EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY:
Writing From The Jenny McKean Moore Workshops
At George Washington University

Edited by
David McAleavey

With an Afterword by
Gloria Naylor
to Faye Moskowitz,
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
of the Jenny McKeen Moore Fund for Writers

and to all the workshop participants
both members and teachers
Director's Note

With this volume, both the GW Washington Studies series and its sponsor, the Center for Washington Area Studies, enter a new stage. The series and the Center were both inaugurated by Roderick French and sustained by George Washington University's Division of Experimental Programs, which he headed from 1977 to 1984. With French's appointment as the University's Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Division of Experimental Programs has been eliminated, the Center transferred to the School of Public and International Affairs, and the editorship of this series passed into my hands.

The publication of a book of work by Washingtonians not focused exclusively on Washington might appear to signal one further break in whatever traditions the Center has established over the past few years. In fact, such a volume sustains our longterm goal to enhance knowledge of the indigenous as compared to the federal nature of the capital city and its regional context. The Jenny McKean Moore workshop which brought these contributors together was, like the Center, sponsored by the Division of Experimental Programs and entirely supportive of local writers. The publication of these contributions serves both as an affirmation of that sense of community generated through the workshops which David McAleavey describes in his introduction and as part of our commitment to provide a historical record of Washington writing. The Center's semiannual publication, Washington Works, provides a running commentary on individual works of fiction and on trends among Washington poets. Most recently, we have begun planning an archiving project to collect the work of local writers in George Washington's Gelman Library. This volume, then, establishes a new and yet logical link between the Center's past and future roles in advancing an appreciation for the life of the Washington region.

Howard Gillette, Jr.
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Preface

In her will the late Jenny McKeen Moore created a fund whose purpose would be to assist writers. The trustees of that fund established, with the Department of English and the Division of Experimental Programs at The George Washington University, an on-going program which brings a prominent writer to Washington each year to teach one university class and one free community creative writing workshop per semester. Since this program began in 1976, the visiting writer-teachers have been Marilyn Hacker (poetry), Susan Shreve (fiction), Amiri Baraka (poetry, fiction, and drama), Blanche Boyd (fiction), Carol Muske (poetry), Peter Meinke (poetry and fiction), Lucille Clifton (poetry and children’s literature), and Gloria Naylor (fiction). Julia Alvarez (poetry and prose memoir) will be in residence during 1984–85.

The goal of the free community workshops at George Washington University has always been to make college-type creative writing courses available to those who otherwise would be unable to have them, whether through lack of funds or previous education, or through age, or for any other reason. While successfully pursuing this goal, the workshops have become, over the years, a prominent focus for writing talent in the Washington area. More than 1000 writers have sought admission to the workshops; more than 200 have participated in them.

This anthology represents, in a highly selective way, that enormous interest in the writing of literature. Here are both fiction and poetry; the work of urbanites, suburbanites, and country dwellers; the work of blacks and whites, of young writers and of retirees, of “amateurs” and “professionals,” of a city manager and a former nurse.

Throughout the wide range of styles and subjects is quality: these pieces succeed. They use powerful material cleanly and efficiently. Class, race, economic factors, relations between the sexes, the intersection of private personality and public society, literature as a form of metaphysical knowledge, even the workshop experience itself—all these subjects can be found. Most of these writers, of course, operate on several levels, with multiple concerns. Witness, testimony—whatever: evidence, in any case, of our community’s imagination today.

Unfortunately most of the material submitted for inclusion in this anthology had to be winnowed out; indeed, only 30 workshop participants are represented, and many submissions were set aside. The editing of this anthology was done during the 1983–84 academic year, and so no members of Gloria Naylor’s workshop have been included. Instead, this anthology represents work from only the first seven years of the program. Gloria Naylor herself, however, has contributed an afterword which discusses the community workshops from the teacher’s perspective. I have contributed a different sort of essay on the general theme of writing in Washington, which is an attempt to answer the often-posed question as to whether or not we have a “Washington School.” That essay may be most useful to readers of this monograph series who are accustomed to seeing in this format essays which are studies of Washington, rather than poems and stories, if I may put it this way, by Washington. Readers new to this monograph series, on the other hand, who are interested in this volume primarily as a presentation of Washington writing, may find my essay useful as a statement of what one person sees as the difficulties which face writers seeking a sense of community in Washington. Once we understand our mutual problems, we may find practical solutions for them.

In terms of its literary contents, however, what can be hoped for from this anthology? Besides providing that authentic literary experience which involves, for the reader, both contact and growth—which any serious book should aspire to produce—this anthology seeks to do several relatively practical things. A major goal is to record what writers of the Washington area really are producing, and for that reason we have included a number of works in this anthology which were written after, not during the workshop sessions. Another goal is to stimulate even keener competition among
writers, to encourage even better, more astonishing writing. Yet another goal is to encourage more writers to participate in the Jenny McKean Moore program—not for the sake of the program, but for the concrete good that can come to writers as a result of their participation: comments on manuscripts which might lead to improvement; elevation of ambitions; formation of long-lasting friendships among writers; and not least of all, practical gain, through the location of contacts, agents, and even publishers. As one participant, Patricia L. Walsh, wrote,

_I will always be grateful for the opportunity to attend the workshop, especially under the tutelage of Blanche Boyd. She is a dedicated and unselfish instructor who fulfills every dream Jenny McKean Moore could have had about the work-shops. It didn't matter at all to Blanche that I had absolutely no formal background in English or writing. She knew how to deal with each of us on our own level and did so quite successfully in my case. My manuscript, Forever Sad the Hearts, was already written when I attended the workshops, but Blanche put me in touch with people who were instrumental in getting it published. Thank you for the fine work you are doing, and I hope many more people like me will be given the opportunity to develop a career in writing. I am already well into a second novel which will be published sometime next year._

We invite you to enjoy this anthology. Your appreciation for the Washington literary scene cannot help but grow.

D.McA.
Devil's Game:
The Washington School of Writing
DAVID MCALEAVEY

What sort of writing community is there in the Washington area? Is there a "scene?" Is there a Washington School of writing? What community does this anthology give evidence of? To tackle such questions, we need to be aware that they reflect a number of tacit assumptions about literary and cultural progress, assumptions we should try to discuss.

Let us say we first have swept through the history of consciousness and scanned the development of literature since 1800, and then eased down towards our nest, a peak late in the 20th century, situated in Washington. From that sweep and that scan we will have observed that no longer are writers sponsored producers of texts immediately acquired by patrons; no, the tribal ur-functions of literature are now served even more mysteriously: writers write, and a few are found—some sooner, some later in their lives—to have produced important work. Those few are rewarded, sometimes intelligently, sometimes generously, by editors, grant-givers, and book-buyers. Many are called, few chosen has to be the cruel maxim by which writers live; since financial security cannot be, the motive for writing has to be that the writer feels compelled from inside. The writer must write, it is his identity, his call, and if he is rewarded, so be it.

Since few members of modern society believe in the rule of Destiny, however, most writers try to tip things in their own favor. So Ezra Pound, back in 1912, recognized that he could promote some of his friends to Harriet Monroe at Poetry, and to her readers, as the protagonists of a movement called "Imagisme." According to the critic Hugh Kenner, Pound confessed, in 1915, that "the whole affair was started not very seriously chiefly to get H. D.'s five poems a hearing without its being necessary for her to publish a whole book." In letters to Monroe, Pound calls his own poems "Imagiste," and forwards work by Richard Aldington despite its now-obvious stylistic and qualitative difference from the work of H. D. and himself.

The history of the avant-garde is filled with ephemeral movements, each trying desperately and shrilly to unseat its predecessors and beat out its competitors in order to plant itself, its own concerns and its own members, at the center of culture, as if saying, "Artists are prophets? Well then, here we are, prophesying what will come: a future which includes my friends and myself as founding fathers." Artists in all the arts are becoming their own promoters. Thus, André Breton and a Surrealist friend took a table into a Parisian movie house in the 1920's, set it up in front of the screen, laid out their food, and enjoyed their lunch, complete with wine and loud literary argument—during the (silent) movie! The flamboyant self-promotion of a Breton or a Warhol or a Maller is not an exception to a norm; such flamboyance merely dramatizes the situation all artists and all writers find themselves in, of having to escape being drowned out by their competitors. The fear is not so much of being rebuffed by established critics, as it is of never being heard.

Virginia Woolf complains, at the end of The Common Reader, that since no critic now has enough authority or credibility to be trusted with literary evaluation, each writer or reader is forced to examine the masterworks of the past for himself, form his own judgments, and guide himself. The great literature of the century has not turned out to be as tentative as she feared it would as a consequence necessarily be, yet she was noticing something crucial. No single literary school has affected patterns of reading and writing to the degree that, say, economic and educational realities have. The greatest mass of writing is, after all, mercantile and not artistic, written for a middle class fascinated by how-to books, with recreational interests in fantasy, "scientific" fictions, and romance. The less literate audience simply watches TV.
These reflections are prompted by the need to explain why we might want to find a Washington School of writing, or why people have wanted to identify a New York School, or a Beat School. Not only artists, but curators and editors could be said to try to fix it so they will have a chance to be swept into history. Even scholars, though it is no surprise, pursue fashions; and English teachers, attempting the difficult task of showing students what literature really feels like, pursue any system at all. To find the Washington School (or the Portland School, or the Mid-Atlantic Regional School), would reduce chaos. Locating a movement might give us the hope that there is an avant-garde, that culture is headed someplace.

In this context, then, could we say there is a Washington School of writing? Clearly it can’t be the same as all works which are set in the city of Washington, D.C. That is too mechanical a definition. It can’t be focused only on national politics. That is too narrow, too specialized an interest. It can’t be composed of all writers born or educated in Washington. That is too broad a definition. It might involve, if it existed, shared style, shared subject, shared orientation. If the movement resembled characteristic avant-garde movements, there would be rapid developments in style and substance as writers and other artists collaborated and quarreled.

There is, as it happens, a current, legitimately avant-garde movement in poetry, now led by the so-called “Language Poets.” These writers, however, are spread all over the country, in New York, San Francisco—and even Washington. Nowadays, of course, writers do not need to be in walking distance to stimulate one another, even though avant-garde movements can probably only begin in a particular location.

There are, however, other types of “movements.” Over the last two or three decades feminist, Afro-American, gay, and Hispanic-American groups, among others, have formed distinctive audiences, and those audiences are now being spoken to by new voices which have never been heard before. Everyone interested in literature as the expression of peoples and “manners” as well as of individuals should be invigorated by these developments, even though some of us may, as it happens, be unable to participate directly, and even though easy assumptions about a national identity or a national literature must be shaken up by this new Babel of our increasingly liberated pluralism.

Another type of “movement” is the regionalization of literature. For whatever reason, most poets and fiction writers of Appalachia seem to share more with one another than either group shares with the poets or the fiction writers of the large Eastern cities. Likewise, many Southern writers celebrate and defend the traditions of their region. Many California writers, far from the commercial contacts, lunches, and cocktail parties of New York publishing, form separate alliances and base their esthetics on “counter-cultural” axioms.

It is therefore relevant to inquire whether Washington has such a regional literary identity, and to wonder whether its identity derives from its indigenous community, which is economically and racially heterogeneous, or from the apparent uprootedness of its transplanted populations, or from the frequent changes in federal government. Almost instantly, however, some basic questions and contentions will arise before these inquiries could get under way. For instance, it could be argued that a city which serves as a federal capital cannot sustain an identity of its own.

It could also be argued that Washington cannot offer artists and writers enough opportunity, and so will never develop a regional or local literary identity. For instance, in a city without the variety of ethnic and working-class neighborhoods more typical of industrial urban centers, young artists have difficulty finding the cheap housing and congenial jobs they need while they develop their craft. Washington is neither Paris of the 1920’s nor San Francisco of the 1950’s. Furthermore, there are few literary magazines or book publishers in Washington, and the city’s main newspaper disdains to emphasize local writers, choosing to see itself as a “national” journal, at least when it treats literature.
It could even be argued that Washington has no recognizable literary identity because local competition is discouraged by the ritzy connoisseurship practiced by well-to-do consumers of culture here. The Lansburgh cultural center and the Writer's Center, like the community workshops of the Jenny McKeen Moore Visiting Lecture-ship program, are self-conscious efforts which are succeeding because they do at least help would-be or not-yet-successful artists and writers to communicate with one another. But more such umbrella organizations, no matter how helpful, would probably not create in Washington a climate truly conducive to the creation of The New, given the inclination of money and power here to provide such institutions for themselves as the Kennedy Center and the National Gallery.

The "national" scope of these institutions is in a way precisely the problem, for, laudable as those institutions are, they regularize the tendency in Washington to support merely already-honored successes. The national-scale institutions do not attract or help train sufficiently large pyramids of talent: few actors who appear at the Kennedy Center honed their skills in off-Kennedy Center productions, or in off-off Kennedy Center productions. Instead, performers are brought in who acquired their skills and national prestige elsewhere, a fact which tells the young talent of Washing-ton that it must move away to succeed. Will the recent decision to establish a resident repertory theatrical company at the Kennedy Center remedy this situation? We can hope so; in any case, it is an example of what must be done if the local arts are ever to become truly vital. Of course, Arena Stage, the Folger Theater Group, The Source, and other ventures do impressive work. I'm not primarily objecting to what is being achieved, only arguing that even more needs to be attempted.

But these contentious arguments do not prove that the Washington region has no literary cohesiveness. A more level-headed approach to a discussion of local writing would first try to describe it.

For background, we might wish to turn to a literary history of the region. Unfortunately, there is nothing adequate, although a person who wished to write that history would find a lot to study. Several people have been accumulating and preserving relevant data. Richard Peabody, in his magazine Gargoyle and especially in his D.C. Magazines: A Literary Retrospective (Paycock Press, 1981), is one of the most devoted students. The first of a projected series, D.C. Magazines excerpts from work published in three Washington literary magazines, Voyages, Portfolio, and Dryad, between 1945 and 1978. The included interviews and appendices help document a complex local literary life.

There are many writers who have comparable interests in recording local literary activity: Alan Austin's Black Box magazine-on-tape is now preparing its second cassette issue of Washington poets. A dozen anthologies have been published in the past ten years documenting various segments of the contemporary writing scene. Interest in Washington's black heritage produced a symposium specifically on black writing in Washington held at the Folger Library, featuring Sterling Brown, May Miller, and E. Ethelbert Miller, who has been independently collecting information about a number of Washington writers. The D.C. Commission on the Arts and the Humanities has recently sponsored its second annual "Larry Neal Writers' Conference," which provides a forum for discussion of local writing.

But lacking a history of Washington literary life, we should examine Washington writing as best we can, as it can be found now, and as it is represented specifically in this anthology. This is the peak we nestle on, and which we should explore, even if we must explore it impressionistically without either guidebook or map.

It is my thesis that, while there are many aspects of community in Washington, there is no Washington School of writing. There is no distinctive avant-garde move-ment originating here. Nor, despite the fact that the Washington area has a number of excellent writers, is there any sizable "school" imitating or following the example of any particular author. That goes for the well-known novelists and poets not currently
established at universities, such as Herman Wouk, Les Whitten, Larry McMurtry, Sterling Brown, Linda Pastan, and Brad Leithauser, as well as the many writers who do have university appointments.

This anthology in a way substantiates these comments, for it includes many approaches, and, even though these writers participated in the writing workshops at George Washington University, there is no evidence here of common stylistic traits or shared subject matter or authorial stance.

In other respects, too, this anthology is of a piece with the local writing scene, for, as is generally the case in Washington, there is almost no experimental formalistic writing included. Retallack’s work may be the exception.

A number of writers represented, perhaps in order to demonstrate how they would reject any coercion or domination, rely on techniques of irony to create sometimes wistful Pierrot-esque effects. Walthall, Brucker, Stroblas, and Cotts are among this group, reminding the reader of the invincible separateness each individual endures.

Some writers here, on the other hand, attempt to move us by being relentlessly or recklessly or abandonedly personal: Wohlfeld, Gordon, and Thackery are examples. Theirs are kinds of confessional writing which focus on intimate subjects, possibly based on the writer’s autobiography, possibly “merely” created from the imagination.

Other writers have committed themselves to subjects beyond or outside the self, exemplifying what Keats called “negative capability,” the ability to empathize with the subject of one’s focus: Bolz, Schinto, and Walsh, among others, seem to me good examples, while Estaver, Wood, Soley and others try to balance confessionalizing and objectifying impulses.

Walsh’s work also indicates another possible goal for a writer, namely, to induce political and social change. Alston and Gibbs try the same thing—but probably, since no writing can escape being “political” to some degree, many other pieces here will seem to some readers to argue for change.

* * *

This anthology represents the diversity of seven years’ worth of free community workshops. Because it is a diversity which we at George Washington University working with the Jenny McKean Moore Fund for Writers have continued to support, I have titled these remarks “Devil’s Game”; writing in Washington is a devil’s game, played with contradictory goals: diversity is gratifying, but greater sharing, more interaction, would be even more gratifying.

We select Jenny McKean Moore lecturers in part to help segments of the community bring themselves into greater creative expression. In this effort we have always been eager to encourage new voices and visions of society different from those already comfortably accepted.

In fact, nearly every literary program in the area tries to enhance variety: the readings at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, and also at the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Library of Congress, stress a rounded view of literary accomplishment, though admittedly the last two institutions have always been most eager to reward established and famous writers, or even traditional and conservative ones. The Washington Post, even though it de-emphasizes local art, tries to review all types of work for nearly every book-buying audience. This is what is happening: literary organizations in Washington try very hard to be fair. As with the federal government, at least in principle, moderation and balance of various interests characterize this area’s approach to literature. Instead of encouraging some particular movement, the institutions of the local writing scene look for fair representation. Instead of developing one school, they try to listen to all schools. In a funny sense, it is no wonder that there is no Washington School; writers and writers’ groups resist all schools, one after the other.
But while this encourages diversity (or, to put it cynically, discourages idiosyncrasy), the contradictory goal we might follow would be to forge such a dynamic scene here, prompted by an enthusiastically over-arching sense of community, that it would spur all local writers to step forward more, interact more energetically with one another, and stimulate each other to produce more advanced, more challenging, writing.

The problem is partly one of tone. Literature takes exception to the world it finds, but in Washington, the business of governance threatens to dominate the more fragmentary voices of those who are trying to articulate their private visions. Too many writers work on their own, without bothering to investigate or stimulate the local scene around them. (The Jenny McKeen Moore free community workshops have flushed quite a few out, but they cannot have reached everyone!) Mostly, I would judge, many advanced writers must believe that local contact would be too unrewarding, too time-consuming. But the effect on younger writers, as well as on the natural readership of literature, is to suggest that the rewards of literature, at least the local rewards, are not great enough. Apathy on the part of local writers will tend to choke future writing and limit every writer’s achievements.

Probably it is time for the local universities to step forward more energetically. Greater university support for writing could help create the kind of ideal community in which excellence is honored and simultaneously created by the pen-to-pen competition of writers from all over the area who believe that the rewards are large enough to merit their best efforts. The chief reward, now as always, is simply that of being heard.

What Washington needs, really, is more ways to make writing public, more ways to publish, more publications. It is hard to believe that no truly prominent, vigorous, and flexible literary quarterly is published in Washington, open to the best intellectual and literary commentary in the nation, and yet especially receptive to local writers. But a top-flight quarterly, with an editorial mission pertinent to local conditions, publishing poetry, fiction, and essays from around the country, might germinate that greater sense of community which would make it possible to answer the question about the existence of a Washington School of writing in a very different way. As a matter of fact, several more publications would bring about emphatic changes; but in the meantime, those magazines which currently are published here need greater local support—the independent Gargoyle, the somewhat traditional Poet Lore, the purist and avant-garde Sun and Moon, the substantial if remote American Scholar, the art-oriented Washington Review, for examples.

This anthology is a step towards growth in the local writing scene: the first anthology publication of writing from the Jenny McKeen Moore community workshops. For at least one of these writers, this anthology marks the first time ever in print; for others, what is being printed here is being reprinted from acclaimed, published work. Whatever the variety of acclaim which its authors have already acquired, this book reflects our belief that writing in Washington deserves more attention. While it is true that for a sense of community to flourish, more of the actual writing done in Washington needs to be distributed to Washington, the main reason to publish these pieces is to share their pleasures with more readers.

Finally, then, this anthology begins to answer the needs for expression and community which have been demonstrated every year since 1976 here at George Washington in our free Jenny McKeen Moore writing workshops.
English lessons
for poor, black
and/or oppressed
peoples

GARY ALSTON

1. Sentences begin with capitalism.

2. Sentences express Inhuman thoughts.

3. Sentences make a statement,
tell something.

4. All sentences end, with a period.

5. Some examples of sentences are:

  5 to 15
  10 to 30
  15 to 45
  20 to life
An Observation

FLORENCE BARBERA

When I saw the man in the large green coat
sift through the trash can on Wisconsin Avenue
examining everything
and then lift the plastic straw to his lips
and suck
pulling on nothing really
I thought of how often people pull on nothing and how
the whole thing must be something
we can not let go of
something from long ago;
the need we had then to cling to our mother's breast
while she smiled
even when she had nothing
even when part of her wished
deep down
that we would go to our own bed.
Sometimes we are children
sometimes mothers
grasping at nothing
turning everything away.
The Lead Plates of Romm’s Printing House

Based on a Yiddish poem by Abraham Sutzkever.

HAROLD BLACK

In Vilno,
in sewers
and underground bunkers,
we are stretched
like fingers seeking light.
Hungry, thirsty, short of bullets,
dreamers become soldiers.
We must melt into bullets
the lead plates of the Talmud
stored in Romm’s Printing House.

A naked lamp,
shadows like panzers,
we melt holy letters.
A line from Babylon,
comments by Rashi,
mixed in a common vessel.

We are the ancient soldiers
who fought for Jerusalem
when the walls crumbled.
We hold the words in our heart.
Others will carry them on.
The Second Enemy
JODY BOLZ

I saw rats enter the garden. Then larger animals and wide-faced women who climbed onto my porch.

All of these made sounds as, streaming not too far away, water would.

But the danger was elsewhere—in someone who’d be glad to find the great house dark, its grounds demeaned;

someone who says when he sees me at the window:

You dreamed this.
I can never forgive you.
Signs
JODY BOLZ

Before you judge deaf people by their English,
ask yourself how well you would fare if you
were required to learn a foreign language
under comparable conditions.

from the introduction to Ameslan
by Lou Fant

You come here,
roses in your hair,
walk by me so fast and waving.

In the office everybody laughs.
What are you telling to them?

Do you think I will be sorry if
I leave my husband?
He always likes to go out
with some friends,
never to take me out.

I don’t feel much
feeling for him.
I told him I won’t
start a family
unless he changes his night life.
He said we have family first,
then he changes—better life.

I told him he thinks of
a child
more than wife.

If I stay
I think it will turn my mind.

I’m not sad really.
Just I am afraid to go to
the doctor when my leg swells.
I slept with it high like they told me.

No, my doctor doesn’t know signs.
Can I go to the doctor you
found out for me?
Monday morning is okay.
The park where all deaf
people work at a restaurant—
how far is it
to go there?
Is Manila a good place?

All the time I think
I would like to go back to
South Carolina, but
the jobs are better here.

I am confused when you ask
what I think is music.
I feel it like drums.

Does a dog listen to music?
I see the picture from RCA Victor.
What is the joke?

Can a woman be pregnant
after she have an abortion?
Not still pregnant but
pregnant again?

I don’t think we both will be apart.
Sometimes I wonder if any people
are always happy in marriage.
This weekend I think I will make him
to take me out—to test how
husband he is.

I don’t tell my mother.
She’s sick and worried—with
no room for me to stay:
I have four brothers, one sister,
and one dead.
The twin brother is retarded.
Do you think he could learn reading?

My mother says he speaks
not so good, but
he acts nice.

Thank you for making me
to see the mime.
I understand everything what
he acted about.
My favorite was “Bip Becomes a Soldier,”
which is funny but sad too.
And when he walked
to the back of the stage,
it seems he is smaller and smaller.
Like magic.

I can tell what you say if you
move your lips high.
Try it.

“I like your blouse.”
“This is my desk.”

Most people go too fast and
I don’t know all the words.

I can teach you signs for things.
You know the alphabet, but it’s too slow.
If you want, I’ll show you
new words every day.

I heard before about the article
you gave me on
gorilla learning signs.
Isn’t it so great!

When they show her that
she tore up a sponge and is naughty,
and ask her
“What is this?”
about the sponge,
she makes sign for “trouble.”

How will they put her back in the zoo?

When I look out the window
I’m watching the bird
come to that tree.
Can you see the little hole?

He’s tiny and can
fly inside so smooth,
without even his
wings touch the edge.

If the bird makes a song,
is it as beautiful?
Starlight, Star Bright

JODY BOLZ

Believe me, I wished everything that way. Why be starstruck by the wide dance, sky and entourage?

Only I was. I was.

Fortunes are what I no longer think in terms of, growing strangely fond of incapacities:

This is how I am.

What a relief to be tied here and here, to say without disappointment, I just can’t—

So tuck up the night as far as I’m concerned. No more rushing out at dusk to be the first one, no more straining to see pictures drawn with stars:

the skirt, the sash, the fan, the invisible hands.
Villanelle

PAUL BRUCKER

I have been lonely since God died.
Perspiration and inspiration flood my brain.
Why worry? Darkness is our guide.

I bang at the window. No one looks bonafide.
The lobsters are friendly; they come from Maine.
I have been lonely since God died.

I hear there’s better bowling on the other side.
I could go by elephant or biplane.
Why worry? Darkness is our guide.

At the picnic I feel 86% realistic inside.
The garbage is pretty and wrapped in cellophane.
I have been lonely since God died.

No one believes who I am though I’m certified.
I don’t need death and biographers to validate my pain.
Why worry? Darkness is our guide.

My eyes will adjust, truth will be bromide.
Good cheer, as always, will follow good champagne.
I have been lonely since God died.
Why worry? Darkness is our guide.
Aquarius

PAUL BRUCKER

Thanks Mercury and you too, Uranus
for giving me a pitcher of water,
along with an addiction to truth, to carry
until Pisces gets a nude shoeshine in 2600 A.D.
I'm always eager to work if there's a chance to do a job well
and redeem the past. The old seems very new
and I've either got to stare at stone with little lustre
or close my eyes real hard to achieve fame or altruism.
My face is classic from various small upsets.

Though people usually nap during my divine revelations,
I have every reason to feel optimistic: I am innocent.

I was in Akron when they built the flute factory.

I like to wear a crazy hat and pretend to be transcendent.

Solemnly I would photosynthesize your plants.

I see a light invisible to others.

I know the road, I used to teach history and math there.

I don't know where I'm going,

but I have a lot of water to drink when I get there.
For Jessie Who Froze to Death

MAXINE CLAIR

Winter's a hard core, Big Mamma, Jessie.
We've seen her snowflakes
stripping their lace, throwing their bodies down
with no grace;

yes, we know her.
Her winds that used to stroll and whistle idly
scour city corners, spoiling for a rumble;

she's a junkie, Jessie, her stuff's uncut,
she'll steal your life if you nod.

She wants to be your woman, loves a desperate man.
We placed our bets and dressed you for the wedding.
Naptime
MAXINE CLAIR

Take heart from the little ceremonies:
She sits in the middle of the high-up bed
clinging to discovery and crackers
and every afternoon something comes to pester her.
It approaches in stealth—she falls back
and wails, offended not afraid.
It stings her eyes, she mashes them
with soft, balled fists
and when tears won't cool the sting
she folds arm under arm and rolls
to force it from the bed;
it spreads further than she can reach.
She gathers what she can of it to her chest
holds it down with a fretting
that is mostly song; and she rocks,
satisfied that each minute delayed is gain.
As she reviews her strategy
the bars come down one eyelash at a time
and she flies away.
Lesson
CYNTHIA COTTS

This time I'll beat the computer, she thinks. Denise is in the sunroom, knee jiggling a mahogany chairleg, playing Othello. As the clouds part behind, her nose shines on the screen. Six, seven. Now she captures three discs, almost aware of her strategy, when a Yamaha brakes in the street.

Sam? she answers the last upbeat of his engine with shimmies, forgets the next pair of coordinates.
I'll convince the man yet, he's deciding, unsnapping his gloves.
Denise crawls over the couch out the window, boatneck unbarring a shoulder, as Sam hides behind bushes.
Izzat you? she calls out.

He makes birdcalls, backing into the cobbled street. She swings over the porch railing and lands in a nest of dry leaves. Mongrels bark as she chases Sam down the block, tries to jump on his back. Kneeling, he lets her tighten a grip on his neck, runs her past white-washed brick.

Be nonchalant, he remembers, don't let her know.
She's yelping Stop! so he lets her off on a stoop. She pulls down her sweater and shivers.
We're level.
You've got the advantage, he tells her, kissing her cheek.
Izzat a beard?
Eight hours on the road and no shave. How's the vineyard?
I have purple toes, because Dad made me squash grapes.
Can I see?
Let's go around back. She runs down a brick walk between ivy walls, unlatches the gate—wood swinging loose on its hinges. Sam catches it on the return, scallop with damp lichen edges. He loves this humid winter. But now his head hurts; he could drop in her lap. During mid-terms he reread her letters and tacked up her art. Crayons trailing vines, river views, the abandoned canal. If he could persuade her father, take her camping or back to school with him. Mr. Sonneman, she needs a big brother.

Denise likes what? Phones with long extension cords, whiskey and cigarette voices, down slippers, her mother's wall hangings—wood and natural fiber, except at the hair cutter's where neon, chrome and the shampoo boy tickling her scalp make her giggle. She knows they look when Ramón untangles her long mane to make plaits, a French twist. He stretches her earlobes, ruffles them like suede and pins them both down.

African girls have ears down to here, he explains.

* * *

Sam and Denise walk along the canal, pass a canoe with an inscription worn off the prow. We can float you downstream, Sam croons, a candle in each hand and tiny braids in your hair. You'll wear a buckskin dress with beaded seams and no hem, the cut edge hitting your calves, and straddle a basket of pears and pomegranates, bleeding nasturtium—as a gift to the city. They might not return you. For that, Denise gives him long kisses.

At the footbridge they watch a young boy climb the ramp, along the ledge outside the railing. His mother doesn't bother to look, only calls out to the wet dog galloping to catch up. Denise shrugs and says, she must trust him.
On the main drag, Sam searches the bins for an import and Dee eyes crumpled suede boots. Hungry, they stand in line.
I can't get along with my teachers, she tells him.
Double scoop of boysenberry and rum raisin, he orders.
They call on me all the wrong times. When I'm dreaming, doodling or writing lyrics.
Is there one class you like?
Intro to Programs. We have a hep teacher, Mr. Berman. He plays Europop and takes us to artshows. He says electronic art is the only form left.
How many times have I told you, there's no soul in that music. Rhythm needs another layer of feeling.
I get hypnotized by the beat. Denise takes her cone and licks the bottom scoop smooth.
You're getting addicted, Sam tells her.
To ice cream?
Electronics. Do computers make lace?
With graphics.
Real lace. The bustier you wore in the summer?
The one you untied?
Who made it?
Sean.
See, any software can do graphics, but your mother makes originals.
Who cares? She only wants to live at her colony.
Got to go where your heart says go...
Can we go now? I think Dad's waiting.

Darryl Sonneman is stretched out on the couch, in a stone house gray-yellow with age. He keeps Sean's truffles in corners: mallard decoys, straw hats and second-hand silks in the closet. (When the footbridge washed out one year, she was feeding bread to a swan, and it bit her.) Denise took the prints upstairs that used to hang over the mantel. Scenes of the market, tiny men with trained monkeys and rubber balls bouncing. Dee was six when Sean brought the prints home, pointing out words in Cyrillic and explaining why alphabets vary. Dee needs more things explained, but he doesn't know how. He reaches for a legal pad and begins writing.

Sean: I continue to miss you. The gardener has arranged a bowl of narcissus bulbs in the window, only the bottoms in dirt. Acuminate shoots have stuck out and begun to divide, and the gardener says they bloom in two weeks. Mornings the ground is often frozen. I dreamt last night the woods flooded where you used to run, sewer pipes unearthed and oaks fallen. You were directing refugees in a fisherman's jacket, distributing rafts. In full charge, as always.

Perhaps you would come back, at least for Denise. You may call it a breach, but remember: the mediator said bend to new situations. If you could talk to Denise. At her age, she should be more active, but she spends all her time with the headphones on playing computer games, or dressing up and going out dancing with boys whose intentions I have trouble discerning. She is alert, a bit edgy as if she has something planned. I would like to enroll her in a summer program at Talcott Mountain. She needs opportunities to exercise logic, and the program I mention offers hands-on experience with speech synthesizers and graphics tablets. I am aware of your resistance, but I need time to myself this summer, as the case is decided in August. Please call. All is forgiven.

Darryl hopes she can read his scrawl. The last time he wrote letters was when they first met. Sean worked in a gallery, a bony woman in culottes and cheekbones. Whose rum lips he found to be cracked, whose heart shrunk. She wanted to weave her own version.
Look, he told her, you're just courting demons. Come back.
Out there are no looms.
Then we'll buy one.

* * *

Today in a meadow, Sean treads a long mound, a property line from days when farming was in. She wades through a thicket towards a vaulted area of shade and mulch; and lies under loosely spun strands. The web is so wide it would fit on a loom. She looks closer: down the center a seam like the zigzag stitch on her Singer. Its placement intrigues her. Later on, she asks him about it.
Cayetano, with his sunken cheeks and dark eyes, registers all that goes by unnoticed. Hands on his knees, he talks slowly. Overlay is done by one spider, the golden orb weaver. Other spiders hang webs in the evening and destroy them at dawn, but that one has thicker silk, so his webs last all day. The seam's a detour for birds, a signal to change course. It saves butterflies, too.
So is the spider a hunter, designer, or both?
Each motive reinforces the other.

Like the Navajo, we use mountain sheep wool. Sean is teaching a class of beginners. First the wool is sheared, and then carded: pulled through a box of teeth so all the fibers lie straight. Then we twist fibers into one thread, winding it around the spindle, and keep the whorl spinning.
Is that how all yarn is made? asks an elderly woman.
Originally, yes. For the loom, you need verticals a slight distance apart, like tree trunks, stone walls, or two poles. The beams are lashed to the poles, and then linked to each other by warp threads. The warp is one strand wound up and down between the beams. It forms a neutral background for the weft.
Which is the weft?
The one you weave with. Now if I raise the warp with the heddle, I can lay several weft threads through the same warp sequence, to repeat a design. The color changes when I tie on a new weft thread—see all the knots at the back?
When do we weave? asks a young man.
Not yet. What I need are spinners.

In the city, they called her Missus, hands off. Sean remembers ordering filet in the market, her face flushed, driving gloves on the counter. In the backroom there were buckets and knives. Two lobsters fit in a box, claws twitching as ice fell between them. She drove his Accord until under the freeway a rock fell on the windshield. When Denise came home, she spent hours listening and measuring progress. The trouble began when Dee put on height and assurance; when Sean lost one child and interest. Darryl was embarrassed, unable to discuss the slipped bruise of empties—no matter how warm they slept under quilts, how much saki they drank.
When she left, the null feeling subsided. No mornings left behind with the paper, Business and Sports inside out and Dee's apple core in the sink. It had been too easy to drift, surface at parties and leave him alone, cry days and nights on a tether. Things he would never notice, done to get his attention off deadlines.
She talked to the cook and the maid, asked them to stay on without her. She wouldn't ask for support, only relief from Denise, was that much? Unruffled, he let her go. Denise went to day school and sassed, moved her cursor all over the screen. The flash and the beat kept her going, fingers on the keys, her own bones.
If Mr. Berman said Forget boys and get wired, she would.
Denise? What’s that you’re doing?
Shankin. A dance.
I see. Were you in school?
And why not?
I hear attendance is down for your generation, hmm? She looks sour at Dad. So what happened today?
Mr. Berman played a tape of new music and the laser did designs on the wall. Is he encouraging you to be a spectator? Darryl folds up his Journal, by turns stern and sarcastic.
No, we’re learning about frequency and tonal vibrations.
How many in the class?
Six. But I answer his questions. Okay? I’m going out with Sam tomorrow night. Have him over for lunch. Dee? Please be good.
Sure, Dad. It’s only dancing.
You'll watch out for slamdancers?
What you do when you see one is duck.
You’ve been to venues where they do that?
No, but Sam has. He told me about it.
I don’t want to know. Just be careful.
Okay. Denise kisses his brow, runs up the half-spiral stairs. Darryl pours one more on the rocks and shuffles briefs in a pile on the table. He works in a reticulate system, as complex as weaving, but with applications, external concerns. All Sean has among cockles and rocks is her stranded ideas. He can’t summon her back.

Cayetano is in a time of regression, like Sean. After leaving the art dealer, he joined this colony of exiles. For years he was coast-hopping in khakis, distinguishing imitations from Navajo weaves. He knew all the buyers. They invited him to their parties and asked him to finger the twill, show lazy lines. They wanted to know which dyes from what plant, and whether this rug predated the traders. And how was growing up on the land?
He was wise not to tell them, his parents had moved to a duplex and mall-shopped for hardware and clothes. That the old ways of understatement in public, the walking in an area to know it, the passing down of weaving techniques had all gone. That the weavers whose names they were hearing, the stars, were untied from the land. Whereas before, Indians wore the blankets and gave them to friends, now they’re made to be sold. Before every woman had a loom, and wove daily to work out her vision; but today only star weavers survived. They borrowed unnatural designs to make eye-dazzlers, hooks for the too-well-endowed. His patterns, monotonous for him steering the weft, grow atmospheric the longer he looks.

Cayetano gives Sean some advice. Every tribe has weavers, he tells her. but they won’t build accounts. One rug might sell for ten grand, but most weavers earn maybe a dollar an hour. It takes me as long to finish a rug as it did a century ago, Sean; so why are you weaving?
I need a tradition.
So I’ll teach you to analyze a design. But you’ll never repeat it. Cayetano wonders about her, gets angry, remembers how stubborn she is. Sean isn’t handing him checks; she has time. He suspects she has pockets crammed with an energy that ought to be out, eyes not used to the horizon. Can she concentrate on a defined field of vision, sort out color and shape? Or is she only escaping?
The next morning he dresses the part for her lesson. Bracelets of coral and silver, the buffalo pelt, swinging a bag of corn pollen on horsehair. They eat peaches together, juice gloss resisting every swipe at her chin.
Sam, guess what we learned in biology? You can tell if a woman is ovulating by looking at a smear of her mucus under the lens.
What? How can you tell?
It looks like a blossoming fern.

* * *

What fabrics do you use sewing? Cayetano asks Sean.
Velveteen, muslin.
And what did you sew?
Mostly skirts for my daughter, jumpsuits, a black dress for the opera.
There’s a past for you. Cayetano reaches into a tin of tobacco, sprinkles leaves thick on the crease. Did you sew a lot?
Mm. I was bored.
In our culture, a woman who spent too much time at the loom had to stop and make some kind of sacrifice.
Like what?
Like decorating her spindle with turquoise and feathers. But when a girl is born, the grandmother rubs spider web on her fingers, to be sure she never stops weaving.
Where’s your daughter—why isn’t she here?
She hates me.
You think so?
She has all she needs, with her father.
And no woman? Why don’t you go back?
I’m at home here.
No, you’re too closed off. If you go on looking down at the world they’ll replace you. Then you’ll never weave right.

At her loom, Sean shuttles the weft in a rage. She won’t do what he says. She left Darryl to sort out the voices inside, not to adopt a new bass line. In the city, old friends sneer from the vantage of networks. They gather abstractions that she never cared for, while she pieces an unconscious pattern to please, a warm garment.

Even in the islands, Sean isn’t remote. Closing her eyes, she can still see the pageant: two dudes on the train blowing bones, a model with her trouseau of polka dot silks, limos to carry the famous and dead. She sees a schoolboy running up marble steps, his bookbag flopping and knees red from exposure; and a man on the freeway arch over boathouse and charnel. Beneath the dark curly hair, he has worries. A servant of justice, no time for a sweeter pursuit, a man spurred.

As she opens her eyes, a thread breaks in the warp, and another. Astonished, she takes three steps back and slams the door to keep the wind out. Water lilies bloom in the rockpool, and slowly her careful design floats out and unravels.

Darryl is out of the shower, half-dressed doing push-ups. Maybe he’ll take Denise to Barbados for Christmas, let her run dark in the surf and sip rum. If for only a week, he’d relax. After that, he’ll work weekends researching his case, getting psyched. If the State allows a monopoly on electronic data, the idea of free information turns into a joke. Only one company’s subscribers will be in the know, one board reap all the profits. Then another repeat, more robber barons, three more generations on trust. Darryl thinks it’s all right to protect your children, but not at the country’s expense. Only fools would unfetter big business. More cracks in the bell.

He pulls on a cardigan sweater, picking off balls of lint. At two, he’ll watch the game, meet Lindsay tonight. Lindsay, a senior partner at the firm where he started, is still playing drums. He and Darryl meet at Lalibela, an Ethiopian restaurant where they flirt with the hostess. After days shuffling papers, Lindsay says he likes eating lamb with his hands.
After that, the Greek belly dancers. Darryl misses women, but he has no patience for courtship, too much pride for one-nighters. Looking for a stamp in his drawer, he hears a scraping noise from upstairs. Denise must be cleaning her room. He'll ask if she wants to go riding tomorrow. Lindsay has land in Virginia; and his son has it in for Denise.

Sean is on her way home. She asks Cayetano to realign the warp of her rug and let someone else use the loom.

What happened?
The warp seemed loose so last night I tightened the cord around the top beam. It was easier weaving with tension, but the warp snapped.
Are you upset?
I don't know. The development was off, like you said. I'm catching a train home in the morning.
Cayetano smiles, puts a hand on her shoulder. There's a woman in your city who gives lessons. She'll tell you where to find a loom and meet other weavers. Don't give up.
Thanks, she smiles back. I'll figure it out.

Silhouettes in the dark, two figures walking the beach at low tide.
Why not go back to the reservation?
I miss the desert, but the spirit's not there. In this culture you can't look back.
Here, take this.
She accepts a necklace of flat silver links, as rivulets of surf intersect, cancel out at their feet. Halfway up the dune, they trade tastes. His pungent as leather and smoke, hers tart as anise.

Denise and Sam tiptoe downstairs, meet Darryl making a sandwich.
Hi, Mister Sonneman, says Sam, switching his bomber jacket to the other arm to shake hands.
Hello, Sam. When'd you get back?
Yesterday.
Any speedtraps?
No, sir, in fact—
Watch out when you're driving Denise.
Look, she waves at them from the living room. I bought a new helmet. I'll keep it on when I'm dancing the mongo.
Darryl finds them a bit silly together. How's school?
I'm shooting in Super Eight now.
Oh, you are?
Dee would make a great actress.
No, I want to play keyboards. Dad, can I take lessons? Sam's friend teaches in Cleveland Park.
How's your pitch? Darryl asks.
She hears progressions, that's rare.
I want to play in a band.
Is there anything you don't want, Denise?
To grow up.
Can't blame you. But if you misbehave, you'll grow up more quickly. Dee rolls her eyes.
Mister Sonneman—Sam clears his throat—I was wondering if Dee could come up to school with me. She has a role in my film.
She can't skip classes.
It would be after Christmas.
So I can hear Sam’s band.
Now wait. Wouldn’t you rather go to the Caribbean?
For Christmas? Dee is uncontainable, hugging Dad with near-spherical breasts.
Fourteen, thinks Sam. Too effing young.

Sam and Denise are out playing Frisbee, and Darryl is reading a journal. When
the phone rings he answers, Yello.
Darryl? The voice, the straw-blond.
Where are you?
At the station. In town.
I tried to call, but they said the line’s disconnected.
A storm blew out the power.
When?
Thursday, why?
Are you coming home?

In the cab, Sean is wondering if she looks pale and wispy. What will he see, if at
all? At home, Darryl pours a small drink. He hopes she’s more mellow, projecting her
angst somewhere else.

As the cab speeds along the boulevard, the branches of oak on each side form
canopies overhead. The cab turns a corner and stops. Reaching into her pack, Sean
hands the African driver five. He was explaining Wealth and Poverty to her, but it
didn’t sink in. She opens the gate and walks up the path, knocks on the living room
window.
Darryl?
In the doorway they hug. Stroking her hair, he remembers how delicate she is,
how unlike Denise.
Here, he says, put your pack in the corner. I opened a Gewurztraminer, to
celebrate. No questions!
She’d forgotten how smooth he could be. She lets him sit her down on the couch,
pour the wine and unlace her boots.
It’s too sweet! she protests.
It’s all the rage on the coast.
And this music?
Gilberto Joao, on loan from Lindsay.

Denise and Sam are back in the sunroom looking at graphics. On the screen, one
doorsframe slides slinky-like into an infinite series.
Bitchin’, says Sam in awe.
Sean won’t let me wear leather, says Dee.
Sneak it out—
And she’ll wait up for me to come home.
Just play her by ear, he says, taking a bite on her arm.

Darryl and Sean go on in low voices, exchanging preliminary information, while
they get mildly lit on the wine. Now they’re laughing.
Hi, Mom.
Hey, you. They hug a bit stiffly. What’s up?
Nothin’ much. Remember Sam?
You play bass?
And you weave. Your rugs are funky.
Oh, thanks. Sean likes the rough look of Sam, easy swagger.
Denise has a new plan, explains Darryl, winking. She wants to learn keyboards
and play in a band.
Oh, yeah? Sean looks amused. Have you started?
Not yet, but there's a mini-Moog at school. I have a good ear.
And rhythm, adds Sam in the driest tone he can muster.
Sean looks around. So why not take lessons?
Yippee! Dee gives her a kiss and twirls around Sam. Darryl is scratching his head
at this mayhem. Now he can stop reading personals in the Review of Books and
composing his own.
Sean, let's go to Barbados for Christmas.
Love to, she answers. Darryl knows how to trick people into admissions, so he'll
try to pin Sean with a question:
How long will you stay here?
Until Dee has too many clothes?
I want a taffeta skirt, Dee demands.
I'll make you one, if you'll keep it.
I will.
I Want You
DIANE DE VAUL

I want you
like I want
a hundred blackbirds
to somersault
down a snow soft hill
with eyes crackling
tongue chattering,
white feathering
red and black,
to somersault me lightly
out of winter
into spring.

I want you
deep beneath
the city
in the raw tunnels dug
and hollowed out
to receive the thrust
of metro’s coming.
I want you there
on a warm spring night
in the underbelly
of the city
to have you
with the earth smells
the rough wood timbers
and the rumble of traffic overhead.

Hidden in a fold
of Montrose Park
blocked by
incessant pacing
of city streets
I want you
high
in a Tulip tree
raising your vision
with the fiber of your limbs
the sensuousness of your leaves
unafraid to flower
and litter the ground
with your seed.
The Parable of the Wise Frog

DIANE DE VAUL

There once was a wise frog who decided she was a princess in disguise. What she wanted was a real prince. She hopped from princeton to princeton. When she thought she found one, she would hang around, following in his footsteps (which made for some embarrassing moments) until she found him smellier or dirtier than a real prince. Then she'd start her journey again. And she found her prince, one who got better with time, not dingier. One day when he was sitting down, resting, she hopped into his lap, and before he could shoo her away, smacked him a great big, slippery kiss. And behold, the heavens opened, a ray of sun hit her slimy back, and she was indeed a beautiful princess. After a while though, the spell wore off, and she began to wonder if she were really a frog; merely reflected as a woman in the prince's eyes; instead of a beautiful woman who had hopped around as a frog for protection. For she was smart enough to see that maybe what she had found was not a real prince, but some insane frog lover, whose fantasy life was bound up in frog fetishes; and being a frog at heart, she couldn't sort out the truth. Being timid in some ways, she handled the problem by covering all the options. When she felt a crouch coming on, she would run for the prince, leap into his lap (even if she had to knock him down first) and smack him wetly on his lips. At first this strange ardor amused the prince, but quickly he came to resent it, and said it embarrassed him. Besides, everyone in his princeton was telling jokes about his princess. Then, one night in her sleep, she croaked out loud. Her prince listened to her nightmare and she thought he understood. But the next morning, he decided he needed to get away. The thought of his leaving, panicked her, and she started feeling the crouch coming on more and more often. The prince left soon after, and she found out, after many sleepless nights of terror, that her skin didn't go green and spotted. Her legs didn't fold up like a card table. She discovered she wasn't a princess either. There was grey in her hair when the prince came back, no longer a prince. And she found out she was still alone. She had to start all over, as now she knew nothing was as it had seemed.
How High the Moon

PAUL ESTAVER

I dreamt Virgil Waggoner
again last night
trying to kill himself with a trombone.
Fat Virgil
grey as an oyster—
all he had was blowing
and they told him it would
blow him away
but when the sweat
and the booze and smoke
under silver spots
burn your eyes
your breath and your beat
become the swinging
and you blow, man
you chop into that syncopated fluid
and your ax is
the glistening link between
the galaxies
and nothing matters—
not love
nor light
and sound is light
and light is blowing
and the beat is
your crippled heart
and dead is maybe
blowing across the galaxies.

Forget the mothers, dad—
wind up your bed like a pretzel
blow and try to die
because that would be dying, man—
to go out on the stand
and go off like a trick cigar...
Fat chance, Fat Virgil
what you did was pass out
on the seventh chorus of
Perdido—
but while it lasted
nobody could touch you.
When they carried you out
we hoped you were dead
with love
with the hoarse echoes
of your occlusion
ringing right down to
the cheeseburgers at Hank and Fan's
before they let the grille
cool down.
Mother-With-a-Gun
PAUL ESTAVER

(Mary Frances Muldoon, 1923-1953)

Death's easy for the dead:
they're still at last,
the clamorous tin cans
(tied to the bumper of one's honeymoon)
whose brutal tune
proved more durable
than Dancing in the Dark

But the ripped sheet-metal
of bodies left behind
will not be hammered out so easily
despite acetylene blue-tipped curettage
and junkyard parts
reassembled after supper
by dads and uncles and whatever
mechanical wizard tootles by
with Jesus in his toolbox.
Poetry Workshop
LILLIAN FRANKEL

O.K. READ YOUR POEM.

staring at the blank paper
white snow
scattering black letters
tumbling, tumbling
joining together
black birds
wings spread
on the snow white,
fly me a poem.

TAKE OUT THE WINGS SPREAD.
TAKE OUT THE BLACK BIRDS.

O.K. READ YOUR POEM

staring at the blank paper

TAKE THAT OUT. TAKE OUT TUMBLING LINE AND BLACKBIRDS.

O.K. READ YOUR POEM

white snow
scatter the black letters
joining together
on the snow white,
fly me a poem.

IT WOULD BE BETTER THIS WAY
WHITE SNOW
SCATTER BLACK LETTERS,
FLY ME A POEM.

O.K. READ YOUR POEM

white snow

TRY IT WITHOUT WHITE SNOW

scatter black letters,
fly me a poem.

HOW CAN YOU FLY A POEM? TAKE IT OUT
AND SCATTER BLACK LETTERS WITH IT.
O.K. READ YOUR POEM

.  

GREAT! BUT TAKE OUT THE COMMA.

O.K. NOW READ YOUR POEM.

.  

34
Alex's Memory
TOM GEORGE

Sunday morning ocean, running
toward the Second Tower, away
from the mosquitoes and their
hawks, into sea water home
of Men-of-War, sharks, manta
rays and sting rays. Paddling
through 7 foot waves could
crush your back or break spine
at the neck, slam you on sand
bars in 2 foot deep scum, suck
and bury you under 10 feet
of foamy washing machine soap,
until one didn't know which
way the surface light came,
what way to go up. Where are
you? You had nuts then, almost
drowning 3 times in one after
noon. Scars, purple on right
crotch, white in the left palm,
floating on a 6’2” hunk of fiberglass polyurethane, stood
straight in a 6 foot spitting
cave where MC² revolves quiet
and an exit curves before you.
More Hard Times For Niggers

C. JEANEAN GIBBS

Have you been listening...to your local...
radio station lately?...
Have you been checking out...the news on your
favorite channel...on T.V.?...
Don't you think it's amazing...the way the media
keeps fabricating...
These...long...rigamarole...stories?...

Now...the media knows...full well...
That...most of the time...
A lot of us...don't understand...
We don't know...what they're talking about...
But they will come up...with phrases like...
Mis-appropriation of funds...the budget crunch
The energy crisis...the economic slump...
They insist on using...all these brain-busters
and tongue twisters...
When all they really need to say...
Is..."MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS."

Have you been reading...the morning papers?
The Times? The Post?...Can't say which is worst
To me...they're like regular jigsaw puzzles...
full of riddles...
Especially...when you get to the finance section
Have you ever tried...to figure out...those charts
and diagrams?...
That they claim explain...the spiraling growth
of inflation?...
The Dow Jones Industrial...ups and downs?...
The New York exchange...stocks and bonds?...
Then you have...the oil embargos...wage...but
no price control...
Prime rates boosted...tax incentives...
Windfall profits...going to large businesses...
Well...what else is news? Isn't it obvious
that they're out to confuse?...
Using all these...brain-busters...and tongue-
twisters...
When in essence...what they mean...
Is...MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS

If you've been paying...any attention at all...
To your friendly neighborhood media...I know
you've had it...
Just listening...to local rhetoric...
The Government has defaulted...millions of dollars
deficit...
The Federal Reserve Board...has upped its lending...
Home mortgages declining...freeze on all hiring...
Plus there will be some firings...
Condominium conversion...mass exodus to suburban...
Court injunctions...but no equitable solution...
Now...we all know...that Mr. & Mrs. Average Joe Blow
don't know...
And ain't even...trying to deal...
With all these...off the wall...terminologies
Yet they will continue...bombarding our psyches
With a whole lot of...irrelevant...brain-busters
and tongue twisters
But regardless of how...they turn it...or twist it...
You don't have to be psychic...or be no sooth-sayer
If you really listen you will hear the media saying
over and over and over...

MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS!
MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS!
MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS!
MORE HARD TIMES FOR NIGGERS!

AND SOME WHITE FOLKS, TOO!
Flush out the Good Ones

BONNIE GORDON

I have always squirreled away things.
And have a need for china,
Packed and unpacked often as the need.
Bone china, wishbones, bones of
Contention.
"Sugarbones," he called me.

Fritz has vanished on me,
Flesh and bones.
Though I meant to bring him home.
He would deny my search,
Think I meant to get away alone.

"I'm Bavarian," denying all his teutony.
He'd say that once he knew a Jew
In Ingelstadt.

He gossips,
But I changed his life, he said,
And who denies such flattery?
I've always been obliging
To men who said I'd changed
Their lives.

When I wrote to him,
His house was gone. Torn down.
And I who owned the doorbell
Felt sick deep in my bones.
He would have chipped the wall away
So I could take it home.
And yet we couldn't save each other.
This one is special
I will find this one
If only to jump on his bones.
Lost Richard
BONNIE GORDON

When the baby fell, he was with me,
Sucking up the shock with wet air,
Gathering the tiny sweater full of bones
'Til it began to cry,
To be alive.
He was still and silent in calamity
And tall with straightened hair
While my taste runs to shorter men
Of deep complexion.
(Much later in my life I dream of
Pushing her beyond the little curl
Of trees, the stubble at the edge.
I am happily unburdened
But wake up chilled beneath the quilt.)

I love Richard for the day
He didn't save us,
But we were saved by Providence—
An old brown bough of pine.

He wrote once
And my mother tossed his letter
Thinking I was married to someone else
And shouldn't be interrupted.
A Childhood In Reno

BONNIE GORDON

At eight years old
She is very thin—
Though she eats a lot—
And realistic.
But I sometimes see
She wishes things were not so.

She does not expect to find gold
In the hills, but in the Truckee River,
Where wedding bands are dropped.
Learning to watch for little bursts
Of temper on the bridges
Or a very solemn turn of head.
She follows the tosses with her eyes
And has a fine collection—a fast car.
Postcard Of Vermeer's Girl Asleep

JUDITH HALL

Postcard Of Vermeer's Girl Asleep

Neither drunk nor in love, the girl
Sits behind a barrier of red folds,
Close to a dark distilling above her.
What does she think? Why penetrate
That mystery when through the scene
Sparks and flashes of edge freeze.

Yes, I'm well enough to write & admit
The pleasures of illness frighten me.
The paradox of a body collapsed and a
full mind widens as when I was a girl:
Sick, assuaged with television & tiny
Dolls asleep in quilted shadows. Now,
Among rituals of warm liquid, starlit
Shows, will I pass from virus to virus,
Seizures of dream, snuggling away from
A world more than dark and light, more
Than tidy rhythms that flirt and fade
And return; order is an easy addiction.
Chess Game
VERONICA JOHNSON

I locked my king of love
Into the castles of my mind,
And surrounded it with 8 pawns
To guard it at all times.

And my queen of passion
Was guarded by two knights,
Her bishops were all set
To defend the queen and fight.

I moved my men into the rank
And you countered on the file.
You observed my plan of attack
And I saw your subtle style.

I captured half your pawns
Thinking I was in control.
But you stole both my castles
And began aiming for my soul.

I conquered both your castles,
Just knew I was getting even.
One by one you won my pawns,
Your plan of attack, you were weaving.

You captured my queen of passion
After you defeated my knight.
But you handled her so gently
I knew I had lost this fight.

So

To you I surrender my king of love.
I am at your command.
My queen of passion is also yours,
Be gentle—I think you can.
Ninth Floor Reprise
CHRISTINA LLEWELLYN

(58 girls crowded into a cloakroom)

The glass blackens and shatters.
Who will come for us?

Up on Tenth, typists and bookkeepers leave
ledgers to ashes, machines to melt.
The packers and switchboard-lady gone
the phone cords and crate slats spurt
split into stars and meteors.

Up on Tenth, our finished shirtwaists unfold,
crack the crates, jump upright, join sleeves,
dance the Hora and Mazurka, spin like dreydls.
They call to us, their makers:
Stitcher, Presser, Cutter, Tucker.

"I saw them piled," testified Fireman Wohl,
"they pressed their faces toward a little window."
Sear
CHRISTINA LLEWELLYN

Always adding. Revising this manuscript.
I plant direct quotations on the page.
arranging line-breaks, versification.

Newspaper files: Frances Perkins speaks
from the street, I felt I must sear it
not only on my mind but on my heart
forever. One mother, When will it be
safe to earn our bread? Their words.
Yet some call that schmaltz, soap-opera-

Sentiment, victorian melodrama. Riding
the subway, smoke fizzes in my ears and
in my room, electric heater coils glow
Cs and Os in the box. To write about them
yet not interfere, although I’m told
a poet’s task is to create a little world.

A testimony: Two tried to stay together
on the ledge, but one suddenly twisted
and plunged, a burning bundle. The other
looked ahead, arms straight out, speaking
and shouting as if addressing an invisible
audience. She gestured an embrace then

Jumped. Her name was Celia
Weintraub. She lived on
Henry Street.
Late Bloomer

ERIC NELSON

Its great green arms embrace the window.
Even its motion seems born in stillness.
Behind my bird nervousness, hop and peck
in the hierarchy of order, it stands
full-bodied and patient, motherly
clucking its apron of leaves.

When it flares with the fires of October
I stare in astonishment at the proof
that dying is as beautiful as living.

Inside, I sense the stirrings
of a motion so sure of itself it feels
like the very roots of rest are taking hold.
Almost there, peacefully unaware,
I lose it in the chorus of crickets
yammering the long lesson of the tree.
How Water Made Light

ERIC NELSON

When I was old enough
I was allowed alone
in the rowboat moored to the dock.
I held a stick with string
in the water like the men did.
The line of houses on the river
stood like soldiers in white
uniforms trimmed green.

The river nudged the boat.
When I closed my eyes
it felt like something
was crawling in my stomach.
Just before it made me sick
I opened them, then closed.

I felt the flood rise
grandmother said crested
above the fireplace, how she
and grandfather got out
in the rowboat with Toby
yelping between them.

Everything they had was gone.
She said move to New Hope.
He'd be damned if he was going.
First thing he did was wire
the entire house for light.

I don't know why I loved
to sit by myself in a rowboat
tied bumping to a broken dock.
And how my grandfather
got the idea of light to keep
the river from his house,
only the river knows.
Three Views
ERIC NELSON

I count on imagination.  
The contours of a leaf  
are my grandmother's eyelids  
after the spell laid her down  
the last time, and a breeze  
off the river fluttered them,  
a hint of ice in its veins.

I expect the constant astonishment  
of beauty in disguise  
suddenly revealing itself,  
like the driver of a hearse  
who slows down to watch  
a flight of geese over the cemetery.

Apart from these there is  
another moment, more rare,  
a movement of the parallel,  
my self beside myself, watching,  
two eyes on the trappings of death  
and two on the point  
where worlds switch tracks  
and a grieving woman walks away  
from a stone with my name on it.
Dos and Don’ts

JOAN RETALLACK

In a word, you must choose between the position
of a philosopher and that of a mere outsider.
Epictetus

Never bring an umbrella on a boat.
Never allow an effect to precede its cause.
For a successful story employ
the following emotions:
happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, surprise,
fear from anger, sadness from disgust, fear
from surprise, surprise from happiness, feigned awe.
Do not speak of the ‘boneless’ tomato.
Likewise the ‘toothless’ banana.
Do not necessarily seek the better life, however
when jazz comes up the river
meet it at the end of the dock.
Remember predicates can be
unsupported, violated, exhausted.
Avoid, therefore, outbursts
of syntactic violence.
Never feel forced to conclude while yet
maintaining a respect for logic.
Do not be glib in your opinions, e.g.:
Beckett grew up in the suburbs; what can you expect?
Destroy a pet that persists in autophagia.
Do not, that is, fault biological conservatism
or only when it leads to world ruin.
Meet life with humor lest your head split in two.
Concerto for Violent Oboe and Strings

JOAN RETALLACK

Dusk breaks on the prow of this old Buick
carrying the sunset in its rear view mirror

speeding toward Source Perrier—
nature's own deep processes.

Here we are at Source Perrier.
There goes the torso of the Tsarina

in a light sleigh drawn by chestnut coursers.
Is this what's called a socio-realist drama?

My third grade teacher's handwriting
was fluid and round.

The trunk of the foreman
is found in a burnt-out Renault.

Electrons cruise their nuclei like flies
spiraling down a cool arboreal core

indent with shadows. Night is coming
with all its inestimable portent.

You try to focus on a primal word, like cleave.
You try to cleave to something as primal as focus.

The head fits like a cap on a spike.
"I lust." "I am lost." "I long."

The couple stands off-center, incidentally,
squinting to a single shaft of light.

Here they are at Source Perrier.
Flies cruise sweet rotten fruit

littering the foreground of this old picture.
Tonight he will come in his bent barracuda car,

pink corsage in a crisp white box,
fragile and exotic through the cellphane window.
Why Are There So Many Dead Porcupines on the Roads in Maine?

JOAN RETALLACK

Crossing the Tar River behind an Airstream
on the way to Florida, Bill has just made
contact with Ernie on the CB.
Tom is defending the "brute given."
Oliver, the dog, is sleeping on a blue and white blanket.
"I," the persona, am contemplating suicide again.

Diana is engrossed with the mind/body problem.
A wad of quiche is arrested mid-gut
as the tone of the conversation shifts.
It changes your feelings about Fall
when you own a tree.
In Nō, the mask is not put on the face;

the face is drawn into the mask.
Why are there so many dead porcupines
on the roads in Maine?
The typewriter sounds like a machine gun.
We look at the sky and see tired light.
The dog looks at my finger when I point to his ball.
Blood
JEANNE SCHINTO

From the edge of Earl's garage Phyllis watched Ted Lehnards arrive. Leaving his wife and child at the car, he hurried up the dirt hill. Phyllis did not hide her friendly disapproval. Mr. Lehnards's business with Earl was bound to take more than a minute. Phyllis waved and called yoo-hoo to say that the mother and daughter should come on up the hill, too, if they liked. It was cool in the shade of the garage.

But the young wife did not reply to Phyllis. She was busy pulling her daughter's dress off over her head. The two were having a difficult time. The child's arms were tangled, her head was snared, and her feet were working, stamping up the yellow dust.

Phyllis called again, come on, pretending that she didn't even notice the young mother's troubles, and this time the reply was a brief, frantic gesture to say that they had better stay below.

So Phyllis turned to greet Mr. Lehnards. He had brushed past her, as well as Earl and Ruth, on the way to his newly painted car. She was going to say hot one, isn't it? And getting hotter, summer hot—surprising them all: this was spring; but Mr. Lehnards evidently had no time for talk. He was making a slow, determined circle, tight-lipped, around the car.

Phyllis sidled up close to the sweep of Mr. Lehnards's path; she did not like to be ignored, and, large as she was, was not used to it. She considered herself, since he wouldn't: Earl had compelled her to grow her short hair, and she had complied. She fussed with it as the young Mr. Lehnards passed by her again.

She was glad Mr. Lehnards was so slight. Earl was a small man, too, though he was wearing a large man's workclothes. He looked as if he had recently shrunk. Sleeves half-covered his hands. An oblong smear of grease was sketched along his boyish cheek. His hands were filthy, but he brought a forefinger occasionally, breifly, to his mouth. Phyllis saw that it was bleeding.

Mr. Lehnards's long, girlish fingers smoothed across the red paint. They looked like fingers that never got dirty, that picked at his food, that counted his money several times over to see that the change was correct. Phyllis gave him a healthy grin when he came around to her side of the car again. She waited for him to smile back, and he did look up at her once, then went back to his chore of frowning at the work Earl had done on his car.

"Is that a smudge in between the lacquer layers?" he asked, twisting his nose with his knobby, white fist. Phyllis thought it looked as if he were trying to coax it into a neater, smaller shape.

"We use the best damn lacquer we can find, yessir," Earl said distractedly.

"It looks like a smudge," Mr. Lehnards said, stepping back on skinny legs. He looked at the car harder, squinting, as if his eyesight had grown suddenly poor, or the garage suddenly dim. "It looks like hell."

Phyllis wondered how someone could voluntarily spoil his own day, when he was free to ignore what he didn't like, and be happy, and Earl could be happy, too.

"Oh, it doesn't look so bad to me," Phyllis nudged Mr. Lehnards. "Does it look that bad to you?"

Mr. Lehnards searched the air above his head, as if he heard an annoying buzz, then moved closer to Earl. Earl had dropped to his back and shimmied himself underneath the car; in a muffled voice he was telling Mr. Lehnards about the rocker panels. His legs were sticking out and flailing, his voice cheerful as a salesman's, answering Mr. Lehnards's stern one.

Phyllis kept smiling. What was the sense of saying what you thought unless you were thinking nice things? She could always find the good in people, even if all she found was that their fingernails were clean. She looked back down the hill at Mr.
Lehnards’s wife and daughter. The child, with her dress hung like a barber’s bib around her neck, was leading the mother on a zigzag towards the edge of the woods.

Why were the children of Earl’s customers so often misbehaved? Because the parents did not give them a smack, Phyllis decided; they just spoke in their quiet sentences, with their hands dangling down by their sides, gaping at their children as if they could not figure out where they’d come from. Earl was certainly not like that; he’d swat the boys if they needed it. And Phyllis was known to have given a spanking in her day.

“You came so highly recommended by what’s his name, so the disappointment is keener,”’ Mr. Lehnards said.

“Just wait ’til you see the pitchers,” Earl said, shimmying out from underneath the car. “Ruth Ann, go get the pitchers, will you honey?” he said, smiling up at his daughter, with strain.

Ruth skated off in her thongs, perfectly erect; she walked as if she were balancing something on her head.

Ruth was good, Phyllis reasoned. She did as she was told, and though the rest of the time she was dreaming, it didn’t seem to interfere. Still, she was Earl’s daughter by another marriage, and Phyllis couldn’t be expected to like her. Phyllis often tried to whisper to Earl that the girl was slow, but Earl shut his ears. He always thought it was better to have too few brains than too many; he said he made it a point for himself not to think too hard.

Phyllis went to another corner of the garage and busied herself with a box of rags, separating the cleaner ones from the rest. She would use the clean ones torn in strips to stake her tomatoes. No matter that the stakes hadn’t been driven yet, nor that the tomatoes themselves were a good four weeks from staking. She needed something to do with her hands, and noisily and with determination, Phyllis tore and tore.

Ruth returned from the office, bearing reverently a stack of color snapshots in the tray of her palms. Earl grabbed them and began to flip them close to Mr. Lehnards’s face.

“Here it is all stripped, and here it is with the rust, before we did a thing to it. See all that rust?”

“I can see that the body work is good, just by looking at the car,” said Mr. Lehnards, backing away. “I don’t need any pictures. It’s that paint job that leaves a lot to be desired.”

“See those rocker panels just eaten away?” said Earl, following him.

Mr. Lehnards kept as far away from the pictures as he could, without moving his feet further.

Phyllis moved closer to the car. In the paint layered on it dust was suspended. She looked at Mr. Lehnards’s face, trying to read it. The expression she found was one she thought that people reserved for failings of their own. She tried to catch Earl’s attention, to give him a sign of something, she didn’t know what, but his worried eyes had shifted to the door.

The wife and child had appeared at the edge of the open garage. The child was wearing only a diaper and a large pair of sneakers. She looked too old for diapers: her eyes, half-closed, were not the bright ones of children: they were cloudy and suspicious.

The wife looked exactly as she must have in first grade, Phyllis thought, but with her brown hair tousled now with strands of wiry gray. For no apparent reason, she looked at Phyllis and laughed; then she smiled and giggled in Earl’s and her husband’s direction. Phyllis was reminded of people whose response to everything was a giggle; in case something funny had been said, they would want to be polite.

The child took exaggerated steps to her father’s legs, threw her arms around his knees and buried her head in his thighs. Mr. Lehnards held his long-fingered arms a little apart from his slender body and smiled down at his daughter with stiff approval and pride.
Ruth took side-steps to the young wife, with her eyes relaxed and dreamy. "I'm Ruth Ann. What's your name?" she said.

"Me? I'm Honor," said the wife. She pulled at a strand of her hair growing from the crown of her head.

Ruth laughed with her shoulders. "I know somebody named Sylvan, but nobody named Honor."

"Well, now you do," Phyllis broke in. Ruth needed help in conversations, whether she knew it or not.

"And this is Sarah," said Honor. "Sarah? Come over and say hello to our new friends."

Sarah, still holding onto her father, glanced behind her with her small mouth set firmly.

"It sure is hot for spring," Phyllis remarked. "Sweating is good for you, though. Some people can't sweat. I wish I could sweat more. Then I'd be cooler."

"Do you have a maid?" Ruth asked Honor.

"We have a cleaning person..." Honor hesitated.

"I want to be a maid when I'm old enough," said Ruth. "Then I could live in one of those big houses all walled away where no one can visit unless they're announced. Either that or work in the Pizza Hut. How old are you?"

"Thirty," said Honor.

"My stepmother's forty," Ruth said flatly.

Phyllis said: "Ruth! Tell your age to the lady, if you're going around telling anybody's ages."

"I'm fifteen," Ruth said with pride. "Most people think I'm younger. They try thirteen or twelve. What did you think?"

"I really hadn't thought anything," Honor said. Then: "Sarah, honey, no! We shouldn't play near paint!" Honor took the several long steps to get to Sarah's side. The child was at an open pail of paint, squatting and peering into it as if she were watching something swim.

"Paint is used to cover things," Honor continued, squatting down beside Sarah. "See daddy's car? Paint makes things nice, pretty colors. And it's per-ma-nent. It doesn't come off. And we don't want to get it on ourselves. We don't want to be red. So we have to just look at it, okay, Sarah?"

Phyllis's large, calm face rested pityingly on both Honor and the child. "Do you understand all that, Sarah? All those big words?"

"Oh, yes, sure she does," said Honor. "Don't you, Sarah?"

"Ruth! Ruth!"

Earl was calling.

Ruth skated over to him.

"Get me a pail of soapy water, will you, honey?"

Ruth went out around to the side on legs as smooth as rivers, heading for the pump.

Phyllis and Honor watched her go. "It's nice out here," Honor said none too convincingly.

"Lots of room, at least," Phyllis said. "It's a cheap piece of land. That's why there's so much of it."

"Where's the house?"

"What house?"

"Where you live."

"Oh, no, we don't live here! The twins have a treehouse. That's about it. No, we live a little better than this."

"I didn't mean—," Honor said, but she didn't finish her sentence.

"Da dirty," Sarah said and ran to squat near the remnants of the lunch Phyllis had cooked on the three-legged electric frying pan set on the floor. Around it were a
bunch of overgrown spring onions from the garden, an empty bottle of ketchup, and
the wrappings from a package of meat and hamburger buns. Sarah grabbed the
ketchup bottle and put it to her lips. Honor snatched the bottle away. Sarah repeated:
"Da dirty."
"That's not dirty, honey," Phyllis said. "That's our food. We were hungry. If
you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything. Dirt, sometimes. People in a plane crash I
read about ate toothpaste, shaving cream, then each other."
Honor hiccupped a laugh, then covered her mouth with her hand.
"No kidding," Phyllis said. This time, she thought Honor might be laughing
at her.
"Da dirty," Sarah said a third time, going to her mother's legs.
"Honey, we all eat a peck of dirt before we die, just by living. Something like a
peck on unwashed fruits and vegetables alone."
"She's not saying 'dirty,'" Honor interjected. "She's saying 'thirsty.' She's
thirsty. Is there a Coke machine or a water cooler?"
"We've got a little sink back here," Phyllis said, herding them both into the
office. Within that cubicle was another partitioned off: a bathroom, without a toilet,
just a sink.
Phyllis rinsed a mug and filled it halfway.
"Jews," Sarah said when Phyllis handed the water to her.
"There isn't any juice, Sarah," Honor said. "Is there?" she asked Phyllis.
Phyllis shook her head.
Earl's and Mr. Lehnards's voices were more high-pitched and strained when
Ruth returned with the pail and Phyllis and the wife and child came out of the office.
Earl's grease smear jumped. Mr. Lehnards's hands were lifted with a jittery motion.
Phyllis saw that Ruth's hands were colored with blue and red.
"What happened to you?" Phyllis said, picking up one of her stepdaughter's
wrists.
"Gerald and Stacy must have been playing around the pump," Ruth said.
"Who are Gerald and Stacy?" Honor asked.
"My twin boys," said Phyllis.
"They put on war paint with berry juice," said Ruth.
"Indians?" asked Honor playfully.
Ruth shrugged. "No. They defend their treehouse. They want to scare burglars,
strangers, anybody who doesn't belong."
"That smudge could be dirt," Earl was saying as he swabbed the car with a rag.
"You're crazy," Mr. Lehnards said, laughing. Furiously he was making notes on
a tiny pad. "And besides, the smudge isn't the only thing that's bothering me." He
gestured into the air with his pen. "This isn't a dust-free environment. You should
paint a car in a dust-free place—."
"See those fans?" Earl said, pointing.
"Let me rephrase that," Mr. Lehnards said, fluttering his eyelids. A muscle
beneath the skin of his hollowed cheek was pulsing. "Dust is never absent. You can
never really get rid of it. And the ideal place for painting a car would be one in which
the dust had been stabilized—."
"Are you telling me how to paint a car?"
"I might be telling you how to paint my car."
Phyllis turned to Honor: "Would you like to have a look at my garden?" She
didn't like to see Earl this way, and she didn't want anyone else to, either.
Honor said, "Sure," and Phyllis gathered them out into the hazy sunlight and
back down the hill.
They crossed the road.
"Oh, is this a garden?" Honor asked at the edge. "Oh, right. I see now.
The rows."
"It needs to be weeded, but there just aren't enough hours."
"Oh, I know. I had a ten-by-ten plot once, and I had trouble keeping it up. Is that your compost heap?"
"No, honey. That’s just a pile of weeds."
"I had a compost heap, but it smelled like garbage, so Ted called someone to cart it all away."
"Do you fight with him?" Ruth asked. "The way he’s fighting with my father?"
"Ruth! Don’t go asking people such personal questions," Phyllis said, kneeling and making a show of pulling weeds. "If she wanted to tell you a thing like that, she’d just come right out and say it without your poking and prodding. You could poke and prod some of these weeds instead right here."
Honor said: "What are those?"
Phyllis looked to where she was pointing. "Beets. Didn’t you love to eat beets when you were young? The beet juice colored your lips like lipstick."
"I never liked beets," said Honor.
"Me neither," said Ruth.
"Ruth, you do, too!" said Phyllis.
"Not anymore."
Phyllis said: "I don’t know what I’m going to do with so many beets, then, if my family doesn’t like them suddenly. Can ’em, I guess. My mother taught me to can. I’m glad to have something she passed on to me. She died. Five years ago this November. Did you hear about those survivalists the other night on TV? Cans and cans of food stored underground, or else they learn to dig a hole and then drive their car over it, and live down in the hole under the car. In the event of a nuclear holocaust . . ."
Phyllis shaded her eyes to look back up the glare-white hill at the shimmering garage. "I guess Earl and I and the kids would come out here. God knows, the twins would love it." She glanced in the direction of the twins’ treehouse obscured behind some trees. "They beg and beg us to let them spend the night out here."
"I couldn’t say what Ted and I would do," Honor said. "Ted isn’t handy."
Sarah came to them, running, with green beans stuck between her fingers.
"Oh, Sarah," Honor said glumly.
"You gotta eat what you pick," Phyllis said. "Eat ’em up, dearie. That’s the rule."
Sarah and Honor both watched the beans fall to the ground, and Honor giggled.
Phyllis looked again at the treehouse. From the garden it resembled a monstrous paper and foil kite caught in tree branches. Children, your blood, show you what you are, Phyllis thought, as she suddenly wished for a place just as secluded, where not even Earl could find her.
"What is that?" Honor said.
"My brother’s hideout," Ruth said. And they all stood looking at it, as if the three had silently agreed not to go any closer to it.
Only the small, determined body of Sarah was headed straight toward it, walking in a line oblivious or in defiance of the rows of vegetables she tramped in the process.
"Can Sarah play with them?" Honor asked.
"They won’t let her play," Phyllis heard Ruth say; cursing, she had fallen down on her hands and knees, to fix a trampled beet plant.
"She’ll be back here like lightning, you’ll see," Ruth added.
"Well, maybe I’d better go get her," Honor said.
"They won’t like you snooping around, either," Ruth said. "Come on. I’ll show you my magazines."
"I better go," Honor said, taking out across the garden after Sarah, stepping over the rows of plants, but inaccurately.
Ruth started after the two of them.
Phyllis’s lips curled. "Let them go."
Ruth bit her plump bottom lip and set her eyes ahead.
Phyllis got up from her knees, rubbing them.
They both kept watching the woods, and the bobbing figures of Honor and Sarah disappeared into it, moving together in a line as if they were connected by a strong yet invisible thread.

Then Earl was calling them from the other end of the field. He was running towards them like a shipwrecked sailor, a survivor in torn clothes belonging to somebody else. He reached them, out of breath, looking rugged and oddly happy.

"What happened to Mr.-Stick-Up-His-Ass?" said Phyllis.

"He swallowed a whole bunch of sticks, didn't he?" Earl said, adding, "he's calling his lawyer."

"Did you hit him?" Phyllis asked.

"I pushed him," Earl admitted.

"Let him call," said Phyllis.

"Where are the other two?" Earl said, shading his brow.

"At the tree hut," Ruth said a little desperately.

"Oh, boy." Earl wiped his eyes.

"I wanted to be her friend," Ruth told her father.

"You'll lose your friends, and even your enemies'll forget about you eventually," Phyllis said, "but you'll always have your relatives." She found Earl's hand and held it.
Untitled
JENNY SINGLETON

The madboy feel of him,
Shoopshooping along the beach,
Under the boardwalk
Where the last of the
Dark is.
Waking in the sand and shells,
Grit of early morning
Jeans and leather jacket
In the grey of early on.
I lie still and watch him
And his adolescent wonder
At waking on the out/side—
Soft skin in sleeping bag,
Hands laid ecstatic cold atop it.
Down goes this strip of beach,
Fine glaze of silk-silver water,
So flat, so vacant,
Such a mirror of the clouded sky,
That and one lighthouse
Out across the strand.
F Street

JENNY SINGLETON

Walking some streets near broke me
The real of the tired architecture
The end of an urban cycle
A time of collapse I couldn’t
Make myself shun or hate.
Not wanting to,
Wanting not to,
I found a sleekly heavy glamour
The gloss of a perverse austerity
Squatting in the rubble,
Holed up immodestly
In the basements and upper floors
Of century-old storefront
Gutted flats overlooked in
The rush on downtown real estate
A different look at art
Down near the business district.
Creem/David Byrne 2/12/81

JENNY SINGLETON

for my brother

We've knocked all the old surroundings
Slightly askew, and we are, like them,
Atilt under the influence of a
Just-displaced mode of going at our work.
Employing nothing constant, nothing permanent,
No framework, no base of operations
We dose ourselves with ironies
Bestow love from a distance on
Lives we only perceive in
Art house snapshot fragments.
List the objects of our affection:
Distant cities,
Night streets we've
Heard about,
Slicked, enameled black with rain
That urban lovecry of electric
Guitars—high on the reverb,
Distorted, chopped out onto the pavement—
A high-heeled blackjacket metaphor
That tells nothing in the life
Yet otherwise seems a dream sprung
Out of the back of my shifting mind
The stillfotol bravado of the roof, the fire escape
The crammed club in an old brownstone
The voice so obviously untrained
So inexplicably, so absolutely
Perfect—
The bittersweet halfobserving half participant
Way one feels—
A bittersweet just dying to
Leave off sweetness.
Blood on the Tracks
HOWARD SMITH

"The valley spirit never dies;
It is the woman, primal mother.
Her gateway is the root of heaven and earth.
It is like a veil barely seen.
Use it; it will never fail."

Lao Tzu

The blood of a wild Adirondack dog stains my hands.

When I was a boy, no more than eight or nine, Murphy offered to take Dad and me fishing.

"Now a hole up to Devil's Pond where the bass grow big as gators," he said.

When Dad had a case to file over at the Oxbridge courthouse that day and couldn't make it, and even though I was a bit scared to go fishing in some place named after the Devil, the prospect of landing a gator sized fish kept me willing to go along. I threw my bamboo rod and creel beside Murphy's iced down case of Genesee beer in the back of his rattletrap Ford pickup and off the two of us went. Murphy and his wife could never have kids of their own, but being the friendly, fatherly sort, Murphy made it a habit to adopt any stray he could find, even if it was just for the day. Today was my day.

As I said earlier on, the pond resembled a trident and the Devil's Run creek that flowed past my friend Aaron's blacksmith forge onto Bluensoe Lake served as the shaft. Murphy kept a well worn and patched wood frame, canvas covered canoe nicknamed "Old Blue" tucked up under a shed near the outlet to the stream. He wouldn't use any of those new aluminum canoes so popular with the tourist down on Bluensoe Lake. "Too noisy," he'd say, "scare the fish away everytime your knees creak." Man and boy, we slid Old Blue onto the pond. With me and the beer up front for ballast, Murphy paddled proud as a Mohawk sallying into battle toward the northernmost of the three prongs.

"Look a here," he said when we were half way across the lake. He pointed to the rounded top of Johnson's Peak that loomed over the pond. "Up there's the ruins of Marcellus Church. Look quick, you'll see the steeple."

A stone spire split the tree line at the mountain's apex. "Beneath the ruins there's the beginnings of a cold brook that'll feed this pond. Cuts right through the limestone, yes it does, and makes the sweetest fishing hole this side of the county line. Hot days them old bass just hunker down in that cold well waiting for Murphy to draw them out. Gonna be a fisherman, boy, you got to know that."

I nodded and Murphy dipped, stroked, and feathered his paddle till we reached his fishing hole. We baited on worms and dropped sinkered lines over the side. It took an hour—which Murphy passed by downing his Genny—before we gauged the right depth, but once we hit, those bass kept flying into the canoe. Murphy'd tear them off our hooks fast as he could and toss them into a metal basket he'd hung over the side. Though we didn't land any big as a gator, those bass later fried up juicier than any I've ever caught since.

When we'd hooked our limit and then some, Murphy paddled us back to the shed and we stowed Old Blue just as the sun was going down over the lake.

Murphy tossed our gear into the back of the pickup. "You happy, boy?"

I'd had my eyes to the ground, staring at some animal prints in the mud. I looked up at his jowled cheeks and grinned, "What's these?"
“What’s what, boy?”
“The tracks.”
“Tracks? Hell, they ain’t nothing but the memories of something that ain’t there no more.”
“But what are they?”
“Oh hell, I don’t know. I’m a fishing man, not a hunter.” He bent close by my face to see them better. I could smell the beer on his breath. “Looks to be a fox—or maybe a dog—hell, probably just some tourist’s little bitch. Ain’t nothing.”
Satisfied, I followed Murphy into the pickup for the drive back down the hill to town.
“Hell’s bells, boy, you’re gonna be a good fisherman some day, just like your dad,” Murphy said. He shifted the truck into gear, turned on the high beams, and rolled the truck down the steep dirt trail we called Johnson’s Lane. “You got that killing instinct. Yes, sir, you just kept pulling those bastards outta their hole. You’ll be a good one.”
I smiled with pride and settled myself back in the seat. Even in the gathering dusk I liked riding up high in the truck cab where I could see everything on the road. Murphy talked awhile then had me pop him open another bottle of beer. “Ah, love that Genny,” he said as he took another swig.
We’d gone about half a mile down the hill when suddenly a fawn colored dog with a bright red collar sauntered onto the road.
Too late I yelled, “Look out.” Hypnotized by the highbeams, the mutt froze and Murphy, who made no attempt to brake or turn aside, plowed right over it.
“Thump, thump,” went the tires as they crushed the dog flat.
“You killed it!”
Murphy didn’t even flinch. “Hell, yes, dog ain’t got no business being in the road.”

My own encounter with the wild dogs of the Adirondacks came some two dozen years later on the day after I’d driven north to Bluenose from New York to see Murphy about selling my father’s house to Dorie Cimino.

The first sign of the dogs came soon after Aaron and I drove up the steep, snow covered Johnson’s Lane to my cabin on Devil’s Pond. Along the western wall of the cabin I’d built a woodshed with one door leading into the cabin and another opening directly outdoors. While I carried my skis and gear in from the jeep, Aaron went into the woodshed to gather wood for the franklin stove.

Just as I stumbled into the cabin and kicked the snow off my boots, Aaron called, “Come here.”

I dropped my skis against the kitchen table, walked into the shed, and found Aaron kneeling in the far corner by a pile of kindling. A sour, musty smell permeated the air.

In the bitter cold of morning his words came out in a slow assault of condensation. “You’ve had company.” In his gloved hand he held a white stick. I’d no sooner asked him what it was than I recognized it as a piece of bone.

“Deer,” he said. Aaron shoved his hand under the kindling and pulled out several more pieces. All bore the deep scoring of teeth.

“Wild dogs?” I asked.

“I sure as hell don’t think Smokey the Bear’s been sleeping here.”

“Ain’t no place for a man to find peace. How’d they get in here?”

Aaron pointed to a crack in the outside door where snow and light drifted through. “Must have a loose crack. We best patch it before they come back.”

Aaron and I searched the rest of the shed for further signs of the dogs. Although we half expected to find a haggard bitch wedged between the cords of wood with a den of week old puppies suckling at her teats, all we turned up were some more gnawed bits of bone.
“You’re lucky, Sandy. One of those runts must’ve stopped here to shelter out a storm. Rat poison mixed with oatmeal and hamburg will keep them away.”

“Or dead?”

“You got it. Come on, let’s get that fire going. Best thing you can do is let them know you’re here. I’ll fix the door for you.”

“Thanks.” I pulled the cap pistol he’d given me the night before out of my pocket and fired off a round.

“Bamm!”

Aaron jumped, “You crazy?”

“Just practising. Maybe you ought to loan me the real thing so I can clean those bastards out of my woods.”

“Don’t get carried away. They scare easy enough unless they’re rabid or starved.”

“Or both?”

“Sure. That happens, just smash them with your ski poles. Come on, let’s get that fire going.”

We gathered up kindling and a few logs and brought them over to the franklin. The dried wood caught quickly and soon thereafter the blaze warmed the cabin. As I fed the flames, Aaron pounded a board onto the shed door with some ten penny nails.

“Coffee?” I asked when he came back into the cabin.

Aaron nodded and sat down at the table. “Just a quick cup. Tess needs the Blazer to finish shopping for the party. By the way, Dorie called after you went to bed last night, said she’s definitely coming tonight. You’ll still come, won’t you?”

“Wouldn’t miss it—or her. Twelve years is a long time.” I rummaged through the cupboards for a percolator and a tin of coffee left over from last summer, then filled the pot and set it on the stove.

“Good, Tess and I, we worry about you.”

“Why?”

“The way you talk—you know—you and Sally, your stomach, and you’re pale as an old picket fence. Never seen you so down. Tess thought you should’ve stayed the weekend with us, not up here alone.”

“Being alone is what I need. It gives me space to think and reflect. This valley is filled with memories—most of them good. They’re like tracks in the snow and I want to follow them. Sure, Sally and I are having a rough time and I don’t know if we’re going to make it, but we and the kids spent a lot of joyful summers in this cabin. If I’m alone maybe I’ll remember what it feels like to be happy, and if I do, I’ll take that feeling home and share it with Sally.”

The water in the percolator had begun to boil. We watched as clear liquid turned more and more the shade of amber with each successive bubbling.

Aaron shook his head and let out a long sigh. “I know you’ll be okay. I’ve seen you bounce back before. That’s what I told Tess. What about Sally? She still talking therapy?”

Before answering I tried to imagine Sally back home. About this time she’d be getting dressed, probably putting on her makeup. Tucked into the frame of her mirror was the business card of a Dr. Viola Heller, a psychiatrist recommended to Sally by her friend, Maggie, three years ago. Sally’d made the promise to go back into therapy before, but never carried through.

Often I’d see her at the vanity, applying makeup the way I cooked, she’d work without a recipe, dabbing, streaking, patting, and softening, until she feared she’d put too much into the pot. If she was happy, she’d be satisfied with just a touch of makeup, but if she was depressed she’d keep layering foundation and rouge until her face had become a mask. When that happened, she’d reach for the card, but never quite touch it, as if actually touching meant a commitment, then she’d drop her hand to the vanity and resume the tedious process of applying eye shadow and liner.

I told Aaron the story and wondered which face would she put on today, and
whether, when she reached for the card, she'd touch it and call Dr. Heller as she'd promised on the phone last night.

"What will you do if she doesn't call?" Aaron asked. "Give up? Leave her? Take the kids and run?"

"I don't want to go but I feel like my foot's in a bear trap. If the hunter doesn't get me, the vultures will."

"Could be you're just not made for each other. Can't build a house without mortar and a marriage without tranquility. You ought to think about your options?"

"Damn it, Aaron, I don't want to go. She and I, we went through this last year and she threatened to keep the kids if I walked out on her. What the hell can I do?"

"Fight back."

"And lose Angie and Pat—and Sally. No, no way. If I fought for custody, they'd have to carry Sally out in a white coat. The other night she even dreamed the kids and I left her to drown."

Aaron's blacksmith eyes narrowed to a half squint. He leaned back in his chair and studied me the way he would a bar of hot iron before he strikes it with his hammer. He nodded his head then laid on the next blow. "What about you, Sandy, what do you dream?"

I mulled his question over while filling two cups with coffee.

"Cream?" I asked.

"No, but I want an answer."

"I dream it will all work out."

"Come on, Sandy, I know you better, you're shitting me—and yourself."

"The truth, huh? Okay. When I dream, I see Sally's mouth running faster than a greyhound, and then my hands reach up to her throat and clamp themselves around her neck and squeeze until her tongue stops wagging and her cheeks turn blue. That's what I dream."

Aaron chugged his coffee. "It's no wonder you're getting an ulcer. It hurts me to see you in pain. Maybe Tess is right, you ought to cut the bitch and let her go." He glanced at his watch. "Hey, look, I've got to get home."

As he stood to leave and then gulped the rest of his coffee, I felt myself getting more and more annoyed with my friend.

"Shit, do that, go on home. You're all so hard on her. I come up here to look for good tracks and all you do is talk about options."

"Then go find what you can," said Aaron as he walked over to the door and zipped up his parka, "but don't expect Tess and I to accept Sally if you can't. Go ski, get it out of your system. I'll see you tonight." He opened the door and the wind blew a gust of snow into the cabin.

"Maybe," I mumbled under my breath as he slammed the door.

The second sign of the dogs came shortly after he left. He drove down Johnson's Lane in the Blazer, leaving me the old jeep to get around town in. When he'd gone I set about the task of getting my cross-country skiing gear ready. I waxed the skis, oiled the toe bindings, cleaned my poles, and changed into my skiing shoes. Afterward I filled a day pack with some of the food I'd brought from home, bread, cheese, raisins, my sheath knife, and a pint of brandy.

I'd no sooner stepped out on to the back porch, than fresh dog tracks greeted me. Two, maybe three dogs had passed by the cabin while Aaron and I had been drinking coffee. Even as I stood staring at the tracks, little swirls of wind had begun to cover them over with snow. I tapped my gloved hand against the pocket of my parka and reassured myself that the cap pistol was still there, and then I held myself still and listened to the wind moan through the frozen limbs of the surrounding forest. The sun turned the branches of an oak just behind the cabin into a spider web of shadows that trapped me in their midst.
I had planned to ski up the mountain to the ruins of Marcellus Church where Sally and I had once made love, but instead a thought pounded through my brain: follow the dogs. The trail of prints had come across the edge of the frozen pond, then meandered around the oak and up to the shed door. There they stopped and then reversed before finally circling off into the woods down slope of the cabin. I dropped my skis to the ground and stepped into the bindings. I'd track the bloody bastards and slit their throats. As I knelt to lock the toe clips, I sniffed the air like an Indian on the trail of wolves. I'd drain their blood and dress in their hides, murder their pups, chase them from my forest, reclaim this land and become the bloodiest bastard of all. I could do it, I knew I could. Just like Murphy said, I had that killing instinct. With my original goal driven to the back of my mind, I pushed off with my poles for the woods.

Their tracks entered the forest through a dense screen of hemlock and cedar. Breathing hard I worked past the branches and followed the tracks deeper into the woods. Beyond the cabin clearing the tops of the trees blocked out the sun, leaving the dense woods cast in the half light of a false dusk. For over a hundred yards I trailed them until the tracks separated. Two sets of prints veered down a steeply banked slope, while the third cut a wide swath through the knee deep powder on a path parallel to the crest of the hill. As I paused at the fork and leaned on my poles, I wondered what the hell I was doing. An unarmed fool had no business chasing after wild dogs. Logic prevailed. I turned around and followed my own tracks out of the woods before they too were covered over by the drifting snow.

By the time I returned to the cabin, the last of the dog prints had vanished, and I remembered that I had other tracks, those of memories to follow. I set off after them.

My mind's eye broke the climb up Johnson's Peak to Marcellus Church into three distinct sections, the Fishhook, the Forest Flats, and the Flume. Each had its own characteristics and memories.

My cabin stood at the barbed tip of the Fishhook. From here the trail curved sharply along the shores of the pond, on past Murphy's shed where he still stored Old Blue every summer, over the Devil's Run inlet bridge, and then it ran along the far shore for about a mile. A little ways past Murphy's fishing hole, the trail climbed upward ever so gradually until it came to a point of rocks I called the Eye of the Hook. At the Eye the trail reversed directions, entered the forest and climbed across the face of the mountain for another three-quarters of a mile. This section I called the Forest Flats, being smooth and steady as it sliced through the woods.

The Flats ended at Blackberry Meadow, a natural clearing just below the summit where I'd often find deer gathered around a salt lick or slaking their thirst in a brook that crossed the meadow.

The Flume, last and most severe section of the trail, began on the far side of the meadow. It was a steep and narrow cut into the mountain. Even in summer on foot, climbing up the Flume to the greens surrounding the ruins of the colonial era church at the peak required good shoes and strong legs.

Back along the rim of the lake by my cabin, powdery snow, three and four feet deep, covered the trail. A ring of clouds hovered over the mountains on the western horizon, but the remainder of the sky was left clear and blue. Devil's Pond sparkled like a frozen jewel. My exertion warmed my body and despite the subzero weather, I remained comfortable inside my parka. I circled around the lake shore, past Murphy's shed, and crossed the bridge over the Devil's Run inlet.

About fifty yards past the inlet I found my first memories along a section of the shore known as the Beach. In the summer the families with cabins on the pond brought their kids down here for swimming. When Angie was less than a year old, Sally and I had taught her her first strokes.

As I shielded my eyes from the sun's glinting off the frozen face of the lake, I remembered that day. It was hot, ninety degrees in late August and the water around the beach had grown steamy under the sun. Sally and I stood waist deep in the clear water. I held Angie in my arms, a wet, cuddly monkey clinging to my chest. Sally knelt down until the water reached her breasts.
“Come to Mama, Honey,” she said. Since giving birth the previous autumn, Sally’d had nothing but a smile on her face. Her skin was tanned and radiant and if she’d had any extra weight on her frame it all seemed to be in her breasts which were unusually firm and swollen from her continued nursing of Angie. Except for a rare freelance assignment, Sally hadn’t worked in a year. Sketching, painting, or shooting pictures only when she wanted to, she was more relaxed and at peace with herself than she’d ever been before becoming pregnant.

I lowered myself into the water and bathed Angie in it. She giggled as I dribbled water over her head and around her tiny pigtailed tresses. I shifted her around into my hands with her face toward Sally and held her as far away from my chest as I could.

Sally spread her arms out toward Angie and sank deeper so that the water came up to her neck. “Come on, Honey, come to Mama.”

Angie gurgled, “Mama,” and she churned the water with her chubby legs as if she were trying to walk. She stretched her arms out toward Sally and I let go. Her movements carried her the foot to Sally’s arms. Like the newly hatched guppies that congregated around the beach, she’d swim her first stroke.

Pressing my skis deep into the powder and pushing off with my poles, I glided along the trail. Drifts of snow covered the other cabins along the lake; only their chimneys were visible. The Fishhook was as quiet and still as a hibernating bear. Sporadically gusts of wind would swirl loose powder off the frozen lake or a jaunty sparrow would dart through the wooded bank and hide in the branches of a spruce as I passed by.

In other seasons past, before the advent of acid rain, when deep snows blanketed the hills and muffled all the noises of the forest, it was easy to forget the death of the lakes. Nature appeared to renew herself, but now I saw through the deception. Under the ice lay another year’s worth of chemical death. The whole balance of the hill country was out of whack. I hated the acid rain that had destroyed the fish and even more I hated the wild dogs that seemed to have taken their place.

As I skied closer toward the Eye of the Hook, the heavy line of snow clouds that had hung behind the mountains earlier, began their advance toward the lake bearing an ominous grey cast on their soft underbellies.

Not far from the Eye of the Hook and no more than a quarter of a mile from Murphy’s secret fishing hole, I skied past the ruins of a long ago burnt out cabin. Behind the cabin there’d once been a pier where years earlier I’d introduced Sally to the art of fishing.

She was pregnant with Patrick then, maybe six or seven months along, and we were just beginning to waddle—she from her distended stomach, me from all the gear I carried, fishing rods, tackle box, knapsack and an aluminum chair for Sally. The pier was hidden from the road and the rest of the lake by a dense screen of weeping willows.

“Watch your step,” I’d said to Sally as we’d walked out onto the old pier. The rotted planks were full of holes and in some stretches there were no planks at all. I’d slipped an arm around her waist and guided her steps. Sally clutched my fingers in her own. Underneath us the boards trembled.

“If I fall through,” she said, “you know front page headlines in Bluenose will be, ‘Fat Lady Destroys Fishing Pier.’ Can’t you just see it?”

I kissed her cheek. “You can make it, come on.” I led her over the rickety and decayed planks until we reached the pier’s end. I let go her waist and unfolded the aluminum chair.

Sally eased herself into it. “Ah, caught yourself a whale. Bet you didn’t know they swam up here.”

“Sure did. Aaron and I used to catch ’em by the basket full when I was a kid, and you—you over stuffed turkey—are going to do the same. We’ve got to feed that belly.” I patted her stomach and felt the baby in her womb kick.

Sally latched onto my hand and held it tight against her blouse. “You’re the only
catch I want, Pecan Sandy Ford. I don’t need a rod or reel, just keep feeding me your love.”

I bent low to kiss her earlobe, but Sally pulled me around to her lips and let her tongue play against mine. We wrapped our arms around each other and didn’t let go until we had to come up for air.

“I’ve never been as happy as I am now;” she said. “I’m getting to like Bluenose, and wish my life was always this laid back.”

“One long vacation?”

“Sure, and I’d just keep having kids. I love being pregnant.”

“Two’s not enough?”

“I’d take a dozen if I could.”

“How about a dozen trout instead. That’s all I’m up for today.”

“I thought you were my sperm whale?”

“Sorry, but I can’t get it up without my trout.”

“You’re crazy,” she said.

“And you’re not?” I asked as I knelt down on the pier to assemble our rods and bait on worms.

Sally tapped my butt with her foot and when I turned around to see what she wanted, she gave me a look of mock nausea. “Before you mess with those skeevy little critters, would you rub suntan oil on my back?”

“Don’t you like worm juice?”

“Nooooo,” she scolded. “Ugh.”

I set down the rods and pulled the suntan oil out of my pack before spreading some on my hands and rubbing her shoulders and neck. Absent-mindedly I kneaded her skin as if giving a full massage.

“Ah, that’s great. Do my whole back, would you?”

Before I could answer Sally pulled her blouse off over her head and dropped it at her feet.

“No bra?” I asked when I saw her swollen breasts hanging like obese pendulums over her rounded stomach.

“Nothing fits this fat lady. You’d better rub me front and back unless you want our baby to drink burnt milk.”

“Blackmail.”

“No, no, I’m just getting my share. Even fat ladies enjoy a little titillation.”

I finished rubbing her back, then reached over her shoulders to massage her chest. Her breasts were white, almost translucent, and the blue-red lines of her veins and arteries were visible. As the sun warmed her, tiny beads of perspiration settled like dew on the areola. I touched one of her dark red nipples with the tip of my finger and it came hard and erect. Bending over, I pressed my lips against her nipple and sucked hard as I knew our second child would as soon as it was born. Sally cradled my head in her arms and stroked my back.

“I want a dozen,” she whispered in my ear, “A dozen.”

Eventually we did get around to fishing, snaring a handful of perch and crappie—nothing spectacular, but enough for two nights worth of dinner.

As I skied on toward the Eye of the Fishhook I could almost taste those fish which we’d grilled over an open fire. I don’t know whether it’s the tension of living near the city, or of having two kids while we’re both off working, or something more organic, a defect of nature that changed us, but those smiles we shared, that easygoing playfulness we once possessed are long gone and I wish I knew why.

At the point of rocks the trail reversed directions and began to climb into the forest. I called this stretch the Forest Flats only in contrast to the severe incline of the Flume further ahead. Instead of the easy looping slide steps I’d skied with down on the Fishhook, here I had to plant each pole firmly in the deep snow ahead of me and then pull my body forward. I grew hot and perspiry under my laters of clothing and
unzipped my parka. The rush of subzero air felt soothing, like eating Italian ices in July.

The trail up here was also much narrower than down on the Fishhook and the overhanging limbs of trees blocked out all signs of the sky. Once again I travelled in a dusk-like darkness at midday. Whereas the Fishhook was a dirt road, the Forest Flats was just a hiking trail. Local legend dates it back to the days when Mohawks in leather moccasins and loin cloths crossed the mountains to hunt bears hibernating in their caves. More than once while digging through the rubble on a cave floor I’d found flint arrowheads.

Once, when Sally and I were fresh out of graduate school I brought her up here to explore one of the caves just off the Forest Flats trail. It was a day in late May or early June, not long after the last of our final exams, and a good two months before either of us had to begin our new jobs. I’d landed a low paying assistantship at Stony Brook and Sally’d signed on with a commercial photography studio that specialized in department store catalogs. Sally’s always had a good camera eye and as a graduation present her father bought her a Nikon automatic with a matched set of wide angle and zoom lenses. Our hike up here would give her a chance to try out her new equipment.

In spring the hillsides are bursting with color from the blossoms of trees and wild flowers. Eagles would swoop down on unsuspecting trout. Migrating ducks rested on the pond and filled the valley with their raucous quacks, and raccoons scuttled along the banks with fresh water clams locked in their teeth.

Every quarter mile or so along the trail Sally’d stop, focus in on a stalk of goldenrod, or a mushroom bursting through the forest floor and shoot off half a roll of film.

When we’d finally gotten half way up the Forest Flats trail I asked her if she still wanted to see the cave.

“And play Goldilocks?” she asked.

“Nobody’s home, I swear it.”

“That’s what Goldilocks thought.”

“Bears only use caves in the winter to hibernate. Come summer they move into the mountains and away from the tourists.”

“Sure, sure, but if we find three bowls of porridge cooling on the table, I’m splitting.”

We left the trail and pushed off into the woods. There was no path to the bear cave and I had to find it by dead reckoning, no easy feat in a forest that’s constantly changing. More than once Sally asked if we were lost. I answered with words that still haunt me. “We’re not lost, we just can’t find what we’re after.”

That day I eventually found the mouth of the cave hidden behind a young spruce that hadn’t been there five years earlier when I’d last explored the area. Whether I’ll find the magic that binds a marriage is an open question.

The mouth of the cave was no larger than the hatchway on a submarine. Sally and I crawled into the first chamber, a box shaped room fifteen feet across. Fissures in the ceiling allowed light to filter into the chamber. At the back of the cave a black tunnel led to an inner chamber.

It was there that Aaron and I as children had found arrowheads.

“The light in here is incredible,” said Sally. She’d plopped her camera bag on a shelf of rock and was busy snapping pictures all the while she spoke. “Just look at the contrasts.” She fell to her knees, then rolled on her back like a puppy to fire away at the ceiling with a zoom lens. “Can we go through the tunnel?”

“You couldn’t squeeze into Little Bear’s bedroom at half your weight,” I said. Sally laughed and grabbed the back of her thigh. “Are you saying I’m fatter than a bear?”

“No, but I haven’t been able to fit through the tunnel since I was ten.”

“Shit, I still want to see what’s back there.” She crawled over to the opening and stuck her camera and flash into the opening, and then inched forward until only her hips and legs protruded from the mouth.
“Christ, it’s dark in here.” Her voice echoed. Just as she flashed the camera she let out a blood curdling scream. “Aahhh, Sandy, there’s cubs back there! Get out!”

I grabbed Sally’s camera bag and the two of us, fearful of getting trapped by the mother we knew wouldn’t be far away, dashed headlong for the opening of the cave. I pushed Sally through the crevice and squeezed out after her. As we stumbled past the spruce that blocked the entrance, growls and yelps besieged us from behind a thicket. We ran down the hill but Sally tripped and I fell over her. We rolled over each other before coming to a stop at the base of another tree. The growls changed to barks and when I looked up I saw a craggly bitch of a dog, no bigger than a terrier, her white fur mottled with dirt, jumping up and down from the roof of the cave.

I was about to throw a stone at her when Sally reached an arm up to stop me. Her camera clicked and clicked again until the mutt retreated inside the cave.

“And to think,” Sally said as she capped her lens, “all that ruckus and we didn’t even touch the porridge.” We looked at each other. She rolled her eyes upward and we collapsed in laughter.

The memories of that day stayed with us in the form of photographs. Sally always enjoyed shooting work for herself more than she did doing it for someone else for pay. She mounted and framed the best ten prints of that day, including the one of the puppies huddled inside the cave, on the wall of our livingroom. Little did I imagine then that those dogs and their descendents would one day terrorize these woods.

As I continued skiing up the Forest Flats past the woods that still hid the cave, I could hear Sally’s laughter echoing in my memory. I missed the joy we used to share. Our marriage seemed as naked and empty as the bare limbed branches of the forest. Her laughter was like the leaves that brought new life each spring. I missed her and in search of her I pressed forward on the trail to the church.

Not all of my memories of this trail are linked to Sally. Dorie has her share. The Forest Flats ended at Blackberry Meadow and it was there, beside the swimming hole, that Dorie told me when we were only seventeen that she was pregnant. And it was there too, beside the now frozen over stream, that I saw the third sign of the wild dogs.

I recall that day with Dorie at the swimming hole almost as vividly as I remembered our last day together at Aaron forge twelve years ago.

She had called me the night before, asked me to meet her at the meadow. She had to talk and couldn’t do it over the phone with her folks around.

After borrowing my Dad’s car I drove up Johnson’s Peak far as the Eye of the Hook, then hiked to the meadow. Dorie, I figured, must have come the other way up from Oxbridge by car to the church and then hiked down from there. When I came into the meadow I saw Dorie sitting on a boulder down by the stream. Though the day was unseasonably hot and humid she wore long jeans, hiking boots and a long sleeve purple T-shirt. That summer her hair fell close about her waist and was blond at the tips and slightly darker at the roots. She looked up when she heard me brushing against the tops of the meadow grass. I started to trot toward her and assumed she’d do the same, but when she didn’t I knew something was wrong. She drew her knee up to her face and hugged her leg. It made me think she’d been crying.

When I reached the rock she slid off to embrace me. Dorie buried her head in my shoulder and held me tight. We embraced that way in silence for near a minute before she pushed herself back. Her eyes were moist, though not teary. I kissed her lips but she was too saddened to be responsive. Before I could ask what was wrong she told me.

“Sandy, I think I’m pregnant.” She sank back against the rock and slid down until her butt touched the ground.

“Oh, shit,” I said and I slumped down beside her. We’d only started making love that summer and had been as careful as we thought we could possibly be. “You sure?”

“Of course I’m sure. I’m six weeks late.”

“But we were so careful,” I said, knowing as I spoke that that counted for nothing now. I just needed something to fill the void between hearing bad news and comprehending the ramifications. “What are we going to do?”
Tentatively I put my arm around Dorie, not knowing whether she really wanted me to touch her anymore. She sagged beside me and shook her head.

"It's over. I've got to tell my Dad and he'll kill you."

I nodded. Mike Wagner was a quiet man, not given to saying much, but he did have a reputation for getting even with anyone who crossed him.

"We could get married."

"Come on, Sandy. We screwed up once, isn't that enough?"

"I suppose you're right. At seventeen we had a year of high school to complete. Marriage and a baby would not be the smartest thing we tried. 'What then?' I asked. The options weren't many.

"You know Dr. Cutler?"

"The vet? You're not going to let him—"

"Yeah, I will. I overheard Demergian and Dad talking once. Seems Cutler does it all the time. Helped Demergian's niece when she got in trouble with a boy down in Utica."

"You sure you want to go through with this?"

"Hell, Sandy, I can't carry this baby and then give it up. If my mother knew—if anybody knew in town—you know what it would be like—'The Whore of Bluenose.' They never forget here. People will follow me to my grave talking about how Dorothy Wagner gave it away to some city boy. I'd never be able to show my face."

"I'm with you, whatever you decide."

Dorie looked up at me, her eyes great wells of tears. "Don't you understand, Sandy? It's over. As soon as I tell my Dad, that's it. He'll never let me see you again."

"I can help. I've got money saved. My Dad will talk to your father. He'll understand."

"No, Sandy, No! No! You don't understand. Nobody can know. I almost didn't tell you. Wished I could disappear."

I wrapped my arms around Dorie and pulled her close to my chest. Her tears fell on my arms and her breath was choked with sobs. I rocked her as I would a baby and stroked her back, but she kept trembling and crying. I wouldn't let her go, couldn't let her go, couldn't let the void of separation overtake our lives. She meant too much to me. With Dorie clinging tightly to my chest, I leaned back into the meadow grass and laid flat out on the ground. For over an hour her sobs continued and all the while I held her close. At some point we fell asleep, our limbs entwined like those of two kittens deserted by their mother.

When we woke stiff and clammy and our clothes drenched in tears and sweat, I felt as if I'd spent a night drinking scotch. My head ached with sadness. Dorie's tears had transformed the little bit of makeup she wore into a mask of streaked mascara. To think of her under the knife of an abortionist made me nauseous. I couldn't stand the pain.

She walked to the edge of the stream to wash her face. She'd do that and be gone. The end would come. I couldn't let her go.

"Let's swim," I said.

"Oh, Christ, Sandy, not the way I feel. You're crazy."

"No, really, I mean it. We need to do something. I can't let you go like this."

"I can't, I just can't."

The more she protested, the more I pushed her toward the water, as if bathing in the stream would at least wash away the pain just as tears wash away sorrow. She argued with me, or at least tried to, all her strength had gone. In the end, she relented but I could tell by the lethargic way she moved to take her clothes off that her heart wasn't in it.

We'd always gone skinny dipping in this creek and today wasn't to be any different, or so I thought until we'd undressed. We looked at each other in disbelief. This would be the last time we'd ever see each other naked again. Dorie looked so sad, and so beautiful, the sun glistened off her skin, and her young breasts hung like
gently ripening peaches sheltered by the long waves of her golden hair. Her arms trembled as she held her hands out to me and tears washed her face anew. We fell back into each other.

"I can't lose you," she said.

"We'll find a way. I won't let you go."

We stood still and held each other tight, feeling our skin touch and our hips press. We didn't kiss or stroke or fondle each other, we just hugged, until I broke the embrace and led her down to the water.

There's a deep pool behind the rock where I'd seen Dorie sitting earlier. I slid into the water, Dorie followed. The stream was incredibly crisp and cold, I'd forgotten just how cold it could be. My arms were covered with goosebumps. I dove under the surface and swam up behind Dorie and took her in my arms.

"Do you mean it?" she asked.

"What? About not leaving you?"

"Yes, yes, do you mean it—no matter what?"

"Of course I do."

She spun round in my arms and pressed the tip of her nose against mine. Her eyes lit like lanterns and she smiled for the first time that day. "You really mean it?"

"I do, I do."

"Good, because I'm not going to let you go either. I don't care what my father says. You mean more to me than any of them."

We swam a few minutes more until we were thoroughly chilled, then hauled ourselves out onto the rocks to dry off in the sun. Dorie sat with her back against a stone slab with her knees drawn half way up while she combed the knots out of her hair. I sat against another slab perpendicular to hers, and remember staring at the birthmark on the inside of her thigh when I noticed it, the spot, a dark red stain on the stone.

"Is that blood?"

Dorie's arms froze in mid-stroke as she looked down between her legs. "It's me, Sandy, it's my period!"

The soft swirl of falling snow roused me from my memories as a fresh breeze drifted in with the clouds from the west. Grey nimbus clouds blocked the sun. Layers of snow built up over the course of the winter buried the rocks Dorie and I had once sat upon. Toward the center of the meadow, where the wind had thinned the snow down from four or five feet to four or five inches, I found the third sign of the dogs. Very near to where Dorie and I had swum, dog tracks crossed the meadow. Though the continued shifting of snow made it difficult to ascertain just how many dogs there were or how long ago they'd been here, I recognized at least five different sets of prints, one of which was stained with drops of frozen blood. This set headed down the slope and into the thickest section of the forest. With my nerves tingling I crossed the frozen stream and skied away from the tracks and toward the opening of the Flume on the far side of the meadow.

The climb up the Flume to the ruins of Marcellus Church was the father of all my memories of Sally for it was there that we made love and I proposed marriage. Before our trip to the church we'd been living together for five months with no real thoughts of future commitments. Prior to our finding an apartment to share, we tended to spend most of our nights together anyway and it became a nuisance dragging clothes back and forth from one place to another. One night we'd be at my place, another night hers. At neither did we have privacy as roommates filled both houses. "A bond of convenience," said Sally when we moved in together and it stayed that way until our trip to Blueneose.

Before the hike into the mountains we hadn't even talked about marriage. We'd both applied to graduate school at Columbia for the following term and agreed to find a new apartment in New York if we were both accepted. If one of us didn't make it, then we'd simply split and go our separate ways.
Just as I now struggled to plant my ski poles in the icy crust coating the Flume and side step up the steep slope, so too had Sally and I fought our way to the top.

She'd worn sneakers that day and couldn't get any traction on the loose gravel in bed of the Flume. With my hiking boots on, I'd been able to scramble up a few steps and latch onto an overhanging branch.

"Hey, Monday," she called, "Give me a hand."

Holding the branch with one hand so I wouldn't slip, I turned around cautiously only to see Sally hopping up and down like a chimpanzee.

"If I laugh, I fall right on top of you," I said.

Sally stopped jumping and then stretched a hand out to meet mine. Out here in the mountains with the shadows of the forest playing over her face, Sally looked particularly pretty—delicate and rustic at the same time. She'd pulled her hair back with a red bandana, but a few wisps fell across her cheeks, adding a girlish charm. I'd always been able to measure her moods by the size of her smile. Today it blossomed wide as a sunflower, and her cheeks were flushed pink. She'd unhooked all but the center button of her blouse and tied the front tails in a French knot. The skin she exposed to the sun on this balmy spring day was smooth and white, and from my vantage point up the Flume I saw below her neckline to where her nipples capped the ends of her breasts like new strawberries on the vine.

She sensed my eyes were wandering and called me back to task. "If you want to fuck this monkey, you're going to have to give me a hand first. I can't make it to the top without you."

"I wouldn't want to be there or anywhere else without you," I stretched my arm, hands, and fingers forward until they touched hers.

"You're sweet, now pull me up."

"Once you're up, I'm not going to let you down."

"As long as we're together," she said.

I grabbed her hand and pulled. Sally scrambled up the slope until she could latch onto the branch with her other hand, and then I pulled her close to me and we kissed.

"I love you," I said.

"First sweet, now mushy, what's gotten into you?"

"Must be the heat, the exercise, they've warped my brain."

"Good, keep it up," she said.

We did. For the next quarter mile we climbed the Flume in the same fashion. While Sally held her ground, I'd dig my boots into the gravel and push myself up to the next branch. I'd grab the limb in one hand, turn and offer Sally the other. She'd reach, I'd pull her up, and we'd kiss. On and on we climbed a half dozen times or more until we reached the top where we collapsed exhausted against a tree trunk some fifty yards from the ruins of the church.

Then, unexpectedly, it came out, the proposal. Between wheezy breaths I said, "If we're going to keep doing this, maybe we ought to get married."

Her smile that'd been wide as a sunflower collapsed in disbelief.

"Wait, wait," I said before she could speak, "I should do this right." I rolled away from the tree trunk and knelt before her, then took her hand in mine and pressed it to my lips. "Will you marry me?"

Indicating she wanted me to be quiet, Sally raised her forefinger to her lips, then she stood, took my hand in hers and motioned for me to follow. She wouldn't answer me in words. Instead she led me across the green to the ruins of the church. We crossed the threshold and then walked up the stairs of the steeple. At the top she turned to face me and unbuttoned my shirt.

I reached for her, but she gently pushed my arms back to my sides. After she'd undone the last button, she slipped the shirt off my arms and spread it on the stone floor. Then she knelt at my feet, untied my boot laces one by one, then slipped my boots and socks off. My belt and trousers came next. She pushed them down and
pulled them off my legs along with my underwear. I crossed my arms and stood naked while she laid my clothes on the ground beside my shirt.

Sally raised her hands, a sign I should remain still, while she undressed herself. She untied her blouse and dropped it on my shirt. In quick succession she removed her sneakers, anklets, jeans, and underwear and then she laid down upon the bed of clothes. As a last gesture she whispered, “Yes,” and I had my answer.

We married that fall, now eight years gone.

The snow in the mountains fell in heavier swirls and the darkness at midday was so deep, I couldn’t see the top of the Flume from the bottom, but I was grateful for the extra powder which gave the edges of my skis something to bite into as I labored sideways up the hill. I pushed each pole into the snow just as I’d come deep into Sally years earlier. I huffed and puffed as I climbed, hoping to reach the top before the brunt of the storm struck.

We’d made love differently that day, toying with each other like children, our efforts concentrated on pleasing each other. All around us we heard the noise of spring as swallows spun overhead and crickets sang in the grass. Sally came without hesitation or fear. I didn’t understand it then, but I realized it now as I struggled up the severe slope of the Flume, that it wasn’t the way we made love, or how good or bad sex was on a particular day, or whether we reached orgasm, but rather it was the spirit that bound us together. We cared about each other and could play without worries or a suitcase full of psychological trash. The spirit of caring was the key I needed to rediscover.

Determined to reach the top, I pushed up the hill like a madman, bent on recapturing the past. In studying the Tao I’d learnt one’s strength is one’s weakness. The strength of our marriage had been laughter and joy and our best moment came when we were away from work or on vacation, but when the grind of our jobs and the stress of raising a family left us exhausted, we couldn’t cope. We’d learned to laugh together but not how to fight together. Sally attacked me and I battled back. Instead of support we pulled the timbers of the pier out from under each other. If only I could reach the ruins of the church, and let the magic flow over me, I would possess it and share it with Sally.

As I neared the crest the squall struck with full force, and the wind howled and blew snow in my face. I had to squint to see at all. When I came over the lip of the Flume, planted my poles securely in the snow and turned my skis around for the race across the field to the shelter of the ruins, I saw the fourth sign of the dogs.

There, ahead of me in all directions, fresh tracks thick as rush hour traffic in Manhattan matted down the snow, and blood, a deep red blood that had just begun to freeze, lay everywhere. My body shuddered as I cocked my head to listen for the presence of the dogs but all I heard was the rattle of the wind in the trees and my heart thumping.

The wind spun the snow in a dozen miniature cyclones and as each one passed around me I saw more of the field and of the blood on the tracks.

Tales of hikers dismembered by grizzly bears at Yellowstone ran through my mind and I remembered the news story of the US Olympic team skiers attacked by dogs at Lake Placid. It could happen to me.

To quiet my own fear I pulled the cap pistol Aaron’d given me and fired off a dozen shots. The noise pulled me back to my senses. If they were here, I’d have to fight. How? Everything I’d ever learned about dogs came back to me. Never turn your back, throw them sideways if they leap, keep them off balance, don’t be afraid, and never retreat. I thought of weapons—if they didn’t scare the cap gun was useless. Damn Aaron, why hadn’t he given me a real gun?

Through the swirls of snow I could see the outline of the church, but it seemed different, changed, until I realized the steeple where we’d made love had collapsed
back into the ruins. I'd come so close and now it seemed so far. All my instincts cried for me to turn back, but then for a moment the snow abated and in the shadows of the ruins I could see a body—a man's body—I wasn't sure, slumped against the wall.

To scare off the dogs and clear a path from the Flume to the church I fired the cap pistol again and then I skied with caution around the edge of the field, hoping the trees would shield me from an attack. Each time I lifted a pole and jammed it back into the snow, I saw a spear lancing a howling bitch. My path took me other patches of frozen blood but the closer I skied toward the church the heavier the snow fell and the less I could see. The wind continued to howl and off in the distance I heard the barking of dogs.

At twenty yards I saw a stained fur coat around the body, at ten yards I recognized the antlers of a full grown buck. Its neck severed, its abdomen dismembered, the eyes of the dead animal stared in frozen panic. My stomach sickened and I threw up.

Still nauseous, I dragged myself into the ruins and took shelter under a decayed roof. After calming myself with a round of yoga breaths, I removed my knapsack and pulled out my sheath knife. I wedged it into the pocket of my parka where I could find it quickly. Though far from hungry I forced myself to eat some chunks of bread and cheese—I'd need the strength for the trip back down the mountain. I rinsed my mouth with a few sips of brandy and then stuffed the bottle into my pocket as well. The hard glass made a handy club, and if it shattered, I'd have its jagged edges for an extra knife.

After resting maybe ten minutes, I stood back on my skis and swung my knapsack over my shoulders. Just as I started back across the field to the Flume, a far off howl echoed and I knew it wasn't the wind. Fearful of an encounter, I'd ski home as fast as possible.

Snow from the squall had all but buried the carcass, only the antlers remained. The carpet of blood I'd skied across faded under a new blanket of white. By the time I reached the lip of the Flume the last vestiges of blood had vanished.

Trees on either side of the Flume dulled the force of the wind, and as I shot down the chute like a ski jumper at Innsbruck I could see the rocks down in the meadow and the next sign of the dogs. Three dogs the size of wolves stood guard over the frozen stream. They looked at me and I looked at them. Too late to retreat, we'd fight at the bottom of the hill.

But just then, the unexpected—as I passed the midpoint of the Flume, a fourth dog, one who hadn't seen me, wandered into the middle of the trail. Unable to swerve or avoid him, I swung my poles ahead of me like a two headed lance and jammed the tips into his flank. He howled in terror as the momentum of my drive drove the spears into his guts. The two of us spun round and round in a bloody somersault that ripped my skis from my feet. We landed against a tree and I righted myself as quickly as I could ready to fight but nothing happened.

With my poles puncturing his abdomen, the grey mutt lay still against the tree trunk and his death cry had frightened off his companions.

I'd killed a dog.

After removing my poles and wiping the blood clean with snow, I covered his body with branches from a dead pine. As a last gesture I uncapped the brandy bottle, poured the contents over this pyre, and then torched it all with a match.

I waited until the flames turned acrid and burned with a vengeance before clipping on my skis and fleeing for the sanctuary of my cabin along the shores of Devil's Pond.
My Father’s Hands

ROB SOLEY

They used to prowl the house
like great brown bears;
could pull corduroy over
the side of a chair,
line the upholstery tacks up,
and with one lock and swing
bring the hammer home
and leave no slack.

Once, my friend Eddie,
afraid to go home,
hid under the expressway
among the rusted girders.
Those hands stood between
Eddie and his father clamoring
to crush him into a faceless doll.

Later, when beer and whiskey
flowed like angry red rivers
behind his eyes,
the hands wrapped around
the arm of a chair,
tore it away, then threatened
to tear us all apart.

It was then he thought
of cutting the hands off.

Now, his voice has dried, his eyes
are thin blue circles of paper
and have started to sink.
The hands will be the last to go
but even now they sometimes hang
like two late November leaves.

And when I hold his hands in mine,
feel our blood pulse through them,
I know there is no need
to cut them off,
his or mine,
instead, they have begun to dance
although sometimes quite slowly,
like great brown bears.
Meditation
ROB SOLEY

Tonight, the Potomac will not freeze
though winter still descends,
layer after layer stacks its weight
on brittle District streets.
Cracks appear, people disappear.
Quiet as crumbling sidewalks
they slip into secret alleys
or blow through the city's empty shapes.

Some spread out on steel mesh beds
where all night long blood is steamed
to a thickened flow. Dark moves
over their bodies like a hungry dog;
sniffs for food, for moist breath,
or maybe a wild mount
under a moonless gravity
that holds them prone.

Dawn.
Sun splits
like a dry cold lip.
A few clotted drops fall
on the piles of rags,
arms and legs protruding,
under a split sun
that can only bleed
at the look of such bodies.
I Felt Like Quitting When the Clock Struck Five

WILLIAM SOMMERS

The oak desk glistens in the rawing light exposing papers stacked to wait the memoed action of another day. The date book sheets, holed and fitted on elliptic rings, flip like fanblades in the aircon’s sudden breath and come to rest on Monday’s plan for the fullness of time:

morning with the technical staff, lunch along the way with Mr. Ontolog, afternoon in brief compunction over budgets spent, an evening out with scotch in hand wrapped round a cartilage of talk while in a distant chamber groping thoughts stain the mind like drops of ink flecked across a freshly laundered shirt.

The seconds slacken as I flick the switch as though it were a magi’s nail, wondering at the why that keeps me here chained to the self I like the least. I should go home and break the link, shred myself to what I’ve always dreamed I was.

But realists don’t burn themselves upon their own creative fire nor torture psyche with visions of a child who sleeps at play.

We would rather rally in our inner rooms and, inert to shame, make a moral of the loss.
Versions
DONNA BAIER STEIN

We are all sympathetic people. Individually or two-by-two. None of us has ever refused a frantic midnight call from a witch-held friend, sat while a pearl-haired senior stood in the aisle of a bus, or shoplifted anything but books, and that was many years ago.

We are rich, at least Harry and I are. Harry (my Hiruite Doll) and I live in a huge (five bedrooms with pool) ranch house in Plano, just outside of Dallas. About twenty minutes from Nieman-Marcus, and then of course the Horchow catalog comes in the mail. I may not get elephants in my mailbox, but I do get a plethora of mail-order catalogs. Try as I may, I can’t resist going through them as soon as they slide through the slot on the front door.

I was flipping through one’s glossy, four-color pages the night Harry called from the clinic to say Nina was coming by to “pick up some of her things.”

I was surprised. Other than the massive, silent kiln crowding my washing machine in the basement, I didn’t think Nina still had anything here. I had cleaned every closet, gone through every room in a fastidious campaign in the eight months Harry and I had been married.

“I better start drinking now,” I laughed.

I am thirty-two, although any birthday past my eighteenth has surprised me. Harry is thirty-five for real. Gray is just beginning to fleck his black beard. He has run his own orthopedic practice for five years now—setting fractures, correcting clubfeet and bow-legs, straightening spines in plaster of paris jackets.

“I’ll come home as soon as I finish up,” he promised.

I hung up the wall phone in the newly redecorated kitchen—we’ve put in a Jennaire and a pastry island. I poured Scotch, checked my watch, sat down to wait in the living room.

Harry’s success and his busy schedule are well-deserved, after eight long years in medical school and a residency at the Good Sam Hospital in Phoenix. I didn’t know Harry then; Nina shared those lean, Kraft-macaroni-dinner years. I don’t know why Nina left when she did, just when Harry’s income started snowballing, but she did leave.

Sometimes—maybe four, six times since we’ve been married—Harry will do something that really makes me mad and I will run out of whatever room we are in, grab a phone book and search the Yellow Pages for a nearby motel where I can spend the night. The few friends we have here belong to both of us and are, in fact, more Harry’s friends than mine, and any girlfriends who would understand my coming for just one night live far away. I never end up going to the motel anyway. Those times, usually prompted by one of Harry’s loud and frightening rages that he can’t somehow mold life the way he molds hips and legs, I can see why Nina ran out on him, but usually I don’t understand it.

Nina and I didn’t overlap in Harry’s life for even a day. A clean break like that between Harry’s commitments meant no cat fights, no verbal sniping at The Other Woman. In fact, I often liked to think Nina and I might have been friends.

There were no children, although Harry told me they had tried to conceive about a year before Nina left to move in with her dulcimer-maker lover. Instead of remodeling the kitchen or putting in a pool like most strained couples around here, they hoped their own lucky talisman of renewal might be clutched in a baby’s dimpled hand.

Harry and I are still trying to decide whether or not we want family. Harry works hard for long hours, and requires constant attention when he’s not at his clinic. I imagine deep down he worries a child might take me away from him. He’s never said that out loud, but I suspect that’s one reason he doesn’t push me to have one.
I smoked an Ultra-Light, then got up to wash the ashtray and hide the pack of cigarettes. Harry thinks I’ve quit.

When I heard Harry’s BMW pull in the driveway, I met him at the door and after we kissed, we walked upstairs together so Harry could shower.

I stood in the bathroom looking at the fogged-up mirror. I had to shout to be heard above the water; Harry likes the nozzle set on high massage.

“Why didn’t you have kids?”
“I’ve already told you.”
“Tell me again. I forgot.”
“Because Nina would get one of her sinus headaches every time that was the right time. Because by the end we were making love only after big fights. I was greedy, like we were trying to feel each other, trying to remember who this person we’d been married to for ten years really was.”
“Oh.”
“Don’t be silly.”

Harry stepped out of the shower, dripping onto the carpet. He kissed the back of my head.
“What about the house?”
“What about it?” Harry, now in his big terry cloth robe, started wiping the mirror in big circles with his arm.

I still stood beside him; in the mirror we were about the same height, but Harry was dark, with a year-round tan, and I was slightly sallow. I had short hair now, after so many years with it down to my waist. I looked unfamiliar; Harry looked protective.

“I don’t know. I don’t want her to feel bad. Everything’s different. The kitchen, the bedroom. The Oriental. More.”
“You worry too much. Don’t worry, she’ll like you. You’ll like each other.”

Harry went into the bedroom to dress. I sat down in the sitting room, another new addition, with my elbows on my knees.
“So where’s she going to move?”

“Didn’t I tell you? San Francisco. She’s going to San Francisco to set up some sort of gallery or workshop or something. She’ll leave next month.” Harry was bending over to pull on his chinos and I was having a hard time hearing him.

“Don’t you still know people there?” he asked.

I had gone to art school in San Francisco; I had studied painting there. I had married my first husband, David, in San Francisco.
“What are you smiling about?”

“Just thinking. I know lots of people there. Wonderful people.” I sat up. “It’ll be perfect. Yes, I can tell Nina all about those people. They’re wonderful, they’ll take her in.”

I stood up and started rifling through a drawer in the little desk in the sitting room. I pulled out my address book. Almost every name in it is followed by a long list of scratched-out residences.

I did know people in San Francisco, people who’d be happy for a chance to retrieve and wipe clean some dusty vision from the sixties. People who wouldn’t bat an eye at my request that they host and protect my husband’s first wife. The people I know in San Francisco are special—artists, photographers, beer drinkers all—and I’d spent many heady hours with them in the kind of conversations nobody seems to find time for anymore.

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Six months before our divorce, David and I were drinking beer in a neighborhood bar called the Catfish. We were celebrating the completion of David’s dissertation, on Unamuno’s “saving incertitude.”

“Dad’s just offered me a job,” David said.

My first father-in-law marketed a special kind of TV antenna.
“Look, I can’t make it as a philosopher. The standards are too high. I’m going to take the job.”

I lit Kools one after the other while David wondered out loud if he might find a happy medium in the family company. He talked about the parallels of transmitting information, the sensitivity to distant messages, the receptivity to truth.

I told him how I thought my art was very different from his philosophy.

“When they come at all,” I said, “my paintings stream out of me. You’ve seen that happen.

“Maybe,” I said, my tongue wiping beer foam from my lip, “it’s that unself-conscious process that counts.”

I tell him that for me, his philosophy and his antennae sound like rugged outcrops of rock standing far out in one of the polar seas, while my paintings are like the temporary, blazing hibiscus that grow along the roads in the islands.

“You’re a child,” he said.

Even after we divorced, when David would hear from friends about my latest catastrophe, like carrying $600 in cash for a rental deposit and losing it to a Chinatown pickpocket, he would call up to remind me just exactly how naive I am, how totally unequipped to deal with the real world. Every time he called, he unintentionally confirmed my decision to leave him. I figured I didn’t need a scratched and stuck record, like one of my father’s old Mills Brothers, telling me what I already knew.

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There in the sitting room, Scotch at my elbow, I started copying the names and addresses of people I still knew in San Francisco.

“Katy—she’ll save wandering cats, hearts, anything. Abby, prowling thrift shops. Chris with his board games, Matt with his basketball…”

I felt overwhelmed. I couldn’t write it all down, so I’d underline two, three times, and write in all capitals.

I listed places where Nina could eat, drink, look for apartments. I filled both sides of one sheet of paper and at the bottom, printed “NINA, WHEN YOU GET TO S.F., PLEASE CALL THESE PEOPLE. THEY’LL HELP YOU FIND AN AP’T, FEED YOU, KEEP YOU HAPPY. THEY’RE GOOD PEOPLE. THEY’RE SUCH GOOD PEOPLE. PLEASE CALL THEM.”

As Harry finished dressing, the doorbell rang. I followed Harry’s chinos downstairs to the front door.

Nina had this huge frizzy halo of black hair. She had on a corduroy jacket and, on her feet, striped wool socks in leather sandals. She looked confident.

The three of us stood there smiling and saying too many “hello’s” until Harry, always the fixer, said,

“Nina, come on in. Let’s get out of the hallway. How about a drink? Bloody Mary? Or a vodka gronic?”

Harry beamed and his hand brushed my shoulder. “Nina’s original recipe,” he said.

“Juice,” Nina said, walking before us into the kitchen. “I haven’t touched alcohol since I discovered shodi.”

“Shodi!” I asked, smiling.

“Japanese tea ceremonies. I even make my own pots and cups. Better than yoga.”

“That ratty old leotard,” Harry laughed, reaching towards the refrigerator.

“Harry, wait.” I couldn’t remember if Nina had said what she wanted. “We don’t have any grapefruit juice because you finished it this morning. Remember?”

“Don’t worry,” Nina said, smiling at Harry and looking around the room.

“You’ve certainly done a lot in here, haven’t you?”

I nodded. “Let’s go sit in the living room.”
We walked in and positioned ourselves: Harry and me at opposite ends of the
couch, Nina in the chair by the fireplace.
“So you make teapots?” I asked.
“Among other things. Lately I’ve been working with sgraffito.”
“What’s that?” Harry asked, crossing his leg.
“It’s a technique, with a brown glaze. When I scratch a design on the glaze, the
natural clay underneath shows through. I’ve been working a lot lately, using the kiln
at school. With the move, I want my own back.”
“You’ve got all those dyes down there, too, you know,” Harry said.
“I know. I’ll get it all. And that drafting table, the one Pop gave us when you
started school. And the propane lamp.”
“Sure, sure,” Harry said, finishing his Campari. “I forgot that was yours.”
“And the gas grill.”
“Now wait a sec,” Harry said. “That’s not yours. I had that before. Didn’t I?”
“No. We got it the summer of the Sparlings. It’s on the agreement as mine. Take
a look.”
“Hell, it’s fine. I really don’t care.”
Nina stood up and walked over to a small rug I’d moved from the den to put
under the piano bench. She started laughing, hands in her front pockets, neck
stretched back and loose.
“I thought something looked weird,” she said. “You’ve got the damn thing up-
side down.” She flipped the rug over.
“It is?” I asked, walking over to her. “Oh, lord, you’re right. Now it looks like
something. Now there’s a pattern.”
Nina turned to Harry. “What vacation is this from anyway? Is it mine?”
“Oh no you don’t,” Harry said. “That I know belongs to me.” He stood up.
“Anybody else ready for a refill?”
When Harry walked out of the room, Nina picked up a little box she’d been star-
ing at on the bookshelf.
“What’s this?” she asked. “Segillet? Why do you have this?”
“I was on a dig. Many years ago. In France. Those are little shards of pottery,
segillet, you’re right.”
“Ah, digging up the past…” Nina turned away from the bookcase and looked
at me.
“Do you still paint?” She sat down again, still staring at me. “When Harry first
met you, he told me you were pretty good.”
“I don’t do much these days,” I said. “I feel busy with the house. With Harry. I
mean to go back to it, but I don’t.”
She shrugged.
“So, Harry,” she said as he walked back into the room, “What about you? What
keeps you busy?”
“Well, actually, I’ve got a pretty interesting case right now. A bone graft. It’s
tricky. It’s to stabilize a joint in a young woman’s leg. The graft has to be accurately
fitted. First we remove a normal bone from the patient. Then dovetail it to the defect.
It’s really a case of the body providing its own best cure, though by fairly violent and
dramatic means.”
I looked over at Nina to see if she minded hearing any graphic details.
“Listen,” I said, standing up and walking over to where she sat, “I made up this
list.” I held the sheet of paper, covered with writing, before me.
Nina raised her eyebrows and took the list from my hand.
“They’re old friends of mine. I thought you wouldn’t know anyone when you
move. I want you to meet them —” I stood waiting.
“Sure, thanks.” Nina stuck the list in her pocket. “I’ll take it. Doubt I’ll have
time to call, but I’ll take it.”
“Nina’s pretty good on her own,” Harry said. “Remember that time, going to Mendocino, when was it, summer of ’65?”

Nina laughed.

“Sure. Driving all the way from Edison, New Jersey, to Mendocino, California in a Day-Glo van. A Day-Glo van.” Nina sat back in her chair. “You were already a budding compulsive at nineteen.” She looked over at me. “Harry drove 800 miles our first day out. Then he fell asleep on a mattress we’d set up in the back.”

“When I woke up,” Harry interrupted, “Nina was at the wheel, driving! There we were, cruising down the highway at 75 or so!” Harry and Nina laughed.

“That was the first time she’d ever touched a stick shift!” Harry said to me, still laughing.

They talked more about people they both knew. I kept wanting Harry to leave the room again so I could talk to Nina alone. I stared at her while they were talking, wanting to hear more about her pottery, her tea ceremonies, wanting to talk about my paintings.

After a while, Nina said, “I’d better be going. I’ve got to meet someone.”

“Let’s go get your stuff then,” Harry said. “Most of it should be together.”

We all walked down to the basement. In the laundry room on a bookshelf lining one wall, there were maybe a dozen heavy brown paper bags with mysterious labels: 2PbCO3·Pb3(OH)2, 25 lbs. flint, Copper Carb. On another shelf there were two dozen large jars, again labelled and filled with colored powders: Cornwall Stone, Ilmenite, Zircopax. There were boxes of cones to test the heat in the kiln and plastic bags filled with newly-dried clay. A thick slab of plaster of paris sat on top of a table next to the kiln; Harry had told me that’s where Nina had wedged her clay.

Loading up our arms, we each made several trips out to the pick-up Nina had borrowed from a friend. The kiln was lighter than it looked; Harry and Nina together managed to get it up the stairs and into the truck.

Then we went into the den for the drafting table. Harry wanted to take the whole thing out in one trip. Nina and I both said we thought it wouldn’t fit through the door. Harry tried his way without any luck, then Nina and I started unscrewing the legs and carrying the pieces out to the pick-up.

Harry went to wash his hands and Nina and I walked back into the hall.

“There’s one other thing,” Nina said. “A lace tablecloth my Gramma Rose made.”

“I haven’t seen anything like that,” I said.

“But I always kept it here,” she said as she opened a closet door and looked inside.

“But it’s not there,” I said. “I know. I would have seen it.”

Nina looked like she wanted to touch things in the closet, move blankets, picture books, but she closed the door and looked into the living room instead.

“If I see it, I’ll mail it,” I promised. “It’s just that I’ve gone through everything. I would have seen it.”

Harry came in then with the lamp and the grill and he and Nina walked outside to put them in the car. I stayed inside, sitting at the shiny-topped new rosewood dining room table, and waited for them to come back, but then I realized Nina was leaving.

Sitting there at the table, with the front door open, I heard Nina say goodbye to Harry. Then I didn’t hear anything for a minute. Then I heard the pick-up door slam and the tires crunch over the gravel in the driveway.

There’s a yellow light a few yards down the street from our house. A traffic warning that flashes all night. First the top bulb flashes, then the bottom, casting alternating circles of a golden glow on the sidewalk and the grass. I stared at the light and wished I could levitate the list I’d written so carefully out of Nina’s leather pouch and back into my own hands.
There's a version of me that David knows: surrounded by untaped but still packed cartons of brushes, jars and books, I stand in paint-smeared jeans and a dirty smock, twisting and sucking on a strand of hair, staring at a blank canvas.

There is a version of me that Harry knows, sitting on our Chinese rug in front of our fireplace, flipping through magazines, filling out order forms for crystal door knobs and brass letter holders, waiting for replies.

There is Harry's vision of Nina driving down the highway, a phosphorescent cannon forever heading west. There is my vision of Nina pulling out of the driveway, her hands on the wheel bathed in on-again, off-again gold.

There are visions and versions of people all over the place. No matter. Whatever the reason, sitting there at that table, hearing that door slam, watching those two lights in eternal indecision, I felt like I'd lost something.
Late Fall, View from the Castle

LAURIE STROBLAS

Beside your hospital tray
a mirror lies, its magnified side up

enlarging the morning. Another false prince
arrives on horseback, stethoscope against

his chest like a jewel.
It is easy, he believes to compete

with the moon. His thin lips
crack and fill with light.

The red dawn sings down your body.
He draws some off and carries it away

with him forever. If a bird
leaps into the air now

it is only because he has wanted it to.
Where the moat narrows to woods, cancer

spreads orange. Children
in long white gowns, their fine hair parted,

drift through the gardens looking for signs.
Contributor's Note

Laurie Stroblas

Some of my poems have recently appeared
in nightgowns on dark, filmy streets,
and one came through the wall like a bully
and went right to the refrigerator
without even asking. My poems have appeared
in several magazines, out of thin, dangerous air.
Also, a cameo at Luigi’s Restaurant as the waitress.
My poems have put in an appearance at parties,
then snuck out too soon to be asked back.
They’ve shown up an hour too early
and at the wrong corner. Many of my poems
have not appeared. Weathered travelers,
they’re always on the lam. One
just got a new identity from the government. Oh yes,
many of my poems are not what they appear
to be. One recently disappeared
in a magazine. He left behind an awkward page
blank except for the number, and a wife and three kids.
He may have been sleepwalking—last seen on the Beltway
flagging down every car that passed, asking directions.
Sleep
LAURIE STROBLAS

The little girl wakes in the middle
of batwings, handveins, movement
at the bedside. Blind men
rocking through subways, singing
their tinny songs. Mother
creeping in to retrieve the covers
that have eased to the floor.
Her love brings its layers,
its feathers of plumped worry.
No footsteps, but a slit of light
widens, narrows, as the figure creeps out.
And something begins breathing
through the child’s mouth, open
just a crack. Now comes a memory,
so early it is without words
to pin it down and will later seem only dream,
of flame and commotion,
heat rising to try its own escape.
A blanket beating down many times.
The covers slip again as the child
turns, satiny in sleep.
She is moving back to give herself air.
Something is inside without words.
As she grows she will grow to live the wind
licking her skin, the feel of men
clothing her with their bodies.
Something is inside and outside pounding
without words and a slit of light is widening again.
She reaches for the pillow instinctively.
Something is inside and outside pounding,
pounding, pounding her little girl’s heart
with mallets of devotion.
The 1926 Dodge Business Man’s Coupe whined toward Lake Erie and Cousin Monique Flannagan began to tap on the steering-wheel with her gloved hand: “Bring Rose, with the turned-up nose, but don’t brrrrrring Lulu!” she sang. She was not the angel vision Mama had described, but a laughing, chunky, almost-boy with frizzed hair and hardly any bazooms at all, but he liked her anyway and her thigh against his seemed to have a life of its own as she pressed and released the accelerator.

“Guess what, Davey,” Mama had said. “You’re going to the National Rifle Matches at Camp Perry, your Aunt Frederica and her Dodge, Aunt Dora and Cousin Monique. Won’t that be fun? Fun for me anyway.”

David Dunlop knew his mother loved but did not like him. “I barked like a dog when you were born,” she said alone or in company. “You objected to everything.” “If it hadn’t been for having you, I’d have…”

Aunt Dora, as small and dark as Monique was small and blonde, sat on his other side and turned half around to talk to Aunt Freddie in the back seat who looked hooped over and bird-like as a school-teacher should be: “Mike says the squaw tents at Camp Perry are really primitive,” Dora said. “He’s having you to stay at the clubhouse, Frederico.”

“I wouldn’t mind the tent,” said Freddie. “When I drove my prins-pul and those other teachers to California we slept in a tent all the way out and coming back…and so as I said…that’s the reason why…” Aunt Freddie always trailed off like that, as if she couldn’t think what came next.

Dora went on talking, but the boy only half-listened. Instead, he concentrated on the press and crawl of Monique’s thigh. A tingling warmth began to spread over his legs; it was like his dreams when he was little of being folded up in warm woman flesh or rolling off the tops of big stomachs and laughing like a crazy man.

“How far yet?” he croaked, wanting Monique’s leg never never never to move.

“About ten miles,” said Aunt Freddie, who kept track of everything.

“Make my bed…light the light…I’ll be home…late tonight!”…sang Monique.

Sweat stung the hollow of his left knee like salt rubbed into a sore place, but he held his leg motionless as a log so that Cousin Monique should not sway away. It was a good thing she could not read his mind, he mused.

Sooner than he wished, the Ohio hills began to flatten out into a broad slope of sand like the desert in a Tom Mix serial and the roadsides became grassless and pine trees thrust their green spires into the hot sky.

“Bye, bye, Blackbird,” Monique sang, purring her silk cheeks and swinging her head in time. What made her so delicious? Army life, he supposed, with no cows to milk, hogs to feed, magnesia to swallow. That and being a general’s daughter. “They are the cream de la cream of Army society,” Mama said of Monique’s family. “Southron Army society. Oh David, I so hope you can learn to be a true Southron gentleman.”

Aunt Freddie broke into his thoughts: “I wouldn’t have minded the tent. In Colorado….”

Monique ceased to pat the steering wheel: “Mike specified you were to stay at the clubhouse, Frederica. And you know he’s not called Iron Mike for nothing. Dora and I and Davey will stay in the tent; Mike will be with troops, but he’ll visit and naturally you will too, Frederica.”

“What happens at rifle matches?” the boy asked anyone who would answer. Aunt Freddie said, “The Army trains the National Guard to shoot their rifles at big targets. Cousin Mike’s an instructor because he’s a sharpshooter. You’ll see, just keep your eyes open and your mouth…so that’s the reason…as I told my prins-pul….”
Monique pushed at him with her shoulder: "Light me a Camel, will you Davey Honey?"

Quickly, before she could change her mind, he fumbled in her handbag, found matches and the cigarettes, lit one, and handed it to her, smiling inside that her lips would, in a way, touch his. Watching her inhale, he swallowed a gulp of the smoke that he'd managed to retain. It tasted like the smell of a wool blanket on a bonfire.

"His mother would fuss if she saw that," said Freddie.
"Oh Frederica," said Dora, "don't be so wet!"

Pleased to have been selected for the tent, the boy said benevolently, "I'll come to see you Aunt Freddie."

"Yes, you'll visit with your old aunt, won't you Davey? I wouldn't have minded the tent. As I said, when we crossed Wyoming...." But the other women went on talking and did not hear the end of her sentence. He noted that since he'd last seen her, Aunt Freddie had got some gray hair and her nose was sharper and closer than ever to her chin. She was over forty and wouldn't live much longer, probably.

At the clubhouse, Iron Mike strode across the verandah, banged the screen door with a military sound and posted up to where they were standing at the registration desk. He wore a campaign hat that almost touched his eyebrows and pushed at his blond mustache with a little finger, smiling with downturned lips. His bottom was rather wider than regulation, but so was the boy's own and otherwise he was perfect, even to the gloss on his Sam Browne belt.

Monique rushed into his arms: "Darling, darling, darling!" she squealed and kissed him again and again. "I've missed you so, so, so! West River and Toledo were so dull!"

"Hello, Army Brat, long time no see," he said. His lips smiled, but his eyes stayed bayonet sharp. "Hey, hey, Uncle Dud," he shouted and rubbed Cousin Monique on the small of her back and she cringed against him like the boy's collie that Mama had named in her putty-ony way, "Pretty."

"Oh Mike," Monique squealed, "let's just raise hell!"

"You're on, Sweetheart. What if I can't see the targets tomorrow; those National Guard ganks won't know the difference, they're all drill press operators and garbage collectors. Say, Frederica, did the girls tell you you're to be in the clubhouse?"

"Yes," said Aunt Freddie. "I would more or less have liked the tents. As I said....."

"Clubhouse for you, perfesser. Not going to have this boy's mother think we didn't take good care of her sister."

Aunt Freddie stared through a clubhouse window at blue Lake Erie with a left-out look that made the boy want to tell them all how she'd taken him on his first airplane ride at the Toledo Flying Field in a Waco bi-plane and how the pilot had done Immelman turns and she kept smiling though her face was white as milk. And that Mama had told him that "Loves ya, Aunt Fred," was one of the first things he'd said as a baby. But there was nothing he could do now about her. She was ugly as sin and that was all there was to it. And she was always saying "and that's the reason why" when there was no reason and no why.

A soldier began moving their suitcases around and Iron Mike pointed here and there giving orders and said, "Now let's just get this impedimenta over to the tent—Freddie yours can stay here,—and then we'll have a knock of Flint's Fist, eat, and chase the blues away." He sang the last part of his sentence like an endman in a minstrel show.

"Oh, Mike, yes, let's just raise hell!" said Monique.

The tent had a board floor with sand scratches on it, sides of fly screen and a green-gray pyramid of a ceiling to which dust clung like the mould on jelly. Four Army cots occupied the corners. "Why are there four cots?" the boy asked. "There are only three of us." Cousin Mike and Cousin Monique looked funny at each other.
Then the soldier came bumping in through the screen door and Cousin Mike said, "Watch it, Chief." The soldier put down the suitcases, gave a mean look all around and left.

Cousin Mike threw a suitcase on the extra cot: "Say Kid, how'd you like to come out to the firing line tomorrow and spot targets?"

The boy could say nothing for surprise and delight.

"Guess you wouldn't crab about that, would you Sheriff?" and the boy could only nod yes, yes, yes, afraid to trust his voice.

As they moved about the dusty floor the women talked around and above him. "Little girl talk," Aunt Dora had once called it. And at dinner they did the same thing. He knew it was because at dinner they were afraid to pay attention to a kid because people would think he belonged to them and they didn't want to be that old. So he did not say one word through the whole meal except to ask and get seconds on ice cream. As they walked back to the tent Cousin Mike asked how was school and Cousin Monique said what did he want to be when he grew up and he said he liked school and wanted to be a civil engineer. Both answers were lies.

Suddenly, it was dark, though the sun had left a dark orange glow in the sky in the direction of the lake.

"Better get in bed, Buster Brown, you're tired," Iron Mike said.

"I'm not tired, Cousin Mike."

"Get in bed."

The boy undressed at once, careful to hide his privates. His cot stood smack against the screening and he could hear the shrill radio sound of mosquitoes trying to bore in. Dora unpacked stockings, a manicure set, a hair receiver. Monique did not unpack; she and Mike stood face to face, their arms resting on each other's shoulders.

Dora dropped the lid of her suitcase and said, "Let's go, gang! Monique, you'll have to unpack later."

"Where's everybody going?" the boy asked.

"Clubhouse. Welcoming dance," said Monique. "Hotcha, hotcha, kitchy-koo, Davey Campbell Dunlop, I love you!" She danced with herself, little girl steps, hugged herself, but did not look at the boy.

"I like dancing," he said with great courage, for he could not dance a step.

"Dancing?" shouted Iron Mike. "A big stand-up-in-the-road like you? Quit your kiddin' Boy." He snapped off the light that hung like a rotted orange half swallowed by a blacksnake. "See you at reveille, Commodore. Don't let me catch you out of that bunk or it gives twenty days bread and water in the guardhouse." Footsteps, laughter, Iron Mike's rumble, the women's company tinkle, trailed off toward the clubhouse.

The boy at once began to fondle himself. Lately, with much squeezing and pumping, he could sometimes cause a tiny pearl to appear as his thighs dissolved and blood beat a tattoo against his shut eyelids. Tonight, after he stopped lurching and shaking, he did not investigate—there was no way to see; he could not reach the string pull of the light. For a moment Mama's shaken finger warned of madness, but he was too tired to go crazy.

Up at 6:30, milking time at home—he examined his pyjamas. Yes, a small starch spot had stiffened the cloth. And it was clear that he had not gone crazy. He dressed, peeking at Monique and Dora. Monique's hair lay like a crushed bouquet of dried flowers, Dora's like a river of coal. He thought of stealing kisses from their open mouths, but they had lost all beauty and he was pretty sure their breaths would smell.

At the clubhouse a waiter with dark, deep-lined cheeks and stuff in the corners of his eyes said, "What's yours kid?"

"Canteloupe, Corn Flakes. Orange juice, and I guess milk." He wanted pancakes, but knew that he had to give up something for playing with himself.

He ate quickly, for he was enormously hungry and when he finished the waiter
showed him where to write "Lt. Flannagan" as Monique had instructed. He added, with a flourish, "U.S. Army."

But he realized that he had no money for a tip. He was about to scurry out of the dining room when he saw the black-eyed waiter advancing like a gunman. "I forgot my money," the boy began to explain. "If you'll just wait a minute, I'll run and get it and be right back."

The waiter shook his head and removed the boogers from his eyes with thumb and forefinger: "Copacetic, kid. You can get me next time," and began to clear the table. The boy, a fool, a blunderer, slunk out.

On the firing line the "prannnnnnng" of the rifles seemed to coat and re-coat his ears with tin and there was a tin or copper taste in his mouth. The targets stood in a long row like giant teeth or white dominoes; the Guardsmen, and some civilians, lay prone and pointed the "pieces" as he learned the rifles were to be called. He tried to sight targets with both eyes open as Iron Mike demonstrated, but the attempt made his eyes blur and cross. "Well, shut your left one then," said Iron Mike, which meant that he was indeed pure tenderfoot. Iron Mike also explained that a red flag was a miss—"Maggie's Drawers." The boy twice called out "Maggie's Drawers" in a high, positive voice, only to find that he'd missed seeing the white scoring placard and Mike had to correct his count.

Gun blast jerked his cheeks and sweat stung his eyeballs until the targets melted and he was ready to beat it back to the squaw tents but of course he could not do that.

After lunch, Cousin Mike sent him and Dora and Monique to the tent for a siesta: "Expect all you delegates are tired; big dance tonight, don't forget." Unfairly, as they prepared for naps, the two women talked in whispers and he wondered if they did that to Aunt Freddie, who, he was sure, did not talk little girl talk.

His last image before sleep was of Monique's creamy shoulder above her pink teddie. But when he awakened Monique's cot was empty and it was Aunt Dora who stood naked before him. Her flat breasts looked like Papa's eggs, fried too quickly in the hurry to get out to milking, their centers dark orange and shriveled. Down below hung the big black beard—shockingly black—hairs coarse and crisp like the frayed parts of the mohair sofa back home.

"I'm not going swimming," Aunt Dora said, as if he had been arguing with her. She looked straight at him, her body open and stark. A kind of terror that strove to become bigger and bigger seized his body and contracted his muscles from his toes to the back of his neck. He wanted to shoot out of the cot and run run run. It was as if a ghost had appeared in a dream—no, worse than a ghost, a monster with four eyes above a black triangular devouring mouth. A soundless gasp, somewhere between "oh" and "yes" clutched at his throat. Too late, he formed the word "love" with his tongue.

Suddenly, she giggled, turned and dropped her bathing suit back into her suitcase, using her hip to hide the rest of her.

Letting on that he was drowsing, he lay watching with half-closed eyes as she dressed. She kept her back turned and called over her shoulder as she left: "Don't go near the lake without telling someone, Davey. All right?"

"Yessum."

"Swee' boy!"

He got up, dressed and went at once to the lake which burst out before him like a newly fallen sky. Port Clinton lay on his right, a dark, thin worm. He could not see Toledo at all, how far was it anyway? He scuffled through the sand toward a beached boat beside which sat two boys, one older and one younger than he, and two girls, both younger. One boy fondled an ocarina, the other a kazoo.

"What you doing?" he asked the older boy by way of introducing himself.

"Going pirating in that leaky fucking boat in a minute." The older boy's nose folded his freckles out of sight as he looked up into the sun.
“Lemme play your kazoo,” David said to the younger boy.
“Naw, I don’t want yer spit.”
“Go to hell then.” He made a face that he hoped showed contempt, but the older boy ignored this: “Want to go? We need someone to steer.”

At sea the oarlocks squeaked and the oars clunked woodenly against the sides of the boat as they broke water. The boy, put to steering with a broken oar, knew even as a lubber, that the other two were poor rowers. The girls gave small fake screams of panic as spray from the whitecaps dotted their dresses. The boy tried attaching Monique’s breasts and Dora’s arms and legs to the older girl’s body, but it was no good, they were just kids like himself.

The wind had risen and the lake turned grayer, a huge live desert, the distant camp a drawn-up army of khaki pyramids. There was almost a storm, he concluded. Water could gobble you up, all right, all the time singing in your ears, pressing first yellow, then green flowers against your eyelids—how different would drowning be from being smothered by fat women? He closed his eyes in a test of the flowers.

“We’re getting too far off the fucking shore,” shouted the older boy. “You steer rotten, kid.” In protest, David threw his steering oar as far out into the lake as he could and to show that he remained in control of his life, he moved to the center seat and put his arm around the younger girl’s waist and tried to reproduce the feel of Monique’s hip. The girl was bony and motionless; she stared fixedly at the dirty water sloshing in the bottom of the boat. He removed his arm and began to blow into the sweet potato shaped ocarina that the younger boy had left on the seat. He remained silent through the rest of the voyage.

When, extremely tired, he arrived back at the squaw tent Aunt Freddie was there alone, playing solitaire. “Have a good swim, Davey?” “No, went in a boat.” “Did you get permission?” “Sure.” “Weren’t there waves?” “Yes, we could have drowned, but I saved everybody.” “Oh David, you’re such a liar.” It was the answer he had fished for. “You’ve got a sad look on your face, have you been to the bathroom since we came?” He ignored her question: “When are we going home?” “Why, are you bored?” “No, but I don’t get to do anything; dance, or like that.” “There’s a dance tonight, you can be my date.” She smiled her bird-toothed smile.

Could she be serious? Aunt Freddie, a date?
“We don’t have to dance if you don’t want to; we can watch the others; it’s just as much fun.”
“Okay. I can’t dance anyway.”
“Neither can I; not very well. As I said, when I went to Columbia Teachers College . . .”
“Okay, Aunt Freddie, I’ll go with you if you want me to. But I’m not going to dance.”

The band was a mandolin, a banjo, a sax, a trumpet, a piano. They called themselves Skeeter’s Hawaiian Serenaders. The leader had pimples and a large jaw and sick eyes with lashes longer than a girl’s.

“Michael and Monique dance quite vulgarly, don’t you think?” he overheard Freddie say to Dora.
“Oh Frederica, you’re such an old hen.”

The three of them sat in brown varnished wooden chairs near French windows that looked out on the lake, now black with a thick darkness running on and on to Canada and the North Pole and Siberia.

At the end of a number Iron Mike and Monique came up to them and Mike said, “Come on Adorable, let’s dance.” Dora’s cheeks went crimson and she got up at once and they jigged away.

“David and I are enjoying just watching,” Aunt Freddie said to Monique. “Aren’t we David?”
“Yessum.”

“I’m so glad,” Monique said. “My mother would kill me if she knew I’d sent David to the clubhouse for breakfast alone, made him shift for himself.”

“He’s used to that, aren’t you Davey?” and without waiting for an answer: “We Campbells are very enterprising. As I said... And that’s the reason why...”

When the boy got home to West River downstate, Mama met him at the Pennsy station. A ‘28 Chevy sedan was parked at the baggage platform.

“You traded cars,” he said.

“Yes, the old Lex was just worn out.”

They got into the Chevy. He patted the seat, which was of velour instead of leather like the old Lexington’s. A stir of dust arose from the cloth.

Mama said, “I’ve made a date for you for the dance they’re having at Heavenly Rest Parish House—Lydia Brooke—her mother teaches out at the college you know. Her mother said Lydia will help you learn to dance.”

“I don’t want to go to a dance with Lydia Brooke. I’m off of women.”

Mama looked at him with her cold eyes: “You’ll do as I say. I’m your mother.”

He did not reply but cried bitterly to himself, “You had your chance you dope you had your chance!” There was something about the new second-hand Chevy and the way Aunt Freddie had stuck up for him that made him see that someday love would be bearable.
Excerpts from *Forever Sad the Hearts*

PATRICIA L. WALSH

[This is a scene from the hospital where I worked in Da Nang, Vietnam, caring for civilian casualties of the war.]

We drove to the northern end of the small city and entered a walled-off compound consisting of three large stucco buildings. They were arranged in a U shape, connected by verandas which were crowded with people. Surrounding the main complex were several low wooden hovels bursting with patients in ragged plaster casts. Amputees hopped around with the aid of crudely fashioned crutches, and dozens of scantily clothed children squatted lethargically against the flimsy walls of the buildings. The stench of rotted flesh and old blood filled the damp, April air.

We stopped outside one of the main buildings and I followed Leo into a compact room crowded with people who were reading mail and smoking cigarettes. He shoved my suitcase under a chair and introduced me to my co-workers, but the group looked up from their letters only long enough to say hello.

"We might as well start with the O.R.," Leo said, leading me back to the main hall and down a screened corridor lined with people clutching dirty scraps of paper.

"They're all waiting for surgery," he said. "I hope Shelly gets back in time to do them today, while we don't have any fresh casualties."

He squatted for a moment on the cement floor and spoke in Vietnamese to an old man, who anxiously handed over his scrap of paper. "These are the only hospital records they have," he said, standing to show me the paper. "All we require is a hematocrit above twenty-five percent."

I knew Leo was serious but it was hard to believe they were putting people to sleep with such low blood counts. At home we'd transfuse anyone below 30 percent before even considering an anesthetic.

"Be sure you check their mouths carefully for betel nut," he said. "We let them chew it because we have no preoperative sedation to give and the stuff seems to mellow them out. But if you don't make them spit it out before you put them to sleep, you might have a wad of it stuck in a trachea."

"It looks like only women are chewing it," I said, looking around.

"The men usually smoke opium."

As I surveyed the patiently waiting people, some silently nodded their heads in greetings and others said, "Chao Ba."

"I didn't have language training," I apologized to Leo.

"Ba means Mrs.," he said. "They don't address you as Miss unless they know you're unmarried; then they say Co."

"Chao Ba," I said to an elderly woman, bowing my head slightly, as she had done.

"Be careful how you say Ba. With the wrong inflection, you could be calling her a cow."

"Saigon told me we had plenty of interpreters," I said as I followed him through a set of swinging doors.

"We have one, but he's not always easy to find."

"I wish I hadn't agreed to forgo my two months of language training. But Washington had an urgent request for an anesthetist."

"Bullshit," Leo said. "Saigon sends those bogus requests so it looks like they're working hard."

We'd entered a dark area, which contained only one concrete sink and a large garbage can overflowing with putrid dressings and casts. I could make out operating rooms, opening off where we stood, but they were deserted except for an American woman who was busy swatting flies. We went into the room where she worked and Leo introduced her.
"This is Jean, the American supervisor of the operating rooms."
"It looks like Jean and I have a lot in common," I said.
"You could be twins!" Leo laughed. We were about the same age and both had freckles, hazel eyes and brown hair. The only significant difference was Jean's greater height.
"I didn't think anyone was as skinny as me," I said. "I'm sure I sweated off ten pounds in Saigon's heat."
"Being thin's an advantage," Jean said. "Fat people don't do very well over here."

While we talked, flies landed on our faces and tried to crawl into our mouths and noses. Leo and Jean didn't seem to notice, but I swatted frantically at the persistent pests.
"Why do you have the windows open?" I asked, watching as more swarmed into the room and crawled over the operating table, feasting on the old blood that had dripped into its crevices.
"I know it's not very aseptic," Jean said, "but the power is off and we can't get enough light through these damned frosted windows."
The two translucent windows opened into a central courtyard which contained a thriving green garden. I watched as several patients left the hospital and deposited their wastes on the vegetables. I knew about human fertilizer, but the idea of night soil from sick people made me shiver within the warmth of Shelly's sweater.
"I've picked out a few patients from the shacks," Jean was telling Leo. "I know you don't have much left to work with, so I chose ones who can be done under spinal."
"Shelly's out at Navy cumshawing," he said. "If you're willing to show Kate around the hospital, I'll get the cases started."
"O.K. Jim wants to start as soon as my staff gets back from siesta."
"Jim Ramirez is our orthopedic surgeon," Leo told me. "He gave up a year of his private practice in California to do volunteer work."
"Do you and Shelly do spinals?" I asked. Only physicians had done them where I'd trained, although the nurse anesthetists had been responsible for caring for any complications once the drug had been injected.
"Jim taught us after we got here," Leo said. "We can teach you."
"I don't know, Leo. This is all sounding a lot more complicated than Washington or Saigon led me to believe."
"You already know how to manage spinals," Leo said. "Putting the needle in is nothing."
"If the Vietnamese students can learn, you can too," Jean said. She was hanging a sticky string of flypaper over the O.R. table, to replace the carcass-covered one she'd taken down. "They've only had a few months to learn what you covered in five years of training." Her voice sounded impatient but not angry.
"We're teaching some Vietnamese how to do anesthesia," Leo explained. "We still have a few problems with them, but they're getting better about not going out for a cup of tea while they have someone anesthetized."
"I didn't know there was an anesthesia school here," I said. "No one mentioned it in Saigon."
"They don't know about it," he said. "I just started it on my own because we didn't have enough people to staff all of the O.R.s."

A group of giggling Vietnamese O.R. nurses interrupted our conversation and Jean left to give them their afternoon assignments. Leo showed me the antique anesthesia machine at the head of the operating table.
"We do everything below the waist under spinal," he said. "That way we can save our oxygen for the ones who absolutely have to go to sleep. If they're injured on both ends, we sometimes do the lower half under spinal, then put them to sleep for the upper part."
"You even have to ration oxygen?"
"We ration everything," he said, "even time."
I followed him back to the central hall, trying to avoid the frequent red blobs of discarded betel nut which blended with patches of dried blood on the rough concrete floors. Each of the three O.R.s was the same, a set of windows and an unreliable air-conditioner set in the otherwise bare walls, an outdated operating table and a supply cupboard with nearly empty shelves. There was one operating light above each table, dark now because of the power failure.
"How can you do surgery with no electricity?" I asked.
"Jim can work in the light from the windows," Leo said. "He’s used to operating without suction or cautery."
Only then did I notice the single x-ray view box near the door of each room.
"How does he read x-rays with no electricity?" I asked.
"The windows."
The flies no longer disgusted me. I felt grateful for the all-purpose source of light and ventilation.
"Ether is our main anesthetic," Leo was saying. "I know you’re probably not familiar with that either, but you’ll learn."
"Why ether?" The old-fashioned electric suction machines I’d observed in each of the rooms would pose a special danger around an explosive anesthetic.
"It’s cheap, it has a wide margin of safety, we can give it open drop when we don’t have any oxygen, and it’s all we have," Leo said, ending with a smile.
"Sorry I asked. I just hope you’ll be patient while I learn how to use it."
"Of course."
The fourth room we looked into was nothing more than a cubbyhole with a plain wooden table and a portable light. "We only do minor things in here," Leo said, "like fractures and amputations."
Jean caught up to us and introduced me to a small Vietnamese man, whose darting black eyes appeared to take in everything at once. "This is my counterpart, Mr. Hai," she said.
He bowed slightly and said, "Chao Co. Welcome Viet Nam."
"I’ll take over the tour now," Jean said, dismissing Mr. Hai with a bow and Leo with a smile.
"Does everyone have a Vietnamese counterpart?" I asked as I followed her along the screened corridor.
"That’s the plan," she said. "We’ve just supposed to act as advisers." I nearly ran to keep up to the stride her advantage in height allowed. "The whole Vietnamization program is directed at teaching the locals how to take care of themselves. Unfortunately, we seem to be doing a lot of the work, while they stand around and watch."
"It doesn’t sound too encouraging," I said as we entered a large ward just across the corridor from the lounge where Leo had first taken me. Ancient iron beds lined the peeling walls, each containing two or three patients. There were no mattresses, only thin woven mats spread across the rusted flat springs. The floor was littered with additional patients lying under beds, or wherever they could find a vacant spot. A tangled network of tubes connected the suffering bodies to bottles of blood and glucose solutions suspended from a wire that stretched the length of the room. Drainage bottles were placed randomly amongst the clutter to empty distended stomachs and bladders or to collect the bloody discharge from chest tubes.
"This is the intensive care ward," Jean said. "You bring your patients here for recovery from anesthesia."
As she spoke, a willowy blond approached. She held a wad of stinking dressings in one hand and rested the other on her hip as she looked me over with nothing less than a look of contempt on her face.
"This is Margaret," Jean said, "the charge nurse."
"Are all of these patients recovering from anesthesia?" I asked, surprised by the number.

"Oh, no, dear," Margaret said in a slipped British accent. "These are my patients. Yours are over there," She pointed to a cramped corner of the room where two patients lay on canvas stretchers placed directly on the floor.

"That's the recovery room?" I asked.

"The recovery space," Margaret corrected, adjusting the starched white cap perched on her neatly combed hair. It was the only nurse's cap I'd seen so far. "We're just kind enough to take care of them until they're ready to be transferred to another ward."

She pointed to a lone tank of oxygen and a rusted suction machine. "As you can see, we have all of the latest conveniences," she said, and abruptly returned to supervising a group of young Vietnamese girls who were changing dressings on moaning patients.

"Don't be offended by Margaret," Jean said, as we returned to the corridor. "She'll bust her ass to save people or to try to teach, but she's not known for her friendliness."

"Where were those students from?" I asked. "Did she start her own program like Leo?"

"There's a nursing school located a few blocks away. One of the instructors is on R & R and the other one's in the States on sick leave. Margaret shows them the ropes in her ward on her own."

Jean told me there were fifteen people on the team—Margaret, from England, and assorted Americans and Canadians. The various agencies, including the Public Health team which Jean was part of, combined their staffs under the supervision of the Better World Organization, to make things simpler.

As we talked, we came out onto an open veranda. There, children with surgical dressings wandered about, trying to stay back from the eaves, where water dripped in a steady stream to the littered ground. Others leaned pitifully against the walls, unable to walk because of missing legs or feet.

We stopped by a makeshift x-ray department, where I met Gail, the lone American technician. There was no radiologist, so the surgeons were responsible for reading their own films.

"Gail shoots all of the pictures and develops them," Jean said. "She also manages to teach a few students in her free time."

The attractive young woman had continued sorting through a stack of military medical supplies. "In case you're wondering," she said, "this stuff is all outdated. They'd just burn it if I didn't take it."

"We each have our own sources for supplies," Jean said as we returned to the veranda. "Gail has friends at an Army hospital."

We next entered a room designated as a laboratory by a hand-painted sign over its door. I was immediately impressed by the orderly cleanliness of the room, where a studious-looking American worked over blood and urine specimens with the assistance of several young Vietnamese.

"Greg Troy," he said, standing to offer his hand as Jean introduced us.

"Nice-looking lab," I said.

"Thanks. We try to keep it up," He was very tall and wore glasses so thick, they kept sliding down his nose. The blood bank he showed me was an old-fashioned refrigerator jammed with bags of blood bearing the stamps of various military hospitals.

"It's all outdated," Greg said. "I worked out a deal with the military to let me have it instead of dumping it."

"Is it any good?" I asked. I was relieved to hear that wounded Americans were receiving only good blood, but I wondered whether he was doing these people a favor by using their rejects.
"It produces some reactions," he said. "But it does the job without killing them. We're trying to reeducate the locals to donate, but they've been indoctrinated by the Viet Cong that we're trying to bleed them to death. Besides, not many of them have any red cells to spare."

After thanking Greg for his time, we returned to the veranda and climbed a flight of slippery stairs. "The general wards are located up here," Jean said, leading me into an airless, windowless room that smelled worse than our pigpens back on the farm. As we entered, a dim overhead light flickered on, indicating the return of electrical power. As my eyes slowly accommodated, I took in the sight of dozens of patients lying on straw mats or on the bare concrete floor. Women with bloody dressings covering their abdomens or severed extremities wrestled with crying infants who desperately tried to extract nourishment from their limp breasts. There were no sanitary facilities and flies swarmed over the patients, sucking at their dressings and crawling into the babies' draining eyes and noses. The adults made feeble attempts at brushing the insects away, but the children seemed oblivious to their existence.

I heard giggling behind me and turned to see a group of Vietnamese girls in spotlessly clean white uniforms standing in the doorway.

"They like to look over the newcomers," Jean said.

"Why don't they try taking care of the patients instead of gawking." I asked indignantly.

"They're laughing at the way you're swatting at flies," Jean said, causing my hand to stop in midair.

I brushed past the group of onlookers and returned to the veranda. Jean followed, her face a combination of anger and frustration. "They don't go in the wards because they're afraid of catching a disease," she said. "You can't really blame them when they've had none of the immunizations we take for granted."

"Then why don't we give them the damned shots and put them to work?"

"Politics," she said unemotionally. "We get our shots from the military and they're not allowed to."

"Aren't there any public-health programs to inoculate the people?" I asked.

"We should be trying to prevent disease instead of trying to save its half-dead victims."

"Our primary responsibility is care of casualties," Jean said patiently. "We do what we can for the cholera and typhoid victims, but there's very little public health work being done."

From what I'd seen during my short stay in Saigon, I knew that public health projects were incredibly behind schedule. But I thought they'd at least have immunization programs.

"I don't think I can take much more," I said, leaning weakly against the rail of the veranda.

"You might as well find out right now just how much you can take," Jean said. "This is not an easy job, and we need people who can contribute their share in spite of the frustrations."

I felt unfairly chastised, but defiant enough to follow her into the second ward, where my spirits immediately lifted. Two windows admitted fresh air, which was circulated by a large overhead fan. Most of the patients had at least a portion of a bed to lie in, and a Vietnamese nurse was busy taking care of them while issuing directions to an old woman who assisted her.

"She was trained in the States," Jean explained. "Her husband was sent there for pilot's training and she went to nursing school."

"Chao Co," the nurse said to Jean, smiling shyly at me.

"Chao Ba," Jean said. "This is our new nurse anesthetist, Co Kate."

The nurse inclined her head and her assistant gave me a black-toothed smile. Until now I'd thought all the peasant women were toothless, but up close I could see that the assistant's teeth were coated with a shiny black substance.
“What’s that stuff on the old woman’s teeth?” I asked Jean quietly when the two had returned to their work.

“Lacquer,” she said. “I think they do it to cover the stains from betel nut. But I’ve also been told it’s considered a mark of beauty in the peasant class.”

“Number one,” Jean called to the nurse as we left the neat ward. The nurse blushed and lowered her head.

“Everything is rated on a scale of one to ten,” Jean said as we returned to the veranda. “Number one is the best and ten is very bad.”

“I can’t believe the difference in that ward compared to the first,” I said when we were safely out of earshot.

“The others will improve as soon as we get more American nurses to take charge.”

“Or British.”

“God, don’t tell Margaret I said that,” Jean laughed. “She already thinks Americans are too impressed with themselves.”

We descended to the lower level once more and slowly made our way along the crowded veranda to a room located at the very end of the U-shaped structure. The stench of decaying flesh assailed my nostrils and I wondered why she was showing me the morgue. I considered telling her she was going too far in testing my resolve, but obediently entered when she opened the screen door and motioned me inside. The place I entered was more gruesome than any morgue I’d ever seen.

Patients who looked half decomposed moved about as if in slow motion. Eyes stared out from bloated red and purple faces from which layers of skin had been completely burned away. Ribbons of flesh dangled from arms and legs like loose shingles flapping in a storm. I felt as if someone were holding my face in a decaying carcass, and began breathing through my mouth so the putrid air would not have to pass through my nose.

“The burn ward,” Jean said.

A tall, handsome woman with weathered skin and silver hair stopped wrapping a bandage on a child whose arm had been charred to a twisted stump. Her walk was almost queenly as she came over to where we stood. “Could I help you?” she asked in an equally regal voice.

“Ruth, this is Kate Shea, our new anesthetist,” Jean said.

“Thank heavens,” the nurse said with a relieved smile. “I was afraid you were from that Concerned Citizens group. When they come in here, my whole routine is shot.”

“Don’t let us interrupt you,” Jean said. “I just wanted Kate to know where you’re located.”

“We appreciate any help we get from the anesthesia department,” Ruth said. “Some of our patients get severe tracheal or bronchial burns so they need special attention.”

She returned to her work, her slow movements seeming to have a calming effect on the patients. I watched in awe as she supervised the most unique debridement operation I’d ever witnessed. Burn patients at home were taken to an operating room and given an anesthetic to have necrotic tissue removed. Here they used a buddy system to accomplish the task, the patients sitting in a row and each of them peeling away the dead bits of flesh from the person in front of him. They worked methodically with only an occasional subdued moan.

“Have they been sedated?” I asked Jean.

“We don’t have anything to give them,” she said. “They’ve never had pain killers, so they don’t expect to be free of pain.”

“Careful of my door,” Ruth called as we left. Jean closed the screen door carefully and we walked around to the back of the building.

“It took her a long time to get that door,” Jean said. “Some Sea Bees built it for her.”
"It must have been terrible before with all the flies."
"Ruth's worked in many countries as a missionary. She's used to doing without."

We'd stopped next to an old bathtub just behind the burn ward. "This is her latest acquisition," Jean said. "She brings the bad ones out here to soak their dressings off."

"Who fills it?" I asked, noticing the holes where pipes should have been.
"She does."

We were on our way to see a rusted old generator that stood behind the hospital when I asked Jean the question that was crowding all other thoughts from my mind. "Were those patients burned with napalm?"

"Yes."

The nausea I felt in my stomach was quickly replaced by rage as I thought of the Air America pilot referring to them as crispy critters.

"That's why the Concerned Citizens group Ruth referred to is always bugging her," Jean said. "They're against the manufacture and use of napalm and spend a lot of time taking pictures to prove their point."

"Is that all they do, take pictures?"

"Occasionally they take patients back to the States for skin grafts."

"They take them to the States! Why the hell don't they get Ruth some decent equipment and drugs to take care of them here instead of spending all that money on just a few?"

"Why don't they give Ruth the money they spend on their own plane fare?" Jean said. Her tone made it clear that she didn't need a newcomer to point out the obvious.

She showed me how to activate the generator but warned me not to rely on it.

"We usually end up cranking it by hand if we're in the middle of a case where we absolutely have to have power," she said. "Most of the time we can get by without it."

We were on our way back down the hall to the O.R. when a young Vietnamese man cruised past us on a sputtering motorcycle. The corridor echoed loudly and the fumes made my eyes water, but no one else seemed to notice.

"They park them inside for safekeeping," Jean laughed when she saw my face. "Anything left unguarded is stolen."

We stopped in the lounge which she unlocked with a key she wore around her neck. "I hope you brought your own uniforms," she said. "We don't have any extras on hand."

"I have a couple in my bag," I said, glad that I'd thought to pack them even though O.R. attire was customarily provided.

She handed me one of hers and said, "Are you ready to go to work?"

"I guess so," I said, pulling on the gown that nearly came to my ankles. Somehow I knew I'd done the right thing by coming here, but my legs weren't so sure as I followed her towards the O.R.s.

[Another scene from the hospital.]

We'd deposited our patient and were leaving recovery when we met several American Marines carrying moaning, mutilated bodies in from a large troop truck. They hurried towards the screened-in porch, where Jean was trying to make room for the new arrivals by moving to one side the patients from the shacks who'd been waiting for surgery. Leo opened a room adjoining the screened corridor and instructed the men to put the worst ones in there for triage, the sorting process to determine who would be taken to the operating room first. The small room contained only two I.V. poles and depended entirely on the windows for light.

With the precision of experience, Leo and Shelly carried I.V. solutions, needles and tourniquets into the room and began working on the hemorrhaging victims. The
missing limbs and jagged pieces of bone jutting from torn flesh didn’t seem to bother them, but I stood for several minutes in numbed silence. They made no comment, and eventually I began sorting through the rows of stretchers in the corridor to see who needed immediate attention.

Many of the patients had been on a crowded bus that had gone over a land mine, blowing away portions of their legs and feet, or severing them entirely. The smaller children had escaped serious injury by being above the level of impact on their mothers’ laps. But their frail bodies were riddled with bits of shrapnel, and they screamed hysterically for the mothers who’d protected them and now lay near death. The truck had barely pulled away when two field ambulances came through the gates. Navy corpsmen unloaded victims who had lain for hours in a rice paddy after being caught in a fire fight. In some cases, mud had oozed into their wounds in sufficient quantities to stop the flow of blood from torn vessels. Others had not been so lucky. One entire stretcher was piled with infants and small children; corpses mingled with the wounded, who whimpered pitifully as we eased them from the tangled mess. Mothers clutched dead children to their breasts and wailed inconsolably as they swayed from side to side. Children screamed in terror as they tried to arouse dead parents, their frantic cries creating a deafening din in the small room which now looked and smelled like a slaughterhouse.

When everyone had been carried inside, a young corpsman came over to me and said, “Sorry we can’t stay to help, but we have to get back.”

“That’s all right,” I said. “Thanks for bringing them in.”

“Don’t thank us,” he said, nervously readjusting his blood-spattered helmet. “I’m sorry about all the kids.” He walked quickly out to an ambulance where another corpsman waited and they roared out of the compound.

“It’s hardest on the corpsmen,” Leo said behind me. “They aren’t part of the killing but they have to watch.” When I turned to face him, I saw a man much older than the one who’d laughed over beer at the Bamboo Hut.

“Leo, why are American military called to pick up civilians?” I asked.

“They don’t have to be called, Kate. They’re the other half of the fire fight.”

It took me several moments to understand what he was saying. American military were shooting people whom they’d later pick up and bring to an ill-equipped hospital staffed by American government workers, to be cared for with supplies curnshawed from the military. I shook my head and steadied myself against one of the damp walls in the gloomy corridor.

“It’s crazy,” Leo said. “We all know it’s crazy, but we just take care of the patients and don’t ask too many questions. The guys feel bad enough about the people they bring us.”

“Then why don’t they stop shooting?”

“A lot of them would like to.”

“Do you go along with all of this, Leo? Do you think the war is right?”

“We have work to do,” he said, walking back to the O.R. without answering me. At least they bring them in to us, I thought, feeling a confused sense of relief. Shelly poked her head out of triage and said, “Kate, how about taking over in here so I can get started with the ones who’re ready for surgery?” I hurried into the room, my conscience pushed to the background for the moment.

[The following is a scene from a military hospital where Kate had gone to beg supplies for the civilian patients she cared for in her ill-equipped hospital. If not for the generosity of the American military medical facilities, many more innocent Vietnamese would have perished, since the supplies intended for them all ended up on the black market. The government workers, such as Kate, were ignored when they protested to Washington.]

He parked the jeep clear of the helicopter landing pad at Navy Hospital and we entered a quonset hut marked RECEIVING ONE. It was a plain rectangular room but
was well stocked with everything necessary to handle mass trauma. Several wounded Americans were presently being treated by efficient Navy doctors and corpsmen.

At one end of the room, a young Marine lay silently staring at the ceiling while blood was pumped into his arms. Two surgeons clamped several blood vessels on the mutilated stumps where his legs had been. One of the surgeons was Shelly's boyfriend, Tom. He worked quietly, like Dr. Ramirez, doing the best he could against improbable odds. But at our hospital, a double above-the-knee amputation would never get the attention or blood this young man was receiving in an attempt to save his life.

"Land mine," the corpsman pumping blood said quietly when I walked over to where they worked.

"Hello, Kate," Tom said, continuing to clamp torn vessels that oozed in spite of tourniquets. "What can I do for you?"

His casual manner seemed irreverent even though I knew he was doing his best. I'd seen injuries like this—and worse—in our own triage, but my feelings were different as I looked at the Marine. There shouldn't have been a difference, but there was. The frustration I felt about the suffering Vietnamese for whom we were so ill-equipped to care was a world apart from the revulsion and disbelief that filled me as I looked at the sunken blue eyes in that pallid, bloodstained face.

"Are you visiting or on a cumshaw mission?" Tom asked. His face looked fatigued from lack of sleep, but his uniform was not saturated with sweat as my dress was. Each building had its own generator to pump cool air-conditioning over the patients and busy staff. I was happy they had it, and happy our wounded had the best equipment and supplies available.

"We can come back later," I said to Tom. "Is that an American girl?" the Marine asked weakly.

"Sure is," the corpsman said, motioning for me to come closer. I moved to the head of the stretcher and looked down into the chalk-white face. He riveted his eyes on me as he had on the ceiling, imploring me to keep them from the monstrous sight at the end of the stretcher.

"What's your name?" he asked. He had to spurt out the words between gasps, like someone suffering from asthma. I looked at his chest, which appeared uninjured, and assumed he was weak from pain and blood loss.

"Kate," I said, my voice sounding nervously loud in the quiet room.

"Hi, I'm Ray." He tried to shake hands but couldn't lift his arm because of needles and tubing. I put my hand over his and felt the cold clamminess of shock.

"What're you doin' in Nam?" he asked.

"I'm a nurse at a civilian hospital in town."

"I didn't know there were female nurses here. You should work out here so we wouldn't have to look at these ugly corpsmen." He smiled feebly at the somber, freckle-faced boy who continued to pump blood.

"Someone has to look out for the people who get caught in the middle," I said. "We take care of wounded Vietnamese." His damp brow wrinkled and I immediately regretted my words. "They're mainly women and children," I added quickly, "not people actually involved in the fighting."

The lie passed easily between us.

"It's good you're takin' care of them," he said. "There's a lot of women and kids gettin' blown away for nothin'. Someone should be lookin' out for them." His voice trailed off and I looked towards Tom, who turned a thumb down below the level of the stretcher. When I looked puzzled, he lifted a sheet covering the Marine's midsection and I saw a wad of blood packs that had been stuffed into a gaping hole in his pelvis.

The patient suddenly seemed to rally, jerking his eyes open and trying to sit up. "Take it easy, buddy," the corpsman said, gently pushing him back onto the canvas stretcher. "We'll be taking you into the operating room as soon as we get this blood in."
“No big deal,” the Marine said. “Where’re you from?” he asked, returning his attention to me.

“Minnesota.”

“Oh, yeah? I’m from Iowa. Guess I’ll be goin’ back there as soon as the docs get me fixed up.” It was his first admission that he was wounded and I wondered if he knew how badly. My hand tightened on his involuntarily and he smiled up at me.

“Sure is great havin’ a nice American nurse to hold my hand.” His voice was weaker and he blinked repeatedly to clear his clouded vision.

“I’ll come out and hold your hand whenever you want,” I said. As I spoke, his hand went limp and his mouth dropped open to release its last breath.

“There’s no point trying to resuscitate him,” Tom said. “He didn’t have a chance.” The pelvic packs were removed, revealing what was left of his insides exposed by the missing flesh where genitalia should have been.

I felt light-headed and almost giddy. “My god,” I said, “I feel like I’ve just stepped into an old war movie.”

“This part of war doesn’t change,” Tom said. “Only the location does.” His voice was flat, exhausted of feeling.
Mister Crudity
HUGH WALTHALL

_for Richard Flynn_

Love will always know more about You than You
Knows about Him/Her/It.

I was a poet; now
I let my fists do my talking for me.

Do you have weird dreams?
I only dream about money.

Nobody lives forever.
Not Ginger...not Fred. How about a kiss?

Trust me.
My heart is in the right place.

This is pretty.
Did you make it yourself?

They say you have a shallow personality.
Did you think it was a secret?

Some monkeys love coconuts.
What else is new?

I am no pushover.
I am a cool customer.

This is a nice china shop.
Remember the last time I was here?
All Kidding Aside

HUGH WALTHALL

My life is a shambles, a dumb jumble
of grossly subtle mistakes riding over me the way a
High Pressure System does, mashing down
stagnant air onto an area, a city,
in late summer.

Riddle: Everything is taken from life,
yet I am not my life.

Beneath the gruff exterior there lies the
gruff interior, where Nip
and Tuck go at it Tooth and Nail.
Can I see you again, as
you were?

The Kiss of Death: either you’re born
with it, or you’re not.
The Magician and His Assistant
VALERIE WOHLFELD

The tap of his wand against the glass means insomnia. How can he sleep when the scarves he tugs from his sleeves never seem to end? She’s awake, too. The moon won’t stop glowing. It’s his white gloves inside a dark trunk she can’t close. They kiss but the white ball appears on his tongue no matter how often she pulls it from his mouth.

Once they replaced all the white stones in a Japanese garden with eggs. She broke one. As the yolk caught in her hand he told her, See, the egg is the only stone with a heart.

His heart, she thinks, is moon all the way through. She’s taken off a little corner of it like a child biting into the ear of a chocolate rabbit to see if it’s solid. It’s hollow, a locket around his neck that will never stay closed.

At the end of the show he carries her up stairs, a painter’s ladder. The audience applauds. Why? she wonders. Because they think I have made even you, he answers.

She knows there’s another moon, beyond this one. When he dies, she knows his ghost will come out like the last tiny doll released
in a set of nesting dolls
and float up to circle the other moon.

*Collection of stale bread crusts*
he says of the moon.
*And the man-in-the-moon,* he tells her,
*probably female.* On the news that night
she thinks she hears *Man with ovaries*
discovered on moon.

At the end of each day
there is the whiteness
of the rabbit always there
on his head when he takes
off his hat at the dinner table.
Later, when they can’t sleep,
she’ll watch the broken TV,
its picture a moon
of white static
while in the bedroom
his scarves follow him,
whether he’s awake or asleep,
a trail of silk
as he practices carrying her
up stairs that won’t end.
How I Was Grown

VALERIE WOHLFELD

I never heard my parents making love
though when I was barely in the womb
they sensed my presence.
Like children hiding in long grass
they held hands and covered each other’s mouths.

Once a friend told me
she heard her father
planting the seed
and her mother crying
for him to plant it deeper.

They planted the seed
during winter, on a beach.
My mother was barefoot
and had ribbons in her braids.
My father wore his face like a veil
no light could enter.

Inside a cave my mother found
they raked earth
with their cold fingers,
stoppping once to rub
each other’s hands warm.
The seed grew there,
safe as a child hiding
under grandfather’s huge, black cloak.

The day I was born
my mother came to me in the cave.
She told me she had seen clouds take the moon
on a stormy night.
You’ll go like that, she said,
you will go like that.

My husband thinks I’m shy.
When he enters me
I cover my face in my hair,
thinking of the cave
or the moon dissolving
in clouds like a finger
of butter and bone.
I am remembering my parent’s sheets,
white and coarse, muslin.
The dark bed where they moved
hesitantly, their bodies pure
and noiseless, touching
like two angels
combing each other’s wings.
Too Good To Be True

SUSAN WOOD

Small towns in Texas have names
too good to be true. On Sunday drives
we’d pass the signs for Bug Tussle
and Jot ‘Em Down but never see the towns.
Scattered houses, maybe a grocery
with an empty pump, one church
(certain to be Baptist), they became
their names, common and temporary.
No doubt, someone had traced
their origins and put them
in a book, but I don’t want to know.
I’d rather imagine a farmer
looking out at cotton fields flattened
by hail or torched by sun, who thinks
to himself they aren’t worth enough
for boll weevils to fight over. Or,
a man writes down the possible names
of towns but can’t come to a decision,
though one he discards is Emblem, chosen
by a girl who picks a sprig
of crape myrtle to remind her
what happened in the garden
among the shrubs and laden trees.

Some things seem so right
they’re wrong, telling us so much
about themselves there’s nothing left
to be said about them, or believed.
That sign hung for years above the courthouse:
“The Blackest Land, The Whitest People.”
Black was for soil, the rich earth that would grow
anything, and white meant only
a kind of neighborliness. If someone did a favor,
you might respond, “That’s white of you.”
Anyway, that was the explanation.
“Even our niggers are white,” they said,
in Greenville. So fact becomes stranger
to fiction and can’t survive
our imagination of it. That’s why
stories are told in families, but never
written down, leaving no room
for doubt, like a young man
who walks into a general store
one summer day in, maybe, nineteen-ought-two,
as they used to say. He’s a farmer,
and poor, because the storms and heat
have ruined his cotton. But he’s happy,
we can see it in his face, and he's about
to be married. He wears a sprig
of crape myrtle in his lapel, and he enjoys
so much telling a story about his grandfather,
who went to California in '49 and came back
rich. The bridles were sterling silver,
he says, the plates were gold. And then,
the grandfather went to war and took
his slave and never came back
from that. An old black man leaning
on the counter begins to weep, tears
filling the ditches of his face.
"I am the slave," he says, "who went
with your grandaddy to the war."
No one believes him. Not a young man
who wears his happiness like luck,
or a wedding, nor the farmers talking idly
through the long afternoon about failure
and the weather, who shrug and look
away, trying to forget, for just a moment,
that things that once seemed right
can turn out wrong, or how a life might prove
to be a long and rambling story, too true
any longer to be good.
1669 Oxford Street

SUSAN WOOD

The photographs mounted on black paper and underneath the mysterious names etched in white ink in my mother's delicate script:
Wiltz, Maggie, Chick, Onalee... Characters in a story, proof of the world's existence to a child. In the photographs of my parents, it is 1944 or '45 and in the backyards of Berkeley the young wives sip gin and tonic and wait for the men to return from Alameda or Oakland. See them stroll up the sidewalks, their white uniforms silver at dusk. How handsome they are, and the women dressed in that style we speak of now as "The Forties" but which to them was simply what they wore. My mother, who does not even think she is pretty, is beautiful. The bottle-brush trees shed their red blossoms, and today Chick and Wiltz have flown once again far out into the Pacific, but the War will soon be over. And soon he will lead her up the stairs to the small apartment where dinner is heating on the stove. They will lie on the Murphy bed and the night will cover them with its breeze. I will be absent no longer.
Afterward

GLORIA NAYLOR

The seminar room in Lisner Hall is dominated by a huge, rectangular table. On the left is a low bookshelf that runs the length of the wall under a blackboard. At the far rear and on the right are high windows. Besides a scarred desk pushed back near the door, there are no other distinguishing features. It basically boils down to being a large room with a large table. And when I enter that room on a Thursday evening in September, I encounter sixteen faces around that table. For the most part, these people are strangers to each other and strangers to me. We have met each other only through the written word up until that night. They know of my life only what I had chosen to tell my publishers and newspaper reporters, and I know only what they have chosen to tell the English department when they applied for the Jenny McKeen Moore workshop. They have read my work, and I have read theirs from among a pool of applicants from the greater Washington area. That is the place, and these are the people. And in the next four months (once a week—in roughly 32 hours total) we will have accomplished a minor miracle: seventeen strangers will have reached the point where they care enough to laugh with each other, feel with each other, and fight with each other—and that is because of the process—we are all there to write.

My entrance that first night was accompanied with the ambivalence that most writers have about leading workshops. First, there is the feeling that you cannot actually teach anyone to write. Either the talent is there or it’s not; and at best you can only encourage and refine whatever is in the individual before you. Many students come to you looking for that elixir of creativity—the magic formula that will breathe life into a piece of work. And there is the strain of having to play God for others when you’re well aware that you daily grovel at the altar of the Muses yourself for their inexplicable and capricious blessing to your own hours of excruciating labor.

Secondly, there is the fear that if you spend too much time turning an unconscious process into a conscious one for your students, it will affect your own work. That you will begin to doubt yourself, pre-edit your manuscript to the point where you’ll ultimately think it to death. Often, you are breaking every rule in the book when you sit down to write, knowing that the bottom line to any sentence, paragraph, chapter, or book is simply—does it work? And always the end justifies the means. But they are coming to you for those means, and so how can you take them apart for your students and then forget that once you’re home? If every writer were honest and willing to forego the income that keeps so many of them subsisting, a workshop would take exactly three minutes, or whatever time is involved in saying to a group of people, “Just go out and write. Then write again, write again—and pray.”

Thirdly, and I believe most importantly, is the writers’ fear of sharing themselves. One of the paradoxes of your profession is that in order to sustain the energy demanded of recreating the outside world on the paper in front of you, you must isolate yourself for intense extensions of time from that very world. Children, husbands, lovers, and parties with friends must be blocked out in order to sit at a typewriter and invent convincing dramas about children, husbands, lovers, and parties with friends. You may have projected that it would take roughly three hours to have a phone ring in your manuscript, but when it rings in your livingroom, you sigh and realize that projection is now pushed up to four hours or a day or a lifetime—depending upon what frightening demand of your time and energy is waiting at the end of that phone line. So each of those students in your workshop becomes a potential ringing phone, each manuscript they will hand you a subliminal time bomb that you hope only deprives you of hours, but there is the fear that something is lurking in there that will take a lifetime.
All of that was going through my mind when I entered that stark room and felt those sixteen pair of eyes on me. I knew what they wanted, and I knew what I wanted—to have these next four months be as productive and painless as possible for all of us. They had stories they wanted to write and write well, and I had a novel to complete. And I realized that if we were going to do that at all, we would have to do it together. At first glance it would seem that we were an unlikely combination. I had purposely selected individuals whose closest contact with each other—and me—only would have been changing trains at Metro Center. We were male and female; well-employed and unemployed; black, white, and hispanic; Christian, Jew, and atheist; gay, straight, and in-between. We were housewives and childless, conservative and liberal, old and young. In short: we were America. Once we stepped outside that room we wouldn’t agree upon anything from the best restaurant in town to the best person to lead this nation. But inside that room there was universal consensus about one thing—we each had a story to tell, and we demanded respect and tolerance for that story.

And that’s where our relationship began, where all literature that will eventually be worth more than the paper it’s written on begins—with all writers’ firm affirmation of their unique existence, their personal visions. Once that is in place, language is seen for what it really is—a simple tool for the articulation of that unique vision. And it is through the mating of language and vision that you hope to conceive art. This brought up another paradox in the writer’s profession, the closer you stay to home, the greater your chances of touching the universal. To demonstrate this, we began by reading three American writers who in all possibility wouldn’t even have passed each other at Metro Center: Toni Morrison, Tillie Olsen, and Henry James. Each represented a vital segment of this country, each a superb craftsman who dared to stretch and bend words to the service of his or her particular world view. We didn’t approach these books for the right or wrong of those views, but for the language. Because it was
to the language of each student that the workshop would address itself. "Only you can tell us where you want to go, and then we'll tell you if you went there."

The authority for us to judge an individual's language came from our experience as readers. We were all writers at different places in a spectrum, and while you may find avid readers who don't write, it is exceedingly rare to find someone with the commitment to write who has not read. Each person in that room was privy not only to my experience as a reader, but to the experience of fifteen other avid readers. They were quickly made aware that I was not positing myself as a guru, but another intelligent pair of eyes and ears among sixteen others. It became a joint venture and a joint responsibility. Each session we began as equals, because in spite of the fact that a product had placed me at the head of that table, it was the identical process that we each labored with afresh every day. In that room was a microcosm of the reading public that these emerging writers hoped to reach, and here was an opportunity to be given an insight and hopefully a sensitivity to the feelings of others. Too often, modern literature has become an exercise in mental masturbation. Writers forget that they are writing, after all, to be read. And while their work must serve their own intellectual horizons, it must also be accessible to an audience.

Each of the participants started at different levels with their mastery of the craft. None was given unstinting praise, because none of us learns by being told continually what we're doing right. It was, after all, a workshop which meant that unevenness and mismeasures were to be addressed honestly and suggestions for correction offered with a view to the writer's personal sensitivity and autonomy. I only had to look under my own skull to be aware of what each of these writers needed when they dared to expose their work to public view. Inevitably, nothing that is said about your work is totally satisfying: if readers say that all is well, you're suspicious of their honesty; and if even the slightest fault is found, you're suspicious of their intellect. But if whatever is said is done so with love and good intentions, then you grow. And the task at hand was individual growth in that workshop—with each person being measured only against themselves.

But as the weeks went by something else began to grow in that room as well. Strangers were slowly being transformed into people. Old and young became Franks and Cathys. Black and white became Faidas and Lynns. Christian and Jew—Dorothis and Hunters. And if the definition of friendship involves mutual support and trust then it's safe to say that the people were being transformed into friends. That is the only thing that can account for the fact that we were saddened when Joe was leaving us to go write in Mexico, we could applaud when Patrice thought she had a book contract, be sure enough of the communal spirit that the workshop was planned to continue after G.W. closed for the semester.
Contributors' Notes

Gary Alston: poems in The Vanguard, Black Box, The Panther Paper and elsewhere; has put out two collections, Outside (1978) and Changes (1981).

Florence Barbera: poems in Phoebe, Quintessence, The Poet Upstairs. Does visual arts and works for a scientific research firm in Kensington, Md.


Paul Brucker: poems in Blue Ridge Review, Washington Review, Rivanna. Worked for George Washington University for four years, in Public Relations and for ERIC. Now attends the graduate program in advertising at Northwestern University.

Maxine Clair: has attended American University's M.F.A. program in creative writing; poems in Gargoyle, Washington Review.

Cynthia Cotts: a recent M.A. from Johns Hopkins; the 1983-84 Writer-in-Residence at St. Albans School; stories in Telescope and Appearances.

Paul Estaver: won the Virginia Prize for Fiction (1983); works in a research institute in the Department of Justice; has published Salisbury Beach—1954 (Washington Writers' Publishing House, 1983).

Lillian Frankel: wrote radio scripts for the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago; more recently has worked as a psychiatric social worker (retired 1983); author of numerous "juvenile" books.


Tom George: now attending the University of Central Florida, studying with the poet, Judith Hemscemeyer.

C. Jeanne Gibs: originally from Trinidad; published in Uhuru, Whose Woods These Are. Member of The Message Makers, a poetry performance group. Her collection is Drum People (Lutt's Productions, 1980).

Bonnie Gordon: her most recent chapbook is Childhood in Reno (Street Press, 1983). Associate Editor at Science 84, and editor of a forthcoming anthology of science poems.

Judith Hall: has taught at Marymount College, and in the Virginia Poets in the Schools program; won a 1984 Ingram-Merrill grant. Her work appears in Shenandoah, Antioch Review, Southern Poetry Review. Her most recent chapbook is The Old Vows (Tropos, 1981).

Veronica Johnson: a graduate of Federal City College, she works in the federal government. This is her first publication.

Christina Llewellyn: work in Washington Review, American Poets on Lebanon, Minnesota Review, Thirteenth Moon; has recently completed a book of narrative poems about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911 in which 146 garment workers perished.

David McAleavey: Associate Professor of English, George Washington University. Poems in Poetry, Virginia Quarterly, Seneca Review. His most recent collection is Shrine, Shelter Cave (Ithaca House, 1980).


Joan Retallack: work in *Massachusetts Review, Epoch, Ambit, Little Magazine*. A review article in *Parnassus* won a 1984 Pushcart Prize. Her book of poems, *Circumstantial Evidence*, is due out from S. O. S. Press this fall. She teaches in the Honors Program at the University of Maryland.

Jeanne Schinto: stories in *Ascent, Cimarron Review, Confrontation*; twice given distinguished mention in *Best American Short Stories*; writes for the Washington *Post*. A graduate of George Washington University, she has an M.A. from Johns Hopkins University.

Jenny Singleton: recent graduate in Arabic from Georgetown University; works as a translator in Baltimore. Also a graphic artist who has exhibited locally.

Howard Smith: now a student in the screenwriting program at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles; recipient of two D. C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities grants, and of a Bread Loaf Fiction Scholarship. Has published in *G.W. Review, Phoebe, Blueline*.

Rob Soley: a member of Sojourner’s Community, a radical evangelical ecumenical Christian community committed to social action, which also publishes *Sojourners Magazine*.

William Sommers: after twenty years with A.I.D. in the State Department, including fifteen years in Southeast Asia, is currently City Manager of Englewood, New Jersey. Has published three volumes of poetry, all of them abroad.

Donna Baier Stein: poems and stories in *Kansas Quarterly, Open House, Washingtonian*. Works as a freelance direct mail copywriter.

Laurie Stroblas: poems in *Tendril, Poet Lore, Portland Review*. Won a 1984 D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities grant and was awarded the 1984 Larry Neal Writers’ Conference Poetry Award. Works as a freelance promotion/advertising writer in the publications field.


Patricia L. Walsh: permanently disabled while serving as a nurse in Vietnam; her book, *Forever Sad the Hearts*, is to be reissued in August, 1984, while her second book, dealing with the aftermath of Vietnam, is nearing completion. She now writes full-time in Boulder, Colorado.

Hugh Walthall: has worked as taxi driver and dispatcher, now assists at Town Clowns, Inc. His collection is *Ladidad* (Ithaca House, 1978); has poems in *Shenandoah, American Review, Laurel Review, G.W. Review*. Publishes S. O. S. Books.

Valerie Wohlfeld: earned an M.F.A. from Vermont College; recently returned to the Washington area after a two-year sojourn in California.

Susan Wood: has worked for the Washington *Post*, and now teaches creative writing at Rice University. Her collection is *Bazaar* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).