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The Alembic

Aether

Earth

Spring 1997

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE



The Alembic

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SPRING 1997

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THE ALEMBIC

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INTRODUCTION

The Alembic – Literally, the name denotes a medieval mechanical apparatus used in distillation. For this magazine, the term connotes a figurative “distillation” of the collective literary and artistic talents present in the Providence College community. The medieval apparatus distilled each season’s yield of grapes and produced a refined and tasteful mixture of wine. This literary “apparatus” also attempts to collect and distill each year’s fruitful yield of creativity, in hopes of likewise producing a palatable artistic vintage.

DEDICATION

The editors would like to dedicate this issue to Forrest Gander, Professor of English at Providence College, faculty advisor to *The Alembic* for the past 7 years, and a constant source of inspiration to his students. His generous donation of his time and talents has been instrumental to *The Alembic*’s success. Forrest’s presence on campus was greatly missed this year, but we are fortunate and thankful that he put us under the expert guidance of Professor Bruce Smith, whose endless enthusiasm and encouragement made this publication possible in Forrest’s absence.

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FORREST GANDER
The History of the Ruling Class

Nature forms a repetitive lattice
in crystal as in the mind

I sway by.

Every time I make a gesture
I think— how many times already?
If I could deceive myself, get drunk enough,
but I'm still looking for maxims.

Thus, thus, truly thus,

evidence degrades and disappears.
But must I add myself
to a form of maceration? Am I
held back— at last— by my own weight?
It's not so much the others
who bore and disgust me, block my way.
It's myself.

I'm no good except alone,

and with you. You are the honeysuckle
cut into my coffee. Your meticulousness
gives things their proper value.
All our childish marriage
we participated in ourselves

like adjacent colors

in a breeding country
without order or imagination
for the matter and model we are.
We wear the brows of grace. Look
how the hornets built their nest low—
we'll have a mild winter
although it begins tomorrow.
Women don't hack their hair
and there are no ululations
for men who piss their days out.

(Still in the spell of words— a protraction,
but of what?) I am either
above or within the world.

goes by blood.

The hourglass

The Differing Qualities of Light

for Yuko Kameoka

No it wasn't her, he said.
 in three days. *It wasn't.*
 Clothes, stereo, books,
 The song that summer was Wannabe
 The sun drew all color
 through the desert,
 The sign said
 The Anasazi, he went on,
 a thousand years
 clawed her way over the boxes.
 Then she would claw
 window. At the rest stop the woman
 none of the stalls had toilet paper.
 toward the urinal
 to stand from the puddle.
It was a possum. As they were leaving,
 looking soft
It wasn't her, he said.
 In less than a mile,
 by the cat's
 frantic, searching the backseat, the floor.
 wildflowers in the median
 The motorcycles were gone,
 Looked everywhere crying,
 An hour passed,
 Back in the car
 very, very lightly,
 something crumpled
 tar bubbling
 blooming cereus, her insides
 if it was her,
 She didn't want tar
 He went out to make sure.
 into the dashboard. Shards
 in her belly as he opened the door

Bleary, trying to make the west coast
 The Fairlane crammed to the roof.
 he read aloud while she drove.
 by Hole. *No.*
 from the landscape. Plastic bags blew
 cacti caught them.
 Picture postcards at Reservation Prices.
 dry-farmed this land
 and disappeared. The Siamese
 Then she would curl up in his lap.
 over the boxes and sit by the rear
 drip-dried,
 The man leaned
 with his hand on the wall
It wasn't her, he said.
 the bikers arrived,
 away from their motorcycles.
No.
 she was struck
 absence. Wheeled into the breakdown,
 U-turned through
 speeding back to the rest stop.
 she did not remember passing them.
 rushing up to strangers.
 the sun stung at their eyes.
 she put on her glasses and
 he touched her knee. She could see
 on the shoulder of the access road,
 in little pools around it. Like a night-
 began to open. She asked him,
 to pick up the body carefully.
 to get on her fur.
 She sat staring
 of light converging
 and got in.

JANE LUNIN PEREL
Knocker to the Sea

The sea is hollow.
Knock and she knocks back at you.
Rock and she rocks you back.
Swallow her and she keeps swallowing you
down and down until you coil
into the flying fish stinging the roe
that sprung you.

You burst through her foam.

She bursts through yours.
Salt for Salt.
She makes a swimmer out of you
and you make a goddess out of her.
The closest you will ever come to flying
is floating down her sparkling
cleavage whose diamonds she
shares willingly with you.
"Mother" you call.
"Mother" she answers
and that night you both give
birth to dark stars and murdered
songs that rise
over her kelp beds
over the black seaweed of your hair.
Their fire buried
like memory
inside the amnesia of dreams into
which her gigantic yawns launch you and
from which you will never
swim back.

*the History of my Body**for Carla and Patricia*

A black fish with a feathered tail hissed through
 the yellow center of my yellow eye and I began
 to grow. Grow until I burst the sac of my
 beloved. Through the groans, the cold
 I learned to hate what I did to
 her and love the flames my
 lungs bellowed out into
 the white hot cold.
 She forgave me,
 but I was of
 two minds.
 One to furrow
 back to the sac of
 my formation. One to exhale
 the past and leap beyond her
 stroking. This explains the nature
 of my song. Languor holds me. Then Laputa
 hails. I am bondservant of the wind, though my
 bones are wide and long and my flesh encircles
 me like rings around the inner tree. Inner tubes off
 floating islands, my thighs are never somber or frail. I
 set my course with them. They pull me through the
 humid air. Stand spellbound in frigid air
 dispelling ice like stoves. My breasts
 are towering peonies opening. White
 pinions cover me and flashfall
 of plumes swooned down by
 guns beat deep inside
 my cage of ribs. I
 can not remember
 being small. I
 grew like a river. Tigris
 bloods me. My hands are fixtures
 of silt. My feet, appendices of sludge.
 My nose stopped short and also my eyes are
 worn down stones gathered from riverbeds where
 only unnamed goddesses play harps made of fish bones.

My bottom is in a class of its own. It trails after the rest of
 me. Landscape of snow mounds, small towns where round faces
 stare into igloos of mirrors and sleeping white bears.
 In my brain there is a deep cleft. On one side sun
 fills the valleys where sheep munch. On the
 other a deep ravine descends where black
 snakes swarm in dank and rotting
 bayous. Beware that mud. Out
 stare that stare. You may
 pray to the cauldron
 of my stomach that
 churns skins and
 seeds. Gastric
 juices chanting good
 and thanks again. Bow to my
 ovaries. Those bowls of stars. And
 the uterus. The flute of my expanding
 womb from which even your Queens and Kings
 spin out bawling, crushed by the cold air and
 the iron lung of gravity. Then consider my tongue.
 Raw flamingo of the red triptych of my throat. The song
 is a soft squabbling devotional to air that breaks into blood-
 screams and perpetual dares to annihilate whatever is near.
 Cravings come. Cossacks on horseback. Their swords slic-
 ing the sky. Their boots muddied and dug into the
 horses' sides. They bang down the door. My
 glands are malachite and tigereye. The
 hardened pouches of daybreaks bound
 to slowmoving rituals. Tenderness
 of old hooves cracking in snow.
 Surely, the Chagall windows
 of my blue and purple
 veins glow more
 deeply than
 Amenhotep's jewels.
 They stun my calves and
 the back of my left knee with
 a deeprooted reverie only flesh knows
 and from which only flesh can be set free.
 Darling toes and ankle bones. Tarsis, metatarsils.

How can I commend you sufficiently for your wide patience?
 Your continuity. Step by step you have drawn the drama
 on beyond what I thought I could endure. Only my
 fingers are as loyal. More flailing, trailing
 words, their music through the air. And
 entrails all, a word for you. Subsumed.
 My contorted ones throbbing out
 your bohemian rhythms. Sculpted
 amoebas of Darwin's longing.
 You thrill me, but let's
 keep a truce. Stay
 where you are.
 Don't unwind
 and I won't let
 the rest in. So neck,
 your spiraled vertebrae
 hardened like chinks of clay.
 It is regal to have a neck that
 cracks and sways. That tilts and lifts
 itself through tyrants' gazes and gory battles
 waged til sunsets dissolve the blackened blood into
 blackened dew. Ears that hold the calls and rattles of all
 wounded and disturbed ghosts. Boleros of roots weeping
 and mountains spat into sand. And liver and kidneys
 quarantined, cleaning. The rental duct and much
 more. The myriad ganglia. The anus. The
 opened door. Gale winds bring me to
 my heart whose red isolation
 rises beyond itself.
 Blazing muscle
 clamped inside the
 hammering throb of the
 sac of its belonging. Stay in
 the tattoo parlor of drums you boom
 through. So my speech swims free because
 of you and my mouth plucks the mouth of the other
 to take him into the tango of my discontent
 and the living assent of our will and
 fiber to make a singing of wind
 and bone. Not to be alone.

And you, my body. History
of clots and dissonance.
Treatment center for
the addict of my
inner living
and the addict
of breath and water.
You are a city succumbing
to the desert and the flood.
Poise yourself against the echoes of
silent battering. Holy body of my own blood.

Leaving Dorchester

“Jew Ball”, they screamed and the rock clanked my temple, dug in and bounced off the curb with an echo like trucks gouging ice. I was sprawled in the street by then, but I heard the name and wondered before the blue-black spinning gold of spun dummyhood took me in, “Jew”, yes, but why “ball”? Limbs scattered and messy like strewn flowers after an argument. Not a ball, a wad of rubber cut out. But whole and bleeding with fingers and toes twitching, I picked myself up and touched the blood that glued street-dirt to my head. The throb announced itself in cymbals of gone want and rage at the Irish boys. But why, again, ball? Wobbling home the fall air cleaned me out and mother cleaned the wound. Forty years later still throbbing. Still bouncing.

ADAM S. HASLETT

Reunion

When it finally arrived, the minister's letter was in a typed envelope bearing no return address. The body of the letter was typed also and signed at the bottom in careful script. The request had been seen to, all the arrangements made. The local council would require a check; an address was given. James read it on the stairs up to his flat, and having copied the information onto another envelope, he placed the letter in the sink, struck a match from the box by the cooker, and watched the heavy bond paper burn to ash.

Simon, his manager at the Estate Agents, had initially thought it a bit peculiar that James should want his holiday at such short notice, and all four weeks at once. But it was mid-summer, nothing was selling, the time was as good as any. He had said James could leave right away if all his work was in order, which it was—he had seen to that before making his request. He stood now in his living room, removing from his briefcase the bits and pieces he had collected from his desk, placing the framed picture of his father on the mantle.

"How 'bout a pint before you push off?" his red-headed colleague, Patrick, had offered. He had been kind and helpful from the beginning, yet James was caught off guard by his suggestion, a first in their year long acquaintance. What would he have to say, sitting in a pub with this fellow he'd spent time thinking about. Over the partition, colleagues had looked on. "Perhaps another time," was all he had managed to respond.

The groceries put away, James showered, and afterward stood before the mirror, wrapped in a towel. Three or four times he drew the razor over the taut flesh of his chin before he was satisfied the stubble was gone. Shaving made him look younger than his twenty-five years, and with a receding hairline brushed the right way, he could still pass for a University student. He examined the skin beneath his eyes, noticing a little flaking, and the hint of a rash just below the surface. Stepping back from the mirror, the latter disappeared, and he observed his now smooth face with a modicum of contentment; he looked alright, he thought.

In his bedroom, he found a clean shirt and a pair of boxers,

each folded neatly in the bureau drawer. The room, as usual, was tidy: the bed made, the curtains fastened in place, laundry piled in the corner hamper. He returned his suit to its hanger, fitted his brogues with shoehorns, and put his tie on the rack fixed to the inside of the wardrobe door, wondering, all the while, how long this order would last.

Across the common, figures scurried over the public courts, swatting at tennis balls which arced slowly in the damp air. On the perimeter, young people, home late from work, jogged the asphalt path. James crossed the green, headed toward a line of trees whose branches swayed against a darkening sky. There was food in the refrigerator, he reminded himself, and a guide to the evening's television awaiting him should he lose his nerve. Beneath the trees, he took a seat on a bench. The occasional car passed behind on the far side of the stone wall that surrounded the common. Music from an open window rose and fell on the wind, losing itself in the hushing sound of the trees. A couple, hand in hand, walked along the common's edge. Just off the Tube, their briefcases weighed heavily in their hands: his tie was loosened, she wore sneakers. James watched as they disappeared through the gate, headed for the warren of rowhouses that stretched over South London towards the river.

It was seven-thirty, the light beginning to go, and parents were collecting their children from the football pitch. Nearby, a gardener stowed tools in the municipal shed before padlocking the door behind him. A middle-aged woman in evening dress hurried a terrier over the edge of the grass, pulling it back toward the lights of the houses, visible now through the gate's arch.

James opened his letter pad and began to write on the small, lined sheets:

Dear Father,

Today I have left my job at Loxtons. As you can imagine, we've been doing very little business, and they won't miss me at all. This isn't for lack of effort on my part. I've worked many long days and called hundreds of people, but the market is bad just now and no one has made a sale in three weeks. My manager was helpful and said I could take holidays straight away. The hardest thing was saying goodbye to Patrick, the fellow I've told you about. We'd become quite friendly, he even

asked me for a drink this evening, but I was afraid of what I might have been tempted to say. I don't suppose he notices my glances at the office. This must all seem rather odd to you, worrying about the young man across the desk. At my age, you'd already met Mum. People probably didn't talk about this sort of thing then. I wonder what you really make of it?

He could just make out the words on the page when the street lamp across the wall came on. He closed the pad and returned it to his pocket. The common was dark. Above the faint glow of the city, the lighted towers of the housing estates at Sand's End rose like beacons to cloud-borne ships. The distant sound of traffic crossing the river floated towards him over the grass, making the space before him seem vast, the darkness rolling in quiet waves up to his feet.

A few minutes passed before he heard the first steps on the path, slow and intermittent. And then to his left, a shape moving through the trees, caught in the corner of his eye, vanishing as he turned his head. The street lamp felt like a spotlight now, blinding him to the darkened house. He unzipped his jacket and put his hands in the pockets of his jeans. A light flickered by the hedge beside the tennis courts, lit the tip of a cigarette, and was gone, leaving behind the glow of an ember. James felt his breathing become shallow; he dropped his shoulders and told himself to relax. Here and there leaves were brushed aside by shuffling feet, and whispers carried in the breeze. Rising from the bench, he headed for the small copse beyond the gardener's shed, impatient for his eyes to adjust to the lack of light. He leant against a tree, training all his senses on the darkness. Nearby, a man groaned softly; from over the wall, the music still floated.

It was a few minutes before he sensed a figure approaching. As the man came closer, James saw he was wearing a suit, his tie pulled down from the collar of a white shirt. Late thirties, James guessed quickly, unsure whether to advance or retreat. The visage emerged from shadow—a broad neck, double chin, the features of a once handsome boy cloaked in the flesh of a man's face. Their eyes had met, and James already felt, with a paranoid terror, the disappointment he would inflict were he to step away now. The man attempted a half-smile, generous and disarming; James cast his eyes to the ground. The hand on his shoulder came as a surprise, but he fell into the touch, making of the man's extended arm, an

embrace.

Afterwards, walking back across the common, the air felt cold against his brow. His breath became full again and he jogged the two blocks from the gate to his front door. On the stairs, he felt lightheaded, as though all of a sudden his blood had gone thin, and he took the last flight more slowly.

A week passed. On Tuesday, the office called about a semi-detached in Parson's Green; they couldn't find the paperwork. James let the machine answer, and phoned back the next morning. How was the holiday going? Simon asked. Where had he gone off to? A village in Cornwall, James said, just a bed and breakfast, a quick walk to the sea. Wonderful to have time on his own.

Matinees were cheaper than evening shows, and London was full of movie houses. He watched the films he had missed over the last few months, soon moving back further in time to the repertory houses—70's classics, the Italian directors, the films of Dick Bogarde. On a particularly hot afternoon, he sat in an empty theater on the Fulham Road and watched *The Night Porter*. The only other patron left as the unlikely pair closed themselves in the hotel room to make love, thus missing the final scene of the couple's dawn walk on the bridge.

If he rose at eleven, took a leisurely breakfast, and chose a long picture, the long matinee would consume the better part of the afternoon, and evening would soon be upon him. He cooked at home, and visited the common at night. Each evening, as he sat on the bench, waiting for the light to fade, he wrote a letter to his father, even if it were only a few lines, being sure to place it in an envelope as soon as he returned to the flat.

One Friday night, he arrived home from the cinema to discover the fridge was empty; he had seen a double feature, and it was now past closing time. Just as happy not to have to cook, he showered and changed before heading out for a curry.

The place was crammed with an after-work crowd that had stayed for supper and was getting progressively drunker. He sat on his own at a table near the kitchen, reading the newspaper. Just as his food arrived, he heard a voice from behind.

"Is that you, Bennett?" He hadn't been called by his surname since school days. He turned around and saw a broad faced male of his own age, his complexion brightened with alcohol, leering

down at him. "You remember, hiding wickets in the dovecote with Templeton—it's me, Newman, Clive Newman." The description sounded more like an Evelyn Waugh novel than anything he could remember, but the name rang a bell.

"This is crazy! I'm back for just a week, Hong Kong—banking—and Trisha's here too, a girlfriend of mine. Come over then, Jamie, that's it, right? Jamie?"

"Yes. James."

"Eat with us," he instructed, lifting the dish of rice from James's table and heading for his own. What could he do? He picked up the rest of his food and moved reluctantly to the front of the restaurant where a group of seven or eight sat around a table covered with lager glasses.

"Well, everyone, we have here St. Stephen's finest actor—H.M.S. Pinafore, wasn't it Bennett?" A few of the assembled chuckled absently while the others continued to chat. Someone had passed his tandoori down the table and a young woman in pearls and lipstick was picking at it with a fork.

"Did we order this?" she asked.

"Actually...." James began, but Clive had his arm around him and had begun to speak.

"Have you ever been back, Bennett? I was there last year—Old Boy's Day—cricket vs. the school side and all that. For a prep school they do quite a bang up—tents, speeches—you'd think you were at bloody Harrow. None of the fellows showed up though, just a pack of geezers going on about 'The War'. Which one, I wanted to ask." The table's food had arrived, and people began to spoon the oily mixtures onto their plates. "Where do all those years go, hey? Lost back there somewhere." He paused reflectively, as though on the verge of some profundity. Then his face lifted with a smile. "Listen to me, whining on like a house Frau."

Despite himself, James's mind wandered back: chapped legs in winter; the mud soaked parquet of basement changing rooms.

"It's all ahead of us Bennett," Clive Newman said. "Christ, we're only a quarter century old, aren't we, my angel?"

"Yeah," the girl sitting next to James said, appearing not to have heard the question. Trisha was an ethereal looking character with a mass of hair as light as the skin of her face. Her eyes were large and protruding, as though she were forever alarmed. James

thought them an unlikely couple, she rather abstracted, he so literal.

"And what is it that you do?" she asked softly, in an intimate tone, beneath the rising chatter of another round of drinks.

James was surprised by the genuineness of the question. She was speaking to him alone, removing Clive from the conversation with the quietness of her tone. He had turned to his food and was soon caught on the wings of another discussion.

"Well," James began, unsure of where he was headed with this stranger, "at the moment I don't do much of anything."

"And do you enjoy that?" she asked, apparently uninterested in the whys and wherefores.

"I can't say that I do."

"Funny, nor do I." Cautiously, she looked down the table, sizing up the young woman in pearls, whose brown hair hung in a gentle curl down to her shoulders. Over the cacophony of deeper, male voices, this woman's nasal inflection rose. The accent was well-to-do, the repartee with her male companions conducted with nonchalance, perhaps a little disdain. Trisha looked down again, inspecting her hand of painted nails, pressing back strands of frayed cuticle with the edge of her thumbnail.

"I take it then that you're not working at the moment," James said.

She laughed. Pushing her plate away untouched, she fiddled with a pack of cigarettes. Her smile stiffened, came to pieces, and appeared again, as though attached to strings pulled by other hands. Then she leaned in closer to James and, *sotto voce*, said, "This isn't as it appears. I'm here in what you might describe as a professional capacity. It seems that your friend here wanted a little company while he's in town, and though I think he's a bit of an asshole, I imagine we'll be sleeping together in a few hours." She sat up again in her chair and smiled vaguely at Clive, whose bloated face was growing ever redder with drink.

"You can laugh at me now," she said nervously, out of the corner of her mouth. Then she turned to James again, pulled in by the intensity of her thought: "You can go ahead and tell me what a worthless life this is." Her whole expression reached forward in anticipation, as if she saw a blow to the head coming and was determined not to flinch.

James felt as if he had been yanked from a stupor, pulled into the tight space of this woman's fury, and to his surprise he didn't

feel like turning away.

"No," he said, "I don't want to say that. I honestly don't."

She leaned her elbow on the table, resting her head on her hand. Her features became relaxed; she looked disappointed. Around the table people were calling and laughing, conversation having given way to anecdotes shouted over the din.

"So are you rich or something?" she asked beneath the noise. "Is that why you've got time on your hands?" Gathering her plate back, she picked at a piece of bread.

"No," James replied, feeling a sudden tenderness for this stranger. "To tell you the truth, I'm dying."

His companion froze for an instant, as though she too had been torn from her own form of complacency. Remaining silent, she let the idea filter through her mind, her expression passing from disbelief, to incredulity, to a kind of somber calm.

"I'm sorry," she said, and James thought it genuine. "Do you have long?"

"Difficult to say. Probably not."

Suddenly, Clive was leaning over them, putting his arms around their shoulders, his bulbous face inserted between them.

"What are you two going on about, then, hey?" he said, louder than was necessary. "Just here a week, Bennett, and I want to see my girl." He cupped her head in his hand and kissed her roughly on the lips. "Go on then, push over." James rose and moved down a seat. Over Clive's shoulder, the woman reflected in the concern of her gaze. But as Clive began to caress her cheek, she broke her stare, manufactured a smile, and let her eyes close as he nuzzled against her shoulder.

Later, standing in the foyer of the restaurant as the group prepared to leave, Clive insisted James join them all the next evening at a pub on the King's Road; Ginsborne, another class-mate, would be along. James muttered an excuse: a project at work, long hours.

As she leaned against him by the cigarette machine, the girl came no higher than Clive's shoulder.

"It was good to meet you," James said, but just at that moment a waiter glided between them, and when he was gone so too was her attention, his sentence lost in the entrance way traffic; repetition would seem overbearing, he thought. He waved goodbye, and ahead of the others, made his way out of the

restaurant.

On the curb in front of him a bus pulled alongside the shelter, and a small group of passengers stepped off the rear platform, disbanding as they gained the pavement. He headed east, behind the quickly disappearing figures.

The bench by the wall of the common was empty, the street lamp already on. He should go home, he told himself. But then there was a rustling of feet by the beech hedge, the murmur of shallow breath. He kept walking. At the copse, he saw an unshaven man in a tank top picking his way carefully around the glimmer of the ground's muddy patches. James moved further towards the shed, and waited now and again to pierce the shadow, a white piece of clothing or the whites of their determined eyes catching a speck of lamp light and floating for an instant in the darkness. He let them pass by, trying still to convince himself, as he always tried, that he would thank himself for turning away.

Soon, a man with thinning black hair, wearing a suit and polished brogues, approached and hung beside him. James remained still, reminding himself to breathe. There were muffled greetings, a hand placed flat on his beating chest. He reached out to loosen the man's tie, and then their lips met. James closed his eyes, and the pent welter of longing rushed into his limbs. He ran his hands down the man's back, pressed his shoulders, grabbed at the back of his head. In the now perfect darkness, he had the oddest sensation that it was the girl from the restaurant whom he was embracing, her slender frame, her solitude. He moved more gently, holding her like he would hold an old person, or someone who has lost their strength, straining to speak with his touch the broken words of forgiveness. Then he felt the scratch of stubble along his neck, ran his hand past the dangling tie, and it was no longer the girls he was pressed against in this fantasy of apparitions, but his father. The hands at the fly, the condom, the warm mouth, they all came as a disappointment.

One morning, a month later, a man from British Telecom knocked on the door. For weeks, James had thrown his post in the garbage unopened, and the habit seemed to be attracting unsolicited visits. They had sent warnings, the man said, they had tried to contact him by phone, but his service had now been discon-

nected. Was there a problem? He told James there were installation plans for people with financial difficulties.

"I have plenty of money," James said, "I just don't want a phone."

The man looked confused, as though perhaps James was a disturbed character, and the service under discussion was that of a half-way home. He peered through the front window, presumably looking for the person in charge.

The previous Tuesday, the cable service had gone out, and soon thereafter, James had noticed that the newspaper no longer appeared on the doorstep each morning. Stepping into a taxi on the way to a cinema one afternoon, he had seen two men in sunglasses knocking at his door, and recognized them as employees of the collection agency Loxtons used for its rental properties. They must do a sideline in credit cards, he had thought, for while he ignored his mail, he had been careful to pay his rent. He had no interest in being homeless. He just wanted nothing to do with the world.

"Here," James said to the man, as he picked up the telephone which he had wrapped up in its cords and placed at the foot of the stairs a week before, "I imagine you have come for this."

That evening, as the light faded over the common, he wrote:

Dear Father,

We are well past the summer solstice now, and though still long, the days are becoming shorter. I suppose it is with this sort of observation a letter should begin, in the safety of neutral facts, though there seem to me fewer and fewer of these each day.

Since I have stopped working, time has slowed. I think a lot about the past, and the memories tend to make the present less real, like the memory of you standing at the back door in your blue suit, leaning your head against the stone as dusk encompassed the yard. Some days I feel as though I am still in that yard, watching you, wondering what you're thinking. Do you see me there? Do you remember?

You will be glad to know I have been the most responsible about my money. Everything has been drawn up and signed. Mother should have no problem with it.

I find you now and again here on the common, bits and pieces of you scattered in the woods, but as the days go by, so the need lessens. I will be coming home soon.

He remained seated at the end of the bench, listening to the trees and the music from the flat behind. His breath was shallow, though not from excitement.

In the vestibule, his hands shook as he held his key to the lock, and he had to steady his forearm against the casement. On the stairs, he made good use of the bannister.

It was a rainy morning later that week when the doorbell rang again. Wary of the bill collectors, James looked through the curtain to identify the visitor. It was Patrick, his colleague from Loxtons. James was supposed to have returned to work three days ago, but by that time he had unplugged the phone; if they had been trying to call, he knew nothing of it. He considered letting the doorbell ring, pretending to be away, but his nerve gave out and he went round to the hall. Patrick stood in the doorway in a raincoat, his red hair clustered into dark strands by the drizzle.

"James! You're here!" he bellowed. "What's the story, mate, we thought you were dead down a ditch in Cornwall."

James stood staring at this young man over whom he had fretted so during his year at the office, catering, invisibly, to his whims and preferences, whims and preferences that James had likely imagined to begin with—an elaborate set of spinning wheels, attached to nothing.

He was frozen. He hadn't spoken to anyone in over a week, and found himself caught off guard by Patrick's presence, as though this person ought to have moved on by now, the way a thought passes from the mind. But there he was, dripping rain, a dopey, half-smile playing over his mouth.

"Come in," James said.

For a moment, they both stood in the hallway, unsure of what to do next.

"No," James said to Patrick's back, "I'm not in a ditch in Cornwall."

Patrick swiveled round. "Right."

He hesitated, sensing, it appeared, that he had wandered into something larger than expected. "Simon was worried." In the twilight of the hall, he narrowed his eyes, staring cautiously at James. "You don't look so great. Have you been sick?"

"Yeah. This rash, I... it won't go away. I've had a head cold

too, I was going to call but there was some problem with the phones—in the building I mean.”

Patrick was looking through to the living room, glancing at the clothes strewn on the furniture, the mantle cluttered with jars of ointment and prescription bottles.

“As a matter of fact, I won’t be coming back to the office. I’m moving.”

“What’s this then? Does Simon know?”

“No. I have to tell him. You see I’ve decided I need to spend some time with my father back in Wiltshire so I’m not going to stay on here. It’s a bit sudden I know, but that’s the way it is.” He felt himself balking at the ruse, and yet beneath that feeling was a relief, an unsentimental farewell to the bond of simple honesty, to the assumptions they might ever have shared. He had occupied himself with the idea of this man’s happiness, and now he could cast at him a distant glance, fiddling with the truth.

“Pardon me, I should have taken your coat,” James said, suddenly the consummate host, wielding politeness like a knife. “Won’t you come in and sit down?”

“I should be getting back.”

His expression was of confusion, as one might expect to find on the face of a man who has wandered into the wrong cinema and finds himself in the dark with strange or disturbing images.

Before he knew what he had done, James had his hand on Patrick’s cheek and was passing his thumb over the soft, freckled skin beneath his eye. “Thank you,” he said, “thank you for everything.”

Blushing, Patrick turned his head away and reached for the handle of the door. “I must go.”

He stepped down the walk to the gate and did not turn back on the street, but kept moving until he had disappeared behind the bus shelter and was gone.

James never did call Simon. At first, he harbored a feeling of guilt, a worry he had let someone down, but as the weeks went by, his sense of the world became ever more abstract. He began to doubt that if he went to the office there would be anyone there he recognized, or who would recognize him. The doctors had said this could happen, one’s memory might go, confusions could overtake you as the illness entered the brain.

Slowly, time began to evaporate, the process swallowing

whole periods of his life. He forgot Simon and the office, Patrick and the year he had spent worrying over his affections. One morning, he realized he did not recognize the flat he was occupying, and began to imagine that at any point the real occupant might return and send him onto the street. He wandered about the unfamiliar rooms, convinced at times that he was in the yard of his childhood, crouched by the bird bath where he would wait as dusk encompassed the room.

There was a common nearby, and he would walk there in the evening. Often, as he approached the far corner, where a bench sat empty in lamp light, he would feel nonplussed. From somewhere would come a barely audible whisper, one that vanished as soon as he stopped to listen, as a dream vanished beneath the effort of recollection.

Returning from his walk one evening he was accosted by a young woman. It was by the pedestrian crossing. She had just come over the road, and was about to pass by, when she came to a stop before him and looked intently at his face. She had the overlarge eyes of a lizard and a gaunt face which matched the color of her hair. She began to speak to James, asking him questions about his health, exclaiming how much weight he had lost. Did he need money, she asked. He smiled, and answered the questions as best he could, hoping she would continue on her way. He had seen her at a bad time, she said, rifling through her bag to find a cigarette, things were different now, she was out of all that racket. He nodded in agreement, and this seemed to comfort her, for her hands ceased to move so rapidly, and she placed one briefly on his arm. She was sorry, about everything, she said, she hadn't meant to bother him about herself. Was there nothing she could do? Politely, he declined, imagining she had mistaken him for someone else.

James sat in a room by a window, trying to read a book. It was afternoon, and outside there was a steady rain. The novel was about an old woman who captivated her granddaughter with stories of her ancestors, drawing closer and closer to the present, until finally she was telling the girl the story of the girl's own life, and the narrative had become a prophecy which frightened the listener. He read a few pages at a time, resting his eyes now and again, or just staring out onto the street. There, shawled women queued for the

bus, and old men with their caps pulled down hung in doorways, waiting for the rain to pass. Their silhouettes appeared fuzzy, blurred by the weather, their dark shoes blending with the wet pavement until it seemed to James as though they were sinking in mud. He shook his head a bit and returned his attention to the page. But he had lost his place in the story, and he found himself reading the same sentences over and over until the words made no sense at all. He put the book down, and looking out, was transfixed by what he saw: his father standing across the street, gazing up at the window. He was in his blue suit, his arms hanging straight at his sides, the corners of his mouth turned down. Motionless, he stared at James who felt as though heavy cables were being cast from the sockets of his father's eyes over the street and through the window until they wrapped themselves around his skull. He rushed to the window and put his hands against the pane, but when he looked again, the figure was gone, dissolved into the rectangles of concrete and the soot-stained wall behind.

It was later that day that he fainted, standing over the sink with a glass of water in his hand. He saw the counter begin to move quickly to one side, then blackness. When he came around he was lying on his back on the linoleum floor. The room was dark, and by the projection of car headlights sloping across the ceiling, he could tell it was dark outside as well. He lay there awhile, listening to the cars pass, and further off the sound of jumbo jets descending to earth. When he moved to rise, he found he had no strength in his arms, and shifting about on the hard floor, realized he was lying in a pool of sweat. For a moment, panic gripped his chest and he felt he would scream. But just as it had arisen, so it passed, and he stared again at the sloping lights of the ceiling. Gently, images flowed before his mind, and the inscrutable enormity of remembered life washed back over him, leaving him weightless and expectant. He thought of St. Stephen's, and the exhilaration he had felt on winter afternoons when games were through, running back over the fields to where parents waited in their heated cars; and he thought of his sealed letters gathered on the living room shelf. He was calm. Soon he would be home again, resting beside his father's grave, just as the minister's letter had promised.

MICHAEL MERCURIO

Somewhere in my bones the moon rests her calcified head,
tired from the day, from pulling at the ocean
from watching the shifting of the continents
anticipating the moments of weakness
inherent in geology.

She, too, has felt the shifting skin,
and she knows that all bodies must fall
from moment to moment
and she knows that she fell once,
and her skin will heal.

And her eyes, filled with ash and light
will clear with sleep, to watch tomorrow
as mountains learn to stand alone
and I will be lighter, left with my own thoughts
of many wings that stipple the sky.

BRUCE SMITH

In the Empire of Love and Treachery

On the day of the reincarnation,
our debts settled, our hands transparent
in the last light with our discharge papers

and, no, we won't repeat the same mistakes
twice, three times, the gluttony and the arrogance,
the wrath and the lechery, but first

a bowl of Forgetfulness soup. We're hungry,
we'd forgotten how hungry, we can't remember
when we've ever been this hungry...

She set traps, my mother, and captured sparrows
that her father, home from the arsenal,
ate, a little something

for nothing, baked and taken with wine,
drinking up all the broth
while the ghost in the wind

returns and circles the house
in a course like the proofreader's mark
for delete. It was the murderer

mystery and the romance
she read for the body foreshadowed
and brilliant under the bare bulb

or the moon, and she drank deep,
I believe, of the sweethearts and the stiff,
nights, when she was off work, the aspirant of tap

and jitterbug, wishing to dance the undanced
numbers she heard on the radio
of her bobbed head, big bands

with their hungers and humors,
 their choirs and dominions,
 their calls for vaults and violent falls.

Imagine the smell of gunpowder in the air
 all day at work. It's no wonder
 that the men took violent pains to see

their heartbeats sparklessly hammered back
 into almost silence, that vortex of cautions
 and quiet, the *doom* of the heart's

stressed syllable, heard, but as if at a distance
 like the bird's one muscular contraction
 and flap is heard. *What was that?*

she thought she heard murders
 in the muffled exhaust of cars,
 enflamed things that were extinguished
 by the alive-at-this-moment
 we take one breath of, one crumb of, one sparrow,
 one sparrow's song of, and eat it against this century.

The Count of Monte Cristo's system
 was small doses of arsenic and wolfs bane
 taken to prevent his death in the empire

of love and treachery. And if a boy
 were to read this story and remember,
 would he be nobility? I dream

with a schoolboy's mind that loves
 to pass and please, eye to the teacher, of something
 not permitted my human, my American,

my turbulent earthling. As a boy
 I would metaphysically fuel those jets
 I would assemble with intoxicating fluids

and shoot. Not only to fly
but to drive the gods into layer
upon layer of sky unknown to us.

Another color and time.
Another bridegroom and bride.
Who or what was it that I was

in that other life? And why this present,
this hemlock, this venom, this pardon,
this violent first person,

this bestial lick and heal, this gamut,
this letter, this press
I need to stay alive.

JENNIFER PIEHLER
Dachau's Horror



KATHY SAAD

Shame

Swallow the fleshy ashes that stick to the corners of your throat — walk on, eyes down, back bent, gems of salvation smoldering in your coat pocket, as empty eye sockets stare beyond the electric gray blue wire, waiting to be incinerated, praying to be shot first.

Blood Born Pathogen

I watch you take your manifesto of pills — a tribute to modern medicine. I think about the times when we used to go grocery shopping and fill the silvery cage full of items that we playfully knocked off the well-stocked shelves. We never read the labels, to see what had made our pleasures real. Now — we roam down the sticky aisles, our shoes squeaking, the only language between us aside from “no” and “probably not” and “definitely, no way”. We buy food to mix with your pills, so bland, that it won’t turn the thin walls of your stomach shades of flamingo pink and fluorescent green.

Your bony hands grasps the checkbook scrawling out a number too small to feed a grown man, but it feeds you. Suddenly you smile — and your coffee-stained teeth let pass a gravely laugh from your throat. And the poor cashier, who was in the way of our moment in time, a witness to your eulogy in the making, as you say to me:

“I only have two checks left. No need to order anymore.”

Su Corazon

(His Heart)

— *for my father*

I can't look
at the left side
of my father's chest

there
where the thick, dark,
Lebanese hair
will never
grow again
reminding me
and him
of the day
a stranger
with disinfected
stainless steel
tore apart
skin
and dug
through
flesh
to his heart
forcing the muscles
to grow over
the metal gadget

a pacemaker

I thought
that heroes
lived forever

The notion
of being 20 years old
and digging

a dark grave
to consume
my father
to mark
his life
in stone

makes my heart shriek
and scream for mercy
while my mind furiously runs away
from the painful thought
 he could die

When
I was told
about the surgery
my world
broke down

and every part of me
that came from him
separated itself
from who I am now
and choked the language from my throat

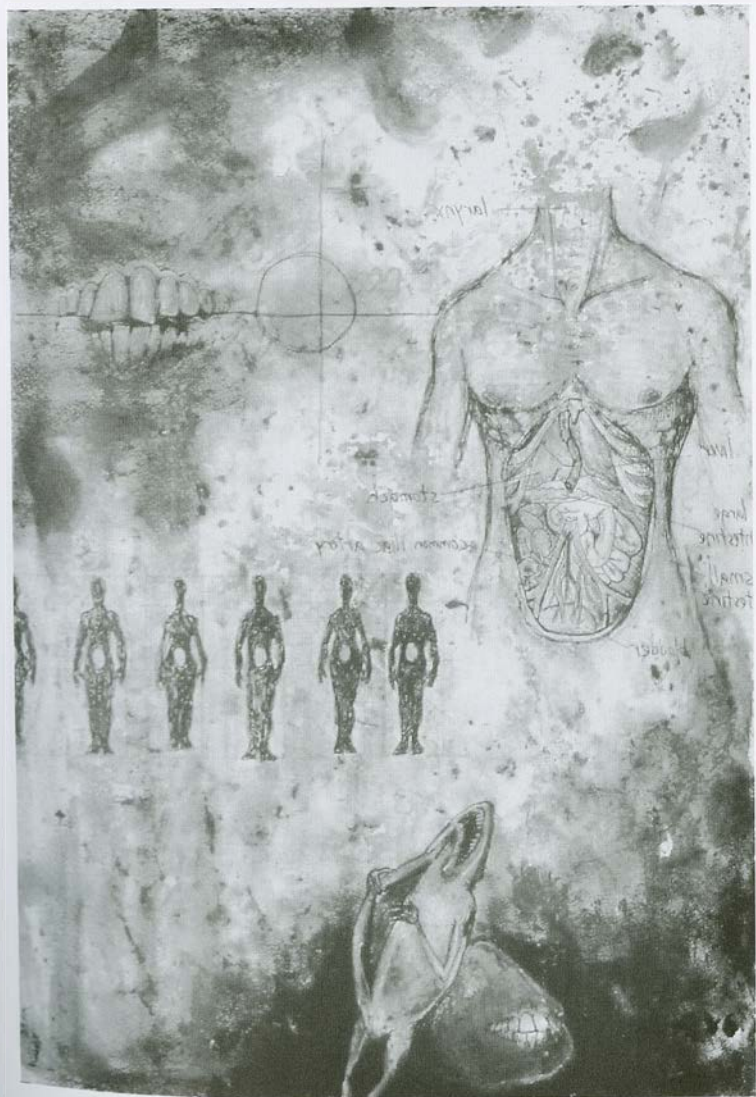
I stare at the glossy 8x10 photograph
tormenting myself
forced to swallow
my sharp-edged tears
lodged
in my throat
exploding
in my gut
resonating
in his eyes
as he whispers over the phone
I'm okay
 I'm okay







PETE MITCHELL
Untitled



Untitled



PAULANN PETERSEN

Reprieve

Through the phone a woman's voice asks
if I am my name, and when I answer yes,
tells me she'll put my mother on the line.
My mother wants to talk to me, she says,
and a crazy lightning sheers through my pulse
as I say *my mother?* certain of, but not thinking
of little miracles, windows of clarity,
brief spans — surely not that unheard of —
when the randomly struck notes of Alzheimer's
might suddenly form a pure chord,
full sweet sound of my mother saying
I don't want to be any bother,
but come get me, I need to go home
or You know, honey, if there's anything at all
I can do to help you, say the word
but quickly: the woman's confusion in the face
of my confusion, her stumbled apology explaining
she doesn't usually work this part of the floor,
she got mixed up, but my mom's just fine, actually
she's placing a call for my mother's roommate,
and somehow grabbed the wrong name and number,
oh dear, she can see how the call would be a shock
and she's sorry, really sorry, but my mother
is fine, is doing just fine.

Hanging up

I'm stunned and half sick at myself,
wishing I could have said without hesitation
Yes, put her on, wanting to believe
that with enough faith, whole and unwavering,
I'd have heard my mother —
her voice finding something on her mind,
maybe slow and faltering, but yes, just fine —
heard her speak to me one more time.

Migratory

Not even noon
and my feet are thick
with dust and heat. I stand
at the pedestal sink, placing
first one foot and then another
into the faucet's stream,

balancing like a shorebird —
one leg planted square to the floor,
the other crooked, knee to my chest,
an egret far from home.
I'm pale, almost white in this land
of olive bodies sun-browned darker,

deep. Heat riddles my skin
with discontent. It won't relent.
Bells from the Church of Metamorphosis
tell their story of ten, eleven,
highest noon. Height of sun.
The day's light stands straight up,

it floods straight down.
Land of heat, say the bells,
realm of swollen sun. No room
for a moon to hang its smudge of light
in a daytime sky. No place
for a pale moon of a bird to hide.

Narrative Description, Imaginative Leaps

The story beings as a figure, maybe
human, maybe not enough. A plain outline
filled in with keyrings and dreams,
arrivals, departures, little nicks
in the process of healing, alarm clocks

set and ticking, a few too many scars.
Then the figure is carefully
cut out like a doll from paper,
taken away from everything else,
placed on another blanker page.

What's left when the figure's gone
is more than simply a home minus
what's been taken away. What remains
is every possibility, each move
that figure didn't know how to make.

What happens next becomes
much less a matter of conjecture
than bone for contention —
whole skeletons of malcontent
without a single closet in sight.

BRIAN JOHNSON

Tarzan's Swing

(from *Field Days*)

Long, drawn-out thread of being
in the red hair of evening
I follow you, past the row of poplars
down Mulberry Street and Queen's Lane, to Stonybrook
married, to Candycastle Wood,
you flirt with me, you catch the air
as my compass jumps, a weathervane in the middle of your gaze
my fingertips cloud your lamp,
I look ahead, years, the boulevards cross between the pine-trees
there is a stream beyond us winding in a circle, a circular moon
on the bottom, smiling, and statuary float like buoys
while I dream on the wide banks, with the breeze
fingering your ringlets, and the frog trumpets to the frog's sun
and the nightingale sings to the nightingale's moon,
never a sun or moon
we haven't known or imagined, sinking in the hills
in the happiest valley, on a pair of chalets and their hatlike roofs
growing as the snow falls
on the sheep, the deer, the well, and the meadow
hidden, as flakes stir in the glass, the miniature
dome of childhood, the hemisphere shaking in our hands
as we cross the valley to find our grove, our cave, our castle-keep
and all our kisses dissolve in weeping, our cries
in keen silence, a mine
when all our metals dissolve in air, all our airs
in light, when a saintly lion sleeps in our study, or the salamander
crawls in our bed, we might be serene, and content
like a couple of elephants
in the act of being uncaged
or a pair of giraffes, who, extending their necks
to reach the fruit are condemned, thereafter, to live among trees
the stellar branch and the earthy bough and the twittering
lashing and creaking of Orpheus, the weather-beaten god
whom no one follows but those in love
or those wanting soul, thinking soul is approaching

clearly, when it lives somewhere else, in the rough
 off the fairway, at the root of a tree
 and the golfer who seeks a better lie has no choice
 but to toss the ball, blindly, over his shoulder
 and turn around and see what happened
 so love operates hand-in-hand with memory, soul is
 played outdoors: a flying squirrel, a lunging bear
 we are not ourselves, but our favorite animals gathered in a forest
 the night transfigured by a legion of sounds, a patrol, whistling
 beyond the horizon-line, in back of the cattails
 hang the matrilineal moons and the patrilineal comet, a family
 as the toys of Jupiter belong to God, and the universe
 a symphony of bells
 a field of carousels and marionettes, transcends the earth
 and the orchestra stalls and the opera-box are closed for winter
 and once we stood at the door, crestfallen, we rang every bell
 again, hesitating to go
 but you discovered the sign
 we are migrating not lost, you cried
 in Venice, the echoes followed you all the way to sleep, and me
 onto landings, as I dreamed of the broken shell
 on the shore where the sandcastle collapsed
 on the beach where the head is still visible, a crown
 and a body paralyzed by sand, which all the children forgot to unbury
 as their umbrellas flew toward the sea and their beautiful mothers stood up
 over the sound of waves sea-horsing the rocks,
 and our father closing the trunk,
 a cold wind pummeling the cliff-face
 my Samsonite heavy my sister blue
 my heart on vacation
 a hurricane with a pretty name Monique
 a name that launches the ropes, that fells the chains
 that brushes the velour jacket
 and opens the horn-book
 of youth
 the idylls of the king without his parrot, or his palace-walk
 Tarzan looking for his swing
 in our basement, in the cities of Africa
 let the two of us descend on stilts, wily
 tender-hearted, on the street of crocodiles

THE ALEMBIC

waving for the crowd
we are human, too, we are animals
on the turning stage, by a river
when the atmosphere of the festival is sad
when the snows of yesterday have melted
when, in the well's eye, a stone
a pebble is eternal
the last years of the kid, the ferriswheel
and the wooden bridge is falling, piece by piece, board by board
like the soldiers buckling in her, drowning her once-brilliant structure
only the moose is now a swing, a meaningless swing
a braid in the moonlight swaying from a nail
and the Model-T rusting in the riverbed, a lizard in the glove compartment
we discovered the summer we stayed in Chattanooga
we went to Chattanooga, we conquered Chattanooga as children
imagine, a crayon city, a land, moss slippers and the hole in the sea
where the stars and stargazers go to sleep, content, while the comets trail
in the foundries of space, and expire
before the sirens, before the rain-sheets, driven
by winds, or tigers, drunk
come nearer, in the cold, on the frosted glass
October making the sign of the cross
at midnight the god of jests appeared, casting
adrift, a kaleidoscope on the wall
when the dance of extremities is unstoppable
as long as the raindrops, but the rain slowed
and entered the woods, in black
the next morning a sea of timber
on the green, pieces, in the mud-spongy grass
or several hands of tissue, a cathedral
strung from the oak, hanging on the pine-limbs
a roll of paper tossed by the moon, and later
when the sunrays arrived on the oriental carpet, passing through us
we saw the spider's cathedral
and the crow's sun, between poles
approached by stages, an eye staring down on the horizon,
like our grandfather who believed in miracles
in the resurrection of life
athletic Saturday, Sunday hymns and the stories
leading to China, to Atlantis, Mesopotamia and the heart

when antelopes talked to women, and women shed their gowns
 when men slumped over thin-legged tables, and wept, filled with letters
 when the audience of poets and sandalbearers
 crossed the hill, on sun-baked tracks
 all limbs and all words stretched, all faces tanned and sweet around the lips
 gathered in the bath, lids open, and fingers dreaming
 spreading
 the sky as clear as water, as clean and endless and silent
 we could not trace a single elephant
 no airplane, no helicopters, nor a kite
 the sky alone
 the last dream of a Sunday painter
 forenoon, midday, afternoon and twilight
 when the sphere is delicate, and love, fleeting
 in the long aisles of Babel, by the busts
 of Rome, and the drawings of the Renaissance
 by pillars of salt, by the hieroglyphs, the obelisks
 and a colony of elms
 chalk-marked for death, leafless, on the trail to the shuttered house
 we follow up, we follow our sighs
 the donkey-eyed boy and the walleyed girl
 days wilting in the seed, the unwatered unrealized bloom
 despite the water-can, and our whispering
 Spring is here, Spring the Conqueror
 it's here, the gladiola has come, a turtlehead
 petals fell last night, they mingle on the patios
 with a cold snap
 the bloom diminished and the perfume
 left, and the speechless vine
 twisting and thickening its fingers
 to reach the top, only to be shaken, and lose its grapes
 in the storm whose sutures cross, thread around the sky,
 oblivious to bolt and chain
 horses, and gods within earshot, on the thresholds of parks
 and steps emptied of children
 our steps, our railings, missing, unmoored
 and the future takes the uncertain course, like the bat
 flying from the batter's hands, like the oar
 split in two, we go
 pointing, and smiling, for the way is crooked

and the batter's angry and the rowboat's sad
 the whole scene is painterly, or the world is unpainterly
 when a seagull flies from mast to flagpole
 anointing metal and non-metal, steel and pine, she purifies herself
 and adds to our vision of wavering things
 beauty, a screen unfolding
 we cannot leave, or walk beyond the mound of ash, to another
 in the distance, a campsite without time
 smiling in her handkerchief, Elizabeth, standing on the porch, Anna
 in the swing, dying of wishes
 Joan on a winding staircase, a landmark
 at the corner of Main and Grand. where eyes assembled in a line
 and headed up the sidewalk, around the block, for admission
 to the film, the silvers
 of love, and silence, a Vaseline
 on Saturday, the thirteenth of August, after dark
 when convertibles circled the town, with their luminous fins
 and whitewalls rolled down the street, in search of an idol
 in search of a statue with rivers of hair
 we looked homeward, ran, hand-in-hand, always on time
 to parents fixed for all time and the cupboards locked until mealtime
 we changed, and suffered ourselves
 the boy with high cheekbones, the sloe-eyed girl
 who returned by supper, laughing, with the pick of blood-roses in their laps
 who climbed the tree and fell down who climbed the wall and fell down
 we fell without knowing the way, and where
 we skinned ourselves
 in wide-open fields
 in places opened by feel, by chance, foresight took no part
 as the owl takes no part in the nocturne, or a frog
 listens, paralyzed, to the zither
 while a genius blows on his homemade flute
 pollinating the empty road, and the country air
 walking into twilight, the rising and setting of smoke, the late barbecues
 of tall aproned men and barebacked women
 the cows roasting on the balconies
 and flesh slapped, and hands dismissing the shortlived flies
 for the sake of greater peace, company
 understood as life itself, as love
 a simple thing, neither tragedy nor verse,
 but poolside talk without children . . .

BEN MILLER

Tiny Tales Of Mayhem, Madness And Murder

#121

Meta Goldman, proud and very elderly descendent of Emma Goldman, honored the birthday of her famous relative each Spring in a different, befitting way. One year she procured a hundred and seventy-three diaphragms from Planned Parenthood at wholesale and painted the outer cups with duck and pheasant scenes, exhibiting the finished product at the weekly "Our Lady of Men" craft fair in the National Guard gymnasium. Another year she whittled granddaughter Bethany a luxurious mahogany case in which to keep her vital birth control pills. This year, however, she wanted to do something out of doors and AIDS information oriented. Condoms were a natural. Dangling latex tendrils. Hanging rubber fronds full of . . . packed with . . . bird seed and peanut butter! That was it! The seed was in the basement. The Jiff in the cupboard. The condoms but a convenience store away. She drove there, bought two dozen Rough Riders from a speechless middle aged man and then went straight back home and stuffed them full with a soup spoon. It took a little under two hours. Her wrists ached and so did her neck. She couldn't wait till tomorrow though. She just couldn't. So, as the sun was setting, the crickets wailing, the tulips closing, she hauled the devices into the backyard in a bushel basket and proceeded, with the help of a kitchen chair and a flashlight, to hang each one from a prominent limb on the evergreen tree, right out in the open, where it would stand the best chance of nourishing and protecting two species of young.

#124

The Wirtz's dinner party menu changed dramatically after the triple suicide, an hour before cocktail hour, of their popular dog Cram, cat Niso and parrot Bluebeard. Mr. Wirtz took the hastily scrawled list from his stunned wife and ran red lights all the way to the local Food Etc. Barn. Tootsie Rolls wrapped in lettuce to start. Oatmeal soup to follow. After that a nice filet of caulking steak with sides of paper clip potatoes and steamed masking tape, and, to finish, a hefty serving of caramelized postage stamps. All the things to keep the mouths clamped shut about what need not be mentioned.

THE ALEMBIC

#126

I am a font. Not a word, or even a letter, but the container in which the letter lives. I want nothing from you. I just want much from myself, to fulfill my potential, that is, to provide decent affordable housing for all the homeless P's and W's and Q's out there. My font father drummed this into me. He'd make me sit at the desk every night shaping myself into sensible forms that would have pleased his hero, the child genius, John Stuart Mills. My mother was supportive, also, in her own way. She told me I don't know how many times. *looks are everything, and don't you ever forget it.* I miss them now that they are not used anymore. But, in a way, I feel that they live on in me and my brothers and sisters. In the way we stand still.

#131

The silver handcuffs he received in the mail when he came of age in 1956 were emblazoned with his ID — 15654AX — and smelled of the factory where they had been forged by slave labor. Of smoke and toe nails. He fulfilled his legal obligation by immediately encircling his right wrist. "I'm darn proud of you son," said Father, shaking the very shackled hand. Mother was too choked up regarding this right of passage to speak a word. She just stood there and sniffed. He was a man now, no doubt about it. One cuff on, one cuff off. And for the rest of his life, in this barred and blue country, he would be required to wear the cuffs to facilitate easy arrest should he commit a crime. Drinking coffee at Cafe Shlee with them on. Making love to Nandra and then Petra with them on. Working at the keyboard with them on. Not even noticing the weight after awhile, inside or out.

ALEXIS ROCHEFORT
In Frigid November

In frigid November, when everything grows gray
I cough on the sharp, icy, smoke-smelling air.
What can we do but accept? The only way for me
is to accept. The trees have no choice but to sleep.
For this crime, they receive the weight of the snow.

We get the results. "The end is inevitable."
Morning comes. "It's time we must part from one another."
We know that we've had more time than most.

The bride leaves her father in a final dance.
The grandfather lets go so the child can run.

Old and young before us have parted this way.
I would see you, and you me, Sundays in church.
We would be two souls intertwined in prayer.
I stand before your stone, unable to move, unable to pray.
I weep in the cold without tears; without understanding.

Living Vietnam

He says he still hears the bombs sometimes.
And now they go off inside my head.
I've seen the picture of the crater
the explosion left outside his bunker,
and I've tried to fill that gaping hole,
that swallowed his livelihood before I was born,
with smiles and A's and trophies and dreams.
And I can almost hear the machine gun ricochet
when his alarm shrills at 3:00 AM,
and he tries to tuck me back in,
but I follow him down the stairs to kiss him good-bye.
Those whirling chopper blades carved out his life
and I have been poured to fill that mold.
So I creep back to bed, pushing back memories
that are not my own. Waiting for his demons
to thrust me into another day of work.

In Your Good-bye Dream

You search the filthy basement for his face,
but he's not there. He'll never be there.
You'll fall asleep to the rhythm of his breathing.
But it's only your dog, looking dead in the blue before dawn.
And you hear his screeching, "I won't forgive you!"
You wish they'd stop the C.D. from skipping.
You'd wish they'd stop the phone from ringing.
He said he was coming. You wait outside. It is raining.
You're late for the dance! You have no dress!
You run down the highway, your scarf suffocates you.
He waits on the sidewalk with his motorcycle,
smoking a cigarette he throws at your feet.
The children are yelling, "It's your turn to play!"
But you are so thirsty, you can't speak a sentence.
You reach out your hand, and he slaps it back,
handing you a cup of gasoline. That was your last chance.

SHEILA FLANAGAN
Self-portrait As San Diego

I want the water to be blue
Metallic, like I always wanted
My tattoo to be.
I just keep building
Bavarian castles in the sand.
My shadow.
Smaller than the Taj Mahal.
Washed away by the tide.

I want to be the Coronado Bay Bridge.
At least I'd be warm
And I'd never see snow.
I'd be in sunny Southern Cali
And people would drive over me all the time
With their vice-filled suitcases
In the trunk.
I'd be helping them get somewhere.
And after, they'd buy postcards
Of me.
To send to friends.
Sometimes dark, with lights glimmering
Along a stretch of shore
Along my sides
In two mile long lines.
Dots of an Impressionist.

I'd rise in the sunset
With As and Vs of birds overhead.
And collect the stars from night.
Wrap them in a Bon Voyage package
With ribbons and bows.
And return the sky to blue.

Tylenol, P.M.

I'm seeing astronauts,
And their anorexic wives.
I'm alone.
I'm listening to the unfriendly silence
Of a blue tomorrow,
Because all the pretty things
Have gone into hiding.
Tonight, I gave up.
Romeo and Juliet
Are in the Army alphabet
And nowhere else, I guess.
I'm playing the piano,
All night long.
I'm drawing monsters on the ceiling,
And it's almost dawn.
I'm listening to spiders
Spinning their webs
And tangling myself
In the silky gray thread.
I'm turning the furniture upside down.
I'm vacuuming at three a.m.
I'm chatting with the demons
And laughing at the angels.
Tonight, it's just me and them.
I'm opening windows
And turning off lights,
Scaling the fences,
And sinking in deeper.
There's a picture of a perfect martian
With ducks circling overhead.
He's reading me a bedtime story,
And I'm explaining the concept of velocity to him.
I'm counting the blue tiles on the bathroom floor.
I'm playing chinese checkers with Abe Lincoln and a used car salesman.
I'm selling the rocking horse
To someone else who needs it,
Because I outgrew it this morning.
I'm seeing the troll under the bridge.

THE ALEMBIC

He beckons with a smile.
His hat is blank, and the rest of him green,
And he hands me a box of Crayolas.
I'm spilling ravioli into a waterfall,
And it's raining malt liquor.
I'm already drunk from too much lemon pie,
And we cry together,
The sky, the river, and I.
Aristotle just asked me a question,
But I don't know the answer.

J.R. STEWART

*A Lakota Woman Speaks To A Corpse,
Of The Seventh Calvary,
During The Evening Of June 25, 1876*

The Greasy Grass licks your blood from my hands.
I cannot see where my own blood ends.
I am breathing now the sharp air of your death.
Your hair is the color of the grass, but is dead and strange.
It reminds me to watch the sun kiss the hills,
putting a blush upon the cheek of the sky.
My husband fell seven days ago in the Rosebud
with a great hole in his chest.
He will make my cheeks blush no more,
but, oh, how they do burn.

I take your eyes
because you do not see.
I take your ears
because you do not listen.
Your feet are mine as well.
You cannot chase children on the Other Side
and you cannot escape my son,
who sang his death song after you vomited yours.
You were not ready for death.

Today was a good day to die.
The Great Spirit sings new songs.
On the Other Side, I hope all you *wasichu*
go elsewhere and do not bother us.
If you must exist in that life that comes after this world,
I hope it is behind a great spirit mountain.
Maybe you are only different while you breathe this air.
maybe it is this air that makes you crazy,
waiting to own everything that is.

Boomer

Curtains of rain
drawn against warmth and sun
keep the study,
brooding books
framed in orange firelight,
at the grey edge of darkness.
I sit overstuffed
in a grandfather's chair,
feet in their wool kicked up
on the hearth steaming
like the cup resting on my thigh.
I should go back to the door
and get the boots,
still wet and cold,
and dry them here with me.
But given my mind this day
it is too far to go.

My parents did the last Great War
and then bore us into a peace
whose illusion is easy to maintain.
White guys weren't fighting white guys.
We boomers are the hangover
from one hell of a victory party.
We are the watermelon seeds shot
from between the squeezed fingers of
the early and middle Forties.
We grew up and honed our killing
in the new Third World where we learned to
ignore the intimacy of regimental death.
Our parents never got to kill Russians
on a scale large enough to generate
the heat of war so they taught us
that sophisticated weaponry fires ammunition
equal to the weight of a fat wallet.

The rain rattles again against the glass,
sinking me deeper into the chair,
loathe to look out at the trees
dancing in the storm for my amusement.
I thought a walk through the howling
would cheer me and shake loose this
dire turn of mind.
The wood I burn in one evening,
to dry my socks and light my attitude,
would serve a Sarejevo family for a week.
Those white guys are fighting,
but they have no money so they don't count.
I feel the bite of guilt and watch
the whiskey and coffee clash
in my central nervous system,
seeking to generate false euphoria
in the absence of my own.

Stuff

A hanging bicycle
 the sleeve of a coat
 the chopping block by the woodpile
 the woodpile
 a motorcycle
 a car with no doors
 an unfinished model boat
 car doors
 a pile of papers on the counter
 a pile of papers on a table
 a pile of papers on another table
 on another counter
 on a desk
 on the floor
 on any convenient ledge
 dishes in the sink
 paperbacks in piles
 clothes at the end of the bed
 socks and underwear on the rug
 shoes in the living room
 guitars and their cases
 amps and toys and wire
 boxes
 appliances that have no homes
 haunted hearts
 bones of old lovers
 pictures of relatives just born
 pictures of relatives newly dead
 pictures of relatives as children
 as young adults
 as those about to die
 hours on the clock
 someone else's work

It is all in the way
 catching at my sleeve
 tugging at my heart
 clawing my mind

as I try to clear
a space in my life
for who I might be
room

if I can just make

MARTHA GIES
Readiness

After thirty-three years of not seeing him, of receiving only the occasional evocative postcard — of Feininger, Cocteau, or Schiele drawings, and once a head of Eleanor Duse — Della got a phone call from Barnes Lundstrom. He asked her to join him at Vesuvio's in the middle of the afternoon. Della tried to tell him that there were better places to meet for a drink, but his heart was set on seeing North Beach again.

She went with great anticipation. He was one of the few with the dreams of his youth intact. Years ago, all of her friends had vowed to always hold their hearts open to adventure. Yet it was as though their lives had been lived, not forward through time, but downward through space. Earthbound by habit or laziness or fear. There are not many, Della had decided, who resist these spiritual laws of gravity. Barnes Lundstrom was one.

After moving from one university town to another, he'd finally stopped traveling and settled in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In 1995 he turned 63. On the phone he told Della he had expected to finish out his life much as he had lived it for the last decade. And then — he said he'd tell her about it later — he'd gotten an unexpected phone call.

Della arrived at Vesuvio's to find him seated near the window, and he stood to embrace her. She was not prepared for how he looked, even though he'd sent her, the year before, a newspaper clipping which showed his beard to be nearly white. In the photo, he carried a placard which read: "If you work for peace, stop paying for war," and in the margin he scrawled, "Portrait of the Artist as a Grey-Beard Loon." The eye wires of his glasses were perfect circles, like those seen in photos of James Joyce.

Now he stood before her in an old raincoat. His eyes were still dark and expressive, but he appeared shrunken, his skin tight and translucent over his cheekbones. Her eye went to his frayed cuffs and to a coffee stain on the front of his raincoat. Once, when Della was 19 and Barnes 33, she had imagined they were the same age. As she settled into a chair, she tried for a quick glimpse of herself in the window, her jeans jacket, scoop-neck leotard, close-cropped hair, but she got only a view of Columbus

Avenue traffic stopped at the Broadway light.

"Barnes," she said. She laid her hand over his.

"I wondered if I would recognize you," he said. "But the moment I saw you, I knew that smile."

"Didn't you write me that you'd quit flying?" Della asked, too self-conscious now to smile.

"I had quit doing a lot of things," he said, and gave a short crow of a laugh. "That was before the miracle."

"The miracle," Della said.

"Exactly," he said, beaming. "In October I got this phone call from a person I hadn't seen in years. She said she was holding to passes to the Vermeer show for January. She said she'd thought about it, and there was no one she'd rather go with than me. She asked me to meet her in Washington, D.C. I went, I spent two days with her. Afterwards, I went back to Chapel Hill, quit the landscaping job, gave the boys the deed to my house, and filed for social security." He had delivered all this in a breathless recitation. "She lives in Bodega Bay," he added.

"And you're on your way there now."

He grinned widely, nodding his head.

The bartender strolled over and they ordered. Della asked for a white wine, and Lundstrom ordered a Linkwood. "Haven't got that," the bartender said with impatience, and he suggested Laphroig, which he served neat, in a heavy shot glass. The first time Lundstrom brought the glass to his mouth, his hand shook with palsy. He attempted to steady his wrist with his left hand. Della directed her attention to the inside of her purse, where she examined a silver pen and then her blue comb.

"Have you seen *Children of Nature*?" she asked, looking up again after a moment. The film was about an older couple who run away to the wilds of northern Iceland.

"I don't watch movies," he said. "I have a tape of Alicia Markova dancing *Giselle*, and I watch it once a week."

Hearing his tone, Della decided to skip it. Markova. An English ballerina who had danced, at age 15, with the Ballet Russe. Della associated her with a certain poetry and fragility, but had never seen her on film.

"And are they all *movies* now?" she asked, wryly. In the old days, it was *films* they saw together. *Movies* was a word reserved for the mindless entertainments from Hollywood.

"Maybe it's come to that," he said, and he laughed. His was a

quiet life before this phone call, he wanted her to know. Evenings he enjoyed a good Spanish *rioja* and had found a local distributor who would order it for him by the case. An expensive pipe tobacco, which he bought mail order from New York City, was his only other indulgence. Except for his annual tax-season protests, when he picketed on the sidewalk in front of the post office, nothing interrupted his routine. He still had his literary pleasures and, as a gardener, work that was good and independent and honest.

They talked Chapel Hill. Barnes had been sharing his home with his two sons, now in their twenties. Their mother had gone the way of his first wife before her, back to school to earn an advanced degree. "My wives get divorces and then doctorates, in that order," Barnes said. Here he'd been, his coy smile intimated, with only a master's degree, and raising the kids.

She did not ask about his work because he had kept her apprised of its major turnings, through brief letters over the years, and those postcards. He had left academic life at the end of the eighties, feeling he no longer had a place in education, once it became so consumer-driven. He had started a worker-owned landscaping company with three other people when he quit the university. For the name of this company, Lundstrom had proposed, *The Geranium*, after a much-loved Theodore Roethke poem; in Lundstrom's mind, Roethke's life and work was the important link between his two careers.

Della tried to talk to him about the Joyce conference scheduled for Ireland, where she had wanted to go for years, but he showed no interest.

He asked her if she still read Proust. Della saw the strategy in his question — from Proust to *Remembrance of Things Past* to Vermeer. Barnes wanted only to talk of his current adventure, and was awaiting the first moment to bring the conversation around.

"So you are in love," she said, half resenting his self-absorption.

"At least you're not going to ask me how old she is," he said. This time he brought the shot glass to his lips in one swift motion.

"She's young, isn't she?" Della asked. "I'd guess twenty-five?" A look of wild hurt flashed in his eyes. "That was just my guess," she murmured.

He laughed out loud and slammed his glass against the table. "I don't know how you do it!" he said.

"How did you happen to know her?" Della asked.

"She was in the last continental lit class I ever taught," he said.

"You had a relationship?"

"No, she was a student," he said. "Her call came as a surprise."

"And you've dismantled your life on her account?"

"She was the second woman I ever fell in love with at first sight," he said, and he rested his chin on his hand and gazed at Della. "You were the first."

* * *

Della first met Barnes Lundstrom in 1963, right after she moved to the Bay Area. She was enrolled in classes at Berkeley that summer, and another man had taken her to Lundstrom's Russian Hill apartment, where a number of concerned people had gathered to listen to tapes from Birmingham. From the moment Barnes opened the door, there was an electricity between them. After that night, Barnes took Della to see foreign films at the Surf — Truffaut, Renoir, Antonioni, Kurosawa. His favorite was Bergman, whom Della had also admired right up until *Winter Light*, which they saw together. "But he's the only director grappling with the big questions, Barnes had insisted.

To her, the film was cold. But Lundstrom was God-haunted, she'd decided, like Bergman himself. Beneath Lundstrom's professed atheism lay a natural religious temperament, one which watched seasons and marked signs and cultivated memory and welcomed the dark.

They ended most evenings drinking Metaxa — the moon and the stars, he called it, because of the golden stars on a midnight blue half-moon label. They only had that one summer together. He had received an appointment to Miami University, and would soon be leaving for Ohio. Although they were seeing each other three or four times a week, Barnes wrote her every day. They kept up this intensity without ever becoming lovers. There are some men to whom a woman does make love for fear of disturbing the force of their romantic projection. Or so Della thought back then.

"It's amazing," Barnes said to Della, "how many things I remember about you considering as how we didn't . . ."

"Spend all that many hours together?" she suggested.

"Exactly," he said. "Maybe I knew from the very first instant how unforgettable you'd be."

She laughed. "How long did we have together?"

"I left San Francisco the day Theodore Roethke died."

"I never realized that."

"I didn't find it out myself until I got to Ohio," Barnes said.

"He was still on the faculty at University of Washington, and he'd gone swimming with some rich friends of his on Bainbridge Island. He had a coronary occlusion, and three women pulled his body out of the pool."

"When would that have been?"

"August 1, 1963."

"My God. Then our whole time together in San Francisco was actually only forty-five days?"

"Forty-five days?" Barnes repeated. "Yes, maybe it was that long." And that elfin smile of his appeared.

And so Lundstrom told Della about the trip to Washington, D.C., where it had been unseasonably warm in January. He had arrived in the early evening by train. After spending an hour contemplating the monumental Beaux Arts design of Union Station with its huge domed ceilings, he had taken a taxi to Georgetown, where the woman had reserved him a room. He was surprised at how many cuisines there were to choose from in Washington, as though around each embassy orbited several culinary satellites. He chose a small French restaurant near his bed and breakfast, where he ate beef steak and ordered a Bordeaux. He didn't know if she were already in the city, nor where she was staying. He relished these first hours alone. He was content to savor, more than the wine or the sights of a strange city, an alertness in himself that he'd not felt in years. Travel, he decided, was about this *readiness*, a cultivation of the receptivity deep in ourselves, more truly than it was about the experience of new avenues or chapels or trees.

He slept that night in a strange bed, the mattress softer than that which he was used to. He listened to unaccustomed sounds in the street, and woke to the running of water through the pipes when, at 4:00 a.m., someone flushed a toilet in the room above.

At 10:00 the next morning, all of his senses buzzing, Lundstrom waited outside the National Gallery and watched Laurel — that was her name — walk slowly toward him. She wore a yellow cardigan sweater over a long crinkled, gauzy skirt. Later he would mark that moment, when the East Wing's improbable axe-blade edge severed him from his old life.

And so they spent the day together in contemplation of

twenty-one canvasses, steeping themselves in the imagination of this painter, about whom so little is known. He lived in 17th century Delft. He operated a tavern on a busy market square. He had eleven children. To supplement his income he sold fabric and dealt in art. And still he had gone bankrupt. He died of a stroke, when he was 42. He had been a convert to Catholicism. Most of his paintings are set in two rooms of his own house.

Looking at the work, Lundstrom was struck by the thought that things do not happen in their own time, that his response to the show was something he brought with him, not something evoked by the paintings at the moment he saw them. His pleasure in the Vermeer was intertwined with memory and with literature and with Oriental spice of Laurel's perfume.

They took time for a cup of coffee. Lundstrom said he was overcome by the sense that Proust, too, was somehow present at this showing, because that sunny patch of roof in the "View of Delft" had meant so much to Proust's character, Bergotte; because it had been Proust who brought Vermeer to our attention in this century.

They went back to the exhibit and walked slowly past each painting once again, fixing in their minds the woman opening a window, the woman weighing gold, the woman making lace, the woman reading a letter, the woman pouring milk.

The next day, Lundstrom told Della, they had talked for hours. He didn't say how they had spent the evening, but Della's intuition told her they'd gone to dinner together, but not to bed.

They had taken a carafe of coffee to the sunny rock wall behind his bed and breakfast. Lundstrom filled his pipe, smoking it thoughtfully, and Laurel smoked French cigarettes from a blue box. They told each other what they most remembered about Vermeer.

For her, Laurel said, it was the way the light picked up objects. She had read somewhere that Rembrandt had ground glass into certain pigments to achieve a greater luminosity. Had Vermeer also, she wondered? She remembered in particular a pearl earring and a silver pitcher. And, of course, that patch of yellow roof. She looked away when she said this last, as though she did not want to make a big thing of it.

For him it was the women, something in them he'd never seen before: saucy or merely candid, they had an indifferent assurance, an insolent nonchalance which fascinated him. "But I

also keep seeing that one room in which he painted so many of his subjects," Lundstrom said, "the leaded glass window to the left, the yellowed map of the Netherlands on the back wall."

"Vermeer understood that what we know of beauty is recreated from the same few elements," Laurel said, and she exhaled a thin stream of silver smoke. "The elements just get rearranged."

And at that moment, Lundstrom was ready to quit landscaping the gardens of others.

* * *

Through the window at Vesuvio's, Della saw a thin woman in a trench coat and three-inch heels step out of a club. She stood at the curb, rubbing her forearms, watching traffic. A silver Porsche, westbound on Broadway, pulled to a stop, and a man leaned across the passenger seat handed her something through the window. Then he drove off. Della remembered why she no longer came to this part of town. Barnes hadn't seen it. His was a world of Alicia Markova dancing *Giselle*, not of a stripper who needed a hit to get through the rest of her shift.

"So when are you heading up to Bodega Bay?" she asked.

"Depends," he said. "I haven't been able to get Laurel on the phone."

"What!"

"I've spoken to her brother in Oakland, and he says she's there. She just doesn't answer."

"Are you still going?"

"Listen to this," he said. He fumbled through a leather satchel and brought forward a journal, a special book she could see, with marbled end papers. He flipped through the pages looking for the thing he meant to read. "Okay, here," he said, and he creased the journal open at the seam. "Hamlet says this to his friend Horatio." He cast a meaningful glance at Della, and then he began to read:

*If it be now, 'tis not to come;
if it be not to come, it will be now;
if it be not now, yet it will come —
the readiness is all.*

"Listen to that!" he said, and he looked up, wild-eyed and triumphant, still the literature professor after all these years. "Listen to that word *readiness*, the thrill of those polysyllables after all those short words." And he read her the passage once again, marking each beat with a quick chop of his right hand. When *read-*

i-ness sizzled up the second time he opened his eyes in a wide punctuating glare, and then cackled humorously to himself. When he was done, he folded the book back into his satchel.

God, he *was* a grey-beard loon, Della thought. But then she had a flash of herself in front of her Joyce class, reading with the same private sensual pleasure the last three stunning paragraphs from "The Dead," while her students sat patient and unconvinced, yet politely resisting the impulse to exchange knowing looks.

"She wore yellow," Barnes said.

"Yes, you told me," Della said.

"You wore yellow the night George brought you to my apartment the first time."

"Surely I wore black."

"Yellow," he repeated. "A yellow sleeveless two-piece dress."

She had no recollection of such a dress. "You have a remarkable memory, Barnes."

"I have no memory," he said. "I have scars."

* * *

For days after his visit, Della was haunted by Barnes Lundstrom, by the palsied hand shivering a shot glass up to his lips and the stain dribbled down the front of his frayed raincoat, signs that, in the eyes of a stranger might be dismissed as pathetic. In leaving his job and his home to trail after a woman thirty-nine years his junior, he might even be taken, by many, for a fool.

In her heart Della knew Laurel would never answer the phone, that she had already fulfilled her mission of bestowing on a favorite teacher the perfect romantic two days, that she had choreographed the unexpected phone call, the disorientation of a strange city, the charm of her own personal warmth and wit, the heady promise — withheld for the moment — of physical love. And she had staged them against a backdrop of those rare and valuable paintings, and the lovely lost world which they depict. Della knew that Laurel would not answer the phone now, three months later, because she had nothing else in her repertoire. In order not to diminish the effect, she must never consent to an unrehearsed encore.

As the images wafted through Della's mind over the next few days — Vermeer's patch of yellow roof, Laurel's yellow Cashmere sweater (the same shade of sunlight-on-straw yellow, Della was

certain) — she realized that even though she could identify with Laurel's actions, her sympathy lay with Barnes. In the tradition of poets and madmen, he had come completely unhinged.

Two weeks later Della received a note from him, postmarked Seattle. And this was how she learned that he was neither in Chapel Hill, nor with Laurel at Bodega bay. He wrote that he was on his way to Bainbridge Island, that the old Bloedel estate was now open to the public, and that he intended to visit the spot where Theodore Roethke had spent his last afternoon.

He said nothing of going home and nothing of trying to phone Laurel, let alone of settling into some domestic situation with her. He said only that he wanted, frankly, to swim in that pool.

The card troubled Della, and she lowered it slowly to her lap. Evidently he did not know that before the Bloedel Reserve was first open to the public, in 1988, the swimming pool had been filled with gravel and a Japanese meditation garden now stood in its place.

Barnes appended a line from Roethke's "Words for the Wind."

*I am no longer young
But the winds and waters are;
What falls away will fall;
All things bring me to love.*

There were no further messages from Barnes Lundstrom. That was a lovely spring in San Francisco, but after his visit Della wanted something else she could not name. The Vermeer show had moved from Washington to The Hague, and in May, less than two weeks before it was scheduled to close, she frantically called the airlines to see what it would cost to fly to Amsterdam. It was expensive, of course. She hesitated, unsure of who might teach her classes. And then it was early June, and she knew the show had come down, and it was too late.

Yet she was still restless. She found herself down at the library looking through books of Vermeer's work, as though the answer to a riddle lay in the paintings themselves. There she saw something she had never seen before: as Vermeer moves from his early browns and reds to the glowing blues and yellows for which he is famous, he stops using a convention which was popular among genre painters of his day, and that is the device of the open

door, a door on the rear wall which leads to other rooms, other thoughts, other lives. In the later masterpieces the door behind the subject is shut, all escape routes closed off; the room is self-contained, and the blues begin to glow with an ethereal light.

LIAM RECTOR
Careering

He was a take-charge sort with a can-do attitude
And his career was going... well, good—smackers—
Until oops, some subordinate, some fecal member

Of the supporting cast he'd hired got *stupid*,
Got loud around the wrong producer, an old-timer,
One what still had enough lion in him to make it

Hard, real hard, on any new-comer... So we was all out
For the moment, down for the count and the hard view
Of the canvas, in trouble up to our asses with our careers

Looking *kaput*.... But there were other packs—there always
Are—other packs to run with (like George Raft said: A smart guy
Can always find an angle), and soon we had assembled another

Rock and roll commando unit and by god we was back up,
We was doing it... (“Regrets, I’ve had a few”—
But fuck that) And then’s when *she* came back

Into his life—into the picture—the real *looker*,
The Metropolitan Ballet ballerina who smoked Luckies
Without a filter, so fit she was—so fine and determined.

He had hung with her when they was both back in high school,
Full of longing, and she waved him off when it looked like
He might stand between her and what she wanted, which had

A distinctly uptown ring about it.... He was the sincere sort
Got the bends when he went above 14th street, and he stayed,
After she dumped him, down here with the rest of us....

But she tired, and she tired quickly, of the kinds of guys
She was meeting, and she was back now for some of the roughness
And affection of the streets what made us all who we were....

LIAM RECTOR

We begged him to stay away from her, not to get tangled
In all the artsy crap came with her, but he said to can it—
She was back and they was doing it together. She'd changed;

She wouldn't be trying to out-class him anymore. She was back
With him.... And by then he was getting a nose for the uptown action
Himself, because that's where the money always is,

And she wasted no time insinuating us all into an entirely new *set*.
We cut out the garage and the bar crap, where we was being
The voice of the people, and the things we then started doing to

Real, well, *conceptual*.... We'd set up a mannequin in the middle
Of the stage and then we'd all rush him, rifle-butt the top
Of his head off, pull back the top of his skull skin, and then

Piss into the fucker's brain and make sure there was steam
Rising off where our pee hit. We was going piss-wild!
And the people uptown seemed to go for it, us acting out

Their wildest sexual (and spiritual) crap for them, and she
Started doing all the front work for the group, which soon had us
Regarded as an internationally renowned troupe of postmodern

Piss artists, which is just about the time I met Monique.

JOHN M. RODERICK

The Welder

The welder shifted his enormous weight back on his heels as he crouched before the blue flame. He looked like he was offering prayer in homage to the flame. He lifted the welder's glasses to his forehead, smudging the soot that was forming on the furrows of his wide brow. He looked backward through the small opening he would have to squeeze his body through again when exiting the compartment and cursed. Then he pulled the goggles back over his eyes and continued his weld line. The acrid smell of burnt oil mingled with the melting flux and irritated the lining of his nose. The welder thought about the hell and could not imagine how it could be any worse. He sneezed violently three times, and the flame of his torch momentarily flickered wildly and then returned to the neat geometric pattern it etched along the steel.

Within the bowels of the hull, the summer sounds of children's laughter from the nearby beach could not be heard. The only sound from above was the intermittent thunder of a hammer resonating drum-like against the deck. The other noise came from the welder's torch as he welded a bead of molten flux along two plates of steel. Salt water which seeped along the floor sizzled into clouds of steam at the point where the blue/red flame met the cold iron. As the metal plates heated up, the thin layer of oil that seemed to be everywhere rose up in smokey vapors. The temperature on the sandy beach was 89 degrees. Inside the small compartment where the welder welded, the temperature was 110.

When the lunch horn belched twice, the ship builders above slowly made their way to the wash room across the ship yard. The droning clatter of steel tipped shoes along the deck drowned out the piercing shrill of the horn, and the welder continued his toil until he heard the rap of a hammer from above pounding out the tune of "shave and a hair cut, two bits." It was Rizzo's signal. The welder screwed the torch valve tight until the gas that fed the blue flame gasped for life and then flickered off. The only light now came from the small hole at the other end of the bulkhead.

The welder removed his goggles and took the cigarette lighter out of his pants pocket. He knew from his entry earlier that the

squeeze through the bulkhead was so tight that even the shape of his small lighter protruding through the pocket of his coveralls would hamper his delivery through the hole. The hazy, dim glow that reminded him of the live above struck his retinas painfully. He knew that he would experience flashers again that night when he tried to fall asleep. His broad thumb and forefinger pushed against his eye sockets and rubbed the tired orbs before he ventured through the porthole size opening.

He first pushed his huge arms and shoulders through and then began a snake-like squirm to wrest his enormous bulk into the next compartment. He resembled an overgrown fetus struggling for delivery. When he broke through the womb, he lay for a short while panting. Sweat poured from his round face. He heaved forward and freed his legs. He would not be able to use them to stand to his full height until he cleared the next compartment opening which, fortunately, he thought, was much bigger. In the bilge proper, he stood and climbed the wooden ladder that would put him on the deck. His eyes adjusted slowly to the ever increasing intensity of August light.

The sun glinted off the small ripples on the Coles River like light from a shattered mirror. Waves lapped against the steel hull under construction in a slip of Bedford Marine. In the glorious history of ship building, from sleek schooners to stout whalers, from ocean liners to man-of-wars, Bedford Marine was cast as a minor player. Bedford built barges.

The welder heard the peals of children's laughter carried on the southerly breezes blowing from the town beach just a hundred yards away for the first time. They were the high-pitched summer sounds of children at play. Those on the deck of the ship under construction occasionally looked in the direction of the beach. They took off their hard hats, wiped the sweat from their foreheads and then resumed their own toil, blotting out the softer life.

"Hey, Welder, where the hell you been? You going to play today or what?" The caller was tall and thin with acne covering most of his face. He was about nineteen and the "gopher" at Bedford Marine. Besides running errands, his job was to keep the yard clear of debris and the deck free of scrap pieces of iron. He stood near a 50 gallon drum that had pieces of scrap iron sticking from it. He carried a chess board under one arm and had a black lunch bucket dangling from the other.

As the welder's eyes adjusted, he saw heat waves rising from the deck of the ship and he wondered how he would get through the rest of the afternoon in the hole. When he passed the gangling youth, he said, "Nice barrel, Rizzo. They got you guarding it?" He laughed and went into the washroom to scrub the black from his giant hands.

The yard boss was standing in front of a urinal and looked over as the welder's bulk momentarily blocked out the light when he came through the doorway. "Why do you bother taking a lunch break, Welder? You got enough fat on you to keep you alive for six months." The welder did not look up from the sink. "Hey, I'm talking to you. You get deaf down in the hole? How do you like your new assignment, anyway?" The yard boss laughed alone.

The welder worked at the sink on his blackened hands and then his puffed fingers fumbled with the brown paper towel rack which was already empty. He swore and wiped his hands against his soiled coveralls. Then he fished behind the coke machine in he corner and retrieved a gray lunch box and walked out into the yard leaving the yard boss in mid-sentence, "I said how do you like your new assignment in the hole..."

Men were scattered in small groups eating their lunches on the few patches of grass in the yard that were protected by shade. "Say, Rizzo," the welder said when he approached the acne faced youth who was off a little to himself sitting on a grassy tuft, "you set everything up?"

"Yeah, everything's set," Rizzo answered. Next the frail Rizzo the welder appeared even more of a hulking mass. The mass eyed the chess board on the grounds suspiciously. "You sure my knight was there?" the welder asked his eyes narrowing.

"It was there. You think I cheat? Come on. It's your move. It's going to take us a week to finish this game, you're so goddamned slow. What the hell kept you? Lunch started fifteen minutes ago."

"You try crawling in them holes below the deck and see how fast you get up here." The welder pulled a salami grinder from his lunch bucket and bit off a few inches. "I hope you don't screw this up. Everything better be set." Then he shifted his attention to the board and asked again, "You sure..."

Rizzo exploded, "You don't trust me let's just forget the whole goddamned thing." He pretended to gather up the pieces but was stopped by the welder's massive hand moving his own

welder had met his match. Those with no bets down cheered and coerced, "Just seven more feet. Just seven more feet."

"C'mon, welder. don't quit now."

Others were not so kind. "Put her down, fat boy. You're lucky you can carry your own weight around."

"Hey, welder. Maybe you should try carrying this!" Laughter broke out in the crowd. Sweat was pouring down the welder's arms under his long-sleeved shirt and dripping off his hands. His grip slipped slightly with the extra lubricant and his face reflected the dilemma. His cheeks were flushed brightly. Anyone monitoring his blood pressure at the moment would have given a start.

It was the welder's eyes, though, that reflected the test best. They started skyward and seemed oblivious to the shouts and noise around him. They even seemed oblivious to the huge barrel clutched across his chest. They just stared upward as if studying the endless blue for an intelligible sign. For a moment, the welder's great feet appeared cemented in place. He had just three feet to go before they crossed the line but they seemed resistant to any commands he might be giving them.

For the first time since he lifted the barrel off of the ground, the welder lowered his eyes and looked at the men around him. His gaze met with fists shaking and eyes glinting narrowly in the bright light. It was as though he had suddenly lost his ability to hear, but his perceptions of sight had improved a hundred fold. In the silence, he saw Frank spit into the dust again. This time to mark success. He saw eyes that ridiculed him and eyes that mocked him. Then he saw the acned face of Rizzo. It appeared tense as it stared at the line and the dirt just inches from his feet. He saw the bills clutched in Rizzo's hand as the gopher now made a fist.

Then the barrel bearer caught the eye of the yard boss, whose face cracked with a crooked grin but whose eyes stared meanly. The two men maintained their gaze for a few long seconds, until a slight twinkle appeared in the welder's eyes. Before the yard boss was quite sure what he had just seen, the welder dragged his feet across the line and dropped the barrel to the ground.

There was a momentary pandemonium in the crowd. Those who waged bets cursed loudly. A few in the crowd clapped. Rizzo came over to the welder and slapped him on the back. He counted out half of the take and handed the rest over to the welder, who stuffed the bill into the front pocket of the coveralls and looked

over to the yard boss.

"Get your ass down in that hole or you're going to get canned for taking such a long lunch break," the yard boss blurted before limping off in a rage.

" Yes, sir, boss, " the welder saluted.

Rizzo counted his money again, standing next to the welder. The other workers dispersed up on the deck and into the yard to an afternoon of toil.

The welder looked around and then slapped at Rizzo's outstretched palm. "You better move that barrel out of the way," the welder said. "Somebody would get hurt." He laughed and slapped at Rizzo's palm again and made his way up to the deck and towards the bilge. He was aware of the children's laughter coming off of the beach for the first time. He knew that the heat would not be as intolerable this afternoon.

Rizzo laughed, too, then the frail youth grabbed the barrel that the welder had struggled with moments before and easily carried it to the line of the drums at the edge of the dock. He took a few heavy pieces of angle iron out of the other barrels and tossed them into the nearly empty drum just for good measure. He resolved to begin reading the welder's chess books on strategy that night. Then he patted the small wad of bills in his pocket and turns his thoughts to Lizzy.

Clotheslines And Baseball

Our Fenway Park on a postage stamp
was a square patch of dirt and weeds,
that masqueraded as a baseball field
where second base was a moveable feast,
exact placement dictated by
puddles that stayed for days
after a heavy rain,
and the baseline rarely
the shortest distance
between two points.

Clotheslines zig-zagged
across the tiny backyard
And on washday
the lines rippled like a multi-national flag
of torn flannel shirts, faded jeans
bedspreads and robes,
new boundaries for an old game:

a ground-rule double of the ball
caught in Mrs. deCosta's sheets,
and a homerun if it cleared
Madeline Fleet's blankets
on the third floor,
three outs if the ball landed
in Hazel Baker's bloomers
or one of her basket-sized bras,
which also ended the game
when nobody wanted to knock
on Hazel's door

On some washdays
there was just no getting the ball
out of the infield

JOHN C. RODERICK
*Red Puddle In The Corner Of A Howard
Johnson's Painting*

Indigo blue,
A touch of
Yellow ochre,
And some cobalt black
Mixed in slightly imperfect proportions
Form a glowing aura that Bob Ross himself
Would be proud of.

Where are the happy little clouds?
I ask jokingly of the unknown craftsman
Whose latest creation sits proudly
On the Day-glo orange wall paper
Above the late night menu of Howard Johnson's
His masterpiece, my drunken amusement.

Torn away
From thoughts of an artist in a basement Rec. Room
Who brushed every ounce of his creativity
Onto this 11 1/2" x 16" canvas
From the art department of the local K-Mart,
Drawn to
The left hand corner, just above the \$25 price tag
Where a bleeding red puddle of ketchup sat in a snow drift
Placed there by another artist who once sat in my seat
Armed with a squeezable bottle of temptation

"How could anyone?"
His wife would ask,
Hiding her former pride behind a tear,
When they came in for Sunday brunch
At their usual seat of honor.

JOHN C. RODERICK

Mesmerized by the world of a man I don't know,
Riddled with guilt for a crime I did not commit,
In a position to play God with this artist's dream.

I pray

That he will never see my living room
Or the red, bleeding puddle which now graces its wall.

*A Football-Shaped Note From Kim Guimelli In
5th Grade Math Class*

With the care of two soldiers to the tune of "Taps" she folds
First in half, then half again, One corner bent down
Pulled taught to make an edge all the while avoiding
The shattering crinkle that would give away, over
And under, tucked in tight... a perfect right angle,
Equilateral bliss long before she knew what it was
To square both legs to find a hypotenuse
Now sealed and prepared to be sent
On a journey through the jungle
Of unbalanced plastic chairs
Into my hands which shake
With the hormone
Driven fear of
Getting
Caught.

KIM STAFFORD

Singing Bowl

With my finger, I touch the window as water touches. Here, and here. When there is rain on the window at night, I wear silk for you. Tonight, you have to come back, because I ache for you. The ten commandments all say no, but after the ten, every next command is yes. The rain commands the green urge, and my fingers command you. You have to come back from the streets, climb the stair to this bed, our bed. I have lit the candle. I have brought incense to this flame, and the smoke goes up, a green wire that kinks and turns, my wrist of smoke. I have wet my finger with perfume, and touched my hair, my skin. Here, your cleft behind my ear. You have come back to me in the dark, because first you will smell the incense, and then the scent, and then my breath. You have to come this close and kiss, because my body aches for you. At the party two years ago tonight, everyone was beautiful, but my light went to you, and you turned and saw me. You came to me, you live with me. You betrayed me, yes, and tonight you have walked away. But I have touched you, and I know how to bring you back.

I have touched you, and you remember in the green of the meadow, the grass that splayed out from us. You remember the river you could not pronounce, the circle of our bed in the deep grass where my scarf spread. I touched you, and you could not say words. I made your tongue tangle when you tried. You remember our day, the air like a silk veil. Deep in the tall grass, I touched you, and you have to come back. I was the command of sunlight, and you lived in me.

You have to come back because you gave me this begging bowl of brass, the bowl from the Tibet that sings. You made it sing, and then you gave it to me. I put it back in your hands, but you told me in one of your books it said, "All gifts to be received with grace, and nothing to be refused." You have to come back because I feel your hands holding my hands in this bowl. You gave me the bowl, and the smooth oak wand to make it sing, and I know how to bring you back.

I sit on our bed. First, when I hold the bowl, it is cold. Rain at the window knocks with its tiny hands. I warm my fingers at the candle flame.

I am bringing you back because your hands are touching me. Your hands are holding my hands, showing me how to touch the bowl and make it sing. I touched you, and that music made your tongue useless, all your books, the light of any other. Other women could parade, and you would turn to me. They all grew thin and blew away when I touched you. They were confetti, I the body in your embrace. And now I hold the bowl in my left hand. With my fingers I move the wood wand around the bowl's gold rim. You hear it, wherever you are, you hear it, this silver thread. You hear it spiral up from itself, and command, because I touched you like this.

I open my left hand wide, so the bowl lies balanced where my first two fingers open. If I could open my hand so wide the bowl touched me not at all, but stood suspended in the air, I could make it ring to split this window, splinter all the rain, tug the streets like ribbon and take you back. I bring this ringing up steep out of the bowl, a river of light in the room, all the horses of the water pounding, and the walls beating, beating thin.

I will bring you back to make your body sing like this. I will dizzy you, I will kindle you and you will burn in my hands. I will be rain, fire falling on you everywhere. The candle shakes, the singing touches you, reaches and finds you, and I am the rain, and you have turned. My touch is pure light, and you have turned. It rains, and the rain is my fingers, and I wear silk, and you turn. The streets are long, but I am the map, and you are a distance that is finished.

Now, now, now now you blur my eyes. Now I hear your hand coming to the door. Yes, your hand is wet. You have been reaching through the cold, and your fingers close on the knob. And you turn it, turning over and over, still. Silence at the threshold below. Rain at the window, silk on my shoulders loose. I hold the stick still so the ringing out of the bowl wavers and soars, soars and softens, softens and settles. The ringing is like a bird's wing beating softly, softly in place, a feather that turns and settles on the grass. You, there, below me. I hear the door behind you close. No light under the room door. You fumble up the stairs, your hand smooth on the banister. My light gathers and goes to you — under the room door.

a flame. I feel you, just outside. I feel you. For this moment, the loose buttons of my blouse. Yes. I command yes. For this, you open the door, and in the dark, the soft green sparks fly from me as I pull away the silk.

Le Vagabond Immobile

Remember how we said we didn't have to explain? If that night in the meadow can't, I can't. Woman to man in naked sunlight, not enough for you? What can I do, but say it's over? It's over except for this, this little promise. We said we'd write and tell what happened in a day, sometime before the new year. That was our good-bye bargain. Your idea. Very simple.

So here goes. I was in the bookshop *Vagabond Immobile* at eight, first customer, and Madame had a new translation of Grimm, and I turned to my favorites, and they came sweetly bitter to my tongue inside my silence as I read. Like you at first. Like chocolate so expensive it hurts.

You remember the one I read you by candlelight that night? From our bed, you reached for my book, and I read to you. I looked up and you had closed your eyes. You said that's one for the dark. So you closed your eyes and I stayed in the candlelight to read. "What can fill a room?" the father asks, the older son tries to fill the room with straw, with feathers. But the wise son, the youngest, the one who had been a lazy fool, he brings a candle into the room, and its light touches everything. He wins the whole inheritance. And then you loved. Then you rolled over and pinched the candle dark, and loved.

I read that story today, and then I had to close the book. For a while I stood with my knuckles tight, until Madame asked if I was well. She sees me. She is used to my moods. I said yes, and I would buy the book another day. I went for the *Jardin du Luxembourg*, rode the metro through the dark, through the dark earth, crossing in my lit box alone under the river, out and up the stairs and there the square was gray and cold. I walked where we walked, to take possession in my own body again. Two boys were insulting each other, practicing like their fathers for women. In the short one I saw you. And a bitterness came into me, a sorrow that someone made you that way, and you let them. Something withered me about the whole diminishing of life. Maybe I sat on that bench a long time, a tunnel going straight down into my thoughts. I was so small I had no magnitude. What shriveled us? I once owned all that work, carried your anger in my shoulders, in my neck. On my bench I felt the crunch of the sky itself, pressing

me down. But then a little bird the size of my thumb, way high in the sycamore, sang and filled the park, the trees, the sky. How can a candle wick or a bird's thumb have that amplitude? How will I ever get such amplitude? The song of the bird was bigger than the bird, bigger than my sorrow, your darkness, our story. On the gravel path before me, suddenly there was this light.

I stood by the bench and listened, listened. I closed my eyes, swayed out from myself, and it was years that filled my head. We only knew each other a month, but it was years of light compressed like coal. It was seasons, some kind of spinning. When we used to walk, you and I, a brightness filled the city. The air had some kind of gold dust that sifted onto everything. I had to remember, remember how I reach for fragments of that fullness now — little things remind me. But today, it turned around, and everything was bigger in me: the light of a book shining like a candle, a bird calling against stone buildings, a fragrance of some woman's perfume as she walks by me. In those days with you, it wasn't only light or music or fragrance — it was the whole breath that made me. And from inside this resonance made all of Paris shimmer — sun and stars, nights, conversations, silences.

Now you're the silence. My father is a silence, my mother. They're gone. You're not gone. You live. But you become a silence, a darkness you choose. I do not light your candle, read you my spirit, give you my body. Walking home to my apartment, standing on the Pont Marie, I looked down at the spiral in the water where it turns past the stone, and I knew that was where I'd put your letter, if you kept our promise. I will read your words, then put them down into that whirl of the water and send you to the sea. The ink can expand to fill the river, thin and pale and travelling away.

At my flat, I lay on the floor with my ear to the thin weave of the persian carpet, the frayed wool meadow that once was flowers, and I heard my neighbors below argue in their two voices. I had a record on, so with my right heard Françoise Hardy singing something very sweet, like the happy song of rain in a minor key, and with my left ear I heard the two fighting below, like you and me at the end, that phone booth we got into to fight in private, like an old life squeezed into a coffin to die fast.

I lay on the floor, and listened to that old war in my head. An old life below me and a new life above, both happening at once. Dust in my nose, defeat.

I left my chance open, and I stood up. Francoise silenced you with that bell groaning out of her voice. Something stared me humming and dancing, spinning. I will be soft and survive. I will be tender, and last. I will be the quiet one, and taste my own mind. I will feel and feel, hurting so much I get past it. I will keep wanting what I want.

I want to be loved, because it will take everything I have to do it. Not by you, by someone and me. I'll be more than I've ever been, I'll be so tender to be strong enough to be loved. I translate the rain when I touch a man, remember? I have that in my fingers.

I like night when my hands swim across the back of someone. I like going out at night then, putting my feet in shoes old enough to fit me — my good life older than you, my hands younger in their pleasure than you'll ever be. I like you gone, and me with the pain and the treasure of me.

That's what happened. Bargain done. This is the last of me to you.

PETER JOHNSON

The Millennium

In the basement, in the playroom, Ken's throwing darts at another Ken while the flies of fairy tales nod off on a concrete wall, on a red plunger by the sink, on a lonesome cue ball. Upstairs, a pair of twins dancing on a hardwood floor, pushing tiny Santas in miniature baby strollers. I need help to sit down. "Next you'll be wanting a back rub," my brother says, then leaps from a coffee table, toppling our Christmas tree. Not enough bulbs to poke holes through this night's black logic. No one strong enough to turn The Great Telescope, still partially unwrapped. Four hours to midnight, my niece embracing her Sleepy-Time Barbie, eyelids set to close at the turn of the century.

AGHA SHAHID ALI
First Day of Spring

On this perfect day, perfect for forgetting God,
why are they—Hindu or Muslim, Gentile or Jew—
shouting again some God-forsaken word of God?

The Angel, his wings flailing—no, burning—stood awed.
The Belovéd, dark with excessive bright, withdrew
and the day was not perfect for forgetting God.

On a face of stone it bends, the divining rod:
Not silver veins but tears: Niobe, whereunto
your slain children swaddled dark with the Names of God?

You spent these years on every street in Hell? How odd,
then, that I never saw you there among the few
who've held you (*Hold me!*) against every word of God.

The rumor? It's again the reign of Nimrod.
Whoever you now are, I depend on your message,
but you are still bringing me word from (*Could it be?*) from God.

And now on earth, you and I, with longing so flawed
that: Angel forced to grow not wings but arms: What taboo
keeps you (so abandoned by God)
from holding me—perfect for forgetting God?

JULIE HERBST
She Became Death

She became death without dying;
as light iced the walls
of the dining room,
the door wouldn't close, inviting
sharp air to flicker in late morning
breaking up the lukewarm haze.
She became chemical,
an odor of pancake batter
replacing sex
an intrusion by the sun
kicking her wiry skin,
blue pulsing beneath
white wrinkled sheets
when muffled daytime
beckoned her
to return.

JEAN HOPKINSON

Tokyo

— for JS

I thought you were the alarm. You should see me, I'm dressed to kill, I don't know who yet... No it's okay, it's okay, you know I love you just the way I am... I roll out of bed, roll my hair into a bagel, and put on a pot of coffee. I am proud of my ability to skillfully rest your voice on my shoulder. Now I can begin the daydreaming you have already done. Better say our good-byes before we begin our conversation, before we get cut off. How was today, so I'll know? And the sunset? Long after the caffeine high has worn off, I will be tossing and turning in your broad daylight.

Whistling and Wandering

He whistles as he wanders among the rows and rows of books in the library, back and forth and forth and back. He is a dark brown man with dark brown hair whose eyes and clothes sag. He must have the books memorized by now but maybe not, because he has this way of looking at them without really looking at them. Maybe he just knows their colors. Nadia goes to the library and sits in her favorite place, which happens to be next to what she assumes is the wandering whistler's favorite row of books because she always sees him there. Maybe she sits there on purpose for the diversion he creates, but maybe not because she has this way of looking at him without really looking at him. She sometimes gets some work done, but Nadia gets so distracted so often that not being distracted has become a distraction. The last item on her Things To Do List is "make a Things To Do List" and she starts all over again. She is sure to stop and sigh a heavy sigh at regular intervals. While not doing what she has to do, Nadia wonders what the man has to do besides whistle and wander among the rows of books in the library, back and forth and forth and back. Has he ever had a broken heart or a broken home or a broken bone? Is he always alone? A giggle rolls around inside of her and threatens to erupt when she thinks of asking him if he's a good witch or a bad witch. "Why I'm not a witch at all" he would say and they would have a good laugh over that, but a laugh too loud for the library. But she never heard him do anything but whistle. She wonders what he has to whistle about, and if he could always whistle softly and sweetly enough for a library.

As Nadia looked at him without really looking at him, she thought about her little sister Alex whose eyes actually danced when she again told Nadia that she wants to be exactly like her when she gets big. Nadia had laughed inwardly wondering if her biggest fan would like being called "big" any better than she did at the self-conscious age of eighteen. She wondered if there was a dark brown man with dark brown hair that whistled and wandered that the wandering whistler had aspired to be like as a child. Nadia could not imagine why he'd want to be a wandering whistler any more than she could imagine why her little sister want to be like her. Then she wondered if maybe he had an Alex. She wondered if he'd ever experienced the feeling of having a ten-year-old think

you have every answer to every question imaginable, and the feeling of hearing those answers repeated to dolls that she has named after you. Or the feeling when the kid comes to you for reassurance, putting the kind of faith in you that you would never dream of putting in yourself, and you use the strength you never knew you had to somehow restore hers because you just have to be able to do that. And it works. It actually works. The kid's eyes actually dance and she tells you that she wants to be just like you when she gets big and she is the only one that can get away with calling you big. Their mom told her that Nadia means "hope" in Russian. Nadia always thought that Alex should have had her name.

Nadia continued to look at him without really looking at him as he walked up and down the rows, back and forth and forth and back. Is that his job? Would he go back to his dark brown wife and dark brown children at the end of the day and get scolded for forgetting to pick up milk on the way home? Or maybe he lives here. If he does, then where does he sleep, because he must sleep and he always looks like he just got out of bed. And where does he keep his change of clothes because he must change his clothes. Does he eat here, because he must eat, or does he eat out, and does he ever have to worry about the ATM monster eating his card? She could just hear Alex saying "He doesn't eat much. Can we keep him?" Their mom never let them have pets.

If he lives here then who else sees him? Alex used to see things that nobody else could see. She had imaginary friends when Nadia ignored her or was too busy to play. Nadia felt bad for ever ignoring Alex and never would again because Nadia had this fear that one day she would get home to discover that they had lost Alex tragically and unexpectedly and of course "allegedly" somehow or another and that would be the day that Nadia would have forgotten to tell Alex that she loved her before she left for school. Nadia wondered when she would get over this fear. She used to be afraid of singing solos at choir recitals when she was younger but one day she wasn't. Not because of her mother's standard advice about picturing the audience naked though. That advice turned simple stage fright into full blown mortification because what kind of audience was she performing for anyway? But Nadia is not afraid of singing anymore. And she never forgets to tell Alex that she loves her, just in case. And she is never ever too busy to play

and that's probably why her little sister wants to be just like her when she gets big.

He is still wandering and whistling sweetly and softly enough for a library when Nadia decides it is time for her to leave. Maybe he is not wandering, but knows exactly where he is going. Maybe this was on his Things To Do List and he is actually doing it. He did not even notice Nadia.

Purple Grass

Transported by the smell to a time before using flesh color became controversial. The excitement of a built-in crayon sharpener tempers the anxiety of raising a hand to go to the pencil sharpener. She has traded her sky blue for his burnt sienna and now she needs it back, for the sky of course. One arm is slightly longer than the other and she has forgotten her ears again. The yellow sun is smiling down on the purple grass. The sun is always yellow. The sun is always smiling.

Today, I think I will be a leggy blond. And for my eyes, tropical rain forest, named by Walker Watson, age six. Little Walker has probably never seen a tropical rain forest in his life. That's okay, neither have I.

BETSY SHOLL
Blues Is My Companion

I

On the radio, Eddie Kirkland, bluesman, talking
with a deejay about the road — long string
of one-nighters, then Sunday mornings driving

through small towns, folks gathering for church...
Once he pulled off the road with his guitar,
started strumming, and it seemed a whole woods

full of birds, who'd been making the craziest racket
hushed right up. Half the morning he tested it —
man sing, bird hush, man still, bird squawk like mad.

Says he could live off that a long time. *Eddie,*
Eddie Kirkland, ladies and gentlemen — the deejay
starts a tape, and it's blues you can dance to.

You have to put down your paring knife and move.
Dinner can wait. You have to tear out time
and place, tape it to the wall, newsprint

photo of his face, tilted back in light, all sweat
and gleam. Forget black & white, forget history
with its great divides, its swat team of assumptions

swarming in. Here's mystery, ladies and gentlemen.
Plays an upbeat blues, town after no-name town.
Says he just lets the music bubble and smoke,

till all those tired folk can't help but dance.
Mississippi to Chicago — carried him
sixty years, in and out of trouble, in and out

of war, rot gut, Jim Crow, those steel string hungry,
those battered, hocked, rebought, — those back room
to spotlight, sweet, get-up Child, blues.

II

For years I wouldn't turn on the radio,
wouldn't let any kind of music get
to me, after growing up with my sister

who breathed it, drank it like soda — music,
instead of movies, guys, the phone, whatever
the rest of us were using for floatation.

I hated the way we'd be talking, I'd
be getting to the juicy part, then
suddenly she'd tilt her head so I knew

what was coming: *Shhh, shhh*, and whatever
I was whispering (sobbing) — “the teacher said
she'd flunk me,” “then he put his hand on my —”

was nothing. What was the something she had heard
instead? I couldn't tell, I'd be so backed up
with the choked off sentence, the words like phlegm.

(Can you just swallow them? Don't they have to
go somewhere?) When I caught my breath, blinked,
there she'd be raising and lowering the trap

door to the attic, unfolding its scratchy creak
and spring, elongating then snapping the pitch.
Or she'd be off to the keyboard, sounding

one note, a handful maybe, as if she'd caught
only a small riff of herself of it herself, just a breath
of this half-heard thing. I hated the way

it was always more important than
my story, her great pneumatic hush,
cathedral door shutting in my face.

III

But there's a moment in a B.B King song
the guitar holds a note, then the sax comes in,
same pitch, and keeps going higher

as the guitar falls away. "Sweet sixteen,
and you wouldn't do nothing for me."
Every time it comes round on the tape,

say I'm jogging, something hushes inside,
gets clarified — something I hadn't known
was jumbled. Low-down words, it's true,

but then music takes over, lament
pushing out of lechery into loss
so palpable it fills the body, the song

plugged into a communal dirge — like birds
lifted out of territory and hunger,
given rest from their frenzy. *Frenzy?*

Would they suddenly see it that way?
Dull ordinary brown birds in the shade,
until the music flushes them into

the most amazing sun-struck indigo.
"When I lost my baby I found the blues
instead." You can live off that a long time

if you have to, the way on live recordings
an old singer will sometimes clear his throat
so you can feel the knot in yours, feel it

pass through — a pushed down, kind of
stepped-on thing at the back of the song.

Halfway

Tolstoy or Camus or something denser,
 I don't care, she was always reading—
 in elevators, or waiting for a ride
 while the rest of us joked, students hired
 to set up a halfway house for mental patients.
 In the car at night, book tilted to catch
 the street light, at bus stops, in restaurants,
 her hair a fine silk veil straining out
 the contamination of our eyes.
 Few people in my life I've wanted to smack,
 but she's one. I am another—left over
 from the days of my childhood stammer,
 seeing through someone else's eyes
 as I butted my head, how they wanted
 to fast forward, to yank or shove me
 over the block. Little good it does.
 The patients were wiser, knowing who to rush,
 who to skirt at meetings where they planned
 new lives. They were breaking out from walls,
 from shuffle and haze, from head banging
 or birdlike fright. And suburban smugness
 was breaking our, town after town: zoning
 refused. Asked where they thought the patients
 came from, whose fathers, sisters, aunts—
 a town's lawyers and housewives would erupt
 as if they were the nuts, splitting off
 from all that wasn't manicured, zipped, sure.
 And while the rest of us took that furious heat,
 our reader sat in each town hall's back row,
 cool head bowed, exclusion personified,
 or—we joked—on *books* instead of thorazine.
 Couldn't she see that the more she read,
 the more our anger rose, as if her attempts to avoid
 only upped the pressure in some tank of ink
 whose thick unrefined reserved swelled toward
 barely articulate shrieks? I was there
 only by marriage, a team member's new wife,

learning my own liberation through lips,
direct address set free of speech, hours
of being wanted, loved. So I hate to say
how good it felt snatching the book from her lap,
watching her shrink into shut eyes, hands
on her ears so she could hear the blood inside
drumming *run, run*, as we circled her chair.
who didn't feel their innocence crumble
that summer? Who didn't stand in the rubble
of their own good selves, having to choose
whether to rebuild the walls, tearfully
mumbling, brick by brick, or let it all go
like the patients, whose halfway house
ended up on hospital grounds instead
of that unwilling world they came from.
They gave up a lot to be set free—
the private comforts of rocking, sucking
on thumbs, other things I don't need to name
because you know them. And you know
when you see someone on your block searching,
for cans as if it's hard work, *it is* hard work,
being in this world, remembering
your radio is not God, eyes are not
laser swords, and the raindrops racing down
the bus stop's scuffed Plexiglas windbreak
like messengers wanting to speak to you,
actually could be speaking to you.

Undersong

As if it's that easy — just breathe in, breathe out,
lips all floaty, hands relaxed. But I'm flashing
back to a halfway house fundraiser
in the after-hours aquarium where it wasn't
dark enough for the phosphorescent fish.

Halfway to black-out, somebody wearing my clothes,
downed flute after plastic flute after plastic flute of champagne,
and still wasn't glowing, so why should the fish?
Maybe they were trying though, whatever it takes
to get lit — pushing, squeezing, moving their lips.

Gestures I remember from my grade school
stammer, trying to squeeze out an *f* or *s* —
years ago, and here we are again, fast-forward
past the aquarium to this class on prayer,
still trying to navigate between withhold

and release, numb out and feel. I close my eyes
and flashy little day-glo speed freaks hustle
the walls of their tank, angel and devil fish.
Who would have thought prayer could look
like a bad trip? Or am I just a bad attitude,

some kind of outboard carp who guns
through the tank, sloshing gas-filled water
against the walls, slamming into reverse,
just to taste its own pungent wake. Memory
has this way of plastering the eye with decals,

so the only holiness I can picture
is hurricane wind, one of those revved up
storms that blew through our town like bikers
emptying boardwalk bars, swilling the bay
through streets, splintering docks

into popsicle sticks. But now we're asked
to say what ballast we're willing to chuck,

what crates of rage, oil drums of guilt, like it's
just an easy tumble backwards over the side,
not to worry, a friendly dissolution:

just relax those white knuckles, think: huge
fluency, voices effervescing as they fall.
Think: shimmy and sway of creatures already
arrived where they always wanted to be,
see-through gelatinous flowers, bright

synchronicities of fish, and in spite
of myself, an extravagance of whale song,
erupts in my mind — humpbacked hallelujahs,
beluga and sperm song, killer and blue
praising what they pass through, what passes

through them: such infinitesimal phantasms,
tiniest ash of plankton glitter, phonemes
relieved of grammar, bodies of weight,
effortless sway of water and tide shift,
and world without rift. Amen.

Fine Arts

Riding a backpack through the museum, my son
 would cry up the scale from suggestion to howl —
 his first staccato sentence: *down, out, home, now.*
 Was it the gallery of stern grandparents he couldn't
 grin into sweet babblers? We'd hardly get

passed them to Degas or Toulouse-Lautrec,
 without a guard ushering us out. Never made it
 to mummies, stiff as a game of statues
 gone horribly wrong, without the bum's rush
 to the lawn, where my boy happily waddled up

to cigarette butts and crumpled wrappers,
 chased pigeons into flight, or tried to catch light
 playing through leaves. Light in long shafts,
 or high noon's neon — isn't that what painters love?
 Sometimes after a snack, we'd try again,

rushing past ballerina's in pink, slumped on break
 or stretching at the bar, torch singers in fishnet,
 one calf exposed, so you can almost hear
 a man's whiskey laugh, music pulsing the floor.
 Then *out, now, down, home* would rise again,

and like art thieves, we'd duck the guards,
 slipping into a crowd, past a tour guide's phrase,
marvelous instant. We'd snatch what we could
 and make off — enough to see trolley tracks gleam,
 or make a lone pigeon seem Picasso's invention.

And a whole flock? My boy would crane
 to follow their swoop and rush till he toppled over,
 learning the world's worth falling for,
 not a bad place. On the steps there'd be
 bigger boys with free passes scanning

the crowd for fake parents to shuffle them in,
 as if art's guardian's didn't trust them alone
 in the basement Egyptian rooms, art's guardians
 intent on making sure something that's outlived
 almost unscathed, Aristotle, Suleiman,

Einstein, will outlive these boys as well.
 Such an old debate: those who long to finger
 mummy rags, or after the day at school want
 to pencil, "Sue was here" on anything in sight —
 versus — the guards with their "Musn't disturb...,"

as if they never saw how light in one mood
 paints us gold and in the next just wants to
 obliterate. What's a mother to do
 but tell her son, if he wants *home*, it's his,
 and if some spendthrift years lead through *down*

& *out*, through whisky rush and throaty song?
 Well, she'll tell herself that's not the end
 of anything — after this *now*, there's another,
 another marvelous instant, we're far
 from closing, far from whatever that means.

THOMAS E. KENNEDY

Anniversary

On their first wedding anniversary, Bradley's in-laws invited them out to the theater. They saw a revival of *Long Day's Journey into Night* at the Beaumont. At the intermission, the girls went to the powder room, and Bradley's father-in-law told him to wait by a pillar while he got them something to wet their whistle with.

While Bradley waited, he watched another couple standing nearby. They were about his own age, a couple of years younger. The young man was dressed less than casually, in unwashed jeans and a ratty sweater, while the girl was very smart. She wore black leotards under a narrow black skirt, a black sweater that exposed her tan shoulders and throat and a yellow silk band around her forehead. She was smoking, and Bradley could see the red lipstick on her cigarette filter. He looked away, but his eyes wandered back to her. The third time he saw that she was looking at him, too, very openly, and he became aware of himself standing there in his three-piece suit and the fifty-dollar haircut his wife had given him for an anniversary present. The young man's back was to Bradley, and he was speaking to the girl who nodded and smiled, but Bradley could see the smile was for him.

Then Bradley's father-in-law was there with four glasses on a tray, two orange juice and two whiskeys. Bradley took one of the whiskeys. His father-in-law put the tray on a table and raised his glass in silent toast, drank, then said, "Well, gloom gloom gloom, ey?"

Bradley stared blankly at him.

"The play!"

"Oh," Bradley said. "I like it pretty well".

"Course, you're a college man and all," the father-in-law said. "Guess you know more about plays and things. Still, seems there must be more to a life than *that*. Think of all the joy. Hell, how many people have a mother-in-law who's a drug addict? I mean, you know, how many w-h-i-t-e people."

Bradley nodded sideways, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, thinking the gesture a polite response to a vulgar statement. His eyes stole to the young woman with the sloppy young man. The

young man was tamping out his cigarette in a knee-high ashtray. The girl took one more puff as she looked at Bradley. Their eyes held. Then she blushed and looked away, and he felt ashamed of himself.

His wife and mother-in-law crossed the lobby toward them.

"Yoo hoo," called his mother-in-law.

Bradley looked at his wife. She wore a silver lamé skirt and blouse. The blouse did not sit quite right across her back. She had complained about it at the mirror before they left. "Looks like I have a dowager's hump!"

"Nonsense," he said. "You look fine."

Now, the father-in-law said, "Better drink your juice so we can get back to our seats."

Bradley caught a glimpse of the girl in the yellow silk headband returning into the dark of the theater just as his wife reached for the whiskey glass he held. "Can I have a sip?" she whispered.

After the theater, they had a snack at O'Neal's Balloon, then they picked up his wife's father's car and drove back to Long Island. All through dinner and on the ride home, Bradley's mother-in-law raved about the play and especially the actors. She knew little things about the private life of each of them, who had just had an affair, who was divorced, who had a child with a birth defect. She turned to face them in the back seat to talk to them. From time to time, the father-in-law glanced over his shoulder and went, "Ha!" and winked at Bradley.

Bradley had his wife's fingers laced through his on his knee. The underside of her wrist was damp with perspiration against the trouser leg of his pin-striped suit. He studied her hand. It looked young, unfinished. He looked out the car window. They were crossing the 59th Street Bridge. The river glistened like onyx beneath them in the cool May evening.

The mother was saying, "I *never* thought I would see Jason Robards himself play live on the stage! Oh, he is so magnificent!"

Bradley could see his father-in-law's tilted grin in the rear view mirror.

Bradley's car was parked at his in-law's house in Bayside, and they were invited in for a night cap before driving back to Flushing.

"Just *one!*" the mother said to Bradley. "You know what they say. Too much wine maketh a man dull". when she said this she opened her mouth wide, as if she were screaming, and poked him in the side.

"Mo-*ther*," Bradley's wife said, and the father went, "Ha!" and winked at Bradley. He opened a bottle of champagne which they drank in the living room. The mother-in-law invited her daughter upstairs to see their new bedroom drapes, leaving Bradley and his father-in-law alone for a few moments.

"So," the older man said. "A whole year together, huh?"

"Yes, sir," said Bradley.

"Thirty-three here."

"Sir?"

"Thirty-three. We been married thirty-three years next month. Try that yourself and then see what you say. Not many today can match that record".

"I'll say."

"Damn divorce. Selfishness. Think of it. Think of all the kids of broken homes. What kind of life do they get out of the deal?"

"Sad," Bradley said.

"I'll tell you something. It's not always easy, being married. People are more different than they think, and then you got to give of yourself, you know?" He touched his chest when he said those words.

"You're probably right," Bradley said.

"No probles about it. I *am* right. I *know*." His eyes shifted up toward the staircase and he leaned closer across the coffee table, fingering the stem of his champagne glass. "Listen, I'll tell you a story. Don't ever repeat it on me, okay? Promise?"

Bradley said, "If you're sure".

Just then the mother and daughter came back down the stairs, and the father-in-law measured out the rest of the champagne into their glasses.

At the door, when they were leaving, he slapped Bradley on the back. "Member what I told you now."

In the Pinto, driving back along the Long Island Expressway, she asked, "What did my father tell you?"

"Nothing really. He started to tell me some story, but he never finished."

“What kind of story?”

“I don’t know. He didn’t even get into it. He just said he was going to tell me a story, and then he got interrupted, and he didn’t continue. Didn’t go back to it.”

They were on the long run of highway just before their turn-off, and he watched the trees run past the side of the road in a leafy blur, trying to imagine what story her father had been about to tell, but it was like trying to see through a wall. He hadn’t a clue. Moonlight through the trees cast dark lacy shadows across the windshield.

In bed, he lay and stared at the ceiling while she changed into her nightgown. He could hear the upstairs neighbors moving around. It sounded like they were inching a heavy piece of furniture, a trunk perhaps, across the floor. Then it stopped and their foot movements stopped, and he could hear their voices, muffled, though the floorboards, and then the heavy dragging sound again.

She opened the window and propped it on a book, and he felt a puff of fresh air waft across the bed. Her nightgown was of some beige silky material, diaphanous. She smiled at him as she slid into bed beside him and switched off the lamp.

He lay there thinking for a while.

She coughed.

He was thinking, almost nodding off, then gliding back to consciousness again. He thought about her father, the look on his face when he glanced up at the staircase, about to tell that story. He tried to call the expression on the man’s face back into his consciousness so he could study it, as if it might give a clue about the nature of the story, but he could get nowhere with it. His thoughts moved on. Then he was thinking about the woman in black leotards with narrow black skirt and yellow silk band around her forehead. He pictured his wife dressed like that and walking toward him across a lobby, smoking a cigarette, with another man. The other man was just a blur. He pictured her glancing at him over the other man’s shoulder as she put the cigarette to her lips. He pictured the way her lips opened slightly as she inhaled the cigarette smoke.

His wife coughed again and turned on her side, facing him. He listened to her breathing and could hear that she was not asleep. His own eyes were shut. If he turned his face and opened

them, he would be staring right into her eyes.

He felt that he ought to do that and was about to, but suddenly, irrationally, thought he did not know who would be there staring at him, did not know what expression would be on her face or how his own face would respond to it. He couldn't catch his breath. This is crazy, he thought, but still he didn't turn to her, and when her palm touched his arm, he did not move, just lay there.

In a minute, he thought, this'll turn into a fight. He put his arm around her and slid over against his shoulder, and he lay there, holding her, his eyes shut, trying to remember, to imagine, just what her face looked like.

WALT MCDONALD

Going Home

Salt cedars, where the bees stung me,
where we played witch doctor after dark,
where I buried my brother's cat, a grave
we dug ourselves. Blood dripped from the road

to the porch, where Mother hugged
and shooed us away, blood on the steps,
another trail to the back yard
where we put it down and stared.

I don't know why we dug there with a stick
and shovel, my brother blubbering,
staring at the teeth, the skull crushed flat.
I wrapped the cat in an oil rag.

but the blood soaked through. I scooped dirt
damp with blood and covered it up.
My brother looked away, his lower lip
drawn back, teeth chattering.

He begged for the green collar,
but I wouldn't dig it up, not then,
not next week when dogs dugh down to the rag.
I shoveled a mound I weighted down

with rocks and broken plows.
We never played witch doctor there
or dug up coins we stole from Mother's purse.
There may be money buried yet,

although those cedar trees are dead,
the house where we were born hauled off
and sold at auction, those prairie acres paved
and sub-divided. Sometimes when I'm back,

THE ALEMBIC

I find the water tower, blocks landscaped
with flowers and cactus, a hawk
in skies so dry I almost feel at home,
no boys with pets I recognize.

After Sixty

I'm peaceful in old age today, bird-watching,
shelling peas, waving at neighbors driving past.
An inch of rain last night, the grass already dry.
I've counted dozens of cardinals and jays,
a thousand sparrows. For decades, our dogs drove them off,
barking, wetting spruce and pears we planted

and pampered. Now, shade twelve hours a day,
the loam crawling with worms for robins.
Flocks of cedar waxwings adopt us, rock doves,
mockingbirds. So this is retirement, rocking for hours
and sighing, phone off the hook till noon. Before dawn,
I worked four hours and watched the east. After coffee,

after an hour apiece with the paper, we'll jog to the park
past houses locked, couples gone to their jobs,
their children in day care, dogs barking behind locked gates.
All summer we'll try this trial retirement,
then back to work, four years till we're old enough
to be old, to feed these birds and worms forever.

MEGAN SOUTHARD

With Less Glory

(The Graveyard at the William Floyd Estates*)

A crooked T
christ's wooden pity, it creaks under its own
weight, paint flaking off like a thin white skin, stark
and leaning, so like christ with arms spread
pleading skyward but feet planted
in earth, cracked-brown
and unrelenting.

With less glory
this marks a slave's grave, the 'charlie' streaked
in blue-black coal ash or some other unvalue, not even ink to
hold the given name to rotted wood. It pulls
at its false roots. The earth
repels its work.

This separate patch
swells like a welt, row after row closed in
with rusted barb, sinks in the heat and in the shadow of marble-
those looming monuments of grandeur, of stone that cannot burn
their carved letters will stay fixed and
will not return.

*William Floyd fought for the colonials during the Revolutionary War. He was a wealthy slave owner, and his estate is intact in Long Island, NY.

CORRINE DE WINTER
The Romantic And The Damned

I.

In the underground bar,
Atmosphere as heavy
As an El Greco painting,
Someone flashed your picture
At me, asked
If I'd seen you.

The last time I saw him
I had a rose between my teeth
And danced circles
Around a sombrero.
The last time I saw him
He was sleep-walking South.
Honey, I said, do you think
If we put our hands together
We'd have a prayer?

The last time I saw him
I was playing an extra
In The Romantic and the Damned

I said

He told me to see
The sun as an Aztec God.
To see the full moon
As nine months too late
Or too soon.
To see the portrait of Christ
Hanging from a nail.

I said nothing but that
I'd never seen your face before,
Had no idea
Who you were.

II.

When I feel like kissing you
I light a cigarette
And blow smoke rings.
The room is filled with Oh's.

Desire is all fiction & ghosts.

I don't weep over your leaving
or having never known
You from the inside.
Words can penetrate,
Work their way through
The muscle of the heart.
At the strangest times
They'll fly around you
And you
Will think of me.

III.

When I lay down in the sweet grass
and look up at the clouds
I am as young as a raindrop
And as old
As Cleopatra's bones.

And the children
rolling down
the green hillside
like the tide going out,
their laughter bird-like
in the open air
are manna for the soul.

I can only sigh
When I think of you sitting
In the half-light of pre-dawn
With a needle
Sinking in your arm.

CAROLYN MCINTYRE

Like Sap

Stop, rewind, stop, play. Same song, different day. Laugh out loud. I want a cigarette. I escape to this well worn field everyday now, escape from the screaming pipes of my room and the silence of my roommates. And there are no cockroaches out here. Just innocent bugs. I let them scamper over my skin, scurry through the deep ravines and valleys in the creases of my nylon running pants. These pants are the noisiest thing in my room. Almost as noisy as the thoughts in my head. I don't know how many times I've listened to this song now. The lyrics are simple and articulate. They sketch and blueprint the ideas bouncing off the brick walls inside my head. "Fu—You and your untouchable face. Fu—You, for existing in the first place." Stop, rewind, stop, play. People just don't pat attention to details anymore.

I pick up a pine cone, I almost cry for it. I feel its tired and ancient wings, stiff from rigamortis. It is lonely, lying here at the feet of its mother tree. The only mourner at its own funeral. It sobs for its own wrinkled skin, sunburned and well spent from last summer. I whisper sweet nothings to my pine cone. I tell it that I remember it when it was firm and green, floating high, pressed up and laminated against the blue Atlantic above. I tell it I remember its perfect soldier posture. My index finger flips through each dry flap of its wooden flesh, searching, searching like some bored secretary lost in her file cabinet, chipping her bright red manicure. Stop, rewind, stop, play.

There is a bug hiding in a small nook of my pine cone. I can almost feel the race horse of his heartbeat. I don't make eye contact with the bug, and put the pine cone down. I stopped killing insects two years ago. Well, I still kill mosquitoes. I pass it off as self defense. I pick up another pine cone, one that is covered with the crystallization of sap. Sometimes I feel like I am covered with a viscous protection, and you pry at me, piecing me apart, all of my perfect thoughts. I begin to form sticky little lozenges between my thumb and forefinger. It keeps my attention for only so long, and eventually I am rubbing the sticky crap all over my Nikes; these sneakers are now grey, covered with scrapes and abrasions from the unsympathetic concrete of last summer. This is one of the

reasons I come here now, to run on this field. This dirt is soft and careful, considerate, and the insects welcome me and the rugged landscape of my pants. I think they like my pants more than they like me. They hardly ever venture onto my bare flesh. They do not look up at me. Humbled with fear, perhaps, fear that I might thoughtlessly end their lives with my oppressive thumb. Maybe these bugs just appreciate me. They don't even know me. I try though, I really do.

The sap smells like a Christmas tree. People either do it before the holidays, or you wait until after Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's are long forgotten about, and even despised; your bankbook never lies to you, and neither do all the elaborate and scorning department store receipts. But sometimes I lie to myself, and sometimes I lie to you. I never used to lie before I came to school. You've come to mean this much to me. Too much has made me sick to my stomach, too many holiday desserts. You with your beautiful excuses. I can't afford you, and try to find an appropriate day in my empty day planner to exchange you for credit. I just can't afford you. I can whisper smooth and intoxicating words into a pine cone, whom I've only known for five minutes, but I can't even look at you anymore. I wish I fit the nook of a pine cone. Laugh out loud. You don't even know it, either. My hands are brown and dirty, partly from the stickiness of the sap, and partly from the permanent dye. My mind is dirty with these hidden thoughts of you. I hide this: sometimes falling out of love is belittled of its importance. My stomach hurts. I suffer anxiety attacks and can no longer tell if I am serious. These lyrics are beginning to mean nothing and everything to me. Stop, rewind, stop, play.

I pull an elastic out of my hair, and let the strands fall to my sweaty cheeks. It sticks to me, like sap. My eyes fight through the jungle-like locks, fighting to reach out to the horizon of the field. My eyes are side tracked. My feelings for you are side tracked. My hair is dyed black, and I am not quite used to it yet. I did it on Wednesday. I thought I hated you on Wednesday, and you didn't even know. You hate it when I dye my hair. This time, it won't wash out. But throughout the millions of vine-like strands, I can see glimpses of my natural color, caught in traps and webs of sunlight. Maybe its you standing there on the horizon. I look different than I did last summer. My skin is no longer copper tone

and my eyes are no longer Atlantic grey green. You wouldn't understand my smile. My sister says I remind her of ice. She knows all about not paying attention. But she says my posture is holding up.

My pants stick to me, like sap, suffocating and panting for cool air to dry the damp sweatiness. My skin tastes like salt. My virgin lungs hurt from too many cigarettes from last night. I never smoked before I came to school. You had terrible asthma. Now I smoke whenever I can get my anxious and spiteful fingers on a pack. Stop, rewind, stop play. My muscles are sore from jogging. My mind is sore from these thoughts racing in my head.

I could never smoke here, not in this field. It's as though I don't want this field to know that I come here to improve my health, to clean my lungs and feed them with pure oxygen, and once I leave, I poison my hard work. Defeated purposes. So I sneak around on the outside of the fence. My feelings are sneaking around on you, inside of me, and I have no control over it. And the worst part about it is that you don't even know. Laugh out loud. My life is such a contradiction. Our world is one of opposites, but still no one ever pays attention. Stop, rewind, stop, play.

It's only at times like these that I get my fingers dirty. The permanent dye has stained my fingers, under my nails. It's at this hour every day that I litter my mind with these black and artificial thoughts of my feelings for you. They fade, but the dye doesn't. I get dirty because my roommates wouldn't approve. But then again, I am paranoid. They probably don't even notice. I laugh nervously and try to make a joke about it to them, and they look up briefly, only to return to their silent conversing. Why the hell should they care? The insects appreciate my attempts at improving my relationship with them, by involving themselves in the lowliness of their soil centered lives. The pine cones appreciate me, in spite of their worldly rejection. No one pays attention anymore. Not even you. I'd like to say that you've destroyed my life, to scream at you about how you've left me wounded on a dusty and deserted road to hell, but you haven't. You've been decent. The truth is, I've fallen out of love with you. And that's probably more painful than anything else. I can't explain it. I want a cigarette. I wish I knew the name of this song. Stop, rewind, stop, play.

Every day, I run for five more minutes than the day before. Every day, I smoke an extra cigarette. I almost understand these

lyrics now. I try to apply them to all the things in my life that are so complicated to figure out for myself. I steal lyrics from songs instead of thinking of something to say myself. They aren't even appropriate. This time, you'll know I'm lying, to save my own back. I am selfish and weak. I've changed, I will say. Your eyes will drop to the cigarette I am trying to hide in my palm. I try to light it, and the match dies too quickly. You look like your going to be sick. Everything that comes to mind is something that I promised myself I would never say, something that is found in the back pocket manual of life. I will hate myself in the end. You just don't know me anymore. You look at my hair. I hope it doesn't insult you. Don't bother raising your eyebrows in disgust, because I'll already know your doing it. Stop, rewind, stop, play. It's much harder when you know you aren't the victim, it's much harder when you are the murderous thumb. I crush my pine cone. Quick, easy and painless death. Laugh out loud. I do this because I think it will make me hurt less. I know these details all too well. Everyday, a little finer, a little more practiced. I need a cigarette.

ALLEN MAHAN
Adventures With No TV

for Lena

"Walking the wire is everything. The rest is merely waiting ... " - Karl Wallenda

All through the Great War, I was a Captain in the national disgrace. .
. you strong, Latin, torpedo-woman, you. Your love was like a
hydrogen scare; swift, free-wheeling, and impossible to repair. I am
a man walking in luke-warm air. My head floats on a string like the
balloon tatoood on my hand. In ten seconds I will explode in front
of your stand — One: you — die happily, mightily — by my side.
Two: I dive into your eyes as your fingers light my tender buttons.
Three: you need a smoke, so you get up to pee. We meet on your
tiny border's lover's seat. You cover the wet-spot under a palm
leaf, because there's no TV. Four: you fall through the floor to the
core of the globe. You recall the convent and education and swear:
"I'll never see that door again!" Five: you bleed to me, over the
phone, from the very next room. Six: it's Four Sticks. We play till it
chaffs — you vaccinate my ass with the phonograph needle.
Seven: all good children make love in Denver. Eight: I watch you
masturbate. Nine: you cry — "You'll always be mine!" Ten: you
never want to see me again. . .

. . . if the wind rimes with the willows then the nest beds my
reason; your parfum, shampoo, champagne, for example.

THOMAS DAVID LISK

In the Pink House

For years you felt many wonderful sensuous things, things which were also emotional, and you brought them home and put them in a trunk which had once been military green and barrel colored, and which you painted blue where it had been green and red where it had been brown, and when you opened the box... I was inside. A little joke. No. Nor was the other obvious possibility true. That is, there was *not* nothing in the trunk. Not exactly. I was watching you as you tried to figure out what you'd been doing. Those saved or salvaged bits of radiant equipoise turned into slants of venetian blind with the paint sand blasted off them so only a swirl of smooth circular patterns mars the glassy surface of the thin flexible steel. You want to think about six or seven key ideas that have shaped civilization so its pear shape fits the human hand, but the bathroom faucet keeps dripping (even after the plumber's visit) unless you set the handle just right, and you find yourself believing these trivial tinkering must be mythic voices burbling to you through the poundings of the surf.

DOUG MARX

In the Heaven of Working Class Hands

The hammered hymn of a new moon
rises into its blue twilight
beyond a few scraped knuckles:

Pay it no mind—

all that I wanted to say
was buried along with my forefinger

and the puckered stump
like a scream sucked
into itself proves

there is nothing
so bodiless
as song

As if foretold in a dream
given over to a wing
and a wheel

 the bridge
many hands cast like a net
over the ghost of a rainbow

my palm became a breadboard
and a desert

When I'm gone let
homemade passion take
shape in a callus

and cleave into this life
like a starfish cruising a wave

September

By what
miraculous absentmindedness

have I let a lime
green maple leaf tinged
orange around the edges

enchant me floating
solo
straight down

rightside up
slo-mo through a late
summer afternoon

extending its reprieve
without the pardon
till I lose sight

of the end and
my hand tingles
teetering along by my side

as if it were mine
to bless
and forgive

The Midnight Choir

I'm one wing without you

a gate that won't close
reiterating the consequences of rust:

my voice half a mouth flapping
like a deaf bat
trapped between the glass palms
of an unanswered prayer

my words vagabond
through a street light's pocket
ice blue
pulsing the skipped beats
of evening's heart murmur

Listen:
the pure misery of my lust
is blessed
by the howling moon

and a chained dog
chasing the siren in his ear

LINDA ELEGANT

Villanelle: Virginia Woolf and I

We shared two months in 1941
she facing the end as I was the beginning.
I couldn't know then what she had done.

We breathed in the same air, felt the same sun
in her last winter, my first spring.
We shared two months in 1941.

While I was safe in Camas, Washington
Bloomsbury was crumbling. Long introspecting
ardor of friendships, brilliant work done.

Her beautiful London was falling down,
house and press gone, her convictions faltering.
All hope faded in those months in 1941.

She gathered her pockets of stones
and walked to the river unwavering.
The cold water closed over and her pain was done.

Before I knew her, she was gone,
had relinquished her life as mine was unfolding.
Virginia Woolf and I shared two months in 1941.
Only now can I know all that she had done.

JOSHUA BAKER

Harvest Moon Now, Then, And Lost

Peach moon in front, bright Venus behind,
Three of us lurch, lope through a black glue,
fish heads, and nettles after squabbling.
Yeats defined twenty-eight phases of
history. In which one lives the fresh
rugburn gracing this river's sick banks?

These all, snapshots: piers stripped by floods
from moorings, hurled into alders;
the muck that won't leave our boot lugs;
flashback to a night, warm, the last
in a freak row — acid party —
a drug-stung beach, blood moon rising.

I crave, embrace a poetics of
the negative, and extricate hope
from burnt needle eyes, watch Venus rise
balmy spring nights, hold my lover's hips
and my bitter tongue, because ashes
sow hope in skins scarred by dry weather.

JEFF SCHIFF
My Son Dreams of Lucre

And what did I expect
That he would of his own accord
renounce

the need to be everywhere at once
and in control
That age nine

he would
sturdy sandals sack cloth balsa flute
push chastely

into the Iowa prairies
and beyond
inured to the math of greed

More likely
had I imagined him
taking it all

stooped
Pole bean to cantaloupe to habanero pepper
crate by migrant crate

counting himself
a martyr's wage
Or rather

did I see him
in the face of an urchin
hawking his bangles

and greasewood kitsch
on the beach
of some Vallarta resort

THE ALEMBIC

eager
after haggling
to inscribe your name

on a grain of Mexican rice
or fix you up instead
with clean sheets

truck battery
and the last virgin left
beneath a bloodmoon

there on Calle Presidente
If not rectitude
then utility

If not honor
Then savvy at least —
let there be currency

in the lessons he has learned

BT SHAW
Licking County, 1931

She poses, perched atop her mother's split-
rail fence. Laughing, presses big-boned
thighs into his slight and suited knees.
He smiles back but bends his head
away from her, one elbow thrust
beyond the camera's frame, fingers
furling in his lap. Her arm fast
around his neck, her hand a clutch
of narcissi, as though she didn't think
she stood a chance with lace of Anne
or wood lilac, heady, lush and drunk.
As though she'd never know the patience
of the paper birch, would never look
for hazel blooming witch-like in the snow.

ROBERT COOPERMAN

*Auliqaq, Banished from His Clan, Confronts
the Marooned Crew of the Discoverer*

White-faced demons pierce me
with their eyes, shriek like raven
when he flies away in rage,
punishment for killing Inqak and my wife,
the two of them laughing at me:
gape-mouthed as a musk-ox calf
when wolves set fangs in its snout.

Their spirits rose to torment me,
and our chief pronounced banishment,
so I wouldn't foul our ice houses
and summer tents with my screaming
when Inqak's and Uqvit's spirits
rooted me out like wolverines.

Now I'm surrounded by strange demons:
dancing, raising their clubs,
shaking fists in taunting attacks
that will end with my head splattered
like the spilled Berry Moon
before the great eye of heaven shuts
and storms rise like an ice bear
searching for seals on a floe.

But their chief clasps me like a son
bearing wondrous gifts and meat.
He chatters into my face, hugs me.
I wish he would speak like a true man,
but he points to the west shore,
where a great cache of meat
and carved bowls must lie hidden.

He will give it to me —

after I have performed my penance —
so I can share it with Inqak's brothers,
Uqvit's father, and win their forgiveness.

To Take Her Pain

Usually, they walk home
from church arm in arm,
the two sisters who've lived together
more years than I've been alive.
But this Sunday, Margaret lags
a good half block behind.
At first, I think they've fought.

Then it strikes me:
Margaret's labored gait,
pushing on like a polar explorer
while Mildred rushes ahead
to look for the pills,
prepare a bath or call the doctor,
worry stitched along her forehead
like hastily sewn sutures
after an auto accident.

"What will I do without her?"
Mildred, the hardy, silent sister —
the one who attacks yard weeds
like a ruthless prison guard —
seems to be crying
in her purposeful strides,
keys in hand, the front door
just a few steps away,

While Margaret limps gamely on,
her steps slowing, but determined
to collapse into her favorite chair,
an amulet to take her pain
into its mothering plushness.

LIZ CONDON

...and I have

fallen
off big wheel tricycles
carried
broken nursery school cash registers
a fourth grade midterm
pools of watery cafeteria tomato sauce
and chalky parmesan cheese
in my stomach
stashed
the eleven-year-old
pages of an overdue library book
are you there god it's me margaret
in between the bathroom trips
of my first college roommate
exploded
into the incredible hulk
through exhaust
from a missed bee-line bus
incited
a tidal wave of prom-night screwdrivers
rung
like a wrong number telephone call
and i have not finished yet...

Noticing

In between
my football missing uncle and my observing aunt
I never noticed the feet
kicking and hiding
underneath the table
there are sweet potatoes ground
in multicolored oriental rugs
we'll never notice next Thanksgiving
he stopped drinking
pools of sarcasm
she almost swam out of
one year
I always hope
we'll eat vegetarian and cry
someone notice the sweet potatoes

Powder Blue Soup

Tonight
like a holy dam
a screen window
sifts the night
from the moon and stars

Bathroom
tiles like promises
embrace the cold
flooding out
every saintly gag

Until
blank porcelain circles
cradle the night
trickling
into your black hair

Later
seagulls will scatter
across the sky
like pepper
in powder blue soup.

MARJORIE PRICEMAN

Dream Life

I wake up one day about a month ago and a lock of my hair is missing, a two inch hank from the back of my head and I call my husband Robert at work to ask exactly what he might know about this missing hair of mine and he says, "Oh. I took it."

"Excuse me?"

"I got carried away," he says, "Can we talk about it later?"

I should be fuming at this transgression, this theft, but in a strange way I'm sort of bowled over by it. Robert's impulsiveness makes me dizzy. Makes me feel like I'm going over a waterfall. Or up an elevator real fast. I think maybe he's going to fold the hair into an amulet and wear it near his heart. Something wildly Medieval. Something quaintly Victorian. Something so Robert. He keeps some dragon lady press-on nails, which I wore exactly once, in a box in his office drawer. He says just to look at them makes him shiver and want to recite poetry. Want to just fling open the window of his sixteenth floor office and drop sonnets and flower petals down on the people walking by.

He's not your average lawyer, my cousin Bonnie said, when she was trying to set us up. He's a little, you know, out there. Perfect for you, she said. And what's that supposed to mean, I asked her and she said, well you're not the average high school music teacher. And besides, she said, he's *exactly* your type — creative, adventurous. But with a job.

On our first date he took me dancing at a bar in a bowling alley because he said they had the best jukebox in town. We were dressed like we were going to the Rainbow Room. Just the two of us and some guy with a gas station shirt sitting at the bar. Me in an ankle length blue silk dress scooped down the back. Him in a dark suit and rep tie. Drinking exotic drinks with paper umbrellas. Drinks with slices of fruit, palm tree swizzle sticks. Blue drinks. And drinks that looked like sunrise. And I think there was something else in those drinks, some potion or poison, some aphrodisiac. Some citrus scent that transported me out of myself. Made me levitate. Weightless, but not empty or invisible. There and not there is the best I can describe it. Dancing to Smokey Robinson at the Pequa Bowlerama. Him whispering the lyrics in my ear. Soft, so soft. And all the while, the crash and thunder of

bowling balls making the whole place tremble. Smell of almonds. Smell of toothpaste. And gasoline, which always makes my head swimmy, courtesy of Frank at the bar. Smell of floor wax and pretzels. Crazy citrus whiff in the air. Smell of starch on his white white shirt. Just him and me, and me in my three inch heels because Bonnie told me he was tall. Then he said, "Let's bowl a few games. Are you in?" I married him because he is just that crazy.

"So, where is it?" I ask him when he gets home from work and he gives me this what are you talking about face, loosens his tie and drops into the easy chair. I punch him in the arm, but nicely.

"HMMMM?"

"The hair," I say, and lean over to massage his shoulders. And then I run my fingers over his chest and slip my hand into his shirt pocket, then down his arms, circling both wrists. And there's nothing there. No packet tied with purple string. No silver locket. No little bracelet braided out of lover's locks.

"Where is it?" I say deep and slow and bite him on the neck. And he gives a little groan. A sound from underground, a volcano waking up.

"Tell." I bite him again on the ear. "Me."

He sighs, leans forward propping his chin on his hands and says, "Kentucky." Like I beat it out of him.

"No, really."

"Really. I sent it to a lab to be analyzed."

"Did not."

He shakes his head yes. I'm just standing there now with my mouth wide open looking like some tropical fish of the Midtown Tunnel.

"Last night. When you were sleeping. I put it in an envelope with a check for \$49.95 and then I walked up to the corner and dropped it in the mailbox and now," he makes an upward sweep with his hand and a noise like swissshhh, "off to Kentucky."

"It's a joke."

"I couldn't sleep," he says. "I was watching some talk show and the topic was how to tell if your kids are on drugs and they mentioned this place where they'll analyze a sample of your kid's hair and they flashed the address on the screen."

"I'm not hearing this," I say.

"The expert said this was something you might want to do if your kid has suddenly changed, has new friends, mood swings, erratic behavior, that kind of thing."

"Who has erratic behavior?" I say.

And he says, "You, Linda. You do."

And I say, "First of all I'm not your kid and second, I suppose it's not the least bit abnormal to sneak into someone's bed with a scissors and cut off their hair while they're sleeping?"

Then Robert falls into the chair, looks at me kind of exasperated and says, "I didn't know what else to do."

"You think I'm on *drugs*?"

"No. I don't know. Something."

Then I see the scissors on the coffee table. I grab it and start clipping the air around Robert. And he's cowering just a little because he knows I'm mad.

"You know what needs to be analyzed," I say. "Your head is what." And I snip a little closer now. "Let's send your head to Kentucky."

And he says, "Lin — da."

"Maybe they have a test that measures mid-life crisis. Is that what this is? Maybe there's a test that measures just what a goddamn untrusting nut-case you are."

"I'm sorry. But ever since the fall — the time you *fell* — things have been strange."

"I'll show you strange," I say.

"What can I do?" he says.

"You can get me back my hair. I look ridiculous."

"Anything else?" He lifts his eyebrows, gives me a look like can we please be serious.

"No. Just one thing. Undo the thing you've done. Give me back my fucking hair!"

He laughs a little nervously then he says, "Restore the lock! she cries; and all around. Restore the lock! the vaulted roofs rebound."

I fold my arms. He says, "Pope," and looks at me with eyes wide, looks at me for forgiveness.

"I'm not laughing." The words small and cracked. I squint my eyes, try to cut him with my stare. Press my lips in a straight line. Robert stands, hands held out, palms up, like an empty

embrace, like petitioning with prayer. Like a school boy waiting to be smacked with a ruler.

"No, me either," he says. "I'm not laughing. Can we talk about it?"

I don't answer because if I open my mouth to speak I know the words will come out coiled like snakes. The words will come out jagged and scratch my mouth. The words will shatter like china on a stone floor. My jaw stiff with anger. A rock lodged in my throat. I go into the bedroom and slam the door. But it's a cheap hollow-core door and it doesn't make my point. It doesn't make my point. It doesn't shake the house with my rage. So I kick it hard and the cheap wood dents and splinters and it doesn't make much noise. But my foot is screaming. And I start crying, from exhaustion mostly. Because lately I've been so tired.

There's a tapping on the door. Robert. "Here's why I did it," he says, his voice muffled, slow. "You're either sleeping all the time or you're going like last week when you said you'd be at Bonnie's and she called here. And she said she wasn't expecting you either. Or else you're too happy, wide-awake. Wired. Three different people asked me at the Clark's party what was up with you. The way you were dancing and talking so fast. And that night driving home from the movies and you couldn't make out the street signs. And you must have missed work five times this month. I don't *remember* the last time I heard you play the piano," he says, and his voice fades. The word piano he says like vapor, like mist.

"Go away," I say. And I dry my face in the pillow. And I cry some more. And I sleep.

I dream that Robert and I are in the supermarket. I'm tired and I want to leave but we have to buy groceries so Robert says why don't you ride in the cart and I'll push you. And I don't want to. I'm too big for that. But he insists and I climb into the child seat and my big legs are hanging out of the cart. The other shoppers look at me like I'm some sort of freak. And then Robert says he forgot to get spinach and he just leaves me in the bread aisle. I'm stuck there and people are staring at me and I don't know if he's coming back.

When I wake up I write it down in a notebook I kept next to the bed. Then I look up what it means in my Dream Dictionary. I've been recording my dreams for a while now. Ever since I've

been trying to get in touch with my other side. That is, the metaphysical me. Because there's more to life than what you can see, touch, or eat. There's more to a person than just a body.

I have two notebooks filled with my dreams and their meanings.

Dreams about being on vacation somewhere exotic like Tahiti or maybe Bora-Bora and I've just arrived, haven't even unpacked, and I have to turn around and go home. Of course there are assurances that I can go right back to Tahiti or Bora-Bora as soon as I take care of this or that urgent business. (This is a dream about believing that nothing good can ever last.)

Dreams about going to a party and not knowing anyone there and what's worse — being entirely dressed wrong for the occasion. For instance, I am wearing jeans and a sweater and everyone else is in formal wear. (This is a dream about not fitting in. About being self-conscious in new situations. Fear of being different.)

Dreams about waking up in a crib, about being a baby except in my head I'm still me. In my head I'm thirty-four years old but I have the body of a baby. (This is a dream about dependency, about having to rely on others. Fear of responsibility. Not wanting to grow up.)

Dreams about eyeglasses, windows, telescopes. (These indicate the desire to see something more clearly. To know the future. To understand.)

Dreams about walking through a house, my house, and opening a door and finding a room I didn't know or had forgotten was there. Sometimes the room leads to other, larger rooms. I resolve then and there to make great use of all this new space. (This is a dream about wasted talent, wasted time, wasted potential.)

Dreams about being in an elevator and suddenly it starts moving sideways. (This is a dream about being stuck. Love life, career —all at a standstill.)

Dreams about looking in the mirror and my hair is falling out. Or turning gray. (This is about fear of growing old, fear of death, of wasting away.)

Dreams about lifting out of my bed at night and circling the house, flying. (This is a dream about sex.)

Dreams about being in an airplane that is diving or crashing.

(This is fear of sex.)

Dreams of snakes coming out from cracks in the floor tiles.

(Ditto.)

Dreams about being at a dinner party and a man I have just met leans over and puts out his cigarette in the middle of my dinner plate. (This is a dream about sex, forced.)

Dreams about eating seeds, nuts or fruit. (This usually means pregnancy or childbirth. Or, fear of. Or sex.)

Eating equals sex. In particular, carrots, cucumbers, baguettes, zucchini, you get the picture, indicate sex/male. And fruits, pies, donuts, quiches, eggs, etc. equal sex/female. Dancing symbolizes sex. Flying and falling always mean sex. As do teeth swimming, skyscrapers, tunnels and trains, elevators, some automobiles, shoes, aggressive dogs, fish, trampolines. Submarines — I don't have to spell it out for you. Dreams of sex, on the other hand, are usually about death.

For five nights now I lock the bedroom door because I don't want Robert sneaking in. Who knows what he'll take from me next? Throat cultures? Fingerprints? Maybe he's going to check me out with the FBI, see if I'm on their wanted list. Maybe he'll steal my organs, drain my blood. I have visions of him creeping into bed at night and plucking out my eyeballs. Or pulling my teeth with a pair of old pliers. Tearing my heart out. Sealing my heart in a jar and sending it express mail to Kentucky.

I avoid him in the evenings, eat my dinner in front of the TV. I leave notes conveying essential information. Trash days, groceries, phone messages. I leave a note on the refrigerator reminding him that I am not, in case he hadn't noticed, speaking to him. He leaves me rhyming couplets written in soap on the bathroom mirror. But he's not getting off that easy. One night he looks up from the newspaper and I'm clipping my toenails. I scoop them up quick and crumple them in a tissue.

"You're not getting them," I say.

"She speaks!" he says.

"Ugh." I grab the phone and bring it into the bedroom and talk to Bonnie about the tragedy that is my life.

"He did *that*?" she says, incredulous. "Wow."

"I know." I say.

"Don't you feel.....violated?" she asks.

"Exactly," I say.

"Why don't you get away?" she says. "Come with me on the Goddess Tour. Santa Fe. Sidona. The Pit of Healing Mud. It's just what you need."

"I can't," I say. "Between work and appointments. Besides, my leg still bothers me. I shouldn't walk on it too much."

"Still? Bonnie says. "That was months ago."

Since I get off work earlier than Robert, I figure I can intercept the odious hair analysis and toss it in the trash. On Saturday, he sees me rush to get the mail before he can. I shuffle through it. He says, "Don't bother. It's being sent to my office."

Tuesday I come in and he's sitting in the kitchen. Home an hour early at least. He has a beer in his hand and two empties by the sink.

"What are you celebrating?" I say sarcastically because I'm still not really talking to him. I'm still really mad. He's got the mail, some bills, a computer print-out.

"The results," he says, waving the paper.

"Uh-oh," I say, opening the refrigerator, looking for something.

"It says here that you're not a real redhead."

"Disillusioned?," I say, and take a swig from the orange juice container because I know that makes him crazy. But he doesn't even wince.

"Deficient in vitamins B2 and E," he says.

"Want a divorce?" I say.

Now he's not saying anything, just staring at the paper. Then he holds it out to me. "What's this?"

I brush past him. I open the refrigerator, close it.

There are five items under pharmaceuticals." Now he's standing, thrusting the paper in front of me. His hand shaking a little. "What is all this stuff you're taking? What's wrong with you?"

"It might be nothing." I say and leave the room. And I'm a little shocked at my own stupidity because it didn't occur to me it wasn't just *illegal* drugs they tested for.

"And it might be *something*?" he says, following me.

"Let's not get alarmed," I say.

"It's why you're tired all the time isn't it? What does the doctor say?"

"He says fifty-fifty. He says it's a difficult diagnosis."

But I don't say everything he said. I don't say that when I told the doctor about the fatigue and the blurry vision and the weakness in my left leg he said it could be many things. Some of them bad. Some of them "debilitating." He said that word and I heard crutches, canes, wheelchairs, respirators. He said — then again, *maybe not*. And I've been hanging everything on those two words. Because the other words are too cruel and too hard to say.

"Mind if I have a talk with him?"

"Can I stop you?"

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I wanted to wait. Put it off as long as possible. But now it's starting."

He sits, drums the table. Reaches for my hand. Holds my hand tight. "Do you want to take a trip?" he says. Then, out of nowhere, "Should we have a baby?"

"I've been thinking a dog would be nice," I say, "For when you're not here."

"I'll always be here," he says.

Ah, so defensive. I say, "For when you're at *work*."

"We can get a dog. We can get a dog right now. I'll bet that place in the mall is open." He starts looking through his wallet. "No cash," he says. "Can you charge a dog?"

"I'm tired," I say. I fall forward, hoping he'll catch me.

"Can we go tomorrow?"

"Sure," he breaks my fall. "Tomorrow."

Lately I have this dream that I can fly and the reason I can do this, in my dream, is because I innocently eat some bird seeds that I find on a plate in a room, in my dream. Sunflower seeds, I think. As soon as I swallow I feel them fizzing inside me and then I'm lifting right out of my shoes, (brown suede T-straps with French heels). My clothing shrinks like plastic wrap and I float straight up because the room doesn't have a ceiling. And the wind flutters under and around me like fingers. And the blood in my body rushes like a river. Like something magnetic, tidal. At

THE ALEMBIC

my center of gravity, a whirlpool surging. And I'm cutting through fog like a cleaver. Blood pushing at the tips of my fingers, my toes. All senses connecting. All nerve endings ringing. Lifting, lifting. Until I'm above everything and I can see everything. Little houses, little cars, little people. (I see Mrs. Johansen waiting for the bus and I want to tell her the bus is broken down six blocks from there so she has time to change that ugly dress if she wants to but I'm too high up and she can't hear me. Nobody can hear me.) I see little roads and bridges. Little trees and farms, little cities with their grids and wires strung like webbing. And I feel the sun hit my body and I disperse into a cluster of silver beads; liquid metal like mercury. A flock of starlings. A meteor shower. Then I fuse. I regroup. I pitch to the right. I dip below the cloud cover. I can see my house from here.

(This is a dream about flying.)

DANIEL M. NESTOR
Who did she want to be?

after Sonny Sharrock

She wanted to be a landscape,
a pure, taffeta prettified thing,
so stripped of previous evenings
every breakfast went *tabula rasa*.
She wanted me to listen to her loud shouts
outside, arguments when the corner turned
over-the-shoulder curious, workmen
drinking coffee in slurps. She wanted
to hit me in my sleep, flatulent,
obnoxious, and steal over
the comforters between her thighs.
She's still talking. She wanted sunlight
regulated, the room and the moon
to rise when she said so, she wanted
every fabric unruffled, eventually
delivered, her skin, her skin, the morning
a helmet to muffle what was too strong.

DOUGLAS SPANGLE

Plays

it's as if
the thought plays
childsplay,
light,
that is.

Pearls rolling
in the expanse above

Mt. Tabor,

a permanent act of becoming,
stratoscopic fluency.

I am curious, blankminded above
the tabletop, coffee half-consumed,
as the two young women, twenty, maybe,
slip murmuring onto the worn sofa, which is just
on the rusty side of maroon; tune in:
the one slender, the other plump and pillowy,
both unremarkable to look at. They recline
into one another, cuddle; their hands nestle
and knead together, mutual, uncontenting.
Time melts slowly away; a few years ago
it would not be happening this way. We
wouldn't mingle like this, we
could all three as well as say.

I marvel
at the perfect play
of moonlight and shadow
from the lilac
on the mossy and weathered planks
as I lean on the rail
of my back porch at night.

My thoughts play
hide and seek,
Ollie Ollie Oxen Free,
all right.

SEAN HARVEY
A Stranger Comes to Town

The breeze crawled like a cripple along the porches
of the quiet side street in Tombstone.
In a week we were leaving for Brooklyn.
It was obvious that something was wrong.
Still I pretended, a small child itching
to get out of an angel costume,
etching away at each small crack,
reinforcing a demolished building
with a half-dozen plywood planks.

She'd been angry for the past few weeks
but was calm as she sat on the rickety paint-chipped
swing and spilled her guts.
Life is before us... holding her back...blahblahblah...friends.
The anger poured out of her, transformed
like the bodies of Christians after the Second Coming
into its natural shape, the truth.
All of that anger sifted through the trees
and dispersed like magic, a mass of pre-dawn mist
snuffed out by a passing van.

My last night in town I held a party
in the ruins of my apartment.
All of my things were in boxes outside the front door.
Near the end, a beautiful woman rubbed up against me
and pretty soon I took her hand and placed it on my mouth.
We picked our way over the three remaining passed-out drunks
into the blank bedroom
where I wrestled into her on the carpet.
When I woke up she was getting her things.
"What is your name," I said, and she said "An aesthetic."
Then I actually did wake up
and saw that I was really alone.

THE ALEMBIC

I rubbed my eyes awake shambled to the parking lot
waiting for my friend to arrive in his beat-up hatchback.
We loaded it up with my stuff and drove across
the dreary panorama of the Ohio plains,
the cop-infested hills of Pennsylvania
and the vast post-apocalyptic vision that is Newark
until we spanned the bridge
and crawled along the city's outer rib.

I gawked at the spectacle of concrete and artificial light
and said "Do you think I'll be all right here?"
He turned his neck uncomfortably, as if scared
by the sudden prophetic responsibility placed upon him
and said, "I don't know, man. You'll have to figure that out."
We found my temporary apartment, unloaded my stuff
and he was off to his girlfriend in New Jersey.
I looked out across Brooklyn at the beaconing forest of buildings
and breathed and went, "Damn."

LAURA ALBRECHT

White Out

Snow blows, frothy as cream,
Adhering to my windshield,
No distinct flakes, only
A swirl of seamless white.
My headlights blunt, hitting
Wall, hold their light inside.
On the four lane highway,
I swerve around coyotes.
They trot easily across
The freeze, their sliver
Fur glinting like icicle skin.
I feel my back tires slide
Again and again as I spin
My steering wheel, hit my brakes,
Trying to miss their bodies.
Their black noses smear
Against my windows, thawing
Patches that drip, refreeze.
I hear their yips, their
Occasional long wails,
Watch their spread footprints
Blow clear off my front hood.
I hear them leap from the roof,
Hear their teeth graze my
Hubcaps, stir up glassy sparks.
They gallop faster than I dare
Drive, running ahead, looping
Back, the whole pack drawn
By my warmth, my movement.
A snow ghostly image of your
Shaggy head sits on my dashboard,
Nodding, sticking out its tongue,
Breathing up into my eyes,
Yelping at my mouth, long
Light-colored hair ruffling,
Alive as waving fingers.

Even with my hands, my teeth
I could never sculpt a lasting
Facsimile of your fierce face.
I know this one too will
Soon fade, another chimera,
Leaving behind only its noise.
I open the car door, tumble out,
Safer with the killing weather,
The pacing, scenting dogs.

3000 Watts Blown

With his homing instinct, he returned
To her again and again, hunting her down,
Discovering her in different forms,
Settings, always giving off a familiar
Scent, like spices set on fire, always
With the same arced angel chin.
He longed to make her chromium eyes
Dear each time he saw himself reflected,
Chilled twin miniatures, in their sheen.
She balanced him on the ruffled edges
Of her multiple tongues, slippery circlings
Of saltwater fish gushing strange laughter,
Foreign open kisses stretching her lips.
Tunnels tubing through her howled,
Full of smoke, running dry and demanding.
She gained momentum, ran him down
With all the forward impact of a car
Crash mannequin ricocheting at the close
Of a choreographed collision course.
Her autonomous mouth, plush as
An abrasion, spoke and acted on its own.
Hand-shaped bruises dented her skin.
Near her, he found the air saturated
With live electric current, dousing
Everything neon, slicked with kick.
She amplified, a swallower thirsting.
All the pore holes in her bones longed,
And him without enough red to fill them.
With the pop, she blurred like a hologram
Held at the wrong angle, phosphorescent
Thumbprint whirling away to nothing.
The darkness that flooded after came
As a drowning, slow-motion breathlessness.
His fingers scrabbled for the power switch,
Snagged copper wires, dead glass instead.

ANMARIE TRIMBLE

Ouija flood

Hysteric February and I
sobbed six inches in two nights —
Your scent still in my bed,
I throw the sheet downstairs.
It drowns, Ophelia in my basement.
The water is deep.

Paper and detritus drift...lilies
then tea leaves, sticking against the stairs
into clumps of fortune
telling me I'm abandoned.
I wade in, read messages
against family archetypes —
Zenith short wave,
Grandma's Prohibition beer vat,
unpaired stilettos, Elvis 45's —
other people's memories
of dance and high fidelity.

Enter my deus ex machina —
The pump jumps.
Currents eddy around
empty bluing bottles and
something resembling
exploded bread loaves.
A suck and everything moves at once,
papers channeling —
"dear"
"love always"
"payment due upon"
"do not cover misuse" —
all fortunes, facing the wrong way.

Ode to my 216th egg

The body smells
of a cell giving up.
The month dies faceless,
limbless, heartless,
half the code,
free to go as the
big clock pleases,
remembering me to
unsecretive messy secrets,
charades explained through
matriline and hygiene package.

Some women writhe,
stuck with the tide's
voodoo pins and moon's
kick to the stomach,
leaving me to ponder
doubling over,
girls sitting out gym class,
female prehistory and fitness
measured by flight from bears and lions.

I feel the infinitesimal
ache of that which is bigger
than me, nurturing
the possibility of diaries,
of biographies,
epics and photographs
until the species fall to the
twenty-six million year
cycle of extinctions.
This burden, this dwarf star,
this medicine ball,
the weight of it.

DEIRDRE O' CONNOR

Caretaker's Song

She learned to hate him long before he died,
his sleeping thinker's face and sour tongue,
but had to be a woman, kept him alive

in her own bed, the sheets twisted wildly
beneath the comforter, the comfortless.
She learned to hate him long before his death

but called it illness, a life obscured by drink
she might obliterate with work and love
one tends to be a woman to keep alive.

All day he read and drank and talked, a self-
appointed genius deconstruction what
she learned to hate before he died: herself

inside her circumstance — a man who seemed
to need her to survive, which make her stay,
kept him alive, and bore her smallish songs

whose unheard, repetitious gist
underwrote the page, still new,
on which she learned to hate him
as he died inside the woman, kept alive.

Fools

Hell isn't other people, but purgatory may be
the ones we couldn't fall in love with,
watching them talk from across the table
like time-lapsed flowers, blooms that fell
from the rose, while Who We Were Kidding
diminished herself more fully inside our bodies
and let them talk, and asked them questions,
and told good stories they didn't hear
for what they were worth.

No fault of their own, the not-hearing,
since they too felt the flames below
reach for the soles of their feet;
they too were rather distracted
by clinking silver and coffee cup clatter
like horses' hooves en route to Eternity.

Like us, they were suffering gladly
that we might somehow be the one
to bring the heaven down to their arms,
so they might also rise to fill its occasion.

SAM GRIDLEY
A Special Night With Johnny

I think I'm in the right mood. Nobody will know what mood I was in, but it's important to have my head straight. Stretch out on the couch as usual. My one light on behind me, the rest of the room dark. Get settled, pull my comforter up. Switch on Johnny.

Hi Johnny! Hey, cool jacket, babe. I like it! Let's have some lame jokes to keep my spirits up, Johnny.

Ewww. That was worse than usual. Even the audience groaned. Even our esteemed president, dull asshole that he is, deserves a better zinger than that.

Don't mind me if I punch the volume down with the remote, it's not a comment on your monologue. You know me. I just like to watch your face and hear your voice in a little low murmur and catch shots of Ed guffawing and Doc preening in front of the band. Later on, if I last that long, I'll gape at the actor hunks you bring on or the half-naked bimbos. I usually don't even know who they are, but I like checking them out.

While you talk I'm going to start taking some pills here, but that isn't a comment on your monologue either, trust me.

I can't believe you're quitting next week, I thought you'd go on forever. I've been watching you as long as you've been on the tube, what is it, almost thirty years. Since I was in junior high. The nights Mom let me stay up late, we used to plop down by the old Magnavox in our nightgowns, with a bag of Rold Gold pretzels between us. She used to grab her knees and rock back and forth and laugh. I loved to watch her like that, her hair loose on her back, her makeup off. Like me, she never acted that free around her husband, only for you, Johnny.

There's something exciting, being up late, alone in the house like this, but tied in with the tube to millions of people across the country watching you. Maybe I'm the only one up for miles, our house is so isolated, but still I'm part of your flock, Johnny. A special congregation, us Johnny-watchers of America. All those middle-aged women out there, sitting in bed rubbing moisturizers on their skin, they're members. All those men in their jockey shorts coming out of the bathroom with toothbrushes in their mouths, wondering

what joke you had just told that made the wife laugh.

When you told an especially raunchy one, Mom would hug me against her, cover my ears and say I didn't hear that.

I've got my pills lined up, ten bottles of them. I brought in a couple bottles of water, my favorite type of Perrier, so I don't have to get up again. For me, it has to be Perrier when I take pills, it disguises the taste. I want to maintain my standards here.

I'll start with the red ones, I think.

I've got some wine too, see? My favorite cheap stuff, Gallo Hearty Burgundy, so I can stay in the right mood. I don't want this to get depressing. God know there's been too much of that in this house the last year and a half, with me sick all the time. Depression thick as fudge. So pour the first glass of wine, let's party. Notice I'm using our best glasses, the crystal we got from Paul's parents for our fifteenth anniversary. I'm wearing my silk nightie too. This woman has style.

Gallo Hearty, it's what we drank in the sixties when we were learning to be hip. Good wallop for the money, and it mixed nice with the weed and the acid — or maybe we were so zonked it didn't matter. Funny, we were so radical, so political, but we didn't have a clue about the poisons getting in our bodies. The chemicals, radiation, electromagnetic fields, everything that slips in and sneaks around, mutating the cells, till one day you have cancer and everybody acts surprised. I know I was amazed it happened to me, there's no history in my family. I started thinking, was it the acid I did in college? Was it the birth control pills? The cigarettes I quit five years ago? Was it the nuclear power plant up the river? The glazes I use on my pots? Or the stuff they spray on fruit, or the UV radiation, or my hair dryer? What the fuck, nobody knows.

And the big irony, of course, is I'd started to get healthy, after years of being a haphazard type. I was going to the gym to work out, cutting down on red meat, copping new recipes with broccoli and oat bran.

I'm not whining you know. Everybody knows disasters can grab anybody. You say why me? and the answer is Why the hell not? Still, people like to think their life has some sense int.

So what do *you* think, Johnny? Does my life make sense? I suppose that's an unfair question but you owe me something for watching you these thirty mucked-up years.

OK, finish your monologue. Do your shtick, your little grin and imitation golf swing and while the rest of the country cuts to a commercial you can hope me concentrate on this.

Hold on a sec — let's have a couple more red ones, I think that's six. Another gulp of Hearty. I'm doing this slowly so I don't throw up. I want to get up to fifty or so of different types and colors before I pass out. This ought to be artistic.

OK, we're ready? One woman's life, beginning to end. They say you're looking for movie scripts to get involved in, so tell me if this one's got potential.

It starts with this typical bright and bratty girl in a regular American family. Zoom in on the lawn or something. The father's got a good corporate job, the mother teaches school, the younger brother's weird but lovable like everyone else's younger brother. In her teens the parents get a regular American divorce, the messy style. The father gets remarried, moves away, they hardly see him anymore; that's not too unusual. The girl goes to college, decides she has creative qualities, majors in art. She does her political protests, her drugs and sex; close up of pills in her dresser drawer. Meanwhile the weird but lovable brother gets political too but the wrong way, so he joins the marines and gets blown into itsy bitsy pieces in Vietnam. A little family tragedy there, we can call it that -shot of the coffin — but she goes on, gets her degree, teaches art in high school while she makes pots at night. Meets a nice law student, moves in with him, moves out, moves back in, marries. Hot sex scene here. Has a beautiful baby daughter Marie. Nursing, diapers, playground, "Sesame Street," bedtime stories — she's kind of a klutzy disorganized mother, so maybe this is a comedy part. Dropping the groceries while she puts the kid in the car; or dropping the kid while she puts the groceries in — you decide. Anyway Marie starts school and Mom works her potting wheel again. Husband joins important firm, becomes successful. They get older. They buy a dream house in the way-out woodsy suburbs. She thinks her pottery's getting good though she can't find a real gallery for it; she sells a few to places with names like the Olde Harbour Craft Shoppe. She has a little swelling in her armpit, turns out to be advanced breast cancer. Gets the breast off, the lymph glands out, lots and lots of chemo. Throws up twice a day, long stringy yellow stuff. Ulcers in her mouth. Hair falls out. Get a shot of her bald in front of the mirror; people like a little pathos,

you know. Then her brilliant doctor rebuilds the boob with the best fake stuff, makes a new nipple with skin from her cunt. When her hair grows back in, nobody but her husband would know. She's recovered, she's made it, she throws new pots to celebrate her new artificial self, then one test goes bad again. They call her back for every expensive test in the book. The doctor says more surgery, more chemo, more of everything! She says fuck you, wonder-man, I'm done.

Pardon my language.

Paul says I'm "blunt," that's a joke between us. When has his politician friends over he always ends up kidding that his wife is "blunt." It makes me mad sometimes.

I think I'm getting slightly drunk, Johnny, or the pills are starting in fast. I see you're back with a guest, who the hell is that? I'm so out of touch I don't recognize her, even though most of her body is hanging out.

You didn't answer my question. How does the script sound? Do I get my movie deal or what?

Three more reds, then I switch to whites. Or maybe I should alternate.

It's so dark out the window, that's one thing I've never gotten used to here. Quarter-mile down the driveway to the road, hundreds of yards to the next drive. No light but the one I made Paul put on the garage. Our house stuck way back in the trees, so dead and still-no crickets this early in the year. Sometimes we hear treefrogs down by the creek. I don't hear them tonight. Paul was the one who wanted to move out here, build this beg expensive place in the boonies. I never got along that well with Nature. Everybody I know is in the city.

But what am I complaining about, I've got my charter membership in the Johnny Watchers Of America Society!

Don't look at me that way. I know this is serious, I can't help it if my sarcasm leaks out. Nature didn't treat *me* serious.

For your information, it's this one on the right. Maybe I've never told you all the details before, but tonight's the night, Johnny. Let it all hang out like your friend there is doing. Our last time together, it ought to be a special night, huh?

Here take a peek at it.

It's a good reconstruction job, no? Dr. Shaw the Great is so proud of his work. I look damn sexy with clothes on, you know.

People who've heard about my operation are always sneaking a look, trying to guess which side is which. Idiots.

Of course it's not what you'd want to show a lover, or a husband. Too patchy still. And the feel is sort of-Well, nothing's perfect. And now where do you suppose that new cancer's hiding? Back under there, they say. Interesting. The human body is full of surprises.

Don't *look* at me that way. I didn't force you to see! God damn it, I don't want any crap from you, Johnny.

All right, I'm putting it away.

At least you didn't have to touch it, like Paul. He's always so careful about it, though he pretends he's not. He touches sort of casually to prove the fake one doesn't bother him.

Jerks. All of you.

Couple more white. Swig of Hearty. I'll mix it with the Perrier for variety. Am I talking out loud? Who cares.

You know those days in school, drinking and smoking and dropping till late at night, everybody high, sprawled on the floor every which way, I was the only one that wanted to watch Johnny. You were too unhip for the others, sad to say. At 11:30 I'd switch off the Grateful Dead or whatever and turn on the tube. Somebody would get up and yell about it but I'd tell him to put his head in the toilet where it belonged.

Then I'd sit real close to the screen, lay my arms around it, keep your voice way down low like a lover's, and you'd help me through. I sang little songs to you. I told you my secret thoughts. You were cool.

Sometimes, then, I thought of Mom sitting in front of her own TV, hugging her knees and rocking, alone in that apartment that she moved to when she sold the house. A few nights I even called her up. I'd say, I know you're still up, Mom, I can hear Johnny in the background, did you like that comedian that was just on? And we'd talk real good for two or three minutes, but then it'd stall, we had nothing else to say. OK, see you, I'd tell her, laughing-maybe I'll drive home next weekend. Then I'd hang up. She must've know I was stoned.

Poor Mom. We never fought, we just stopped being close, even before Jamey got killed. And afterwards, when I was raving about the war and marching against the Pentagon and all that, she was hardly there. I don't even remember what she looked like in

those days. She just sat in her apartment at night grading papers and waiting for your show to come on . I thought she'd given up and had no life at all except her teaching. One time I lectured her about it. You're still alive! I said. So live! Go out and meet somebody! I thought it was a fault in her character.

How many is that? Try six of the little pinks.

A fault in the character. Like anyone has a right to judge.

Damn! Spilled the wine! Shit, don't want a red mess on my gown. Pour some Perrier on it , rinse it...Aw hell, I'm getting my leg wet.

Relax, just relax. Nobody's looking, it's black out here. The pills are hitting now, doing the job. I planned it right. If it gets a little sloppy Paul will clean it up.

I can rely on Paul. He's so utterly reliable.

He's at one of those political meetings in the city, he'll stay in a hotel overnight and catch the train back in the morning. Plenty of time for my pills to work. He asked me four different times if it was really all right for him to go; then he phoned me before he left his office tonight, said we're going to have a good long talk this weekend. He doesn't suspect. Or Marie either, she's sleeping at Tammy's with some other girls, celebrating the end of exams; she won't even call till noon.

I could phone Marie now, make sure she's OK, start preparing her for what they'll tell her tomorrow. What would I say?...They're probably in pj's in their sleeping bags, giggling. Music on low. Half -asleep but wired from gossiping about boys. I remember those days.

...Actually I have no idea what they're doing. She didn't tell me who-all was going to be there. No boys I presume, Tammy's parents are supposed to be home. But she spent a long time on her hair and makeup and picking out music to take. She came and stood in my bedroom doorway for a couple seconds before she left. You going now? I said. She shrugged. You look nice, I said, which was partly a lie because I don't like her with so much eye shadow. But I was thinking, you know, this is probably the last time, and I saw how beautiful her face was under the eye shadow, and I wanted to touch her. My daughter. I wanted to feel her eyes, her cheekbones, run my hands down her arms-but you can't do that with a teenager. So I just went over and gave her a peck of a kiss, standard mother style. She stood there with her hands at her sides.

I hadn't told her about my test results, but Paul must've. I said, Take care of yourself, honey. She tossed me one quick look over her shoulder, almost a scared kind of look, and she was out the front door.

...No, I better not call Tammy's. I might say the wrong thing, give it away. Or upset her so she'll have a bad memory.

Couple yellows.

She'll be OK with Paul. They get along real good, better than I do with either of them.

Pinks. More Hearty.

So Paul, meanwhile, he's down there schmoozing with the old boys tonight. The boys with expensive haircuts is what I call them. Those earnest 40ish clean-cut types that are gonna gang together to reform the city and the county. A couple of them are sort of cute. I had a thing for that Darren guy once.

...But Paul, you know, he could be an important person if his friend gets into Congress. He already knows so many movers and shakers. Before I got sick we were having those large dinner parties, I had that blue strapless I wore, don't know if it still fits...And with Paul moving in the top circles, he might even get introduced to you, Johnny. Imagine that. He'll shake your hand and say, My wife, my late wife, watched you every night, she was a tremendous fan. And you'll smile, your little egotistical smile, and you'll ask about me.

If I hadn't got sick I might've met you myself. I can see the picture on the society page. Me taking your manicured fingers in mine. Coming close to you, standing on tiptoe. Licking your face?
Eww.

Naw, I wouldn't do that. I might possibly pat your bottom though. 'Cause I've always liked your rear end, Johnny, I wish you'd turn around more. If I could put one of Cher's semi-bottomless outfits on you-now that would be something.

Three more pinks.

One big hug, actually, is all I'd want. I'd settle for that.

Sometimes the hardest thing, I want to tell you this, the hardest thing about being sick was they didn't hold me. The way you imagine it, if something terrible happens to you all the petty conflicts fall away, your family rallies round you, they support you-you picture them hugging you, the three of you hugging-all in it together, fighting the disease.

But Marie, you know, acted embarrassed about it. She stopped inviting her friends over, especially when I was throwing up so much. She got her father to drive her places instead of me. She snapped, she was bratty, or she just kind of hid from me like what I had was catching. I didn't blame her. I was crabby, nauseous, I looked awful, and what could I expect from a teenager? So I tried to say to her once: I don't mind that fact that you don't know what to say to me, how to be with me, I don't mind that you find me hard to look at (because she didn't look at me much, she kept her eyes a little off)-I don't all mind all that, Marie, I tried to say, because I'm your mother no matter what. I know you're afraid and you don't know how to deal with this, it's no your fault. But I couldn't get the words out. When I started to I only got furious.

But Paul, on the other hand, he was different. He was so exactly considerate, so *precisely* considerate. He asked me if I wanted this, if I could handle that, and he never lost his temper.

So what am I saying-did I want him to lose his temper?

Those long trips to the hospital with him. I hated every hill, every tree we passed on the way. I hated the big parking lot and the long beige hall you went down to chemo. I hated the green vinyl chairs you had to wait in till your name was called. I hated the metal tables in the examining rooms. I hate the needles, so sterile they gave off a little blue glow. I hated the catheter they put in for the chemicals, poking its nasty head out of my skin.

And I hated Paul because he-

I don't know.

See, when you come out of there, you're not a person anymore, just a walking chemo lab. You need something human, something crazy maybe, to bring you back. I don't think Paul understood that. He'd pat my arm and kiss my forehead and drive me home, and the two of us would sit down and wait for me to throw up.

He was so practical and thoughtful. He told me not to worry too much. He *accepted* it for god's sake!

Probably we lost our zip a long time ago. The way my mom and dad did. Before I got sick, we even talked about divorce. But we said, because of Marie, we wouldn't do it unless it got really necessary. When is it "necessary"?

Night before last, he came home, he got a can of his Mexican beer from the refrigerator, flipped through his mail and sat down

in a kitchen chair. He loosened his tie. I slid our dinner in the Microwave and punched the buttons and leaned back on the counter. I said, Paul, Dr. Shaw called this afternoon, he's figured out what he wants to do. He said, Oh? More tests I bet. I said, No-surgery and chemo; he want to remove the implant, cut out more of the chest muscles, and give me lots of courses of chemo like last time, with more kinds of chemicals.

God damn, he said. the skin above his nose sort of crinkled, and he looked down at his beer. Well OK, dammit, he muttered, if that's what we have to do.

No, not OK, I said.

I know (he started to reassure me), it's another tough one, but we can-

I mean, I said, it's not in any way OK. Not with me. Enough is enough.

How do you mean? he said.

I'm just not doing it. Not again. Not when the chances are bad.

Who says the chances are bad?

I reminded him about the statistics they gave us the first time. Now I'm in the second group, I said, the one that flunked and has to try again. You know that means.

So what other choice is there? he came back at me.

You know what it amounts to, I said. When I start to hurt, they can probably do stuff to make me "comfortable."

He looked at his beer again. He looked up at me. He pinched the end of his tie, hard, like he was squishing a beetle. He said, If that, if that's really what you want, if it's your choice...but we have to *discuss* this, we have to *think* about it. Talk to doctors, explore all the options...

He looked so very tired, confused. He went on mumbling about options and so forth. All at once he sucked up the rest of the beer and crunched the can flat.

But he never got out of the chair. He never came over and held me, Johnny.

I don't blame him. He was shocked, he was trying to grope around it. This whole affair has wasted him as much as me.

Of course some people's husbands wouldn't leave them alone two nights after they got news like that. Paul asked, though. Give him credit, he asked if I minded. Naturally I said I didn't mind. I

wasn't going to tell him I did.

With another husband I might have to worry more that he's fooling around. But I know Paul's at his political meeting. And if he gets a little something afterwards, what's the harm? He's smart enough to use protection. I'd kill him if I found out, that's all.

So don't suppose I'm blaming him, Johnny. I'm being good to him, giving him a better way out of this. He won't have to hold my throw-up bucket again or watch me dribbling away in my sickbed.

What's he losing anyway? for years all I've done is live off him and make my pots — typical middle-aged artsy lady with a rich husband. That's what I've turned into.

On his birthday a couple months ago, you know how ridiculous it was, the present I gave him. He takes off the wrapping, grinning trying to be excited, and he sees it's just a pot like the other eighty-seven thousand around the house. He sits back. It's beautiful, he says, with that crinkles over his nose. He admires my special glaze. He gives me a dry kiss on the cheek. I could tell he didn't have the slightest clue why I made that for him, I'd never given him a pot as a present before. He must've thought it had something to do with my cancer, my emotions, but he couldn't figure out how. So he said, as brightly as he could, I'm going to put *this* one on my *desk*! And he marched off with it, carrying it in two hands like a full throw-up bucket.

He didn't look at the bottom. Where I usually put my initials, I'd cut "I LUV U" and the date. At the time I thought it was cute, or funny, I don't know what — it seems childish now. But no matter, he never saw the message. The pot's still in there on his desk. He put his boxes of paper clips in it.

You see, Paul is not the type of man who looks at the bottom of a pot.

But the worst thing is, I meant it, Johnny. What I wrote on the bottom. When I was shaping and smoothing that pot it was like — well you know, every once in awhile, just for a minute, it feels like you've got something really alive under your fingers. You're turning and working it and you feel it grow and start to breathe like a lover, or a baby, or a monster, and you don't know what it's going to be, you just have to let it come. So I had one of those moments with that pot, and it connected up to Paul, and right then, for that instant, I loved him and wanted him so much I

cried on the clay.

Then I cut the stupid message in it which he never saw.

... About twenty-five I think. Halfway.

I must be lucky my mind is staying clear. You can tell my system's had practice with drugs and chemicals, I'm not even close to vomiting. There's just a sort of hollow feeling in my stomach. You know when a cartoon character gets shot and you can see a hole through his middle all the way to blue sky on the other side? How that looks is how my stomach's starting to feel.

Interesting. Well I always thought my life was a cartoon.

Like that time there was mix-up in the hospital and they tried to give me medicine for kidney stones instead of cancer. I remember Paul saying, while he patted my hand exactly three times, We have to keep our sense of humor about this, honey.

I laughed and laughed at him. What is it? he said.

You're right, I told him. It's so *funny!*

... That dark out there keeps peeking at me through the window like a person, but I'm sure it's nobody.

In my chemo dreams there was a dark thing. He'd lean over me and creep his fingers, grinning with his yellow teeth. Smelled like a rotten hamburger. Fingers creeping toward my chest. He was going to touch it, touch right on the cancer — pet it, squeeze it. Then I'd jerk up awake, sweat all over my face.

But I'm not scared now. I've got my wine and my Johnny and my pills. Not scared.

Don't know if Paul's had awful dreams, he's never said.

Anyway, what he finds in the morning won't be a dream. He may think it is at first. Or he'll suppose I fell asleep in front of the TV. He'll shake me, he'll call my name. When I don't wake up, what'll he do first? Go to the kitchen for a Mexican beer?

Just keeping our sense of humor here.

Where'd you go, Johnny — another commercial? Jesus you're always sneaking away, can't trust you. So you've decided to retire from the show, leave me for good — well this joke's on you, baby, 'cause I'm retiring first! Eight reds.

... My father left me, you know. Moved away, came back for Jamey's funeral, stood in the cemetery and looked at the box with the flag on it and pieces of a person inside. He kissed me once on the cheek. Flew out the next morning.

Marie runs to a slumber party.

Dr. Shaw says we'll take the whole thing out and start over. Then he says, 'Bye now, don't you worry, and hangs up.

Screw all of you!

Jamey had it easy. One wrong step, there was a mine, he went up in pieces. Bits of meat tossed around the jungle.

I was thinking about him last week. I went walking in the meadow down by the river. I was waiting for Shaw the Great to tell me how much of me they'd cut or poison and I thought, What if there's an old land mine out here in the boondocks from some war that everybody's forgot? If I step on it these problems are done, huh? *BOOM*, little pieces splashing up in the sky.

I thought that'd be neat. Spectacular way to go. And Paul would have to hire a very expensive landscaping firm to clean up. What he deserves for making me live in the boonies.

... Wait. That's not right. Let's not think that way. I'm getting out of hand here. I've gotta keep the right mood. Try some more Hearty.

... Honestly, I sat down last night, when I realized I'd be alone, and figured it out. I don't want anything morbid. Calm and gentle, that's me. Drugs and wine and falling asleep so they can't wake me. It doesn't have to be morbid to kill yourself. It can be peaceful, sensible. I mean, can you name one reason why not?

Marie? No, see, if I get it over quick, I spare her the worst. Paul will be real good about breaking it to her. I have nothing to say that could help. If she has a problems about it she'll get over them. Kids heal.

I just have to make sure I take enough before I pass out. Because if I'm not dead in the morning and they rush me to the hospital and pump my stomach and I have to open my eyes and look at them again, I'll lose what's left of my mind.

Oh you're back, Johnny, that's good. For a minute I was afraid I was all alone here mumbling to myself. But I knew you weren't leaving me yet, I didn't mean to sound angry.

Who's that new sex object with you? What happened to the other one? Ah you're a fickle person, Johnny me love, no wonder your wives give you trouble. This one, she looks familiar but she must be fake, she has the same stuff in her cleavage I've got in mine. Touch it, see how it moves.

I think I asked you a question, a while ago. I think you didn't

answer. What was it?

Shit. Spilling.

So what was I saying?... I thought it all through, peaceful and quiet. This is my “choice” all right, my “option.” The Johnny-watchers and me wrapping it up together. My own slumber party.

But I wonder if I should decorate myself for Paulie. A sprig of parsley on my breast?

No. Keep in control here.

I may be giving the wrong impression. With some of the things I’m saying. Really, I wish them all the best. No regrets. No blame.

Listen, there’s one thing I need to say. I thought of leaving a note but I’d goof it up, keep them from finding their own way to see it. What I want to tell you is, this is not despair, Johnny. Even though they’ll say I’ve been saving up these pills for months, long before I knew I wasn’t cured. The thing is, I believe in life. But life didn’t believe in me. Mother Nature decided to write this body off, so who am I going to argue?

We should handle this the same way you’ll walk off stage next Friday — head high, lover, after all these years. Your fans understand it’s time, they’ll sniffle about it but they’ll see it’s right.

That reminds me, I know my mother’s watching your last shows, I meant to call her. I didn’t tell her how the final tests came out. We still don’t talk much. Like we’ve never discussed what I feel having cancer or what she feels having a daughter that has cancer. But I kind of thought she deserved to know.

... What’re up to now, Johnny, I can’t see too good. You leering at her boobs again? Oh you slimeball, I’d punch your face if I could reach that far. You really are scum, Johnny. I don’t know why I’ve stuck with you so long.

I didn’t mean that. Forget what I said.

... But Mom, I wonder about her, what she’s thinking now. Wonder if she has any clue what’s happening to me. I could call her this instant, actually. She’ll be up in her nightgown watching you. I could tell her I remember when you first started — the two of us together on the family room floor, when she hugged me and covered my ears and laughed. I can see if she guesses what I’m doing here, if she’ll say anything about it.

I won’t put anything heavy on her. I mean, losing both her

children, I don't want to make it too much. I'll just — if I can reach...

Unh, no — oops, dammit!

Can't reach the phone.

Feet gone already.

Bye-bye little feets! hope you had a good time!

Hell my head's swirling, can't turn like that. Lie still.

Shit! Spilled again.

... OK, where were we? Forty-two? Thirty-seven? Math was never my strong suit. Gimme some more here. So they can't wake me.

Sloppy. So thirsty. Paul'll hire someone to clean the couch.

So listen, what I told you. Not despair. Remember that.

But you didn't answer me before, I forget what. I think I'm fading.

Another batch down the hatch. Joke, it rhymes. Keeping our sense of humor, Paulie! Dropped the pill bottle — rolled? Heard it roll. I can't get up. It's OK I've got more. More bottles. More wine.

Big hole in the middle of me, sky in the middle of muck.

Hard light through me. No light outside, it's black.

Somebody's fur creeping up my legs. Not scared. Not scared.

Oh look at her bounce, she's fake for sure!

Took enough? Can't be alive when Paulie comes. I may not've done fast enough.

Hell don't let me mess up! Fuck if he finds me alive! Gimme more!

Dropped...

Don't worry. It's OK. Going sleep now.

Reach out honey, give a hug.

Big big hug. Put me in mood.

Mmmm ... That's sweet.

DREYA L. JOHANSEN

The Drawing

There is a bitter shining in your blood,
the glint of spokes wheeling through evening
and exhaust. Is this your life, then?
Or all it can be? This being your palm,
calloused and damp, its opposable thumb
not fisting into the plead of a knock
at the door you can't call home.

Where your heart is, is under asphalt
or concrete, caught in the toothy maw
of the house where you never wanted
to go again but can never leave,
and you circle it, a screaming insect
on a string, never landing.

Where my heart is, is neither here nor there,
but I am behind that door with hand on knob,
and I turn on you for these bitter shining
lights of home on chance that you will see
a shine is still a light, bitter though our shine may be.

City

I am home from school, sick but not in bed.
Watch tv, listen to Ray calling students,
bang and hammer in the workshop, come in
to check on me. Let's go, he says, and we go
in the green Ford, we go to Phoenix, to junk yards
and salvage yards, to acres of waterheaters
and kitchensinks, glittering hubcaps and wires
like rainbows out of grey boxes. I wander
through aisles of heaven, mysterious machinery,
and when we leave the car is hot and so am I,
the world is lit with fever and hookers and idlers
on the street are gorgeous citizens of a city
I dream as we make our passage through.

ARTHUR G. GOTTLIEB

Apparitions

I wake late.
Mournful sky draped in satin
like a mortician's casket display,
six black birds buckshot
couldn't scatter, sitting in
judgment on a wire
like inquisition priests.

No room for error in this house
haunted by mistakes. Bones
buried in the basement
rattle chains on locked doors.

Ghosts, be my guests,
join me at the actuary's table.
I'm serving my guts, stewed
in their own sour juices
on a silver platter of moon.
Here is my head, my hand-picked
pickled brains.
Go ahead, dig in, eat my heart out.

But the ghouls wave me away
as if my words were worth
a steaming pile of tripe.
The bloodless, searching for
souls, are glutinous for more than
mere pounds of flesh.

The threat of their voraciousness
thickens my throat. I can't swallow
the lump of my own bitten Adam's
apple in one gulp.

Even after my offer of a sumptuous

midnight supper, the heavies roam
my rooms ravenous, moaning
about how little is left
for me to give.

Farmer's Daughter

Night's a shade too black.
He pulls the wool over his eyes
and dreams the dead sprout
from dried seed in the side
of his tattered scarecrow.

Too tired to sleep
he counts his chickens
and plows the profits back
into the rich furrow
between his wife's thighs.

From his upstairs window
he remembers the old reaper
bleeding rust in the rain.

The Interstate moving ever
closer is no yellow brick road
leading him to the wizard
who knows only oily asphalt
tracks hitchhikers' soles
lost in the scrub of skidding tires.

He wants to wake to the good
news yesterday's maverick cyclone
that pulled barns apart easily
as butterfly wings is gone
with the wicked witch of the Midwest
melting in a puddle of bloody
mud pudding behind the back porch.

But downstairs the farmer's daughter
hums church hymns happily dressing
as she packs her fiberglass slippers
in a cardboard box.

She's heading East before sunrise
can surprise her father
to a neon city with some hayseed
salesman she met at last
Saturday's square dance.

A WILLIAM GREGOIRE

Balance

Moving along
but not at my pace,
never quiet, but
cut off from others,
the amputation, temporary

A single tree in a field
provides no shelter,
just a feeling that
lightning often strikes

There are thoughts
abandoned conversations
reasons conjured up up
to believe, to understand,
to make sense of it all
Even in solitude
a vow means something

And after that strike,
whatever is left standing
looks to self-sufficiency,
to go on, complete the puzzle,
without the last piece

KIMBERLY CUTRONE

Seven In A Circle

Seven sat in a circle dreaming
Calling their fortunes in phony words.
Optimists planning, loners scheming;
All came together in torrid herds.

Seven there sat in absence of light,
Reading his fortunes in moonlight and dust.
Envious four disliked seven's night.
One, two and three were scourged with disgust.

Seven had thoughts of heaven and hell.
Five flattered him with phony remarks.
Six told the others she wasn't quite well,
While one, two and three played chess in the dark.

Seven there sat in tears of despair.
The darkness kept his tale a secret.
If only there was a light in the lair.
The others may have cared to seek it.

Seven there sat alone in the sphere,
The others' minds in painful slumbers.
Seven there sat with invisible tear:
"How is it that we are just numbers?"

MARK O'BRIEN

Negro Sol

My skin is pale
and I,
the pupil
of the sun.

Such a dis-
grace,
to my
fellow
red backs

basking.

Do you,
take my rays?

No,
I have drawn
my own blue shade.

KIM ADDONIZIO

Domain

In the one of the heart's back alleys: toppled trash, fish-stench,
broken chair, toaster with its frayed cord. I'm here
again. It's where I always come, in a tight black dress and heels I
can't walk in, drunk enough to leave the glare
of shops, my former lovers sealed in their windows like whores in
Brussels, of Amsterdam, indifferent, or gazing out
half-naked to watch me stagger past. I've left the bars, the
spinning stools and slurry music, left the intimate
restaurants
drenched in amber light, the linen tablecloths² frozen white,
enormous roses flattened on the walls, because I'm so
hungry.
starving again, with that familiar need that drives me here, to
where I can't see anything, where I move
like the undead in those horrifying films, my arms straight out,
toward the place I know you're waiting. Soon
you'll light a cigarette, and your face will flicker on for an instant,
long enough for me to kneel down
on the filthy sidewalk, for my mouth to your cock. This is what I
come back for, years after the divorce: the feel
of your hand gripping my hair, holding me there, the taste of what
you finally can't help giving me. This is what
I do so I can go on, can walk out again toward the edge of things,
toward the docks where the boats rock quietly,
where I can stand for awhile with the heart's whole city behind
me, its lights sinking and shimmering so gorgeously in the
water.

A. F. MORITZ
Passing the Torch

Hard to recapture now how wonderfully free
I felt in this old world when it was still the new.
Our age dawned first as perfect loss: one day I woke
and guilt was gone. The problem of evil suddenly

was left alone—it bored everyone—and so it attacked
with new viciousness: the dragon of romance became
a dinosaur. It kidnapped woman. I grabbed my spear
to seek them in the endless forest, hew down their covert,

slaughter him, marry her, and hear again
through starlight at play on her shadowed navel the faint roaring,
the faint rustling, the infinite night disclosing
the murmur of the next still undiscovered people.

Even to remember how nakedness, new, rare, and briefly flashing,
compensated for the torture of the single endless
sunset that disappoints all mornings
is hard, now that the nude is everywhere.

long established, not evil, not guilty, not hungry
in this ultra-modern atmosphere where what counts
is family and loyalty, work and longevity.
City, forest, wood of women, and the world wars:

hitting the beaches full of blood, mounting desire, and confidence
that our godlike enemies were like ourselves but worse,
laying down our fire to an algebraic pattern
good anywhere, even in the abstract vacuum...

it is all gone now, swallowed in its own perfection.
Tonight I went out on one of those long solitary
rambles through the resounding metropole, one of those aimless
reveries by which I first built, in the old days,

all that nature has commanded us to build.
Bypassing the knifings, rapes, and more insouciant injustices,
I prayed to her inwardly: to nature, our mother
and lover, in whom accomplishment

and impatience are one, who creates and sharpens desire
with the impossibility of fulfillment,
the derisive dream she gave us that some day we,
lice on her body, would hold her face to face.

For once my prayer was heard: I saw that the times
were completed. There was no nature anymore, only a few
specimens of what had been: preserved with care,
placed lovingly in corners, as though she were

in these scraps. Earth was a zoo in a park,
and the fate of species, my old adversaries, hung on my whim
and my funding decisions. I was boss, who had thought myself
only the flower in tall grass, the gnat on the gnu.

I recall that as I walked and wondered, the paved way fell
into a gentle bushy decline, and for a moment
enrined by green I almost felt that nature
had come again, for in the leaves I lost sight

momentarily of every sign. But quickly the path
rose back up as planned and I could see there were people
everywhere, I saw nothing but people. But I was gone.
What came up out of that slight depression was you.

Science of Limits

To limit yourself to what can be said abundantly
would be a science like that of what can be known,
or the other of what can be done: a lazy science.

A joyful science with the joy of limits. That is
a tragedy, and anyone around here can watch scientists
enjoying the tragedium of a wet grey Sunday

all he wants already. But what can be said barely
nursed through the niggled nipple of impossibility...
now, there is richness for the hankering baby's cry.

The abundance of the scientists of abundance
is balanced by the oblivion of the singer of want
as deprivation balances the baby Fat:

somewhere to go for someone who has grown
to squeeze out all the milk and marrow of a world
and drain it flat and fill it up from end

to end. Somewhere not easy to find: no forest
up Rio Perososo in the noonday sun
where discoveries find themselves and natives die

of love for the victor and conquistadors
in crowds watch, rippling their toes on chaises longues
and applauding. Somewhere, in less timely happier climes,

where the snow falls, and wind blows, and no one knows,
invention is difficult, the material being,
and the tool, return to a depopulated native land of ice.

Ballad of the Sparrow and the Goddess

A sparrow passing through in fall
came to my tree to look
for the bird-feeder I once had
but now have taken down.

A neighbor feared the birds it brought,
a divorcee, who said
her father had raised pigeons and
had thrown them at her head

when she was small and he was mad—
so now, she said, she had
a phobia about all birds:
would we stop feeding them?

I was translating, at that time,
a work of genius on
fiery woman, sexual god,
from Spanish, from a man.

And how to reconcile with his
mad love and careful anguish
she, brittle goddess, felt?—which now
my period shall extinguish.

I watched the disappointed bird
turn on the branch and gaze
from every angle possible
on the new-empty space,

and saw that if I just stood up
and took him in my hand,
he would consent to be comforted
and learn to understand.

But then the vision passed. Again
it was obvious if I
made any movement fear would make
the baffled sparrow fly.

LACY L. SCHUTZ
Years From The Last Time We Spoke

When, after that decade, I bought Tex a gift for Father's Day, I went to him at the end of a dim hallway. It smelled like parochial school: musty, rotten Christ. I didn't know what to call him when I called to him at the end of the hall. He rose up from the bedroom, confused and disoriented like an old man who has just been wakened from dozing off in his chair. He was pulling a shirt on over his belly and breasts: white and rippled like a grub. I put his gift on the table. He gave me a brightly wrapped present as well. It felt light and empty and I left without speaking, without waiting to see whether he opened his.

Triptych

— *For Bruce*

I.

The things I liked about my father's
wife's farm: the smell of fresh horseshit, scooping
catfood and dogfood out of barrels at 6 a.m.,
Zeus, who leaned against me, all his horse weight
while I fed him carrots, walking to the pond alone
singing church songs, wild roses in ditches,

the next door neighbors.

They kept Shetland ponies and a miniature cart
painted fairytale gingerbread like a tree ornament.
And indeed, when they sat on it with their tiny smiling
faces, they looked like a toy or an illustration
from a children's book about the joy of Christmas
on the steppe. When their grandchildren came,
they brought it out and trotted up and down
the long country block: gravel and dust and other farm's dogs.
And they let me ride along.

II.

I think about this on the train under the bay, today.

Love, the only time I played Spin the Bottle
was with one other girl and one boy. We kissed
ourselves and each other
all night long.

In third grade I learned methods of determining
my soulmate. The letters in our names tell me
that we have a 137% chance of finding True Love.
You're not a rich man, a poor man, a beggar or thief.
Not a doctor, lawyer, a farmer or a chief.

And there is one thing in me that is only for you;
My own adolescent trick for deciding who is nearest my heart.

III.

One night in a furious Nebraska storm,
my mother agonized over leaving me for the graveyard
shift at the hospital. My brothers stoned
and fighting somewhere, the creek rising eight feet.
I listened to the radio for tornado warnings
all night long and heard about an old couple.

Trying to ford a flooded street, stalled
their Buick. It was deeper than they guessed.
Then with Slavic obstinance, rolled up the windows.
Imagine them holding hands; where were they going so late at night?
He reassured her. They waited for nature to subside.
But it rose and kept rising until the force
broke right through the tempered
glass and still they sat there
and drowned.

ANN MARIE PALMISCIANO

cutting the fingernails on the right hand

—for Sophie

i love you more as i grow old
and you grow old

and today you are absent

these crooked nails needing a trim

so, over the toilet-bowl
i cut the nails on the left hand reaching
for your worn bridal-
scissors

i can never manage
the right
without you

and mother, in this routine gesture

i hear you speak.

AMY E. THOMAS

Runaway

My brain is across the river
in a tree. Red oak leaves dying
rustle against it, prick, stroke
as it wobbles in the breeze.

I can't call it back.

My voice echoes and deflects
in the pan of river and sky —
hollow, edged with flames —
fall crackle and blast.

My brain can't hear me.

Through my window I see it
trying to unwind, descend,
drop roots and tap the core.

I sit between walls, angles defined
by chair, fork, books, creeping clock.

I grope at the sun, grab
for more surfaces, want
to have so many voices,
to be heard
as leaves are heard.

AMY E. THOMAS

Interruption

I love the emptiness and dark wash
of this, taste of your absence,
slow crawl of silence

on my tongue. The smoke of it curls
like incense breath around the bookshelf.
On your mesa bed, sandstone sheets,

with you now
he lies blanched and breathless.
He eats the beets we grew as media

of power and love, breathes
my sandalwood. I want you on
and between my fingers, your

amber swell, resin flecked with sun.
You light, fill, extend, displace my cool
stone descending case of stairs, my spiral.

CLAUDIA BISCHOFF

Visitant

Out of the blue
I miss handing you pins
you'd dangle precipitously from your lower lip.
Still carrying on
a conversation,
sometimes just a grr-ing sound
or a two-beat hum —
um hum, uh uh —
thin as sheets overlaying photos
crinkling over not-
so-pretty fabric
your hands smooth.
Like stones on a spree,
they patter
and sprawl down along
cushy mire, umbrageous
fringes. Your eyes,
those of a spring-fed animal's,
just looked up.
The crease in between
is the blue of this tomb.

Open Casket

Lips are two riverbanks
in miniature
pelt-smooth
forged (as no two
effulgent goosewings)
with blackroot thread or indigo
seen only from the inside
but by whose eyes?
No drawl of bluefish rivulet,
insouciant, no warble, yours,
a clam without its signature protuberance.

As from a bridge a few beams of which flail
I lean.
Over Nippersink Creek
I bring you home
an injured bird you quieted down in a basin of cotton.

Foraging

Cartons marked on in oversized, underlined black block letters:
 "Clothing," "Shoes," (ungodly high-heeled), "Christmas"
 usurp half the basement floor. Come undone,
 these charcoal woolen slacks (lining's split),
 its abdomen creased, no side pockets —
 and this frequently-commented-upon hotplate-red Americana dress
 (depicting kitchen utensils)
 scrounged up off a Downers Grove flea market tabletop.
 Can just picture you sifting what "beautiful junk" to be had,
 your free hand overturning trinkets in the process
 of reading handwritten labels under other (less clingy) labels,
 Mickey Mouse electric toothbrushes (hearing you exclaim
 during the telling of how some man walked off with the debatable
 wick, not easily clawed forth,
 on which is superimposed
 an unshapely foetus, almost identifiable.

What use, good or otherwise, will I make of purses
 names "Sweet Success" and "Ratio" with a slash through the "o"?
 How to part with and not think twice about this pair of sizable
 spectacles.
 (a lens of which half's popped)
 in the now-damp case that reads "Hollywood"?
 Or the handful of toothpicks still in plastic
 or this wad of Kleenex, this Band-Aid,
 these ripped-out coupons (in disarray) only recently expired?
 Gleaming alongside a fold at a seam, a safety pin — it have a job?
 Would your fourteen karat gold fingernail
 (you'd convince gullible onlookers it'd grown like so)
 fit my littlest finger?

This lint of your ear behind a metal earring post —
 the smell, a wee detectable, of you crammed into one small space.

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

Tea Ceremony

We pass in silence
the tray of filled cups.
To sporadic
singing of birds
sip hot tea.
It is not the quiet
of a snowfall
hiding spring:
we can hear each other's
throat noises,
swallowing.

In the distance,
thunder rolls.
As rain taps
on the temple roof,
thoughts come in
of the mother of a friend:
88 and afraid to swallow food.
She chews, then
spits out the mass,
convinced she will choke.
Since the stroke
she doesn't know
left hand from right.
Too many friends
this year have died.

I would like
to bring her here
to enjoy this rain,
this roof.
To swallow for her.

The gong sounds
and we bow

to beginning and end
and all between
in a stream
of perfect moments
bringing us to this storm.

In the darkness
I bend to put on my shoes.
The sky lights up,
illuminates
the peach tree in the garden.

SCOTT PALMIERI

Sunday Morning

I heard footsteps before I woke,
Soft somber steps of women.
My eyes, pulled open shades,
Squinted at the sudden brightness and the shrieks
Of the women whose sweet herbs, I can still smell,
Spilt outside the cave.

The sky was scattered with bundled shrouds
As the morning chill shivered our shoulders and
Tightened my knuckles which still stung with chafes from the
Rock we sealed the tomb with.
But the sun rose again
And my hands warmed, soft as bread.

Confusion now rains in this forest
As hard as the storm that flooded Golgatha
Three days ago.
I hear hurried footsteps now
The mad metal jingle of fellow soldiers approach
To join the search party
To scold us and ask
“How long were you asleep?”

I don't know how I'll answer
But I know it was long enough to dream
Though I don't remember dreaming.

The 6 o'clock shift

The boss of the office
Each day you came home,
Pulled the knot from your throat
And turned in your suit
for taxi driver clothes.

I waited for you in the driveway,
Leaving you in the kitchen
with mom
And the shoddy job the plumber did,
The phone bill you forgot to pay,
The long day she had running all over town
while dealing with those crises.

Back in the car, back on the road
Your back must have been sore
With all that weight on your shoulders.
You were stuck on a static station
But you heard Frank Sinatra singing behind the interference
So you kept trying.

"Don't ever get married," you said
To the brown eyes you gave me
Somewhere between a joke
And a warning.
Or was it a misplaced plea
That was never meant to cross the space between us?

Maybe you'd thought I'd nod my head
So you could skip the fare
And just keep driving
To a ballgame
Or some distant highway
Where Sinatra came in clear.

But the cabby drove on silently

And I said nothing.
Upon my departure I thanked you, but not enough.
I knew you'd come back
To pick me up,
Your favorite fare.

JANET MCHUGH

Clara Jenkins

Just before twilight every evening, Clara Jenkins buttoned up the old sweater she favored. Her brown hands were twisted with arthritis; they fumbled but finally she was buttoned. She stuffed her swollen feet into a pair of black sturdy shoes. The laces took some time, but she had that for sure. Pursing her lips she whistled softly for the dogs, Rusty and Puddle. Rusty, with his shiny russet coat, black eyes, and ears standing at attention, came running, eager for a walk. Puddle, like his name, brown as mud, a notch in one ear where he got in a fight with that shepherd way back five years ago, just lay there for a while sort of boneless. No matter to Clara, her movements were slow and easy anyhow like a sensuous body rub. Some evenings the arthritis in her hips stabbed harder, like the time she had that attack of gall stones and it took her breath away, the pain being that bad. She rubbed her hips with her big brown hands; that seemed to ease it a bit. The warmth must be what did it, she figured.

She carried a flashlight for the walk back, when it would be full dark. Clara and her dogs moved at their own pace through the foot path worn in the May grass. Clara hummed to herself as was her habit. She hummed a few bars of "Amazing Grace" then swung into her favorite, "Nearer My God to Thee." Her voice was low and throaty as if she had smoked too much in her youth.

She passed the lilac bush and stopped and broke off a small branch, the sound like the crack of a gun in that silence. The sweet smell of the lilacs brought a smile to her full lips. They smelled just like that fancy soap they took back from the hotel where they'd spent their honeymoon. "He'll like these," she said to herself, remembering that he was the one who had always brought her wildflowers; now it was her turn.

When she rounded the bend in the road, she spotted the dogs standing in front of the headstone. Their heads were bowed as if in prayer. With surprising agility, Clara stooped and placed the lilac sprig against the stone. Chuckling like a young girl she said, "Evenin', I brought you a branch off the lilac bush." She straightened up slowly, her knotted brown fingers pressed against her back. She began her nightly account of the day's events. "The

sun was warm today; good day for plowin' the fields. Took my coffee out to the porch and rocked a spell. Preacher Roberts came by and sat awhile. He's lookin' for money for the poor, don't that just beat all? Old Jessie Crawton came by and brought me some sweet grapes. Those grapes tasted just like the red wine you brought home that time you sold that tough old pig to that city butcher. Now wasn't that just like Jessie, always doin' somethin' nice? I brewed some strong green tea in that fancy pot the mistress gave us for our weddin' gift. We sipped and gossiped just like the swell folks in town. Made some of that chicken soup just the way you liked it, with the chicken in big chunks and lots of celery and onion. I'll eat a bowl of that with some brown bread when I get back..."

Clara ended her recount of the day and softly murmured, "You rest easy, now. I'll stop by tomorrow." With that she pulled the old brown sweater closer around her drooping breasts, just as if his arms were still in it and could keep her warm. She whistled sharply for the dogs; the noise sounded like a screech in the quiet of the night. She flicked on her flashlight, a small moon puddle in the night. The walk back was cold, dark, and hard.

GEORGE YATCHISIN

Imperative

This is a story, really. It's not just thought, not just what Robert Hass writes about his poem "Meditation at Lagunitas," "All the new thinking is about loss. In this it resembles all the old thinking." Mainly it's the story of Harry Houdini, a man who knew change so well that Ovid could write a sequel to *Metamorphoses* just about him. Houdini itself is a stage-name, a performance, a wish—he chose it to honor the French illusionist Robert Houdin. Could Houdini have become who he was if he remained Ehrich Weiss? Perhaps, but that ignores the power of names; Genesis is barely into chapter two before Adam gets busy naming things; in fact, God *brings* the animals and birds to Adam to see what he can come up with. If this creation myth pleases you, then words are our business, Words 'R' Us. And the true exoticism, the Eastern European Jewishness of Ehrich Weiss, is no match for the alliterative, vovelly melliflous, vaguely Mediterranean Harry Houdini. He shed his ethnicity, his poverty, his immigrant status, his life in the tie factory, in a kind of appearing trick, as it were. Imagine trying to eat roast beef at Leonard Slye's rather than Roy Roger's. And who could dream of a graceful waltz with Austerlitz and McMath? But Astaire and Rogers, just the names invite us to dance like an Irving Berlin tune.

But the story, and it's a story of loss because Houdini is dead, is a story of love. His name change was far from sudden magic. For years he shared bills with two-bit attractions: like Madame Thardo, whose act was not dying, although bitten each show by rattlesnakes, like William LeRoy, aka the Human Claw Hammer, whose name says enough. Even Houdini once had to do double duty: When the side show's wild man was sick, Houdini tousled his hair, rolled in dirt, crawled about in a cage, ate cigarettes thrown at him. That's entertainment. The birthday party, then—yes, Houdini once did birthday parties—at which he met his soon to be wife, Bess, must have been a relief, work walked through, coins here and gone, nothing, not even sweat, up his sleeve.

It's a good thing that amidst a regular day things went wrong. One version of the story—and there are many versions—goes like this: Bess, sitting in the front row, ended up wearing

Harry's water-into-wine trick, his sleight of hand a bit sloppy that day. Bess's mom, furious, insisted that Houdini buy a new dress, and between fittings and meetings, she didn't lose her daughter's dress, she gained a son-in-law.

But if Houdini were himself that day, if he were the paragon, the very dictionary picture for magic that's in most of our heads, then it would have been Bess who disappeared. One spill changed his life, one gone wrong went right. That's fate, you say, I can almost hear you. But is that all? So much change at stake in one moment. And water into wine, of all things. A person raised Catholic, like Bess or like me, ends up thinking of Christ's first miracle, the wedding at Cana, when, to cover a host's embarrassment, he changed water into wine. Just think: The son of God uses his powers to cover up a social faux pas. It sounds like it was some wedding, though.

Harry was 20, Bess 18. They became the "Houdinis," not just a couple, but an act. Harry had worked with his brother Theo for a few years, and the biographies show no sign of Theo feeling slighted—he struck off on his own, and that was that. But maybe Theo felt what Joan Didion wrote, if only he didn't antedate her: "Marriage is the classic betrayal." Like so many of Didion's epigrams, that is, when she opts to whittle down her anaphora-extended, parallel-structured oaks of sentences, this truth seems very true, until you realize it, too, needs a whittling. Yes, marriage is the classic betrayal, but only because all living is betrayal. Does Didion really feel she's never done anything to her family before marrying John Gregory Dunne? We're all going to die on somebody, and that's merely the dramatic and final part.

Sooner or later there's an empty envelope in the mail of love. For Harry and Bess, that envelope wasn't posted for some time; again, just as Theo and Harry never seemed to quarrel, Harry and Bess seem to have had one of those exemplary marriages I find myself hating as I struggle at love. Like this, love seems to go—work. And daily, just try to do it daily, to be nice, to like, yourself, the world. Whose idea was it, to love? We fight so hard to make love concrete, to hold it down like a balloon above us in a Thanksgiving Day parade. But it's never just two people keeping Underdog to the earth, is it? That's why making love isn't a euphemism for fucking, it's a prayer. If it only *could* be love we made. But for Houdini, such problems seem no more severe than

magic. An early riser, he would leave notes like the following on Bess's pillow: "Adorable Sun Shine of my life. I have had my coffee, washed out this glass and am on my way to business. Houdini. My darling I love you." He even washes out the glass.

And throughout their lives, there was only one trick Bess came out of retirement for, even when Houdini was one of the world's most famous entertainers. It's a bit of vaudeville, as much a magic cliché as rabbits out of hats, and definitely small-time compared to making elephants vanish and escaping the water torture cell Hollywood's bad biopic starring Tony Curtis has Houdini die in, in a complete violation of the truth. It's a bit called *Metamorphosis*, the staple of Houdini's early act, even with the tall and lumbering Theo. You probably know the illusion, which is actually a series of tricks, and therefore all the more, well, just plain *more*. It's kind of like James Agee's description of how silent comedy often worked—there's a gag, the gag gets topped, but then something tops the topper.

Metamorphosis goes like this: Houdini's hands are bound behind his back. He is placed in a sack, which is tied tightly. The sack is in a box, which is locked and secured with a rope. Bess then stands inside a curtain held by a frame, we just see her face. Three handclaps, and gone goes Bess. Houdini stands in her place—that's the gag. His appearance is topped by Bess, who waits, hands tied, inside the ropes, the box, the sack. The topper: Bess wears a coat Houdini wore, a coat borrowed from an audience member.

I am going to make too much of this, read it like a story and worry that I will have to take a test on the text. These two changed places for years. A kind of faith, then, an agreement that your place or mine doesn't matter. A kind of magic, always, how fast they must pass, how they must touch in that moment. Even the mythical metamorphoses in Ovid, the best those lovers and troubled end up is a tree, a constellation, a season. No one becomes his or her lover, even if it's only magic.

Metamorphosis makes me think of a story by Francine Prose called "Tibetan Time." In that story a character finds herself touched that her husband once grabbed her fortune cookie in a Chinese restaurant, flattered that he wanted anything of hers, nervous he was willing to trade futures. Of course, the story has reason to exist because her husband has since left her, love has

turned to loss, the cookie of her fortune has crumbled. The beauty of the story is now clearly it frames pain, leaving it on the wall for us, the entire short story collection a museum of the ache. Prose knows how the world's command is often a simple imperative: Hurt. That we do so often, facilely, rigidly as scheduled, isn't masochism, really, that's too easy an explanation, and if all we wanted was pain, we'd need no one else for that. Who isn't an auto-didact of masochism? Hurt isn't opposed by anything—it always wins—read the obituaries and add up the names left grieving for yourself. Hurt is floated in, like a sea, and sometimes we swim, doing the hope-stroke, and if we had any perspective on things, we'd see the sky aqua, the sea marine, and us not more than what's between.

So it's a trick. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry Houdini does it today, it even helped launch Doug Henning to the fame he held in the '70s. But magic books, even those tell-all, behind the scenes, magic-ain't-nothing-but-work books, they don't give Metamorphosis away. Henning claims that when he does the trick, it happens so fast he doesn't remember it happening—it's almost magic to him, and he's the magician. His assistant isn't even his lover.

So young they were, and married. There's a picture of Bess and Harry, the Metamorphosis box roped shut between them. Bess, dressed in tights, funny, puffy shorts, a pleated, cavernously-shouldered blouse, seems set to audition for a high school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She seems plenty young enough for that production, too, a perfect Peaseblossom. Harry seems huge next to her, not that he is, it's a trick of perspective, his wide face getting lost in the flash. He, too, seems ill-costumed, his suit baggy, wrinkled, big, enough for him to slouch in. His left hand in his pocket, he seems ready to escape from anything, the picture itself. Bess and Harry do not look at each other, or the camera. The picture's star, its center, is the box, the sack strewn in front of it, the background, and lots of it, dark. Bess's left hand is on the box, not Harry. It's the box, the trick, that keeps them apart, or keeps them together. Neither smiles.

I am looking at the picture for an answer I do not get. How. Perhaps love is metamorphosis: therefore love is change: therefore love is certain: therefore love is loss. It's two magicians that pass in the night, never on the same side of the trick at once. Houdini

even lets Bess take the topper—generally the headliner wants the big applause. Henning thinks Houdini reverses the positions because he was an escape artist, and if he ended up *in* the box, well, so much for escape. But I think Houdini, writer of pillow letters, washer of glasses, had something else in mind.

For 32 years they were married. Gossip comes cheap, but nary a penny was squandered on those two, who every few years would resurrect *Metamorphosis*. Water into wine. Flesh into flesh. Harry into Bess. We want love to be magic. That old black number magic. I put a spell on you. It's witchcraft. Love potion number nine. Even love is all you need is no more than saying hocus pocus and hoping everything comes up flowers. But it's no less, either.

I loved magic since I was a kid, and, not having elephants handy, made Douglas Endler disappear in my basement, a poor stand-in for the Hippodrome. Our parents applauded because that's what parents do. We never did *Metamorphosis* as kids, partially because we didn't know how, partially because we didn't read Harry and Bess as a love story, partially because change didn't seem magic to adolescents—we changed every damn day. That's one reason Kafka's "*Metamorphosis*" is so appealing to teens; what teen doesn't feel like a bug each morning. For Gregor Samsa, "*Metamorphosis*" is all denouement, all effect, no cause, all judgment, no jury. Kafka's forbid any illustrations of Gregor to grace the printed story, at most he wanted a door opening on darkness, cheery Czech that he was. It's meant to be a story, only something in our heads, where uneasy dreams live, after all, and we're all bugs, voiceless, tremulous, our feelers itching at the air. It's a sad story.

Except for Grete, of course. Her brush with bug brother is a right-of-passage, and by the story's end, she fills Samsa's streetcar with desire. It's like finding a worm with an apple in it, and not the other way around. Of course, the biographies say love wasn't kind to Kafka. Sure there's imagination, but you write what you know.

Or maybe you write what you hope to know. But why be coy, by you I mean me, now, doing a thing I always do: Hoping if I say something, repeat it enough, then it will be true. I have a friend always insisting I edit the word "lover" out of my writing. If only I could. And I know the heart's a muscle, a dumb, dutiful

blood pump, but I'm hoping metaphor is, too, even when my mouth curls up as other friends, a couple, say "I love you" to each other as a goodbye on the phone. Why should I deny them their wishing, their belief in themselves, their words? Why should I think its a special secret, a spark that makes cynicism smarts, a seeing behind the trick, that I know we've tied love, heart, and flowers in a big red bow because of the troubadours, 13th century love mercenaries who sang in their Provençal of the conveniently rhyming *amour, coeur, and fleur?*

Magic, that's all I want. And I've tried, though you nay not recall the times. Writing allows me the power to change number, so I can shift, right now, from you-plural to you-singular, hoping you understand. There was an evening with roses, the kind for cash and carry that are never quite as beautiful as the ones you pay more for. Or so it seems. These opened too fast, even for six ninety-nine, but then I thought— a bed of roses, yes. So there you lay, yellow petals drifting about you like autumn leaves, the room that ripe, too much smell, the petals bright as pollen, a luminous moon, or many, soft as the down just behind your ear, just inside your thigh, spots you can't touch even with breath but tickle, they are plush even to themselves, and then I raked the petals upon your breasts, the pale pink of your nipples their own cold roses, that color doesn't quite seem color yet, and I paused, and breathed, and waited. If love is magic and magic is a trick it tricked me, for nothing but sleep happened, the ways to do that, they leave you nothing but to fall into the next day. And so quickly the petals lost their luster, browning, shrinking, uncomfortable crusts in the sheets, rose scabs.

Bess outlived Harry by seventeen years. Although he spent years of his life debunking fake spiritualists, he promised to send a message from beyond, if such a message were possible. None of Bess's seances proved fruitful.

Still, they performed Metamorphosis one last time, in a way. Bess found in Harry's safe a packet of love letters—from other women. That Houdini received fond fan mail isn't a surprise; after all, he was handsome, dashing, rich, even would perform escapes in the nude, although the press photos of such exploits always hid his genitalia in the shadows, or more provocatively, chains. That Houdini did nothing about these letters there is no question. But he seemed to keep the letters to say, I could,

you know, I could. And then every day he didn't.

Bess went this love test one better, however. A few months after Harry's death, she held a fancy tea at their Manhattan townhouse; many of the guests had never been inside the Houdini home before. At the afternoon's end, Bess bade farewell to each guest, handing each woman a present wrapped in a ribbon. Inside the ribbon was the woman's love letter to Harry.

There's one more story. There's always one more story. It's about the painters Samuel Lovett Waldo and William Jewett, who painted in the early 19th century, and who practically no one knows. Waldo and Jewett were Henry Ford before Henry Ford, were production line, albeit two, painters. For each portrait, Waldo was responsible for the hands, face and figure, while Jewett painted the background, drapes and details. For 36 years these two painted portrait after portrait, each only doing his job. There's nothing outstanding about these portraits except that they were painted; in fact, they were almost stunningly plain, as much made art by hanging in a museum as a Duchamp ready-made. We stood before one of their portraits one day, each listening to phones that told us what we needed to know. Maybe we listened to the taped messages in other languages, languages we don't know. Maybe we held hands, I don't know. My museum fatigue—so much past to get to know—wore us down. There's only so much room for beauty, till it cripples us, but that's another essay, or this essay done all again new. Instead, let's finish our time there in Winterthur, surrounded by what so many people did just to live, never imagining their craft would be separated from dailyness and collected and meant to mean and not just be, all of them Ehrich Weisses turned Houdini's by a wave of my pen. Imagine what Waldo and Jewett wanted out of life. Now imagine what they got. Is it enough for them. Is it enough for imagining ourselves into them, when all they have is a job to do. What are we doing here, imagining.

VIVIAN SHIPLEY

Barbie, Madame Alexander, Bronislawa Wajs

I told Jerry Ficowski if you print my songs in *Problemy*, my people will be naked, I will be skinned alive. Desperate to reclaim my ideas, my words, I rushed to Warsaw, begged

the Polish Writer's Union to intervene. At the publishing house, no one understood me. I went home, burned all of my work, three hundred poems. Ficowski used my real name, Bronislawa

Wajs, even though I'm known by my gypsy name, Papusza which translates to doll. That did not matter to the Baro Shero, I was *magerdi*, defiled. Punishment was irreversible: exclusion.

It's raining again, a cold prickly rain that makes the window look like a Spielberg effect on T.V. If only my memories could dissolve one luminous dot at a time but the mud season has

begun with snowmelt. The mantle of the earth is mush, sucking off my boots when I try to walk away. Water stains, etching the ceiling like an antique map of my heart. Thirty four years,

alone, shunned by nieces, nephews, unknown to their children, I'm discarded, mute as my name, Doll. My family's voice, I still hear it in my voice which is my mother's voice, my fathers

voice. The older I have gotten, the more I recall although I will allow no one to listen to my poems or songs. Harpists, my people hauled great stringed instruments upright as if they were sails

for the wagons that carried us from northern Lithuania to eastern Tatras. If we stopped for more than a day, I'd steal a chicken, take it to another villager, in exchange for reading and writing

lessons. Another chicken or two, I got a book. When my father or brothers caught me, I was beaten, my books destroyed.

Married at fifteen to Dionizy Wajs, revered as a harpist but old,

I had a work station in a courtyard corner, a tin tub on wood.
 Pour in boiling water: rub,rub,rub,. The rhythm in my poems
 was born in blankets and rugs, the words in my unhappiness. I

was the youngest wife, a *boria*, who got up before everything
 even the *khaxni*, the hens. In the sooty light, I followed the rules:
 move in silence, collect wood, build a fire, heat water, coffee,

do not speak to a man in the morning before he washed his face.
 All day I talked about sheep parts: brains, balls, guts, organs,
 glands, skinned heads, joints. I would pinch other girls' breasts

in greeting, in play. None of my hard work was mentioned when
 I was pronounced *magerdi* and the banished from the *kumpani*.
 The charges spoken were that I had no children, that I invented

long ballads to lament being poor, impossible love, rootlessness,
 lost freedom and the *lungo drom*, or long road. A gypsy, I had
ou topos, no place to dream about, no homeland I could yearn

for. Tinsmiths, blacksmiths, but no Romulus and Remus, no
 wandering Aeneas to do battle for me. No anthem or holocaust
 memorial because there were no recorded names. Papusza, I sang

in Romani called the cant of thieves, argot of liars but changing
 words meant survival that depended on secret laws that could never
 be written in order to hide the past, to make a hedge to protect us

from the *gadje*, the non-Gypsies. I blackened pages with elegies
 for our nomadic life spread out like the skeleton of a carp wrapped
 in the map of Europe. For thirty four years, I have hidden my face,

afraid to thumb a book or open a newspaper and see Ficowski's face
 who'll ask *So now where is your poetry?* Silenced by exclusion,
 as if living in a well, no voice called down, Papusza but Romani

echoes. *Marime*, *Magerdi* is still warm as the spot where the Baro
 Shero touched the finger I had used to write down gypsy songs.
 My hands sentient, keeping memory, could not forget, could not ball

to a fist and penetrate the hedge. Papisza will be closed over; *date of death unknown* will be my final sentence. I told Jerzy Ficowski if you print my songs in *Problemy*, I will be skinned alive, my

people will be naked. My words did not even light a tiny flicker but mouth to my ear, the voice I remember that will buried with me has more than the sound of one lifetime, more than my own.

SARAH BROWNING

This Bed

Sometimes at night we dream of big things
America the beautiful, dark boulders
broad, flat, threatening.

We could catch a bus at twilight
lean hard on each other in the back seat
spread my coat across our laps
reach up under and head away.

I'd be watching row after glistening row
of high rises recede as we'd trundle
through time. By six the world would not be ours
and our hands would be hung over from desire.

There is no ticket for escape.
No sharp-edged green and white
electronically-coded answer.
There is only this bed, this word
your hand, this dream.

STEVEN ALMOND
Practical Applications

These two cops are having an argument. There's been a B&E, an apparent B&E, an the college campus near the station and a question comes up as to the correct usage of a word in the report that the older cop, Simmons, has written. So these two cops, Simmons and Gilkie, head over to the English department. It's fall break, late, but they figure what the hell?

The building's dark, except for one light at the end of the hall.

Simmons sticks his head in the door. "Hello," he says. "This the English department?"

The kid, hightops on desk, chair tilted back, turns his head. He's got a goatee, bloodshot eyes. "Next Door."

"Yeah," Simmons says. "There doesn't seem to be any one around next door." He looks at Gilkie, who's clutching the report in question. "May I ask what office this is?"

"Comp."

"Comp? What's that?" Gilkie says.

"Composition."

"Composition?" Simmons says. "Okay. Maybe you can answer this question. It's a language question."

Simmons and Gilkie are in full uniform. They both have guns strapped to their waists. Simmons has stripes on his sleeve, square face, blue eyes, good jaw. He looks like a TV cop. Gilkie's younger. He's got big arms and buck teeth and a meatgrinder of a voice.

The kid scoots around in his seat. "I can try."

"Okay," Simmons says. He's ready to give a little cheer. "Great, here's the thing. It's really only about one word. See, we were called over to one of the dorms, Strom, over there by the infirmary. You know that place?"

"I'm a graduate student."

"Okay, right. The thing is we're at this dorm reference a break-in and we talked to this maintenance worker—"

"Just let him see the report," Gilkie says. "Don't try to explain it all out to him, *Paul*."

"Okay," Simmons says, "Alright." He hands the kid the report.

"Now, read the sentence there."

The sentence reads: "Mr. Underwood reported that the door was secure as of noon, October 21."

"Alright," Simmons says. "Now, what does that word mean to you, that word 'secure'?"

"That the door was locked, I guess."

"But what does the word *imply*?"

"Hold on a second, Paul. Just a second." Gilkie is walking in small circles. "You're trying to skew this whole thing. Lemme ask the question."

"I'm not trying to skew anything."

"Look," Gilkie says. "In that particular context, which word is correct: 'secure' or 'secured'?"

"It depends," the kid says.

Gilkie steps closer. "On what?" he barks.

The kid lowers the front legs of his chair to the ground and straightens up. "On what you're trying to say, I guess. If you mean that Underwood noticed the door was locked or whatever, then the present tense is best. But if you mean that Underwood actually went and locked the door himself, then you have to use the past tense—"

"So if Underwood was just saying he noticed the door," Simmons says. "He didn't do anything about it, the 'secure' is correct?"

The kid takes a second to think. "Yeah, right."

"Wait a sec." Gilkie's jaw starts to clench and unclench.

"Are you sayin that 'secured' is incorrect?"

"Not incorrect. Not incorrect so much as just maybe a little bit misleading."

"See!" Simmons does a little dance, jostling his gun. "I told you."

Gilkie shakes his head. "Okay. Okay, Sarge. No need to rub it in."

But it's too late. Simmons is still hopping around, the gun on his hip riding higher and higher, ready to leap. The kid follows the black butt with his eyes. Gilkie Glares at his partner.

"Secure," Simmons sings. "Secured."

WILLIAM PATRICK COYLE

Independence Day, Bayside, Queens, 1964

Sometimes sadness is what blossoms at garden parties.

Children swirl about

under the indifferent gaze of tipsy adults.

Uncles talk loudly,

pass around backslaps and Rheingolds.

The eyes of wives

roll upward

when they hear the inflated salaries.

The men drink and grow sentimental, find

one good friend

whose life too seems all loss,

and agree on what

everyone wants from them.

The women gather in the kitchen —

say they shouldn't but

why not

one more gin & tonic

can't hurt.

A box of tissues appears.

The discussion turns

to how it all unraveled

one night in the lobby

(and the look, that look on

his face).

They speak of how, despite forgiveness,

things get heavy,

of how beauty quickly fades

like the roses, almost gone

of why some men

treat women badly.

CHARD DENIORD

Winter Roses

I was so weary of the world.

I was so sick of it.

D.H. Lawrence

1

I crossed over into another world
like a frightened child who wishes to go.
I was very glad, and all alone in the world.
I trespassed into the unknown,
welcome and joyous with sorrow,
reborn in the labor of winter days.
I called it the kingdom of heaven within me.
I practiced form for speaking plain.

I cried with joy, because I was in the new world,
just ventured in.

I was not what I seemed, volatile form,
bright flame at night, tiger in the veldt.
I had not survived but died
and then awakened from the dream of death.
I was the willing body of death, starved in my grave.

2

There is only one lesson for those who grieve,
no change of heart or spiritual conversion.
The wind never returns to review its breeze.
The river flows intractably.
This is the blessing. Remorseless urgency.
Hard stare of sky. I was rearranged in bliss
to believe that energy itself is sacred,
creating the world, judging the world.
Everything passes into nothing and only this moment
is real but gone, both redeemed and destroyed
in a perfect but harsh religion.

A green eyed woman blinded me in the clear.
I buried her in the air and lost my way.
She was beloved, leading behind.
Singing to me this very song.
The sweep and settle of sacred dust
concealed my steps, christened the past.

3

I repeated in a flood of sunshine,
“This is a dark place. This is a dark place.”
I washed my eyes with paint,
stuffed my ears with dirt.

I felt a joy beyond the joy I used to sing.
My soul that wasn't a soul had died
and left *me there* where I was numb
and wished to feel the very thing I could not feel
and continue to live.

I sat like a crow on top of a barn
and saw how mean my love had grown,
how many bodies lay dead in the fields
from all my killing, pile upon pile.
I had become a murderer from loving,
and this was good, very good.
I was a stranger among friends in this unknown,
too familiar husband to the woman I loved.
I hung my eyes in blindness from the sky
and beckoned to the clouds, “Take your revenge.
I thought I was alive because of them.”

4

I held my wife at night to find myself,
touched her back and thighs.
She said, “There you are” in her sleep
but I was awake and there but not there.
I was as I had told her, ready to die.
I rubbed her body and made a wish

to be reborn, to die to all these nights
 of living in the old world, to step
 onto the raft of death and float along,
 float along, to sleep like this beneath
 the sky, stirring in the morning of my demise,
 flinging out my hand like the hand
 of a soul onto the shore, onto her side,
 rise up renewed, awake and mad,
 unable to describe what I saw.
 No, utterly in awe, standing alone,
 joyous with love, ready to dance.

5

A man approached me who was I
 from across a field that was every field
 I had ever been in.
 Held up a stick and stared at me.
 This was not a dream but a way of seeing without my eyes.
 I had died and this was good.
 I had killed everything with my eyes,
 poisoned the world with myself,
 deceived myself with names: *skies, trees, flowers, birds.*
 As if name alone could protect a thing as other,
 As if name alone could free the world from me.

I helped myself up from off the ground
 that was now unknown and walked the earth
 with defiant knowledge, planted roses in winter.

6

I had a vision of the Missouri inside my heart,
 as if I were America itself, split in the middle
 by a dirty river, while the lone citizen
 I called my spirit wandered naked on the shore,
 straining in the fog to catch a glimpse
 of my beloved on the other side,
 although I saw nothing except that water running
 into a wider river, sweeping along with terrible force,
 slow as it was, filling the sky.

Petroglyph

I headed out against the wind with a spear,
wore a skin against my skin to hide my scent.
Already a few exhausted leaves fell burning to the ground.
A cloud lay dead on the swamp below the cave
and a raven screeched. I imagined a scene of buffalo
as I waited for the herd: the ghost of dust
beneath their feet, the blind low look of hungry eyes.
I believed that this attracted them, my need alone,
like the smell of grass in a distant field.
I took a coal from the fire that night and drew
my kill on the wall. I had honed a skill
for capturing their forms inside my cave.
It was the gift of terror that made them real.
I knew their lines in every detail,
their earthly beauty that was extreme.
I believed in the dark as a world in which
they would return on another plain,
in a different herd, but just the same.
I drew my figure next to theirs,
a winter tree with arm upraised.

Buck

The deer were thin in the posted distance.
Their autumn coats matched the field.
One of them, a buck, raised his head
with velvet rack and scanned the world.
His beauty was proof that no one could dream
of anything that didn't already roam the earth.
I imagined his eyes grow still with a stare
that stopped the sky.

He walked a line
between this world and the next, grazing
at dusk, most beautiful and doomed
from morning to night.

MICHELE GLAZER

Seizing the Storm

"These are the One-and-a-Halves, full humans with incomplete 'parasitic' bodies attached to their own."

"Confronting them, I could feel the final horror evoked by the Freaks stir to life: a kind of vertigo like that experienced by Narcissus when he beheld his image in the reflecting waters and plunged to his death." *Freaks*, Leslie Fiedler

I.

The Half's head (assumed)
is bedded in the belly of its living brother.

Buttocks, legs and back extend
as clear parts
of an unclear plan. In this
it is like history: indiscrete.

Or rather, like history before
its end was audible.
No instructions come with it.
What name do you give your brother?

You brother makes you a uh.
But there are whole days, who doesn't want to come out of
nowhere.

A visible orphan. A new race.
Not repeating anyone's mistakes.

I envy that the evil done you
those years of looking
back at those who looked, to whom
you were a Look,
was personal. An accident
of birth, but of *your* birth.

An 11th finger is nothing I can point to —
I cannot point to anything
about History about Destiny.
What name

do you give your brother? You proved the world
 resist our will
 to divide against
 its nature. Resisted in your pure
 embodiment of blur---
monster.

II.

Now the storms are "Gloria" and "Eleanor."

III.

You got *that* right, Friend
 says eyeing the woman applying
 layers of pink oil crayon
 to the faintly described mouth, revising, accentuating
 lines she keeps
 safe inside of.

Waxy pupils hug inner and outer canthus.
 Bad news makes her grip
 the color stick, digging into the paper the color
 and the color stick, digging into the paper the color
 and the color's shape.

A mirror is propped. (Her easel's
 propped.) In the middle she's the one
 trying to draw her way out.
 She leaves out all the background, though
 the lawn is wide, the pines knurled
 enough to seem more than an incidental
 gesture to the public street. Yes,
it's awful, and smudges the eyes
 just so (a face this exact), eases
 the anger out of the hot rose madder mouth, so
 relentlessly slurring the grimace
 into something softer, kinder,
 more pleasing that she loses--

shortly--

the graphic hope on the real
 face. *What name do I---*
 Does the hair last, marking it in rapidly in caesius waves.

Weather

[Mt. Hood, May 1986]

In another weather
Into the shape of their snow cave.
What few. What survived
The early expedition now stiffens.
Each confirms each other's Oh,
But the snow was hardly blue and
Up out-of-the-question.

How far down did you go?

I answered that
postcard-flat against the storm, the four
brown ponies twisted their necks to take in,
perhaps, me, slogging the knee-deep pasture
snow. That's all.

I was the largest thing
moving anywhere near to look at, buoyant,
like something afloat in---

(To keep above the above the avalanche
you have to act

as if you are *already*

buried.) You have to fake it. How lost
those others got. The aluminum pole plunged,
probing the snow for something hard
enough to stop it. I have to stop thinking
of the damage to a body a pole could do.
The Trappistines are just up that hill.
If I resort to prayer-in-a-snowstorm it won't last
the next warming trend, I swear; there are blue-
bronze shadows, too, in the holes where the ponies
stand. O

hell, we had the usual discussion — Is it
harder to live without It, or...
Forget it. It doesn't wash. Up there,
whose voices entered me like splinters off

ancestral wood, sing behind the right angle
of the chapel where they can't be seen.
Time will ease them out I know
I know but what
did all that probing
yield but
things to be reburied

You

I.

Some fever. Memories singed sweetdeep
that she must upstream
to them to overwhelm them, drown them, plunge them
down under with the bitter ones.
With why it never would have worked.
She holds them
down the way once she had held his head
between her legs.

II.

Something curls up int just about nothing.
All matter is preserved.
You doused the hot coals with fuel, lit it.
We were smoke unfurled, we were
impossible.
The delirium of sword-
ferns into coal;
as close down as the coal burns itself,
that's how.

QUIGLEY PROVOST-LANDRUM

Day of the Dead

— *For Jennifer*

Martini a little on the sweet side
with the little onion — no olive.

Turn the music up, she loved Bob Marley.

A pear, flesh taut with juice.
Red tamales and sweet atole.

Pray she will be satisfied.

Pan del muerto made with cinnamon and lard.
Sugar skull white-eyed and smiling.

I will serve her what she cannot have.

The marigolds, the marigolds,
only one day away or the day after.

Place the cigarette in the ashtray.

Light the candle, the copal. I have taken more care
in these days than I ever took in her life.

Pray she will be satisfied.

Cicada Wake

Before their emergence in the shimmer
of summer they fall slowly from the home
leaf, burrow beneath the humus in sleep.
Seventeen years clutch their bodies silent.
Sucking at dirt clodded milky rootlets
of oak they gain strength for the ascension.
Her lips moving as she struggles against it.
Chanting her rosary into the twitch
of night while I unpin the nightgown
from around her neck. Slowly they go shedding
wombs as they climb. Pale bodies, transparent
wings tremble toward heat from her mouth to lift
them. Males will hiss vespers and females spade
the newborns. Music becoming mourning.

PHILIP BRADY

Lagos

My business is circumference.

—Emily Dickinson

My brother, newly orphaned, phones
past midnight from west to warn
that Lagos is fatal to travelers.

These months I haven't stopped moving
and even to sleep my eyes
need a constant downward
and eastward pull.

He read the sign
at L.A.X. in three languages.

I listen
but can't follow anything that gives up
short of the far margin.

When the doctors
finally gave up, my mother was elevated
to the top floor and I was let
sleep with her in an empty wing.

What dream makes me fear rising?

I need midnight to be whispered
word to word, spirited
over silences like sidewalk cracks
until sounds slip destination
and walking is just falling
in step.

I could just
as easily have been
my brother: this my mother
murmurs in my dreams
in morphine tongue.

These months,
booze and book gloss honeycomb
the inside of the skull.

Downward
and eastward, Lagos
is a hive of unknown millions guidebooks
compare unfavorably to Cocytus.

Sleeping
in the hospital with my mother
was closer than I've ever been
to anyone though I seldom touched her.

She didn't always know
which one I was — sometimes she thought
I wanted blood so she would turn
her head into the pillow and hold
out her left arm.

I was a blue
baby, transfused eight times
in my first two weeks of life.
My mother called me
distant and often joked
I was a changeling.

At night
in the empty wing I sang
her songs and sometimes words
channelled through me from the honeycomb
of rooms below my feet.

God knows.
Is that good? I'll be right back.

My brother and I crashed into each other
from opposite shores each cigarette break.

It was me stranded in California then
and I phoned in almost every breath.

My voyage is conducted by the eyes,
but memory seeps, silting up
the delta of the optic nerve. Then
words give up.

The doctors

gave up after the third intubation.
Intubation is a word but when remembered
it is my mother's face incarnate,
it means shut off from air and speech.

A preist translated — sometimes my mother
thought I was this preist
and turned toward me like a sunflower
toward light.

In Lagos
traffic and gas fumes murder sleep.
I have touched down on one wing
in a city of three languages,
all slurred.

If only to recall
my mother's face turning toward light
I'll translate now: trauma
means suffering if it's someone else's
even if you once nestled in her wing.

In Lagos my eyes move downward
and eastward against my dreams.

Movement

is a mantra.

Dopamine is a number
telling how tight the human network's
being stretched.

If you've seen Lagos
traffic you know what it means
when tubes are forced down a living
throat.

Memory seizes.

Sleeping

with my mother means
her death.

If
my father's low sperm count
hadn't kept me formless until after
World War II experiments with RH factors,
I'd have choked on my own blood.

Death

can be hilarious.

The last thing
she said was, *Don't cry you're getting me
all wet.* And just before that —
she whispers it each night into
my sleep— *Where is
my first born?*

She liked morphine
and when she wasn't being made
to breath by machine, she said
reproachfully, *This
is what drugs should be for.*

Can secrets

conjoin us without flesh?

The doctors said don't worry
how horrible it looks, she probably
won't remember.

When I
remember, the earth skids
and veers, the mind
seizes and suddenly I'm jumbled back
in intense sun under the Ujiji
mango tree where Dr. David Livingstone
encountered Henry Morton Stanley.

Coincidence

sparks a fleeting sexual joy.

I travel

ear to the vanishing,
the way my brother
records his kids shilling ditties
on his answering machine.

Sometimes

in rage we call each other
Father in a kind of mythopoetic
Who's On First.

I didn't sleep with my mother
but lay awake listening to her breath
like fast spondees; she was down

to that — just breathing and I knew
 each breath was made by the fiction
 of one thing following another
 we call memory.

From Lagos, I follow
 the river to the Emir's Palace near the ford
 where Mungo Park drowned.

Can tides
 quell fear?

I returned
 to the top floor and the doctor
 wa already there — it's unbelievable
 they can walk under
 the weight of so much awe.

He was diffident; he'd risen
 to Marin General from theBronx
 and he saw this Brooklyn mother and her son
 and felt, maybe, just faintly,
 that but for luck he might have been born
 me.

Me, that is, the one,
 by miracle,
 blue blooded afer World War II, christened
 maybe in past lives as
 Mungo or Henry Morton —
 that's the trick — to step
 into that one
 of a billion incarnations that won't
 madden.

The doctor said
 he'd been reading my poetry
 while I was out —
 that was before breath
 stopped knitting words to silence,
 and I read or walked or sang
 without fear that every break
 might be the last—
 and for that
 incarnated instant I felt human

that he went without a word or a glance back,
she said she felt like a stranded Baucis.

One night

the capital was spirited from Lagos
to the beautiful planned city of Abuja.

I found my mother naked
on the hotel floor, her face
wedged between the bed
and night table, her right arm spasming
like a crippled moth.

It was the first time
I ever lay down
with her. It was the first
time nothing mattered, just
live.

Heat rises
from Lagos dirt streets past midnight.
Even at night my skin itches and burns.
In the hospital my mother talked with ghosts
using her right hand as a phone.
I learned by eavesdropping
on morphine I am not
her first.

Livingstone missed
the true source of the Nile, but followers
carried his bier reverently to the sea.

Let the sea churn.

When the Emir entered, his peacock
miraculously unfurled, each quill
distinct, the great fan sweeping
the Aegean eyes in a design of moons.

My mother always wanted to be a wren.
She sang herself a cautionary lullaby
about a mother who murdered her baby
and was hanged.

I sing to remember
one thing following another, but I can't
thread words.

My mother never abandoned
her first ghost.

He lived
with the wrong blood only
a week, and so I took
his name.

Lying
with her in the hotel and later
with her body breathing
from memory on the top
floor, I only
wanted to unsleeve my skin.

The string
they call the lifeline is frayed blue.
Maybe I'll unfurl.

No one
knows exactly what happened.

My mother thought she was going to see
her mother, she said her mother
loved her the way she loved me, but by then
I wasn't sure exactly who she talked to.

Seven villages claim the spot
where Mungo Park died.

When my older
brother died, he left
a trace of longing deepening
in my eyes.

I found him
forty years too late as in
some treacly Dickens plotline
winged with harps.

From Lagos,
America seems heaven. For funerals,
they slaughter seven cows, but their
cows look like starved kine of Exodus.

THE ALEMBIC

Undertakers have an underground
air net work — they drain
the blood, apotheosize clients
20,000 feet, then sink six — like
counter-clockwise Christs.

Maybe I'll go.

Maybe a brother needs me. I don't know
where I'd be with my own blood.

There are days I prefer the swimming pools,
the palms, the sweet order of Abuja.

One morning I rose to the empty wing
and she was gone
and though she'd wandered
the morphine labyrinth
for weeks, I don't know
what broke free, if anything
ascended westward, or if
she looked back, but if
she did, if this was
my sweet Euridice,
there was nobody to wave goodbye to.

ADAM KENNY
I love my Dad!

June 17th, Battle of Bunker Hill
Day that light first struck my blue eye
Nine years later, too much cake, not enough
presents, wiffle ball
Baseball glove, nerf football, and a bible from my dear aunt
Rosy
who wears a blue uniform everyday
God loves her, so do I, it's just I'd rather have Chewbacca
Dad's ear to ear grin
reminiscent of a car salesman's
Beautiful mother just hoping Joey Gillis doesn't choke
on his lollipop
The Best is yet to come — waiting eagerly
“I have to go to the bathroom” — Nah, it can wait
Pull up into the parking lot like the same feeling
as losing one's virginity
I glance at my dad, who is walking like
a 42nd street pimp
because we are in his old stomping grounds
We emerge through the doors
and I feel like a member of the New Kids on the Block
with young women everywhere
The tickets come and so does the popcorn
with the hot butter flowing like
the lava of Mt. Vesuvius
The screen is too big to describe as my velcro Kangaroo
bad boys with the hidden pocket for lunch money stick to the floor
The Film is *The Natural* which boosts my confidence
of one day being able to tackle the almighty
Green Monster
Yet, my absolute beatitude suddenly becomes entwined with utter
sadness like the inside of a baseball
“His father had died of a heart attack, Dad, that's sad”
My dad looks on with caring eyes but
a deviant mind
Movie ends, and the only thing on this Birthday Boy's mind,

THE ALEMBIC

except pissin' my pants — is wiffle ball
“I have the best dad” I ponder as he lets me hit a homerun
Suddenly, no more wiffle ball, no more movies, no more Dad
I race to his side as he lies struggling for breath
“Go get your mother”
I immediately see red and dart to the house like an enraged bull
As I balance on the edge of insanity
I manage to glance over at his lifeless body
Yet, he is sitting up and laughing
like he had just finished watching the Three Stooges Marathon
I can't believe my protruding eyes
Hey Dad, that's why I'm different

GAY BREWER

Sleep, Extinction, Early Light

The telephone brings you up - resentful-
through a waterwall of rousing, a man's voice
to warn you only 3,000 tigers remain including every
species, *we need your help, we need you.*

When's the last time you felt good about anything
you did? Closed blinds render time of day
impossible. Somewhere between ten and two.

Bark, bark, add ragged instincts. Where is your dog?

These last months go on interminably -
rivers of indecision, banal fantasies, flirtations
with death, guilt over every failed resolve.

One tiger circles in one last dripping
forest - the trees are blacks, the tiger white
except its flaming eyes. Wake up, I'm talking to you.
Who in this hell do you think you are or might be?

JUDITH H. MONTGOMERY

This is the time we're going to be dying

Verena Cady, 7, after the heart she shared
with her Siamese twin, Ruthie, failed.

Summer 1991

As heart-wings miss a beat in their flying,
Verena sends the nurses to their knees:
Now's the time we're going to be dying.

Mother cups her mouth to the stall the crying,
as two girls shed their body to catch the breeze
after heart-wings miss a beat in flying.

Their wrists blooming feather, they are trying
white egret wings on thermal rise and ease.
Now's the time we're going: to be dying.

Four hands release the knotted cloak, unguying
earth's ravelled clock. One double body frees.
Heart-wings miss a last beat in their flying.

Above the vacant bed, a blur is signing
their future — *alis volat propriis*.
Now's the time. We're going to be, dying.

We living watch below, unpinioned, pining
to catch — Verena did — the moment we,
as heart-wings miss a beat in their flying,
know the time we're going to be dying.

Night Journey

To the child who lies
awake, touching himself with words —

To the young girl sweating
syllables, throwing off her blanket in the dark —

To the boy, filling
twin sacs with white-hot words
until spermy masses tremble on the lip —

To the girl, hoarding magma glow
deep at core, packing iridescence into hot
gold rocks that rise to sleep's surface under emerald grasses —

The children lying in the dark,
singing looped honey against the slow roll of sleep,
forbidden to light the lamp and pry moon from her sky —

Sweet loner after loner
lighting up the dark with murmur,
plash and freshet, undercover water-
fall of line lasting until light, and open pen, and paper:

I say that you feed us
with your whispering and whispering,
your loop and rush, your hidden springs,
your weaving smoke of rivers as they twine
and hollow underworld honeycombs of cavern —

I say
that you fire us, coal
by glowing coal scrubbed in the dark —
You wind a burning thread, O Daedalus, O Icara,
and web your blaze-white ink
writ on night, on ebony, on onyx, on obsidian, jet, carbon, on
graphite stroked to diamond blaze —

Your firetide antidote to Styx,
 your heart-tides' *lub-dub* pump,
 your bodies hover,
 phosphorescent over night-time beds
 (cot or pallet, downy quilt or wretched blanket),

Your hot words burning
 vein and artery to beam, electron
 by electron fitting out the wordship,
 licking sub-atomic into grammar's calendar, time's veiled sky —

We, who have gone before,
 and go, and go again into that fire,
 salute your voices: blazing and shaping,
 rising joyous out of dark warm beds,

Salute your crackling rods and roads,
 your reinvention of the brain,
 of nerve and tendon, in the sweet syllable hub-bub,

Murmuring and memorizing,
 cantors singing down the dawn,
 singing down amnesia, down hails of petals, quarks, and closets

You fuse
 words to bloom, poems lit in fragrant rooms, like
 radium the stars, like the shuttle-weave of hot

blood through cloth of flesh, like
 the secret flashlight clicked beneath the cover, like
 the hidden light shining through the palm,

illuminating bone and blood, beat by (*lub-dub*)
 beat by (*lub-dub/lub-dub*)
 beat.

VIRADETH PHIUPHONPHAN

Along the Mekong

It had been raining endlessly for the last three days. The sound of the rain hammering on the roof was like pebbles falling on sheet metal. For Lai, the noise was nothing. He had been living under metal shingles all his life. It never occurred to him at all that it was a disturbance. He did not wake up as early as he wanted. It must have been the rain. Even though he was wide awake, Lai remained on his back looking straight up into the ceiling, wishing the rain would stop. Conditions like these were never good for his business. He was about to turn towards his wife, but from the sound of pots and pans, along with the smell of steamed sweet rice from the kitchen, he realized that she was up already. He got out of bed and began to take down the mosquito net. He then peered through another rectangular net beside his bed and saw that the two children were still deep in their sleep.

"I really hate rainy season," he said as he was leaving the bedroom. "Hope the vegetables don't spoil," he murmured to himself as he walked towards the kitchen to check on the garden produce that he had picked earlier, "still good, and the fish are still alive too." Lai had caught the fish three days ago and had kept them in a pail since then. good size fish too. They would bring in a good amount of money.

"Het yung gin," he said to his wife wanting to know what she was cooking.

"Fish stew," she said as she slid the shredded fish from the cutting board into the pot.

"Did you use one of the fish I caught?" he asked.

"Yeah," she answered.

"That's good," he said, "the children will love it too. They have been asking me to cook them for dinner ever since I first brought them home."

He walked to the staircase on the balcony of the kitchen, sat down on the top tread, and watched the sky for any sign of clearance. As he was gazing around he realized that the river had risen about an arms length. The dam was probably opened again to its full force to produce the electricity for the citizens. The

stake that he tied the boat to at the bank of the river was no longer visible, but the rope was just long enough to allow the boat to rise with the water. It was fortunate that he had covered the boat's motor with that white plastic sheet. The engine would be nice and dry. Lai climbed down the steps and went under the house. The old wooden stilts of the house had recently been replaced with cement ones. Chronic flooding would have no effect on them. As he strolled to a wooden cabinet beside one of the stilts to get the feed for the chickens, Lai noticed that it was unusually quiet. He faced one of the cages and saw the rooster, the only one he had, lay on the ground. It was dead.

"Oh, ha munnì," he cursed while opening up the cage, "no wonder the damn thing didn't crow this morning."

Lai removed the rooster from the coop and put it into a plastic bag. He fed the hens and returned upstairs. The rain began to thin out. That would be good. He could go out today.

"Our rooster's dead," he said to his wife as he entered the kitchen.

"Oh, what happened," she asked.

"It must have caught a cold," he answered, "the weather has been wet lately.

"I guess you can't mate the chicken today," his wife suggested.

"No, but since the rain is stopping I am going out," he replied as he lifted the fish pail and the basket containing the garden produce. "I'll drop by Sinh's farm today and get a new one."

"Come eat before you leave," his wife suggested.

Lai placed the basket and the pail back onto the kitchen floor. He sat down beside his wife and began to eat.

"Are you still going out in such a bad condition?" she asked worriedly. "The river must be flowing high today."

"It's all right," Lai said as he guided the last rice ball into his mouth and mumbled, "I've done it before, even in conditions worse than this."

After he was done, Lai grabbed the lunch bag from his wife's hand and descended the stairs. When he was halfway down, an old woman shouted at him from a nearby house. "Did you buy that new TV yet?" she asked while chewing on tobacco. The dark tobacco juice seeped through the side of her mouth and she wiped it off with a handkerchief.

"Yes, I did Thoo," he replied.

"Good, good," she said excitedly, "I'll be over to watch the soap opera tonight."

"When are you going to get electricity for your house?" Lai asked as he walked towards her.

"Soon, the utility man is going to wire it up next week," she said. "Have you heard about the body that the people found by the river?"

"What body?" Lai asked curiously.

"I don't know. None of us knows. It floated from upstream," the woman said as she wiped her mouth again.

"Did they get rid of it?" Lai asked curiously.

"Yeah, they pushed it farther down the river," the woman said as she stretched her neck looking into the distance to see what Lai had in the boat.

"That's good," Lai said. "I would freak out if I found one of those on my trip."

"Don't say that! Hearing about it is bad enough," the old woman said, and then asked, "what are you selling today?"

"Fish, vegetables, fruits... what do you need?" he asked as the image of a dead body faded away from his thought.

"How much are the fish?" she asked.

"Seven hundred and fifty geeb each," he demanded, remembering that the amount was equal to one US. dollar.

"I'll give you seven hundred," she said as she offered him all that she had.

Lai smiled and went down to the boat to get her one of the fish. The fish was still squirming when he handed it to her. The old woman quickly grabbed his tail and swung its head onto the bottom tread of the stairway. Lai took the money and thanked her as he began to head back down to the boat. The rain halted completely as he removed the white plastic sheet from the boat's engine. He folded the sheet and dropped it in the front of the boat. Lai could not untie the rope from the stake that was underwater so he loosened the knot from the vessel end and released the rope into the water. He could get the rope back when the water receded. He started the engine by pulling onto the cord that was wound around the flywheel of the motor. The small engine fiddled to life. Its noise had its own character; like an ice cream wagon that rang its bell to let the children know that it was coming. Lai himself

was a distinguished character. Canoeing up and downstream for five years selling edibles had earned him a place in his customer's hearts. Especially when he shouted out whatever he was selling from the riverbank. His white wide-brimmed "goup" on his head was also his trademark.

Lai was ready to leave when he saw his little son waving at him from the house while urinating from the balcony. He smiled and chuckled to himself as he watched a stream of water arching from his son's body towards the earth. The engine roared loudly and the boat had just enough strength to push itself upstream. The river was flowing faster than usual, and the rain had turned the once peaceful river into a large mass of flowing mud water. As soon as the sound of his boat was heard his customers were there waiting.

"Onion! Tomatoes! Bananas! Peppers! Mangoes! Fish! Eels!" Lai shouted as he steered his boat to the shore.

"Haven't seen you for a few days Lai!" As woman shouted, trying to overcome the noise of the engine, "do you have what I wanted!"

"What do you need?" he asked her.

"Pang noir!" the woman shouted while her children ran towards her from behind.

"Softly," Lai whispered to her as he shut off the engine. The last thing he wanted was to let the official know he was selling an untaxed import.

"Give me two bags," the woman demanded, "and let me see those eels."

Lai gave her what she wanted and took out a large eel from the bucket. Both of the children saw the eels and fled in terror. The woman bought one and pointed the eel that was wrapped in a plastic bag towards her children.

"I really desire you to flee when this is all cooked up!" she said knowing they would not.

Lai restarted the engine and left the shore. The woman waved at him and walked up the bank of the river. It was a joy for Lai to see his customers again. Three days without selling anything had delayed his earning towards a new refrigerator for his wife. He did not sell much at one site, but he did make many stops. The goods were almost gone by the time he was halfway to Sinh's farm to pick up a new rooster. It was getting dark. The

river had receded by hardly a hand width. He was not going to make anymore stops, but then he saw two men waving at him from the top of the bank. They started to descend towards him. Lai thought perhaps they would buy the rest of his goods so he turned the boat to shore.

"I don't have much left, but perhaps you can help buy the rest of my goods," Lai said smiling.

The men, dressed in a military uniform, responded with even softer voices, so tender that they sounded mocking.

"It seems you do have something we wanted," they said.

"That's good," Lai said excitedly as he uncovered his goods to show them.

"We desire all your money and that necklace too," one of the men said while holding onto Lai's boat. The other man was reaching into his pocket and pulled out a pistol. Lai swiftly reached towards the front of the boat to grab the white plastic sheet hoping to use it to swipe the gun from the man's hand. He was about to swing when he felt a rush of pain in his right shoulder. Lai screamed in agony as he looked at the blood flowing from his arm. The white plastic sheet fell from his hand into the river. The man fired another shot. Lai fell back. His wide-brimmed hat tumbled into the water as his face landed on the edge of the boat.

Lai's body was half in the boat and half in the water. His face was distorted beyond recognition as he lay face down revealing an opening in the back of his head. Without a motor, his boat just drifted along the river and finally stopped on the bank of a town. The people stared curiously as they stood on the top of the bank talking among themselves. They moved away for an old man as he walked towards the edge of the bank. He had a long bamboo rod in his hand. With it he pushed the boat out to the current where the water was moving rapidly, and the boat continued downstream.

"It's bad luck for a town if a dead body drifts to its shore," he said. All the other townspeople seemed to agree with the old man as they began to head home, the sky above them just beginning to rain.

KEN WALDMAN
In Isolation

Neon and black, a schizophrenic night. Near the fountain, on the pedestal, a nightingale. Someone somewhere is thinking and rethinking infinity as the clock keeps ticking, until it goes teeter-totter, and then makes like a guillotine. For a brief moment, everywhere, the night goes bright and electric, as if lightning, love, or god, as if a perfect fuck. Then back to the teeter-totter, the ticking, someone's distant isolation. On the pedestal, a nightingale flies off. Near the fountain, a peculiar emptiness, though the night is full.

GERRY CRINNIN

Reliefs

Full-figure blonde seeks God-hearted
drop dead gorgeous bowling brothers
still browsing allergic big kissers
into break dancing and Spanish Larry

*

Dead white man, physically challenged, gent,
serious looking, won't see me in life but
through the ups and downs of life. I'll walk
with that special friend into evening, into
corduroy restrooms where accidents happen.

*

Bingo held at St. Hyacinth's
will be held at St. Colomban's on the lake
at St. Hedwig's

*

It was foot-long hotdogs and God's love
he told the driver, free prayer and salt
potatoes, 300 pounds of bagpipe action,
sparks all around the microphone, a real
sweat dancing rally for the Jesus Games.

*

Come Home to Employment 2000:
3rd shift dishwasher soup general
light & heavy American Spread Eagle

*

By a 3-2 vote, the younger boy
punched the older 4th grader
off the bus (a one-shot revenue
fixer for the school board and
not business as usual) noted
village idiot mayor Visa.

*

When the rest of the country is just summer,
a breathtaking display of giant international
home gardeners tell us 30 million "how to"
sessions will be overflowing orchids, bonji,
Disney horticulture and exquisite 25-dollar
Florida nurserymen high atop the spaceship.
Join Epic Stunt for this intricate must-see.

*

Before you reach for the sledge hammer
We specialize in pork butts, sale beef,
deli-fresh turkey wieners, sweet white
Potatoes and we're easy to find. An
unlimited supply of Jersey exists.

*

Vampires wanted for card games.
All calls will be answered.
I can make you.

DOROTHY BARRESI
At the Posh Salon Called Ultra

Lustre, sister, lustre!
Come into the light

where we might see you.
Care for a bagel

with nasturtium-infused
cream cheese, a cup of fizzing tea?

All angels are ectomorphs, but darling
your cheekbones are obscure.

Fat pads the hollows
(hallowed be the name of hollow

around here).
Do you have a bikini line? If so,

how long to groom it
sleek as a mink

drowned in a vat of melted
sugar wax?

There's hair on your upper lip
(hair again!), and your right eyebrow

thinks something is funny,
arching northeast

with a rascally look.
Well it is wrong. You are wrong

subcutaneously. Hello,
come in, sit down. Don't hang back.

THE ALEMBIC

You've even managed to come to the wrong day.
Your appointment was last week

with Mister Galapianapagos,
a wizard with bangs and overly heart-shaped faces.

He's out today
with a bent axle: in your case

we won't discriminate.
Here's a smock to change into, and garment of glory,

raiment of change,
out of the plenum will come,

we will lay hands on,
though the root of the problem may be — don't flinch.

The fix is in. The ginger rinse.
Veils, tissues, blot here, beauty

is art animated
no matter what you've heard

or believed, above it all these years,
living the life of the mind which means

a plain woman despising us
for what we know she lacks,

lay your head in our more-than-physical hands.
God can't love you as much

as we do, or he wouldn't have given you
such pale lashes.

But you are worth saving; I assure you
we have seen worse.

And though it is far from cheap
dreaming yourself into our fashion,

cheer up — it is *very* becoming.

Georgio, Reynald, Coco — a sweep of curls in the dust pan, clank,

and the past is your natural color.

Pucker up. Bring me the big rollers.

When the sham world blows you kisses,

the real world knows you at last.

DOROTHY BARRESI

For Dante, At One

For a year I have lived with the terror
of two things,
that you were born,
and that I could lose you.

About motherhood one says
only what is essential.
There isn't time for anything else.
So when you stand at the wooden baby gate, harrowing it,

howling,
a raisin clamped in one wet fist
and your new blue sandals
like bridles for tiny

unbroken horses
beating time in the other, my little
crumb snatcher, army of one,
your diaper twisting south-

southwesterly,
your gums blazing and boiling
with cuspids and incisors, your father
collapsed on the fainting couch of evening

snoring exhaustion's
old show tune,
and the soy milk bottles, frankly, aren't made,
I find it oddly satisfactory

remembering all this was foretold by my mother
in one of her Black Irish moods.

"A screamer," she said.

"May you have one just like you.

Lord, Dorothy, you were a screamer," then laughing
and coughing on the smoke
that killed her after forty years of breathing it in
just last summer, a month before you were born.

To be eight months pregnant and see
your mother like that,
shrunk down to grimace and bone
and whatever it is

keeps the body afloat
on that burning lake of fire we call pain, I tell you,
emblazoned arch,
double wreck of seeing,

it turns you inside out. I didn't know
whether to nurse her or cry out. Was there a parachute
packed with the extra weight
I carried? And which cord should I pull

to fall behind enemy lines
alone, without her forever,
newly with you?
Little boy blue, they pulled you out

in a code red emergency, sucking air.
Brilliant — your raw neck stretched
for all the lung force gathering.
Then the noise

more beautiful than everything I had known.
Alive together in that surgical theatre,
I learned what my body is good for.
Plenty, as it turns out. Yours too.

I remember trying to quiet those flailing fists
to give you a kiss — my first —
and your response:
a hot shudder

as though you were falling awake in restive sleep, and then
you did wake up, to someone
smearing ointment in your eyes. Then
a louder, longer scream.
Then nuzzling for my breast.

To the Place of Unhurried Goodbyes

I think of all the television my mother watched
 limned and gleamed
 in her blue spirit light, she is spirit now,
 gone, gone, god in the ground,
 back then she was alive.
 Part of the wash and throw
 of imagery in a quivering living room.
 Sofa, La-z-boy: and not the stupid stuff.
 Not reruns of "Green Acres," but
 always the current terribly earnest critically acclaimed
 ensemble cop/lawyer/doctor show
 set in a throbbing moral city
 of murders and swindles
 and deals going down on streets damped down
 to make red taillights liquid
 poignancy, though it never really rained.
 But just watching she must have felt
 lives were saved.
 Bone marrow was harvested for tricky donor matches.
 Nurses kissed doctors, and doctors
 demanded answers, damnit,
 of balky and penurious administrators who might
 next week find a lump in their own breasts, who knew?
 And so on, my mother, my witness, my mother
 my watcher.
 Champion! Super-channeled,
 tranced by valor. Rapt. Kept thus,
 she held a whole room in place
 just by sitting still.
 Bad hip pillowed, candy in the dish.
 My father off somewhere, probably at the computer
 writing his ethno-gerontologies,
 booting and rebooting.
 Disc function failure.
 Path not found. And her kids? Grown and gone,
 though telephoning
 — sometimes right in the middle of a show! —
 to chat about dogs and kids and penurious bosses,

while likewise not asking
when will you love me the way I want to be loved,
or what good is a mother anyway,
if all we keep wanting is
more mother?
Which made it easier to go back to the couch
afterward, and sit down for the steady
watching resumed, my mother, my sister, my brothers,
myself, burning in our separate
fire towers. Even my father
if a plot really sung to him.
Say a smartass lawyer with a sexy client
and a certain dilemma.
You think you know what this poem is about?
Honesty? The felicity of the "lived life"
versus the dirt of valor in our graceless but mostly pleasing times?
Believe me, you don't.
No one does.
In this way we said goodbye.

JOSHUA LOWELL
Still Movement Today

— *For Mary Wolstonecraft*

Matronly duties often done in vain...

Along the precipice, words spoken pause.

Sometimes witches freeze, as does in headlights.

Labour burning thighs, hours labour.

Darling ones are forgiven for being.

Daunting queens have become far less...

Daunting queens have become far less
matronly. Duties often done in vain...

Darling, ones are forgiven for being

along the precipice. Words spoken pause

labour burning in thighs. Hours labour

sometimes. Witches freeze, as does in headlights.

Sometimes witches freeze as does. In headlights,

daunting queens have become far less

labour burning. In thighs hours labour.

Matronly duties often done in vain

along the precipice... Words spoken pause

darling. Ones are forgiven for being ...

Darling ones are for ... Given for being,

sometimes witches ... Freeze as does in headlights

along the precipice! Words spoken pause

daunting. Queens have become far less likely

matronly. Duties often done, in vain

labour burning in thighs, hours labour.

Labour burning in thighs... Hours' labour

darling ones are for. Given for being

matronly, duties often done in vain...

Sometimes witches freeze. As does in headlights,

daunting queens have become. Far less likely

along the precipice, words spoken pause.

Along the precipice, words spoken pause

labour. Burning in thighs, hours labour

daunting. Queens have become far less likely

darling. Ones are forgiven for being

sometimes witches. Freeze as does in headlights

matronly! Duties often done in vain...

THE ALEMBIC

Darling ones are forgiven along the precipice.
Words spoken pause for being.

Sometimes witches freeze, as does labour
burning in thighs. Hours labour in headlights.
Matronly duties often daunting...
Queens have become far less likely done in vain.

Christina's World?

— to Andrew Wyeth

Christina, what's the matter?
Why are you fallen?
Has your
tawny world
pulled you down?
Will your weedy body
get you up? Tired legs take you
back? Trembling arms pump the stubborn well?
Meager shoulders raise the clothes to the line?
Knotted fingers pluck the skinny chicken?
Will you have the strength to smile
at your husband when he comes
home, the man who led you
away from family, friends,
acquaintances, streetlights,
sidewalks, trees, fish, fruit,
brandy, courtesy conversa-
tion, green? Christins will
you get up?

MARTHA COLLINS

Then Again

Wet line.
Another to cross.

That long time
I was never not.

Faithful to that
shorter dress.

Buttons all over
that body.

Common

We've got it in.
Good. Man. Ground.
Down to earth. In
for him. The old
green. Where there
were cows. Or could
be crows. Good
for them. Or good
for all of us? Sense
is what we're after
here, plot we get
together in. Interest.
Added on and on.
Got it? It's our in.

Evens

Even-steven, Steven said, and even
Steven thought so at the time, but then
the times got rough. Call it even and who's
to blame, or what? We need the odds to beat
to keep us running: even money gets
you nothing new, even chance does not
add up, even hands hold out, and even
tempers cool. But even can be even
more, or less, as even children know:
even if they said we could, we couldn't.
For years we worked at getting even, by which,
of course, we always intended more. But then
we remembered *the eventide*, and even so:
we welcomed the stilled waters of that evening.

EDWARD C. LYNSKEY
Next Running of the Blue Tics

“O balls,” he rasped, a toothache raging
despite the warm grill, bloody bays
falling more distant, dawn a serrated pink.
In this palisade of our twin leisure,
hanging loose was simple. “Just
between you and me and the hanging oak,”
he went on. “This hunt’s all I ever
get up for.” Through a pummy grey sepia,
his features buckled, split, and aspersed
into the octogenarian memorial he was.
“Aw c’mon,” I replied. “April in, April
out, we park way back here, talk
bluegrass music, chainsaws, God’s best cold
malt liquor this side of hellbent Georgia.”
Craggy claw on my biceps, he insucked
a spritz of wild ginger, whistled to his pack
of blue tic hounds romping by, perse
tongues dragging, raw muzzles aimed straight
ahead like shot bangalore torpedoes,
frothy fangs chewing scenery, receding moonward.
That night unshaven, jaundice-jowled, falt
on a cot, his ghost sidled up, passing
me the bullhorn for the next day’s running.

CLAUDIA K. GRINNELL
The Memory of Words

Angels move between
heaven and earth
on an invisible ether
and spill like driftwood
into this shore,
which sooner or later,
will be speechless and cold.

A moon bends toward the sea,
slowly, an old acrobat,
half-expecting to fall.
Now it dangles, an inch
above the horizon.
Wave after wave turns
marble white.

A circle of stones
crumbles into dust.
Birds dive into darkness.
Turn, re-turn: the desire
for black holes never lets up.

MARY ROHRER-DANN

Holdings

At the hospital
the machine revealed
an empty sac.
So new, I'd barely begun
to imagine you, yet
already your ghost
was fading fast.

Going home, I watched couds
flee February's frank blue.
In the pasture across the road
a black calf and his twin
mocked the frozen ground
with bumpy newborn grace.

. . .

July in Frijloes Canyon,
parched cradle of ancient souls.
I hike the Falls Trail
marveling at such green,
at the gift of water and birdsong
in this pocked sandstone.

Monarchs dance round me
three times.
Black and gold wings
brush my cheek and brow
and I imagine you
Alghting
in another woman's womb,
holding fast.

Mayflies Spawning at Hardees

Halfway home, we glimpse
 the Juniata's black glitter.
 The Pennsylvania night, wild,
 lush as velvet, thins;
 the highway narrows
 and a billboard warns:
 God Is Watching.

We enter the town,
 drive past houses
 braced by stringent faith,
 flatbeds rusting in pinched yards.
 Soon, the town unravels
 to truck stops, an Adult Gift Shoppe,
 the glare of fast food.

We drive into white chaos.

Lured by light, a breathing scrim
 of bodies—whisper delicate—
 subverts the night and coats
 the orange sign and take-out window.

Three hundred million years old,
 Ephemeroptera watched dinosaurs
 rise and vanish. Tonight, naiads
 from the river's muddy dark
 exchange gills for fanning wings.

We run through churning air,
 stand agape at the thrum of bodies.
 Against the restaurant glass, these angels
 mate, lay eggs, die.

Our order tucked in paper sacks,
 we duck outside, sprint for the car
 and moonless dark pooling
 beyond the town.

The child within me turns,
bumps against my exultant hands.

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN
No Memory of the Bomb

I.

The current Anger Rapids talk after C.D.'s rampage was that his baby Rachel had been born normal which as tounded everyone but Rachel's mother Linda Swain. Linda had grown up in the Magic Mountains dead-centering the hundred thousand acre Okanogan Wilderness in a stockade surrounded by bog miasma and Indian bones. You couldn't plant a rosebush or a Beefsteak tomato without uncovering femur, tibia, skull. She'd attended Montessori and Sylvan schools. Her parents were arrested by the DEA in 1990 after amassing a fortune growing an astonishingly savory marijuana hybrid. Stockade, green house, stables, trout streams, cranberry bog, airstrip, and cabin cruiser were seized. Swain's parents were imprisoned at Walla Walla State Prison, a peculiar redbrick fortress designed in the style of Jeremy Bentham's "workhouse;" the only redbrick in the desolate Blue Mountains, a former deathcamp for renegade Indians. Rendered homeless, Linda moved to Anger Rapids. No one knew her or of her past. She waitressed and bar-backed at Manfield Hoskin's Gaslight Inn.

She initiated a brief affair with Ronald Moss, he gave her the cabin on Clear Lake and a new Toyota pickup. She met him at the bar at intermission the opening night of Khowantchina. Boot Driscoll, Moss's partner in the opera, had raged that people wanted to see "tits & ass" or at least Oklahoma. But Moss stuck to Moussorgsky, and the tale of struggle between superstition and progress in pre-revolutionary Russia was a hit in Anger Rapids. As Moss slammed Stolichnaya chilled neat, Linda read his palm. She saw "big trees." She touched him again and saw Ronald "surrounded by big trees whose leaves were hundred dollar bills." She giggled. Moss laughed "what, I should become a logger?" and stroked her arm. A week later he'd broken out in sweat when Wild Bill Lott casually suggested, over steamed clams, an obscure mutual called Evergreen Growth as a good turnover for petty cash. Moss invested a million. Then Linda had moved from Manfield's dingy garage apartment to the A-frame on Clear Lake. Moss was

a good lover — titillative, uninhibited, gentle — but he was possessive. She stood it for six months. They parted without the “friends” nonsense, but mutually satisfied and without bitterness.

Reading people was Linda’s natural ability. As a teenager she’d “learned world,” esoteric knowledge even her parents — cannabis activist boomers — cared little about. What the Chopunnish, Salish, Puyallup, and Muckleshoot knew about Northwest was pain — drowning rituals and snow-eating; sitting bare-assed on heated rocks and drinking psilocybin mushroom piss for absolution and visions. Linda often slept over at the trailer of the alcoholic shaman Cabildo who taught her, in addition to Lodge Fire Spark Magic, the Tarot, I-Ching and Ouija. Pregnant at twenty-two by C. D. Flowers, Swain could share by placing her hands in an Wiccan O atop her swollen stomach, Rachel’s heartbeat and dreams, the electric tickle of her soul through the milky amnion. New life swiveling in space: the umbilical-corded astronaut’s miniscule pink fingers, ten nails as gossamer as rice paper, touching her unseeing eyes in curiosity.

Linda didn’t “show” for four months, then she bulged an astonishing amount all at once, a watermelon abdomen. Manfield fired her. He re-hired Linda when she identified the father — Manfield loved and feared C.D., was pleased that the man he’d cared for like a wayward son, never charging him for food or drink, would father. No one remembered C.D. ever having a girlfriend since retuning from Vietnam. Many wondered whether bullets and shrapnel had impacted “there.”

Rachel was a quiet and amiable baby. Considering the cacophony her father orchestrated during his life’s final second (though Flowers misjudged the distance Anger Rapids dipped below sea level as the town sloped to the river — the blast sheared upward, skipped the marina and Aire Bonita condos like a fickle tornado, to smash Ilwaco three miles west) folks expected the girl to spit nails. Or breathe fire like the demon Sefiroth who the Kabbalists believed was torn from the womb of Nothingness to torment mankind.

Linda breast fed Rachel on the redwood deck of her Clear Lake cabin every morning the sun shone although she’d been warned by her attorney to “stay low.” She loved the combination of drowsiness and warmth — the sticky heat of Rachel’s mouth, the sunlight bathing her body and the planks beneath radiating an

oily cedar scent. A photographer disguised as a deer hunter took several pictures for Time and People: zoom-shots of a mass-murderer's bare-breasted widow — brown nipple forming a pearl of milk, Rachel's pink mouth rounded in hunger. But the response of the readers was overwhelmingly in favor of "leaving Linda alone." How could she have foreseen that falling in love with C.D. Flowers would make her infamous and irrevocably alter her life?

She received one warning, more beautiful than ominous, in the idiosyncratic manner of her gift of second-sight: the hummingbird & ghost morning. Linda awoke to their shrill notes and blurred-wing prestidigitation, moving like shadow puppets behind her bedroom curtain. The hummingbirds tittered and fluttered, color-dappled whirligigs swooping to siphon nectar from Forget-Me-Not, honeysuckle and climbing rose. Linda hurriedly showered, brushed her hair wet, tossed a palm of chamomile flowers into her teapot to steep: the hummingbirds were back and she wanted to spend as much time as possible with them.

Cabildo the shaman had told Linda the Petasophora Iolata were magical creatures, more angel than bird. She whispered the cabal as she filled the feeder: Petasophora Iolata. Several hummingbirds skimmed above Linda's head, trilling as she topped off the yellow plastic jug with rose-colored syrup to welcome them back. "Good morning," Linda spoke. She sat drinking chamomile tea, following the aerial acrobatics of the rainbow-tinted birds with her head until pleasantly dizzy. She wondered, without anxiety, if Curtis Dwayne Flowers would offer to marry her or ask her to share his doublewide trailer overlooking Anger Rapids. He grew chowder peas, for the fragrant white blossoms. He never ate the peas. He favored an old one-eyed tom called Kanai, who hid from everyone except C.D.. The one night she'd convinced him to sleep over, he'd bloodified her lip in a nightmare, and ran so hard into a wall of the cabin he'd knocked himself unconscious. She'd repair his life. If anyone could do it, Linda was certain she could.

The pregnancy had been a happy accident. Just as she'd dipped her finger into the Rand McNally and opened her eyes to see Anger Rapids under the peach-enameled nail had been a fortunate accident. Essentially an orphan with nowhere to go, her first season of happiness began with the white on black sign of the Gaslight Inn. Manfield Hoskins had immediately hire her,

apologized for the minimum wage and confessed she couldn't expect much in the way of tips in Anger Rapids but she could eat all she wanted. Ronald Moss dropped in every Friday for Starbucks and loganberry pie, after he'd seen Linda he drove down from Seattle Mondays and Wednesdays, too. She told him about her parents, with twenty years each to go at Walla Walla. Moss told her about the Rosenbergs, how wrong it was of their government to imprison and kill parents. She'd thought him eccentric at first, but she'd become his lover their first date, not caring if he thought her promiscuous because she wasn't.

The morning of the hummingbirds and the ghost Linda had been in an especially good mood—in light of her past, the flight from Okanogan, the whirlwind affair with Ronald Moss and falling in love with Curtis Dwayne, seemed gaily speckled with color and vibrancy like the hummingbirds. She was so happy she removed the Ultrascan printout of fetal Rachel she kept taped to the refrigerator and sat marveling at the miraculous dot-matrix. Truly a miracle. A machine's sensor stirred the cold electrolytic gel squirted on her abdomen to reveal, on a green screen, the life inside her womb. Tiny and perfect, like a hummingbird. Linda had once held an Iolata in her hands, glimpsed into its dolphin eyes and seen terror and innocence. She'd been poaching eggs when the cry of confusion and alarm brought her running.

The A-frame's porch, an addition, and was the cabin's sole imperfection: the redwood planking had begun to sag, strips of ornate gingerbread latticework littered the grass after each storm. A pair of old-fashioned bubble skylights, salvaged from the town depot, had been spackled into rectangles chainsawn through the cedar shingle roof. The skylights were dimmed with moss and evergreen needles, and in one of the bubbles Linda discovered a disoriented hummingbird. The creature drummed and shrieked, its golden-coin head masked with cobwebs. Linda recognized him as the rarer Heliothrix Purpureiceps, and carefully trapped the hummingbird in a dishtowel. Its cries brought other Iolata which hovered, chirping to see what she'd do. The bird's heart pounded—she could feel the beat against her palms—then she stepped from the ladder, opening the towel as she did so. The gorgeous gold and silver sparkler tensed, white throat pulsing, before exploding into flight.

Now the hummingbirds trusted her and made no evasive

movements when she stood to make another pot of tea. On her drainboard were several quarts of blueberries. C.D. loved her blueberry tarts. They'd eat Tillamook cheddar sandwiches and blueberry tarts by the Siwash Dam and watch the sun dip behind the concrete and green water. As Linda replaced her cannister of chamomile, she heard a woman singing, a rustling through the salt grass and rhododendron bushes, then a light step on the porch, then the soft grunt of planks as someone sat. "Yes?" Linda called out. She wiped her hands and repeated "yes? who is it?" A woman sat with her back to the screen door and stared in the direction of Anger Rapids. A hummingbird streaked by, hovered before the woman, then chirped and disappeared beyond the vine-maples and stand of Douglas fir.

"Hello," said Linda.

"Hello," the woman replied. Her dark black hair, stirred by the wind, reminded Linda unpleasantly of snakes. "I just stopped to catch my breath."

"Are you lost?"

"Oh, no."

"Trying to find someone? The Lathim place is a half mile down Fish Hatchery Road, towards town. But they don't live there anymore. They died." Linda pointed the way and the woman turned, smiled. Her beautiful face was slightly intruded on by several creases at eye-edge and the corners of her mouth which resembled stone-chisled Roman fives. Linda guessed that the stranger had been a model or actress—she had the bearing of a former beauty queen; when she grinned, expensive teeth were exhibited. But the teeth must have been worked in her youth since the enamel beneath the gold molars and capped fronts had yellowed to a tusk coloration.

"I'm Evelyn." Linda shook the offered hand although she considered the gesture cold and meaningless, a holdover from the militaristic salute. She preferred to hug people or not touch them at all.

"Hello Evelyn. I'm Linda."

"Beautiful place you have here. Primitive and private. Hummingbirds are a favorite of mine—rainbow-colored, delicate and sleek, tiny jets."

Linda stared at Evelyn. Something about her was odd, then she realized the woman's face had shifted as she spoke, from solid

to vapor, so that at that moment of transition Linda's eyes could follow the flight of a hummingbird, unbroken through the woman's head. Fear tingled the pit of her stomach, then Linda relaxed as Evelyn glanced at her with sad but questioning eyes. Linda saw, through the face, the knot-holes and whorls of warped boards. She shook her head.

"Do I frighten you?"

Linda nodded. "Ghosts are sadness. I don't blame you, of course, I just fear what you've come to tell me. I know who you are. Your husband was Johnny. The red Corvette couple."

The woman wept bitterly. "Stop calling us that, Linda." Linda was startled by the legerdemain reworking Evelyn's appearance. The human silhouette melted into a vortex of color.

"There isn't much time," said Evelyn. "I'm out of it and so are you."

"Is it Rachel? Is something wrong with my baby?"

"No. You must leave Anger Rapids. Alone, as you arrived alone."

"I want to bring C.D. with me, I want to save him."

"You can't, you just can't, Linda." The colorful vortex of Evelyn broke apart into a dozen individual wisps, peeled spectrums of corresponding color and shade fading into an opaque center, "Don't go!" Linda cried. A ribbon of color pinched from the vortex to brush, with the slightest tingle, Linda's face. Then wings beat the air, drumming and dissipating the last essence of Evelyn, the red Corvette woman, as the hummingbirds returned into an explosin of color to feed.

II.

September fourteen nineteen ninety-four was the day C.D. Flowers dealt with Boot Driscoll. Boot was president of Proud Urban Development. PUD had demolished the veteran's memorial park on Riverside Drive, razed the Biltmore Hotel (first Washington state edifice to have electricity), evicted residents of Villa Dena (the mobile home slum) and pressured Manfeild Hoskins(he'd failed three health and fire inspections that year) to sell the Gaslight Inn (oldest commercial building and provisional fort in Washington State, circa 1878). Boot Driscoll wanted space for Aire Bonita Estates—splendid condominiums with breathtaking vistas of Anger Rapids and the Siwash cataract, starting at

150k for one bedroom with faux malachite Jacuzzi and remote-controlled gas-log (faux marble mantel but genuine Mexican tile hearth).

Manfield, whose triple bypassed mass of myocardial muscle couldn't bear anymore ersatz building code violations—east coast rat turds buried in his flour, gulf coast cockroaches posed under the Kelvinator—agreed to sell out to PUD. Driscoll then gave full attention to Flowers. Everyone agreed his handling of C.D. had been savage. In light of Boot's persecution, no one imagined C.D. would settle for retaliation as bloodless as tossing paint or reporting Boot to the IRS, two things he did in fact do. "He's a pussy," Driscoll liked to crow after paying an arrears penalty of ten thousand. "Some war hero!"

Out of the blue C.D. called Boot and offered to sell lot 13 to Villa Dena. He told Driscoll that lot 13 had been his home since Christmas of '71 but for cash he'd make way for splendid condominium with breathtaking vistas. C.D. spoke calmly. "Get off my back while I pack and say good-bye. Don't send anymore lobotomized bodybuilders to pour gasoline on my marigolds and shoot my cats. Tell Butterball and his deputies to quit waiting outside the Gaslight to arrest me for public intox and whack my kidneys with a sock & lock until I piss stinking orange stuff. Don't cut Linda Swain's brakelights again and back off Manfield Hoskins,"

C.D. paused to cough, kicking his foot against the broken glass panel of the phone booth. The Bell kiosk tilted at a crazy angle at the end of the gravel parking lot at the Gaslight Inn. C.D. drew his shoe back and forth, cutting an X into the leather toe at the tip of a glass shard. Boot Driscoll hadn't spoke a word so C.D. asked "Deal?" and Boot answered "You sound ready to shit or git." Neither wanted to be the first to hang up. Then C.D. said, "All I ask are these few considerations and you can have my house. It's got the best view of the falls and a brand new cedar deck I built myself, not the best looking spread but where my heart once was."

C.D. knew that police chief Andy Splawns could have stopped Butterball and Driscoll in their tracks. But Splawns had a thing, early in his marriage and sporadically throughout his law enforcement career, for prostitutes. Not the glamorous Alexis hotel callgirls or aerobicized tanbed strippers of Emerald Escorts, but hard flat-chested streetwalkers with bad teeth and gang

tatoos—the younger the better, fifteen about right. And Driscoll possessed a video tape with audio, though Splawns had always been careful about the SeaTac strip motels and King County backroads he used. The girl's name had been Joyce McGill, her whore-handle Tawny. She was sixteen then.

Andy really loved his wife Gracie—he really loved her like he loved his mother. He was a youthful looking man himself, Gracie much older in appearance, heavy and gray. She chain-smoked Parliaments. Some people in Anger Rapids made cruel jokes, calling them “The Bushes,” or “Barb & George” behind Andy's back. Always behind his back—Chief Splawns had a horrible temper. He didn't drink—he'd discovered his alcohol alter-ego in Korea, losing a monster in that god forsaken frozen wasteland, and though the demon earned Andy medals, there were snapshots in his brain torn in strips, so that he could see only bits—a spot of blood, a breast, a slim wrist—never faces, never a complete picture.

Boot Driscoll agreed with C.D. Flowers to have a drink at the Gaslight and transact business. He didn't do business on the phone. “I buy you out I'm bulldozing your unsightly little homestead pronto,” said Driscoll. “So let's not talk about your decks and rose bushes and cats. And that paint ruined my coat, Flowers. That's four hundred I'm subtracting from what I agreed to pay you.”

“I want to sell,” said C.D. “It's just a matter of how much. I need enough to leave Anger Rapids, maybe live in Kirkland by that big blue-green lake with the Winslow Ferry to Bainbridge only a bus ride away...”

“Kirkland and Lake Washington?” Boot interrupted. “Fat chance you'll ever afford that. I'm not gonna screw around with you Flowers, you better get down to earth.”

“Well, Black Diamond then,” C.D. continued. “Live by the raceway and watch the beautiful horses every day and pretty women with umbrellas but then I'd have to cross the bridge at 502 and I'm afraid I'd look down that dirty slow-moving Green River and see a naked female corpse float by and then I couldn't sleep. I'd have nightmares of Nong Khai and the little green-eyed Eurasian girl with the Dodgers cap who did our laundry and polished our boots for candy and spare change. She picked up an M16 one day and emptied the clip in the showers. Eddie Davino

stumbled out clutching his balls and dropped the bar of Lava but it's not Lava it's a loop of intestine and blood pours out of his mouth and they're all dead and we never did catch the little bitch, she got away, they always got away. I'm afraid that when I look into the Green River I'm going to see floaters, cause that bastard won't ever stop until he's thinned out all the look-alikes in his head, exhausted all the possibilities."

Boot Driscoll sucked a deep breath, blew it out, cleared his throat, clinked his loose upper plate against the hard square diamond pinkie ring. "I've never heard such crazy shit. You should be locked up for everyone's good, Flowers. You should be hogtied behind bars at Western State or American Lake."

"Yes, Sir," said C.D.

"I'm bringing my checkbook. I've had it with you. You better not change your mind. I'll give you money and twenty-four hours and you better be gone."

"Yes, Sir, I want you to buy me out." C.D. slammed the phone back into the black and silver coin box and grinned. The infected molar squeaked in his jaw, a rancid syrup of puss trickled into his throat. Flowers entered the Gaslight, ordered a pitcher of Henry's and drank several schooners. He unzipped NIKE and happily double-checked all the wires. He wondered how many steroid-chested frog-legged weight lifters, ripped-stomach boxers and antelope-thighed long-jumpers knew that Nike — a rubric stamped on t-shirts, warm-ups, gym bags and hightops — was the name of the Greek goddess of competition and victory. Nike: darling of Zeus, daughter of giant Pallas and poisoner Styx, Judas to her Titan father if Judas wore pearls. The divine image of corporate spirit.

Revenge by explosion wasn't the best of plans, C.D. knew — as a demolition expert he had learned that bombs were capricious instruments, indiscriminate concerning casualties. A "placed munition" meant crossed fingers, there was none of the "control," say, of a prepared building, its girders cut with det cord, plastique smashing concrete simultaneously so that the pile of rubble collapsed into a neat stack. But Flowers had dreamed of continuing in his own way Ronald Moss's victory: For killing my family. He was sick of excuses, Nike was the best he could do to color suicide with dignity, incinerate memory.

C.D. had suffered many nightmares where suffocating, wrapped in

flames, he screamed silently into the roar of fire; now he understood the nightmares to be merely dreams — he'd ascend from the flames into heaven, stepping down onto clouds from his gangplank of oblivion. Driscoll would plunge through the ashes into hell. Lending a postcard idyll to the dream was a pastoral reconditioning of the ruined landscape: as the blast wave dissipated the salmon returned to Anger Rapids.

Over waves meringued with salt foam the salmon leapt pink-throated, silver bodies glimmering. Exiting the Pacific Ocean they entered Anger River and charged the ladders; blackened concrete portculiises were all that remained of the hatchery. Shattered stumps of hemlock and fir still smoldered along the rocky banks, gray corkscrewing into a blue ceiling. The salmon pushed past corpses of fishermen and bear — those ancient enemies finally triumphed over — made pebble nests, promulgated life, spawned and died, setting the clock of solstice and renewal another year forward.

III.

Manfield Hoskins saw the Nike stenciled in white on red nylon and that surprised him because C.D., the town's only genuine living war hero and nominee for the Medal of Honor (refused) was a slob who never bought designer gear. He dresses like a derelict and his trailer court was cluttered with rusted automobile hulks and stacks of decayed lumber just like the filthy tracts on the Mucklehoot Reservation. Not at all like the Gaslight Inn — since 1898 a clean Hoskins stood behind the bar; there had never been an occurrence of food poisoning or a complaint about dirty silverware. Manfield was proud of that. "What you got there, C.D.?"

"A gym bag, Manfried. A simple gym bag."

Manfeild grimaced. Manfried had been his father's name. It pained Manfield that C.D. would confuse him with Manfried, who had opened a topless joint called Kittens in Pasco, had talked of turning the Gaslight into Vixens. A century of a family tradition of hospitality—beer drinking, peanut shelling, wing eating, horse-shoe throwing, pool playing, card shuffling, football watching, replaced by whores strutting to "Star Me Up", "Night Moves" and "Fire Lake" on the site (as of 1876, a log cabin with grease paper

windows) where Manchester Hoskins, intrepid pioneer, had planted the defense of Washington Territory from savage Indian hordes after the Whitman uprising.

Manfield had set a small fire, a contained conflagration-interior charring, smoke and water staining without structural damage. He'd gotten his father drunk and brought him out. When the Gaslight reopened it looked, smelled, tasted exactly as before. Then Manfield enlarged the parking lot, erected 2-Good-2-B-Tru Antique Emporium alongside for his wife, put in a back room for the Trinity Lutheran Church Ladies Auxillary to hold bingo for Salvadorian refugee relief and the Knights of Columbus their mystical fetes. The Rotarians had been so proud of him they'd given him a brass-tone nameplate screwed to a walnut-grained particle board plaque. Manfield hung his award proudly over the register between the Frito-Lay rack and the 50-cent pulltab machines. He was a moral, ethical success at a time his community worried more about Berlin Wall-Fall, the Green River Killer, Tien An Men Square and the Moscow Coup. His good had triumphed over evil, the old man's life at last played out—pneumonia after falling into Anger Rapids one afternoon while trying to torch the ancient salmon-spearing platform with kerosene and a road flare. His father floating 1/2 mile over white water and rocks—his head battered as if by prizefight and inhaling enough water to end up in the Intensive Care unit at Harborview Trauma Center the final six days of his life, wearing a diaper, bone-colored casts and cervical collar, fed through IV tubes and occasionally gasping “Go away daddy go away!”

“Gym bag? On a health kick now?”

“Sort of. Know what Nike means? Read the classics, Manfried?”

“Hell no. I took practical stuff: 4-H, welding, wood shop. I was running this place when I was sixteen.”

“She's more than a tennis shoe, Mannfried—she's a goddess. A goddess of justice. She calls down the moon, Manfried.” C.D. poured more beer.

Manfield poked him. “I'm bringing you a Worksburger. You're too damned skinny, C.D. you go ahead and marry Linda Swain. I respect her even if she is pregnant out of wedlock.”

“Actually you fired her Manfried.”

“And I hired her right back when I learned you were the

father. You're like a son to me. It bothers me you're still alone and happy about it."

"I guess I'm crazy, Manfred."

"Well, I could understand that. They put you in Nam twice."

C.D. raised three fingers. "Three. Three tours."

"Then that gives you triple the right to be crazy as anyone else."

C.D. smiled. "But I loved it. I love water. I painted all the country bridges, you know. Water, water everywhere. As a SEAL I swam the South China Sea and Gulf of Tonkin, Mekong, the Cua Viet and Red rivers. Water, water everywhere." He winked at Manfred. Hoskins scratched at the see-through gray mustache sprinkled across his upper lip. "You really risked your life in Nam to swim or are you pulling my leg?"

"Gospel truth."

"When you came home in '71 I kept an eye on you, C.D. You know I love you like a son and I don't think you're dangerous to people who care about you. But I wondered if you'd been hurt more than you said. You looked like someone hung out to dry, sometimes you still do. Look at that worthless Lathim. Only God has the right to judge but Lathim never fought a war, never held a job, just lived off his mama and any woman who'd have him. Holds up the Texaco and shoots Van. Poor old nigger crippled for life, and Lathim in Walla Walla. Five years, and his mama at church everyday to pray he isn't sodomized. Makes no sense because his parents are honest, hard working Christians."

"Whereas I'm a bastard. My mother was a loose woman. Boot Driscoll's secretary. Yeah!, I've done the arithmetic."

"God!" Manfred exclaimed. "C.D. after all these years don't tell me you buy that old gossip. It's ridiculous."

"I've done the arithmetic. And don't forget my heroism was accidental both times—in Nam and when I pulled your son out of the Anger."

"Good God, C.D., I'll always be grateful for that... and your mother was a decent, god-fearing..."

"True is true, Manfred. The truth doesn't bother me."

Manfred rubbed his face with his hands and flung sweat drops from his fingers. "C.D., nobody's perfect—we'd all go crazy if we tried! Lathim's mama—I never told you this, you should know this—when she was seven she stole four thousand dollars from

her teller drawer at Seafirst and hid in Vancouver. That was long before she repented and became a Nazarene. Lathim would have turned out all right if he had truly repented and thanked God for sending him to jail as his mama did."

"Sure, Manfred. He was fine right to the minute he stabbed his wife through the heart and slashed his own throat."

Manfield planted pink hands on his fat waist, stared down at his friend with open-mouthed exasperation. "Don't take offense to anything I say. You're like a son to me, C.D. You're a war hero—doesn't that make you proud? Before Boot Driscoll bought Veteran's Park the biggest name on The Eternally Vigilant Soldier was yours, plain as day for everyone to see."

"The truth doesn't hurt anymore, Manfred. Try it some time."

Manfield lifted the beer glass, drained it. He poured another from the pitcher. "The biggest name, C.D. For your Silver Star and Navy Cross and three Purple Hearts and nomination for the Medal of Honor which you refused though God in heaven knows we couldn't figure out why. You could go to college free. Did you tell Linda Swain that? With the Medal of Honor you'd have something to look forward to: you wouldn't have to put away every nickel and dime for a college fund, or sweat about inflation like Maggie and I did. I'd sure think about reapplying, C.D. I looked into it and there's no statute of limitations—the medal's in a vault waiting when you want it."

"It made me sick, Manfred. Would you take something that sickened you?"

"Sick how, C.D., sick why? You killed yours hand-to-hand the way a man's supposed to. In Desert Storm they plowed 'em over with steel cowcatchers attached to tanks then the Air Force napalmed the survivors. You'll always have the biggest name here, C.D., even if The Eternally Vigilant Soldier itself is gone."

"Yeah, Anger Rapids certainly has been good to me."

"Drink up, C.D." Manfield disappeared through the polished oak batwings separating kitchen from lounge. C.D. called Barbara to refill the pitcher. He fed a dollar into the jukebox, reached behind the machine and toggled the volume switch. Boot Driscoll stamped in, scowling through the gloom. "Over here Driscoll," C.D. called. "Right here."

"Where?" He raised then lowered his briefcase, black trench

coat over the other arm. The charcoal Brooks Brothers herring-bone bore a white spot on the one shoulder, another white spot tipped one blue sharkskin boot. Flowers pointed. "Gull shit on your suit, Driscoll." The man swore, daubed at the mess.

"Christ," he muttered, throwing his handkerchief to the floor. "Where we sitting, Flowers?"

"The big table. Want something to eat?"

"Fuck no, not this greasy spoon." Driscoll met C.D. at the table's head. Neither offered to shake hands, both grabbed the glasses of beer Barbara poured. "Bring another pitcher then stay away, Barb." Driscoll seated himself and handed Barbara a twenty. She nodded.

Driscoll opened his briefcase. "Flowers, time to shit or git."

"How much I git?"

"Twenty thousand." He perched a pair of tortoiseshell bifocals on his bulbous red nose, opened a leather wallet to reveal checkbook, gold pen, calculator.

C.D. closed his eyes. "Eighty, Driscoll. It's worth that." In his hands was a bar of Ivory soap. He tore at the wrapper.

Boot yanked the bifocals from his face and slammed his fist onto the table. One of the glass ovals popped from its frame and rolled tight orbits like a spun half-dollar. "Listen to me you long-haired gook-fucker — what it's worth and what you get is why I'm in business and you're not. Went to Nam so you think I pity you, right? Well I was in Korea and that was a real goddamn war — we didn't frag our goddamn officers or betray our country or let a bunch of communists kick our asses."

C.D. crammed the Ivory into Driscoll's mouth. "Bad boy, all that profanity. Nasty little boy, aren't you?"

Driscoll clawed the soap bar from his mouth. A whitecap of foam spilled across his purpled bottom lip. "I'll kill you!" He lurched to his feet, large belly scraping the table edge. C.D. swung the sap he'd made from the butt-end of a pool cue. The sap struck Driscoll's forehead, then C.D. followed with a blow to the temple. Driscoll collapsed, his right hand working under the left armpit. "No you don't, Driscoll." C.D. stepped around the table and yanked the pistol — a five shot Starr .45 — from its holster.

Driscoll daubed his face, stared at the blood on his hand.

"My people will eat you alive. You're dead."

"Maybe," C.D. said. "But you won't be around to enjoy it." He unzipped Nike and retrieved the first of his party favors — a fox snare. C.D. had purchased the instrument through a Herters catalog, repulsed and fascinated by the brutal simplicity of the snare: a stainless steel eyelet & leader designed to garrote the fox when the panicked animal, pursued down its own trail by hounds, ran blindly into the noose. Flowers lassoed Driscoll with the snare, throwing gracefully at his head like Roy Rogers. Driscoll struggled and C.D. pistol-whipped him with the heavy Colt. "Christ," Boot groaned. "Just shoot me and get it over with."

"Over with? Ha. You've got a long day ahead of you. Look what else I brought." C.D. reached again into the gym bag for the sawed-off twelve gauge twin barrel Ithaca. Bolted to the walnut stock was twelve inches of 1/4 inch copper conduit. Through the pipe C.D. threaded the free end of wire snare, shoving both barrels into the fat waddled under Driscoll's throat. Both triggers were welded to fire simultaneously. An eyelet had been attached to the rear trigger, another to the trigger guard. C.D. fed wire through both eyelets, looped twice about the trigger, then snipped the length of spare leader. He whistled, his handiwork completed. "How's it feel, Driscoll? You're screwed. If the SWAT team blows me away your head's going to look like a drop-kicked bowl of cherry jello." He reached the pitcher with his empty hand and drank. Manfield approached with exaggerated caution, making sure C.D. could see him. He held his arms above his head until Flowers said "put your damn hands down."

Manfield twisted his apron in his hands "What would you like me to do? I mean, I gotta do something, don't I?"

"Call the police!" Driscoll screamed.

C.D. poked him. "You have no friends here, Boot. You're all alone." He crunched the barrel deeper into the pink ear cartilage. "I'm in charge now. I've got the guns, I've got Nike, and I've got the moral prerogative." He paused, drank beer. "Manfried, I want you to call the police so that you don't get in trouble for accessory. Before you do, though, I need you to call the television stations on this list, okay? Tell them the evil capitalist mongul of Proud Urban Development has been captured in Anger Rapids."

"You want me to say all that?"

"All you can remember, Manfried, and bring more Henry's."

"Anything C.D. You want me to call your doctor at the

American Lake VA hospital, too? And Linda?"

"Sure, Manfred, that doctor might help. He might possibly convince the cops to take me more seriously and avoid a massacre here."

"They'll take you seriously, C.D."

"But leave Linda out of this — the baby, you know. I'd be eternally grateful if you'd put her on a plane to anywhere she wants to go. Manfred?"

"Yes, C.D.?"

"One more thing. I hate to do this to you, but you better call your insurance company. I have a bomb in the gym bag. It's fused by radio signal to this EEG monitor in my baseball cap and well, if something happens to disturb my EEG waves — like a bullet through my brain — there's going to be an explosion with a rate of detonation of approximately ten miles per second. About the force of a niner-eight field artillery-deployed nuke."

"Oh!" screamed Driscoll. "christ!"

Manfield rubbed his hands, picked his nose, scratched his rear. He always did these things when he was agitated, a nervous display which disgusted Maggie. She was always at him to keep his hands off his face, to stop picking and scratching. "Bomb? C.D., please don't blow up my Inn."

"It's back-up, in case they shoot me and Driscoll somehow survives the shotgun. He won't survive ten pounds of C-8 wrapped in det cord. You see, the det cord is back-up for bomb squad tampering. It's enough to blow a man's hands and face off and then, of course, detonate the primary charge if the radio fails."

Manfield sagged, all three hundred twenty pounds sinking visibly behind the apron. "C.D., I can build a new restaurant, but I have this awful gut feeling you're going to be killed." Manfield peeled a nicotine patch from his neck, reached under his shirt and scraped another from his chest. He extracted a package of Kools from an apron pocket and lit one with a wooden Diamond match. His hands shook and it took several attempts. C.D. watched the matches fall around Manfield's grease-stained Hush Puppies.

"Easy, Manfield, have a drink. Then please go make the calls." So Manfield did, breaking the tax seal on a bottle of Johnny Walker and drinking straight from the bottle while talking to TV and radio station managers, a State Patrol Major who was a

Rotary buddy, the Seattle field office FBI, the Anger County Fire Department, the American Lake VA in Tacoma, and then Maggie. Manfield told his wife that he was okay but C.D. Flowers had a bomb and that under no circumstances was she to come within a hundred yards of the Gaslight.

His promise to make calls fulfilled, Manfield consumed the gelid Worksburger he'd had Barbara make C.D., looking with love at the kitchen he had built with his hands — the clean tile, copper bottomed pots and gleaming knives. Barbara stood in the kitchen, arms crossed, watching her boss weep into a burger. She'd once been in love with C.D., but had given up on him and was glad Linda Swain had made such progress. Hot tears dripped from Manfield's eyes as he gave Barb money and told her to head home. "I'll call you tomorrow if I still have a restaurant," Manfield said. They hugged, then Barbara left. Manfield returned to the Worksburger, his tears impacting the bun and zinc drain board plunk, plunk.

JOHN WHEATCROFT

Miss Emily's Rose

Beckoning her fingers were thin as chicken bones. He wobbled to her side of the bed on his cane, a cypress stick, sanded and bent into a crook. Five or six ago he'd bought it at Clemm's, with his own money, to help him when he toted the market basket, holding what she'd told him to buy, back to the house. Now he was using the cane most of the time.

Two days ago she'd lost the strength to reach for her cane, leaning against the night table, so she could knock on the bed rail to summon him from the back kitchen. Her cane was black, straight and smooth as the barrel of a deer rifle hanging above the mantel in the parlor. Its gold handle, which she hadn't told him to polish for years now, was shaped like a bird.

That cane had belonged for her father. Before he'd taken to his bed and died, when she wouldn't let anyone come near him for three days, he carried the cane whenever he left the house, even in former days when, straight-backed and spring-stepped, he'd had no need of a walking stick.

Now that she couldn't raise an arm, could only waggle her fingers, he felt certain it had come, was perched on the tester above the headboard, waiting, looking down inside the drapery. It would be seeing her as he saw her — a pillow and two bolsters arranged like a body and legs beneath the sheet, above them a face yellow as the pillow slip the back of her head lay on. For the past week he hadn't bothered to run the comb through her coarse gray hair, now a snarl of whipcords.

Until six months ago her face had been full-fleshed, its skin smooth as a ripe peach. Since she'd shrunk, the skin had wrinkled until she looked like a new-born baby about to cry. Except for her eyes — bigger than they'd ever been, they glowed like hot coals.

Small and thin as her voice had become, he could feel her breath inside his ear. And just could make out her words. Smelling and feeling were the best parts he had left. Though he could till see and hear middling.

What now it was time for she'd told him yesterday morning. After he'd slid a few spoonfuls of cream of wheat between her lips

and past her teeth, all there, where he had only three bottom and two top, she'd said, "No more."

He'd picked up the bowl from the night table and turned to go. "Wait," she'd whispered. "There are some things I have to tell you to do."

Putting the bowl back down, beside her watch, he'd bent over her. Her breath smelled like sour custard.

What she'd told him he had to do hadn't surprised him. Long ago as it had been, he knew she hadn't finished with it up there. In spite of what had gone on between her and him all these years. Beginning the night he'd heard her enter his room beneath the cupola. Without knocking. She'd reached down to where he lay in the rope bed, wide-eyed, had taken his hand, not gnarled as it was now, and raised him.

He'd let her lead him down the attic stairs. Past the closed door of her father's bedroom, where he knew it was lying in the four-poster her father had died in and he'd heard she'd been born in. Down the front staircase. Into the room across the parlor, once her father's library, into which she'd had him move the big walnut bed with its feather mattress, so soft after the rope bed he'd slept in from the time he arrived as little more than a boy that it had taken him many nights to get used to.

That had happened the night after the night and early morning the sobbing in her father's bedroom had turned to screaming, the screaming to moaning, the moaning had died into silence.

Never again had he slept in the narrow bed in the attic room. Not even after they'd given it up between them, nine or ten years ago that had been. Before that it had dwindled from at first every night, often more than once, to two or three times a week, to once, to every other week, to every once in a while. Always without any talk or false starts. As if each silently read the other's mind, or whatever part tells when and when not to begin it.

There'd never been occasion for many words between them. Not a one, not even his name, the night she'd come for him. Never any during. Though at a point she'd always start to moan. Then to scream. Afterward she'd sob until she became still. Just the reverse of how it had sounded in her father's bedroom that time.

During the time they'd lived together in the big old house,

both of them graying as it grayed from weathering, the most frequent words between them were her "Buy cornmeal, flour, cream of wheat, eggs, milk, broad beans, cowpeas, apples, mangoes, musk melons." Or do this or that. And his "yes'um" and sometimes in answer to a question "no'um."

It was not only what she'd told him yesterday that had surprised him. What made him wonder was that she'd dared to put off so long, almost until it would have been too late. Yet when she'd no longer had strength to use the cane or do more than signal with her fingers and gesture with her head, she'd known exactly what she wanted done and had just enough breath left to tell him to do it. As if she'd calculated it.

Because his head shook on his turkey neck all the time now, he wasn't sure she'd known he'd been nodding as she'd instructed him a step at a time. In fact, in the dimness of that room, where the blinds hadn't been opened since the night she'd fetched him, he couldn't be sure she was able to see him at all.

"When you've done precisely as I've told you, come back here and inform me. Even though you may think I shan't hear you, I shall. And I will know whether you've done just as I say."

"Yes'um," he'd replied.

Then, as if shooing a fly, she'd waved him off.

Now, a day later, in the quiet that had presided over the house for many years, her voice was less than a whisper, a mere hiss of air. Yet he knew it was telling him it was time.

Leaning his cane against the night table, next to hers, he bent over the bed. When he lifted her head from the pillow, she felt limp as a sack of grain. The fingers of his other hand groped for the chain he knew hung around her neck.

In the sparse daylight that seeped into the house, he'd grown so used to seeing the chain on her person that he noticed it no more than if it were a part of her body, like the mole with her hair growing in it on the left side of her chin or the curve of her hairline high on her forehead. She hadn't taken off the chain since the night she'd gone to the attic for him. When she was dressed, a gold watch, which she carried in the pocket of her skirts, was fastened to it. He'd never seen her consult the watch, even when she'd remove it from the chain each night and lay it on the night table.

In bed, he'd felt the small links against his flesh. Also,

something else that was hooked on. Not a locket, he could tell. Maybe a Cross, he'd thought, which some people wore, though since the day her father had been buried in the churchyard, beneath a great gray granite stone bearing the family name, on which her name and birth date were carved beneath her father's, she hadn't set foot inside a church.

As he tried to slip the chain over the back of her head, as she'd told him, a link caught in her hair at the nape. While he untangled it by feel, her head didn't move. It took two more tries before he got all the fine links clear and slipped the chain over her ears, which looked to have grown larger in the last few years. Dangling, the key came out from beneath the sheet. He slid chain and key into the pocket of his trousers.

Without his cane, he limped around the foot of the bed and up the side on which his pillow lay. Stretching over it, he reached for her head again, felt out a strand of hair, using the balls of his thumb and forefinger.

"Watch me closely," she told him yesterday. Her small hand had slowly lifted itself. The sudden energy with which she jerked her hand away from her head had surprised him. "When you pull out the hair," she said, "you must not be afraid you will hurt me."

"Now he was studying her face, to see whether he could make out a wince of pain when he pulled. By their glow he could tell her eyes were fixed on his. He felt the strand of hair slip from between his fingers.

After feeling out another strand, he wrapped it around his forefinger three times. As he yanked, he saw her eyelids close, as if she'd blinked. Then her eyes were back on his. The hair came out, he could tell. Although he thought her lips quivered, he heard no sound.

He didn't have to make a dent in his pillow with his fist, as yesterday she'd summoned the strength to show him to. From where his head had been resting a few hours before there was still an indentation. In it he laid the hair.

As she'd told him, he placed one palm on top of the strand, slid the other beneath the pillow. Lifting it, he carried it gingerly as he would poison he feared he might spill.

Without the cane, it was a slow scuffle, especially up the staircase. He laid the pillow on the linen chest, right beside the door. There was enough light in the hallway for him to see the

key was brass, tinged with green, appropriately big and heavy for the lock on the oak door. It took some jiggling before he got the key in the scutcheon.

The lock didn't want to turn. Before he felt it give, he had to muster all the strength he could. While holding the porcelain doorknob with its tongue withdrawn, he bumped the door a number of times with his shoulder. At last it swung in, groaning on its hinges. He felt bruised.

The blinds on the three windows were drawn three-quarters. As he shuffled in, something smacked his nostrils so as almost to take his breath. Not the smell, he knew, from years before, when they'd come sneaking onto the lawn after midnight and sprinkled lime around the foundation of the house and on the sills of the cellar door and windows. The smell had died long ago.

What hit him was the dust, acrid dust so thick that as he shuffled through it, carrying the pillow, he had to narrow his eyes to slits. On the gray-brown carpet, under a Morris chair, he saw a pair of shoes. They had been white buck, he recalled, but now looked like a couple of dead rats.

Above them, draped over the rung of a chair, were two yellow rags. From there his eyes went on to the gray suit he'd seen at the kitchen door in the evening dusk all those years ago. It was folded over the back of the chair, neatly, the bright white stripe he remembered in the cloth now invisible to him.

When he reached the bed, he kept his eyes down. Yet he had to see what was on the pillow on the other side and what beneath the pillow was covered with moldy rags on top of the mildewed sheet. There was enough room on the side he was standing on for him to place the pillow just as she'd told him to. He felt for the strand of hair. It was lying where he'd put it, in the hollow of the pillow.

Before leaving, he lowered his stiff bones until he was on his knees, as if kneeling in prayer beside the bedside. Scraping up a handful of dust from the carpet, he scattered it over his pillow and the strand of hair, as she'd told him. Then he ratcheted himself up.

As he scuffed back toward the door, he spied his sole prints in the dust, as if the floor were sand he'd hobbled across. Their eyes, he guessed, would go somewhere else when they'd break down the door to see what was in the room. And when they'd enter, their

prints would mingle with his. To turn the key this time, locking the door, took less strength.

After he'd said, with his lips almost touching her ear, "Ah done what you told me to up theyuh, evathin xactly," he saw her eyes flutter. That meant it was still perched on the tester above the headboard. Her eyes were glowing with dark fire.

Taking his cane from where it leaned against the night table, he was about to shuffle off to the back of the kitchen to wait. In all the years they'd slept in the same bed, he'd never eaten a morsel in her presence. Every evening at six o'clock he'd serve her first. She'd take the velvet-covered chair, with brass knobs on its shoulders, at the head of the mahogany table in the dining room. When he'd cleared her meal, he'd eat, the same food he'd prepared for her, at the deal table in the back kitchen.

That's where he always sat, too. She sat in the parlor, in a leather chair, facing an easel that stood in front of the fireplace. On the easel was a portrait of her father, dark-toned except for the great mane and thick mustache of bright white hair. His gray-green eyes were fixed on where she sat.

Just before turning from the bedside, he sensed something had happened. First he realized he wasn't feeling her eyes on his face. Then he noticed that his lids had closed.

He didn't leave. Stood there leaning on his cane, looking down at her. Now he heard a rasping snore, with silences in between. The silences were getting longer as the snore sounded louder.

He never heard it. No flapping of wings, as he'd expected. Just before the last great snore her eyes opened wide. They looked like two holes burned by the red tip of a cigar in the yellowed linen covering a feather pillow.

He laid his hand on her breast. When he didn't feel it rise, he knew.

Still he let time pass to be sure it had carried her off. After a spell he pushed and poked until he'd nudged the lumps of flesh to the middle of the bed, as she'd told him. Without touching her face, he plumped the pillow so her head was propped. She'd told him not to close her eyes.

Then, as she'd told him, he took the gold watch from the night table and stuffed it in the pocket of his trousers, on top of the key and chain. He touched nothing else in the room, as she'd said

he was not to.

"Then you will have no further responsibilities here," she'd told him yesterday.

Leaving her bedside without a glance behind, he traipsed through the house, opening all the draperies except those in the two rooms it had been in, as she'd told him. Then, dragging himself up to the attic, he stowed his own belongings, none of which he'd move down into the house, in a carpetbag.

Just as he arrived back at the bottom of the staircase, he heard them on the porch.

Plodding to the front door, he turned the key, twisted the brass knob, molded to the shape of a rose, a tugged open the door so they'd know they were permitted to enter. Just as years before she'd told him to admit the four men dressed in linen suits and pastel neckties, holding palmetto hats over their crotches as if covering themselves, who'd come to collect taxes but never got to take chairs in the parlor before she told him to show them out.

And as longer ago for some years he'd received young ladies in bright floral dresses with pleats and flounces who'd come to learn from her to paint flowers on vases and pitchers and teacups. And as before that time, not long after her father had died and she'd had her hair cut short, he'd ushered in the Baptist preacher, in his black suit, starched white shirt with a high collar, and shoestring necktie, who'd started in on her for buggy-riding on Sunday afternoon but who'd left looking like a whipped hound.

Taking the handles of the carpetbag in one hand, wrapping the palm of the other around the crook of his cane, he scuffled past the closed door of the room he'd slept in all those years. Behind him, he heard them starting up the staircase.

He shambled through the kitchen into the back kitchen. Out through the door he'd opened to see the red tip of a cigar, clamped between big white teeth, glowing in the dusk all those years ago.



Contributors

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A.F. Moritz's books of poems include, in the U.S., *The Tradition* (Princeton) and, in Canada, *Mahoning* (Brick Books), which concerns his native place in northeastern Ohio. He lives in Toronto and is a part-time teacher of literature and creative writing at the University of Toronto. Recent poems appear in *Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, and *Yale Review*. In 1990 he was a Guggenheim Fellow in poetry.

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Originally from Nebraska, **Lacy L. Shutz**, lives currently in San Francisco. He poems have appeared in *Verse*, *The Seattle Review*, and *Sou'wester* among others. In the fall she will start an M.F.A. at Bennington College.

Ann Marie Palmiciano is a 1983 graduate of Boston College in Political Theory. She is currently finishing a degree at the Harvard Divinity School.

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Claudia Bischoff lives in Iowa City where she teaches at Kirkwood Community College.

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Scott Palmieri is a senior at Providence College, an English major, and co-captain of the PC Baseball team. He grew up on Long Island, New York.

Janet McHugh is living in exile in Pawtucket with Ariel a black cat that jogs.

George Yatchisin teaches in the Writing at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and have had essays, poems, and criticism published in numerous journals.

The editor of *Connecticut Review*, **Vivian Shipley**, is a Professor at Southern Connecticut State University. *Devil's Lane* was published in 1996 by Negative Capability Press.

Sarah Browning is the director of Amherst Writers & Artists Institute, an organization providing creative writing workshops to low-income women and children. Her poems have appeared in *The New York Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *The Seattle Review*, and *Sycamore Review*.

The fiction editor of the *Greensboro Review*, **Steven Almond's** work has appeared most recently in *The Rio Grande Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, and *The Lyricist*.

William Patrick Coyle is a civil rights attorney who lives in Huntington, New York. He recently made his stand-up comedy debut at the Comic Strip in Manhattan. Poems have been published in *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Descant*, *Kiosk*, among other publications.

Chard DeNiord is the author of *Asleep in the Fire*, a book of poems published by The University of Alabama Press in 1990. Poems and essays of his have appeared recently in *The Iowa Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Agni*, *The Harvard Review*, and *The Southern Review*. He teaches comparative religions, philosophy and English at the Putney School.

Michele Glazer has most recently worked for the Nature Conservancy in Oregon. She received a Paul Engle Fellowship from the University of Iowa in 1996. Her manuscript, *It Is Hard to Look at What We Came to Think We'd Come to See*, won the 1996 AWP competition and will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in fall, 1997.

Quigley Provost-Landrum hails from Portland Oregon.

Philip Brady's book, *Forged Correspondents* was published in 1996 by New Myths Press. His work has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *College English*, and *The Honest Ulsterman*. He has travelled and taught in Africa and Ireland and currently teaches at Youngstown State University where he directs the Poetry Center.

Adam Kenney is a junior Public Service major at Providence College who would like to save the world after graduation.

Gay Brewer is an assistant professor at Middle Tennessee State University and the editor of *Poems & Plays*. His book of poems, *Presently a Beast* and chapbook, *Predator in the House* were published in 1996.

Judith H. Montgomery is a freelance writer/editor from Portland, Oregon. Co-winner of the 1996 49th Parallel Poetry Prize and a recipient of a 1996 Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship, she is completing a first book in which will appear the poems represented in this issue.

CONTRIBUTORS

A senior at Providence College majoring in biology, **Viradeth Phiuphonphan**, came to the United States from Laos in 1984.

Ken Waldman from Juneau, Alaska, has new work in *Poet Lore* and *Manoa*.

Native of Syracuse, New York, **Gerry Crinnin** is an Assistant Professor of English and Jamestown Community College in western New York.

Dorothy Barresi is the author of two books of poetry, *All of the Above*, and *The Post-Rapture Diner*. Her poems and essays have appeared in numerous literary journals. She teaches literature and creative writing at California State University, Northridge.

Joshua Lowell is a senior at Providence College majoring in History. Another of his poems has been accepted for publication in an upcoming anthology from Sparrowgrass Poetry Forum. He lives in Watertown, New York.

Martha Collins is the author of *A History of Small Life on a Windy Planet* (University of Georgia). She teaches at University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Edward Lynskey works in a machine shop. Recent poems have appeared in *Interim*, *Prism International*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Chicago Review*. Stories in *Pikeville Review* and *Pleiades*. He has received two Pushcart Prize nominations.

Born and raised in Germany, **Claudia K. Grinnell** now lives in Louisiana, where she teaches at Northeast Louisiana University. Her poems have appeared in *New Orleans Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Phoebe*, *Bottomfish*, and others.

Mary Rohrer-Dann teaches fiction writing at Penn State University, her work has appeared most recently in *An Intricate Weave: Women Write on Girls and Girlhood*, from Iris Editions.

The first book by **Sean Brendan-Brown**, *No Stopping Any Time*, is forthcoming from XIB publications. He has recent work in *Paris Transcontinental*, *XIB Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *The Laurel Review*.

John Wheatcroft is the author of seven novels — most recently *Trio for Four Players*, a collection of stories, five volumes of poetry, and a play *Ofoti*, which has twice been made into a television film, once starring Susan Anton. His fiction and poetry have been widely published in periodicals in the United States and abroad.

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