

The Alembic

Spring 2002



PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

The Alembic

Spring 2002

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EDITOR'S NOTE

T.S. Eliot wrote, "There are some things about which nothing can be said and before which we dare not keep silent." The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centers confronts us as citizens and members of a larger human community with a paradoxical challenge. How can words begin to do justice to such a profound loss? Everybody in the country, in the world, was changed by the events of September 11th. Such a convergence of raw grief and anger is unprecedented in our contemporary national experience. What ought to be poetry's response? Poet Laureate Billy Collins has made this humble, nascent reply:

"I think language is inadequate at the moment...because the enormity of it is such that a single poem couldn't get its arms around the subject. It would crumble under the weight...but I think it's time to read poems again. It's time to turn to poems because poems do offer a kind of history of the human heart and remind us we're not alone. They provide a history of grief. You could say poetry is a kind of original grief-counseling center; it's where people take grief."

In our turning to new poetry and fiction for this first post-September 11th issue of *The Alembic* we have striven to select poems and stories that extend and enrich "the history of the human heart." We have come to understand anew the necessity of reaffirming literature's redress as a place to take our grief. The voices that emerge from this place, this ground, give witness to the victims of September and solidarity to the survivors. We claim that such a structure cannot be silenced or brought down as long as someone strives, in the words of William Blake, "to place another before [herself]."

An Alembic is a device used for purification, an appropriate title for the times. It removes impurities from water and restores it to its clear, natural state. Poetry is a human alembic. For centuries it has been a platform for the undressing of human nature, a way to achieve a sense of unaffected humanity. It is everlasting and universal, providing "momentary stays against confusion" and catastrophe that remind us that our fragments, our poetry, are an integral part of the whole.

-Elysia Cappellucci, Emily Cesta and Chard deNiord

SUELLEN WEDMORE

That Afternoon

the kitchen grew so silent, I made rose hip jam—
those two towers' bones still stark against a gray sky—
using one apple, three cups hearts of roses, a scant

cup of dry white wine. Remembering the fireman
who climbed the stairs three times, ran back again to die,
the kitchen grew so silent, I made rose hip jam,

dropped the plump berries, trimmed and cleaned
into a large pot, following instructions exactly:
one chopped apple, three cups hearts of roses, a scant

cup of dry white wine. Do you think they'll bomb
Kabul? I stirred in sugar when the planet went awry,
the kitchen so silent that I made rose hip jam,

and when my son was deployed to Afghanistan,
I poured the juice into a clean pan: no need to ask why
I used an apple, three cups hearts of roses, a scant

cup of dry white wine. Balance is gone,
I drop my head as I stir. Tears don't satisfy—
the kitchen grew so silent that I made rose hip jam:
a heart. Three cups of rose hips, dry white wine.

Poesia

Poésie

Poetry

Poesie

Poesía

CHARD DENIORD

Beach

-for John Philpott

I went to the beach to stare loss in the eye—
its one blank pupil that will not close.
To study the sea as a book of names
inscribed on a blue, Atlantic page.
To write your name on horizon's line.
To regard the clouds as the alphabet
of those who write from the other side.
To study the sun, the way it falls behind
my back until only the sound of waves
defines the shore as there, no, there.
To sit in the dark as if it were light.

LAVONNE ADAMS

Burn

When my son was seven, he stumbled
through seed ticks nesting in pine straw
covering our yard. More than a dozen
dug beneath his skin. One by one,
I tweezed them away, but for weeks worried
a rash would wildfire his ankles and wrists—
portents of Spotted Fever.
I burned the yard black.

Have you ever tasted that kind of fear—
felt its tendrils choke your throat? When walking
through woods, I keep my gaze grounded,
searching for holes that harbor snakes.
But Love, last week when we explored
Lake Waccamaw's woods, I didn't hesitate
to cast aside my clothing.

The sun's rays were hot hands. Beneath our serape,
dry leaves crackled as if our friction had sparked
the world to fire. Above us, green branches
grid the sunlight; across my knuckle,
a tick the size of an asterisk sauntered.

JAMIE ANSELMO

Tracy

First day— 7th grade newly-crowded high school "Deluxebury" too cheap won't pay heating costs in old building 200 cattle herded to sloppy-joe cafeteria hung with flags Germany Italy Ireland where's Norway blond-haired girl searches ceiling red white blue cross no that's England Norway is up-and-down and side-to-side - everyone gone- 20+ cattle hearded to rm 109 getting lost where's 109 follow bright corn-blond hair up slippery-dust stairs take right to end of hall cattle staring berry-faced us breathless through door seated in row 5 think about shucking corn cooked in summer sweet with butter.

Second day— typing class Mrs. Curran big nose nasal voice dumb assignment fox red fox see red fox run 3x each down the page tap tap dinggg new line 9 am falling asleep voice over intercom tap tap terrible accident tap -silence- Tracy corn-blond hair suicide by hanging in basement 12 yrs old brother 8 finds her can't be true just saw her yesterday corn-blond hair up slippery-dust stairs Mrs. Curran kids this is a tragedy counseling in guidance office cry for help didn't want to die Mom something happened today rm 109 asks for picture can't remember berry-faced her shucking corn cooked in summer sweet with butter breathless through door.

Third day— funeral cattle herded into Protestant church looks like Town Hall big windows no light rainy day marshmallow white walls hard like stone echoes boom off high ceiling no room upstairs stand behind creaky folding chairs crowded basement unfamiliar people cry upon entering lean the intercom Tracy corn-blond hair bright smile loved laughing soccer brownie troop 539 time with friends -all true- 12 yrs old God's child shucking corn cooked in summer sweet with butter didn't want to die.

Fourth day— fear of getting lost.

CHRIS BEVARD

Bella Luna

At eight:
slipping on the brittle film glasses
the color of chocolate and dried blood,
I squinted against the newly-brown
one o'clock sky.
The moon was having its day in the sun,
the fourth grade classes lined up
on the hot asphalt playground.
My friend removed his glasses,
hiding in the bushes
and staring frog-faced
at the black, spring shadow.
He did not go blind.
We took our teachers for liars that day.

At sixteen:
the outline of you—
black boots, ruby skirt,
skin as clean as the sun's counterpart,
daring me to take off my glasses.
Our fourth-grade teachers told the truth,
and I have the precious scars,
the outline of your figure on my child's eyes,
to prove it.

RYAN BROWN

Two

two arms

reaching out, taking hold

two legs

treading air, keeping pace

two lips

searching for the part where all of you resides

but as hard as I look

I secretly hope not to find

so we can keep playing this game,

started by a kiss

where arms restrain arms

and legs find rhythm

in the movement of a lip or two

RYAN BROWN

For You Whom

I stumbled on your face
grainy and gray

did I know you?

did we exchange glances on the street?
did I hold a door for you?
did you smile and nod knowingly?

and even if I,
we,
you and I didn't

does it really matter?

because now I am as close to you
as I will ever get

on that street
in the doorway
smiling and nodding back

and for now
I think this
this is good enough

E.G. BURROWS

Lariat

An acute sun hangs southwest.
Waters under the earth
have dragged it down by the ankles,
by the knees,
by the rims of its battle-shield
with those mouldering figures
of horses and charioteers
and celestials with wings on their shoulders.
Day hugs a steep slope.

If it were night all winter
and the faucets running,
I would throw a wrangler's lasso
over the lip of the horizon
and pull until the last day of May.

This fading afternoon
with the light nested in firs,
I am full of heresy.
Let science retreat
to plot with spotted dice in a cave,
or kneel to apparitions
rising from steam in the kettle,
I will stand at the edge of the earth
and twirl the lariat
and toss when the noose is full.

EMILY CESTA

In Those Days

In those days all I wanted
was to feel something
other than grief.
When you asked to stay
the night after the funeral
I was too tired
to say anything but yes.

We made love
the way we used to,
before all this.
I wrapped my legs
around your body
and clung to you
when it hurt
so you wouldn't
pull away,
leave me alone
with the notion that
pain can survive by itself.

I could not let you go
even after we finished,
your pulse still strong
inside of me.
As if it were ours.
As if two people
could own one heartbeat.
As if grief could be shared.

BRAD CLOMPUS

Pigeon in a Box

A blur of wings on the ground,
a ring of ten year old kids
hovering, outside a candy shop.
It is late November; the sky
translucent gray, as always
this moment, a field of gray
through panes of gray,
until the frames
fray and fly apart.
But the children, a child
had pelted the bird
with spikes of ice, and now
it is earth bound, on the
pavement, shaking its wings
in a soft arc, slate or dusky blue,
a faint streak, perhaps,
of violet, vibrating
beyond of sight
to fix it. A boy, at most ten,
with an ironic sneer, says
Mister, save that bird, OK?
He scoops it up in a mess
of papers and grit, lays the pigeon
gently in a brown box.
I take it, and start to walk.
But I don't live here;
I am lost in this town.
A police car stutters on a
side street, blue smoke
drifting from its tail.
The policeman frowns,
possibly at me, or the bird
thumping invisibly

in the box, a dismal trick.
*It's a dirty thing. Just take it
to the transit station.*
Inside the pigeon shifts,
beats its hollow bones
on the bottom, slides around.
I have said I am lost in the town.
It is late November, the sky
closed for the day, we can
expect anything to precipitate.
I walk under a concrete bridge,
contingently, holding the box.
Water seeps down the inner wall.
Remember that—it's a clue.
I stop a woman in a parking lot.
Where is the shelter?, I ask,
meaning, you take it, you live
here, you know what to do.
She looks confused, suspicious—
of me, the box. Finally,
she says she doesn't know.
Across the lot, a brick cube,
dirty-white, shades down.
"Chamber of Commerce" stenciled
on the windows. They should
take care of this— it must be
someone's business. Yet the door
is locked. Holiday Hours.
My arms ache; it thumps
again, wings sliding,
swisshh, a frail broom
whisking. Predators near.
I lift the flap just an inch
and see an eye, a beak— wide open.
Maybe I should have finished
when I had the chance,
before complications.
That's what a child said:
Put it out of its misery.
As if that were the choice.

JOCELYN COALTER

Sunday Morning

Bees dance lazily outside our window
perhaps attracted by the
vanilla imprints our mouths have made
on shoulder, neck, belly.
A river from navel to thigh,
watermelon juices.
The cat meows,
hungry,
heard again after
the deafening collision
of our bodies.

LEONARD COCHRAN

Wings

Otherwise unskilled at age ten,
I'd help my mother hang out laundry.

Shirts, their sleeves like puppet arms,
played "catch me if you can,"

socks were dancing, disembodied feet,
sheets aiming to fly off the line

mimicked the Canada geese my heart
longed to join high above our home,

heading I cared not where,
only that it was elsewhere.

Time-tied, earthknit, I wished for wings,
was given words.

PETER DESY

Burnings

A shape I couldn't identify—
a foot-long rigid pelt— lay behind
a rose bush in the yard. The small busy
creatures had eaten the soft tissues, the weather
had done the rest. Fearful of disease,
I raised the thing on a stick
and dropped it on the burning leaves.
It was so bereft of being
it had no odor. When the wind shifted
and shrouded me in smoke,
my eyes burned, gave the sun a
large, blurry corona divers see
emerging to light from under water.

When I was small and fall's leaves were burned
at curbs, I'd stare into the fire's deep orange
core glowing, the wind biting my cheeks,
the beautiful consummations all along the street.

N. LEE DICKINSON

Home of the Pop Tart and Brave Frozen Skillet Meal

Every third house is the same, neighbors
complain of falling fences and loud children
riding scooters through lawns. I live with
people who pay for tanning, who dream
of buying a pool but settle with a hot
tub instead, who purchase two
cars of the exact make and model, who make
BBQ. They fly the American flag, give
you a pie when your mother dies.
They buy toaster oven strudel and Captain
Crunch. They in-stall smoke
detectors and sit late night
in their backyard because they can't
smoke in the house. They have
George Foreman grills and rice
steamers, Dockers, and they mow
the lawn at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday.
They have lost brothers in tornadoes
and uncles to heart disease and next
week they'll give a kidney to their nephew
and sing in church and write
poems with an old Bic pen in a notebook
that their third grader never did use
at Roosevelt Elementary even
though the spiral was on the supply
list at Wal-mart.

NEIL FERREIRA

Cookie Man

Once a day, the supermarket falls into silence
and I am alone again.
I have stocked these shelves everyday
for nearly five years now,
Shuffling and organizing with careful precision
so as not to disturb the picture of happiness.
Really wanting to be seen, I try desperately to blend in
to the background of hustle and bustle.
Disappearing in myself so that people can buy their crackers
in peace, content at having never known me.
I think today I'll just leave a note:
"Your cookie man has gone home. You shouldn't
really expect him back anytime soon. His body
got too old far too quickly, and his mind decayed
into laziness. Don't worry though, you'll hear
from him before long. His book will change the
way the world looks at things; students will race
to overenroll in his classes; he will buy a small
corner store and settle down in the country,
where he can paint, and think, and love his
family. There he'll study scripts and wait
for calls from famous directors, begging him
to be their leading man. You'll hear how all
the critics write poignant reviews, and he'll
feel respected. He'll find happiness in the rest
of a Sunday afternoon, and he'll finally let
himself relax. Thank you, for releasing him
from his task and urging him to follow his
dreams. You can buy your cookies somewhere
else, but you know you really don't need to.
You go home too, and live your life everyday."
I stand up now and the noise resumes in my ears.

Placing my page upon the shelf, I stretch my legs
to relieve the ache in my bones.
Turning, walking away, fresh and reborn,
I give a slight smile to an older couple
as they round the corner looking for a snack.

JEFF FREIDMAN

Bowling Instruction

"Aim at the second
arrow," Ken said
and approached the alley
with long graceful steps.

I hoped his ball
would, for once, careen
into the gutter, but he swung
his right arm back

until it reached the peak
of a perfect arc
and whipped forward
as though sprung from a catch,

just before the release
flicking his wrist.
The ball cracked
against the floor, hooked

into the pocket,
hitting just above
the lead pin,
and sent all 10 pins

crashing into the catcher.
A warm red flush
spread over his face,
and I wanted to match

his sense of self satisfaction,
to show him I could
do it too.
"You're up," he said

I held my hands together
and blew into them
like someone trying
to spark a flame in a grill,

and remembered
what he taught me,
the crouch, the stance,
the release— a deft

stroke in the air.
When I uncoiled my arm
the ball didn't hook
enough, broke

the pocket too high,
and down the long alley
three pins stood—
a wide split.

"It's all technique,"
he bobbed his head
and smiled while the cage
of the pin setter lifted

and the spotted blue
ball rose
through the return hole
into my outstretched hand.

JEFF FREIDMAN

The Twist

When Miss Wait pulled out
a nubby white towel
and wrapped it around her bony hips
and swiveled them side to side,
we all laughed at how ridiculous
she looked, dancing like a teenager
on American Bandstand. The climbing ropes
dropped from the rafters, the loose
strands on their knotted ends
tickling the gray wrestling mats.
In his penguin shirt Mr. Burdick,
who called Dale Dickler "Lard
Butt" and me "Jew Boy,"
blew Miss Wait a kiss
and went to his office behind the caged
window to scribble on papers
or clean up his shelves. At least,
until tomorrow we wouldn't hear him
tell us what losers we were,
nor would we have to pick sides
for football or soccer.
While Chubby Checker sang
about walking twenty miles
to see his lover, Miss Wait's
bright red lips, thin
as scars, spread into a smile
and she extended her hand to all of us.
Under the bright gym lights
we twisted closer and closer
pumping our arms and rolling
our hips at a furious pitch
until we laughed so hard we forgot
this was gym class— no one
left out or unchosen.

MARTIN GALVIN

Screened Bird

A curious bird invaded our vacant space
this early spring, made the usual mockery
of the screen door's need to keep
the outside out, slipped through and killed
herself for the vision that she had.

No harm in that except the summer porch
meant for sitting in and looking out
became her slaughter house. Another bird
I almost met a couple of years ago
died in our attic, battered by studs,

pierced by roofing nails, surrounded
by the hard and dark with nothing to drink
but mouse droppings, nothing to eat
but silverfish. Expected death. Okey-dokey
A way to go where he had to anyway. But to live

like this other one for weeks inside a place
where light is all around, the walls soft lies,
is close enough to our brief passings-by you'd think
I'd sympathize, find common ground
with Icarus and this dark starling. I don't.

I use the iron shovel for her bier, to dig the hole
for the distance that I have been told to keep
her germs away from mine, from such a cleaning
up that might mean death inside and out. I sweep
the feathers into a pile for the kids to understand
the corner where we found her, I teach right angles,

Newton's laws. The crescent left in the screen as record
of her passing through and how and where has been
repaired. We're safe enough from bugs to sit out now.

All summer long, I read the dropping sky for songs.
But nothing comes except some show-off storms.
Now and then in sleep or half awake, I hear her flap
of fury against the attic floor and know that dreams
are stirring up the joys of being blind, with wings.

THÉRESE HALSCHEID

Cathedral

This one is in open air

where pillars
are brown and breathing

and a new ceiling greens
each Spring
then peels
ever so slowly
in Fall.

Careful though

for it is said
whatever prayers
there are
that the sky catches
becomes, in turn, the very way
light enters—

in the spaces between the trees,
the colors
of storied sun
descending daily
are all split
into lit fragments

glassy
as the religious windows
we might look through for answers,

finding ourselves.

JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER

Derivation

Widower, Dad sat on our porch all week
staring at the giant sycamore,
knowing there was a robin's nest up there—
he had seen the parents, worms in beaks,
zooming through the leaves, heard the nestlings chirp.
But he couldn't spot it.
I brought binoculars,
told him to move his chair.
Widower, e and r tacked onto widow.
Widow: "akin to Latin *vidua*,
deprived of." So many more widows
that the woman's word came first for once.
Widower. I called him in for lunch.

DON HERZBERG

Me and Herb

I am ten and Herb
Thinks I am stupid,
Grinning at me
Like everything is fine
And I am just a kid
And all an adult has to do
Is smile at a kid and
Everything is fine
And I watch him
Pouring some kind of whiskey
From a bottle with a cheap label
Into a bottle with a label
In the shape of a crest
With silver highlights, and
In ork for its top instead of
Dite of those screw-on caps.
r am thinking that
Dad dislikes Herb
(Mr. Seligman, to me),
Complains he serves him
Cheap Scotch poured
Into a Chivas Regal bottle,
Which I am suspecting
Is expensive.

Herb has short black hair
Combed so the wave
On his right side
Sweeps back
Like the tail-fin on a '54 DeSoto.
When I see him
He's always wearing a white shirt
And a paisley tie
That has him reaching

For his collar like he wants to get
Out of it or away from somewhere.
I'm not usually in the room
Alone with him, but
Today we have
Bumped up against each other
At a time neither of us
Would pick.

We are visiting the Seligman's.
In the bedroom,
Dad has been yelling at Mom
For not packing the yellow socks
He had planned to wear
With his new yellow sweater
And I have tried to become invisible
In the Seligman's living room
Half buried in the cushions on the couch
Hoping I can just keep my mouth shut,
And Herb, Mr. Seligman,
Actually doesn't see me
Actually thinks he can get his
Cheap Scotch whiskey
Into that snazzier looking bottle
Before Dad storms into the room
And sees the two of us
Conspiring
To serve him second-rate Scotch.

MICHELLE LETTIERO

Untitled

*A ten-year old girl, staring at cars
covered over with pavement,
in the corner of a parking lot*

I will never believe that story—
not for one second!
That just can't happen.
No one covers up cars when no one is looking...
when people are gone there are still windows to look out of.

Maybe you just didn't see it...
Other people always look out their windows,
at least I do.
Fine, I guess you're not like me.

Those lumps look like dinosaurs to me.
With slopes, or half-moons for their backs.
Only, their heads are still in the ground.
If they were uncovered,
the black tar ripped off,
what would there be...
not cars.
Nope.
Not if you see what I see.

MICHELLE LETTIERO

For You

I wrote some lines when you were here today.
Small ones, that could fill up a tiny space.
Somehow I found that all I wished to say
could be contained inside that little place.
I wish those words were eyes to help me see
instead of drifting into dreams of you.
You've found a way to reach them without me
although I've tried much harder to get through.
So many times you know the thoughts I feel
and still I'm left to wonder if you can—
Those words, so small, can capture what is real
but you and I are back where we began.
One day that distance will stare back at you.
And it might be as if you always knew.

KELLY LOCK

Because My Mother Wouldn't Tell Me

At the dinner table when I said twat over and over again like I was singing my favorite chorus, I knew I was doing something wrong. References to anything above the knee, below the neck were not mentioned, just pointed to and my mother would fill in booby, peewee or dingle, and I'd nod.

Twat caused my father to stop chewing, lay down his fork and look at my mother who stopped scooping whatever was in the bowl and stare at me, *Don't say that.* My father ignored me, *You need to talk to her.* When I asked what it meant, my father waiting for her to answer, she just started scooping, and I knew I needed to swallow the word I heard a boy call another while playing kickball just like I was swallowing a green bean

After dinner, I slipped into the hall bookcase, pulled a dictionary from 1965 and found nothing, then began to pillage every book until I found my Mother's *Merk Manual* and my father's police notebooks, including figures one and two, naked diagrams of a man and woman like you'd find at a crime scene or in a rinky-dink motel bed, two bodies fallen apart after hours of sex.

Because my mother wouldn't tell me, I spent hours scouring them, fondling words like *perpetrator*, *penis* and *vagina*.

I hungered for what their definitions offered,
would wait for my mother to wander
to the garden, so that I could squat in the hall,
pull the blue canvas three-rings in to my lap
and feed on the words she thought dirty.

When she'd find me, ask what I was doing
in my father's stuff, I told her I was teaching
myself sign language, showed her
the mimeographed hands spelling
out the alphabet, tell her it was part of a cop's
communication skills, *See?* my hands rushing
through abcdef. She smiled, proud I
was learning something I couldn't at school.

The words like intricate blueprints that even
the sixth grade films that caused us to giggle,
our teachers to fidget, didn't explain. Crimes
like rape mentioned words I kept locked
in my head until I could sneak the *Merk*,
thumb through, my index sliding along
the filthiness of the words. I'd flip the pages
quickly, spell them with my hands, intercourse,
scrotum, abortion, until I found the definitions
that filled the chalk outlines my mother wouldn't.

When the boys at school brought works stolen
from their father's magazines, I'd rush home
to find my parents' books lacking fuck, cunt,
doggie-style. My fingers spelled them over
and over until the hunger for not knowing led
me to the boys who pushed their hands under
my shirt, pulled at my right breast. Their tongues
in my mouth, I swallowed their saliva absolutely.

KHALED MATTAWA

Vicinity (i)

A millionth of an ounce of plutonium
can cause cancer

A political gesture
to critique not on the basis to follow
but because of a historical

antagonism

I still have to trust that I am moved
by a subtle tenderness

to see the worn, the fallen
a ragged star, a sign

2 electricians lost their larynxes to throat cancer
Workers handled 10,000 tons of
plutonium-laced uranium
recycled from Hanford's spent reactor fuel

I didn't know then, and did not believe
only sensed my urge-

a conduit, propelled

toward the sky, touched by its own emptiness

until something human comes

The government still does not know
how much of the material flowed
through the plant from the 1950's to the 70's

Woman and boyfriend-
the centaur, reared in burial grounds
on story books

the dream caught in the tree
draping them-
are charged with injury
to her 18-month child

The wind steadfast
head raised, comet-less

Questioning the air, one fast, last time
I sought a bequeathal, a swirl

Vicinity (ii)

Is it psychological?
to shore up an unwillingness

When the moon sinks
it will take all my questions with it

No death to shatter me, no kiss
still fluttering at my lips

When night falls
its apparitions a host of hungers
and all the other contraptions
of rescue, to rescue

two wide eyes widen further
all the clocks strike
and the shreds of dusk render them unbelievable

Just under a breath in the static air
in the crunch of syllabus

"In professional sports,
not only must the team demonstrate
continuous improvement, but sooner rather than later
it must demonstrate the capacity to win,"

said Rosa Smith, Superintendent
of city Public Schools
in her annual state of the district address

the brittle words
tinkling

The district meets 5 of 27 state standards

The district, an efflorescence
flung wide
"is far from the end zone"

Vicinity (iv)

You were snow falling through a hole in our roof
the unsettling assumption of a different tense

Of course it's easy to get entangled in the small print

Colley who worked in the plant until the early 80's
suffers from chronic bronchitis, chronic fatigue
hair loss, rashes, and connective tissue problems
She's had 3 tumors removed
had had a hysterectomy

Embryonic
(a wing fluttering against glass)
the dream of straw

entangled in the caption below the cut

to raise funds for struggling telecom co.
McCaw sold Tatoosh for \$100 million
300-foot yacht carries 2 helicopters
40-foot speedboat, sailboat, swimming pool

And courageous
the dream of air-conditioning vents

Removed from their care
by Child Protection Services
then returned by jury
Child was found bloody and unconscious
He had broken legs and arms
bruises on his back, burns on his back

Other sections are still in use
Significant levels of plutonium
are present in nearby patch of ground

Vicinity (v)

Finding the subject, purely for poetry...

The ambassador faxes inviting: Dialogue
3 days later the FBI calls and knocks

Just then someone, usually yourself, will say—
it's what you see you're capable of
what you'd be engaged in if not for
the motionless hand
while a grieving ensues

Married to a US citizen for 15 years
father of 3 children, Duruji is charged
for defying a deportation order 17 yrs. ago

walking bus station, train depots
not for rapture, but to taste
a beginning

But what comes now
to our own at last, to end the story

Wobbling to meaning, at last hitting stride
holding a storm with solemn care
The chair summons, offers lukewarm support

(at his table's edge is the rest of the world)

the secretary smiles, askance

Vicinity (vii)

exposed, laced

School officials have apologized to a boy
who was forced to sit in a corner for wearing
a Pittsburgh Steelers jersey to school
on Cleveland Browns spirit day

The settlement does not mean
Heart of Texas Dodge is admitting
ownership of the van

converted enriched for rescue

After 2 hours boy
wearing a Cleveland Indians' t-shirt
was allowed to return his desk
to its normal position

WILLIAM MILLER

My Father in Hell

Last night, I dreamed
my father was in hell,
asked me to join him.

His corner was a cave
lit by a fire I couldn't see,
the stone floor littered
with bourbon bottles.

He told me it was time,
better to get on with it,
match him drink for drink.

I was reaching for
the glass when I woke up,
sunlight slicing through
the window blinds.

Dreams were only dreams,
I told myself, and hell
a fairy tale that scared
little children into
frightened grownups.

But whiskey swirled
down the drain when I
poured the bottle out,
my throat burning
for a final taste,
a single drop.

MARTIN OTT

Unclaimed Baggage Center, Scottsboro, Alabama

In an airplane large enough
to house an alien spaceship, you rifle
through the lives of the newly missing,

massaging rows of lost luggage, deserted
hosiery, make-up bins, designer shoes
and leisure suits. Here you'll find

the legendary missing sock, the beloved
sweatshirt fraying at the sleeves,
the electric toothbrush, silk scarves

and tourist castoffs from every corner
of the globe. You browse through leather
brief cases and vinyl suitcases, armchair

Buddhas, porcelain dolls, and civil war
swords. You have a vague feeling
that if you search hard enough,

you'll find Sasquatch, the missing
link, your lost years of childhood.
Hidden in the wings is a washing

machine where stains and sediments
of miles have left a fading of the road
and knowing hands. The smell it leaves

is familiar, antiseptic, absent of home.
In the back you find the Miracle Dept.
Coffins, wheelchairs, canes— you wonder

how a traveler could have left the airport without them. Our things do not have wings. With them, we are tied to earth.

You imagine what it would be like to race naked through the airport metal detectors to a place yet to be named, heavy crowds

parting, the runway cleared. On your foot, the other missing sock. Where you're going you'll need neither pockets nor change.

AARON PAOLINO

Archer

With a
few hard
whacks the
sapling falls
under my
sharp hatchet
A week
later the
wood is
dry and
ready for
the knife
Slowly and
deliberately
I carve
back the
young ash
Fitting it
smoothly to
the contours
that form
I flatten the ends, moisten, bend to shape and bind them gently in leather my palm
dry, I
While they
pare down
the straight
branches to
thinner than
my finger
Split their
ends, and
bind wedges
of flint
between them
I braid
the gut
of a deer
into a
string
splicing
loops into
the ends
Unbinding the
wood now,
I carve
notches into
the ends
just thinner
than the
cord Looping this string taunt over the end, I bend the staff back on itself
The other end of the cord slides into place to keep it arched.
Notching the thin shaft onto the string, I pull back
Melting into the forest to accept nature's offer

JANE LUNIN PEREL

Falmouth Heights: The Dragon
for Morton

People hurrying to catch the ferry announce at breakfast
where they've been and where they're going.
The faster ferry is, of course, more expensive.

We sit at the beach despite the clouds.
The sound of the water is the echo
of spirit drums. Rising out of

mist and August's cumulus tuft-rolls
flows a cloud-Dragon whose gray silk
scales stiffen in the wind. Its fins

flash pale opal. Under its long taffeta
navy blue belly sail boats turn like white
paring knives on charcoal green-jade sea.

The light behind the Dragon is lavender
with streaks of amber. Dragon, you are
our ferry and our island. Our tickets

burn in the fire of your nostrils that flare
just as you dissolve. You offer no T. shirts
or Dragon bags. Only this altar of light

and shadow we share before we make
the most final descent-ascent
of which we are aware.

MARISSA PEREL

The Visitor

she comes pricking
my vertebrae
with her spiny claws
when the rain washes
the sun away
from the sky
when pale birch branches
arch downward on
january afternoons
when wind purrs through
the window screen
before august lightning
when silver shimmers
on the marble countertop
when a little girl's finger
touches my palm
when it is dusk
and I am singing
by a vacant roadside

my grandmother said
"a chill is never a good thing"
but what else does she feel
on icy thursday nights
in montreal
in the middle
of a t.v. documentary
or when
at the tail-end
of a crossword puzzle
the phone rings

chill comes to the front door
footsteps clip-clopping
against brick blocks
leaves swaying
into her inhalation
a rose petal falls
onto the wet earth
two staccato knocks
chiming the ancient
bell, a hollow choir
of steel voices
in praise of the visitor

MARTA PETREU

Poems from The Book of Anger

In Our Secrecy

And then I was overcome by fear:
fear of the hour of nightfall fear of the dark
fear of the night
fear of insomnia and of sleep with dreams
fear of not being touched

Oho. The drooling dread is on its way is close at hand seizing me
enveloping me in thick acidic slobber
(It was Death. In our secrecy
we gave it the name of a disease)

The hour of waking has the taste of sand
the chemical taste of stone the taste of ashes
Domine. My mornings have the taste of lye
my late love - pure caustic soda
Domine: I am vilifying you: I am a mechanism
in battle with itself

The astringent taste of arrogant solitude

(I know. Night is on its way the drooling dread is close at hand
seizing me filling me with its slobber)

translated from the Romanian by
Adam J. Sorkin and Christina Illias-
Zarifopol

Marta's Everyday Dress

Look for me. It's morning in the world
The earth
and a sadness as heavy as the earth weigh down upon me
With your bare hands with a shovel with oars please remove from
me
the six feet of earth
the six feet of sadness
the six feet of cotton print of my holiday dress

For together they crush me and suffocate me

Lift me up in your arms - in the world it's morning - bring me forth
into the light
wash me with warm water
just as they wash
the newborn and the dead

Yes. Look for me. I need you. Glue words one to another
make sentences glue the sentences to my skin
write with saliva if you have to yes write with your tongue
write a letter a book a plea:
this will be by dress

Marta's everyday dress

Hold me in your arms embrace me twist me up like a rag doll
for both of us it's late it's so very late we sit here are the edge
yes give me this second chance:

perhaps like Lazarus I shall rise again and live

translated from the Romanian by
Adam J. Sorkin and Christina Illias-
Zarifopol

In Memory of Cruelty

Touch me. Slowly walk your fingers over my body
feel my skin on the inside
softly completely compassionately: I used to be in it

Yes. I. Just me. Identical to myself

Caress my skin on the inside. Wet your hands
with the sticky smell of blood
gather blood in your palm as in a clay saucer
taste it with the tip of your tongue: it used to be my blood

Enter into my skin
just like
a soldier squeezing into armor
Oho! I know it's a tight fit for you
Say inside it live inside it polish it put makeup on it
salve it with creams
protect it from wrinkles and from rust
give it a body give it a life: it used to be my skin

Yes. Ease your fingers into the skin of my hands
as in a glove: this shape used to be mine

But as for myself you can plainly see that I've slipped my skin
I've run off I'm far away
Skinned alive my flesh is now bisecting the most distant horizon
it slices the fall night it smears with the blood the brilliant glow
beyond

Perform this ceremony
in memory of love
(oho! you loved me the way a gardener digs his garden deeply
with a spade)

Therefore in memory of cruelty

translated from the Romanian by
Adam J. Sorkin and Christina Ilias-Zarifopol

Psychic Place I

Pain - a hell in miniature

Who is it who reassures me night in night out
that in the foreseeable future everything's going to be all right
who is it who speaks to me

I am here. A stranger

Lengthy tomes have been written about the impure crises of
 melancholy
lies enough have been told
But for you private delectation
I can still imagine delicate landscapes
in no more than a few words I can counterfeit reality:
as I stand in a cold winter twilight - a child
of hebephrenia - on an ice floe

Today I say about suffering: reality overwhelms imagination
in the same way that the wards of a general hospital
put hell to shame

Who is it who reassures me
that in the foreseeable future everything's going to be all right
who is it who speaks to me
to whom should I cry out in the night's black
when in the miraculous lucidity of ideas
I cannot protect my brain my eyes
with just my bare hands?

translated from the Romanian by
Adam J. Sorkin and Liviu Bleoca

Psychic Place II

I am here. Here. These texts these sacred carnivorous words
this verbal membrane
(Read attentively. I admonish you. Read twice!):
curtain meninx electroshock therapy
blanket straitjacket
bedsheet hymen placenta

Praise be to this osmotic verbal membrane

I set myself before you I undress I curse myself
Oho! my repressed pathos of a bacchante:
I set myself before you in full awareness
Any poetic art may be written with ink
but in reality
(imperturbably I extend this public guarantee)
it's with these mortal neurons

Darkness and dust

These texts these words I've culled from books and plucked from
the streets
Only this ultimate membrane
(oho! precious like the hymen
fragile like a soap bubble)
still separates me
from the psychic place to which you've driven me as to the source
of the Nile
the psychic place from which I try - painfully
warily- to withdraw myself:
my hands paws brain heart

What is beyond it? darkness and dust
What is left? poetic art this darkness this dust
these sputtering neurons

translated from the Romanian by
Adam J. Sorkin and Liviu Bleoca

STEPHEN SANDY

Discovered Country

The sky dark, low, blunt as a boot; the last of the wild geese
rendezvous in Flint pond, glide into a maroon formation; mournful cries.

Today again we learned there had been theft: Kenny's new shoes,
books; then food from the kitchen. Like a bird or deer when it has been
shot, life flew out of the wound - as the quick breath hisses from a
punctured tire.

La beauté de la nature, said Landsman, est le silence de Dieu.

People shouldered their long packs and made their way to their SUV's.

JENNIFER SARGENT

Dandelion Heads

Sitting in this hardwood pew
in Saint Michael's church
I listen as my pastor instructs
the congregation to look to God

so I gaze upward. Grandfather,
before the heavens emerge
there is the powder blue ceiling
you painted fifteen years ago.

I picture you teetering
on a rickety ladder in white overalls,
paintbrush in one hand,
beer in the other -

probably Budweiser,
the beer you let me sample
on the front porch in Lowell
when I was four,

when the sun sank behind the
the mills along the Merrimack.
From the kitchen, the smell
of Grandma's pirogues drifted out to us.

You always called me Jeff,
your Polish slur wouldn't let you say "Jennifer."
When I skipped off the porch
did you watch as I gathered dandelions just for you?

I gave you the gift
and you leaned back in the chair,
your long, paint stained fingers
closing tightly around the stems.

Savagely, you bit off each yellow head
and chewed voraciously,
while I stood open-mouthed,
feeling rejected. Later,

I realized they were a fleeting delicacy
and we indulged together,
sitting side by side on the porch,
the bitter flowers our feast.

EDGAR SILEX

What He Wanted

what he wanted were a few orchids
that would not be easy to keep
their daily care the tortured beauty
of a bonsai sunning on the baker's rack
in the slitted light of the window
an evening wine a line from a poem
or a sad song that would lean him
toward the dreams of this world
toward things he knew he could keep
and take with him to the next world

every morning he gives his eyes
to his heart make his way through
each irrevocable day surrendering
changing his mental lists
of all the impossible things
to remember the birdsongs the smiles
the sounds of mornings of oceans
the fragrance of a February-
blooming orchid the madness
of surviving your suicides

despite finding nothing worth living for
on a hill near his house there's a tree
undressed of its leaves by a breeze
that caresses and whispers to it
sensuously it sheds a vermilion
leaf or two a few near the bottom
remain in the moon's candlelight
he imagines he is the light
the tree the wind's tongue
the last few leaves letting go

MARY-JOY SPENCER

The Direction of a Leave

I found a colorful soldier,
Dying for his mother.
A mosaic of red and brown,
Painted his earthly uniform.
Apparently harmed in a separation,
He was bloodied and weak.
I noticed one, last vein,
Branching outward for life.
I could smell the trees,
Where he had been burned and beaten.
I held him close and he crumbled,
Spending his last moments in my hands.

RAWDON TOMLINSON

Geronimo and the Brothers of Light

Someone must pay
for the darkness,

but to nail the chief
to a tree from love?

The death doll's cart
circles all night

axles squeaking
cold quiet:

one lashes another's
back whose head

is bagged in black
one drags a cross

one shrills a fife
from cross to mud hut

and back, all night;
one buried waist-deep

in a grave holds
a lantern and sings

"Las flores de este misterio . . ."
night clothes dry black

skulls kissed and hugged,
candles floating

in the valley—
Brothers of Blood

prepare, adore
dawn is scourge.

The Shop Window

Which window onto which of God's secrets
have I unwittingly approached?

(Fernando Pessoa: *The Book of
Disquiet*)

5 December 199X The patient's breathing rattled like a primitive percussion instrument. She tried to speak, but only indistinctness blubbered from her lips.

The fiftyish, well-groomed woman beside the bed held a lined tablet in her hands. From time to time she added a few words to the page, in her neat librarian's script: *Sustained by her unwavering Christian faith, Suzanne Binder-Salzgeber, 4.IV.191X to .XII.199X, has left the Earth for Eternity.* It's odd, she reflected, I don't know anyone else's birthday by heart but my own.

The voice from the bed was little more than a gasp:

"Rosy, I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what, Mother?"

"I don't know. But I'm so afraid."

The younger woman pushed a call button.

"I've rung for the nurse, Mother. Let's see if she can help."

The nurse who answered the call was a *he*.

"What is it, Mrs. Binder? What can I do for you?" he lisped.

"My mother's afraid," Rosy Binder replied in the patient's stead.

"The doctor's down the hall. I'll ask him to order something. Be right back."

A few minutes later the young man came back and administered an injection. "At least she's not in pain, Miss Binder," he whispered. "That's one good thing about cancer of the pancreas. You can be grateful for that."

"I am, of course."

As the rattle of her mother's breathing subsided, Rosy resumed her writing: *The funeral service will take place at the Hauptmünster on _____. Instead of flowers, it is requested that the charitable works of the Reformed Church be remembered.*

Well, she thought, this is ready: Only the two dates are missing. And packing away the tablet, she got up and tiptoed out of the room.

*

Colored lights adorned the buildings along the Preisweg. Brilliantly illuminated merchandise filled the shop windows, for Christmas was drawing near.

Snow and slush covered the monochrome street and pavements. Reality is gray, Rosy Binder mused as she trudged past the shops toward the train station. The color is just an illusion. We've piled it up on the sides, like a protective embankment, so that we don't see the grayness stretching out to infinity. We couldn't stand it.

I've always supposed Mother to be a deeply religious woman, but now I wonder. Could she know the secret, too? Her belief seems to be helping her less and less as she gets closer to the end. Chemicals do, though. They're replacing her faith a little more each day.

The woman shuddered in the cold wind and turned up the volume on her Walkman.

*

11 August 199X In the aseptic cafeteria across from the university grounds, Rosy Binder consumed her lunch with deliberation. The cheese-and-pickle sandwich was tasty, the coffee excrable.

The luncher wore the expression that she stuck on each morning before catching the train for the city and peeled off each night when she climbed into bed: a faint but determined smile. It rather became her straightforward face-clean features, blue eyes, and lovely skin-with its frame of iron-gray hair.

Branka appeared, as usual, with the big plastic container resting on one hip. With spare, efficient movements, she collected abandoned dishes and wiped off tables. But today, her cheeks were stained with tears.

"Branka," cried the librarian, "what on earth's the matter?"

"My people, Miss Binder. They've had to flee from home. They've crossed the Una River into Bosnia, but I don't know exactly where they are. Or in what condition." The robust open-faced woman, a good fifteen years younger than Rosy Binder, blew her nose loudly.

"I want to help, Branka. Tell me what I can do."

"Thanks, Miss Binder. You're a wonderful person. But right now there's nothing we can do from here. They're heading for Serbia, and they'll call as soon as they get there. Till then, all we can do is pray."

"Count on my prayers, too, Branka. And once you know where your family are, let me know right away. There'll surely be something I can do to help them."

I can send money, some clothes, too, continued Rosy Binder to herself. But the prayers: The poor girl doesn't realize that there's no one to hear them.

*

20 September 199X The white-coated physician looked uncertainly at the patient opposite her and spoke in a tentative manner: "Miss Binder, this makes the fifth year that you've complained at your check-up about lack of energy. You say you're downright exhausted at times."

"I hadn't kept track of the years, but that sounds about right."

"By now, we've cleared up every potential cause for such symptoms. Every *physical* cause."

"Yes?"

"Definitely. You've spent a fortune on blood chemistry in the process, but at least we *know* that physical causes can be excluded."

"The causes, then, are mental. Is that what you're saying, Doctor?"

The physician seemed relieved: "Miss Binder, I think you're suffering from a fairly mild but chronic depression. That's what makes you so tired all the time."

"Assuming you're right, what shall I do about it? Go into psychiatric treatment, or what?"

"I shouldn't say this about my own medical col-

leagues, but I've never seen much improvement in the patients I've referred to psychiatrists."

"What, then?"

"There's a new drug available now. From America. It's called Galaxyn, and it relieves the symptoms of depression in something like eighty-five percent of the cases. The side-effects are minimal. Mostly a little loss of libido, that's all."

The patient's smile almost slipped off her face.

The doctor glanced surreptitiously at her watch: "I'll give you a prescription and ask my nurse to make an appointment for about two months hence. I'm sure this is going to bring about a big change for the better, Miss Binder."

A few minutes later, while the pharmacist was fetching the medication, Rosy Binder felt the way she had as a little girl when she took a shortcut across a forbidden field.

*

24 September 199X The pastor at the Hauptmünster spoke earnestly, with gestures just short of theatrical. When listening to his sermons, Rosy Binder often thought that he would be able to declaim a washing powder advertisement in the same way as Holy Scripture, and with the same conviction.

Rosy skimmed through the church bulletin in her gloved hand. The back page contained the passage of scripture on which today's sermon was based:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this description, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

If God were only *unknown*, instead of being *non-existent!* Rosy cried inside herself.

She remembered the vertigo, the horror of peering through her late father's telescope and seeing . . . not stars, but vast reaches of empty space, of nothingness. Even as a child she had not been able to bear emptiness, absence, stillness. Her parents had eventually acquiesced in her leaving the little radio on her bedside table on all through the night, just loud enough to banish the terrifying silence.

As the girl grew older, she realized that it was not only the universe at intergalactic distances, not only absolute quiet that harbored the grayness of nothing. Everything and everyone harbored it.

All of us piece together curtains, with whatever materials we can find, to block out the sight of it, she thought. The Apostle Paul did, and the good pastor is doing his best right this minute. Far be it from me to criticize any of them for it.

During the singing of the last hymn she joined in with vigor, raising a joyful noise unto the Lord with her pleasant contralto. For music, too, was a veil over the face of the void.

*

19 November 199X Rosy's bedroom in the solid half-timbered house at Todikon looked out on the back garden and the frosted fields of cabbages and turnips beyond it. Between the two windows stood a pear-wood commode crafted by Pastor Binder for one of his daughter's birthdays.

For years, she had kept her Bible on this piece of furniture; two old religious prints and a likeness of Ulrich Zwingli had hung on the wall above it. But Bible and pictures were now laid away, carefully wrapped, in one of the drawers.

A single picture had replaced the others: a disquieting gouache acquired at a sale of drug addicts' paintings. How well Rosy understood what these people were trying to blot out with their cocaine and heroin! On top of the commode stood two potted plants, two tortured ceramics-also created by addicts-and, in the midst of these items, a bottle of Galaxyn.

The Altar of the Unknown God, she smiled to herself sardonically. The drug has really worked wonders for me. I feel benevolent toward other people. More indifferent than ever, too, but never mind. It's at least a benign indifference.

More important: The *Angst* can't get at me now. I'm free of it. I don't care a rap about the emptiness any more. Theology, philosophy, all those desperate attempts to weave curtains over the nothingness. The poor young people in the faculty: They're all trying, too, with a woof of revealed religion and a warp of far-fetched reasoning. But their handiwork will never be thick enough. It will never be anything but a net, and the void will show through, no matter what.

What was the asceticism of a St. John of the Cross, of the two Teresas, really? Did all that self-torture do anything other than create chemical changes in their bodies? Reactions that produced religious visions? Isn't Galaxyn preferable in every way? A simple, painless method of persuading the body to produce serotonin? Serotonin: the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone.

But try as she might, Rosy Binder could not make herself feel comfortable with these ruminations. Something about them was wrong: Something hovered darkly in the background, unthought and unspoken.

Outside, just above her line of vision, she heard the flap of a great wing. And by a curious intuition, she knew that the wing was black.

*

18 December 199X "Where's Branka today?" Rosy asked the younger woman's colleague Nevenka.

"Oh, Branka's in hospital."

"What? Since when? She was all right on Friday."

"It happened on Saturday, Miss Binder. Bleeding ulcer. She threw up blood and collapsed on the street. They brought her up here in the ambulance."

Rosy gulped down the rest of the sandwich and the terrible coffee and almost ran across the street to the university hospital. I forgot to take the Galaxyn after lunch, she recalled suddenly. But I just don't have time to bother with it now.

Unlike Mrs. Binder, Branka lay in an eight-bed ward. At the sight of the patient, ashen, with dark circles under her eyes, Rosy was shaken by tenderness and pity. Not since she had begun the treatment with the new medication had she felt anything remotely as poignant, and seldom before it. Her own mother's long struggle with cancer had aroused a firm sense of duty, but no strong emotion at all.

As the sick woman related her illness, Rosy began to weep. The faint fixed smile disappeared entirely: "Oh, Branka, you've been through so much these past few months, and now this. It's just not fair!"

"I'll be all right, Miss Binder. Sure I will."

"But your family's still not settled for good, and you won't be able to go back to work for a while."

"I'll be all right, all the same. . . . You know, there's a giant hand holding me." "A giant hand? You mean-"

"I guess it's what my grandmother used to call God, Miss Binder."

Rosy Binder trembled. She considered taking a Galaxyn tablet from her purse and swallowing it right before the other woman, but decided against it.

"You know a lot more about that than I do, Miss Binder. Working in the faculty of theology and all. I'm just a simple country woman."

"Don't overestimate my knowledge, Branka. . . . You grew up in the Orthodox Church, didn't you?"

"No, we didn't have a church in our village when I was a girl. They told us at school that there was no place for God in Scientific Socialism."

The sick woman's life-affirming smile broke out all over the pallid face as she continued: "And since then, well, I never seem to find time to study these deep things. It takes so much just to get through the days."

"And you've felt this . . . *hand* before, have you, Branka?"

"Oh, yes. Many times."

"In what sort of situations?"

"When I need it. When I'm all silence inside. Haven't you ever felt anything like that, Miss Binder?"

"Not . . . not quite like that."

"You're such a good person, Miss Binder. Why wouldn't God want to touch you?"

*

21 December 199X Rosy Binder turned wearily into the Preisweg. She had enough time to reach the last train for Todikon without rushing. Bruckner's Ninth boomed in her Walkman.

Winter solstice: the shortest day of the year, she thought. For me it's been the longest. But Mother's out of it now. The obituary is ordered, the pastor and Father's old friends in the church notified, the telegrams sent. I'll go by the burial office and the bank in the morning. Everything else is ready.

I haven't taken a Galaxyn tablet all day. I just had to be on my toes. I couldn't tune out. Of course, I could take one now. She fumbled listlessly at the catch of her shoulder bag but did not open it.

The street was deserted, the shops long since closed. But the windows were still lighted, as were the Christmas decorations on the fronts of the buildings. Involuntarily, something on the other side of the street caught her attention. She crossed over to it.

An elaborate *crèche* filled a whole shop window. Rough plank walls formed the backdrop; fine hay covered the floor. At the center of the scene, Mary and Joseph knelt at the ends of the manger in which the child Jesus lay. The three kings, also on their knees, faced the viewer from behind the manger. Shepherds, intermingled with townspeople, spread out in a fan from the central group to the backdrop, all their various postures expressing reverence. Sheep and cattle, donkeys and horses formed the periphery of the assembly.

The figures were delicately constructed dolls, the most exquisite that Rosy had ever seen. There were hundreds of them. Who on earth has made them, and why are they displayed in this shop window? she wondered. In *any* shop window? There are no price tags on them. Indeed, how could they be for sale? They belong in a museum.

Nor could she determine what the dolls were made of; the skin was amazingly lifelike, the hair and the animals' coats exactly befitting creatures of these lilliputian dimensions. The garments were perfect down to the tiniest details. Many of the figures—the kings in abundant measure—wore jewels that sparkled in an opalescent shower of colors.

Most startling of all were the expressions on the little faces, human and animal alike: deep earnestness, love, adoration, and awe. All eyes outside the manger focused on the child Jesus. The child himself looked straight upward. From a source not visible to the beholder, a jewelled light shone down on the infant, reflecting from him onto the rest of the assemblage.

Rosy gaped at the scene and lost all track of time. But suddenly, she sensed that the music of her Walkman was masking something. Something absolutely essential for her to hear was being concealed by Anton Bruckner. She tore the earphones from her ears and looked about her.

The street was empty, as before. Not a pedestrian, not a vehicle squished through the slush on street and pavements. All was completely still. Almost palpable waves of silence rolled over the solitary woman; for the first time in her life, they worked on her like a healing balm. Once again, time was forgotten.

The train! Departure in six minutes!

With remarkable speed for a sedentary fifty-year-old, Rosy trotted down the Preisweg into the Bahnhofstrasse and along it to the Main Station. Seconds before the automatic doors clanged shut, she rushed onto the train and fell panting into a seat.

*

22 December 199X "In our window? A crèche?" The woman, of Rosy's own build and vintage, fairly cringed as she spoke. "I . . . the owner's out right now . . . I don't . . ."

She opened the doors behind the show window timidly, as if fearful of what might be revealed. With tangible relief, she turned to Rosy Binder and pointed: Medical and sickroom supplies filled the long window. In the center of the display stood not a manger, but a dismal clump of urinals and bedpans.

"But I'm positive it was on this side of the street," Rosy protested, "at about this spot. And your window is the only one in the block large enough to hold it all."

A tic jerked the other woman's livid face: "I . . . really . . . if you'll wait till the owner gets back . . . he may know"

"But surely you would have known about this yourself if you were at work yesterday."

"No, I didn't. Not anything." The anemic lower lip quivered. "Maybe you could ask the health food shop on that side . . . or the bakery on the other," the woman added hopefully.

"I *have* asked them. They know nothing about it. And anyway, their show windows are too small. It *must* have been here."

"I just don't know. I . . . I never saw anything like that. The owner won't be long now." The words died away pathetically.

Rosy Binder and the shop assistant stared at each other without speaking. Each of them wondered whether it was the other woman, or she herself, who was going mad.

Swans

Let me make you some coffee.

No, Ma, I had coffee before I got here.

It's just in the kitchen, let me go get it for you. The old woman placed her hands on the arms of her chair and struggled to pull herself out of the rocker she had been seated in nearly all day. Failing, she settled back into the worn out padding and dropped her hands back into her lap. *I have to go turn off the pot. It's gonna burn. What time is it?*

It's seven, Ma. I've already had coffee tonight... Did you have some coffee today? She gestured to a large brown stain running down the front of the old woman's blouse. It looks like you had some. She gave the old woman a false smile. She continued speaking to her with forced sweetness, as she pulled a cloth from her sleeve and dabbed at the stain. It was dry already.

What time was your dinner?

Three fifteen. I always eat then.

That's pretty early to be eating dinner, Ma. Are you sure it wasn't lunch?

It's always three fifteen, Angela.

It's not three fifteen now Ma. It's seven.

I know what time it is, Angela, I know these things... my show is on in a few minutes. The old woman held her arm out in front of her. See? I know time. How's Sonny?

Who's Sonny, Ma? I don't know Sonny.

Of course you remember Sonny, he's gonna water my tomatoes when we go to Atlantic City.

Bastards...all of them...get the hell outta my house...Him and his dog...I hate dogs... goddamn ugly animals, grumbled a woman behind them. The short, gray haired, hunch backed woman gripped the counter at the nurses' station with white knuckles, and pulled herself toward the doorway at the end of the hall. She paused briefly to pick at a tattered copy of National Geographic that one of the nurses had left on the counter. Quickly forgetting her new source of entertainment, the woman

NO MARY, YOUR ROOM IS THIS WAY! a nurse bel-
lowed from further down the hall. He picked up his pace to catch
her before she reached the doorway and set off the alarm that was
attached to her ankle.

What does it matter anyway? the woman yelled at him. *I
liked him anyway, and you're not...* Her words trailed off when the
young male nurse placed a needle in her arm. She collapsed into
the nurse's arms and he lowered her into a wheelchair. He placed
a gray vinyl block on her lap, and pushed in under the arms of the
wheelchair so she couldn't get up. She placed a hand on his fore-
arm, but her grip had loosened - her knuckles were regaining
color.

What time is it, Angela?

I'm Louise, Ma. Angie died, remember? She's been gone
for ten years. Do you remember me?

*What's it matter? It doesn't, I don't know, I don't know any-
one. What time is it, I have to have my dinner.* She gestured to the
broken wristwatch fastened around her arm and held together
with a piece of electrical tape. That watch hadn't worked for fif-
teen years, but she still wouldn't take it off. It had been a gift
from her husband, and he had passed away a few weeks after giv-
ing it to her.

It's ten past seven, Ma.

*Oh, I've got to go to bed then. The kids are coming in the
morning, I have to be up for them.*

The kids aren't coming tomorrow, Ma, they're all grown
up now.

*No, if I'm not up, they'll leave, and they can't go without
their breakfast. They always leave, they don't remember these
things..., I have to be up for them, they need breakfast.*

No, Ma, they're all grown up. Do you remember me?

Of course I do, of course... how's Sonny?

Ma, I told you, I don't know him.

*Of course you do, he waters my tomatoes when we go to
Atlantic City. He lives next door.*

No, Ma, you don't go to Atlantic City anymore. Louise
studied the patterns in the carpet at her feet.

*What's it matter, I know where I live. 60 Pearl Street, I
know where I live.* The old woman's memories of the past were
perfect. The past twenty years never happened. I've been there all
my life, 1908, when my father got the job with the electric com-

Ma, you're not there anymore, she interrupted. They sold that house.

But they come see me anyway, it's about time. They should appreciate me a little more, I'm their mother. She looked at her watch again. You working Angela?

I'm not Angela, I'm Louise. Angela died, do you remember that?

The nurse returned with a cart and a little spoon. The spoon had a yogurt-like substance on it, with some mashed up pills hidden inside.

Open wide honey! the nurse said, as if she were feeding a child. The old woman opened her mouth and eagerly swallowed the crudely hidden medication.

Maybe you want some ice cream too, Sylvia?

Yeah, yeah, I'll have some ice cream. The nurse produced a Hoodsie cup from her cart, then moved on to her next stop. Louise picked the top off of the Hoodsie and scooped some vanilla ice cream out of the cup. She gave it to her mother, who let half of it dribble down her chin.

What time is it anyway? I think it's time for bed. She was right about that, though, it was almost time for the nurse to come and put her to bed. They started returning the elderly residents to their little cells around seven o'clock, and the halls had gotten considerable quieter since Louise had arrived. They were just taking Mary back to her room now. They probably would use the straps this time.

The only things breaking the silence now were the television in the common room blaring Lawrence Welk, and the clock above the nurses' station ticking off the seconds. She threw a quick glance over her shoulder at the clock. Visiting hour was almost over. Just fifteen more minutes. Louise's thoughts drifted to her mother before she had to leave her in this place. The old woman could barely walk now, and she only left the wheelchair when one of the nurses half carried her. The day she had brought her here, the old woman had tried to get out of bed by herself, and fallen. She broke her hip, and ever since it had been too much for Louise to take care of her.

You can go home if you want to, Angela. I know you have things to do, it's Tuesday. You play Bridge on Tuesday's still?

Ma, Aunt Angie died, do you remember? She's dead. My name is Louise. And it's not Tuesday, it's Saturday. She gave her

mother another spoonful of ice cream.

Oh, Louise! How are you, Louise? Are you working yet? Let me get you some coffee. A hint of recognition glimmered in the old woman's eyes as she looked at her daughter. Louise turned her head. The old woman reached out with one of her long, wrinkled hands. The other struggled to push her frail body up and out of the chair, purple veins bulging through almost a century's worth of folds in her skin.

No, Ma, you can't walk anymore. You fell, don't you remember? Louise was looking at the floor again, turning the ring on her finger.

No, Angela, I'm fine. I should go to bed, though, the kids are coming tomorrow.

I'll get the nurse for you, Ma. They'll put you to bed. Louise flagged down the nurse that had ensnared Mary, and asked him to put her mother to bed. He pulled a wheelchair out from behind the nurses station and hoisted the old woman's frail body out of the rocker. Her arms and legs hung limp. She stared blankly at the nurse.

Goodnight, Ma. I'll see you next week. I love you.

Goodnight, Angela. It's nice to see you again. Tell Sonny I said hello.

I will, Ma. Louise looked down at her hands. She studied the darkening blue lines under her skin, then turned glanced at her mother again. The old woman's arm was hanging limp at her side, swinging in and out of the light. When the glare from her watch disappeared, Louise could see the hands on the face.

KIM CHINQUEE

The Homes of Wild Rose Terrace

The Anderson family

Kirk Anderson tosses his daughter, Lauren, in the air, then catches her. The airplane ride, he calls it. Lauren laughs as her dark hair flies. "Do that again, Daddy." She always asks for more.

In the kitchen, Kirk's wife, Marion, cooks vegetable burgers on the stove, making the place smell like an odd breed of hamburger meat. Her son, Kevin, holds his Crayola markers and asks Marion where the word doodle comes from. Marion tells him to look it up in the dictionary that Santa gave him. Kevin picks up the rest of his markers from the wooden desk and goes into his room. Lauren, seeing him, follows her big brother.

Kirk walks into the kitchen and sneaks up on Marion as she flips burgers. He wraps her in his arms.

"Oh, you scared me," Marion says.

"I'll show you how scary I can be." Kirk winks.

"Let me make dinner, or we'll be late for Kevin's game."

Kirk puts the flowered plates and blue cups on the table, then pours milk for Kevin and Lauren. After being called, the children sit around the table and the family eats together, discussing the events of the day.

The Collins family

Sandy Collins talks on the phone with an old friend from high school. "I think my boss is having an affair with one of my co-workers. She's always whispering with him in his office."

Sandy empties the dishwasher, holding the cordless phone between her shoulder and her ear. "Yeah. I know. He knows I'm married. Besides, he's my boss."

Plates and bowls make clanging noises.

"I'm putting the dishes away. Really? Wow. Peter would never do that."

Sandy's husband, Peter, opens the front door, wipes the snow from his boots, then sets them on the rug. He approaches

the kitchen, stopping briefly to remove his argyle socks. Sandy doesn't hear him, but keeps talking. "I know everything Peter does. It's almost like I'm psychic."

"Hi honey," Peter says.

Sandy almost drops a crystal bowl. "He's home," she says, talking into the phone. "Yeah, okay, goodbye." She puts the phone on the kitchen counter and looks at Peter's wet socks.

He looks at them, too. "I shoveled someone out of a snow bank. Where are the twins?"

"Sleeping, finally. I think John's feeling better. They were into everything."

Peter walks into the twin's room where figures of Winnie the Pooh and Tigger jump around on wallpaper. Peter puts his wet socks in the clothesbasket where the dirty bibs and training pants wait to be washed. He looks at his children as they sleep -- John holds his comforter as he turns in his sleep. Jessica is twisted in her sheets, her comforter thrown on the floor. Peter winds a ballerina that stands on Jessica's dresser, making it dance. He shuts the bedroom door.

Sandy applies makeup in the bathroom, telling Peter she's going to the gym.

"Do you have to? I hardly see you anymore," he says.

"You know how important my workout is. Besides, Shirley's the instructor tonight." Sandy puts a towel and a curling iron in her gym bag.

Peter sits on the sofa, picking up Sandy's *Cosmopolitan*. He always tells Sandy he learns more from *Cosmo* than he ever learned in college.

"The roads are slippery," Peter says.

Sandy puts on her Reeboks, her purple coat and mittens, and heads out the door while Peter reads the article, "How to Please Your Man."

The Nelson family

It's five p.m. and Carol and Jacob Nelson still lay in bed. Carol and Jacob's party outfits sprawl across the floor, and in another room, their children, Jasmine and Mitzi, sit in their pajamas, watching reruns of *Scooby Doo*.

Jasmine and Mitzi look for food in the kitchen cupboards. They make peanut butter sandwiches.

"Let's wake up Mom and Dad up so we can go swimming," Jasmine says.

Mitzi's eyes get wide. "They said to let them sleep today."

Now there's a Barbie commercial on, a pink miniature Camaro, and Mitzi sees, and it makes her eyes grow wide.

"Look," she says.

"You already have her Explorer, her bicycle, her horse, her camper, and her boat. How much stuff does Barbie need?"

Jasmine says. She prefers Lego's.

"Whatever." Mitzi takes a bite of her sandwich.

Carol puts on a pink bathrobe and heads for the bathroom, washing yesterday's make-up from her face, then brushing her teeth, remembering she told the girls she'd take them swimming at the Y. She goes to the kitchen, grabs the box of Lucky Charms, then joins the girls, sitting on the carpet by Jasmine and Mitzi's feet, picking the marshmallow treats from the box and eating them.

Jacob dons his blue sweatpants, and joins the rest of his family.

"You guys smell like beer again," Mitzi says.

Jasmine looks at her sister, puts a finger over her own lips.

"You'll understand when you get older," Jacob says, then enters the kitchen, scrambling eggs and cooking them in the microwave.

The Andersons

Kevin Anderson pushes up his glasses as he stands behind the free-throw line. He bounces the basketball as other third-graders wait for the rebound. Marion and Kirk anticipate, wanting Kevin to make the free throw more than Kevin does.

"That's my big brother," Lauren tells a gray-haired woman sitting next to her. "I'm going to play basketball just like him when I'm in school. Before you got old, did you play too?"

"Lauren Elizabeth," Marion says.

The woman smiles and says that it's OK. Kevin makes the shot and his parents applaud.

"That's my boy," Kirk says.

"That's my boy!" Lauren says.

The Collinses

Sandy steps up and down on a plastic step, following the moves of today's instructor. Other men and women, decked in Lycra shorts and slinky tops do the same. A boombox chants steady upbeat music. Sandy thinks about the twins at home, wondering if they're still asleep.

"One, two, three, step," the instructor says.

Sandy tries to think of something nice to do for Peter, since he's always working late and watching the twins while she works out. When it's time for a water break, Sandy talks to Mitch, another regular, as they sip spring water.

Meanwhile, at home, Peter puts down the January issue of *Cosmo*. He had read Sandy's astrological profile. "Career- New opportunities come your way... Love- Show your man you're in control."

Peter wonders where the stuff comes from. He enters the kitchen and puts a cheese pizza in the oven. Then he checks on the twins to make sure they're still breathing.

The Nelsons

Jasmine and Mitzi jump in the water, getting their pink suits wet. Carol follows behind, slithering into the pool. The chlorine smell nauseates her. Jacob stays home and sleeps.

"Hey Mom, get your head wet!" Mitzi says, then plugs her nose and does somersaults under the water. Jasmine does the same. When the girls surface, their short hair conforms to their heads.

"C'mon, Mom!" Jasmine says, treading water.

"If I get my hair wet it'll turn green. Remember, what happened the last time, after I colored my hair?"

"Why do you have to do that anyway? We like your hair when it's black." Mitzi grabs the side of the pool, kicking her short legs under the water.

At home, Jacob dreams he's Scooby Doo, drinking cocktails with the Jetsons while eating Lucky Charms and eggs.

1801 Wild Rose Terrace

The Andersons' BMW slides on the slick roads as Kirk pilots the steering wheel, Marion praises Kevin for his free throws, and Lauren says that she can't wait until she's old enough to play basketball during recess. Kevin can't wait to go home and draw

pictures of basketball stars. The car slithers into the three-car garage of 1801 Wild Rose Terrace.

1803 Wild Rose Terrace

Sandy Collins drives her black Lexus, forgetting that Peter told her to be careful. She decides not to tell Peter that Mitch asked her out to dinner. She looks at her hair and make-up in the rear-view mirror.

Peter eats pizza and shares it with the twins. Jessica and John sit in booster seats at the kitchen table. Jessica sucks on a piece of cheese. John eats the crust that Peter sliced for him. Peter eats whatever they don't.

Sandy steers the Lexus into the garage alongside her husband's Jeep Cherokee. As the doors close, Sandy joins her family for dinner, drinking Slim Fast and cleaning the faces of her twins.

1805 Wild Rose Terrace

Mitzi and Jasmine ride in the Intrepid as Carol drives. Slick roads scare Carol. She blasts the heat so their heads won't freeze -- the girls convinced Carol to go under water after all.

When they get home, the girls hop in Jacob's bed, waking him. Carol puts the wet clothes in the washing machine, takes a shower, and combs her long blonde hair. The girls bathe together, splashing in the water like they had at the Y.

History

Kirk and Marion Anderson have been married for twelve years. Before marriage, they met in college and dated for two years. Kirk is a successful salesman and Marion, a psychologist, is now a stay-at-home mom. After years of trying to have children, and then waiting, they adopted Kevin, then Lauren. Marion is active in the PTA, and Kirk travels a lot. They remind each other how lucky they are to have such beautiful children.

More History

Peter and Sandy Collins have been married for four years. Peter owns an accounting company, while Sandy is a newspaper reporter. The couple met after Sandy's friend, Susan, set them up on a blind date. Sandy got pregnant three years ago after forgetting to take her birth control pill three days in a row. The twins suffered complications during delivery and spent nearly two

months in the hospital. Sandy took three months off of work after her babies were born. Sandy's friend, Susan, comes to the house to baby-sit. Peter spends time with the twins, but spends a lot of time at the office, especially during tax season.

Even More History

Jacob and Carol Nelson met at a party. They were both drunk and had what Carol thought was a one-night stand. The morning after, Carol got dressed and slid out the door without saying goodbye. Jacob went out of his way to find her number, so they went out to dinner, continued to date, and three years later, she followed him to medical school, and then they got married. After they decided to have children, Carol got pregnant, then got pregnant again. Now John is an emergency room physician and Carol stays home and writes poetry. They've been married for seven years.

Business

Kirk Anderson gets on a plane to fly to Denver where he has clients and negotiates contracts for an oil company. His usual stops include Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and sometimes his home base, Minneapolis. He has a lot of contacts, meeting women at hotel bars, sharing his pager number. His favorite girl is Bunny, who meets him at the Ramada by the airport in Milwaukee.

Bunny finds Kirk's home number in the book, and calls looking for Kirk. Marion says he isn't home, then asks Kirk about it, and he says he'd never met a girl named Bunny. Marion believes him.

More Business

Peter gets in his Cherokee to go to work. Sandy drives her Lexus to interview a woman from the Salvation Army. The babysitter plays pat-a-cake with the twins.

Peter wonders why Sandy is so obsessed with her appearance, that maybe she's having an affair. He goes to work and thinks about it all day. He's gained ten pounds since his wedding, and now his hair is thinning. He thinks his wife is beautiful with her perfect figure, long hair, and sprightly personality. After one of his employees, Joan, cornered him in his office and tried to kiss

him, he started to wonder if men had done the same to Sandy.

Peter wonders if Joan could make him feel the way that Sandy once had, when things were fresh and new.

After interviewing the lady from the Salvation Army, Sandy goes to the office, sits at her desk and writes her story. Her co-worker, Jen, enters her boss's office and closes the door. Through glass windows, Sandy sees them whispering. Sandy reminds herself how lucky she is to have a man like Peter. She thinks of nice things to do for him -- maybe send him something, or buy new lingerie. Maybe cook his favorite food. But then the phone rings, and Sandy forgets.

Even More Business

Jacob goes to work at the hospital. He feels hung over. He hopes he didn't make a fool out of himself at the party. He has been drinking more and more over the years to ease the pain over the trauma he sees in the ER. Sometimes Carol gets drunk with him, but his behavior scares her.

Carol asks Jacob to stop drinking, but he says he doesn't need to, although he knows he really does. Sometimes he hits Carol. But he apologizes, and buys Carol roses. But then it happens again. Each time it gets worse, and then the bruises start to show.

Carol thinks about leaving, but then she changes her mind, afraid she won't be able to survive simply by writing poems that she never lets him read. And Carol doesn't want to hurt Jacob, even though he's hurting her.

The Truth

In Denver, Kirk Anderson whispers into a woman's ear. She laughs. They share cocktails, and later, a bed. He gives her his pager number.

Bunny is pregnant with Kirk's baby. He doesn't know. He's stopped calling. She'll raise the baby on her own, and plans on never telling Kirk.

Marion takes Kevin to a basketball game, where she and Lauren cheer. A nice-looking man sits next to them. Marion smiles.

More Truths

Peter is home with the twins. At the gym, Sandy steps behind Mitch, noticing his firm physique. Even though Peter has gotten out of shape, she still thinks he's the best husband she could ever have.

Peter thinks about Joan from work, but then he misses Sandy, and wonders if she's cheating. Jess and John watch *Barney* on TV.

There's a knock at the door, so Peter answers.

"Remember me? Carol Nelson. From next door. Have you seen my husband, Jacob? I mean, maybe he came home while I was gone. Did you see him come or leave at all today?" Carol fidgets with her hair, brushes it behind her ears.

"I haven't seen him," Peter says. "Why don't you come in from the cold?"

Carol steps inside and Peter shuts the door.

"It's just that, well, this isn't like him," she lies. Carol looks at Peter, noticing his striking eyes. Embarrassed, she looks out the window.

"Can I get you anything?"

"The girls are home. I can't stay. I just thought you might know something." She starts for the door.

Peter nods, then grabs her arm, stopping her. They look at one another. "If I knew, I'd let you know."

"Thanks." Carol looks at a tile on the floor.

"If you ever need to talk, or anything. Well, I'm here."

Carol looks up at him and smiles shyly. "It's just that. Well, it's nothing." She looks down again. Carol tells Peter that Jacob's probably just out running errands.

"You want a cup of coffee?" Peter puts his hands in his pockets.

The twins try to sing the Barney song while Peter and Carol sit around the table with their hands around their cups, talking about the cold weather. Then Carol says she has to go.

"So soon?" Peter says.

"The girls are home. Thanks for the coffee. And the conversation."

Peter says you're welcome, and then they look at one another across the table, then get up and kiss. After petting for a while, Carol says she better go. He kisses her again, and she kisses

him back, and they go into his bedroom. The kids get bored and hungry, so they go into the kitchen and find the mustard, rubbing it into their hands, then across the furniture and television set.

All of Them

Carol goes home and waits, daydreaming about Peter. Peter cleans up mustard, waits for Sandy, trying to think of what to say about the stains. Marion waits for Kirk. All the children play.

The Collinses

When Sandy gets home, she tells Peter that she loves him. She doesn't notice the stains, but says the place smells funny. She's tired, so she asks Peter if he can put the kids to sleep. She sleeps in the king size, where Peter and Carol just had sex.

The Nelsons

Jacob comes home drunk and Carol asks him where he's been. He hits her, and she says she's going to leave. The girls wake up. Jacob passes out. When he wakes up the next day and sees Carol's bruises, he says he'll never do it again. He rushes to work, twenty minutes late.

The Arrival

Marion picks up Kirk from the airport. Kevin and Lauren give him hugs, making him feel like a good father. Kirk talks about his business deals, and Lauren and Kevin tell him about their basketball games. Marion talks about the PTA. They all go out for ice cream, licking chocolate cones.

Another Arrival

Sandy takes the twins to her friend, Susan's. Sandy thinks about cooking Peter's favorite lasagna, but she orders take-out instead, arranging it on their best china, dimming the lights and playing Peter's favorite CD.

Peter drives home thinking about Joan. Then about Carol. Then about Sandy. Joan had asked Peter to meet her out for drinks again. Peter said no, but wonders what it would be like to be with her. He fantasizes about Carol.

Peter walks in the house as Sandy stands in the doorway. He notices the dim light, hears the soft music, looks at the china on the table.

"What about step?" he asks.

"I deserve a night off." Sandy helps Peter with his coat. "The twins are at Susan's."

"What's the occasion?"

"You." Sandy grabs his hand. "I want to show you how much I love you."

They eat dinner, drink wine, and leave the china in the sink.

The Separation

Carol still writes poetry, but gets a job writing for the same newspaper as Sandy. She thinks Sandy's pretty lucky to have a husband like Peter. Carol asks Jacob to leave and he does, even though he doesn't want to. He visits Mitzi and Jasmine every other weekend, and sees a therapist at the office where Marion used to work. He begs Carol to take him back. Carol visits Peter when Sandy's at step class. Carol and Jacob get divorced, become friends again, and take the girls swimming together. Mitzi and Jasmine think their parents will get back together even though they never will.

Affairs

Kirk goes to Chicago, then Atlanta, then Denver, Detroit, even new places like Cancun and Oahu. He meets clients. And more clients. His other women get tired of paging him on his beeper. Sooner or later, they give up. Then he finds new ones.

Marion takes Kevin to basketball practice, even starts him in karate, piano, and acting lessons. Kevin just wants to draw. Marion dresses extra nice for the smiling man at Kevin's basketball game. She wants him to notice her. Lauren takes up ballet, voice lessons, and pageantry, even though she wants to be a tomboy.

More Affairs

Sandy still goes to step class and Mitch still asks her out. She admires his looks while Peter goes to Carol's, where all their children play together. Sandy suspects something's going on, but she doesn't say anything about it, thinking it must be her imagination. Carol and Sandy eat lunch together while at work.

Sandy gets pregnant. If it's a boy, she'll call him Benji. Samantha for a girl.

Even More Affairs

When Jacob isn't working, he looks for dates. Carol works for the newspaper and writes poetry that doesn't get published. She decides not to date, since she has Peter, and for now she doesn't want anything too serious. Jasmine and Mitzi try to find new boyfriends for their mother.

Parties

That summer, the Wild Rose Terrace families have a party at the end of the road. They all drink wine and Bud Light, and barbecue burgers on the grill. Peter talks to Carol, flirting when Sandy isn't watching. She's holding Benji, their new baby. Marion asks Carol what she'd do if she were still married and a girl named Bunny called and said she was pregnant with her husband's baby. Carol looks at Kirk, who plays with all the children. "She's probably right," Carol says.

Marion tells Carol she knows about her affair with Peter. Carol confesses that she's right. Sandy overhears them. She yells at Carol, calling her a whore, still holding onto Benji. Peter takes the baby. Carol and Sandy start a fight, first yelling, then screaming at each other. Kirk steps up to them, and Marion tells him she wants a divorce. Peter just stands there. Benji cries, drooling on his terrycloth bib.

Sandy slaps Carol on the face. They pull one another's hair. The children watch, crying. Marion grabs Kevin and Lauren by their arms, and take them home. Kirk follows, trying to think of what to say.

Peter tells Carol and Sandy to stop fighting, but they don't listen. The children cry harder, saying, "Mommy. Stop!" But the women just keep on. Sandy has a black eye, and Carol's face is bleeding. Kirk comes back and breaks them up. "This is pretty stupid," he says.

Peter comforts the baby, tries to comfort Sandy, but she won't let him. The twins hang onto his leg. Kirk comforts Carol, takes her and her children back to her house, helps Carol clean the blood up from her face. Carol wonders what would have happened if she were still with Jacob. Kirk holds her, telling her his

marriage is probably over. He looks like he could cry. "Being single. Starting over," she says. "It's not all that bad." He knows she's probably lying.

All the homes are quiet now, doors shut, dim lights on. The adults are still buzzing from the wine, and the children are confused, scared, asking their parents what went on. Their parents don't have answers. Kirk talks to Carol's daughters as she makes him coffee.

Marion smokes a cigarette from the pack she has hidden in her drawer. Kevin and Lauren draw pictures in their room. They are quiet. They hope their parents will never get divorced.

Peter and Sandy talk about trying to work things out. Sandy puts ice on her eye. Peter puts the baby to sleep and holds the twins, trying to make them feel safe.

The people of Wild Rose Terrace wonder about what it would be like if they had different neighbors, wonder what it would be like to be living next door. Over time, more families move in, but some move out. Yet sometimes they never move at all.

PETER JOHNSON

The Chair

Paul couldn't believe Alicia wouldn't sell the chair. It squatted in the living room—an ugly chair, faded, with blue imitation velvet. And the back, formed by two thin vertical panels of wood, pinched the shoulder blades of any normal man. He never sat on it, neither did she; even Christopher opted for the floor when he watched TV. Christopher was the boy standing opposite the chair. His soccer shorts were too tight, and when he bent over to examine the merchandise, Paul jokingly pulled the elastic on his waistband.

"Who's taking me to the game?" Christopher asked.

"I am," Paul said.

"Paul is," his mother yelled from the kitchen. She came into the living room, lugging a rusty wok.

"You going to clean that first?" Paul asked.

"I didn't realize you wanted to be in charge."

"I was just asking," he said. He knew she was still mad from last night. But he was mad, too.

Christopher kept digging through the merchandise and came up with something white in his hand. "You're not selling this, are you?" It was a ceramic polar bear about the size of the boy's hand with an aluminum clip attached to its base. "My polar bear," he said.

"The polar bear you've never used?" she laughed. "The one I found in the basement behind the oil burner?"

"It's symbolic," Christopher complained.

"Of what? Neglect?"

"Of my old school."

"You hated that school."

"But that's when Grandma bought it for me."

"Then it's symbolic of Grandma?"

"It's symbolic of something," Paul intervened. "You more than anyone should be able to understand that."

"Just keep the bear," she told Christopher. "But remember, I said you could sell anything that was yours."

"I don't remember that." He looked hard at the bear, then began to search for other things he might call his own.

"Will you carry this to the porch?" she asked Paul. "We have to start pricing. We didn't do anything last night."

Paul grabbed it. "That wasn't my fault." He passed the chair on the way out and felt like kicking his foot through the backrest. This chair, he thought. This stupid, old chair. Back in the kitchen, he started on her. "I want you to sell that chair. Why torture me with it?"

"Don't be silly."

"It makes you think of him, doesn't it?"

"That's bizarre."

"But it's true."

"Shhh. Christopher will hear you."

"Do you think of him when you touch it?"

"My God. Shhh."

"Do you?"

When the front door slammed, she turned on him. "See what you've done?"

"Just remember who stopped him from sleeping in the park where Christopher's friends could see him."

"I realize that, but he wasn't always crazy."

Paul didn't want to hear that story again. To him, the only important point was that he was the one raising Christopher; he was the one who gave up his bachelor's apartment on the West Side and moved to the suburbs; he was the one painting the house and cutting the lawn. Sometimes, he'd rather have been sipping a cappuccino in one of the coffeehouses spotting the West Side, or just hanging out at the Albright Knox Gallery. But he loved Alicia and he was trying to stand by her. He touched her arm. "Just hold me," he said, but she backed away. He went into the living room and dragged the chair into the kitchen. He sat on it, the thin wooden panels persecuting his back. He asked her to sit on his lap, but she walked into the living room. "I'm sorry," he said, following her. "I'm sorry, but you're hurting me."

"Jesus," she said, returning to the kitchen. She dragged the chair back through the living room out onto the porch and down the front steps, leaning it against the telephone pole in front of the house. He watched her from the window. He had won.

Back in the apartment, she said, "You sell it."

"But I'm taking Christopher to the soccer game."

"Then at least price it."

Later, he'd place a dollar sticker on that killer of a backrest, thinking it would be the first piece of furniture to go. But for now, he said, "I'm not threatened by him. I feel sorry for him."

"The only one I feel sorry for is myself," she said.

There were only three minutes remaining in the soccer game. Paul thought the garage sale would be over by now. He hoped some big fat slob of a woman had bought the chair, and he imagined it caving in like an old building when she sat down. He gathered up Christopher's hat and sweatshirt, which the boy had shed when the day had turned suddenly warm. A woman handed him Christopher's water bottle. "Don't forget this," she said. She was Christopher's Cubmaster, a next-door neighbor, a large, athletic woman with big white teeth, who stalked the sidelines with her husband. At one game Paul had had the sudden urge to wrestle her to the ground and feel her muscles.

"Thanks," he said.

"You're a wonderful man," the woman said. "I couldn't say that when my husband was here. Of course you know what I mean." And she walked away.

Before Paul had a chance to consider exactly what she meant, he noticed a dark figure emerge over the hill, crawling through a layer of raw, orange maple leaves about a hundred yards away. Paul reached for the woman who thought he was wonderful, but she was off arguing with a referee. He looked back toward the trees and saw the figure---like a cockroach suddenly surprised by light---disappear. Sweat shirt and water bottle in hand, Paul ran toward the woods, kicking up clouds of dead leaves, reaching the parking lot just in time to see a little black Escort peeling out. Then he heard a whistle and Christopher's breathless voice.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Home," he said. "We're going home."

In the car, they didn't speak. But Paul felt Christopher looking at him. "I saw him, too," Christopher said. "I think he just wanted to see me play."

Paul took a short-cut home, only to find the street blocked by a fire engine. He tried to back up, but the other cars had penned him in. He left the car and ran up to an older fireman who had helped extinguish a huge pile of leaves that had caught fire. "I must get through," Paul said. He imagined Christopher's father wielding an ax, smashing all the goods except for that stupid, old chair.

"Just hold your horses, Homer," the fireman said. "We'll be on our way in a moment."

"You don't understand."

"I understand you're in a very big hurry."

"You stupid old jerk," Paul said, running back to the car. He maneuvered his front bumper around the car in front of him, and spun out on the lawn across the street, racing right past the parked fire truck. Embarrassed, Christopher crouched below the passenger window.

"I think he just wanted to see me play," Christopher said.

"Don't, Christopher," Paul yelled. "Just don't."

Having dodged the fire truck, Paul raced down Union Road, rushing past a shopping Plaza and running the red light in front of a supermarket. He made one left turn after another until he reached their street. As he urged the car slowly around the corner, he saw Christopher's father, a tall, thin, unshaven man, with unkempt, shoulder-length hair. The bottom of his soiled T-shirt nearly reached the fringe of his cut-off denim shorts, and he wore a beat-up pair of black, Converse sneakers over sockless feet. He was touching the chair, talking to Christopher's mother. A young woman stood nearby, scrutinizing the wok.

Paul parked the car and Christopher jumped out and ran into the house.

"Christopher?" the man said quietly.

"You could get into trouble for being here," Paul yelled, stepping out of the car.

"It's okay, Paul. He's leaving."

"I can't leave," the man said. "I need to buy this chair." He put his hand on the backrest. "My chair."

"Not anymore," Paul said.

"I have the money. It's only a dollar."

"I've raised it to thirty dollars. Now you'll have to go."

The man looked plaintively at Christopher's mother.

"Just take the chair," she said. "Just go."

"No," Paul said.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

He moved aggressively toward the man. "Because he sneaks around. Because he watches us."

"I just need the chair," he said.

Paul grabbed the chair by one leg and started to drag it toward the house. "Sorry, it's not for sale. Go home and take your Lithium."

The young woman who had been examining the wok approached Paul. "I've been listening," she said. "Why don't you just sell him the chair?"

"We don't care what you think," Paul hissed. Shocked, the woman moved off toward her car.

"I won't leave without the chair," the man said, moving toward Paul.

Christopher's mother came in between them and grabbed the side of the chair, but Paul wouldn't let go. Then Christopher's father grabbed one of the other legs, and all three of them tugged simultaneously, Paul eventually wrenching the chair free. He lifted it over his head, swinging it wildly, not quite sure what to do, but then he spotted the telephone pole. He crushed the chair against it so hard that one skinny leg was all that remained in his hand, and he brandished it at the intruder like a sword.

Christopher's father grabbed one of the other broken legs, and the two men faced each other, as if preparing to duel. But then the man suddenly dropped his guard, staring hopelessly at the piece of wood, his eyes filling with tears. "Can I keep this?" he asked his wife.

"Just go, please."

"Can I just speak with him?" he said.

Enraged, Paul waved the wooden leg over his head threateningly, forcing Christopher's father to the corner and then down another street. "You crazy bastard," he yelled at the gaunt figure retreating on his heels. "I'll give you your chair, by God."

From the living room window, Christopher had witnessed the entire scene. He was holding the ceramic polar bear and his palm hurt from squeezing it so tightly. He watched his mother as she gathered pieces of the broken chair and let them fall again to the ground. She started to cry, then disappeared around the cor-

ner in pursuit of the two men. Christopher abandoned the window and walked into the kitchen. He stood over the plastic garbage can, dropping the polar bear into it, watching the white figure fall to the bottom. He heard a dull thud as it landed, then he walked out onto the front porch and sat on the steps. In the distance, he heard yelling, and he wondered who would come home first.

Whiter Days

I wanted eggs that day, but Angela insisted I try pancakes. "You'll like them," she assured me, as the waitress cleared our menus. "They come with syrup you can pour on them. Like chocolate sauce, but different." I didn't want to tell her that I didn't know what chocolate sauce was. She started scooching out of the booth, her giant canvas bag in one hand, my hand in the other.

"Come on, time to clean up."

She locked the door of the ladies room, even though we had been told not to do that at the other places. And she lit a cigarette, even though the sign on the wall had a circle and a line. Even I, who couldn't read yet, knew that meant no smoking.

I crouched on the floor to check the stalls. No feet. "No one" I announced proudly. I was glad we didn't have to wait.

"Very nice, very nice, she agreed, fanning the smoke before it hit the smoke detector. We had been thrown out of hotel bathroom for that three weeks earlier. "GAA!! How many times do I have to tell you Jane Olivia??" she asked sternly, pulling me to my feet and lifting me to the sink. The tap was too hot on my hands. She adjusted it.

"No hands on the bathroom floor" I finished. And thus began my makeshift shower at Denny's. Angela suspended my body between hers and the sink, running pink hand soap through my hair. My head still fit under the faucet nicely, so the only tricky part was holding my breath, which I can do quite nicely to this day. Angela was always hasty but careful. It was difficult to remember that she wasn't my mother. It wasn't until three months later that I started calling her Mom.

She let me wash my body with a washcloth we stole in anger from the "no smoking" hotel. It had a swan on it, but by now the swan had seen whiter days. Angela washed my clothes in the sink. She always let them dry in the back seat of the car.

The shove by a woman expecting the bathroom door to be unlocked interrupted our ritual.

Angela calmly placed me under the dryer and put her cigarette out on the tile. She hit the metal dryer button twice as I shivered under it.

"Ma'am" the woman outside jiggled the door.

"Just a minute" Angela returned cheerily.

"Ma'am you're not supposed to lock this..."

"Just a minute!"

She pulled my other outfit, stiff from drying in the back seat, out of her bag. We both dressed me quickly. "Don't worry Janie I won't open the door. No one will see you. She can use the men's room for all I care." I remember laughing at that. The dryer stopped. Angela hit it again before opening and unlocking the door. The woman strode past us. She wasn't pleased. I remember her Christmas sweater, depicting Santa halfway down the chimney. She looked over her glasses at me.

"This is not your personal bathroom."

"Give me a break, lady." Angela got on her knees to brush my teeth.

When we got back to the table, my pancakes and Angela's coffee were waiting.

"You didn't get to shower," I said, as she reached across the table to cut my pancakes.

"Next time. Now, pour the syrup on it." I did. She forked up two pieces and ate them before handing the fork back to me. That was her breakfast.

Angela was my mother's best friend. My mother left me to her when she died.

Angela was twenty-two. I was six. We were homeless for eight months, with nothing but the car.

I drank the rest of the syrup like a beverage, which made Angela laugh. She didn't even seem to mind that I got some in my hair, right after my shower.

"I see you liked your pancakes!" the elderly waitress chirped, clearing our plates. "Always listen to your mother" she nodded sternly.

"I'm so sorry, sister," she mistakenly corrected herself.

Angela looked at me, and we slowly grinned, as we delivered our signature answer.

"Just friends." We would say that for three more months. Then I would call her Mom. Then she would adopt me. Angela paid the check, left a tip, and we walked out into the sun. I laid

my wet clothes in the back seat, then got in the front with her.

"We're almost out of gas, pal." She grimaced, and buckled me in. "Oh well. There's got to be a station nearby. Besides, I need a shower."

JAMES B. KERR

Absolute Auction

From where he was sitting at the back of the church, Peter had a view of an old bank barn through the window by his pew. A light snow had fallen overnight, and the barn, perched on a hill and brightly painted in ochre red, seemed to float untethered above the flat, paper-white landscape. It was like a picture from a Pennsylvania farm calendar, or a painting by Edward Redfield, except there were no cornfields or cow pastures. There wasn't even a farmhouse that Peter could see. The barn stood alone on a barren strip of ground surrounded by recently built development homes. The houses lined the road in front of the barn - upscale executive homes, some so new that their yards were brown as tilled fields. The church was new as well, built on former pastureland behind the barn. As Peter gazed out the window at the backside of the barn, he almost expected Holsteins to come out the stable doors and meander through the church parking lot. Instead, the figure of a man came into view. He was an older man - silver-haired and moving slowly, almost imperceptibly, through the snow with his head pitched down and shoulders slumped as if burdened by some invisible load. Dressed in blue farmer's overalls and a checkered flannel shirt, he shuffled down the hill from the road and stood along the lower barn wall. Peter's first thought was that the man was a tourist who'd stopped to take a picture. It was something he might do as well, given his love of barns, and what a fine specimen this was. Though not today. Not in February, with snow on the ground and the temperature in the teens. And the man had no camera. He didn't even have a coat on. But the cold didn't seem to bother him. His head was tilted back, and he studied the barn as if trying to lock it into his memory. At one point Peter turned away to glance at his missal, and when he looked back, the man was gone.

He thought nothing more about it until the following week. He was sitting in the same pew, at the same nine o'clock mass, when, during the homily, he saw the figure through the window again. The man, wearing the same blue overalls and checkered shirt, stood at the base of the barn, as he did the week

before, and gazed up toward the loft where a beam extended through the wall. He remained there for a long while - long enough for Peter to hear the priest finish up his sermon and go into the Profession of Faith - and then he wandered up the hill and disappeared. That's when Peter noticed a sign, stuck in the ground by the road, where it had not been the week before.

After mass, the priest stayed behind in the vestibule to shake people's hands as they left. It was the first Sunday of Lent, and the priest was wearing purple vestments. Peter lingered until everyone else had left, then went over to say hello.

"I'm visiting," Peter said.

"Well, welcome!" the priest said. He was a little white-haired man by the name of Father John McCabe. People called him "Smiling Jack" because he was always cheerful, always happy, as if there were nothing in the world to be unhappy about.

"Where you from?"

"Down south," Peter said. "Atlanta."

"What brings you up to these parts?"

"I came up for my father's funeral. He died last month."

The priest asked about his father, but shook his head when Peter gave the name. "I didn't know him," he said. "I'm sorry to hear."

"He was eighty-six," Peter said. "He was ready. He was tired of living in a nursing home. Tired of being alone. My mother's been gone for ten years."

"Well, he's with her now, I'm sure," the priest said.

"How long you staying in the area?"

"I'll be here until Easter, at least. I've got to settle some things. I might stick around afterward, I don't know. I grew up around here."

"Is that right? Where'd you live?"

"We had a farm up the road from here. Place is gone now. I drove by yesterday - it's all townhouses.

They razed the house, the barn. You'd never know there was a farm there."

"Yes. There's a lot of development going on around here. Houses popping up everywhere you look."

"I hate to see that," Peter said. "In my line of work."

"What do you do?"

"I'm an architect. I restore historic buildings."

Father McCabe's eyebrows went up. "In that case, a double welcome! We could use an architect around here. Just built this church two years ago, and the roof leaks!"

"That's no good. You should get the contractor back out here."

The priest shrugged, gave a smile. "You know how these guys are. Once the job's done, they're out of town."

"Well, I'd be happy to help if I can, Father."

"Here," the priest said, and he was reaching into his pocket, pulling out a pen, leaning over a table to write on a copy of the weekly parish bulletin. "Let me take your number."

"I don't have a number right now, actually. I'm staying at a motel - until I decide what I'm going to do."

"Ah," Father McCabe said, straightening. "Then you'll have to let us know."

"I will." Peter moved over to the vestibule window.

"I couldn't help but notice the barn there. Is that part of the church property?"

The priest joined him at the window. "No. That's the old Hawley farm."

"No house?"

"There used to be." Father McCabe pointed to the right of the barn where the outline of a concrete foundation showed through the snow. "Beautiful old house, it was. Burned to the ground a couple years ago. Took Hawley's wife."

"My God."

"Yes. Horrible tragedy. Really shook people up around here." The priest's smile flickered for a moment, like a lightbulb going bad. "That man lived Lot's life, I'll tell you."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, it was just one thing after another for him. Lost his crops to drought, then half his cattle herd died from some disease. Ran into money problems and had to sell off his land piece by piece. Then his wife." The priest shook his head. "You wonder sometimes. The Lord works in mysterious ways."

"Yes," Peter said.

"There's just the barn left," the priest said. "When Old Man Hawley died, they put it on the market but couldn't find a buyer."

"I can't see why. It's a beautiful barn."

"Yes, but what can you do with it? An old barn on a couple acres of ground. It's a white elephant. A red elephant, in this case."

"There are things you can do. You could convert it into a house, or an office. A lot of people have done that."

"An architect's dream!" the priest smiled, laying his hand on Peter's shoulder. "Hey, they're auctioning off the place in a few weeks. Make them an offer."

"I don't know."

Father McCabe let his fingers fall from Peter's shoulder. He slipped his hands beneath his chasuble and stared out the window, still smiling, but with a distracted look in his eyes. "Well," he said, "you'll want to check it out first, obviously."

Peter drove up to where the sign was posted along the road in front of the barn. "Absolute Auction," it read: "Saturday, March 28. 8 a.m." Below was a phone number. Peter wrote down the number, then parked on the embankment in front of the wagon doors. He stood by the road and looked at the barn. It was built in the early 1800s, he guessed, judging from its simple, functional construction - two stories high, rectangular as a recipe box, no windows except for ventilation slits under the eaves. The barn looked plain next to the houses that surrounded it, unadorned by dormers and shutters and Palladian windows, and yet proud somehow, dignified by its lack of pretension.

Someone had run a cable lock through the wagon doors. Peter pulled on the handles and was able to open a small crack between the doors. He peered in, his hands cupped around his eyes. It was dark inside and he couldn't see much - hulking

shapes of equipment on the floor, rafters overhead, the weak glow of sunlight through the ventilation slits along the sides. The barn had the look of a museum that had been closed off to visitors. Peter walked down the embankment, watching his step in the snow lest he slip in his dress shoes, and made his way along the barn wall, examining the foundation. It was in fine shape - the stones thoroughly pointed, no sign of cracking or shifting. Peter placed his palm against one of the stones and felt the cold that emanated from the center, and he remembered when, as a boy, he'd sit in the shade of his family's old bank barn on sweltering summer afternoons, resting his head against the foundation - how cool the stones were, even on the hottest of days when the death rattle of cicadas rose in chorus from the lifeless trees.

Where were those stones now, he wondered - the ones that held up that old barn? Probably hauled off by somebody to make a retaining wall or a rock garden. Or else just left there on the ground to be buried by the bulldozers. They were just field-stones, after all - nothing special. They came from the earth and ended up back in the earth, like everything else. *Remember, man, that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

Peter stood back and looked at the barn. It was uncanny, how much it looked like the barn where he'd grown up. This one was in much better shape, though. It had been a constant battle for his father on their barn - patching cracks in the foundation walls, replacing wall boards, shingling the roof - and, in the end, he gave up trying. He grew old, lost his strength, lost interest, and the barn fell into disrepair. The land had more value, and so the bulldozers did their work. Another barn. Another piece of history.

This barn too, some day. Perhaps sooner rather than later, if they didn't find a buyer. There was a limit to sentimentality. Yes, the barn had historical value, but it came down to usefulness. You were useful, and when you were useful no more, it was time to slide gracefully back into the earth. And this barn served no function. It was built to shelter cattle, to store hay and grain, and now there were no cows, no hay, no fields on which to grow hay. The barn looked lost there by itself, like an antique left by the side of the road. How futile it suddenly seemed to him - his work, trying to preserve the past, to recreate something that couldn't be recreated.

Peter lifted his eyes to the barn loft where the beam protruded through the wall. There was a pulley on the underside of the beam for hauling hay up to the loft. In the old days before balers, men would park the loaded wagon below, hitch up a horse to a pull rope, and use grapple hooks to lift piles of loose hay into the upper loft door. Peter could imagine it, even today, with snow on the ground and summer months away. As he was looking up at the beam, feeling the sun beating down overhead, the dry prickle of the hay, Peter sensed something come over him, a feeling of déjà vu or something akin to it. He remembered sitting in the church pew seeing the man standing in this spot, staring up at the barn, and it seemed to him that he had become that man, as if time had reversed itself and now, instead of doing the watching, it was he who was being watched. Then the feeling passed, and he was aware of the cold seeping in through his shoes. He dropped his eyes and looked down at his footprints tracing a clean line in the snow.

Peter called the number and arranged to meet the auctioneer at the barn later that week. On the day of the showing, he sat in his car for fifteen minutes before a red Lincoln Continental came down the road. The Lincoln was moving fast, despite the snow on the road, and it came to an abrupt stop beside Peter's car. The door flung open and out stepped a tall, lanky man with receding charcoal-gray hair and a goatee. He wore a long black overcoat and black dress shoes. He peeled off his driving gloves and extended his hand to Peter.

"Jimmy Rollins," he said. "Lead auctioneer."

"I appreciate you meeting me here," Peter said.

"No problem. That's what I'm here for." He spoke fast and moved just as quickly, taking long strides toward the wagon doors. He dug out a ring of keys from his coat pocket and searched for the one that fit the cable lock. "So, you like barns?" he asked.

"I do," Peter said. "Always have."

"Well, you'll love this one. It's a beautiful old barn."

Rollins found the right key and worked off the lock. He slid open the wagon doors and light flooded in, revealing a large thrash floor crowded with farm equipment - Massey-Ferguson tractor, five-bottom plow, disk harrow, cultivator, hay baler, rake. The air smelled musty of stale hay and motor oil.

"Everything's going," Rollins said.

Peter moved in. The equipment was old but in good condition, as far as he could see - greased and oiled and free of rust. The steel plowshares shone as if recently drawn through a cornfield. Peter pulled the dipstick from the tractor engine and rubbed the oil between his thumb and forefinger the way his father had taught him. The oil was clear and smooth, no sign of grit or shavings that would indicate an engine problem.

"Equipment's been well taken care of," Peter said.

"Oh, yeah," Rollins said. He was standing back by the wagon doors, his hands in his pockets, as if not wanting to come inside. "Old man Hawley took good care of his stuff. The barn, too. He loved this place. Kept it immaculate, as you can see. He was always out here, always working on it. He was real meticulous."

Meticulous, Peter thought. The word sounded odd somehow - out of place.

"Did you know him?"

"I had some dealings with him," Rollins said. "He bought equipment from me over the years. Bought it and sold it through me, in fact. He had to auction off a lot of his stuff at the end, to raise cash. He had money troubles."

"So I heard."

"It about killed him to do it. He had a beautiful combine that I sold for him. Thing was in great shape. Hawley only had it for seven, eight years. Bought it used for forty grand and put another couple grand into it. The best I could get was twenty grand from a dairy farmer who came all the way out from Wisconsin. Old Hawley almost got into a fight with him at the auction. Thought the guy was ripping him off. Thought everybody was ripping him off. The developers especially. He hated those guys. Circling around like buzzards, fighting with him over easements and access rights and flood plains, squeezing him for every dime and then turning around and putting up executive homes at half a mil each. But what can you do? The market is the market. You take what you can get. Especially when you're desperate."

"Didn't he have any family that could help him?"

"Nope. No kids. No brothers or sisters, no nieces or nephews. It was just him and his wife. They were married forty-five years - before the house burned down. You heard about that,

"Yes," Peter said. He left the equipment and wandered around the barn. The walls were made of post-and-beam construction joined by wooden pegs. Overhead, hand-hewn rafters extended the width of the barn, supported by heavy posts as thick as telephone poles. A hayloft was built into the rafters at one end of the barn. Peter could see hay bales stacked up there. "How'd it happen?"

"Smoking, apparently," Rollins said. "His wife smoked like a fiend. She was reading the newspaper in the living room and fell asleep. Dropped the cigarette on the papers and poof! House went up like a tinder box."

A hand-built ladder led up to the hayloft. Peter tested the steps, then clambered up. When he was young he'd kept a tattered copy of a Penthouse magazine in the hayloft of his family's barn. The magazine was like a stain that couldn't be hidden there under the hay. It drew him, irresistible, until one day, compelled by shame, he burned the magazine in the outside fire pit.

"Old man Hawley took it real hard when she died," Rollins said. He had wandered into the barn and was standing on the floor below, looking up at Peter. "He hung himself up there."

Peter felt a jolt as if he'd touched an open wire. "Hung himself?"

"Yup. Three days after his wife died. He got her buried, then went home, got a rope, and hung himself outside that door there."

Peter moved over to an oversized door along the wall in the corner of the hayloft. He swung the door open and was momentarily blinded by the glare of sunlight from the snow outside. The doorway gave view to the lower side of the barn. Off to the right, the road snaked down through the development homes. The houses went on for as far as Peter could see, row after row of them lining streets and cul-de-sacs. Off to the left, the church stood dark and quiet.

"You'd never think it," Rollins said. "Gentlest guy in the world. Wouldn't hurt a flea on a cow's back. Then he goes and does something like that. They had to bring out a fire truck to cut him down from that beam there."

Peter looked up and saw the beam extending out from the wall overhead. The pulley hung down below, within reaching distance from the doorway. It would be easy enough to string up a rope there.

"Sometimes things gang up on you," Peter said.

Rollins continued to talk, going on about Hawley and the troubles he had, but the auctioneer's words rose to Peter distant and distorted as if through water. He was having that feeling of déjà vu again. Old Man Hawley, standing in the doorway, the noose around his neck, the ground below. *Do you reject Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises?*

Rollins let out a snort, startling Peter. "Pissed off that priest, I'll tell you," he said. "Old Smiling Jack."

"Father McCabe?"

"That's right. He spent three years getting that church built - begged and borrowed, ran carnivals and Christmas bazaars and special collections, got the women cooking for bake sales, got the men out on weekends to help with the grunt work, squeezed everybody, the architect, the contractor, the roofer, even poor old Hawley who forked over his back pasture for a fraction of what it was worth - three years, and he finally gets it done, his precious church, when what happens but this guy goes and hangs himself right next door, in full view of the congregation. And on a Sunday morning, no less. Man didn't know how to keep the Sabbath."

Peter moved up to the edge of the doorway and looked down. It was a good thirty-foot drop to the ground. He imagined the farmer's body dangling there from the beam.

"Hey, be careful up there, will you?" Rollins called out. "All I need is for somebody to fall out and break his neck during a showing. I really ought to have people sign a waiver before I do this."

Peter backed away and closed the door. He walked across the loft and climbed back down to where Rollins was waiting below.

"I just want to be square with you," the auctioneer said. "Give you the history. It means nothing to me, but some people get worked up about it."

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yeah. Freaks some people out, that a guy killed himself in here. Think they hear things." Rollins raised his hands by his head and shook them like rattles. "All that shit."

Peter walked off, continuing his tour of the barn. In the corner, beneath the hayloft, he came upon Hawley's workshop. It was a small, well-lit space, about the size of a horse stall, but

remarkably well stocked. Hawley had enough tools in there to fill a hardware store: drills, sanders, circular saws, jigsaws, hand saws, levels, chisels, pliers, wrenches and screwdrivers of every size and type. Everything was neatly organized - power tools stacked on shelves, hand tools hung from hooks on the wall, nails and screws and bolts kept in bins. As he walked around the workshop, observing the way the tools were grouped and placed, Peter could see how Hawley looked at things, his logic and sense of order. It was as if he were standing inside the man's head.

Among the tools hanging on the wall was an antique pitchfork. Peter took down the pitchfork and looked it over. It had three tines and was made entirely of wood. A lot of farmers continued to use wooden-tine pitchforks well into the 1900s so they wouldn't injure a horse's hooves and legs while cleaning out the stalls. Peter's folks had a wooden pitchfork like this, though they'd used it only for decorative purposes. It had hung on the wall in the kitchen above the table. Peter remembered seeing it there every evening as they ate dinner.

"Will you be auctioning this?" he asked.

"Like I said, everything's going," Rollins said. "You can bid on the cobwebs if you want."

Peter set the pitchfork back on the wall and left the workshop. Rollins stayed close to him as they walked back toward the front of the barn.

"You have an interest in this place?" he said.

"I don't know," Peter said. "I'll have to give it some thought."

"Could get a great deal. No reserve. Highest bid walks away with it. Just bring your checkbook. Fifteen percent due at signing. If you have any co-signers, bring them along too. Everything'll be done right here." Rollins looked down, took notice of the ring on Peter's finger. "Your wife need to see the place before the auction?"

"No," Peter said. "She's not here."

"Where is she?"

"She's down in Atlanta."

"Atlanta?" Rollins said. "What, she run away with the plumber?"

Peter said nothing. He made his way through the maze of farm equipment toward the front wagon doors.

"We're separated," he said.

"Ah," Rollins said from behind him. "Hey, I know how that feels. I've been married three times myself. Got kids?"

"No kids."

"Me neither. Just as well. Don't want to get kids mixed up in all that shit."

"Though kids would love an old barn like this," the auctioneer said.

Peter stood behind him, watching Rollins run the cable through the door handles and snap the lock closed.

"Yes, they would," he said.

Rollins followed him outside. He slid the doors closed behind them.

On the morning of the auction, Peter arrived early but still had a hard time finding a spot to park. Cars were lined up and down the road along both shoulders. A policeman guided traffic into the church lot. Peter parked in the lot and started across the church lawn toward the barn. The snow had melted and his boots pressed into the soggy ground. Others were taking this route as well, and the lawn was marked with footprints, the way a pasture gets from cattle traffic. Peter wondered if Father McCabe had sanctioned this, if it bothered him that people were parking in the church lot and chewing up his grass.

Walking up from the back, Peter came upon a throng of people milling about in front of the barn. The wagon doors were open and people passed in and out like tourists. It was amazing, everyone who had shown up. There were farmers there, and equipment dealers, but a lot of people from the surrounding development homes as well, men mostly, with their kids. There was a festive, almost carnival atmosphere. Inside the barn, refreshments were being sold at a stand along the wall. Kids chased each other around the floor and climbed the steps to the hayloft. Men stood, cups of coffee in their hands, gazing upward as if admiring the ceiling fresco of a cathedral. Peter followed their eyes and saw a barn swallow flitting about in the rafters, swooping down and then suddenly upward like a piece of paper swirling in the wind.

The auction was held outside on the side yard. The farm equipment had been moved out there for inspection and men circled the machines, pulling on gears and kicking tires. On the concrete foundation where the farmhouse had stood, the tools from Hawley's workshop were piled up like tinder for a bonfire. A semi-circle of men stood around an auction table set up in front of

the pile. Peter saw Rollins in the center of the crowd, looking a bit like Jesus preaching to the crowds. His eyes were wide and alert, and his right hand bounced from bidder to bidder, following the rhythm of his chanting.

"Who'll give me fifteen hundred? Fifteen hundred bid, fifteen hundred, fifteen hundred? I've got fifteen hundred over here. Now two, two thousand, will ya give me two thousand, two thousand? I got it! How about two thousand five-hundred? Two thousand five-hundred, who will give me two thousand five-hundred, two thousand five-hundred?"

Peter stood at the back of the crowd and watched the bidding. The equipment was being auctioned off first. As Rollins sang out the bids, he would point off now and then to the equipment in the yard as if reminding the men which piece was being auctioned. It was officially spring now on the calendar, but the morning air was chilly and the men stood restlessly on the concrete, stamping their feet and puffing into their balled hands as they awaited items to come up for bid.

"Anybody give me two thousand five-hundred? I got it! How about three thousand, three thousand, will ya give me three thousand?"

The hay baler went to an equipment dealer from New Jersey. The dealer had an assistant with him, and during the bidding he would turn to him and confer like a lawyer with his client. The dealer won the hay rake as well, and then the plow, and Peter was beginning to think he'd walk away with all the equipment, until the Massey-Ferguson came up and a bidding war erupted. A burly, bearded man, not part of the action up to this point, raised his hand at the start of the bidding and seemed intent on staying in. The man wore a trucker's cap and a jacket that advertised some Midwest milk cooperative, and Peter wondered if he was the dairy farmer from Wisconsin, back for another deal. He stood silently, chewing on a toothpick, dipping his head to indicate a bid. As the price of the tractor went higher, Peter could sense frustration on the part of the dealer, the way he would purse his lips and cock his head toward his assistant. Finally, after the bearded man raised his bid another notch, the dealer shook his head, and Rollins' voice rang out like a gunshot.

"Sold! To the man with the cap."

The equipment was auctioned off by mid-morning, and Rollins turned to the tools. More men gathered around for this

part of the auction, given the selection. The tools were individually tagged, like evidence in a trial.

Rollins would pick one up from the pile, briefly look it over, then hold it up to the crowd and begin to chant. One by one Rollins went through the tools, doing them in no particular order that Peter could see. When the wooden pitchfork came up for bid, Peter raised his hand. Another man bid on the pitchfork as well, and Peter was afraid the price would get out of reach, but when Peter raised his bid to twenty dollars, the other man shook his head.

"Sold!" Rollins sang out. "To the man in the back."

After claiming his prize, Peter stood in the crowd holding the pitchfork, feeling like the man in Grant Wood's "American Gothic." A young boy came up and Peter let him hold the pitchfork, which the boy did gently, as if recognizing it was an antique. Up front, Rollins continued to chant, his voice clear and strong like a preacher's. Peter watched for a while longer, then wandered away. The barn was on the schedule to be auctioned off at two o'clock that afternoon. Peter stayed until noon, bought a hot dog and soda from the refreshment stand, then left with his pitchfork and drove away.

The next day was Palm Sunday. It was the longest mass of the year, when the sanctuary became a stage for a reading of Christ's passion. Everyone had a role - Father McCabe as the voice of Jesus, the cantor narrating, the congregation taking the part of the crowd. When, during the trial, Pilate asked the crowd what he should do with Jesus, this man who had done nothing more serious than telling parables in the temple courts, the voice of the congregation rose in chorus:

"Crucify him!"

At one point during the long reading, Peter cast his eyes out the window at the bank barn. The equipment was gone from the yard and there was no sign of the auction that had been held there the day before. The barn seemed emptier somehow, stripped of its contents, like a building abandoned during a war. There was no one walking about, no activity of any kind. Peter understood the barn had been sold to an antiques dealer. It was a good use of the place, he supposed. Better than tearing it down.

After mass, ushers stood by the doors in the vestibule handing out strips of green palm leaves. Peter took a couple to

hang above his doorway. The next year he would bring them back, dried and shriveled, to be collected with the others and burned into ashes.

Maureen's Murder Mystery

There are two scenic drives of some worth. He put her in two nice restaurants. He fed her shrimp and rice and a mysteriously rich mousse with a faint chalky aftertaste. He left her for dead, but she rises in Chapter Eight. He has given her preposterously large breasts. But all the women in the novel have preposterously large breasts, and so she can't hold a grudge just because of that.

No one marries her. Nor does she have a lover, and thus she has no love scenes (thank god). She gets locked out of a tiny cubicle of a hotel room, launches down the hall and begs the passing manager to open her door. She weeps for a pass key, blubbering and half kneeling before the manager who says No not until you're able to produce a laminated I.D.

That begging scene is pure revenge. It's undeniable-his need for revenge. Nothing ambiguous about that.

Today in her actual life, the one she has earned, she went out to Salco's for a quart of milk and a pint of juice. It is a crisp November. All the facets in the city are turned up. She feels strangely alert— not just alert for the usual rapist and mugger but alert as a dimensional being, cutting through the air of 18th Street. And there appears ahead of her a moon, big and tipped, a soft poochy moon, floating thickly between buildings.

An experimental virus left unrefrigerated for two days and the combination of a sheep's nucleus and a human egg: the cause of death. In the novel it took forever for anyone to figure out the cause of death.

Did I mention that he makes her faint in Chapter Nine? She faints, succumbing to brain fever. He puts her in the path of a murderer and a crazed pathologist.

Thus, she tells herself, considering the trouble he put her in, her first animal instincts about the author were right— her first crawling of flesh. The urge to run from the room when she first met him could no longer be attributable to youth and an early afternoon Harvey Wallbanger. Her instincts had saved her.

She's thinking this as she leaves Salco's. She has her milk, her orange juice, a newspaper and a six pack of non-alcoholic beer.

What she remembers is his voice— a hushed, insinuating voice. It was only through the cracks and fissures of that voice that she could begin to estimate his feelings.

The truth was that he moved too slowly for her. She couldn't be interested for long in someone who moved so slowly. His feelings took too long. And then he got rid of her in his own way and disappeared for all these years until he sent her the novel he wrote, and she could hear the flickering sound of his contempt for her on page after page.

Years ago she had listened to his story about the last night he spent in Waukegan and how bad the fishing was until honest to god, a fish of some sort suddenly jumped into his boat. A silvery thing that compelled him to action. He reached over for the net, but the fish threw itself back into the lake and disappeared.

Next he's talking about a story from his mother's mother's people—the fish that became a woman and leapt into a man's boat. In mortal surprise, the man could do nothing as the fish-woman dove out of his boat and back into the river. At the last moment her fair hair caught at his belt and took him with her. Instantly he grew fins and a tail and swam almost happily until he saw the woman's mouth: a great gash where his hook had been. In sorrow he knew that her wound would never heal and that he was the cause of her pain.

On the other side of the table, over a platter of flounder and parsley, Maureen listened and knew in her heart that the man before her was making the whole thing up and that she would never marry him if he didn't come to the point—because an anxious restless nature hates to be slowed, hates to take wisdom as medicine and prefers life in a frying pan to a slow underwater dance even with a brilliant man. She had, years later, reproved herself for her restlessness. It was a perfectly beautiful story she had been told, one that undoubtedly found its roots in the folklore of countless countries. Why should she have been so annoyed? What had it taken all her concentration to keep from tossing her plate of flounder in his face?

She's back from Salco's now. She puts the paper on the table, slides the milk and the juice and the non-alcoholic beer into

the refrigerator—and immediately knows that the author of the novel is dead. A certainty. He's dead and it will be in the obituaries. She opens the paper, a terribly thick Sunday edition, and she hunts and finds the obituaries and passes up and down the columns where a city this size has a lot of deaths and the famous and the infamous and the near famous all get their captions. He isn't there. She goes through the columns twice, three times, until she satisfies herself that he isn't listed today. The belief that he has died—it's like a sickness passing over.

Why even imagine he would be struck dead for writing a novel that used her in it—so slimly disguised that even one of her acquaintances had called her with the news?

The truth was that years ago he was the one to end things between them. Maureen hadn't the opportunity to break things off before he had done so, setting up a dinner at a restaurant between them and failing to show up.

When she saw him by accident a few days later on the street he was so falsely jovial that she knew he was guilty and had intended to harm her.

They stood there in the first snowfall—on a cobblestoned sidewalk near a dead fountain that looked like a failed 19th century invention for milling wheat. He was fidgeting about, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his long tweed coat, and he was looking more animated than she had ever seen him.

Her throat was aching from the indignity of it all. But she was laughing nevertheless and her laughter wasn't fake really—it was a pinched laughter for the absurdity of their meeting and his obvious discomfort, the way he was pushing her ever so gently to the other side of a line. One of his thick black shoes pawed at the pavement as if to move her backwards. He seemed like someone guarding himself with the smallest possible gestures.

The air was bracingly cold, and a gold Christmas star on the Wrigley Building twinkled merrily, glowing from behind his ear.

She stopped laughing, and suddenly she felt a rush of pity for his predicament.

It was then that she could feel a genuine smile moving up from her heart and breaking on her lips; he had set her free of him, what a wonderful man he was after all.

Why now, after all these years, did she again feel a sudden flash of joy? Guilty, beautiful joy. A little lightness—just a feather

of something light and sweet brushing against her face.

She thought about how easily things could have been otherwise in the novel. He could have made her the murder victim. He could have made her the murderer. But he hadn't. He had written her into his thick murder mystery. He had slowed her down long enough to play with her after all.

If she had her way there's one scene that she would add to the novel. After her character faints she wouldn't come to consciousness in a hotel room with an orange carpet and lozenge mirrors and a little bureau. She would come to consciousness in another hotel room in some small country that had recently defeated a dictator, a hotel, small, and with sheets softened from so much washing, from so many sleepers. She would walk to the window and look down into the street to rushing traffic, and she would turn and pick up a complicated telephone and book a flight home--after she had ordered room service (a lovely breakfast of oranges and crispy bread). When she flew home she would unbelievably enough find herself far away from murderers and suspects, detectives, victims, and coroners. Once in her apartment--the very apartment where she is now enjoying her little fantasy--she would take down a book from a shelf.

As she reads the book that she has taken from the shelf it becomes clear that what she has in her hands is the most gentle murder mystery, that no one has yet died in it at all--that any reported death is the offshoot of rumors.

And in this novel, in her second life in letters, the woman who has her face and the syllables of her name and her gestures could never conceivably be guilty. In fact, we know immediately that she is innocent. And she does not faint. Nor does she beg for a pass key. Nor does she suffer a convenient brain fever. She is not angry--or befuddled, or left to trace out characters written in spilled sugar grains on a buffet (page 778).

The book in her hands is not a voodoo doll pinned by words. Not only that, but she's alone when she wants to be without fear of harming anyone who has plans for her.

She is laughing now, although it is always strange to laugh when we are alone. She is laughing because he actually must have feared that he had harmed her. Mistakenly, he had been guilty. So had she-- and guilt had made them both angry. His anger and his guilt-- his self-defensiveness-- were on every page he wrote. He had ruined the shape of his novel by including her, but he

wouldn't give her the dignity of being a major character.

She imagined it: his great deliberations, how he had thought of her and found her wanting and devised a way to make her wait as a way to be rid of her before she could leave him.

She had waited a good long time at the restaurant all those years ago. She had waited for an hour and a half for him. It occurred to her now that even if they had stayed together, what he would offer her was a lifetime of waiting. Waiting between words. Waiting between sentences. As if everything must be considered for a very long time. As if instinct was never to be trusted.

She would make herself chicken a la king tonight and open up the pralines she had stowed away in the freezer. They'd thaw in no time.

She told herself again: He hadn't harmed her, and he could no longer harm her. Not even by writing his long-winded book that must have taken him all the time in the world to write— not even by creating a character like her, determining the character's fate and giving the character inconsequential but humiliating encounters.

What hubris, though, to think he had hurt her. Or to think that he could hurt her decades after his first attempts to wound her. Did he think he was God? He was too slow to be God.

Every Commandment but the Fifth

Parker puts his arm around Linda who clicks the TV off and says, "Should we go upstairs?"

Her bedroom is the only room upstairs, except for the bathroom, and he figures this is his chance. He has fantasized about this, day and night, for the whole three months they've been dating. In his dreams Linda is desirous but shy, he a master cocksman, her bed his workbench.

Walking up the stairs, behind her, is no dream. He's afraid. Afraid he won't be able to do it. She leads him into the bedroom, excuses herself and goes into the bathroom.

She comes back, undresses, and slides onto the bed under the sheet, as naturally as if she's alone and slipping into her bath. Standing alongside the bed, Parker fumbles with the buttons of his shirt, takes it off, then his T-shirt, shoes and pants. With his foot, he pushes the shoes under the bed, then drapes his clothes over a small chair near her dresser. He keeps his back to her, steps out of his underwear, backs onto the bed and gets under the sheet.

It doesn't go as he has dreamed. It goes as he has feared.

"Don't worry about it. It happens." She takes a drag of her cigarette, inhales until her cheeks collapse, blows the smoke out and says, "It could happen to anybody."

Parker sits on the side of her bed, looking at the hardwood floor. Her smoking aggravates his allergies, but it doesn't matter now. He's in no position to be critical.

"Just so you know it isn't you," he says, without looking at her. "It's me. Don't think it's your fault."

"Oh, I know it ain't me."

It might help if she was a little less certain.

"Forget it. It happens."

He wonders what she's thinking now. That's the worst part, wondering what she's thinking. Probably that they could be friends. When she needs it, she'll have to find someone else. He imagines her having sex with someone else. He can hear it more than see it. Linda brought to the peak of passion, noisily, as in the movies.

What makes it worse is that he likes her. A lot. In spite of the smoking and the way she talks with the New York City accent and bad grammar.

He met her last fall, where she works, at a Home Depot. She showed him how to remove a stripped screw from a kitchen faucet. Actually, she had to remove it for him, and she did it during her break.

He went back with home improvement questions, every Saturday for the next three weeks. He wouldn't have had the nerve to ask her out unless it was an absolute necessity. His boss was having a Halloween party and he had to go. He couldn't go alone and Linda was the only unmarried woman he knew who seemed to like him. She looked normal, and most importantly, she was someone he could ask to the party and if she said no he would never have to see her again. When she said yes, he was surprised, relieved, then scared.

He went to the party as Davy Crockett, in a rented costume that had leather pants too big; he had to safety pin them so they wouldn't fall down. Linda went as a cheerleader, in her old high school sweater and short skirt. He was surprised and a little intimidated by how good her legs were.

Now, he just wants to get out of her bedroom, never see her again. He could work it out in his head if he was alone.

But she's being good about his failure. She makes him sit down and talk, and she seems to know about his problem, even says she has wondered over the months what was taking him so long but decided to let him go at his own pace. That's the pace that has him twenty-eight and never done it. She asks about his dreams and masturbation, things he would never talk about, but he feels so in debt to her that he answers everything. His problem isn't physical, she diagnoses.

"Probably has to do with guilt. Catholic guilt," she says. "I had it too. You know what the nuns do to you. They told us girls that our Patron Saint was Agnes of Rome, who died rather than lose her virginity. But I got over it. When I was fifteen."

Parker's quiet, so she says, "Maybe you should see someone, like a shrink?"

"I don't know." He shakes his head. "I don't know if I could do that."

"Do you have any friend you could talk to? Talking about it might make you feel better. I've got a girlfriend I tell everything to."

He doesn't like the way she emphasizes everything. There's no friend he's going to tell this to. It's different with men. If he even hints at this, pretty soon every time someone brings up the name Parker it'll be: 'the boy can't get it up with a crane, his flag won't fly, his soldier won't salute, his piccolo won't play, no lead in his pencil, no rocket in his pocket, no rise in his Levi's, he's got a soft on.' He isn't going to talk to anybody about this.

"You know," she says, "there's a new priest at St. Anthony's. He's a young guy. I met him at the bingo. He's different. He's cool. Maybe you could talk to him?"

"A priest? I haven't been to church in fifteen years."

"That's okay," she says. "An ex boyfriend of mine, he was in the can, not for nothing bad, you know, just for non-support or something. Anyhow, he hadn't been to church in like, forever. I mean, he never had the problem you got, see he was Italian, but sometimes I wished he did. But he had stomach problems. His ex wife told him it was from the stress of not telling her everything bad he'd done. He figured maybe a good confession would help, but not to that bitch, so he went to see the prison's priest."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. After he confessed, his stomach problems went away."

"I haven't confessed in so long," Parker waves smoke away from his face, "I wouldn't know where to start."

"This guy I'm telling you about," she turns her head away and blows this load of smoke toward the ceiling, "he hadn't been to confess in a long time neither, like forever. But he got it over it real easy. Quick too. And he was a bastard in some ways. I'm sure he had a lot more to tell than you."

"How'd he get it over so easy?"

"Well, see, he says to the priest, 'Father, I've broken every commandment but the Fifth.'"

"That's it?"

"Yeah. That's what he told me. See he never killed no one, so he covered all his bases without going through a lot of bullshit."

"Did he break all those other commandments?"

"I don't think it matters. The priest don't care. It's not like he gets paid by the hour. And this way you cover anything you might of forgot."

"I don't know if I can." Parker hangs his head, shakes it slowly.

"You should try it. You got nothing to lose." She touches his arm, then takes him by the shoulder, turns him, raises his chin and looks into his eyes. She smiles a soft smile he didn't know she had. "And, if it works, maybe, you know... we try again."

A week later, on Saturday morning, Parker sits in the last pew of Saint Anthony's Church. At first, it sounded crazy: *Bless me Father for I have sinned... I have broken every commandment but the Fifth.* But now, he's committed to do it.

He thinks about telling the priest just a couple of his sins, the bad ones, but Saints stare at him from everywhere in the church's somber interior, from the pedestals lining the nave, and from the stained glass windows from the north and south walls. He needs to do this right.

It's cold and damp in the old church. He feels the chill in the middle of his forehead where he blessed himself with holy water. The Church's bulletin listed Saturday confession times as ten to noon, and four to six, but the pews are empty except for an old man in the front, near the confessional. Parker presses his palms against the hard oak bench and looks at his watch. Ten-thirty.

A freezing rain starts tapping against the windows. A tall young priest comes out of the confessional and pulls open the door on the penitent's side. An arm appears and the priest helps an old woman up and out. She's short, wrapped in a heavy brown shawl and stooped over. The priest holds her elbow and guides her for a few steps before he takes his hand away, as though she's leaning to ride a bicycle and he has given her a little push. She lifts her arm into a frail wave. The priest ducks back inside.

The old man in the front pew walks to the confessional. Parker looks over his shoulder into the church's foyer. It's empty. He's next. A creaking sound comes from his bench and he looks down at it. The veins in his hands stand out like blue rivers and he realizes he's squeezing the bench with all his might.

Ten minutes pass. The old man must be a slow talker. What could he have to confess? He finally comes out. No one else has come in. When Parker attended Saint William's, the lines

for confession ran all along the wall of the church and gave the penitents time to get their sins straight. He wants more time now, though the last week he's thought of nothing but his sins and he knows exactly what he's going to say: *Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been fifteen years since my last confession. I have broken every commandment but the Fifth.*

He looks over his shoulder again. No one's back there. Then he's up and walking toward the booth.

He opens the penance door. The booth is smaller than he remembers. He kneels on the leather kneeler, pulls the door closed and gives it an extra tug. It's dark. He hears a rattling sound and a small square window slides open leaving a dense wooden screen in the wall, right in front of his face. Through it, he can see the outline of the priest's head. It's time to start.

"Bless me... Father... I have sinned."

A whispered, "Go on."

"It's been... years... many... fifteen years since my last confession."

A brief silence, then the priest says, "My son it is not every day that I have to privilege of welcoming someone back to the church. Now, tell me your sins."

Parker feels some of the tension run out of his body. He slumps.

"Father..."

"Yes?"

"Father... my sins..."

"Go on."

"I have broken every commandment... except the Fifth... I haven't broken the Fifth."

His soul scrubbed clean. Any penance - he will do any penance.

"Every commandment but the Fifth?" The priest's voice is a little strained, as if he's struggling to maintain a whisper.

"Yes, Father. Not the Fifth."

"Well..." the priest clears his throat, "you will have to detail your sins to make a complete and meaningful confession."

"I do... I will?"

"Yes. Oh yes. Are you sure you have broken all of God's commandments, except the one against killing?"

"Yes. I guess so."

"Your eternal soul isn't something for guessing. Take me through your sins."

"How should I do that, Father?"

"Start at the beginning. Commandment number one. You know the commandments?"

"Yes. I do. I used to." Parker takes off his glasses so he can no longer see the outline of the priest's head.

"The first commandment," the priest days, "I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me. Have you worshipped strange gods?"

The priest's tone implies he doesn't believe Parker has worshipped strange gods. Parker feels in the odd position of defending that he has. He digs his thumbnail into the wooden wall of the confessional.

"Father, once I was told to confess to that sin and I said I would but I didn't."

"You were told to confess to worshipping strange gods?"

"Yes, Father."

"By whom?"

"At St. William's, where I went to grammar school, in the fourth grade."

"Huh?"

"My class took a trip to the Historical Society. I had two dollars to spend in the gift shop. I bought a pendant of Isis, an Egyptian god. I wore Isis around my neck for a while and Sister Theresa saw it, made me take it off, and told me to confess. But I never told that sin."

"That stayed with you all these years?"

"I guess so."

"Well, God forgives you that. Do you know the second commandment?"

"Uh..."

"Have you taken the name of the Lord in vain."

"Oh, yeah. I done that, Father. I mean I've taken his name in vain." Parker has an odd feeling of achievement, as if he has gone two for two.

"How so?"

"Jesus H. Christ. That I used to say all the time. It's what we always said."

"Do you still say it?"

"I think I do."

"Well, try to refrain from that expression. Tell me son, do you go to mass every Sunday?"

"Not every Sunday."

"When was the last time you went to Sunday Mass?"

"Father... that was ... I guess that was about ten years ago."

"Oh. Will you go this Sunday?"

"Yes, Father."

"Welcome back."

"My son, do you honor your father and mother?"

"They're both dead."

"Do you honor their memory?"

"Yes."

There's a squeak in the kneeler and Parker feels the priest shifting his weight.

"Have you lain with another man's wife?"

"Well Father... I'd like to... I mean, that's my prob... no Father, I've never done that."

There's a pause, it seems like a long pause.

"Have you stolen?"

"When I was younger. From Saint William's."

"You stole from St. William's, your church?"

"Yes father. Me and my friend. We used to pretend we were putting into the collection basket but we were taking out. I never told that either."

"How much did you take?"

"I'm not sure Father, maybe five or six dollars, all together."

"Okay. Have you borne false witness against your neighbor?"

"Yes. In the seventh grade, at St..."

"At St. William's?"

"Yes Father."

"Did all you life's sins occur at Saint William's?"

"I guess... I don't know, Father... I guess at St. William's, I used up all the bad in me."

"Yes, it seems so. Well, about the false witness..."

"Yes, Father. Sister Mary, she taught seventh... she was deaf, or mostly deaf, but she heard me talking in line and she says, 'Mister were you talking?' I says, 'No Sister.' She says, 'But mister,

I just heard you talking."

The priest sneezes, the sound amplified by the enclosed confessional.

"God bless you."

"Thank you. Go on."

"I was telling a joke in line and Sister Mary heard. I said it wasn't me and I looked towards Joe Klodzinski, not towards the girls or Terrance McGovern because they never talked in line and the Sister knew that. But I false witnessed against Klodzinski."

"What happened then?"

"The Sister, knowing Klodzinski, punished him too, just to be safe."

"Okay, okay. Now, you have never coveted your neighbor's wife?"

"Well Father, yes, I-"

"You have?"

"Yes."

"This wasn't at Saint William's?"

"The first time it was. It was my last year there, in the eighth grade."

"The eighth grade?" The priest's voice rises and Parker worries it might be heard outside the confessional.

"Father, that winter, when I was in eighth grade, Mr. Schmidt, out neighbor from across the street, went to Florida and hired me to feed the family's pet rabbit for a week. One day I skipped school and used the Schmidt house as headquarters. The rabbit's cage was in the back of the garage, behind a 1962 Chevy station wagon and I saw the Chevy's ignition was turned to off but not Lock, in that year's model you could start the car without a key if it was only in Off so I ran the engine and heater and played the radio -"

"Yes... yes, I see, but you weren't coveting your neighbor's wife?"

"Well, that was after."

"After?"

"Yeah. I went into the house to watch their colored TV and I went through Mrs. Schmidt's dresser and her, uh... underwear. And I... I took a pair of her panties."

"You took them?"

"Yes. And..."

"But if anything, that was stealing, not coveting..."
"But, Father, there were a lot of nights after that..."
"Yes..."
"Alone, and I... I used Mrs. Schmidt's panties to... I
guess... Uh... covet her."
"Oh. Okay..."
"You know Father, with my hand-"
"Okay, okay. I know."
"Father?"
"Yes?"
"The rabbit, the one that belonged to the Schmidt kids."
"What about the rabbit?"
"Well, I've been thinking about the Fifth command-
ment..."
"Thou shall not kill?"
"Yes, Father. The rabbit's cage... see it was right behind
the car, and..."
"Yes?"
"I must of ran the car too long and..."

Parker steps out of the church and squints at the light. He looks up at the tall straight steeple. The rain has stopped. The sky shows some blue. It could still be a beautiful Saturday. He feels the cold fresh air, and feels a cleanliness about himself, like when he finishes with the dental hygienist and rubs his tongue over his smooth clean teeth.

He's going to spend the day at home, saying the prayers that are his penance. He will say them twice, maybe three times. He wants to be free of all guilt. He has a date with Linda, six hours from now.

Art

Arte

Kunst

Art-hay

Konst

QUINLAN COREY

Giraffe



ANGELA GAGNON

Untitled



DUCHA HANG



JOHN PHILPOTT



RALPH TAVARES

I Wonder if She's Thinking of Me



Translation

Traduction

Traduzione

Übersetzung

Traducción

ANTHONY ESOLEN

Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*

Canto One

My little ship of ingenuity
now hoists her sails to speed through better waters,
leaving behind so harsh and cruel a sea,
For I will sing about that second reign
where human spirits purge their sins and grow
worthy to climb at last to Paradise.
But here let the dead poetry arise,
O holy Muses, for I am your own,
and here, Calliope, strike a higher key
Accompanying my song with that sweet air
which made the miserable Magpies feel
a blow that turned all pardon to despair.
Sweet sapphire of the morning in the east,
gathering in the starlit atmosphere
pure from the zenith to the nearest ring,
Brought back the joy of looking on the skies
as soon as I had come from the dead air
which had oppressed with grief my heart and eyes.
That radiant star that sheds its love like rain
made all the orient heavens smile with light,
veiling the Fishes in her lovely train.
I turned to the right hand, and set my mind
to scan the southern pole, and saw four stars
no man has seen since they who bore mankind
Saw them in Eden. What joy shone in their flame!
O widowed region of the northern stars,
you who have been deprived the sight of them!
When of that vision I had taken leave
and turned a little towards the other pole,
where the Great Bear had disappeared below,
I saw beside me an old man, alone,
so reverend in his bearing and his look,
no father claims more honor from his son.

Long was his beard, a sable streaked with gray,
 similar to the color of his hair:
 upon his breast in double bands it lay.
The rays of the four holy stars on high
 adorned his face with such a brilliant gleam
 it seemed the sun shone full upon his eye.
"Who are you who against the hidden stream
 have fled the prison of eternity?"
 said he, moving his venerable beard.
"Who was your guide? What lamp has led your feet,
 issuing from the sea of that deep night
 that ever darkens the infernal pit?
Are the abyss's laws so broken then?
 Or have the heavens altered their design,
 letting the damned come to my rocky shore?"
A gentle nudge I felt from my guide's hand,
 and by his words and signs and touch he made
 my brow incline in reverence, my knees bend.
"I come not on my own," responded he.
 "A Lady came from Heaven, and by her prayers
 I went to help him with my company.
But since it is your will that we should more
 fully reveal the truth about our state,
 my will cannot refuse. This man has not
Yet seen the final setting of his sun,
 but by his folly it had drawn so near,
 it left him very little time to turn.
Then just as I have mentioned I was sent
 to rescue him, to free his soul: there was
 no other way but that by which I went.
I've shown him all the people steeped in crime;
 now I intend to show those souls that purge
 their sins under your custody. The time
Would grow too long to tell our pilgrimage;
 from on high comes the power that is my help,
 leading him here to look on you at last
And hear your words. Favor his coming, then!
 He seeks his freedom -- and how dear that is,
 he who refused his life for it knows well.
You know it -- for you did not find it bitter
 to die for liberty in Utica,

where you sloughed off the garment that will shine
 So bright on the Great Day. We have not broken
 the eternal laws: for he still lives, and I,
 whom Minos does not bind, come from the ring
 Where the chaste eyes of Martia still beseech you,
 O holy breast, to hold her as your own.
 For her love then incline to grant our prayer.
 Your seven realms above, let us go through:
 I will bring back to her our thankfulness,
 if to be named below can honor you."
 "In life my Martia did so please my eyes,"
 said he, "that any favor she desired
 I granted to her. But now that she lies
 Dwelling in death beyond the evil river,
 by that law set when first I left that world,
 she can no longer move me, now nor ever.
 But if a heavenly Lady guides your way
 and moves your steps, you have no need to flatter.
 Beg in her name: there is no more to say.
 Go, therefore, and be sure you gird his waist
 with a smooth, simple reed, and wash his face
 of all the grime of Hell, and all the dust.
 No cloud should take his vision by surprise
 who steps before this mount's first minister --
 for he is one who comes from Paradise.
 Lower and lower down about this isle,
 where the waves pound against the mountain's shore,
 reeds grow in the soft mud. No other plant
 That breaks out into leaf, or stands upright
 with stiffened trunk, can long survive the place,
 but yield at last to all the battering waves.
 Do not return this way as you go up.
 The sun arising now will show you where
 to climb the mountain at its gentlest slope."
 At that he vanished, and without a word
 I raised myself and pressed close to my guide,
 casting my eyes upon him. He began:
 "My son, follow my footsteps as we turn
 to go back down the plain, which slopes from here
 unto the lowest limit of the isle."
 The dawn had driven the last twilight hour

We walked along that solitary plain
as one who turns to find the road he's lost
and, till he finds it, seems to walk in vain.
When we had come where dew is slow to fade,
lying where it resists the warming sun,
gathering in the hidden cool and shade,
My master gently ran his open hands
over the little tufts of grass, and I,
who understood the reason for his art,
Presented him my cheeks, still stained and teared.
He wiped them, and at last discovered all
the color that the smoke of Hell had bleared.
At that we came to the deserted strand
upon whose waters no man ever sailed
who lived to tell it in his native land.
He girt me there, as was Another's will.
O wonder to behold! For when he chose
and plucked the lowly reed, in sudden grace
Another was reborn to take its place.

Canto Three

Although the sudden flight had sent the spirits
scattering through the meadows of the isle
to gain the mount where Reason winnows us,
I drew close to my faithful friend and guide --
and without him what would have been my course?
Who would have led me up the mountainside?
Bitten he seemed to me by self-remorse:
O conscience fine and full of dignity!
How small a failing sinks its bitter tooth!
But when his feet had ceased to move in haste,
which saps the reverence from all we do,
my mind, which on one object had been fixed,
Widened its scope to wander eagerly,
and so I turned to face the rocky bluff
which heavenward rises highest from the sea.
Behind my back the sun's rays flaming red,
because my body formed an obstacle,
were interrupted on our road ahead,
And to my side I wheeled in sudden fear

that I had been abandoned -- for I saw
only one shadow darkening on the earth.
And then my strength, my comfort said to me,
"Even now, such little faith? Don't you believe
that I am with you, and will guide you on?
The evening falls already by that tomb
where lies the body that once cast my shadow,
for Naples took it from Brundisium.
Thus if no shadow follows where I go,
it's no more wondrous than that heavenly light
shines unencumbered by the spheres below.
To suffer the tormenting fire and ice
the Power assigns us bodies that are like,
but never wills to show us how He does,
For, trusting to man's reason, mad is he
who hopes to plumb the endless ways of those
three Persons in substantial Unity.
Be satisfied with 'So it is,' O Man,
for if you could have seen the whole design,
Mary would not have had to bear a son,
And you've seen men desire in vain before,
whose intellects might well have calmed the yearning
which now is made their sorrow evermore,
I speak of Plato and of Aristotle
and many others," and he bowed his head,
troubled, and did not say another word.
To the foot of the mountain by that time
we'd come, and found its rocky side so sheer,
had we the strongest, readiest legs to climb
It would have done no good. The ruggedest stretch
of ruined cliff on the Ligurian coast,
compared with that, is but an easy stair.
"Now who knows on what hand the slope declines,"
remarked my Teacher, stopping in his tracks,
"so one can mount who hasn't got a wing?"
While he was staring steadily below,
mulling about the way, considering,
and I was gazing at the rock above,
At my left hand appeared a crowd of souls
moving their feet our way -- I saw them move,
though they seemed still, so slowly did they come.

"Teacher," said I, "look there, lift up your eyes!
If you can't find the way up by yourself,
here are some people who can well advise."
So he looked up, and with a freer brow
replied, "Their steps are easy, that's our way!
And my sweet son, you keep your hope strong, now."
After we'd walked a thousand strides I say
those people even then were still as far
as a good stone's throw from a hurler's hand,
When they all pressed back tight against the hard
masses of cliff, and stood erect and still,
as those who walk in doubt, and look, will stand.
"O chosen souls, O you who ended well,"
Virgil began, "I beg you, by that peace
in Heaven which I believe awaits you all,
Tell us which way the rocks more gently rise
so that they may be possible to climb.
Loss of time brings small pleasure to the wise."
As little lambs step softly from the fold
by ones and twos and threes, while the rest stand
with huddling eyes and faces none too bold,
And what the first lamb tries the others try,
holding behind his back if he should stop,
quietly, simply, though they don't know why,
So did I see the first approaching now
from that most happy flock, of modest face
and in their movements honorably slow.
And when their foremost saw the sunlight fall
broken upon the earth on my right side,
casting my shadow on the rocky wall,
They halted and hunched back a little bit
and those behind them halted too, although
they couldn't tell why they were doing it.
"I can declare before you ask of him
that it's a human body which you see.
That's why the light upon the ground lies dim.
No longer gaze in wonder, but believe
that were it not for strength that comes from Heaven
he could not seek to overcome this cliff."
So said my Teacher, and those worthy folk
responded thus, motioning with their hands,

"Then turn about, and walk ahead of us." . . .

from Canto Five

"O soul who go your journey to be blessed
with the same limbs you had when you were born,"
they came and cried, "here pause a while and rest.
Look! Tell if you can bring back any news
of one of us you may have seen before.
Why must you go? Why can't you stop for us?
We all were sinners till our latest hour
and all in violent manner met the grave,
when light from heaven made us wise to see
Our sins, and we repented and forgave,
leaving our lives at last in peace with God,
who now torments our hearts with the desire
To see His face." "For all I'm studying you
I can't recall a one; but if you please,
O well-born spirits, what I can I'll do
Just as you say, and swear it by that peace
I seek behind his feet," said I -- "my guide
from world to other world beyond the tomb."
And one began, "All of us will confide
in your kind promises, we need no oath --
so long as inability does not cut
Your good will short. Alone then I come forth
before the rest to beg you, if you see
the land between Romagna and King Charles,
Oh go to Fano and for courtesy
plead my case, that my countrymen may pray
and help me purge away my heavy sins.
I was from Fano, but the deep-pierced holes
out of which welled my blood, the seat of life,
were forged for me in Antenora's bowels
Just where I thought myself the most secure.
That duke of Este did it in his wrath,
far past what reason asks for in revenge.
But if I'd fled towards Mira and shunned the path
to Oriaco where they overtook me,
I'd still be in the world with those who breathe.
Into the marsh I ran where reeds and mud

so snarled me that I fell, and there I watched
 as all my veins became a pond of blood."
 Another then: "Ah may that longing be
 fulfilled which pulls you up the lofty mountain,
 assist my longing by your piety!
 I was from Montefeltro, I'm Bonconte!
 My kin and widow take no care for me.
 That's why I walk so humbly in this file."
 And I: "What force or falling-out of war
 led you so far afield from Campaldino
 that no one saw your body anymore?"
 "Oh," he replied, "by Casentino's hills
 rushes a stream they call the Archiano,
 born in the Apennines above the Hermitage.
 Just where it empties and its name turns vain
 I arrived with an arrow in the throat,
 fleeing afoot and spattering the plain
 In blood. And there my sight and speech were gone;
 I ended with "Maria" on my lips
 and fell, and left my flesh to lie alone.
 It's truth I tell -- tell it to all alive!
 God's angel took me, and the one from hell
 hollered, "Hey you from Heaven, why deprive
 Me of his soul? He sheds one little tear
 and you bear his immortal part away!
 I'll have a different rule for this part here."
 You know well how the watery mists arise
 and gather in the cooling atmosphere
 till condensation makes it rain again.
 Well, that ill-will that ever seeks the wrong
 now joined with intellect and stirred the smoke
 and wind, by natural powers that make him strong,
 And all the valley from the Giant Yoke
 to Pratomagno, when the day was quenched,
 he cloaked in fog, and made the skies so thick
 That back to water turned the full-soaked air
 and the rain battered down in trench and ditch,
 filling them fuller than the earth could bear,
 And when it reached the rapids of the hills
 it crashed in ruin to the royal stream
 rushing so fast that nothing could restrain it.

There at its mouth my body stiff and cold
it found and swept into the Arno and
loosened the cross I made upon my chest,
Folding my arms when I was overcome;
then swirled me past the banks into the deep
till the flood's pillage pinned and buried me."
"Oh when you have returned into the world
and rested from the long and weary way,"
after the second soul another called,
"Kindly remember me; I am La Pia.
Siena made me once, and the Maremma
unmade me. How it happened he well knows
Who jewelled my hand when I became his spouse."

from Canto Ten

Reader, I want you not to lose the power
of your good resolution and intent,
hearing how God demands we pay the debt.
Don't dwell upon the form of punishment
but on what follows; think that at the worst
it cannot last beyond the day of Doom.
"Teacher," said I, "the things I see approaching,
they don't seem to be people -- who knows what?
I don't know, with the raving of my eyes!"
"Their heavy torment makes them crouch and squat
down to the earth so low, these eyes of mine,"
said he, "first had to tussle with my thought.
But fix your gaze and let your sight untwine
what comes our way beneath those stones, and soon
you will discover how they're pummeled here."
Weary, pathetic Christians in your pride,
your vision toddles in the intellect
while in your backward paces you confide,
Do you not see that we are only worms
born to form the angelic butterfly
which flits to justice free of its cocoon?
About what do your spirits crow so high,
defective insects all of you -- like grubs
falling short of their form's maturity?
Sometimes to prop a roof or ceiling up

you'll see the corbel sculpted like a man
bearing the weight, knees crushed against his chest,
Begetting agony in those who see --
what's not true makes you feel truly oppressed --
so I saw them, when I looked carefully.
According to the heaviness in fact
they were hunched more or less by what they bore,
and those who showed most patience in the act
Seemed to say through their tears, "I can no more."

from Canto Eleven

"Our Father, you who dwell in Heaven above,
not circumscribed by what you fashioned first
but dwelling there to show your greater love,
Let every creature praise your power and might
and praise your name, for it is right and just
to render thanks to your sweet Spirit's breath.
Let the peace of your kingdom come to us,
for should it not, with all our inborn powers
we never will attain it on our own.
And as your angels make a sacrifice
of their wills unto yours, singing Hosanna,
let us on earth make sacrifice of ours.
Give us this day our daily bread, the manna
without which he who struggles all the more
goes backwards through this bitter wilderness.
And as we pardon everyone from whom
we suffer evil, be kind to pardon us,
and never look upon what we deserve.
Put not our strength so easily cast down
to the test with the ancient adversary,
but free us from the one who goads us on.
Dear Lord, we do not make this final prayer
for ourselves here, for here there is no need,
but for the ones behind us yet to come."
And so those shades beseeching God to bless
themselves and us went forth beneath the weight --
as heavy as those which in men's dreams oppress --
Unequally in anguish round and round
and weary and faint along the lowest ring

purging away the dark mist of the world.
If for our good the spirits there pray still,
 what can be done or said for them on earth
 by those in grace, the root of man's good will?
Well ought we help them wash away the mars
 which stained them in the world, that, pure and light,
 they may depart and reach the wheeling stars . . .

from Canto Twelve

So we were climbing up the sacred stairs
 and the ascent seemed easier by far,
 lighter than when I'd walked the level ring,
And I said, "Teacher, as I climb I feel
 almost no strain! Tell me what heavy thing
 I've been relieved of now." "When every one,"
Responded he, "of the remaining P's
 upon your forehead, faint and nearly gone,
 is scrubbed away just as the first one is,
Your feet will be so conquered by good will,
 not only will they feel no strain -- they'll take
 delight in being driven up the hill."
Then I was like a man who's unaware
 of something on his head, and walks about
 puzzled to see the people point and stare,
So he employs his hand to clear the doubt,
 and seeks and finds and so he really "sees,"
 doing the vision's business -- so I too
Felt with my right hand's fingers and with ease
 found but six of the letters cut into
 my temples by the one who bears the keys --
And saw my guide was smiling at the view.

from Canto Fifteen

And in the ravishment of ecstasy
 there came to me the vision of a temple
 crowded with learned men, and I could see
A lady at the doorway in the mild
 pose of a gentle mother, saying, "Oh
 why have you treated us this way, my child?"

See how we've worried as we searched for you --
your father and I." And when the words were still
what had appeared now disappeared from view,
And, cheeks stained with the water grief will spill
when contempt for another gives it birth,
a second woman then appeared to say,
"If you are really lord of this great city
whose naming brought the gods themselves to strife,
where every field of knowledge shines in glory,
Avenge yourself on those hot-blooded arms
that dared embrace our girl, O Pisistratus!"
And, kind and mild, the lord appeared to me
As he responded, with his countenance calm:
"What shall we do with those who wish us ill
when even those who love us we condemn?"
Then I saw people in a blaze of wrath
brandishing stones to slaughter a young man,
over and over crying out, "Kill! Kill!"
And him I saw then crumpled to the ground
under the heavy death about to come,
his eyes like windows turned to Heaven still,
Praying to God, in strife of martyrdom,
with such a look as would set pity free,
to pardon those who persecuted him.

Canto Twenty-One

The natural thirst that never drinks its fill
unless it drinks the water asked as grace
by the girl of Samaria at the well,
Distressed me, stung me to increase my pace
on that clogged path behind my leader, smitten
with pity for the penance in that place,
When see! as in the gospel Luke has written
that Christ appeared to two men on the road
after he had arisen from the tomb,
A spirit appeared, approaching from behind
as we looked at the crowd before our feet,
nor did we notice him until he spoke,
"My brothers, may the peace of God be with you."
Then suddenly we turned, and Virgil made

a sign of greeting in reply, and said,
 "May that same heavenly Judgment ever true,
 which has bound me to lasting banishment,
 bring peace among the blessed saints to you."
 "What!" he said, lunging toward us for an instant.
 "Who's guided you along His mountain's stairs,
 if you're a shade whom God has deemed unworthy?"
 My Teacher: "Look upon the signs he bears,
 whose lines the angel at the gate engraves:
 you'll see he's one of the blest kingdom's heirs
 And shall dwell with the good. The Fate who weaves
 all day and night has not yet spun the line
 Clothos spools on the staff for every man.
 Thus for his soul -- sister to yours and mine --
 the climb, alone, was quite impossible,
 for his soul cannot see as we can see.
 Therefore out of the yawning throat of Hell
 I was drawn forth to show the way, and shall,
 as far as my instruction goes. But tell,
 If you know, why the mountain recently
 shivered so hard, and why they seemed to cry
 down to its sandy base beside the sea."
 He put that question through the needle's eye
 of my desire, and nearly eased my thirst
 with mere expectancy. Then said the other,
 "Everything on the mountain has its form
 and law divinely set: nothing can range,
 nothing can ever fall outside the norm.
 Purgatory is free of any change.
 No causes operate but those which flow
 from Heaven directly, when it's moved, or when
 It moves within itself. No rain, no snow,
 no hail or morning dew or ice can fall
 above the stairway of the three short steps;
 Clouds do not part, or gather for a squall;
 no lightning bolts or Iris in the skies
 flashing her bow from place to place on earth;
 No dry wind pent up underground can rise
 past the top step I have alluded to,
 where the vicar of Peter plants his soles.
 The earth might shake a bit or more, below;

yet despite all the wind the earth conceals,
 I don't know why, it never trembles here.
 But it does tremble when a spirit feels
 so cleansed, that he may rise or climb the hill,
 and the quake is accompanied by a shout.
 Our purging's proof rests solely in the will
 which, free to change its place and company,
 takes the soul by surprise, and brings delight
 To will the change. Before this, certainly
 we will -- but our desire will not allow,
 wishing that Justice deal us punishment
 As once we wished to sin. I only now
 felt my will free to find a better place,
 I who have lain five hundred years and more
 Here in this sorrow. That was why you felt
 the tremor of the earth, and heard the souls
 who pray all round the mountain praise the Lord
 That He might call them soon." The greater thirst,
 the greater joy to drink -- and, by this rule,
 I can't describe what good he did for me.
 "Now I perceive the net that binds your feet,"
 said my wise leader, "how you rip the snare,
 why the earth quakes, and why the crowds rejoice.
 Then be so kind, please, tell me who you were,
 and in your words give me to understand
 why all those centuries have found you here."
 "In the days when the high King helped the good
 Emperor Titus to avenge the holes
 through which the blood sold by Iscariot flowed,"
 Said he, "I lived there with a poet's name,
 the name most honorable, and long enduring.
 As yet I had no faith, for all my fame.
 The spirit of my melody was so sweet
 Rome called me from Toulouse to decorate
 my temples with the poet's myrtle crown.
 Statius the people call me to this day:
 I sang of Thebes, and of the great Achilles,
 but with the second burden fell midway.
 The brilliant seeds which set my love afire
 flashed from the divine flame which kindled me
 and lit the lamps of many a thousand more,

Of the Aeneid I mean: for all I am
of poet, it was my mamma, and my nurse.
Without it, all my work weighs not a dram.
And I'd consent to spend an extra year --
could I have lived on earth when Virgil lived --
suffering for my sins in exile here!"

And Virgil seemed to ask me, "Please, be still,"
turning a silent glance my way -- but man
cannot do everything by power of will,
For smiles and tears follow so swiftly from
the fountain of their passion, they will least
obey the will in those whose hearts are true.

I flashed the faintest glimmer of a smile,
at which the shade fell silent, and beheld
my eyes, the truest imprint of the soul,
And said, "Now be so good to tell me why --
may all your labor come to a good end --
you showed that little twinkle in the eye?"

Lighter of foot than when I scaled the first
fissures below, without the slightest strain
I followed the swift spirits up the mount,
When Virgil said, "If virtue kindles love,
it kindles love in the beloved too,
provided that love's flames can be observed.

Thus from the day when Juvenal descended
to dwell with us upon the rim of Hell
and your affection was made known to me,
My well-wishing for you was such as no
man ever felt for one he'd never seen.

Now the climb seems too short a way to go!
But tell me, and forgive me as a friend,
if I'm too bold and let the reins slip free,
and talk with me as friends will talk together,
How could greed find a harbor in your heart
amidst all of the wisdom you possessed
in the study and practice of your art?"

Staius was moved to smile at this request,
then answered, "All you say is dear to me,
all is a sign of love. To speak the truth,
Often a false suspicion's given by
externals, the appearance of a thing

whose actual explanation may well lie
Hidden beneath. You found me in that ring,
and so your question leads me to suppose
you believe I was avaricious in
That other life. But that was far from me;
know, my immoderate spending has required
thousands of months to pay the penalty.
Had I not turned my reasoning the right way,
pondering your verse that seems to shout in anger
against the nature of humanity,
'Why do you, holy hunger after gold,
not guide the appetites of mortal men,'
I'd be a jousting where the rocks are rolled.
Then I perceived that you can stretch your wings
too wide in spending, and repented it,
as I repented all my other sins.
How many men will rise with scalps bald-cropped
by ignorance, which steals your chance to turn
in life, and when your breath has nearly stopped!
And know that any fault that butts its horn
against the horn of an opposing sin,
withers its green in the same ring with it,
So if I happened to be settled in
one place with those who weep for avarice,
it was to purge away the opposite."
"Now when you sang the bloody war in Thebes,
the swords that brought Jocasta double grief,"
said the singer of the shepherds, "by the strings
Touched by the fingers of the Muse for you,
the faith seems not to have made you faithful yet,
and without faith, all that a man may do
Will not suffice. What candle, then, what sun
scattered the darkness that you might turn sail,
following the Fisherman?" "You were the one,"
Said he, "who first invited me to drink
of the springs in the grottoes on Parnassus;
and then you lit for me the way to God.
You did as one upon the road at night
who holds a torch that those behind may see,
though he himself's unaided by the light,

Saying, 'From Heaven descends a newborn son;
the morning of humanity returns,
and a new age of justice has begun.'
A poet you made me, and a Christian too.
That you may see more clearly what I draw,
I'll stretch my hand to paint it in for you.
The messengers of the eternal reign
had sown the seed already, and the true faith
had filled the world as of a field in grain,
And then those words of yours I've touched upon
echoed the new preachers so perfectly
I used to go to listen to them speak.
They seemed so holy when they came to me
that when Domitian tried to wipe them out
I wept to hear their cries of misery,
And while I lived and helped them, their just ways
so struck me that all other schools of thought
and laws of worship met with my dispraise.
And before, in my poetry, I'd brought
the Greeks to fight beside the streams of Thebes,
I was baptized a Christian; but I sought
To keep my faith a secret, for I feared.
Four centuries I circled the fourth ring
to atone for the pagan I appeared,
Lukewarm in love, and for so long a time . . ."

The Iliad

Homer, *The Iliad*, Book VI, lines 393-489

Finally Hektor's wife came running to meet him-
Andromakhe, daughter of Eetion, a great heart.
Eetion lived at the base of wooded Mount Plakos-
Thebes-at-Plakos-and ruled the Kilikian people.
Hektor, armored in bright bronze, had married this
daughter.

Now she faced him, their son with a handmaid alongside,
held close to her breast-the child was a baby.
400 Hektor loved him, this boy like beautiful star-shine.
Hektor called him Skamandrios; others, however,
Astuanax, for only Hektor 'guarded the city.'
Now he smiled and gazed at the baby in silence.

Andromakhe came up close to him crying,
taking his hand. She spoke his name and she told him,
"Strange power: your strength will undo you. Have you
no pity
now for your little child or hapless wife? And your widow
soon-for throngs of Akhaians will rush you and hack you
410 down. Surely it's far better if I could
sink in the ground than lose you. Nothing would ever
soothe me again-once you've gone to your own doom-
only mourning, I lack a father and queenly mother.
Godlike Akhilleus truly butchered my Father,
wrecking the Kilikes' town where people had lived well-
high-walled Thebes. Yes, he killed Eetion;
yet he failed to strip him: that troubled his great heart.
Rather, he burned the corpse in its gracefully crafted
armor, piled a grave, and around it Nymphs of the moun-
tains,

420 daughters of Aegis-carrying Zeus, planted some elm-trees.
All my seven brothers who'd lived in our great hall
went on the same day to the household of Aides,
faced and killed by the fast-footed, godlike Akhilleus,
tending their white sheep and hoof-dragging cattle.

Mother, who'd ruled at the base of forested Plakos,
now was taken to Troy with the rest of the war - wealth,
freed when he won a huge ransom. Then in her father's
hall she was gently killed by Artemis, the Archer.

430 "So, my Hektor. You're my honored mother and father.
You're my brother-you're my blossoming husband!
Pity us all, therefore: stay on the wall here.
Please don't orphan your child or widow your own wife.
Stand your forces close to the fig-tree, the rampart
sloping smoothly-the town's most open to onslaught
there. The best Akhaians have struck at it three times-
famed Idomeneus, the two named Aias with Atreus'
sons, and Tudeus' brave son trying to break through.
Maybe a knowing seer told them to strike there;
maybe their own spirits roused them and told them."

Then great Hektor answered, his helmet shining.
"Ah, my woman, I too care about all this.
Yet what shame among Trojan men and women in trailing
robes if I wrongly kept away from the fighting!
Nor would my heart let me. I've learned to be dar-
ing
always among our Trojans, battling up front,
earning a great name for myself and my Father.
"One thing I know well in my heart and my head too:
Troy on its holy heights one day will be laid low.
Priam will fall with Priam's men, good with their spear-
throws.

450 I don't care so much for the sorrows of later
Trojans, nor of Hekabe or Priam, our ruler,
nor of my many brothers, all of them brave men
falling in dust beneath their enemies' right hands.
You, though, seized by a bronze-coated Akhaian,

led away in tears from the days of your freedom . . .
Maybe you'll work the loom of a stranger in Argos,
fetching Messeis' water, maybe Hupereie's,
wholly unwilling. Their laid-on power will force you.
460 People may also say there, watching you shed tears,
'Hektor's woman! The man stood out among Trojans,
breakers of horses, in battles that circled the city.'
So they may talk. And so new pain will be on you,
lacking your man to fight off days of your bondage.
Let me die, though-let earth be piled up and hide me:
let me not hear you dragged into slavery crying."

Shining Hektor reached, as he spoke, for the baby.
Wailing, the child leaned back on the breast of his finely
belted nurse, amazed at the sight of his loving
father: the bronze helmet, crested with horse-hair,
470 shocked him-its topmost crown shook as he watched it.
Both his dear father and queenly mother were chuckling.
Shining Hektor promptly took off the helmet,
laid it down on the ground, the whole of it glowing.
Then he kissed his dear son and dandled him gently.
Praying to Zeus and the rest of the Gods he called out,
"Zeus and you other Gods, grant that my son here
stands out among Trojans, even as I have.
Make him bold and strong, a ruler in strong Troy.
Let men say, 'He's better by far than his father,'
480 coming home from a war. Let him carry the bloody
arms of a man he's killed and gladden the heart of
his mother."

Having spoken he placed the child in his dear wife's
arms. She held him close to her sweet-smelling bosom,
chuckling, crying. Her husband watched her and felt sad.
Stroking her hand, he spoke her name and he told her,
"Strange power: don't be heart-stricken too much.
No man sends me to Aides unless it's my portion.
No one ever escapes, I'm sure, from his own doom,
evil or good man, after he's born with that first mark."

Contributors' Notes

Lavonne J. Adams, the 1999 Persephone Poetry Book Publication Award recipient for *Everyday Still Life*, read as an emerging artist at the "Millennial Gathering of the Writers of the New South," Vanderbilt University, March 2000. Her poetry has appeared in *Karamu*, *New Delta Review*, *Baltimore Review*, etc. She teaches at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Jamie Anselmo graduated Summa Cum Laude from Providence College in December 2001. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and is currently pursuing a career in advertising. This is Jamie's second publication in *The Alembic*.

Chris Bevard is a twenty-seven year old student at Southeastern Louisiana University. His work has appeared in *Bonetree*, *Penny Dreadful*, and *Mindmares*, as well as the upcoming anthology *Tourniquet Heart*.

Livia Bleoca is a novelist, essayist, editor and translator living in Timisoara, Romania. She works for the Center for Transylvanian Studies in Cluj and is an editor of *Transylvanian Review*.

Charles Edward Brooks was born in North Carolina and took degrees at Guilford College and Duke University. Following his qualification as an actuary, he went on to attain a doctorate at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. In addition to translations, his literary output includes novels, novellas and especially short stories which have appeared (or are scheduled to appear) in magazines such as *Aim Magazine*, *Distillery*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Grasslands Review*, *Left Curve*, *Lynx Eye*, *The MacGruffin*, *Medicinal Purposes*, *Orange Willow Review*, *Owen Wister Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Pangolin Papers*, *Parting Gifts*, *RE:AL*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Wellspring*. He was a finalist in the Writers' Workshop International Fiction Contest (1998). He now divides the year between Zurich and a village in the mountains of northern Portugal.

Ryan Brown is a senior at Providence College. He hopes all the hours spent in Blackfriars Theatre will lead to something...Thanks to Erin Keller - his partner in all things creatively good. This is his first publication.

E.G. Burrows worked for many years in public broadcasting at the Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin before moving to Washington state. His books of poetry include *The Arctic Tern*, *Man Fishing*, *Kiva*, *The House of August*, and five chapbooks.

Elysia Cappellucci is a senior English major at Providence College. She is an editor of *The Alembic* and hopes not to be unemployed for too long after graduation.

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Brad Clompus is a freelance writer in the Boston area and teaches at the Arlington Center for the Arts. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Willow Springs*, *Passages North*, *The Journal*, *West Branch*, and *Tampa Review*, among other publications.

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Quinlan Corey is a junior at Providence College.

Chard deNiord is a professor at Providence College. He has published a book of poems, *Asleep in the Fire*, and received a Pushcart Prize in 1999.

Peter Desy is retired from the English Department of Ohio University and settled in northern California. Recent and forthcoming poems can be found in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Shenandoah*, *Quarterly West*, *Poetry International*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. He has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize.

N. Lee Dickinson is a graduate of the MFA program at the university of Texas at El Paso. Her poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Borderlands*, *Hurricane Alice*, *Descant*, and *The Blue Mesa Review*. She currently lives in Norman, Oklahoma. She teaches creative writing at Moore High School.

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Neal Ferreira is a senior Music major and Black Studies minor at Providence College. This is his second year of publication in *The Alembic*. He will be graduating happily unemployed, and he longs to find a paying career as a musician-poet-composer-actor sometime in the near future.

Jeff Friedman is the author of two previous collections of poetry, *Scattering the Ashes* (Carnegie Mellon University Press) and *The Record-Breaking Heat Wave* (BkMk Press- University of Missouri-Kansas City). His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, and *New England Review*. His third collection of poetry, *Taking Down the Angel*, will be published by Carnegie Mellon University Press in fall, 2002.

Angela Gagnon is a senior at Providence College.

Martin Galvin taught writing and literature in high schools and colleges in the Washington area for over 30 years. Recently he has published poems in *The Notre Dame Review*, *Orion*, *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Best American Poetry 1997*, among a score of other magazines. In January, he was selected to be one of the readers at the Library of Congress' Series, "Poetry at Noon."

Therese Halscheid has two books of poetry, *Power Talk* and, most recent, *Without Home*. Her writing has appeared in numerous magazines, including *Patterson Literary Review*, *the Midwest quarterly*, *White Pelican Review*, etc. Her poetry has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes, 2001 and 2002. She teaches creative writing workshops through NJ State Council of the Arts, Atlantic Cape Community College, and elsewhere.

Ducha Hang is a junior at Providence College.

Judith Hemschemeyer is a professor of English at the University of Central Florida. She has published four books of poetry, *I Remember the Room Was Filled with Light*, *Very Close and Very Slow*, *The Ride Home*, and *Certain Animals*, as well as fiction and translations.

Don Herzberg is a physician (radiologist) with a practice based in small hospitals in New Hampshire and Vermont, where he has lived for over twenty years. He has studied poetry and writing independently with Jeff Friedman, a poet in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Christina Illias-Zarifopol is an Associate Professor of Classical Studies and Slavic Languages and Literatures at Indiana University, where she received her Ph.D. She has written a study on the letters of Pliny the Younger as well as a textbook of ancient Greek.

Peter Johnson's new book *Miracles & Mortifications* received the 2001 James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. He teaches at Providence College.

Erin Keller is a senior English major/Theatre Arts minor at Providence College. She is inspired by many, including John Irving, Baz Lurhman, and Ryan Brown. This is her first publication.

James B. Kerr grew up on a small farm in the Philadelphia suburbs. A graduate of Temple University's MFA program, he works as a communicator for a Fortune 500 corporation. Kerr's fiction and poetry are forthcoming in *The Sewanee Review* and *The*

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Michelle Lettiero is a senior English major at Providence College. After graduation, she hopes to attain a Master's of Public Administration. This is her first publication.

Kelly Lock is an academic advisor and part time English instructor at Missouri Western State College in St. Joseph, Missouri. She has been published in *Salt River Review*, *Small Brushes*, *Chile Verde Review*, *Voices from the Outside*, and has a poem forthcoming in the *Alaska Quarterly Review*.

Khaled Mattawa is a poet and professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin.

Edward McCrorie has been a professor in the English Department at Providence College since 1964. He now lives in Rhode Island and New York with his wife, the psychoanalyst and infant researcher, Beatrice Beebe.

William Miller is an associate professor of English at York College in Pennsylvania. His poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in over one hundred journals, including *The Southern Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Tar River Review*, *The Amherst Review*, and *Westbranch*. He has also published a chapbook and three full-length collections of poetry.

Martin Ott is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles. His poetry and fiction have been published in *Borderlands*, *Connecticut Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review* and others.

Aaron Paolino is a senior biology major at Providence College. He is currently conducting marine research aboard the SSV *Westward* in the Caribbean through the Sea Education Association. He hopes to continue on to a career in marine behavioral ecology. This is his first appearance in *The Alembic*.

Jane Lunin Perel is a professor of English and teaches in the Women's Studies program at Providence College.

Marta Petreu's first book of poetry won the Romanian Writers' Union Prize for a first volume in 1981. She has issued five other collections, including *The Book of Anger* in 1997. In 2001, she was awarded a Hellman/Hammett Grant from Human Rights Watch for her role as "a solitary voice of reason in Romania today." She currently works as a Professor of Philosophy at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj.

John Philpott was a senior English major at Providence College. "We as human individuals cannot give up hope. I think the reason these men felt so trapped in despair is because of their lack of faith. The artist has to try, no matter how hard, to love their enemy, because it is up to the artist to save humanity. It is up to the artist to believe that the gift God has bestowed upon them can change people. Artists have to try to be patient with the ignorant, but in the same sense, realize that they do not need the material things ignoramuses boast about."

Stephen Sandy's latest volume of poems is *Black Box* (LSU Press, 1999); his long poem, *Surface Impressions*, will be published in April, 2002. His poems are forthcoming in *Paris*, *St. Anne's*, and *Southwest Reviews*; an

Jennifer Sargent received her bachelor degree in biology from St. Anselm's College in New Hampshire and later received her Master of Fine Arts degree from Emerson College in Boston.

Edgar Silex is the author of two volumes of poetry. He teaches at St. Mary's College of Maryland, and has received fellowships from the national Endowment of the Arts and the Maryland State Arts Council. His most recent poems appear in *Rattle*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The New American Poets: A Breadloaf Anthology*, and *Weavings 2000: A Maryland Millennial Anthology*.

Adam J. Sorkin has published fifteen books of translation. He has won the International Quarterly Crossing Boundaries Translation Award, the Kenneth Rexroth Memorial Translation Prize, and other honors. He has been nominated twice for Pushcart Prize volumes.

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Rawdon Tomlinson's most recent book, *Deep Red*, won the 1996 Colorado Book Award for poetry. He teaches English at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton Colorado, and lives in Denver with his wife and three daughters.

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