hand the knob to her and she takes it and holds it on her lap.

"Ah, look at the sky. Look at the clouds and how different they are from the lines the airplanes leave." She has the window rolled down and the wind is flipping her hair around like fire. You are concentrating on the roads, which are a bit slick.

"Do you mind putting the window up a little; it's below zero out there."

Hannah gives you an adolescent roll of the eyes and presses her finger on the automatic window button. "I think a little cold is worth the price of being so close to nature. I mean, here we are, stuck in this ugly scrap of bent metal, and outside everything is beautiful. Wouldn't you rather just walk to work?"

"Yeah, when it's eighty degrees out. I love nature just as much as the next guy, but why should I abandon technology and prance around in a loin cloth?"

Her eyebrows do a dive, but this time in contemplation. "I don't want to get into a huge discussion about the positives and negatives of technology. All I said was that the clouds look beautiful today, and I compared those to airplane exhaust, and that led me to us stuck in this car."

"Hannah,"

"What." She is nibbling on her thumbnail and looking at her reflection in the side mirror.

"You shouldn't read those magazines first thing in the morning; they make you feisty."

"No, you're just a bore in the morning."

"I can't help it if I don't wake up at six with enough energy to run a marathon. You don't even get morning breath." The light ahead turns green and you accelerate a little.

"I know, that's pretty cool isn't it?" She smiles the sort of smile that would wake anyone up and then turns to look out the window. Suddenly she yells for you to stop, but you don't react, thinking she has just noticed that her other shoestring has been caught in the door this whole time. You move your head slowly and see past her into the street.

Hannah's face is frozen and there is a car coming towards the intersection. Engines roar, tires scream, metal pops, spinning. You see the faces of men standing, their bodies leaning oddly under the weight of a briefcase and their mouths moving. You can't hear anything over the metal and the concrete and the tearing noises, like cloth pulling at the seams. Your cheek meets the side window and slowly everything becomes very cold, and then very warm. The spinning stops, the popping stops, and everything is silent. Your head is tilted and all you can see is blue, the puffy

airplane lines crisscrossing and wrapping around the sky.

It took less than five seconds for your car to spin around and face the same direction. It took less than five seconds for your head to bust open the window and make tiny cuts on the side of your face. It took less than five seconds for you to look over at the passenger seat and see that Hannah was slumped over on the floor, blood trickling down her neck.

"Hannah." You reach over and pull on her shoulders. Her head falls back and you can see the gash in her neck, which seems to stretch with the movement of her skin. Blood eases out in clots, and it is so dark, almost brown. "Hannah."

Her eyes move under the eyelids and her eyelashes quiver. Then she is there, her dark eyes staring up. She looks around, begins to move her neck, and then scrunches her face in pain

"Ow, what the hell's wrong with my neck?"

"You have a little cut, no big deal." The gash is drying and you see that it really isn't a gigantic lie, it isn't a gaping hole.

She crawls back up into the seat, trying to feel the wound with her fingers. "How did I cut my neck?" She looks around stiffly and studies the area where she was lying. "Oh my god, look at that." She points to the radio. The rod, which sticks out at least two inches, is bent and covered with blood. Then she opens her hand, which is still clutching the plastic knob.

"Don't move your head. Your neck could be broken. Just sit there until somebody comes."

"OK, good thing I'm wearing clean underwear, right?" She looks at you with those big eyes.

"Yeah. Your mother would be proud." You kiss her on her uneven part and get out of the car. Everyone else is okay and waving angry fingers at anyone within a mile of the accident. You jump in and holler with the best of them, stopping periodically to peer over a shoulder and check Hannah, who is sitting there with a huge smile on her face. The entire passenger side door is collapsed and she has to sit a little off to the side because it juts into the maroon interior. You question whether you should get her out of the car, but you are too afraid to move her. Her neck looked mighty nasty at first and you remember the story your father told you once, the story about the guy who was in an accident similar to this. He only had a few minor cuts, nothing anyone thought was serious, and he didn't complain about anything. While the police were cleaning up the scene and the paramedics were helping the severely injured, the man went to the side and sat down on a bench, feeling great about his luck. Then an officer called his name (he evidently wanted some information on the accident) and the man turned his head to answer. Then he slumped down, dead. His neck was broken and he never even knew it. Stories like this don't help you feel any better.

It takes forever but the proper white noisy vehicles finally arrive. Hannah is secured with a brace and they pull her out the driver's side and lay her out on a stretcher. You can hear her complaining. "I can walk. This is silly."

The hospital smells like mothballs and antiseptics. Nurses scamper by outside the room on their cushioned shoes and doctors swagger along, shiny technology hanging down their chests. Hannah has just arrived from X-rays and is getting her neck wrapped. They have already picked the glass out of your cheek and you have a big Band-Aid on it. She looks over and grins. "Cut yourself shaving?"

"Heh. Such a lively sense of humor for just being hit by a car. That reminds me, were you wearing your seat belt?"

"No, I forgot. Besides, the doctor told me that it's a good thing I did, because the door came in so far. And you know what else is cool?"

You can't imagine.

"The doctor said that if the rod would have went in just a millimeter to the right it would have punctured a major artery and I would have bled to death. The way it was it just kind of slid right past it. They saw it in the X-rays. Isn't that exciting?"

The thought makes you sick to your stomach but you agree, yes,

that's pretty damn exciting.

"My faith in technology is renewed," she says, "but I don't like the smell in here."

"Hannah?"

"What?"

"You never answered my question."

"What question?"

"What happened to that Finnish Cage guy?"

"Phineas Gage."

"Whatever."

"Well, his frontal lobes were severely damaged, and these are what balance out our intellectual faculties and animalistic tendencies. He underwent a dramatic personality change and came up with extravagant schemes that were never followed through. In other words, he became very hard to get along with."

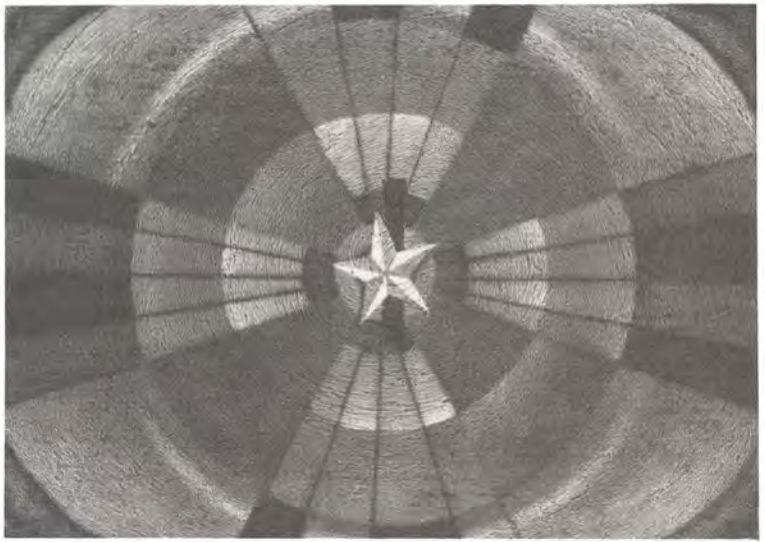
"Feisty?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Well, then, we don't have anything to worry about, do we?"

Hannah smiles a smile that would wake anyone up, but neglects to tell you that Gage died in an epileptic fit thirteen years after the accident.

Phineas Gage information provided from the January, 1995 issue of *Discover*, "What Happened to Phineas?"



Testing Series, ilfochrome, Jack Hartigan

. . . Hannah doesn't watch television. She gets all of her facts out of the magazines that are sent to the house in trucks.

Three Generations of Gas Station Attendants '97

Katherine Ellison

In that space where the tendons form
a little cup,
when the thumb is pulled back and fingers
bent like claws—
that is where grandpa stuck his snuff
before he cleared his throat and inhaled,
dry tongue pasty with cigar smoke
and the burn of an oil cocktail.

In that moment when elastic is released
and returned to small puckers,
when the ultimate failure point
of the structure is reached—
that is when uncle hank smoothed the seams
on his dress shirt and sighed,
dry eyes red with blinking
and the burn of new disinfectant.

In that town where the tall barns frame
an interstate,
where the lights stay blinking red
and sometimes yellow—
that is where I pumped gas into
a rusty truck and saw my breath,
dry throat squeezed with cold
and the burn of thawing

motion

Mechanical Properties of Bone

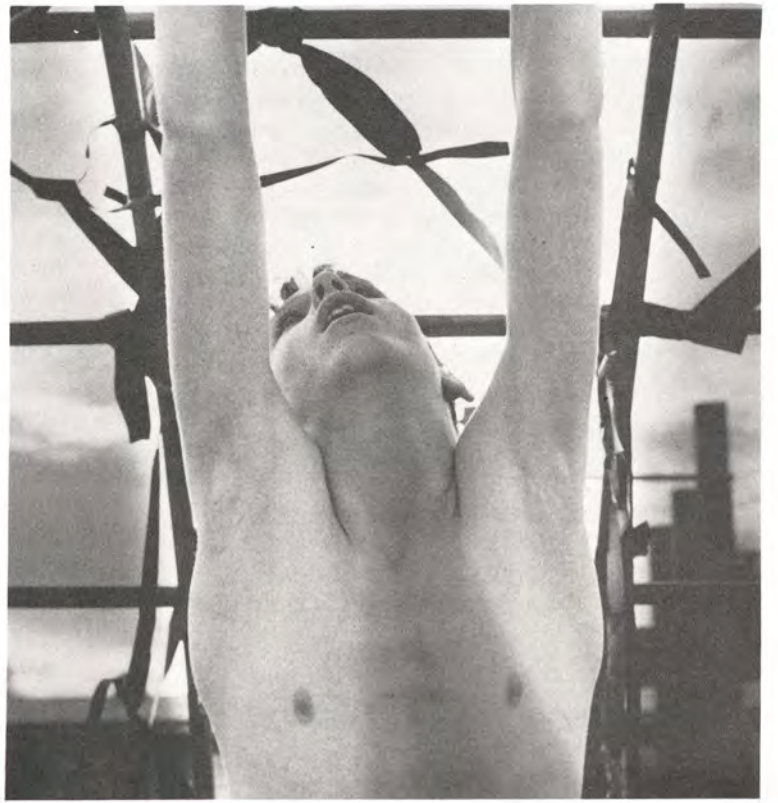
Katherine Ellison

Stress-strain curves for metal
or glass
or rock or stone
Stiff material reserved for buildings
or roads but not
my walking frame
my talking tube,
Bending where brittle things will,
strain from length
and from angle,
Tension, torsion, compression,
the catch of the hip
with a leg lift,
Close to the neutral axis

shear fracture
shear fracture

Four-point bending
with force couple
break and

the run is over.



Untitled, Stacey Bogess, 1997

Close Anatomy

Katherine Ellison

We were in the sixth week and ready for the heart. By the rules we were supposed to tell them right away if we recognized the body or the face, or if a tattoo or birthmark made us think of somebody we once knew. They ship them across the country so the chances are next to nothing, they said. When I pulled back the cover on the first day I expected to see a John Doe that fit the picture in my mind. Everyday brown hair or maybe blonde.

I saw the lizard first, outlined in black across his chest and not all colored in yet. Everybody laughed and said come look at this guy's job, too bad we gotta cut through that fine artwork. I laughed too because there was nothing else to do. Just laugh and remember that once I paid three hundred dollars to get an identical one on the small of my back.

The heart was bigger than my fist and took some time to get to. Sal took the notes and checked my incisions against the diagram. Everything was right where it was supposed to be, nestled under muscle and bone and a wrap of pericardium. You're doing great, Sal said, but I wouldn't look up for fear of seeing his face. For five years I'd been waiting and then, after only twenty-six minutes, I could finally look into his heart and find nothing.

Untitled, silver gelatin print, Stacey Bogess, 1997

Dad

Dacia Jameson

I'm a guest in your house
Invited in politely
Not a part of it all
A silent observer
From the outside

everyone keeps telling me

Dacia Jameson

they all keep telling me girl you have to make up your mind and where do you want to go girl who do you want to be girl what do you want to do i say i say i don't want to be anyone i say i don't want to do anything at all they shake their heads i see i know they don't understand they cant understand i just don't care about anyone anything anywhere anyway when are you going to take care of yourself girl girl when will you ever grow up who knows who cares i hate everyone myself the stares the hate the fear the numb the rut

Mary Star, silver gelatin print, Olaf Jens Olsen, 1997

The Crazed Professor

Donna Walton

Objectivity is not his proclivity.
He speaks with the utmost disdain.
We all come undone, with the lash of his tongue.
Only the stoic few to remain.

Brave warriors are we.
With a propensity for pain.
We trudge on undaunted, his comments not wanted.
He is just a tad bit insane.

Waiting

April S. Kenyon

Bleached legs dangle
over muddy carpet—
a frail form slumping
in an adhesive chair.
Ripening eyes
contemplate
the empty seats
forming ranks
like British soldiers
preparing for battle.
She counts
the gold buttons
lining each
red-breasted
warrior,
quietly ticking off
the minutes—as if
she had done it
before.

The Barn

Tom Birch

The crunch of gravel greeted us
as we pulled into the drive of the new home.
Before me a graying farm house,
a lawn grown over with weeds, and
a dilapidated barn.
The barn, with wind ravaged planks and shingles,
red paint holding its own against the fading sun,
and doors hanging askew on rusted hinges.
Numbers painted on a corner stone: 1888.
The year my grandmother was born.
My brothers and I went to inspect the relic.
Inside, sunlight poured through its many holes.
The hay loft was missing boards.
Huge thick oaken beams
tenuously held the structure together.
Battered stalls that once housed horses and cattle.
A rusted hay hook still hanging from its runner among the rafters.
Seventy-six years it had stood, storing animals, grain
and a farmers labor.
The smell of the farm animals, soaked into the dirt floor,
a wall scarred by the scuff of a leather halter
hung on the wall repeatedly.
Now, in its old age it was to become the companion of three young boys.
Their secret dreams would be shared
inside its comforting walls,
last stands would be taken against invading armies,
and young girls would be seemingly coerced
to expose the innocence of youth.
At other times, it would be a refuge from life,
and the uncertainties of growing up.
Three young boys would grow up here,
with this old barn
making their stand against time together.

The Blues Sound

Reed A. Hartman

The blues ain't nothin' but a sound . . .
of tears sliding down a cheek,
of slammin' doors and runnin' feet,
of promises made in the dark you know they'll never keep.

But the blues ain't nothin' but a sound . . .
of last "goodbyes"
of deathbed sighs,
of remembering laughter that never dies.

And the blues ain't nothin but a sound . . .
of protesting masses
of shattered dreams and broken shot glasses,
of a dropped farewell letter that crumples when it crashes.

The Blues is more than a sound . . .
of guitar played like someone played your heart,
of a harmonica like a train whistling it's about to start,
of a raspy voiced singer whose life imitates his art.

Sermon #6 in A Minor

Jeff Ridenour

Boomedy-Bam POW
s'what it boils down to now
can't save ourselves
can't better ourselves
like little elves
runnin' in tha trees
with birds, gators, lions and bees
no way out a' yr rut
yr life's fulla smut
without tha lord, that is.

Boomedy-Bamm POW
you infidels with yr sacred cow
the true religion
is our religion
of white neck collars
devoted hollars
faithful, faithless, and donated dollars
give yrself fully
ta that heavenly bully
speakin' o' the lord that is.

Boomedy-Bamm POW
y'all can be saved, we'll show ya how
can't think fer yrself
DON'T Think fer yrself
ther's no need to wallow
we lead, y'all follow
'cause if'n ya don't yr souls will be hollow,
ya can die fer yr sins
why, everybody wins
when yr on tha side of the lord, that is.

Dead Wheat

Reed A. Hartman

A yellow DOT truck
parked on the side of the Interstate,
its flashing arrow urging the cars to merge
right, into the golden field
with the grove of trees like gnarled hands,
grasping for the Civil War sky,
or like Nature's fraying nerves,
blackened and waiting to die.

Late December

Reed A. Hartman

A mottled sky,
where clouds churn
wrestling each other without malice,
until they work themselves into
a scarlet rage just before night.

The season's cold gift
drifts down like sifted flour
that no technology can prevent
from covering all that man has built
in a perfect sheet, blindingly bright.

Hopewell Mound, silver gelatin print, Jack Hartigan, 1997

Made in the USA, Michael Green, 1992

View of Point

Reed A. Hartman

A hundred shards of clear glass reform into headlights
as the car slides back, erasing red and black marks on the guard rail,
and its front end straightens from a dented grin.
The car turns around and swings behind a white car
with bright red brake lights
that wink out as it recedes—

and on the left is a blinking yellow turn signal
from a semi rapidly moving
into its own lane.

Oceana

René L. Britt-Hartloff

Agonizingly,
she Beckons
Calling out
in the Dark
Ebbing and flowing
with utter Fickleness.
Gyrating against the shore
urging me Home
Inviting me to follow
enticing me with the smell of Jacaranda
Neptune Kowtows to her majestic vastness
she Lures me
with Machiavellian skill
Naiad, her sister, frolics nearby
entranced by her Overture
Pacific lullabies abound
orchestrating an aquatic Quadrille
Rising and falling
lulling me to Sleep in her bossom
Tacitly tempting me to remain
in her Ubiquitous arms
leaving my Vacuous life behind
Wafting closer with foamy-white regalia
demeanor of Xanthippe
Yearning, I follow her lead
and become her Zillionth captive.

Beck's Mill

April S. Kenyon

The water wheel no longer turns—
The river has run dry.
The jury now has been adjourned—
The water wheel no longer turns.
I wish I could but overturn
that verdict from the sky.
The water wheel no longer turns—
The river has run dry.

Caught in the Hairspray

Ginger Johnson

You'll find me sitting on one of those pink vinyl seats—the ones where a hairstylist named Raoul makes you look hip and you exchange witty conversation with the other ladies. At least, that's what I had hoped for. However, I was not in Cosmopolitan, USA; I was in Iowa, and the seats were just a shade too Pepto-Bismol pink to be in vogue. My desire for glamour is quietly swallowed as reality sets in.

I am here at Vickie's Mane and Mop because it is my birthday. I have no hope for a birthday party, considering I have just come to Winston City and rather than celebrate with my Great-Aunt Tessie, I go to Vickie's Mane and Mop, the only beauty salon in town. Aunt Tessie doesn't believe I deserve to celebrate my birth when I am so sinfully giving birth to a bastard, but she gave me money to get my hair cut, so I wouldn't embarrass her even more than I already am. I saved the money until today, so I would have some bit of happiness on my birthday.

A sign over the door says, "We do dogs too!" I saw the pink vinyl seats juxtaposed against the reflection of my plain brown hair in the plate-glass window and I was inside the door before I could blink. I crave glamour the way a smoker craves nicotine. My parents are straight up-and-down people for whom glamour is merely a divergence from what is really important. They say one shouldn't give in to such temptations. But I've given in to far worse temptations than glamour. So here I sit in my pink vinyl chair, a pink polka-dotted plastic bib around my burgeoning body, wishing for a change in my appearance that might change the course of my life.

Vickie takes my hair and vigorously combs it out. She stops abruptly.

"Where'd you git that scar? Did a horse throw ya?" she asks.

"Oh, I had a tumor removed about three years ago. It wasn't a brain tumor, it was just on my scalp, and it wasn't cancer."

I really want to tell her, "I used to be in a gang. There was a fight and I got smashed over the head with a broken bottle," but I can never think of these things quickly enough. Not even the most gullible soul would believe a whopper like that—I'm too mousy to be tough. Maybe in my next life I'll be a better liar or at least beautiful.

She combs a little more gently, then parts my hair in the middle and sections off the sides with little matching pink clips. My thoughts float up high above the chairs and look down like God's camera upon the happenings below. If I were God's camera, I could take pictures from up here of my pink pinwheel head to put in my scrapbook, I think.

"Tilt your head forward." My imaginary camera clicks off and comes back down to street-level as I obediently nod my head forward. Vickie starts to cut off great locks of hair, measuring the length against her comb. I wondered where Vickie went to beauty school. She cuts and layers the entire crown of my head, then attacks the sides with the same energy.

"So didja just move here? You must be Aunt Tessie's niece, who's gonna take care o' her, ain't cha?"

Aunt Tessie is my grandfather's sister, eighty-seven years old and still teaching ballroom dance to the locals. Everyone calls her Aunt Tessie presumably because no one's ever called her anything else. She's the matriarch of Winston City society, former Winston City Elementary School principal, and present Sunday School teacher at the Baptist church. As soon as the locals heard someone was coming to take care of Aunt Tessie, they assumed her age had finally caught up to her and so she was beleaguered with potato-chip crunch casseroles, molasses biscuits, and

lime jello ambrosia salads. She certainly doesn't need taking care of, she could whip my butt if I so much as asked for it, but her health is the only thing my family could come up with to explain my presence in Winston City and my absence from home for the next five months. I am here because I am sweet sixteen and pregnant and my parents are too old-fashioned to let me be pregnant in peace. Let Vickie think I am the doting niece. I know otherwise.

I keep my mind on what she's doing to my hair, thinking hopefully that I might like it. It becomes my newfound mantra, partially to squeeze out the music playing from the alarm clock radio: "All my ex's live in Texas, that's why I hang my hat in Tennessee . . ."I might like it, I might like it, I might like it, Imightlikeit, imightlikeit. I don't like it. I hate it. My hair is being transformed into something you might see on the 11 o'clock news as Vickie explains the versatility of this cut. It was layered and short all over except around my neck where there were these wispy things flipping up.

"See, if you blow-dry it like this," she yanks on the hair at the nape of my neck, "it will give you more body. If you tease it and spray it, you'll be ready to go out on the town." She pauses in her styling mania, then asks the dread question, "So, do you like it?"

All of the fussing that Vickie is doing with my hair has gradually regressed from the world of television to hit the bottom of the country music barrel. I emerge as one of those ex's who shouldn't be caught dead out of Texas. With the versatility of this cut, I can look like a country singer. I can look like Rod Stewart. I can look like a friggin' cocker spaniel with those little wispy things sticking out at the bottom.

I hate it. That's what my brain tells me to say, but my mouth says, "Yes, it's nice." And I purchase a brand new round brush to facilitate styling. I hate it. That's what my brain told me to say the night I got pregnant too, but my mouth bailed out and said, "Yes, it's nice."

As I exit, I see the sign that says so cheerfully, "We do dogs too!" and I'm thankful I didn't get a perm—I'd rather look like a cocker spaniel than a poodle. I walk down the block to the drug store and buy a pair of scissors to finish what Vickie has started. Perhaps if I cut my hair short enough, I can cut off my old life and flush the clippings down the toilet. But I know I am stuck here like a skipping record, not able to go forward, not wanting to look back, repeating the same thing: "yes, it's nice" until someone bumps into me and I advance to the next scratch on the record, where I will stick again, leaving a trail of hair clippings, caught in the hair spray.

My thoughts float up high above the chairs and look down like God's camera upon the happenings below. If I were God's camera, I could take pictures from up here of my pink pinwheel head to put in my scrapbook, I think.

Doughnuts for Breakfast

H. Suzanne Heagy

Maria knew he was outside, waiting—but not because she had seen him; it was more a sense of lurking masculine presence, of something about to happen. Like when she knew the phone was about to ring or the alarm about to go off. She paid no heed to the man but went ahead with scouring the coffee maker, filling the sugar dispensers, wiping the horse-shoed counter with strong ammonia water.

Not one customer came into the doughnut shop; the last had departed before nine o'clock. She checked each item off her duty list with a dull pencil when it was completed, then stuck the marker where it was handy, in the thatch of gray hair above her right ear. The last item was changed each day at noon by Mr. Krone, the owner. It told her where to hide the money when she locked up at ten.

Maria looked at the clock when the place was adequately clean. Ten minutes till closing time. Walking around the counter, she sat down to count her tips. Eight hours on her aching feet for $8.32. She shoveled the change into an envelope and sealed it, rolling the paper tight so the heavy coins wouldn't jingle around. Three more minutes.

She went ahead and locked the doors before walking to the back to switch off the lights. Her bag of spare doughnuts was sitting on top of a stainless steel work table. She was taking just five tonight, three for her husband in the morning and two for herself. Marie opened the bag and slipped the tight roll of change inside, careful not to crush the sticky circles, then closed the bag with a crisp fold that she sealed with her fingers.

Tonight the list said to leave the paper bag filled with money in the oven. It was one of Mr. Krone's favorite spots. She cleaned out the register with only the scattered beams of the street light to guide her. Picking up her purse and the spare doughnuts, she walked to the oven and then back to the front door. As soon as she let herself out, the man approached.

"Back inside, lady." His voice was younger than she would have suspected.

"I don't want to go back inside," she answered firmly, locking the door. "I'm finished in there. It's time to go home. Come back in the morning." Maria moved to walk past him but he blocked her with his arm.

"Look, lady, I don't want to hurt you or anything Open the door and get back inside."

"Why? I've already cleaned the coffee machine. Do you want some doughnuts?" She held out the bag in her hand, offering as if it didn't really matter.

"Lady, you must be nuts. See this?" He held up his hand, the menacing bulk clutched there. He gestured to the door.

"Back inside, lady. This is a robbery."

"A robbery? Goodness gracious, I had no idea." Her voice lilted into the night air. As if she hadn't known.

"Goddamn it, lady. Open the damn door before I have to shoot you." His voice was low, the message delivered through gritted teeth. His arm holding the gun quivered with emphasis.

"Fine. You want it open, stand out of my light." Her own voice was testy, as if she were dealing with her recalcitrant spouse over something as trivial as changing the channel. She unlocked the door and walked inside, closely followed by the youthful thief. She turned and looked full at his face for the first time. "Are you satisfied?"

He glanced around the darkened interior. "Sit down, lady." He

pointed to the floor, close to one of the stools. "I'm going to tie you up." She started to protest, but he pointed and told her to shut up, dammit, and sit down.

Marie sank to the floor, slowly and not very gracefully, arranging herself so that her skirt didn't cut into her thighs. "Now what?" she asked. The young man pulled a nylon cord out of his pocket. He muttered as he tied her hands together behind the single steel leg of the stool.

"Do you need more light?"she asked. "The switch is in the back."

"Goddamn it, shut up, lady." He stood after making sure her hands were thoroughly bound and walked over to the oven where he had seen her place the bag. As the oven door clanged shut, he scuffed past her to the door. "I'm outta' here, lady. And next time you're robbed, keep your damn mouth shut. The next guy might not be as nice as I am." He took off into the night.

Once the thief was gone, Maria loosened her fists and felt the rope go slack. She jumped up nimbly. The robber would have been surprised if he could have seen her. She locked the door quickly before heading behind the counter to set the black rotary phone down on the floor where she squatted to dial 911. "I'd like to report a robbery," she said. "Please send someone right away." She stayed down, behind the counter, until she saw flashing blue lights strobe their way through the dark interior of Krone's Doughnut Shop. Only then did she allow herself to cry.

"It was awful officer," she sobbed, unlocking the door to let the policemen in. There were four of them, two cars of two. "He must have been waiting for me to leave." She told them the story and gave a precise description of the thief.

The police offered to take her home, but Maria refused. "Just walk me to my car, please," she said, gathering her things. She drove straight home, obeying all traffic laws, and called Mr. Krone, even though it was after midnight. "I'm giving notice," she said. "I'm not going back, Mr. Krone. Worst experience of my life. I'll never be able to eat another doughnut."

He agreed to mail her last check and Maria hung up, satisfied.

She walked into the kitchen and opened the neatly folded bag. Dumping the contents onto the table, she began counting. It really had been a lousy day. Only $547.36. Oh well. It was two weeks off her feet. And enough to buy something for breakfast besides doughnuts.

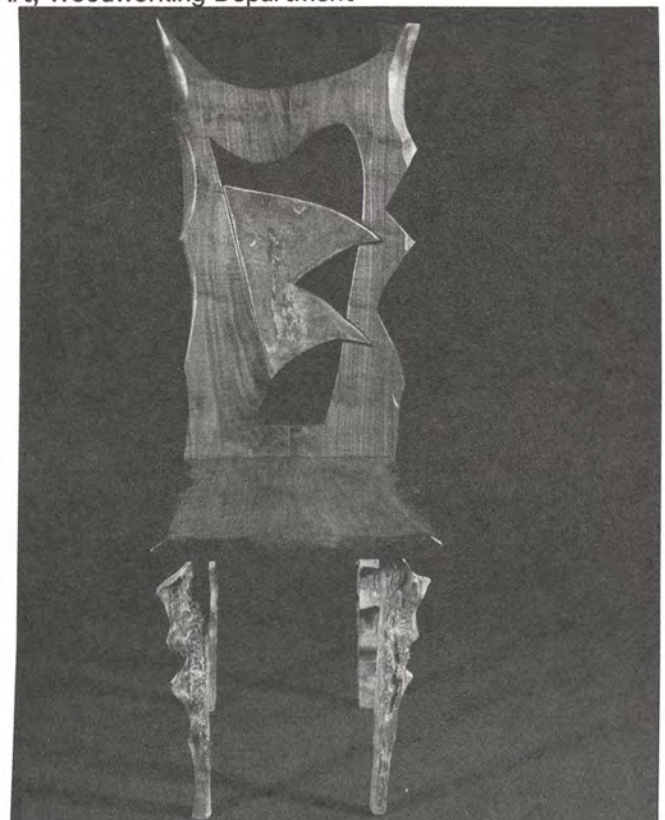
Lounge Act, Sherri McGlothlin, 1988

. . . she sat down to count her tips. Eight hours on her aching feet for $8.32.

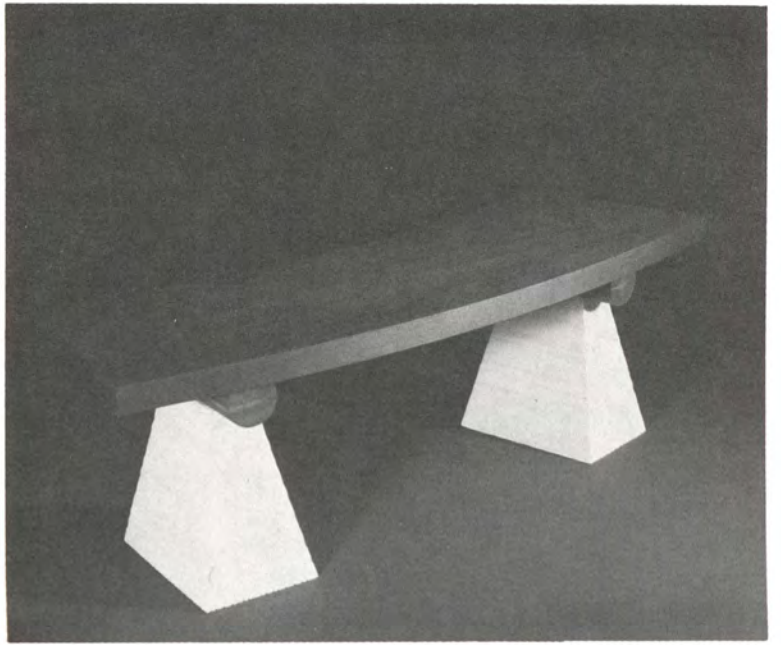
PORTFOLIO

Furniture Design from Herron School of Art, Woodworking Department

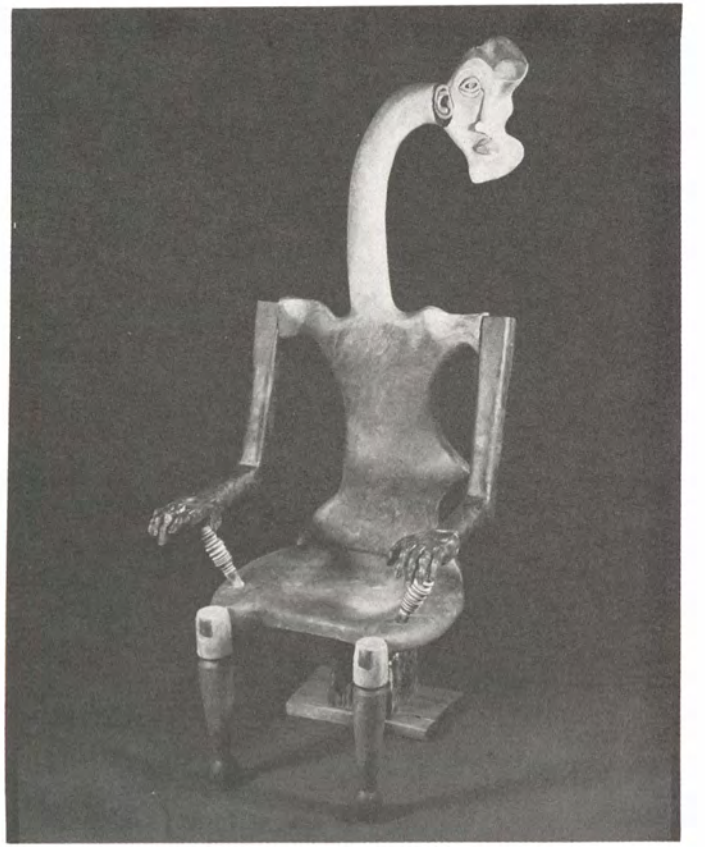
Chair, poplar and cast aluminum, Gerard Masse, 1997



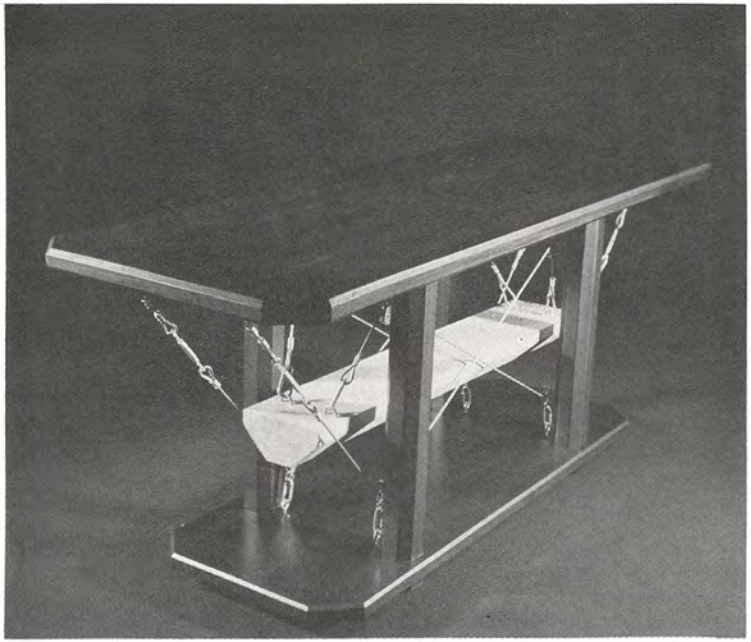
Chair, black walnut and cast aluminum, Gerard Masse, 1997



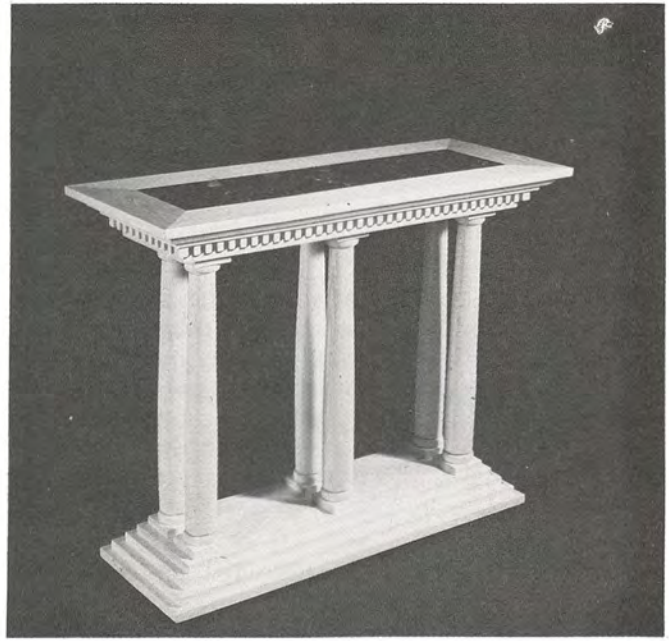
Bench, poplar, Chris Jones, 1997



Throne, painted poplar, Matt Jefferys, 1997



Table, graphite finish on poplar/cables and pulleys, Joe Bricker, 1997



Table—Sideboard, bleached ash and marble, Joe Bricker, 1997

A Glimpse of Tomorrow

Daniel Incandela

Where to begin? A new collection of thoughts and ideas. A method of displaying my artistic ability. Which may prove that I possess none. A car pulls up to the curb and demolishes a small village of puddles. Traffic lights send secret messages to each other, and the policeman forgets how to use his whistle. Polyester screams for attention. Life is where I live. Drug users run for presidency and the conformists of yesteryear lick the footsteps of others. The whistle sounds, in the nick of time, and fender bender fate lingers patiently. The policeman has a great memory. Electronic tattoos flicker from time to time. Buddhism prevails over Christianity in chess, but Christianity never loses at Monopoly. We don't have to lick envelopes. Andy Warhol movies are inaccessible. Bill Clinton has a talk show. Buffets are limited to nine visits. Cats bark, dogs meow, and I haven't noticed. When she pulled the trigger, pieces of poetry hit the wall. My friend is in the process of suing his EX, for dumping him. I remember books, do you? We still rape Mother Nature. Telephones are actually answered. We recall O.J. . . . . Everyone in ABBA remarries each other. Pickles are outlawed . . . finally. We haven't killed each other yet! There is a Talk Show Channel. Were you cloned? 13/22nds of my family seeks help in the form of therapy. We forget to thank adversity. We read . . . @#**!! Touch your friend.

Thanks.

Richard A. Cross Poetry Award

Starting with the 1998 school year, an annual spring $100 award for best poem of student work published in *genesis* will be selected by a juried panel. This award marks the tenth anniversary of the untimely death of Richard A. Cross, known for his abiding interest in and appreciation of poetry.

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