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COVER ART:
"Only the Fool" by James Tisdale
Earthenware 48" x 18" x 15½"

FRONTISPIECE:
"Docked" by Walter Crump
Pinhole Photograph 19½" x 13"

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Acknowledgement: "Going" by Mireille Juchau first appeared in a slightly different version in Australia in *Meanjin,* summer, 2000.

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JEFFREY LEVINE

Thé Dansant

See her down there? That's our planet as a young child—
red, eruptive, difficult, Jurassic, lost.

At Olduvai Gorge, for example, a flat-headed chunk of skull gathers
in its furrows the fetid air, one millennium and then another.

Near Lake Turkana, the ridged brow of the twelve-year-old—
who went for water two million years ago—still lards the plain.

Jaw fragments, leg and hand bones. A scattering
of hackberry seeds. Teeth. Those, too.

It got cold, then colder. You see?
One night the moon diminished, next the entire sun.

Still, we forgive the lightning, promise children light follows night.
What do we know? It pleases us to think it might.

Let it be so. It pleased the kids to dream
thele, dream *thelyblast,* dream the lee wash of night itself.

Only an epoch pause, each of us a furrowed, hair-matted thing staring
at the ice-borne rim just long enough to scatter seeds across the melt.

JEFFREY LEVINE

I Make a New Friend Wi

Which dessert, which fly rod, v
In this hemisphere, the choices

and under water, or appear pal
on Limoges, a platter full of saf

To illustrate: Somewhere deep
there was a waterfall and ripe v

coconuts and banana trees, but
tips sharp as blades—and don't

Back by the water's edge, all mar
spoiled in the sun's heat and un

I'd rather not waste six hundrec
booties, fins—still, the right lor

One employs false methods, tak
lets the eager heart go blind. Yo

Go ahead. Betray it! Throw the
You're cheating. It's a crime, bu

You do it because love adores, i
and with it, the water burns.

Don't let it blind you, *mon petit*
Breathe in, breathe out.

JEFFREY LEVINE

I Make a New Friend Who Speaks in Idioms

Which dessert, which fly rod, which pair of smoked eyeglasses?
In this hemisphere, the choices are all bright silver

and under water, or appear pale blue with cherry-colored fins
on Limoges, a platter full of saffron beards and scarlet snouts.

To illustrate: Somewhere deep in the interior,
there was a waterfall and ripe vegetation—

coconuts and banana trees, but also plants with star-shaped trunks,
tips sharp as blades—and don't forget the flying foxes, slippery pigs.

Back by the water's edge, all manner of delicacies: white flesh, soft and flat,
spoiled in the sun's heat and unspoiled in the cool of night.

I'd rather not waste six hundred dollars' worth of masks and snorkels,
booties, fins—still, the right longitude plays hard to get.

One employs false methods, takes liberties, smashes into everything,
lets the eager heart go blind. You leave the world to its broad daylight.

Go ahead. Betray it! Throw the others off track.
You're cheating. It's a crime, but isn't it a kind of glory?

You do it because love adores, it burns inside you,
and with it, the water burns.

Don't let it blind you, *mon petit poisson.*
Breathe in, breathe out.

SUSANNE KORT

Migraine

Alicia goes & buys stones when the Librium
drains off—amethyst, rose quartz,
what the white witch

recommends—she has learned to trust anything
she can pay for & heft
now: pellets of yellow citrine

stuffed for cheer in the empty cup
of her brassiere, the left one,
'84, the year before

Gunnar has gone for sure.
She gets on elevators & stays there: up
& down come to her. Stevenson's precarious

Aes Triplex appears, skewed,
in sporadic nightmares: the deadly
perils of not being here.

She pours a quart of the best scotch over the fresh loam
of his grave; in bed she
investigates the beyond

where he is, & comes to the conclusion
she'll see him again
the son-of-a-bitch

in some reincarnation. She starts & stops
karmas & has her palm read, she kept his
suits, his ties, she cries diamonds

onto the mute checkbook that is hers. Creaming,
she dreams of reconstructive
surgery, she dances, palms up

over the rim of the earth

SUSANNE KORT

The Joy of Cooking

I am in the kitchen.
I am building a simulacrum of my life.
I begin with these papery bricks, in various states
of disrepair & decay, although some of them,

soupstained, reeking of prehistoric onions,
still have their covers on; the majority, the fulvous Godivas
have been sauced to death: these are the ancient
warriors, amazons, oldest inhabitants, the best

& the brightest, the residue, this very house, deglazed
to some essence not attainable by day:
for it's night outside always, it's late but never dawn
when I begin & rebegin this re-creation, pillaging

the shelf by the phone for hoary antipastos,
benne seed wafers, that hyperborean lentil
ragout that one of the two of them
used to request, come first frost: I pick through

the spices & mousses & bay leaves, the gravies & frassy
aiolis, the green mayonnaises that once shored us up,
drunk on capers,
the pantries & oriels, anterooms

random guests bussed me in, stirring formulas, those discarnate meals
that if they'd just occurred in time

would have absolved one. I seem to stand
convicted, hammer in hand, teeth

full of nails, on the top rung
of some scaffolding. It's time
for dessert now. Almonds? & icing? Hearts
of angelica? Was I all pie.

RICHARD MCNALLY

The Rooming House

That was the night I told Dora I felt people were walking all over me, that I was more a thing than a person, that Cavalcanti, with his torn shoes and straitjacket pessimism and fifty-nine varieties of mindsores was dubious company at best, that the Tschissiks were out to get me, to abuse me, to bang me around till most of my inner mechanisms were broken and smashed and worthless, and that ...whatever...something else, I would go on and on with her. She's one of those people you feel the need to say not something to but everything. We had been discussing a remake of the Hitchcock film about the Canadian who visits England and is hunted by secret agents who mistakenly believe he has intercepted a classified communiqué from abroad, and by British police who mistakenly believe he has committed a murder, *nowhere to run to baby, nowhere to hide.* "I can see you're in a difficult situation," she says in a kind tone as we walk through Central Square, clasping her pocketbook to her side like a deflated football, the November wind blowing her hair forward, "but try to think of it as a stepping stone to something better."

Mrs Tschissik is sitting in her bedroom in an easy chair with nailhead trim praying to a framed newspaper photograph of the Virgin Mary standing on a globe with her right foot resting on the head of a serpent, the lower edge rippled and discolored, suggesting something had been spilled on it before it was framed. The photo sits on a small elliptical table beside her chair. The door behind her is secured by a chain lock, a padlocked hasp, two inter-grip rim locks, and a circa 1930 police lock, its steel bar angled against the center

of the door, a dead bolt implied by the face of a cylinder set in the rectangular brass plate from which the doorknob projects. A lamp with a porcelain-urn base and a shirred drum shade stands on a chest of drawers behind her and illuminates pinch-pleated drapes in a tea-rose pattern; a triple dresser against the wall to her left bearing a tiny stone vase filled with dried flowers and a black-framed photo of a young man in a military uniform, his smile constrained, his eyes empty, the background a zoo out of focus, or possibly the interior of a bank; and a double bed with a carved wooden headboard surmounted by a triangular pediment, the pediment having two deep teardrop notches near the apex on either side of a fluted central shaft with a tapered point that, in an emergency, could do service as a wooden stake for plunging into the heart of a vampire weighing anywhere from 250 to 400 pounds, if one believed in such things.

Nothing like the sight of an open grave to set one's heart to pounding, pounding.

The conversation in the Cantab Lounge was a runny mass of half-truths and intemperate speculation and malicious gossip. Blame Cavalcanti, a starved-looking courier with gravedigger eyes I met in Jack's the night Pandora opened for Cri de Coeur. On the way home he said: "I feel like something is squeezing my rocks till I'm blue in the face." I tell him that in Christian iconography, rocks are often associated with the practice of stoning to death those who had committed unforgivable sins, especially blasphemy.

Mrs Tschissik is down on her hands and knees in the front yard rooting around in the garden. Sunlight creates a tiny white scab on the tip of her nose. (Cavalcanti: "Mrs Tschissik is not so much a woman as a garbage can with a bow on it.") She has often thrown me down the basement stairs and I resent it. One day as I'm lying

on my back at the bottom rubbing my elbow, the cement floor beneath me cold as a slab in a morgue, my legs extending up the staircase on a diagonal, she comes down and steps on me. As her foot comes down on my chest I say, "I oppose this." She looks down at me and says nothing, her face rigid, her breathing labored. Holding on to the handrail, she brings her other foot up and I get the benefit of her full weight. "I unequivocally oppose what you're doing to me." She continues looking down at me, saying nothing, then goes up on her toes and, with the smile of a copulating rat, comes down on her heels, hard. A flame ignites beneath the lower right side of my ribcage. She is crushing and abusing me not out of hostility or vengeance or a mindless will to destroy but only because it is her nature, her destiny, her preordained role in the scheme of things, or I'm greatly mistaken. "Are you trying to offend me Mrs Tschissik, or is it happening by accident?" My intention had been to spend the day doing good deeds, or some reasonable approximation, but there I was sidetracked, detained, derailed. She reminds one of a _____. I tell her that standing on me is uncivil, that it gives me a poor impression of her upbringing, that it irrefutably violates state and local statutes governing landlord-tenant relations, and that it is unwarranted since I'm only three months behind. Here she belches and a moment later, the smell of carrion spreading through the air, my mind is filled with a vision of dead kittens lying in a heap—who did she think she was, my stepmother? My thoughts start going in and out of focus—a family in China plays monopoly on a board with a jail in each corner; in Jersey City some kids are shooting baskets on an asphalt-paved playground, the rim netless, the rusting steel backboard pierced by three holes clean on the side with the rim, jagged on the back, irregular pointed slivers curving backward from the edges; in Eurasia the winds blow and blow and blow; in Lockerbie tiny flakes of paper from a disintegrating page of Leiter's *Modern Economics* are blown against a large rock the shape of a

dented oil drum; in history, most facts remain the same; in a manner of speaking, the servants study a language they will have little occasion to use, Servant A saying: *"Nipo hapa kwa likizo,"* to which Servant B replies: *"Nitapima homa yako"*; in Havana, Castro, reading a novel by Burt Lancaster, looks up for a moment, tugs gently at his beard, gets up and goes to the window, looks out at the ocean, decides to build a zoo in Las Palmas People's Park that will contain snakes only. The flame beneath the lower right side of my ribcage is getting hotter so I say to Mrs Tschissik: "Sharing is better than hogging." She farts, twice.

It was time to move. I would find a new room, no matter where, the end of the earth, what's the difference, no matter that Dora had said: "Intensity is an unreliable indicator of value. You're thirty-seven, you should know that," and swart-skinned Jean Laughton, the day we were playing chess in the park in front of Rindge: "The point of law courts, honey, is to turn one's subjective pain into objective gain," and Cavalcanti as we stood throwing stones into the Charles: "Better to shake one's head in disbelief at the disgrace of homelessness than to participate in it." Screw it, I was determined to just get up and go, how hard could it be to find a rented room?

A woman very similar to Mrs Tschissik, almost identical to her actually, or at least not unmistakably unlike her, and by no means her absolute and incontestable contrary, comes home after having had the accelerator of her VW bus adjusted at Flynn's Autobody and says to her dog-tired, dog-eared husband, if I'm not mistaken, or at any rate to the flat-faced man sitting on the corduroy sofa in her living room with his feet resting on the *Globe* on the coffee table: "I passed Moss on the stairs to the basement this afternoon and we brushed shoulders." "Is that right? Did he say anything?" "He mumbled something but I wasn't able to catch it." "Son-of-a-

bitch," says the flat-faced man, or words to that effect, unless what she said was: "I haven't seen Moss lately, have you?" to which he would (probably) have responded, "How many months behind is that son-of-a-bitch now?" On the other hand, if what she said was: "I passed Moss on my way down to the laundry room today and felt an impulse to bump into him and knock him down the stairs," her husband, if he said anything at all, would have asked her if she wanted to go out to eat, or to a movie, or both; under no circumstances would he have asked her if she wanted to go shopping at Lord & Taylor's for, if the documentation on this point is reliable, she was an unswerving customer of Filene's Basement, or some such place.

I decided not to move. I would simply do my laundry elsewhere, why should I allow some bumptious misbegotten rag of a landlady to run my life, dictate where I lived, because if it's true, as Cavalcanti said the other night in the Oxford Ale House as we were sitting at the bar drinking Virgin Marys, his head half its normal size, steam rising from his scalp, several arrows with blue-black feathers sticking in his back: "What we love most is our unending dream of love," I was still intact, I still had options, no matter that he (Cavalcanti) was an admitted logothete working, at age thirty-seven, as a bicycle courier, his father having been a taxi driver. "We're all copies of copies," he said one day last fall as we were walking along Mass. Ave. toward the Square discussing our families, "and if we fail to acknowledge it, fail to realize that at some point we must shred and discard our entire history, the road to uniqueness will be permanently closed." He said he wanted to stop in at Copy Quik and when I asked him what he was going to have reproduced, he said: "Nothing." Then why go in? "To soak up the atmosphere for a moment or two. Among massive machines continually reproducing yet adding nothing to the world but redundancy, I'm in my element."

I would move out after all. You can build your house out of toilet paper if you want to, but it's not going to keep out the rain, as N.O. Ting (or was it M. LeClerc?) may have been suggesting when he said that since language and thought have evolved in a three-dimensional world, we find it extremely hard to deal with the four-dimensional reality of moral grandeur. To move or not to move, it's an old question.

The fire spreads quickly. Within minutes after arriving the firefighters shift their efforts to preventing the surrounding houses from catching.

I put my coat on and go out. Standing, leaning against a cast-iron street lamp on the opposite side of the street, I look back at the Tschissiks' white clapboard, flat-topped, three-story rooming house, houses invariably associated with the word "story," as *conte* is with a certain "box" (as in *knock, knock, knockin' on heaven's door*) for the simple reason that when we are confined within a physical structure of non-infinite dimensions with another human being, or beings, the entire history of Western pseudo-philosophy, minus the footnotes, is inevitably reenacted, intellectual ontogeny recapitulating intellectual phylogeny in a morality play of anywhere from 250 to 400 (or more) acts, for though our will is unlimited, driving us toward ever more grandiose acts of psychological colonialism, our intelligence is not, regardless of our social standing, country of origin, or hairstyle. So I'm leaning against this street lamp looking at a rooming house, the Tschissiks'. It is early morning. Or a rooming house in every way similar to the Tschissiks', since I may have gone for a walk, as I often do, for one of the unbending rules in this world of hurt, as I have discovered through vicious experience, is that one is not permitted to stay in a single place for an unlimited period of time. It is late afternoon. Without looking up I sense the sky is cloudless. *Blue skies, nothin but blue*

skies, over me-ee. I look up. A cloud the shape of a white porcelain object is stalled in the sky above the rooming house. It is the size of Yankee Stadium. Though it appears as if it will never move, I know it will, inevitably, and as for those who ask why Manhattan is the shape of a turd, I can only say this—geography is often destiny.

Mrs Tschissik bangs into me and knocks me off balance as I'm coming up the basement stairs. As I fall backwards I drop my clothes, twist my body, try to break my fall with my hands. I land on my side, slide to the bottom. A hard, gem-like flame ignites in my left wrist. Mrs Tschissik's feet whomp down the stairs and she starts kicking me in the ribs and though it hurts, I feel a kind of grim relief that she is not kicking me in the head. Small spurts of flame erupt at various sites on my ribcage. "Unh!" she grunts as she delivers each blow. "Unh! Unh!" But the relief I feel is like a phone call from a friend on a Sunday afternoon when one is glowing with non-specific anxiety, a state of suffering that a certain philosopher regards as subconscious fear of death because whenever someone asks us what's bothering us in the midst of an attack like this we invariably respond: "Nothing," which this celebrated thinker takes as an unintentional but revealing reference to the nothingness into which he believes we descend, or ascend, when we die (don't fall for it)—but the guy is a freaking documented Nazi so the hell with what he says. Mrs Tschissik clearly has no intention of killing me because if she did she would be kicking me in the head, directly in the temple, I'm certain of this, or she would have a handgun and be firing at my vital organs, the bullets entering my body like small cylindrical projectiles of drop-forged self-doubt, foam running out the corner of my mouth, my limbs twitching, head jerking from side to side. I start sliding into a state of shock and just before I lose consciousness it comes to me that life is one long fight against the urge to stay in bed all day that in the end we always lose.

This story takes place on the squared circle referred to as "the earth." (Cf. M. LeClerc's *Infrastructure of the Intangible*: "The fundamental principle of the universe is not to gratify my volition, therefore life is absurd.") This is the context, therefore let her step on me, it's all MOTS anyway, no matter what she does or doesn't, who am I to object to someone knocking me down the stairs or standing on my chest or kicking me in the ribs? Who am I to make a bold effort to get out from under Mrs Tschissik's feet, to protect my "inalienable dignity" as a human being? Forget it. I'm just some guy, some schmo struggling to keep his head above the waves like everybody else and if a house is on fire across the street, no matter how high the flames—that's MOTS, as in More Of The Same.

At this point we're something like friends, the Tschissiks and I, or a couple that resembles them to a hair. Very few of our problems reach the point where we feel compelled to engage in physical violence and within twenty-five to thirty thousand years other rooming houses may exist in a similar state of calm for political evolution, which infiltrates, and some would say governs, all interpersonal relations, occurs at approximately the same pace as biological evolution, unless I'm greatly mistaken, so if you're in the process of wearing your life out trying to speed things up, think again amigo, think again.

The last time I saw Cavalcanti was this past January in Cardell's, or somewhere very like it, a mirror image, a simulacrum in all respects the equal, or near-equal, of the original, down to the sawdust on the floor and the stamped tin ceiling and the scowling waitress with the thread-like limbs and mannish eyeglasses (forever on the verge of sliding off the tip of her nose) muttering curses at the patrons as she clears the dirty dishes from the tables and loads them on her cart, unless it was the Mug and Muffin, or

possibly the Wursthaus, his favorite hash house in the Square, in which case the muttering waitress was not present, could not be present. He motioned to me to sit down. I came over and stood next to him. He was wearing clothesline suspenders and had some nasty shaving cuts on his neck, calling to mind a _____. He said he was going to apply for a bank loan so he could open his own courier service and asked if I would co-sign it. I said sure, provided he agreed to pay all his employees the same wage as himself, and required them to wear black capes lined with lemon satin.

I'm in a sleeping bag on the Common. I feel something nudging my side and open my eyes. It's Jean Laughton standing over me, waking me with her toe. She says Aren't you afraid someone will come along and step on you in the middle of the night? I say How... who told you I was here? She says Word gets around. I tell her that at the moment getting stepped on is the least of my worries. With an anxious smile she asks Can I help? The lower right side of each of her breasts is cupped by a crescent of shadow, her hair hangs lank, I can see up her nose. She asks What's in the garbage bags? I tell her they're not garbage bags, they're suitcases. With a sorrowful smile she says What can I do? I ask her if she happens to have a shovel on her.

From my coign of vantage across the street, leaning against a rusted streetlamp on a conical cast-iron base embossed with... whatever... that stuff in the labyrinth... I watch the rays of the late afternoon sun highlight what appear to be padlocks holding the shutters of the third-story windows closed. Looking more closely I can see what appears to be a sheaf of papers sticking out from between the shutters of the window on the far left.

MARY SPALDING

A Few Regrets

Okay, I was troubled. No, I *was* trouble.
You'll find all that in my father's journal on a shelf
in the house of voices, full of everything.
Full of absence now.

I must have been crazy to hurt them.

I hear them crying in that book of days,
and a voice saying, but someday
we'll all be together. Someday?
We'll all be gone, just like that.

Where did I go?
I defected to cities: Florence, London,
New York. I was only looking for art
and atonement—chiaroscuro. *You* know.

(There on the terrace, someone watching
gulls scatter like bread upon the waters.)

Forgiveness? I should put that book away.

I'm thinking there's still time
to take a small boat out on the river
before the day takes its bright path down.

MARINO MUÑOZ LAGOS

The Yellow Travelers

Autumn
carries on in its roots,
in its journey toward the night
of the earth, toward the tired
and damp heart of the dead.

Beggars appear
with a destitute dream on their backs,
like sad trees,
twisted and silent
between the mist and oblivion.

And in the yellow face
of parks
there is a road that runs
from life to death
over tears and more tears.

Translated by David A. Petreman

MARINO MUÑOZ LAGOS

Notebook Pertaining to Autumn

I was the sad beggar
of silent autumn,
the first beggar of the world
with his heart bound to nostalgia,
the last beggar upon whom fall
the tears
of oblivion,
the rough beggar
of street corners where rain
watches itself in the windows.

I am the musician bitten
by winters,
the poor forgotten musician
who sleeps on the ground
with his warm rags.

Translated by David A. Petreman

EDWARD BARTÓK-BARATTA

The Ways of Dying

Of all the ways of dying I like this one best,
pushing the ink-like blood across the page,
pulling open the window, letting the small
summer insects blow in on the humid air,

into my hair, where they die. You might be pleased,
as long as it is me, dying while I write,
but you're spending sweet breaths, your limited air.
Reading is a secret, quiet way of dying.

This man swoons as he walks, he curses his wife,
my neighbor downstairs, who throws plates while he talks
on the telephone. And there is no Man Upstairs,
only my metaphor here. Fighting is one way

to die. His wallet soon empty, old neighbor, nearly a tree.
I spend one part of my dying by your side.

EDWARD BARTÓK-BARATTA

Memo From a Dead Man

It's this way with the dead, they keep popping up—
a man sells me ice cream, faint scars on his wrists,

my murdered brother's shoulders. What if the face
doesn't fit? Still, I'd know that walk anywhere,

my ex-wife, who is not dead but "disappeared,"
as they say in South America, vanished

without taking away the pain. I'll be damned,
but isn't that my uncle? He disappeared

himself on the thin end of a rifle, sky
full of stars where I see his face flash. How odd,

my face like a bulb or balloon every day,
a fistful of flowers thrown out on the trash,

hovering in the mirror. And is that you
standing at my side? Not as quick as you once were.

MIREILLE JUCHAU

Going

He could have tried to get the stuff he wanted from the chemist girls with their shushing white shoes and front-zippered uniforms. But the truth was he didn't know what to call it. The words *sleeping draught* came to him but he could not bring himself to speak. All the substanceless things within him were stoppered—breath, tears, his clear morning thought transparent as dew.

Thea hadn't laughed at his jokes: his humour seemed a new landscape she'd stumbled across, sudden and foreign. Maybe that's what had kept them together fifty-three years in an uneasy union where he wasn't constantly flattered by her attentions, where neither was able to anticipate the other's version of events. They hadn't formed that singular shape of other couples, whose arms were always entangled, whose feet nosed their way toward one another in the night and rested together in a clumsy knot of toes. They slept in separate beds, at first because of the barnyard racket of his snoring, and then different rooms, the kind of change he'd thought would mark the death of marriage. Maybe sleeping separately increased the tide of it, the longing that stirred in some deep spot he imagined between his arthritic hips. There had been one time in the dank garden darkness. Another on the itching carpet in the lounge—an aching and lonely loving, the TV flickering beside them like an ebbing fire.

His desire had lately grown heavy, a writhing thing that rose up and hooked its ache beneath his ribs: what he knew as lust, and love beyond words had become sore and unwanted like a cancer. He kept thinking about the title of the book splayed open like a broken-winged bird on the table beside Thea's bed: *The Heart's Dark Ardour*. She hadn't read beyond page eighty and he would

never know whether she'd been a little bored, or if she'd savoured each turned page. He decided to read it in the grey hours of the morning when sleep eluded him and quickly reached a page with a once-folded corner. The delicacy of this domestic origami, in knowing where she had paused for the night, marking the book with her slim bony fingers, left him shocked and bereft, more sleepless than before his reading. He traced the seam of the crease with his finger. It resembled a wavery wrinkle in the cream flesh of her face, or a line that crossed her palm. He stared up at the moulded plaster ceiling and the bows and flowers melted and flowed together.

The girls in the chemist used to laugh at his tired jokes, bits and pieces of ancient card-shark smut and cracks garnered from moments in the pub or the in-between-races banter of the disc jockeys on the AM dial. But his interactions with them had grown suddenly solemn. They probably pitied him, on his own now and hardly practised at it. They'd always given him free things with his bottles of Mylanta, slipping them in the paper bag while he waited for his medicines. Combs and toiletries on special, sometimes lotions and balms you'd usually need a script for. Acne cream once for his neighbour's son, Joel, embarrassed and pinker faced when he handed it over, though he hadn't thought it possible—the boy already looked like an unlit matchstick. Girl's products for Janey when she visited, little clips he couldn't get his arthritic fingers to work in her hair—that was Thea's task, the hairdoings. Special conditioners for Thea that made her smell like the contents of someone's garden, or wrinkle creams. He once jokingly told the girls she was *beyond lotions* when the pure truth was she'd grown more compelling with each change in her face, and he loved the fact she didn't try to hide it, brushed her hair back when they went out and let the sun warm her skin, unpowdered. Thea said she couldn't stand *public powdering,* pointing it out one day at the club so he would notice it forever, ladies swiping their cushiony faces

with little pads of sweet smelling stuff. Beige motes of talc hung briefly in the air around their faces. Thea whispered gravely, *it's their protection.* And when he'd asked what from, her cheeks creased with laughter and she said, *if I knew I'd be powdering too!* The chemist girls said a woman likes to spoil herself with these things. Next time you tell us what kind of lippie she wears and we'll get her the right colour.

He could have casually asked them for something heavier and more viscous in his veins but didn't. Just bought the mild sleeping drug the doctor mentioned. He didn't want a fuss. Anything we can get you Jack, you let us know, they'd told him and the plump one, Christine, turned purplish with guilt when she asked how was the Mrs, all the other girls nudging her and putting pearly nails to their lips and saying Jack, we heard and we're so sorry love, here, and the next week a card with gold ridges and roses on the front.

Fridays was fish no matter what and he tried to maintain the custom. A meal almost entirely white in colour, mashed potato, the bream and the sauce, the clotted custard and tinned pears for afters. And then the Mylanta, liquid and chalky so he had to rinse his mouth out. Bits of grit stuck to his teeth. Pink and sweet. He considered giving up eating—he'd never learnt to cook and had to peer down into her recipe books every two minutes while something burned and something else boiled over and then there was that lurid milk to follow—his pink evening tipple. Her recipes were crusted with drips and smudges of unidentifiable foodstuffs from meals long past. In the end these reminders of her hands' busy work in the kitchen, of the thousand meals they had chewed in the silence of peace or the strained quiet of things unsaid, became unbearable to recall. He'd find himself glancing back and forth from an ancient dandruffy stain to the recipe, piecing together evidence of the meal she had made from the mystery ingredient dripped there. He caught himself squinting furiously at a brown splotch and wondered what he was becoming. A crazed

professor of domestic science, peering over his glasses into the centre of a mouldering splash, as if the rot and flake were a sign of something bigger, beyond cookery.

Peace and quiet was what he wanted or just required: to garden, listen to the races in the afternoon. But he'd find himself out there in the yawning thickness of the summer and he'd hear her goddamn voice calling him in for tea at two or dinner later at five. Kept hearing her and spinning round on the spot as if she were on the back step there with her apron all floury sending little spurts of white across the grass.

She had complained he was overzealous with the pruning and so one Friday he stops, turns and walks inside to fill the house with the noise of the TV though what he wants is Brahms, a lullaby to put him to sleep. It's too much of a risk though, the feeling in his throat when he played the tape a week ago like a huge fruit stuck and splitting down there. There's a greenish lustre in the afternoon light, soon lightning will come. He sits in the ochre glow of the lounge sipping a creamy beer and watches the storm. Each flash fractures the thin membrane of the sky. It no longer seems a thing of shelter, but a stretched tissue against which all forms of life are heaving.

Soon the jasmine clambers up the side of the porch and the honeyed breeze drifts inside and the once fussy flowerbeds fill with weeds.

A weed is just a plant out of place.

He had visited the club some nights but the blokes were a sad bunch. Talked about what was wrong with themselves—prostate and bowel mainly, one night Jim saying *prostrate* by mistake and them all laughing, saying *won't be long though, will it!* Bowel and prostate, not what he wanted in his thoughts while dabbling with the sauce-covered steak—mushroom, same colour as the other choice, something *Worcestershirey.* The body was a private thing. Only Thea knew his goings on as well as he, probably better—his

night farting, morning stomach growl, the click of his teeth going into the glass and the faint plash of toothwater. The smell of his gummy mouth. The club wives were nose-powdery bustley types wanting to come over and help him now she was gone. Leaving teatoweled scones by the door while he was out, still warm when he unwrapped them or baked-in-the-tin meat pies that he fed to Graham the Manx cat over three days, smiling blankly at the hum the fellow made and his pastry whiskers as he curled himself round the chairleg. *His Royal Catness* Thea had called him. Graham with his special chair. The teatowels were a problem. And the tins. He couldn't work out if he was supposed to return them.

Things could be simple. He used to make sure—tried to keep his thoughts only on what was there. He learnt this in the mud and funky stink of the slit trenches in New Guinea, concentrating on a bright tropical bug or a raincloud, blacking everything else from his mind, a kind of meditation. But now there is the repeated sound of her name in the hollowed cavern of his mouth like an *om*. And then the phrase *Thee and Thou,* full of priestly eminence.

He's lately turned to thinking, and then thinking about thinking and he knows it's the loneliness, but he can't face starting some new activity, taking up bowls or bingo or wherever people take themselves when the day's passing becomes a singular concern. He finds himself in her bed at twelve when the postie bangs the lid down though it's usual he's out at six leaving his footprints in the twinkling grass and trimming the hedge down to its limit of survival. This morning he lies, listening to her voice in the wind and tries to drown it out by listing all the types of weed he can think of: chokeweed, asthma weed, couch grass, paspalum, nutgrass, sorrel, crab grass, marshmallow, dandelion and cat's ear, lamb's tongue, cudweed, chickweed, clover and creeping oxalis, bindii and carrot weed.

A flower is just a weed in place.

And in the evening he laughs out loud at *Hogan's Heroes* or *The Odd Couple*—Felix's fussings—and turns his head to her chair to find her knitting needles poking up and wrapped in the red wool of next year's winter vest she's half finished for him. *Clickety fucking click,* he'd said once when they were fighting, the metallic sound growing louder in his ear as he strained to watch the box. She looked at him with that steady gaze, stood and walked to the backdoor with the needles still in her hands but quiet now, the wool trailing across the floor as she walked and then paused, staring out into the dusk. He felt badly but still locked up in annoyance yelled *what are you looking at Thee, it's dark out there,* as if she didn't know the fact of night. He peered down at the wool, a red lifeline running toward her, antsy because he wanted her beside him but couldn't make the leap of apology. Her busy hands.

Shirl from the bank had asked should she take the knitting and Thea's other things so he wouldn't have to remember and he said *I fucking want to remember don't I.* As if a glance could reveal what was whose, how could he explain it—the knitting, the perfumes, the folded nightdress with her smell curled inside it, her raggedy toothbrush, her kitchen shoes, all these are his too, like amputated limbs about the house.

The sweet peas have grown to heaven and back and no one's up there like he'd assured Janey. Little fingerlets of green reaching beyond the trellis trying to find something to grasp onto. She'd asked him why weeds grew faster than flowers and he said, it just seems that way, you're *wanting* the flowers to grow. Like the watched pot, never boils. Heaven is a place, Janey said, when will dad come back from there? Last time he'd seen the little tyke he'd made his fortnightly trip to mow their front lawn and ended up digging the whole grassy lot. The child had developed some sort of fright of bees since James' death and wouldn't cross the yard. They dug it up on a cloudy afternoon and turned the soil and she helped him fling the new seeds high across the dirt. A chamomile lawn. The

bloke in the nursery claimed it was like medicine, crossing it in bare feet could bring about some sort of calm. It was the last time he saw her face, enraptured, throwing the seed and forgetting all about the lurk of bees while she skipped across the mud toward him.

They had made plans together, the child and he, grand garden plans, so she could enjoy the lawn again. They listed the flowers they would buy and plant, special varieties that were known to attract butterflies. He imagined her walking barefoot, watching the insects turn on the breeze, floating down to the flowerheads. He still has the list somewhere, another plan that went astray. He thinks it's just as well she can't see him now, her grandfather all out of hope and drained.

A weed is a plant out of place. It's all in the placing.

On the fiftieth day without her he takes off the doors of the house, unscrewing them from the rusting hinges til they tilt and fall with a thud to the floor. A house is just a cleared, plantless place. It isn't what you'd call *home.* He lets the garden inside, coaxing the jasmine round the doorframe.

On the sixtieth day he dresses carefully in his cleanest clothes, the darker patch of her darning on his trousers sending a current of memory running through him—her hands, her hands that he loved in long-fingered flight. He tells himself *don't,* tries to flee the image forming in his mind: her palms in stillness on his body taking him on a holiday from his wretched self the afternoon of James' funeral. Love in the lounge with the light of the TV. The son gone before the father and the world's not right.

Cradling Thea's head after that final breath and how it fitted neatly into his hand outspread, the weight of it despite the gone breath. Her lipsticked mouth had hung slackly open and he'd taken out the teeth and pocketed them. Curled his aching fingers around these remnants as he sat in the back of the bus and

trundled home in the purple light. Then fumbling the key in the lock. Their house an alien plain he moonstepped across, things atilt and furniture drifting through his salt warped vision.

He says to the world: I'm just a thought whirling in your head.

Moves out into the garden and sits at the base of the largest tree. In the morning, sun. In the afternoon shade from its leaves. He looks up at storeys of light, an apartment of light in the treetop. A dog barks in the empty chamber of a house nearby, his stomach rumbles, he lists with the breeze like the branches in the slowing cool of the yard. He wants to become loam, feel the grey stuff in his bones dissolve, the ropy veins collapse. A bird alights and takes off and he thinks, I am the trace of flight in the stilled wing, that final feather lifting upward.

In his pocket a lump, hard and stuck to the lining. He pulls it out to see, his breath fast indrawn. Thea's teeth, a smudge of crimson on one of the incisors. He wonders suddenly about the colour he'd kept forgetting to check. Her lipstick. The faint slick of it there, even at her death—the nurses came every day to do her face. It was disconcerting at first, the makeup was heavier than Thea ever applied it. A new face he'd have to get used to, her drooped eyelids were iridescent crescents, the lashes spidery and dark. He'd brought her cosmetics in with the slippers and nightgown, and checked the lipstick colours finally, thinking he'd drop in to the chemist and pick up a new stick of the stuff—Damask Rose or Burnt Sienna. When he kissed her cold cheek his lips came away dusted with something and he wondered if it was face-powder or the fine grain of her skin sloughing off already. He had wiped the thought from his lips, feeling their flaky surface with the heel of his hand. It was the end of winter and the dry leaves on the hospital drive reminded him of her skin and his mouth. They drifted slowly from the cleaned bones of trees.

The light in the yard is dim. Shadows lean from the house like figures stretching toward the far trees. The moon yawns in the

sky. With the heel of his shoe he kicks out a hole in the grass, a miniature cyclone of dirt flying up, the soil thirsty and packed hard. A fist-sized hole he drops the teeth into. Removes his own and places them on top. He covers the little tooth grave and sucks on his gums, moving back out of the heat to the small pocket of cool beneath the tree.

DAVID FRANCIS

The Peale Museum, Philadelphia, 1785

What are you supposed to look at
in Mr Peale's Museum, a wing
of his enormous house, and how?
How do the still-life paintings in one room
concern the animals in the next?
The glass eyes and giant bones?
The hall of self portraits?
The fossils filling the shelves?

The admission ticket is no assistance:
"The Birds and Beasts will teach them!"
But what exactly does Mr Peale
intend you should learn from a knife
with ninety-eight blades, a pygmy's tattooed head,
or a cat mummy—as if those objects
were all that remained of the world?

AMANDA SCHAFFER

Jennifer Falling Down

It must have been a carnival
because the flag of no country

flew and the crowd included
ex-cons drawing bodies in chalk.

A discharge of floor lights
swam up the walls of the tent,

up the bodies clapping, the lady
set to spin in a cord

that was not a noose
but dipped her repeatedly above
a pail of water. Always,

at such events, a lion
with one glass eye snarls
at the four-legged chair hung

to distract him. Shadows slip
out of bodies, cannot go

back and are left with legs
extended by wooden stilts,

and are discovered kissing.
Thrown from great heights,

snow floats as sawdust falls
and becomes the floor, with puddles
and a vine jutting through. Always,

the tent is sky nailed by four
pegs to the dust. Always,

there is one unfinished corner
where the artists pluck
lady apples from each other

mouth to mouth through the empty air,
and the hush includes joy.

AMANDA SCHAFFER

Small's

One floor below the street tonight,
the mind is slow, lost for some time
as it tosses between trumpet

and bass, each trying to rid
itself of the other—the stutter
of trumpet stumbling over beer

puddles, the bass intruding
to whisper it's never had
any extra love. Stay awhile

till one climbs on a chair, one slips
to the floor, relents, then pipes
up again to rub pain into

her feet and hers. In the dark,
one body is the other, rearranged—

a pile of plates on a barstool
moving just enough light for shadow.
A while is a drift of form,

a decimal. Stay for its shifting
shape—the fragments that once defined
a reptile's jaw, then found their way,

after years of slippage, into ourselves,
settling down in the alcove where
sound enters, brushing the small hairs.

The three bones that vibrate in the ear
are set in motion—so easily.

MATTHEW COOPERMAN

A Mini-Mart Near Fresno

What peaches and what penumbras!
—Allen Ginsberg

I was a child of love in a flowering town, canary yellows, a daisy chain,
stunned particular of forgetting
which was love,

which was just California stretched like an Indian drum between peace
and Vietnam. Unrequited,

I was greenhoused sativa, the Wandering Jew, a kind of Walt walking
divided streets, united, nostalgic in a placard maze.

I knew Sturm und Drang, Cheech and Chong, Wham-O, "Hell No,
We Won't Go!"

The architecture of God was in the plan of the city: draft zone in the projects,
Head Start in the parks, Southern Pacific regularity,
divorce, quietude.

Let's say polling room, intricate busing I was, Black Panthers, blotter blue,
ecumenical philosophy, a nuclear 2.2.

Such buzz and then such languor: how the marsh for the mall,
the hill for the cross, the slough for the production
of burning unguents.

How Warlocks, Alarm Clock, Symbionese Liberation…
How probative sensibility, Question Authority, conjurations
of chlorine and myrrh,

this family, country, beehive and molehill, what you can make of it,why.
I loved the network of holiday boats, the shape of the hulls
as they delivered the sea…

How eventuality, lull, level sands: whosoever wakes here eat these words:
I was the Golden Hind of Camelot Arms, a little ecstasy,
a little neon plaint: requite, requite, the lyric
mercado I was.

MATTHEW COOPERMAN

My Brueghel

Some of us have wiles, Porsches, saxophones,
the mower lawned and craving mums,

and many days, fires, no fire, frost and habitation
and the calendars click into place. Luck!

What have you. Lottery of nights and sweats,
Motown, oiled brushes, variety in oranges

and sheens. Think of parsing, piercing, long dead
elders, and here my Brueghel loves me. Many

are the one to preserve emblematic. I serve
voices and hives with a mind full of honey

and rest awhile, stay stammer shadow. The roar
of the North, and the sough of the pipes, how Faith

goes out for drinks, cigarettes, finds Still Life
to slake the coffers. Psychic landscape, it's a need

and here my Brueghel. I dream winter scenes, folklore
imperative, der poof! and in High German. Whatever signs

to the receptive. It's the dog and the smell of the dog,
the blind lady palming a bowl of wheat, ever anon

suggestive, avatars branched in the snow. To be set off
[magic bracket], to continue nonetheless. The star falls

in the middle of the dance floor, miraculous ribbons
of magnesium. She's a messenger for incompletion

—dash, sixth sense of the wishing. The well goes on
with its waters, compounding the bedrock

which is a source also. Like turnstiles, house calls,
May Queen inversions, a wolf at the door and the art

full of rooms. Mr Corpse, are you listening? Living's
a pigment to peel. All of us Brueghels, pirates, veneers.

ROB TRUCKS

Kansas

I'm a traveller but I stick to roads. When it comes to airplanes, with me, all ground is holy.

When I was just a baby my mother took me on an airplane out to California so my grandmother could see me before she died. My mother hated my grandmother. Never forgave her for running away with a pipe cleaner salesman, the single thing that killed my grandfather Arnold for whom I am named.

My aunt tells me this story and everything else I know about my family. My mother wasn't one to loudly talk. Dead two years, she whispers still, a spinster librarian except for the blatant fact of me.

My aunt, all the family I have remaining, lives in Tampa with her third husband in a house with sliding glass doors and a pool. She sunbathes in the nude behind a cracked redwood fence.

There's no telling with family, who comes from what.

At sixty-three, she's still a looker. On any given summer afternoon you can find twelve, fifteen teenage boys trying out their peepers, smoking cigarettes and breathing heavy. In the evening, their mothers ask where they got so many splinters.

My aunt may play loose, with the truth and others, but it is hard to doubt a naked woman, especially one of advancing years, also kin. Once she gets started into a story, she will not be denied. Doubting coughs, politely raised hands do not yield answered questions. Such joy is evident in her telling. Her laughter is like a steamroller and not at all familial. She cannot be stopped.

It causes doubts, herein lie.

I am no good with planes. With airplanes I am like an ulcerous old man slurping a chili dog. I love airplanes. They do not love me.

On an airplane I am like a child screaming for its mother on the first day of school. If I were more brave I might have reached my mother's side before her passing but the distance by land was too great.

There's no telling now. As it is, and was, I cling to the firmament with a sense of duty, honor bound.

I cannot imagine myself, even infant sized, on a plane.

I have tried several things, all manner of pills and spells and lubrication, to quell my discomfort in the air but have only succeeded in riding one lost stewardess, locally quarantined for the duration of a Christmas flood.

It was something.

My grandmother disappeared one Monday morning while my grandfather fished. Few of the particulars are known though she did leave a note.

The note said, "I've left with Mr Leroy, the pipe cleaner salesman. Do not try to find us as we're going to California. The gas pump is near dry. Your wife, Marjorie."

The note was found pinned to my grandfather's chest, a bullet hole through each.

He shot himself with his deer rifle in a mixture of seasons, still wearing his waders from his morning in the lake. There was talk of assistance provided. The rifle possessed a long barrel, hard to turn on oneself, especially towards the chestal region.

The local barber, Milton Marston, a friend and fellow fisherman, was rumored to have given relief to the spring of the rifle's trigger but lived a full life officially unaccused. The whole town knew he was only helping my grandfather out of his shame.

My grandparents ran a small grocery store with wood flooring. They sold bait, sardines and potted meat to the local fishermen,

hunters in the wintertime and farmers who ran out of supplies earlier than most of God's children are awake. The doors opened at five o'clock every morning but Sunday when my grandparents slept late and opened at seven.

In a glass case behind the register my grandfather kept transistor radios and alarm clocks, stempipes and wristwatches that gathered dust like interest.

After her parents were gone, my mother tended the business. She opened at five o'clock. She ordered the gas for the pumps and sold the sardines and bait that reminded her of the morning my grandfather Arnold took off to go fishing, the morning her mother ran off with Mr Leroy, the pipe cleaner salesman.

She didn't do a lot of business that first week for all the people coming inside to pay their respects and others, less social, just standing out by the gas pumps pointing, shaking their collective head, saying, "That's where it happened." As if the lives of my mother's parents were a particularly gruesome automobile accident.

My mother managed for a time. Lasted a couple of months, my aunt said, until one morning she was approached by the bread man in an unsavory manner. Memories of her mother dredged up and shame itself coursed through her veins. Her pulse quickened, but not with desire. Steely quiet, my mother bit her lip. Ignored the man until he relinquished his grin and returned to the business of restocking the shelves.

When he turned his head my mother gathered cans of Vienna sausage from the next aisle over and fired them, repeatedly, until several welts and some blood were apparent.

The milk man, a lodge brother of the bread man, either in sympathy or from fear, was the next to refuse delivery to my grandparents' store and once pressure had been applied to the man who delivered the bait and potted meat, my mother had no choice but to sell.

She left town. Moved away and became a librarian. She thrived on the quiet and solitude of her position until three years later when her mother called to say she was dying.

My mother succumbed to guilt in a way that she had surrendered to nothing previous and the story dictates that she soon locked the doors of the library, wrapped me in swaddling and boarded a plane towards California, hoping all the way that she would be too late and her mother would already be dead.

Despite my lack of memory, it is a trip that has informed my life.

The story of the trip out to California to visit my grandmother begins before there was a *Green Acres* television show. Eddie Albert was already Eddie Albert by then but I have no idea what Eddie Albert was Eddie Albert for. He just was. He was known.

I like to think it happened over Kansas. I have always felt a kinship there, a bodily rush that begins almost palpably whenever I cross the state line and which does not diminish until I transverse again. Maybe it's the farmland, the soil, a sense of home.

I look like the dickens with a pitchfork.

You cannot believe how good I look with a pitchfork in my hand.

Somewhere over Kansas, I imagine, my mother felt the need to relieve herself. Perhaps she was distracted, distraught over the prospect of finding her mother alive, or maybe, like her son, she never got used to the roaring of airborne engines, but somewhere over Kansas my mother entered the airplane's facilities and forgot to lock the door. Somewhere over Kansas, with her stockings around her calves in the closet-sized space of the airplane lavatory, my mother came face to face, in a sense, with Eddie Albert, the future star of *Green Acres*.

When the door to the airplane lavatory opened, my mother knew that she was being gazed upon by Eddie Albert. She knew

that it was Eddie Albert gazing upon her while she sat in a position of immodesty, stockings around her calves, dress hiked up around her waist. This fact did not then, or ever, escape my mother.

I never, not once, saw my mother naked, unlike my aunt who parades like a Shriner.

Her entire life my mother bathed behind a deadbolted door.

My mother's bathroom, once inhabited, was safer than a bank. No egress or ingress and tight like a vault.

I used to sit outside my mother's bathroom and talk to her at night. I sold the house with a worn spot in the carpeting just outside her door. I spent an accumulation of years sitting, straining to hear my mother's whispered counsel while she concluded her toilet.

One of the things she told me was never go to California.

My aunt's story.

She does not say who watched me while my mother attempted to relieve herself. What stranger my mother might have entrusted to care for me while she ventured into the nether regions of the airplane in order to relieve herself over the wheat fields of Kansas.

My aunt does not say what happened with Eddie Albert once he had gazed upon my mother. Whether he was asked to autograph an air sickness bag or something more personal.

I cannot believe my mother would leave me.

The story told by my aunt makes great leaps, bounds like a giant rubber ball. I am left to fill in the rest. Determine fact from fiction.

This excursion that I cannot remember produced a rippling of effects.

I cannot believe my mother would leave me unattended while she availed herself of the airplane's facilities. Over Kansas or not.

I do not remember the trip, the plane, my grandmother, California. My mother whispered to me not to go and I have never been.

I went to New York instead. I carried my pitchfork.

You cannot believe how good I look with a pitchfork.

It was my tool of choice on the farm where I started work at the age of thirteen and I held it like a charm as I moved up in the world. I retained the implement when I rose past manual laborer, becoming an apprentice pig farmer by the age of fifteen. A specialist in midwifery.

Along with responsibility came tags of discomfort. I developed an odor which I carried throughout my teenage years, a porcine stench detrimental to social ascension. At times I felt an outcast, an orphan.

I was called names by my peers, Trough Boy and worse. Pig Pen for one.

I never liked that cartoon. Never once named a dog Snoopy.

The dust actually helped to tender the reek. It clung to me as I to it.

Each evening, outside the bathroom door, I strained to hear my mother's whispered counsel. Kept my pitchfork in hand.

For sentimental reasons I would occasionally use the tool on particularly heavy afterbirth though I can only pretend it was useful. In these times, my pitchfork was an idle prop, a staff, a rod, support.

I was good at my job.

I carried the pitchfork with me when I ventured to New York. The stink of the city instantly masked my porcine smell but other consequences of my arrival were not so fortuitous.

My tool was the first thing stolen when I arrived, though not by the hoodlums who further their careers surrounding the cesspool known as the Port Authority Bus Terminal. No. Instead, it was the Times Square Mounted Police who separated me from my support by clamping their cuffs across my wrists and allowing me to spend my first four nights in the 11th Precinct.

Upon graduation, I was told that the pitchfork was lost but I have other beliefs.

My mother warned me, in her librarian's whisper, not to go. She warned me of feminine wiles and was not there to comfort me when my heart was broken by that departing stewardess.

My mother warned against vacating the steadiness of employment but my wanderlust would not be denied. I yearned for more, a search, to leave behind the gasp that met the stench of porcine placenta I carried though I could hardly smell it myself, having grown used to my own.

The stewardess yelled out, "Sooey," during our session but I thought she was from Arkansas.

In memory, it was enjoyable, despite the clarity of her yelp.

Everyone has to take their vacation somewhere.

When I awoke from slumber, the deepest of my life, my stewardess was gone. She left no note and I was left without comfort or support, my pitchfork having already been reclaimed.

I thought of my mother but did not turn back. I ventured cross country instead, through Kansas and others, chasing my winged angel, wanting to explain that what she took to be rooting was nothing more than a lack of carnal education.

I was always a leg, a connection, or a round-trip excursion ticket behind. This is when I learned of my mother's imminent demise.

At my mother's home, in the midst of the wake, my aunt longed to give me comfort but I was inconsolable. She tried to wrap me in a bare naked hug but I would not receive.

Though she tried, herself, to point the way, my vision chose breast over hand and followed her nipple, pointing down. All things returning to earth.

I held fast to my station, a worn piece of carpeting in the hallway outside my mother's bathroom door.

I tell myself that my mother would've wanted it this way. That she would've preferred the avoidance of any face-to-face confrontation. Eyes to the ground, I imagine, even behind a bathroom door.

I attended her funeral in a dazed cloud, floating, lost. It felt like an ascension. I thought I saw Milton Marston wrap a blanket around my aunt. I thought I saw Eddie Albert by my mother's headstone.

The preacher said, Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Voices repeated, Amen.

The preacher took time to clear his throat and congregational gullets repeated in kind.

The meek shall inherit the earth, he said.

I looked up, searching for who knows what. My mother. My love.

A small twin engine rumbled westward across the sky and I followed its flight until it had disappeared. Nothing left but an invisible drone.

As it is and always shall be, the preacher said.

As it is and always shall be.

ROB TRUCKS

California

I would have never thought, ever, that it would come to this. An innocent flight of fancy now turned into something ugly, my ruin. A vision of my own wife, mind you, outfitted in naught but hard hat and work gloves, tool belt and boots. Mine own angel Gertrude, sashaying near naked towards the bed, all lights on. Me draped in the finest rope binding wrists and ankles.

Ah, Gert, come to me now. Remove the gloves when you're ready but leave the boots on. They're a part of this. Even if no one sports the pants in this family, someone must wear the boots.

The clang of Gert's lunch pail wakes me from negative reverie. She knows better than to bounce the thing on the coat rack or umbrella stand, brass and polished.

"You're home," I say.

Gert sighs in some kind of relief.

"Grab me a beer, will you hon?"

I reach for the pail, a kiss, but her jaw is nearly tight and all she offers.

"Never mind," she says, "I'll get it myself."

"Gert," I say, following her into the kitchen.

"Give me a minute, will you hon?" she says, and I know my face drops. I feel my cheeks succumb to gravity, fall towards my meager chest, also drooping like gravy.

I've seen this look in the mirror when it was me come home.

We stand facing one another, Gert's countenance tighter than my own, until she is saved by the buzzing of the washer finished its cycle.

"Laundry done?" Gert says.

"Soon," I say. "Soon."

When I turn to collect the clothes Gert sneaks up behind and gives me a pinch on the rear. I can't help but smile and she is, once again, released.

Gert professes that I saved her. Will tell you herself how I plucked her from the frigid depths of inland Canada when oil pipe was the coming thing. She was fresh and young and ready to escape.

"Do you want to see my particulars?" she asked.

"Very much," I said.

I brought her to Seattle, to Washington. I brought her to water, though inland and stagnant beneath massive ship hulls. With the union's medical plan I straightened her teeth, bought her some new breasts. My overtime pay caused her underwear drawer to overflow with scant and frilly things. Times were good and Gert was happy. Then I have my vision and screw the whole thing up.

It was Halloween last that she trotted over to the neighbor's in pressed t-shirt and jeans, my hard hat and toolbelt providing the trimming. She stuffed socks in the steel toes of my workboots to keep from tripping and leered ghoulishly as she twirled before her exit. She promised treats on her return, and they were presented accordingly. Gert leaned over me with her silicon cylinders pressing. The vision came.

I suggested she put one hand on the hard hat to keep it from slipping. Perhaps two hands would steady it best. She rode me like a bronco there in the easy chair, arms raised in both celebration and balance. I imagined her this way for days.

The office boss had been in need of secretarial assistance for some time and Gert was getting bored at the house. She was pining for some extra Christmas money. She wanted to sojourn to the Golden State. She wanted to see waves.

I made mention one day at lunch and Gert began the next morning without so much as an interview. I drove to work, proud as a rooster, with Gert riding shotgun. I wasn't even thinking.

It wasn't just the office boss who enjoyed a glance at Gert's assets. Pretty soon a lunchpail became a license to whistle. All of a sudden, men who dwelled on scaffolding needed paperwork filled out. They started calling me Lucky Bill.

Maybe I could've handled the noise on the site but at home, too, Gert's vocabulary increased by several nouns: loadsize, drydock, rigging.

Once, astride me in the Barcolounger, she muttered another.

"Stevedore," Gert said, but I misunderstood.

"My name is Bill," I said, straight as a judge despite our position.

My recoiling shock caused her to dismount and that's not all.

That afternoon in bed I became rope-burned at the ankles and wrists in a fit of premature enthusiasm. I've given up my job and my wife in a fit of what felt like free will.

My vision has failed to bring lasting satisfaction. In truth, it hasn't been good since the first and I am left to merely shake my head and ponder the fact that I brought this into my own house.

I suggested to Gert that we go see waves for real. Move down to California for the winter, pick up some work there. I insisted we could live on the beach, something we couldn't afford, but she, in a motion newly learned, stroked my flannel-shirted sleeve, and said, "Ah hon."

For the first time in her life, my angel doubted me, the man who had taken her away from the frozen wilds. I quit my job expecting her to follow but this was no time for testing.

It didn't happen. Worse. Gert believed that she might give loading a try. Said how it paid more than the secretarial. How it wasn't just a man's world anymore. The office boss gave her my job. Told her how this is what they call irony.

A change came over me. I began drinking vodka in gulps and listening to the country music. Tammy Wynette. Loretta Lynn. Kitty Wells. Long, plaintive sounds in octaves I could not reach. The neighbor came over to see if we were beating the dog again. The thing is a mongrel bastard, retriever and beagle mix, with the saddest eyes and sheddingest coat. Sometimes I call the poor thing Lucky Bill, it slinks so.

I was not always such a hardened soul.

I wash and I iron. I vacuum and polish. I take cooking classes at the Community Education. I made an A on my final but Gert stays late, puts in the overtime. My delicious exam turns cold and I feed it to Lucky Bill.

When Gert walks through the door I am standing behind her chair, crying, inconsolable.

"Ah hon," she says as I run into the bathroom and shut the door.

Can you see where this is leading? Can you imagine where this will end?

It was an outreach to shame that caused me to don Gert's French maid outfit. It was an effort to set Gert straight, to show her how inverted our lives had become. That it was not too late to reach out for the waves and ride them through this little episode.

I met her at the door wearing nothing but a stiff white apron. In my hand, beer in a frozen glass, just the way I used to like it.

I figured she'd cross the threshold and come to her senses. I figured Gert would walk in the door and see what she'd done. I figured how the apron was the last thing I'd wear before I changed into some jeans and start loading our stuff in the car, glad to have this chapter behind us.

I was seriously incorrect. I was certainly mistaken. Holding a frozen glass of beer and wearing a starched white apron I couldn't have been more wrong.

"Ooh la la," Gert said.

For my birthday I received an iron. A G-string for Christmas. At Valentine's it was roses and a box of chocolates which she ate herself.

"Maybe you don't need these, hon," Gert said. "You've put on a little weight."

She said this Valentine's night, walking through the door, like she'd been thinking about it, maybe even discussing it all afternoon.

I myself once rode the workbench of lunchtime talk. How this worker longed for another child he so missed the pregnant breasts of his wife. How this one had committed adultery with not only his next door neighbor but the preacher's wife as well. How the young guy, Steve, would marry his girlfriend if she would just lose fifteen pounds.

No disparaging my Gert, though. I had no complaints at all. I was happy I had her. They called me Lucky Bill.

This Halloween Gert brings home a plastic pumpkin filled with fat-free whipped topping and a sheer lace teddy. Her grin is mischievous, hopeful. I give her what she wants.

I lie back in bed, hands lashed to the headboard, lingerie bunched around my middle. The new stockings chafe my calves. Gert mumbles agreeably to herself as she has her way. I close my eyes against all visions. I lie back and think of the waves.

CATIE ROSEMURGY

What I Wanted to Say Instead of Yes When a Guy at a Bar Asked Me If I Grew Up Near Lake Michigan

May I draw a line across the middle
of your face? I'm used to half the world
being blue and lapping at my feet.

The reassuring calm of your forehead
almost perfectly replaces the lake
and may leave me with nothing to do but sleep.

Only the sound of waves is missing
from your skin. How peaceful. How easy.
Let your busy lips be all that's left

of the city. Rome, New York, Troy,
the local beach. Your mouth is big enough
to explain the history of decline.

Two months have gone by since I last got rid
of the land and the sails and went under,
since I last lifted my leg from the water

and created composition, curve, and skin.
And you can tell. There are no drops running
down my face. There's nothing glistening to catch

with the tip of your finger. I'm not new.
No wonder I can't get you to shut up.

CATIE ROSEMURGY

Doll Up

> I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
> Above a sinking fire....
> —W.B. Yeats

I need to go doll up.
I need to run and get the crown jewels,
pluck the life out of my eyebrows.
Perfect arcs.
Pinches of rubies.
I believe the fingers of young virgins
left these priceless red marks all over me.
Oh, and parts of me can fly
when I widen my eyes.
Actually the flying is real;
it's my long, veinless legs
that take work.
Everyone will think of sparrows and guillotines.
Everyone will cry a bit inside.

Fling Beauty.
Let it fall from you in clots.
Get a good sound out of it
when you hit the plate.
Whipped cream isn't just a sex toy;
the thwack it makes against the pie
is a teaching technique
for how to say *I'm leaning in the doorway now.*
The princess and the peritoneum.

Everyone knows exquisite women
scratch and drool in their sleep.
Everyone has bent over
a decaying log and felt cocoons twitch
between the disks in their spine.

Let's go make loud tragic joy
behind a bush,
beside an old-fashioned street light,
near an exclusive hotel
while we die.
Everything in my life led up
to my inappropriate laughter.
Let's not call our fate tragic joy anymore.
Let's call it that sucking sound we all like so much.
I need a ten thousand dollar dress.
I need a pair of scissors.
Cut the indigo fabric off at my realistic waist,
find me the perfect thigh highs.
We are going out tonight.

DREW PERRY

Stigmata as Party Trick

It's a bet, she says,
in the glow-dark of the porch,
blue lightbulb from the strip mall party store
lighting up all the wrong parts of cheekbones.
The beginnings of sleet tick on magnolia leaves
and five-dollar lawn furniture.
She decides he is handsome enough.
They agree about the cold,
and sure as shit he runs an index finger
right damn through his palm.
Oh, she says,
I can only do that thing
where you pretend to lift off half your thumb.

BARBARA O'DAIR

Past Struggling Up

The sky is bleached of color
up north, reflecting nothing,
the great wide open
just a dull bell
under which we make our adventure—

like this drive
into a gray well, the dirty bay
along a loop of road,
where the past is settling down.
A tug trawls the surface,
hauling relics in its harsh nets—
boots like lost souls, kettles,
the occasional inner tube
with nobody in it.

Those who escaped sank
or did a salty bob
back to civilization.
They're not asking to be delivered.
I hardly remember them at all.

beautiful bridge, and many Chinese are fishing fish there, like this"—he spread his hands—"gigantic beautiful fish, silver, like made of silver. Yah! Good fish! *Good* good fish!"

He rubbed his stomach and I laughed.

"But, dad, they got the same kind of fishes here? Maybe New Orleans fish don't act like San Francisco ones. In San Francisco..."

"Ah, fish is fish," he said. "Fish is fish is fishing fish. Yes or no?"

"No."

"Yes. We fish for fish is fishing for fish."

I saw K-Mart in a light I never had before. We walked the aisles and I wanted it all. I touched everything I saw. My father made a sucking sound with his tongue in the roof of his mouth and swatted at my hands. *"Bu yao la, ah?"* He frowned his disapproval down upon me and the thing I'd touched. Then he'd wait a moment, and, when he thought I wasn't looking, he'd touch it too. Opposite the gun counter, we came to a towering white cooler anointed with the words NIGHTCRAWLERS, REDWORMS, SHRIMP, CRICKETS.

"Hey dad, they got worms in here!"

"Worms? Yes. Fish are liking worms."

"Should we get some?"

"Hmm." He looked to his fingertips.

"Can I help y'all find somethin?" A woman appeared beside us.

"We're going fishing!" I said.

"Yah," my father said. "We like to buy some fishing rod, string for fish, hook, bob, worm that fish likes."

"You say you wanna buy some fishin line?"

"Fish rod, string for fish, hook, bob, worm that fish likes."

"String for fish? You mean, like, fishin line?"

"Yes. This string, and fishing rod, hook, bob. Worm that..."

"Yeah, worm that fish likes," she started laughing, and looking around.

I looked at my father. When people started laughing and looking around, I knew what was coming. My father often had difficulty discerning whether someone understood him or not, but he had no difficulty sensing the slightest impatience with his English. But as she looked for company she found no one, and her laughter went the way laughter does with no one to share it.

"All right," she said. "C'mon."

She guided us through the aisles.

"You want a fresh water pole or a salt water pole?"

My father just stared at her, blankly. I knew the anger behind his stare and was grateful that the woman likely did not.

"Well," she said, "you *might* wanna choose one or the other. Cause 'tween a fresh water..."

"Yah yah yah," my father said. "You just give me fishing pole and I buy, okay?"

"But if you get you a *fresh* water pole you might could wanna go out to the *salt* water later..."

"Oh, fresh water salt water. Yah, you are very clever, huh? Fish is fish."

"No they ain't. Salt water fishes, they *bigger* and..."

"You are not intelligent person. I don't listen to you. I buy this pole, two."

"*What?* Boy, you best find you some manners fore you..." Her mouth tightened into a flat line and she shook her head. I thought she was going to punch him. She was not a small woman and there was naked fury in her eyes.

"You are not intelligent person," my father said. "I buy this stick, two."

"Boy, if I wasn't gon lose my job I'll teach you somethin you gon remember. You know, you in America now and we don't..."

"Yah yah yah. This stick. I buy two, okay?"

The greatest problem my father had in purchasing anything was his inability to distinguish between impatience over a difficult

transaction and what might be interpreted as racism. He was often on the other end of such transactions in our store. Although everyone who lived in our neighborhood was black, including all the customers at our store, he was either unable or unwilling to learn anything about them. I think now that he survived only by a freakish kind of luck. He was, perhaps, uniformly granted the particular variety of deference reserved for the implacably insane.

The woman seemed, after a moment, to come to the same conclusion about my father that so many others had reached, suddenly encountering the mystery of his anger. Though she shook her head, and their eyes warred, she sold us the rods and everything else. As usual, my father was his normal self within moments. And as he handed her the money, my father laughed and said in Chinese roughly the same thing he always did after such confrontations.

"This stupid big nose black," my father said, laughing and trying to sound instructive. *"You know what would happen if she had to sell her idiotic strings in China? She would lose her mind. Her mind!"*

"Hmm." The woman exhaled through her nose.

My father fussed with the bag, giving the woman one of his fraught, blank glances. He looked at me the same way. Fixing me with the blank, meaningful look, all the more meaningful for its blankness, he took my hand in his. I felt the hard pads of his palm.

"Yah," my father said, "There has a day every one must put the shoulder to a wheel, and have to push. Come to this day, you must know what means this wheel." He took my hand, and added, in Chinese, *"Understand?"*

"No."

"Yah," he went on English. "When you know what means this wheel, you know what means difference between push and pull, and not have to work rest of your life in K-Mart."

"What?" The woman shot back.

My father gave the woman the blank stare, turning me to leave. She sneered, one eyebrow curling upward, and shook her head. As my father pulled me away, I watched her over my shoulder, wanting to apologize, and wanting to punch her in her sneer.

"You crazy," she hollered after us. "Hear me? Crazy!"

We ended up in Bayou Seignette. My father had heard some of the men in our store talking about the fishing across the bridge and perhaps he imagined that a fisherman needed only to cross the bridge for the fishes to fly into our pockets.

It was a sight. Back in the Treme you scarcely noticed that autumn had arrived; there weren't many trees and most of them never changed color. But here, rounding the belly of the bridge, we followed the highway down into another season, a carpet of red and yellow cypress and maple that spread out toward the Gulf. Flat, boxy stores and shotgun houses crowded the highway, and the signs of diners and filling stations rose up above the viaduct. Billboards with cartoon alligators and crawfish pointed the way toward Jean Lafitte Swamp Tours and then the highway flattened out and my father pulled across the road, to where a horseshoe of clapboard booths ringed an open patch of dirt, some sort of bazaar or carnival with the booth vendors standing over coolers, under signs that read FRESH CRAB, LIVE CRAWFISH, GULF SHRIMP, GATOR MEAT.

Dust flew up behind us as we rolled over gravel and potholes. The car stalled as we pulled between two sedans.

"*Stupid big nose car,*" my father said.

"That sign over there says live bait." I pointed up toward a store at the other end of the parking lot. "Maybe they can tell us where the fish're at."

Flies buzzed against the screen door, trapped from the inside. A bell tinkled as we went in and the old woman looked up at us from behind her reading glasses. She smiled, turned the page of her

newspaper, and my father returned the smile, held up a palm in greeting. I liked her immediately. She reminded me of my best friend T's grandmother, Minnie. The store owner wore the same type of horn-rimmed reading glasses Minnie favored, smiled with a familiar warmth and depth.

"What can I do you for today, gentlemen?" she said, speaking to me.

"We're going fishing! You can tell us where the fish're at?"

"Where the fish're at! Ain't that just what all the young fishermen'll be wantin to know these days! That's a secret we give out only to our very *special* customers..."

"I'm a special customer!"

"Huh," she laughed. "Ain't you just."

"Win," my father said, not because he sensed victory lurked somewhere in the room, but because it was my name. Lose was also my name, depending on who in the neighborhood was calling it.

"Oh, that's all right, sir. I have grandchildren of my own, and everyone of em special as you please."

My father scolded me in Chinese. *"Why do you always do this? Ha? People will think we haven't raised you properly."*

"I didn't brag. It wasn't bragging," I replied.

I looked at the woman beseechingly: "Was I?"

"Was you what?"

"Bragging."

"Whatever your daddy said, son. Best listen to what your daddy said, cause that's the truth, right or wrong. And he's taking you fishin which makes him even more right, wouldn't you say?"

My father laughed, deeply pleased, and patted me on the back. I was suddenly glad she had said what she had, as it struck me that without her advice my father would probably have made a similar point when we returned to the car, but without need of words.

"Listen to her," he said, wagging a finger. "This is a very wise woman, boy."

"Well thank you, sir. Now what kind of fishin y'all planning on doing?"

"What kind of fishing? Fishing is fishing, yes or no?"

"Oh, well. Yes, fishin is fishin."

My father winked at me.

"But, on occasion, it does help to know what kind of fish y'all want to catch."

"*Oh?*"

He liked her. Any one who elicited his prized *oh* had clearly won him over. She told him about redfish, the way they fed and the types of baits and lures they took, about bass and how they weren't hitting now because the water level was too high and muddy, about the panfish who would take just about anything so long as it had lived at one time or another, about the catfish who took anything whether it had lived or not, and my father nodded and nodded and nodded. I felt very good about the woman as my father hadn't done much nodding in his lifetime, although a good portion of his life had been spent shaking his head vehemently.

Following her advice, we found the park gate and then the road that ran toward the water and the wooded picnic areas. Hauling the bags through the woods we avoided the deep alligator holes, which my father told me were undoubtedly makeshift toilets left by inconsiderate "big nosé" picnickers, and came out onto a long grassy embankment.

It was less than a river and more than a canal. Pads of moss and scum escorted by an occasional plastic bag crawled toward the fork where two arms of yellow water met. At the other bank, past the point where the waters merged was a bridge built over wooden pilings, the road over the bridge leading toward a fenced in area that appeared to be a swimming pool.

"My god," my father said in Mandarin. We stood at the edge of the bank and peered into the muddy water. *"What kind of fish will live in water like this?"*

As if to answer him, not five yards in front of us, a shining black smoothness rolled across the surface, leaving the water in roiling knots behind it.

"Hey! Hey!" I screamed with delight.

"Shhh!" My father gave me an excited, wide-eyed look. "Must be quiet! Fish doesn't like loud little boy."

"Come on, dad! We gotta catch that fish!"

We were equally rushed in putting together the rods, reels, and line and we failed miserably. We were able to attach the reels to the rods but couldn't fathom the mechanics of the reels. The bails and drag settings were too much.

"I thought you said you and uncle Sam used to go fishing all the time..."

I was prepared to offer further complaint, but the look he gave me suggested I would be a fool to do it. We bent down on our haunches and I watched him hold the rod in one hand, the line in the other; he poked with the line at various parts of the reel, as if it were a needle and he needed only to find the eye.

I heard voices. They came from behind the trees that hid the bank where the water forked.

"There's some people over there, dad. I can hear 'em. Maybe they're fishing, too. Maybe they can help us..."

"My god," he said, poking at the reel. "Be quiet one moment, ha?"

I rose and ran toward the trees. A boy about my age stood squinting over the water, his close-cropped hair purplish in the sun. He was holding a rod much smaller than either of the ones we had purchased, and next to him a bald man leaned back on his elbows with a can of Budweiser, his own rod leaning against his bent knee. The bald man adjusted his sunglasses as I approached.

"Hey," I said. "Y'all catchin any fish?"

The man greeted me with a jerk of his head and lifted the beer to his lips. The sun reflected brightly off his dark, smooth scalp.

"Naw," the boy said, "we just got a couple perches. I'ma catch me a bass, though. I know they in here cause I seen 'em rollin."

"Rollin?"

I looked into the bucket beside them. Two tiny fish about the size of my hand darted against the walls of the bucket a moment and settled, tails swishing.

"Wow, you caught some fish!"

"Aw, they ain't nothin but perches. Can't hardly even call 'em fish. We keep 'em for the cats. We got cats that live under the house, ya dig?"

"Yeah, we got 'em, too. Everybody got 'em."

"Watch this, though. I'ma catch me a bass in a minute, and then you gon see some fish."

I looked at his rod, at the reel. His reel was like the ones we'd bought, but smaller. I watched him reel in his line, saw the way he flipped the bail and held the line before casting.

"You fishin, too?" he asked me.

"We just got here. We ain't caught nothin yet."

"You shoulda been out here yesterday. My pops caught him a catfish big as your leg."

I looked at my leg.

"Big as my leg?"

"Bigger," the man said, smiling. "Big as *my* leg."

I looked at his leg.

"No way," I said.

The boy looked at me and nodded in such a way that I knew it was true.

I ran back to my father. His hair stood out oddly, his hand fussing with it. I saw the expression on his face and decided against telling him about the catfish. I picked up the other rod and found the line in the grass. I did what I could.

"Here," I said.

"Yes."

"Hold the line so I can reel it in."

"What?"

I heard a splash. We looked and saw the circles spreading in the water.

"Come on! Hold the line so I can reel it in!"

I jabbed him with the spool until he took it. I began to turn the reel arm and the spool jumped in his hands.

"Here, like this." I placed his fingers in the holes at either side of the spool. He held and I reeled.

"Hey," he grinned. He patted me on the head and gave me what in Chinese is a considerable compliment. "*Bu cuo,*" he grinned, *not bad.*

My father was able to tie the hook on and then a bobber; the worm thrashed in his hand but he got the hook through it. Remembering what I'd seen the other boy do I hurried to the water's edge and attempted to do the same. There was a whipping sound and then something hit me hard in the mouth; it was the bobber. I was sure it was the bobber, as that was what I saw swinging in front of my face, secured there by the hook which had attached itself to my shirt. The worm squirmed against my chest but my mouth hurt too much to be bothered by it.

"*Ai-ya!*" My father took a few quick steps toward me. He was laughing. "You trapped a big one, huh!"

He checked my mouth, and seeing no blood he laughed again. He worked the hook free of my shirt.

"Caught," I said. "*Caught* a big one."

"Yes, you catch a big one, hahaha. Look boy, look. This is not intelligent behavior. You see here, give it to me. How do you free the string?"

I showed him and he began pulling the line out, letting it fall to the grass. He grasped the line a few feet above the bobber and

began twirling the line above his head. He released the line and bobber and worm arched majestically through the air, the one lopsidedly orbiting the other. And then the line caught in the grass and the bobber splashed into the water, all of six feet from shore.

"You see, boy?" He stood proudly admiring his work, arms akimbo. "Now we catch the fish."

"That's not how you do it, dad."

"What you're talking about?" He gestured at the accomplishment with both hands.

"Here, dad." I handed him the rod. "This is how you close the flippy thing, and here's how you pull in the line."

I put the other rod together and managed to feed in the line, attach the bobber, hook, and worm. When I again emulated what I'd seen the other boy do I was a bit more successful: though the bobber and worm flew nearly straight up into the air they splashed down slightly further out than my father's had.

"*Wah!*" he said. "*Bu cuo!*"

He pulled in his line hand over hand and slung it out again. I reeled in and cast out, and this time the line went out fast, the bobber sailing, and I felt the line whip against my finger.

"*My god!*" he said. "Not bad! *Ai-ya!* Hey boy! Come come!"

I walked over but couldn't see what he was pointing at. He bent down and put his hand on my neck.

"You see!"

A bubble rose and popped next to his bobber, followed by another, and then another.

"Shhh... This is fish." His eyebrows lifted excitedly and he patted my shoulder.

The bobber dipped once and slowly began to sink. A tight tingling went through me. My father grasped the line and began to pull on it, at first gingerly and then in a crazed fury. He began to jabber feverishly in Chinese: "*My god...I can feel the fish...this fish...I know you...come on, you fish...my God, this big big fish...come here...come come come come...*"

A dark form turned underwater, flashing yellow, and then it broke the surface, struggled, and sank again; he pulled hard once and it thrashed against the bank. It was round as a dish, its belly glowing whitely in the sun; yellow stripes ran brightly down its black head, the shell caked with mud.

"It's a turtle, dad!"

Its fat legs turned in the air, the hook embedded in its left front claw.

"Turtle," he said. He dropped the line and scratched his head. He reached down with one finger and the jaws snapped with a clicking sound, but missed. He scratched his head and made a sucking sound with his tongue. "This is very good for soup, but... well, I don't think mommy knows how to cook this."

"Soup? Ugh."

"Yes, we forced to let it run away."

My father looked at his fingers, and then at the turtle. A thin wash of blood ran down its leg. He reached for it again and again the jaws snapped violently. He shook his head.

I heard the other boy's voice from behind the trees:

"Did y'all catch somethin!"

"Yeah!"

"What you catch!"

"A turtle!"

"Turtle?!"

"Yeah!"

He came sprinting around the trees. His father trailed him, walking and sipping from his beer.

"Bean," his father said. "Bean, you let them folks be, boy."

"Hallo!" My father said.

"How you doin!" Bean's father hollered. "Y'all hooked y'a turtle, huh?"

"Come lookit, pop. That bitch big!"

"Watch you language, boy." Bean's father cuffed him on the head and Bean made an annoyed face at him. Bean's father made

an annoyed face back. Bean's father looked at my father and gestured with the Budweiser can. "What kind o' turtle y'all got?"

"Yes," my father shook his head, raising an eyebrow. "This is turtle."

Bean's father leaned over us and laughed. He pulled his sunglasses down with thumb and forefinger and his eyes were large and black and soft looking.

"That one of them snappin turtles. You best keep you fingers clear o' that mouth. They good eatin, though. Y'all know how to cook them things?"

"I know to eat," my father said. "Unfortunate that my wife doesn't know how to cook."

"I be happy to take it off your hands, y'all ain't gon keep it. Fix up a good turtle gumbo."

"You want?" My father rose, and swatted Bean's father on the shoulder lightly with the back of his hand. "Okay, you take."

"All right," Bean's father smiled and extended his hand, and my father took it with a nod.

"Pop, I ain't eatin no turtles, pop."

Bean's father looked at Bean and laughed a little, pushing his sunglasses back into place. He bent down and grabbed the line. He tested it once and then pulled the turtle up, the water running off it, the legs working.

"Pop," Bean said. "I ain't playin with you."

The turtle landed on its belly and made for the water; Bean's father planted a shoe on its back. Taking care to balance his beer he hopped up on one leg and brought the other shoe down on the turtle's head; there was a dry cracking sound; the legs continued to churn but when the shoe came up the head lay still, misshapen and perversely twisted to one side, the beak open and the little grey tongue lolling out.

"*Wah! Ai-yah!*" My father slapped him on the back.

"Check them legs!" Bean said.

Bean's father slapped my father on the back and laughed. "Yeah! *Ai-yah!*" he said.

"It ain't dead yet!" I said. It bothered me to see it was still moving. "You gotta finish it off!"

"Naw, son, that sucker dead all right. Them legs just movin on they own." He drew from the Budweiser, contemplating the turtle, whose legs continued to claw and push. "Bean," he said, "go fetch that bag I got my earl in—we gon put him in there for now."

Bean returned with an empty, dripping garbage bag. His father held the hooked leg with his shoe and worked the hook free. He kicked the corpse into the bag and twisted the mouth of the bag, tucked it under the bundle. I could hear the legs struggling against the plastic.

"Say, I wanna thank ya for the turtle, mister..."

"I am Charlie."

"Charlie?" Bean's father laughed.

"Charlie. What is funny?"

"You ain't Vietnamese is you? Cause if you is, that just ain't right."

"Vietnamese? I am born in northern China, near Beijing. Do you know Beijing?"

"You ain't Vietmanese?"

"No. *Chinese*. What is funny?"

"I thought you... that still don't seem right. Somebody done... you ever see that commercial on TV with the fish, for tuna fish?"

"Fish?"

"Nah. Nah, never mind." Bean's father extended his hand and my father took it. "They call me Rip, and this my son Bean."

"Yes." My father was very pleased. "And he is Win. Also my son. *Ai*, Win," my father looked at me and jerked his head toward Bean, making a face.

Suddenly Bean and I regarded each other with trepidation.

"*Hai*, Win," my father repeated.

"You ain't gon holler at you boy there, Bean?"

I extended my fist and Bean smiled and nodded.

"Where y'at Win." His fist came down over mine and I brought mine up over his.

"You drink earl, mister Charlie? Beer?"

"Beer? Yes, I like beer very much."

"Bean, go fetch some earl for mister Charlie. A'right?"

"A'right."

"Say, Charlie, where you learned to rig a pole like this here?" He leaned down and picked up the hook and bobber.

"How you supposed to do it?" I said.

"Well, the bobber, it got this little hook here for puttin the line through. It ain't quite meant to be tied on like you got it. You want me to get it right for ya?"

"Ah?" My father said.

"Yeah. You just do like this here."

"*Oh?*"

Bean came back and handed the beer to his father, who handed it to mine. Bean's father continued to work with the rig, explaining the necessity of each aspect of it.

"Y'all stay cross the river?" Bean's father said.

"Yeah," I said. "We stay over in the Treme."

"Yeah? We got people over there. Bean's momma family stay out there by the Colton school. Rough out there, boy."

"Rough?" My father said.

"Rough all over, but over by that Ninth Ward, boy…"

Bean made a raspberry sound with his lips and gestured with one hand, waving off his father's gravity. I smirked and nodded, coolly.

"Nine Ward…" My father shook his head. Our store on St Roch bordered on the Ninth Ward. He didn't have to understand the man's words to grasp their import.

Bean's father finished with the rig and handed me the rod. He and my father stood looking out at the water, silently sipping from their beers. My father's head bobbed up and down absentmindedly, as it always did when he was thinking or nervous. Bean and I looked at them, at each other. Bean shrugged at me and I shrugged back. Without turning Bean's father touched my father on the arm with the back of his hand.

"How long you been in the states, Charlie?"

"Thirty, thirty-five year. I arrive San Francisco nineteen fifty-nine."

"San Francisco...I hear it's real pretty out there, with the fog and that Golden Gate Bridge, and all kind o' space."

"Yah. Pretty. But not all kind of space."

They nodded together. Then my father said a funny thing.

"You?" He said. "How long you have been in America?"

"How long I been in America?" Bean's father laughed.

"Shit," Bean said, also laughing.

"Hey! What I say bout that cursin?"

Bean stopped laughing.

"I been in America all my life, Charlie. Born and bred in Alabama. Different when I was growin up. But different depend on who you talkin to. You know. That broke back state still got a Dairy Queen with separate bathrooms for white and black."

"Separate bathroom. Yah. I remember."

"They had Jim Crow in San Francisco?"

"Jim Crow? Ah, Jim Crow. No no no, not San Francisco. I come to Baton Rouge nineteen sixty-two, attending college of LSU. Taking Greyhound bus. My wife and I, after we marry. Funny story," he shook his head, gravely. "Very funny story."

"Pop. We ain't gon fish no more?"

"Hold up, Bean. Naw, you go head. I'ma catch up with ya."

"Come on, Win, les catch us some fish!" Bean sprinted away.

I stayed where I was. As much as part of me wanted to go with Bean, to fish, to laugh, to talk shit, the mystery of my father's past held me. I was fascinated by his past, by the fact that he had one that didn't involve me.

"What you was sayin, Charlie?"

"Yes, very funny story." He shook his head.

"Somethin had happened at LSU?"

"In the bus, this Greyhound bus. Very funny. We are transferring bus in Arizona and when we are getting in bus, very funny situation. When we getting into new bus, you understand? Yes. My wife is here—" my father put his beer down to gesture with his hands— "and I am here, and when I climb on the bus I see very funny thing. Here, in the front, all faces are white, and here, in back, all faces are black. Not like before. Suddenly, not like before. You understand? Nobody say nothing. Just suddenly all white faces are front, all black faces at back. I am no stupid. I know this is not accident. But, then, I have a very big confusion."

Bean's father began to smile.

"Yes! I doesn't know where to sit! You know! You see I mean? Where we are going to sit! I look my wife! My wife look me! Nobody have told us about this!"

When he saw that Bean's father was laughing he grabbed his arm, laughing, too.

"Yah! You see! Where I am going to sit?!"

"Yeah. Yeah. So where you sat?"

"Bus driver is looking at us not happy. 'Why you are standing here like this?' I doesn't know what to say. So we just walking, walking, until two seats are empty, and when we sit down, people are looking at us but doesn't say anything."

"The white folks."

"Yes, we sitting in the white faces. Later, the college advisor telling me to sit with white people, eat with white people, go to bathroom with white people, because otherwise they will treat me

as black. So, you see I mean? They still looks at me like strange, in bathroom, whatever." My father bent over, emulating a white man washing his hands, turning his head repeatedly and moronically. Bean's father nodded, laughing gently as he drew from the Budweiser. "Maybe they are think, *Why...who is this man...he is not white...he is not black...what do I supposed to do?* Everywhere they are washing hand, look at me like crazy, cannot think what do they supposed to do."

Bean's father turned and looked at my father a long, silent moment. His sunglasses hid his eyes, but his lips were pursed and smiling. My father kept rubbing his hands together, as if washing them, crooking his head to the side, and frowning with his mouth slightly open. For a long moment, he stood there frowning and crooking and rubbing his hands together. The laughter started in Bean's father's nose and spread.

"Yah!" my father said, letting go, too. "You see, mister Rip! You see I mean!"

"Yeah," Bean's father nodded and laughed, drawing from the beer. "I see you mean."

My father tapped his companion's arm again, with the back of his hand. He rubbed his hands together, washing, frowning, scrutinizing, and they laughed heartily together.

"That's a pretty good story, Charlie. I'm gon have to tell that one back to my wife. She'll fall out laughin."

"Yah. I am glad you like story." My father bent down for the beer and drew from it.

Bean's father crooked his head at my father, smiled, and gestured subtly with his beer, nodding.

They stood there a moment, the two of them nodding together for no apparent reason. Bean's father laughed and looked at my father. He raised the can again to my father and sipped from it. My father laughed and raised his own beer and sipped.

I heard Bean's voice.

"Say, Win! C'mon! Let's catch us some basses!"

So I joined Bean and he tried without success to teach me how to set the hook. But it didn't matter. Just the sound of the line whipping away from the reel on a good cast thrilled me endlessly. The thing I liked best about fishing with Bean was the oath he made each time he prepared to set the hook, at the dip of his bobber. "Watch me, Win. Watch me," he'd say. "I'ma kick this bitch ass!" Then he would immediately glance toward the trees, behind which our fathers sat in the grass, talking, drinking, and fishing.

VIRGIL SUAREZ

Big Yellow Oxen

on their way to the sugar cane mill,
bound in twos to the yoke, a weight

so heavy behind them their hooves
track deep pockets in the red mud.

A riddle for those on the way back,
a lesson for those on the way there.

Once in a while they stop long enough
to catch their breath, tug at the ropes

woven through their nose rings.
Over the hills their yellow hides blur—

it's hard to tell if the sun is setting or rising.

DAVID RODERICK

Oratory of the Little Way

To row toward the lone beach,
then and now, to a new town
growing not only in my mind.
To stand on a rock and find
where the sand meets the oak trees
and lead my mare up the shore,
the C C C of her hoofprints
fading under dull-rolling surf.
To walk into the woods as silent as an Indian
and listen to a river's red accent
and see three otters sled down the mud
into the great shad-feast of spring.

There was always too much Plymouth.
So much that the trees began to fall
into the armfuls of their own shadows.
So much that the congregation
could not harness its silence,
a hollow drone that leaked into town
through cracks in the meetinghouse walls.
The earth-fast homes were packed
with a moss that choked all slit-light,
and beyond Cole's Hill, where a statue
now stands under white shoulders of snow,
the meridian drew back to its new arc.

Here is John Billington, cloaked in gin
and tracking the river until sleep waylays his eyes.

He wakes near the otters' play
and stays to learn a tempo
from the woods: the fern by fern
construction of its own language,
the thistle's hymn and call.
But even here there is too much Plymouth:
walls and stone chimneys rising on the hills,
a grist mill's wheel culling water
from mammals and geese,
a small fright-sting caught in their lungs.

I want to huddle down in the sinkhole
foundation of the Standish House,
to poke among its relics and make
a still life with the sipping gourds
and clay shards, a goat skull,
some arrowheads and beads.
I might find a trinket locked
in the ground, a pocket watch
dull and stalled with grit,
a charm to hang around my throat
and thwart the hands of time.

When I ride into town, where the hill
is crowned with root-plied tombstones,
tablets from which squirrels launch into trees,
I hear John Billington address his congregation,
sharing an oratory of the little way
titled "The Dream-Play of Water Dogs,"
which he dedicates to preachers and the King

and those who thrust themselves into dull tasks.
But too much of Plymouth disappears to hear,
so many fences aslant on the landscape
that the Pawtuxet pack their homes on their backs
and settle deep within the woods.

No teepees on the river. No herring run.
The land has surrendered
to blueprints pinned to well-lit drafting tables:
the monarch field scorched,
the bee range engulfed,
the summer nights drawn off
by jet lights and transceivers.
Thus it is time to wade among eels that lie
as still as knife blades in the river,
to pull the sticks away from my boat
and row back to a ship ancient in the sea,
where I will be but a speck in a bronze eye:

Massassoit, standing in the hilltop twilight,
holds his breath until I disappear.
Once I am through with my vanishing
and he has blinked for a moment and stared,
he will walk back to the river of the Great Time Before,
before the mind came and tried to arrange
all the things that were already together.

PATRICK MORAN

Windows

Such
a fragile race
of trembling nobodies.
Such a nervous
surface of shimmer
and sheen.
Such imperfect
reflectors of sky,
bodies and darkness.
Watch them
unpack their cutlery,
their glacial razors,
their tailored
sharkskin suits
when brick
and mannequin meet
themselves
coming and going
like divers
in a frozen pool.

PATRICK MORAN

Chalkboard

There is relevance
to struggle with,
a dilemma over

the meaning of marks
made and unmade:
there is the universe

of its surface to deal with,
at once dark and starless
then suddenly

illuminated with
equations and cursive.
It can't compete

with the drama
of the windows or the doors
or the liberating silences

of the ceiling.
It assumes therefore
a much more

transparent
and classical demeanor:
there when it's there

and not there when it's there.
In our dreams of it
we are always children,

we can somehow
see ourselves at the edge
of its greenish shores

and also feel
the weight of the chalk
like a smooth stone

that we can't bring ourselves
to skip or
throw away just yet.

SARAH ROBERTS

The Mineral Fact

We don't watch the continental seam.
We watch the water, a certain family
of blue that doesn't break. You gave me
the name once. Iambic amber, occluded moonstone—
algae-clogged elbows, mussels in bloom.
Still trying for the word, the mineral
fact turning from me—
spine, relief of

SARAH ROBERTS

Syllable

I'll buy tumblers for your scotch. Find glass
for your mineral. A bed for your sediments. I'll transport
the river's grip. Intimate the orchids. See how close
violet lies to brown—and stay,
petals cursive, barnacles through the looking
glass. And red kelp, when light goes there.
No one believes my word for tentacles. My love
of salt. Can I steel you? Can I braid you?
Wreath of stone and vetch. Cardamom
silts. Jackets of ire. Fern. Fur. My simple liquor.

DANIEL GUTSTEIN

Date Inside S—— Cafeteria

The cashier rings my meatloaf, corn bread, broccoli, potato salad, and coconut cream pie. Slow day, today—one person every two, three tables. A knife clatters a spoon, the plain white china,

where I sit. A man carries his tray, duffle bag. Maybe just tray, his companion, maybe just pie and water. He stands while she must pull out a chair. Her chair, the way he smiles, and not his wife,

either. I hazard the state fairground, midwest. He, dressed the same: checkered flannel shirt rolled to the elbows, blue jeans worn white at the knees, belt and belt buckle, brown boots. She, maybe her simple white dress, straw hat wide as a sunflower,

flat shoes. The mounted police had galloped the arena, a high-stepping spinwheel. Fancy dances, he'd joked. She explained the precision: half the horses, the other half, the fingers interlaced, a hand clasp. When the captain's horse, apart from the others the whole drill, reared so the captain could wave his hat like a cowboy, the man leapt,

clapping. Afterwards, the man and woman walked past the stalls. She petted the horses, talked about coats and diets, the riders. Outside, toss games. He knocked bottles, won her a stuffed cartoon character. They bought food, two trays, maybe just pie and water, hers. She pulled her chair while he, ever the gentleman,

stood. He is there now, asks her, a whisper only she can hear. Yes, she might be saying, the pie's grand. This is the best pie ever—

least the best pie you and I. He laughs, holds the tines near his cheek like a maestro. He twirls another forkful, chews his spaghetti,

beams wine red. Slow day, today—one person every two, three tables. A knife clatters a spoon, the plain white china. The cashier rings a knockwurst, split pea soup, dinner rolls, cole slaw, banana cream pie. Potholes, potholes, two hundred dollars, huffs a whitebeard,

who gets the sharp shush. She must be touching his neck. The man pinches his shoulder blades, straightens his back. The way he liked it, likes it. She must be telling him woogly boogly, the way he whisper-laughs. Look, she says, you're gooseflesh. Daddy wanna purr, don't he,

when Mommy tickles. Dressage, an intimate had said, the horses high-stepping a spinwheel. Five Mile Road, Michigan, warm blue summer afternoon. Dollar bill after dollar bill, roll the ball, the middlemost hole. Those damn pincushion hearts until the ball the hole, our legs rubbed as we walked,

she clutched the handsome white bear. I can feel her fingertips, her fingers and mine like through charge the horses. I can hear her say, this is the best time ever—least the best time you and me. Her lips touch my lips, almost.

SCOTT GRIFFIN

Clouds Ahead of the Rain

Monday and the Greens come out the front door, Mr Green with the television antenna, the television antenna a beat-up coat hanger, Mrs Green close behind with a shotgun hollering hands up, her white nightgown torn from one shoulder, awful red nose bleed dots all down the front, pink plastic hair rollers dangling loose or missing altogether. Mr Green backpedals with his hands up, backpedaling down the steps to his new pickup.

The Greens have the only porch on the block. My room is on the side of the house closest to the Greens. I'm usually in bed when Mr Green comes home in what he calls his new pickup. I'm usually in bed but I hear him. Before his pickup he had what he called his new Oldsmobile. By the time he got around to having the last accident in it the car had so many dents and scrapes to where you couldn't keep a straight face with him right there calling it his new Oldsmobile.

I hear Mr Green because he always scrapes his cars and trucks up against the maple tree in his front yard. Mr Green told me it was his damn tree one time when he came home and caught me in it looking for a good tree house spot. He told me to get down and out of his damn tree.

Tuesday and Mr Green is back, back on the front porch, his unbuttoned shirt hanging from his shoulders like a curtain, arms whipping around as he tries to get a word in edgewise. The sheriff does most of the talking. He hands Mr Green the papers and turns back toward his patrol car.

That's when Mrs Green comes out and Mr Green helps her down the front steps with a backhand. He helps her down the

steps before the sheriff can even pull away. The sheriff gets back out. He gets out and handcuffs Mr Green for a ride in the patrol car.

Wednesday evening and Mrs Green is out on the porch. She's out on the porch begging Mr Green to please just come in, Mr Green saying he didn't get much sleep in jail, saying this in the back of his new pickup while he pushes on a washing machine. Mr Green picks up junk appliances and puts them on his porch, telling anybody with an ear that that's his job. Mostly the junk appliances just stay on the porch.

Most people are asleep, sleeping through the Greens with pillows tight about their heads or a television left on to drown the Greens out. The ones who are up make do with hearing that Mr Green is going to leave as soon as he can get this washing machine unloaded. But Mr Green lets out a long holler, saying now he has gone and done it, now he has thrown his back out. Mrs Green takes Mr Green by the hand and leads him through the front door saying here now, here now.

Thursday morning, his stiff back stove up, Mr Green staggers across the front porch. He staggers across the front porch with a bottle in his hand. He has come out on the front porch to tell the man who lives next door in the scrambled eggs and ketchup house to keep his customers in his own front yard. Mr Green stays out on the front porch, talking about the customers, the man next door already back inside.

Afternoon rain comes down in heavy sheets but smoke is still coming from the Green's house. A fire truck pulls up. Firemen in yellow hard hats pull hoses from the truck, Mr Green and his bad back out on the front porch talking to them, telling them to go on home. But even I don't want to go home, me standing under the maple with only it to keep the rain off of me. I don't want to go home until I know why smoke is coming from the Green's house.

Mr Green tells me to go home and asks me if I don't have enough sense to come in out of the rain. That's when the firemen tell Mr Green to get out of the way, taking an ax and a hose into the house. One of the firemen comes right out. He comes right out with the barbecue grill, and it still smoking.

The rain finally ends on Friday but the weatherman calls for more, a flash flood watch across the television screen. Mr Green has some lumber and says he's clouds ahead of the rain. He's building a ramp to get his new motorcycle onto the front porch. He lets me sit on his new motorcycle. He says he traded his new pickup and his shotgun for the motorcycle, this in between the police siren sound he makes while I pretend to handlebar rev the engine. Mr Green makes the siren sound so good it has the man who lives in the scrambled eggs and ketchup house outside for a look around.

Saturday and Mr Green sets out to sell Mrs Green's car, saying he needs to buy back his new pickup now that he has all the junk appliances on his porch fixed. Or at least he has all that will fix fixed. This he explains to the man buying Mrs Green's car. Mrs Green stands on the front porch with a cigarette and a black eye.

The thing Mr Green is not explaining to the man here to buy Mrs Green's car is that he spent most of the morning working on Mrs Green's car. That's when he kicked the dent in the door and threatened to take the ax that was holding the hood up and chop the car into small pieces. I was there holding wrenches for Mr Green until my mother called out the window and said that she reckoned Mr Green could hold the wrenches himself.

Sunday morning and Mr Green is hiccupping. He is hiccupping and he is dozing off, a little drool of spit coming from the corner of his mouth. I go to wipe his mouth with his collar, waking up his nap.

Mrs Green is gone to church. She said for Mr Green to be out on the porch when she got home or there wouldn't be any Sunday dinner. Mr Green knows. Mr Green knows if there isn't any Sunday dinner there's liable not to be any Monday dinner or any Tuesday dinner. There's liable not to be any dinner all week. He says if I'll just keep the front porch swing swinging he guesses he can stay awake. He says he'll take me to play pool.

Mr Green does take me to play pool that afternoon. But mostly I just watch television and chalk Mr Green's stick. Mr Green plays pool with a one-armed man and the one-armed man plays pretty well for a one-armed man. The one-armed man has tattoos and finally a lot of Mr Green's money. The one-armed man goes by the name Eddie. Eddie tells Mr Green a one-armed joke. He says he thinks he could beat Mr Green with one arm tied behind his back. Har har har says Mr Green.

I never get to play pool but Mr Green stops on the way home to buy me a Pepsi. Mr Green gives me a quarter and lets me push the button on the machine saying he feels fine for a man who just lost all his money playing pool with a one-armed man. He tells me the one-armed man racks loose and says he'll drive his new pickup fast over the First Baptist Church speed bumps if I don't mention Eddie the one-armed man to Mrs Green.

We drive fast over the First Baptist Church speed bumps and Mr Green is feeling better than fine. The reason he is feeling better than fine is the bottle he keeps between his legs, the brown paper bag twisted around the neck of it in a stranglehold.

Mr Green drinks a good half of my Pepsi before we get home. I don't tell Mrs Green about Eddie the one-armed pool player. Instead I tell her about the First Baptist speed bumps. Mrs Green asks me if I'm telling the truth. She's asking me if I'm telling the truth but the truth doesn't matter. Mr Green has his one helmet on and he's off on his new motorcycle.

I hear Mrs Green's voice saying she reckons somebody blinded Mr Green off the road with their headlights. She reckons that's why he missed the curve in the road.

My mother and I go with Mrs Green to see where Mr Green had his accident, to see the light pole that cracked his helmet. I never got to ride on his new motorcycle because he only had the one helmet. I look for tire tracks on the bank of the ditch but I don't find any.

People come by the Greens' house to see Mrs Green, leaving flowers mostly and telling Mrs Green they are sorry, Mrs Green trembling in her black dress. I know she is trembling because she is sitting in the porch swing and I'm swinging the porch swing just like I did when Mr Green had the hiccups.

The men from the funeral home try to get the casket in the front door but the casket is too wide. Then they try to get the casket through the window but the window won't raise up enough. Finally Mrs Green tells the men from the funeral home to leave the casket on the front porch. They leave the casket on the front porch and put flowers around it. Some of the flowers lay over the casket and some lay over the junk appliances to where you don't notice the junk appliances unless you know they are there.

That night I keep hearing Mrs Green's voice saying she reckons somebody must have blinded Mr Green off the road with their headlights. And I hear a scraping sound like Mr Green parking a new car against his maple tree. I ease out of bed, sneak a peek out the window, wondering if Mr Green is still there in the casket on his front porch. I get dressed and go outside to take one last look.

I don't think I'll have to work hard to get the casket open. I figure I can pry it open with one of the tools left around the junk appliances. That is my plan. That is my plan, but the truth is I never make it to the porch. The truth is I never even leave our yard.

I decide it's better not knowing if Mr Green is still in his casket, like it's better for Mrs Green to believe somebody blinded Mr

Green off the road with their headlights. I know Mr Green would want certain things put away and not pried open. Back in my room I think how he would put things away with another name, calling them something new, something I would never have heard anyone else say. I think of all the Mr Green kind of ways to tell his story and put myself back to bed.

GEORGE KALAMARAS

Miltos Sahtouris, Face to the Wall

Was it a directive or simply description? A comma commanded or detente? Miltos Sahtouris sat in his kitchen carefully eyeing his mirrored hand. An electrical hesitation invaded him, as if a broken rug unbraided itself in his spleen. *Cavafy,* he mumbled, to no one in particular. *Constantine lightning from Alexandria, constant—even now—in Athens,* he thought, then became delirious with the sound of a death spilled backwards. Was it his own dissolve or a directive's? Detente or description? The crazed Nile or curved Aegean coral? Cotton braids or wool? A carp caught on the rough edge of the color pink? Miltos Sahtouris somehow aspirated only the absent *h* in *Hydra,* then the extra *th* of *Thessaloniki.* Couldn't quite pry enough hard consonants from *Nafplion,* where the coming of the Colonels confused his lip. *All those sines and only the chord of the arc of this tiny Athenian apartment,* he heard, from no one in particular. The dermatome of Descartes in the corner grafted cliché after cliché upon the sinew of a door. *Surrealism,* Miltos confided, *freed me from many things.* Like the single spinal nerve imitating slices of skin. Like the command that was his most moist vowel. The tendon that was more. Valve that became the book it spilled. Severed rooms that no longer mirrored his hand, that no longer instigated a hold, digital and dispersed of an acute angle that equaled the ratio of the muscular power of a hypotenuse. To no one in particular. He thought this to no one in particular. Like any sensible man of Athens during the eerie calm of the Colonels. Forced marsh against the tepid of the tongue's knotted spleen. Comma obscene, or command gleaned? Cotton from Cavafy's Nile or Aegean detente? Miltos Sahtouris somehow aspirated the missing *h* from the word *wall,* the *h* buried in the snapped bone of

face. Wondered if that absence was a directive or description. Coral or carp. Considered the marched spill of his birth in Hydra a long life away, the cord caught on the rough edge of the color pink a primordial tongue. As he sat in an Athens apartment far from the Colonels, with no one in particular, staring for air.

GEORGE KALAMARAS

The Tongue of Gabriela Mistral

Only her tongue remained. Sad mother. A zodiac of quails. *Gabriela, Gabriela Mistral,* could be heard from somewhere, someone. Somehow only the tongue, banded by celestial spheres, remained more than a leathery lump. But she didn't know, couldn't know. Wouldn't the starlight of a sinking sun put a limp in her lips at the final rest? Only the tongue, still seeking songs of the single mother, comforting any woman ever called *whore.* Was it a dead bird or a bath? A warming in the joints or the promise of jasmine? Carnations combed through her. She roamed what had been the balm of balsam, the bottom of some woman or other's heart. Was it complete? Perfect? Fiery? Firm? Full of over-ripe blood oranges and the rising moon? She didn't know, could not know, could never taste the juice of all that thrumming in her tongue prolonging the promontory that defined her world from the sea. Her world, dead world, proliferous yet complete prolixity. Something kept falling apart, an incessant tangerine splintering in the fist of a boy. Dust from her clothes settling into her bones. Dust from her bones balming earth. Dust from the earth only a prolusion. For whom? For what? The rising moon like a knife at what had once been her throat. *Gabriela, Gabriela Mistral.*

The sad mother, she thought, with something other than mind, sea, *is what we become when we become earth. What we become, when we become.* The blood, the moon, the quails. An over-ripeness in what was thought to be shed, in what remained to aid the chewing over of centuries. Three throats somehow thinking her in her grave, three quoditian tongues: *I love Pablo Neruda, I pity Pablo Neruda; I love Alfonsina Storni, I* am *Alfonsina Storni; I love Robert Desnos, who* is *Robert Desnos?*

WALTER CRUMP

images from The Bent Cities Project

I had been trained as a painter and a printmaker when I was asked in 1986 to teach photography. I had never been in a darkroom, but after a year or so of teaching the course, my fascination with photographic possibilities prompted me to give up printmaking for photography. I was attracted to the alternative ways in which cameras can view the world. About two years later all my camera equipment was stolen, and I built my first pinhole cameras.

I attempt to give a painterly quality to my photographs by heavily modifying them with bleaches, fixer, toners, and emulsions, as well as by exposing them to light at inappropriate times during the development process. I am one of many artists who find it a challenge to explore the alchemy of melding dissimilar media, hoping to create a surface as seductive as the image.

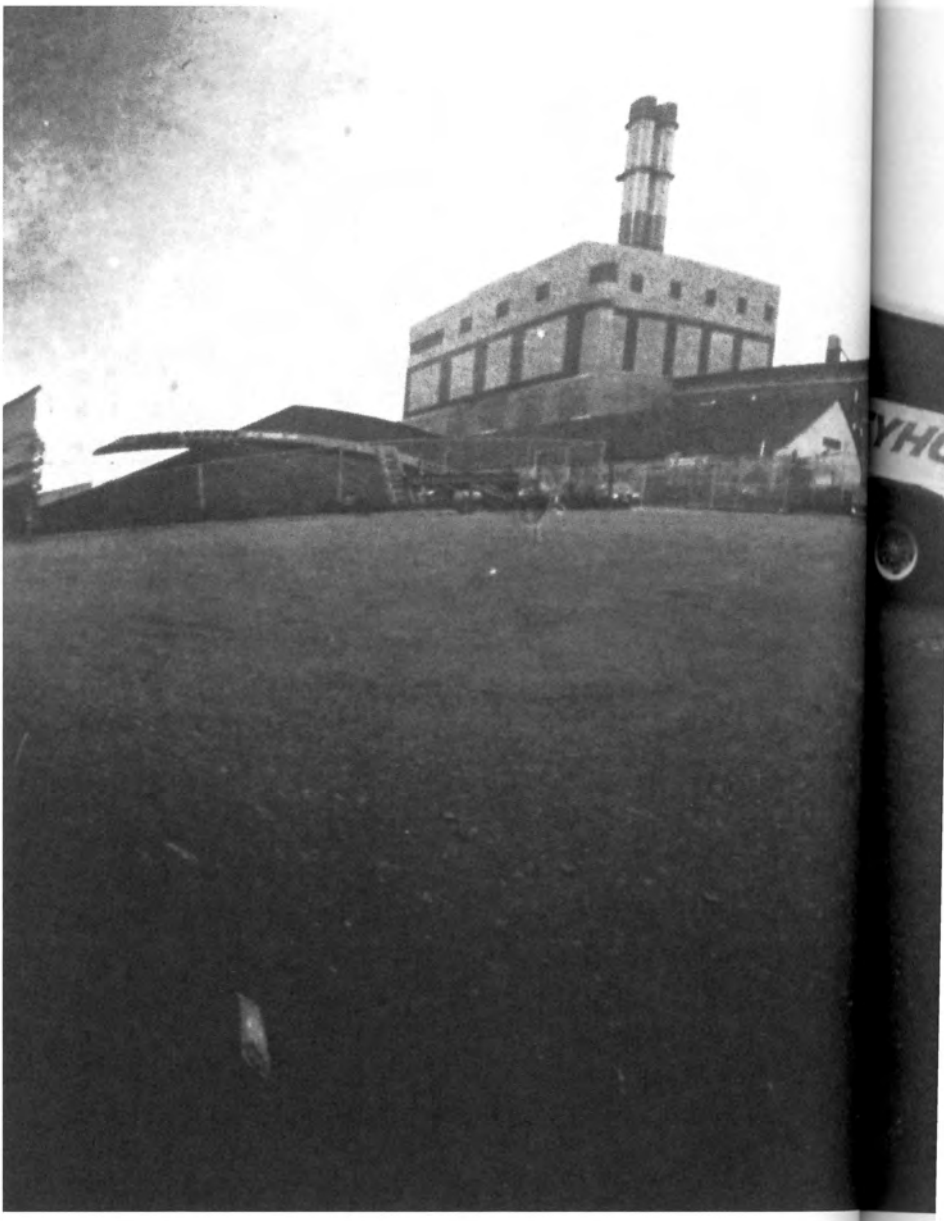
These images are from an ongoing series of pinhole cityscapes. Having lived in urban environments most of my life, I have witnessed the continuous process of birth and decay, the constant flux of the city. The places I photograph may over time become altered, or disappear and be replaced with something new. I mimic this process of change by curving, twisting, or angling the negatives in my pinhole cameras to create a "bent" or more organic cityscape. I like to think of this series of photographs as visual memories that exist in a parallel world. I want these images to look as if they have become luminous wrecks, a surface map, a chronicle blemished by use, tainted by the passage of time.

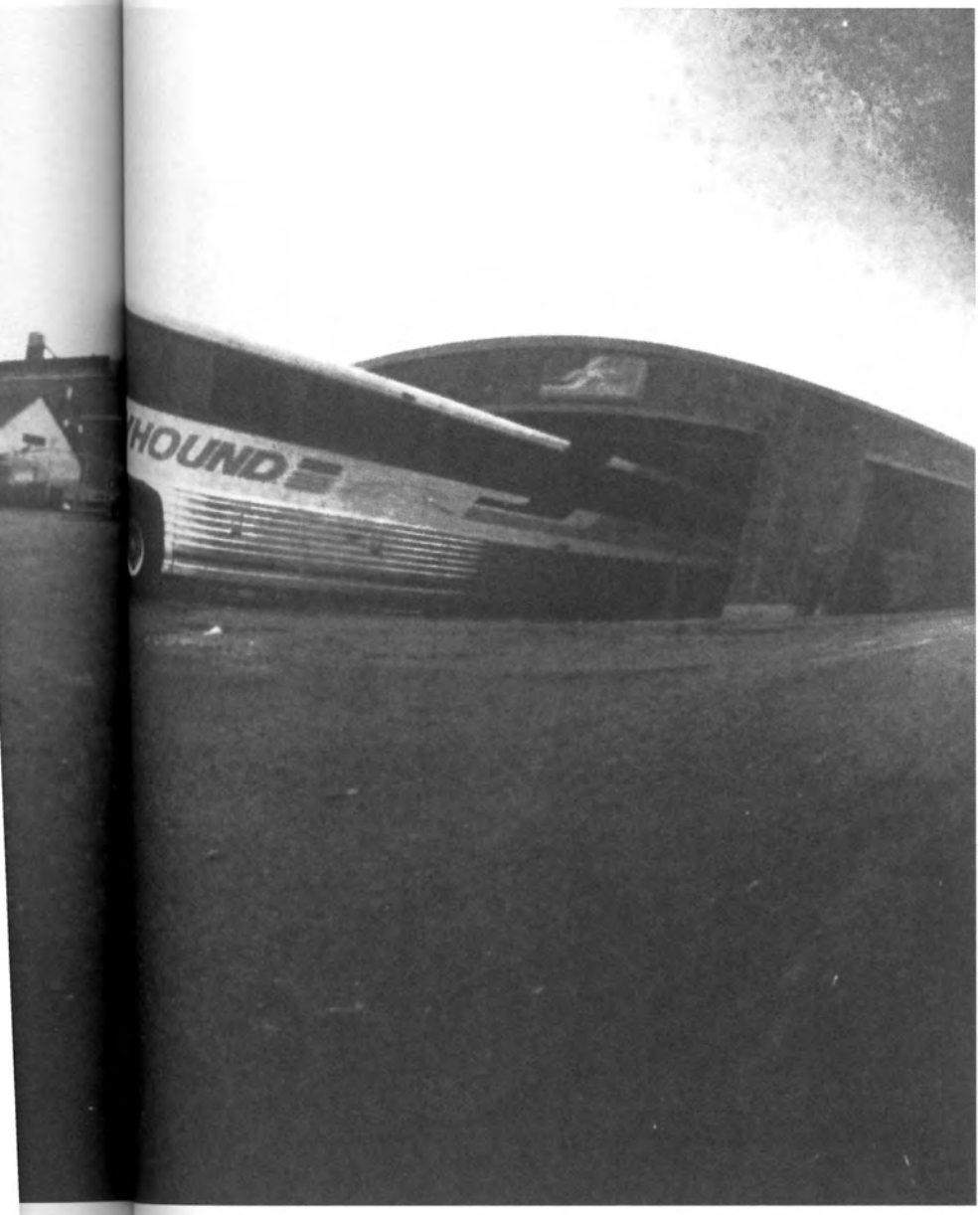
Alleyway

Garbage Day

Open Gate

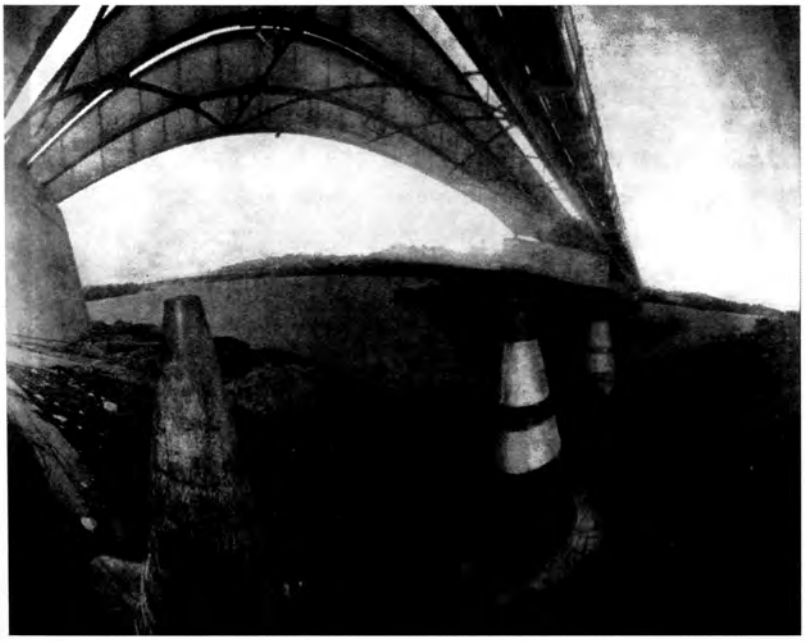
Fence Tracks





Greyhound

Project Gate



Abandoned Bridge

TODD JAMES PIERCE

Doubts

How easy my life was before I had these doubts,
before I took off my Sunday School clothes
and laid them on my mother's bed, before I considered
the likelihood of God speaking through a bush
engulfed in flame, of God following his chosen people
for forty years hidden within a cloud. What kind
of God drives a prophet around in the mouth
of a whale? Yet there is something about these stories
so fearfully odd I cannot turn away, a weathervane
pointing back to the moment before Creation,
a force I would like to know, waiting for stars to spill
like champagne across an expanse we would call "the sky."

So as I stand here, the morning sun bleeding
across my lawn, I am drawn to those beliefs again,
to the sudden knowledge that I am not alone
in the world, that death is a door through which I must walk,
the remains of my faith an ancient vase in my sweaty hands,
the last of all believers, waiting in line to apologize for all
I could not believe, the deeds I have left undone.

TODD JAMES PIERCE

Hypochondriac

Perhaps I overreacted to the reports linking
brain cancer to the way electricity is wired
through my house. And yes, those spots
on my arms went away just fine. But last night,
I felt the steady thump of my heart knocking
against my ribs, as if to say, Notice me, you fool.

Immediately I was drawn down the stairwell
that led to the year my body failed me,
fair-weather friend that it is, the year I slept
eighteen hours a day, afternoons hazy with light.
I felt the dark rope of death lassoed
around my chest, I saw how easily
my flesh could turn against me, could drag me
into the dim ether of endless sleep.

So here I am, your suggestive patient, taking off
my shirt one more time, so I can lie on this table,
diodes stuck to my skin as you begin to address
the concerns I have today. I felt, once,
the flower of illness blossom inside
my chest, and though I know I'm probably fine,
you must understand how little I slept last night,
as moonlight slanted through my window and I thought
of other people my age, those who are already dead.

PATRICIA JABBEH WESLEY

Get Out of Here, Boys!

When we were children, we lived in Slip Way, Bishop Brooks,
Bassa Community, laid out, the masterpieces of an unskilled artist.

We were Turtur and Muriel and Mikey, Comfort and Teeta,
Sunday and me. Me, thin like a needle and my friend, Turtur, looking
like she would break in half. It was not just the houses matted into

each other, not just their zinc roofs touching, not just grass running
from one door to the other, too many pots boiling in one big kitchen.

It was not just us children in the rain, playing *Rain, Rain Come Down,*
or *Nafoot* or *I Was Passing By, My Auntie Called Me In.* It was
something, you see, just something. The boys running around, shirtless,

little sticks for guns under skinny arms, in between houses, chasing
an enemy, playing *Cowboy War;* but we girls, in our corners,
bamboo sticks for people, cardboard boxes for gates, playing *Family*—

Then the boys came running, feet too big for shoes, barefoot, stomping
over our make-believe houses, our bamboo people. Sun so hot
it could set the whole world on fire, and there they were, shouting,

"Paw, paw, kpaw... *War*... ready?" "Yes, war ready!"
And all that shooting began, make-believe shooting,
mashing up our bamboo people in their bamboo beds. Then Auntie Vic

would shout, "Get out of here, boys!" Today, here we are, all of us
now, women with husbands, men with wives and children,

living in London, Manchester, waiting on the war, in Abidjan, Accra, Kalamazoo, oh, Kalamazoo, and Chicago, New York, Jersey City.

At home, Monrovia's on fire, kpaw, kpaw, kpaw.
"Stop that noise, boys, get out of here," Mama would scream when those boys broke through her room, hiding right under Mama's bed.

PATRICIA JABBEH WESLEY

Around the Mountains

We talk of family as Sandy winds her car around little mountains
from Buffalo to Olean. We're in a maze, these Alleghenies humping,
chasing one another up and down. They will take you, if you please,

until the skies fall asleep in your eyes. Now I can see how the hills
lose us or how our eyes lose the hills, giving up so the skies can take
possession, like a teacher of my child. Sandy says when we get

over the mountains the sun will meet us down below. Sometimes,
it is forever before we get over the mountain, and the sun comes
out in trickling twilight. Sandy says when the trees come out,

this place is a paradise, but this year the snow was forever falling.
When the trees come out, tell the trees, Sandy, to make the flowers
white and purple; to mourn the life lost, the laughter in Monrovia's

streets, of people in the market places and on the long beaches.
To mourn my neighbors who wanted to know who you were, Sandy,
my American friend. Eleven years later, and here we are, chasing

the Alleghenies, bargaining with these hills and cops along roadside
exits. Sandy tells me she was afraid we'd all been killed, and I tell
of how a missile landed on our back porch, where Sandy had stood,

sparklers in hand, singing to America on the fourth of July, 1988,
another missile bursting through concrete walls, landing in the room
where she and Barbara used to sleep, the room my children called

Sandy and Barbara's room. I tell of leaving home and refugee
camp, of coming to America, and Sandy sighs. But look at me now,
after eight years, I'm going to St Bonaventure to read poetry, where

Matt is Sandy's three-year-old, and Paul, her husband. Paul, such
a strong name for a husband, Sandy. I'm going to read poetry where
St Bonaventure University spreads itself thin on a field taken captive

by the Alleghenies, where students fall in love not with the Alleghenies,
as I have, but with each other. I like my flowers spread out in colorful
petals, a bed under the skies. We know that spring is just for a season.

I like my husband warm, where summer is eternal, when his eyes
are laughing, and their pupils fold under the milk in his eyes.
I want to fold me under my husband's arms, under his breath, the way

we did in the 1980s, before the war, before the children came, before my
strands of hair began to give way to lost years, before the rebels came,
before the soldiers, before our years were ambushed into memory.

KATHERINE LONGSTREET

Travels in Arabia Deserta

> This book is not milk for babes; it might be likened to a mirror, wherein is set forth faithfully some parcel of that soil smelling of sámn and camels, and the ancient faith of her illimitable empty wastes. —Charles M. Doughty

I knew her by heart from that one first moment at the station. I must have been a boy of ten or eleven, but surely not as old as twelve, because by the time I was twelve the war was over and Holland had been liberated. I remember her as she must have looked on her way to meet us: tall and lanky in her tweed wool coat, thick brown hair tied against the nape of her neck, and her face with a kind of isolated assurance as she pedaled through the winter streets to greet us, her bicycle outfitted with tires made of wood—you couldn't buy rubber ones then—and holding the handlebars tightly over the wet cobbled streets as though any moment the carved wood might split apart.

Yet it seems I only imagine my parents handing me over to her on the station platform in the dusk. My mother holding back tears and my father with a finger like a hook under the collar of my coat—implying that he wouldn't give me up—and the girl, Marta, moving towards us through the crowd with a certain angular walk, looking away with a feigned moment of unknowing, as if, with that one tiny pretense, she could assure we'd never be caught. And her asking what my name was and my mother saying that it should be a good Dutch Protestant name, the same as the girl's. Julian Bakker they decided.

Then a sudden gust of wind blowing my mother and father onto the train that would take them back to Enschede. The train

doors sliding shut, the pungent smell of sulfur, the bitter odor of iron and cinder and smoke. The train slowly starting to move as a man and woman framed in thick window glass—who were not my parents at all—lifted a suitcase up through flickering yellow light to place it in the overhead rack, and suddenly kissed. The train disappearing like water whirling down a drain. And Marta placing her hand on the top of my head with a grave, slightly teasing smile. It is true, I admit, that some of these memories have a certain reconstructed clarity over and above the rest.

She laughed and took my hand,

"You have eyes that stare like a cat," she said. She lifted my cap and inspected my hair with her fingers as if buying cloth. "Same color as mine. If my father were still alive I'd introduce you and say I found you on a street corner. I'd tell him you were born out of wedlock and were just there for the taking. What do you think of that?" Then, passing through the great brick arches of the station, we stepped out into the mist.

My arms around her waist as I sat on the bicycle's back, we crossed through the dusk of a great square and over the bridge of a wide, dark canal tight with sullen barges. The facade of a grand hotel with windows glowing through the rain rose up like candles sputtering in the dark as, one by one, each extinguished for the black-out, the streets all slick and mirror-hard in front of us as she slowed down and we came to the door of a forlorn pastry shop.

"Anybody there?" she called beating a tattoo with her fingernails on the scratched glass case containing only three meager rolls, until a sallow woman with an apron came out from the back.

"What have you got there, Marta?" the woman asked. "You know I can't take him. I have enough. I've told you that. I already have four. That's more than enough."

"I'll hide him myself. Don't worry about it," Marta said, "You can see how reserved and quiet he is. I only came in to say hello."

"Your mother's not going to agree to it."

"My mother doesn't have to know everything. She's too infirm to go down steps without help. She can't climb into the bathtub by herself."

"If your father were still alive it would be a different matter. He was..." The sallow woman searched for the right word and came up with: "...sympathetic."

I think back and try to remember the house on Prinzengracht as I saw it that night, the sitting and dining rooms opening from the entrance hall like small dark countries with ambiguous borders disappearing into the depths, and Marta leading me to the kitchen where a door opened to steps that descended down into the cellar. I hear her fumbling for something, then striking a match, and the wavering flame of an acetylene lamp becomes manifest in the dark. Her hand that holds the lamp appears and then her face, which is luminous and soft, becomes all of her, in fact. It's cold underground in this windowless basement, but then everything was cold during the war. People's hands never got warm enough to touch one another without a shiver. Yet there's a certain boundary imposed by the circle of light from the lamp which takes the two of us in but seems to ostracize everything else.

I think back and I hear the minute sound of dry tea leaves hitting the bottom of the two porcelain cups that Marta would bring down into the cellar on a tray. I hear the clank of the copper pipes inside the wall which told me her mother upstairs was washing up. I take one more feeble step back into that time and feel, for example, the slightly rough wood of the basement steps, smell the transmutation of wine through hundreds of corks, remember the musty odor of the stacked and dusty books that Marta's father, years ago, had run out of space for in the upper reaches of the house. And I recall the sound, like a dry twig underfoot, of opening *Travels in Arabia Deserta,* its spine giving out a gentle, but definitive crack. Then, it seems to me, I'm able to remember everything. I'm able to fill in all those blanks with something that almost

resembles memory itself. And I see, as if it were now in front of me on my desk, Doughty's epigraph on the first page: *Prosit Veritati.* And I say the words, *Prosit Veritati,* quietly to myself.

I didn't think of my parents then. I suppose I had an idea I'd see them soon, maybe in a week or so after this particular adventure had passed. They'd told me nothing except that I was going on a short trip. I was to be the boy, I supposed, in the stories I knew by heart, the boy who has numerous adventures at sea with hurricanes or pirates, or perhaps climbs the Matterhorn, rescues a female child in a pinafore floating alone on a raft. When he finds his way back home, his mother doesn't know him, nor his father, though they've waited for months. It's all so unexpected. They'd given him up for lost. And he's grown and changed, of course. But home he is. You can see, in the inevitable last engraving, his mother, at the front door of their simple cottage, hugging him to her ample breast.

So I adapted to a succession of days in the wine cellar, the surreptitious delivery of tea on its silver tray, and bread, and bowl of milk, the skimpy piece of cheese the size of a domino or sometimes the slightly enlarged size of a match box, an occasional boiled egg, its slices splayed on a small plate with the imprint of ivy trailing its borders. And Marta telling me how she'd stolen the egg from her mother or gone out into the country in the middle of the night to trade a bottle of wine for a loaf of dense, mule-colored bread. How there was no sugar, and how three carousing Nazis had seen her and made lewd gestures but had been too drunk to even care about being suspicious. And I adapted to the arguments I heard through the door at the top of the cellar steps, the strident voice of Mrs Bakker chastising Marta.

"Why else would you be going so many times into the cellar? When this war is over there will be nothing left. That wine is worth thousands of gilders. I can smell it on your breath. You stink with it."

I could hear Marta saying something soft and low which I imagined to be,

"Mama, Mama, quiet yourself. Please, now, don't get upset. The wine's still intact. You only imagine it on my breath."

Which was true, of course. Though the wine was slowly being traded off, none of it was on Marta's breath.

I connect that particular conversation with my memorization of the first short paragraph. To this day I repeat Doughty's precise nineteenth century prose when in times of trouble or doubt as some might repeat a favorite mantra or prayer, though it's not a prayer at all, but the beginning narrative of a true and honest adventure. I recall repeating it when I left Holland and got off the plane for my first semester at Columbia, then in desperation after my first wife left, two years later saying it again the night I met my present wife. It's Doughty's recounting after he had come down from Damascus with the pilgrim caravan, and it goes something like this:

> A new voice hailed me of an old friend when I paced again in the long street of Damascus which is called straight; and suddenly taking me wondering by the hand, tell me, said he, since thou art here again in the peace and assurance of Allah, and whilst we walk towards the new blossoming orchards full of the sweet spring as the Garden of God, what moved thee or how couldest thou take such journeys into the fanatic Arabia?

Then the long caravan of the Haj, winding its way across the deserts, is opened to me, and my present circumstances, whatever they many be, seem to disappear in Doughty's elevated words and precise tone, and, for a long moment before the world comes back, we are riding next to each other, bowing at each long, stalking camel's step over the endless sands towards Mecca. And I hear Marta's hushed voice asking,

"And how long was the caravan, Julian?"

And I hear myself answering in the lamplight, "Hundreds of kilometers, Marta. A never-ending river of camels, pilgrims on foot, the rich in litters, and Persians who had already traveled for months before joining the Haj in Damascus."

Or the voice of Mrs Bakker on a completely different day explaining something to Marta who was still in the kitchen eating breakfast.

"You must cut the ends. Then put each stem in by itself. Otherwise they will not stand upright. Some things one knows from birth, Marta. From birth."

"Yes, yes," Marta says.

"It is knowing, without being told, good wine from bad, how to press linen flat. That sort of thing. When it will rain or who to open the door to."

"Yes, of course, Mama," Marta says impatiently. "But you're not listening to me about this thing. That's not what I meant."

The book is as thick as the length of my forefinger, 1,368 pages. It's bound in red leather stained with time and the cellar and irregular smudged markings that have bled into it so that its antique color can hardly be called red.

"There is every year a new stirring of this goodly Oriental city in the days before the Haj," Doughty writes. "Already there come by the streets, passing daily forth, the akkâms with the swaggering litters mounted high upon the tall pilgrim camels. They are the Haj camel drivers, and upon the silent great shuffle-footed beasts, they hold insolently their paths through the narrow bazaars. The mukowwems are weathered men of the road. It is written in their hard faces that they are overcomers of the evil by the evil, and are able to deal in the long desert way with the perfidy of the elvish Beduins..."

And before long I know it must be night and Mrs Bakker gone to bed, because I hear Marta up at the top of the cellar steps opening the door. And down she slowly comes, her legs and skirt and

waist following after her careful feet, and I hold the lamp to light her way and the dark glitters on the worn bricks as if it were coal. As if the caravan had stopped to rest for the night and we, descending from our camels, had looked up into the desert sky suddenly cold with stars, and I tell her about the strangers from far away provinces passing through the bazaars and their unusual speech and clothing, some from Asia Minor wearing white turbans that weigh twice as much as their heads.

"Perhaps they carry their belongings in them. Like you," Marta laughs, "carrying everything you own in your head."

"The poorest pilgrims wander in the streets looking for bread, Marta. Almost every house has someone in the caravan going to Mecca."

"When the Germans come and get us, you can wrap a towel around your head and tell them you're a sheik on the way to the holy land."

The tea leaves settle in the bottom of my cup under the lamp into a loose, disorganized frown. The porcelain is so thin I could bite through it.

"The tent makers are repairing the canvas of hundreds of tents and tilts... and the curtains for litters," I say slowly, no longer feeling eloquent.

"What are tilts?" she asks as she breaks a piece of bread off. But it doesn't matter and I don't know. So I say,

"The curriers are selling leather buckets and saddle bottles and matara..."

She brings her hand to my cheek and laughs.

But who can blame me for not wanting to remember everything that I heard from the top of the stairs, not wanting to remember Mrs Bakker saying,

"We can do nothing about the Germans. Let it be. No need to go on about it." And Marta answering,

"We should not have fought for only two days."

"If we had not fought at all your father would still be alive, and we wouldn't have them checking on us like clockwork. You young think you'll never die. It is only the old that see mortality. Besides, the Jews got themselves into trouble. Amsterdam will be an easier city without them." And then an unexpected kindness in her voice as she says, "But hard on the children to be displaced. Don't you think long train rides are hard on children, Marta?"

But when did I suspect that I wasn't the first? When did I realize that there had been others before me? When Marta opened a book of fairy tales, which I was much too old for, and exclaimed: "Ah! Michiel liked this one. He liked the drawing of the boy sailing his wooden shoe the best. Look, Julian, the boy has made a sail out of a handkerchief."

Or was it when I found the mouse-gnawed crayons and little origami animals constructed out of dusty colored paper hidden under one of the wine racks? Or finally, when Marta gave me a worn, needle-pricked doily all stretched out of shape to embroider and said,

"I gave this to Kira, but I think boys sometimes like needlework."

"Didn't she want to work on it?"

"Yes, she did a fine job, and she wanted to take it with her. But I had to have it for the next child so I ripped out her work."

"What happened to Michiel and Kira?" I asked.

"I moved them on."

"Moved them on?"

"On my bicycle in the middle of the night between curfew rounds. I only receive. Someone else has to keep them."

And I would say,

"Listen Marta, these are the ages of camels according to their teeth until the coming of the canines..."

"Ah, you know so much from these old books," she said looking impressed.

"The calf of one year, *howwar*. Of two, *libny*. The third, *hej*. The forth, *jitha*. The fifth, *thènny*. The sixth, *ròbba*. The seventh, *siddes*. And the eighth, *shâgg en-naba*..."

"No, no," she laughed, "I can't keep up with it..."

"*Wafìat* and *mùfter*..."

She would rise to go up to bed, and I'd lie on my cot in the dark and see not the racks of bottles through the feeble lamp at all but the open alleys of Damascus spreading out behind us, the passage of hundreds of litters, and hear the Persians strange warbling like birds waking up as the sun rises, the mount of Hermon hanging before us covered with the first snowfall, white as a cloud in the mist.

It was a Sunday when the pilgrimage began. Doughty says the azure summer light had not yet faded from the Syrian heavens. The thirteenth of November, 1876. In each tent, he says, the watches are kept till dawn. A paper lantern that burns all night hangs before each entrance. A sentinel with a musket stands guard so that strangers can't pass.

And I awake the next morning hearing Marta helping her mother down from the bedroom.

"The newspaper said this is the coldest winter in twenty-three years," Mrs Bakker says struggling down the stairs, her voice always louder than it needs to be, for Marta is right beside her. "The houseboats have been frozen in place for weeks. The herons in Friesland are starving. Farmers are finding them dead in the fields. It's in the newspaper."

"Dead heron must be tough," says Marta, "but delicious."

"Herr Goetz is coming for a drink at six. He is not in the army. He's an importer. Your father bought wine from him before the war. We shall be decorous, Marta. Decorous."

"What's the point of having a German friend, Mama?"

"His wife died last year, poor man. He's a widower."

And I remember the odor of sometimes stale, sometimes freshly acrid, cigarette smoke as I held completely still in a packing box

emptied of its books that night and Marta opened the cellar door with a stab of unnerving light saying to Herr Goetz, "Of course, as you wish, but why not let me bring you a really good bottle." I see him looking at her dully, his eyes flat and impervious.

I would not have been able to sleep that night if the sentinel with his musket and the glowing lamp had not been outside my tent. Late that afternoon we'd seen the rising tower of a kella like an abandoned ship in the desert. We'd been riding three days without water so we were all parched and exhausted. I can still see the simple machine of drum and buckets, the shaft turned by a mule, the water flowing to fill the cistern which, as we approached, was guarded by two riflemen. For a moment something breaks through the picture and interjects, and I hear my mother's voice come from the past:

"Put your head on your paws, little bunny, and go to sleep," her voice says, and a breath like her kiss moves over my form in the cold as I pull my blanket up.

"We were to depart betimes by the morrow," Doughty wrote, "at the cannon's word."

> That shot is eloquent in the desert night, the great caravan rising at the instant, with sudden untimely hubbub of the pilgrim thousands. There is a short struggle of making ready, a calling and running with lanterns, confused roaring and rucking of camels, and the tents are taken up over our heads. In this haste aught left behind will be lost, all is but a short moment and the pilgrim army is remounted. There are some so weary, of those come on foot from very great distances, that they may not waken, and the caravan removing they are left behind in the darkness...

And I dreamed then, as I slept, of a ruined city of stone with an eternity of poor nomad tents clustered around it. And a boy turning to me, his sudden wide smile and his shining glance confirming a blessing. Then his voice disappearing into the distance, and a

chestnut mare, never combed by the boy but shining and beautiful and gentle, her tail flowing to the ground. The boy looked straight at me and I saw that his eyes were diseased, as were the eyes of all the others who now came from their tents to gather around and stare.

And I dreamed of heavy sand oozing through my fingers, and a man who had fallen on the sand, a religious mendicant, groaning and stretching out his hands like eagle's claws to the passing caravan. His beggar's purse had fallen from his neck. Bits and pieces of it lay thrown upon the sand, and I saw the travelers passing on, inwardly hoping that the man's dying would not become their own. *Anna mèyet,* the begging derwish sobbed, I am a dying man.

Was it the night the derwish sobbed, *Anna mèyet,* I am a dying man, that Marta, pushed by some new importance, came down the steps carrying her deceased father's coat and elegant silk neck scarf?

The derwish had woken me. I had just that day read about a pilgrim traveler who had lifted the dying derwish to his own saddle. The derwish cried out weakly like a child. The camel rose slowly to a stand under the derwish, and the generous man gathered the derwish's bag of scattered bits and pieces, rock and shell and holy thorn, and reached it up to him, the feeble derwish all the while trembling with fear and thanks.

"Hurry, Julian," she said. "Hurry! It is so cold tonight. Put this coat on over your own."

I pulled on the sleeves of my own coat, then struggled with the other which hung to the floor. All out of breath, she wrapped the silk scarf around my neck, tucking the fringed ends under the collar. Yet some still hung out and her hands shook.

"Marta? Where's your coat? Aren't you coming with me?" I asked.

From beyond the cellar door, I heard Mrs Bakker's voice in the distance. "Marta? What are you up to?"

"Nothing, Mama."

"Marta, darling," Mrs Bakker's voice paused, and then the sound of her cane, clattering down the long hall stairs in front of her. "Marta, please don't be afraid of your own mother."

"Come!" Marta said, pulling at me.

"But you have no coat."

"Come!" she hissed pulling me towards the steps. She looked at me with fury, "Do you hear me? Walk behind me up these steps."

Marta rose ahead of me and pushed open the door.

"Mama," Marta said into the dark distance of the house. "See what happens when you try to walk by yourself? You fall, and then you can't get up."

"Give me my cane!"

"You can have it when I get back," Marta said to her unseen mother, and we walked towards the front of the house.

"Marta! I would never turn a child in. You should know that." Mrs Bakker's voice followed us.

"How would I know it, Mama?" Marta turned and asked, but we were already into the hall and Marta had opened the heavy front door.

Doughty said charity is cold in the great and terrible wilderness. He said pilgrims die every day. The deceased's goods are sealed, his wayfellows in the night station wash and shroud the body and lay it in a shallow grave dug with their hands. They call any pilgrims so dying in the path of their religion, shahûd, martyrs.

"How morose you are," Marta had said listening to me read this part the night before.

"But it's truth," I said. "Honest truth. If it wasn't, Doughty wouldn't have written it."

"But you make so much of this truth. It must be the Jew in you."

I clasp her waist with my arms and she pedals through the icy dark, my shoes, long grown too tight, skim the pavements thick

with ice and I sense, with my arms bound around her, as we travel further and further away from the house on Prinsengracht and on through the night, unique sympathies and virtues in the streets and neighborhoods dripping with sleet, the ravines of frozen alleys, the water in the canals gleaming like oil between slabs of ice. For a moment I thought we could have driven to heaven, but where heaven was, I didn't know.

One afternoon the Haj came to a birket that was dry. The next birket was fifty leagues away at Medáin Sâlih, but no one knew if there would be water there either. On a march like this there are many deaths. The worst is when, in the Haj's lunar cycle of thirty years, the pilgrimage takes place in the midst of summer. The sky is like burning brass, and the sand like glowing coals.

"Aren't you cold, Marta?" I ask. "Stop and take your father's coat." But my words disappear into the streets beyond. Doughty tells about a poor man who died in a cholera year. His friends laid him in a shallow grave scooped out with their own hands. Then they heaped sand over him and left with the moving caravan. In the dry desert warmth, the man revived and sat up. He came to himself, wiped the grit from his eyes, and saw an empty world, for the Haj had long gone. Led by the footprints the way they had come, he staggered from kella to kella, from nomads to nomads, in the wilderness hundreds of miles back to Damascus, and finally arrived at his own house. Yet his family made him out to be an impostor and wouldn't greet him. They'd laid him in a grave in Arabia and mourned him as dead. Now he'd returned out of all season, and his possessions had already been divided between them.

There's no point in describing the next cellar or the family that kept me and became mine, as it were, because a year or two later the war was over. Everyone rejoiced, though it was hard for those with dead or missing family. In The Hague the Germans drove over three hundred political prisoners out to the dunes at

Scheveningen in convoy trucks and shot them on the flat beach sand below the bunkers, then retreated. Some of the dead had worked for the underground press, some held positions in the government, and some had harbored Jews.

Sometimes in dreams I see Mrs Bakker's bulky shadow at the top of the cellar stairs. Her eyes take me in with chill and startled surprise. She sees the narrow cot covered with a single blanket, the wooden packing crate used as a table, the smaller boxes filling in for chairs, the piles of books, the enamel pot for slops unsuccessfully obscured in a corner. And I wonder what she is thinking, what—if anything—she will decide to do about all of it.

After the war, I went back to find Marta but the house had been sold. A servant next door told me Mrs Bakker had died and that Marta had married a lawyer in Rotterdam. But the bakery across from the station was still there and in it was the same sallow woman in apron grown several years older.

"Do you remember Marta Bakker?" I asked. She shook her head in a way I didn't understand and said,

"I knew her."

"Is she in Rotterdam?"

"Further than that," the woman said. "Much further than that, bless her soul."

I paid the woman for a ginger tart which she put into a small white box tied with string, but I suddenly had no taste for it, and when I got out into the street I threw it out. I had wanted to sit with Marta in a cellar and watch her pour steaming water into two porcelain cups. I wanted to watch her cut bread into small rounds so that it would taste better because it resembled biscuits. I was older now, and it occurred to me that I might even make love to her on the cot there in the dark. I would tell her, as we lay and watched the lamp's reflection play against the beamed ceiling, that the Beduin have neither hours nor clocks.

"Listen, Marta," I'd say, "and I'll tell you the partitions of the day: *El-fĕjr,* the dawning before the sun. *El-gaila,* the sun rising towards noon. *Eth-thóhr,* the sun in the midday height. *El-assr,* the sun descending to mid-afternoon. *Ghraibat es-shems,* the sun going down to the setting..."

"Enough. Enough," I hear her laughing long ago, and I'm a boy all over again. "You pretend to see the sun rise and set beyond the walls of this cellar," she says. "You know too many things for the size of your head. Lie down and sleep now. Practice being quiet."

"*Mághrib* is the setting of the sun that brings on the night," I tell her, "a strange town speaking in our ears."

"And what does that mean?" she asks. "A strange town speaking in our ears?"

I probably wouldn't recognize my mother and father if they should come alive and I were to pass them on the street. So much has been disposed of. But I like to think of them like that: walking down a street somewhere, going for an afternoon stroll. Yet if the Haj passed me in the dead of night—even with the moon behind it—I would recognize Doughty by his shadow at once.

AARON BANNISTER

Apostasy

How difficult the separation—
the mussel's threads severed from what
seemed solid, now only a rock

that could not hold it; and adherence, then,
only to air, and the mussel accountable
only to the gull that pecked and pried it

from what it clung to so dearly. Held now
in the gull's beak, does the mussel turn slightly—
soft compass in its mottled shell—

trying to determine where it is going,
and how it might refasten once it arrives?
Painful the dislocation, and difficult

the drop from far above the barnacled rocks—
tightly shut against any chance of return,
and clinging to the air that has accepted it.

AARON BANNISTER

Legion

You cannot know how
the sun sang for me,
how the sores I licked

brought out the bruised stars
and barbed moon
I willed into my blood.

They say by enlightenment
I had been divided—
and it is true. When first

I found the truth, I leapt
about the room—it cut
my mind in two; and

when the voices asked the stones
to taste me, I opened up
and bled. So when God's son,

whom even the wind and waves
could not disobey,
put his voice in me, and sought

to tame my wounds,
and still my songs
that sweetened up

the tombs, I felt division
return to unison.
But the voices said,

before they departed, This
is the world you wanted,
the mystery you tempted.

I have thought since how,
when he sent my voices into
the pigs, and they tumbled hoof

over head, chortling,
whining and humming
into the lake, I couldn't

help myself, knowing
nothing in the end
would seal up all

the cracks. They were songs,
not screams, links, not chains; and I
dove in to take them back.

AARON BANNISTER

Raspberries

In sunlight, moonlight
goose-fleshed and bruisy
we ascend the green,

scaffolding air, and,
fastening with
fragile accuracy,

cling to our stems.
Frost overlooks us;
robins devour us.

When mold cripples
the lesser-attached,
we fall,

unmortared
into the long grass,
shimmied with rain

til once again we
plant and rise, sunning,
smiling, distending from

the absence of our selves.
—Oh, our hairy warts,
Oh, the bubbling aches

of our blister-seeds—
we clamber and climb,
appear dully glistening

in dewfall, baiting,
bricking the day;
thimble shaped

in your hands—Temples,
you'll say, built
to honor your mouth.

MARJORIE KEMPER

We've Seen This Before

It happened when *Brideshead Revisited* was playing again on the Bravo channel. And when you've got something playing away on the television screen that you've seen eight or nine or maybe a million times, it becomes like a river flowing between its banks. It just makes a noise like a river flowing between its banks, and you look up and you see what you knew you were going to see, and you look away. It's like that. And that's how it's been these last months. Not just on the television. Not just *Brideshead Revisited* or *I Claudius*—which is what was on last month. But everything.

She's in her chair. When she's not in bed she's in her chair. It used to be his chair, and now it's hers. In this day and age, live long enough and you will do time in The Chair. ("Would you like to get up for awhile and sit in your chair?") You will be encouraged to elevate your feet.

It's good advice of course, we should all elevate our feet from time to time. Higher than the heart, it's recommended. Which reminds me of that old expression, Head over Heels in Love, remember? Now it's Feet over Heart, not In Love, but Waiting for the End. Whenever *that* comes. Maybe never. On the Bravo Channel there is no End. As soon as something is over, it, or something very like it, starts all over again. Like *I Claudius*. Like *Bridey*.

"Here it comes again," I say to Mama. "It must be March because it's *Brideshead*."

"I don't remember seeing this before," she says.

Really?

I do. Sort of. Let's say it's familiar. It's like an old family story. It's like my mama's Aunt Beryl's parrot. There are at least nine distinct and complicated stories, with miles of plot, about Aunt

Beryl's parrot, but when I think of them I just think: Aunt Beryl's Parrot. Familiar. Told. Never over. That's life now. Same thing: familiar, told, never over.

This is what I think while I fold the laundry. I've folded and folded this laundry. And now I'm folding this laundry again. I'm starting supper. I've made this supper. I've peeled these potatoes. I've fried this meat. I've made this gravy. I've snapped these beans. Snap, snapping, snapped.

She's asleep. The light's going. I turn on the lamps. Later I'll turn them off. The *Brideshead* music surges up. The credits roll.

Mama wakes up. "I don't remember seeing that one before," she says.

She slept right through it. She slept through it last time it was on too, and the time before that. She's right. She doesn't remember it. She can't remember it. I don't remember it. The river has run between its banks. What is there to remember? I pour a glass of wine.

We eat supper. The news is on. It's always on. Here it comes again:

"First a little foreign news," Peter Jennings says.

He doesn't say, "I know you don't want to hear this, but it's good for you to hear it and I'm going to tell it to you."

But that's what he means. We hear it. It's the same news. He's told us this news before. We've heard it.

"I think we may have seen this before," Mama says.

We eat. I'm hungry. Lately I'm always hungry. One thing, when you have to cut up people's meat, when you have to mash their vegetables, it teaches you the value of tough things. Like life. Like this meat we're eating. Tough meat is good meat when you can still saw away at it with your own knife. Because you can still hold the knife in your own fingers, which are at the ends of your own arms. Which are still strong. Strong enough, anyway, to hack your way through a cheap cube steak. *This* is a little foreign news

that I could bring to Peter Jennings that *he* might not want to hear. It's old news, like his, but like his, it's news again!

It's time for pills and shots. Again. One more shot you'll never have to give or take again. In six hours it will be time for another shot you'll never have to give or take again, and so forth and so forth. But on the bright side, and believe me, the time is past when you can afford to sneer at the bright side, there's a good movie on. One with Jimmy Stewart.

"I always liked him."

"This is a good one."

"I don't remember seeing this one before."

No.

In a way I don't remember it either. I've seen it so many times, it's stopped making sense. But when you look up, there's Jimmy Stewart. And that's something. That's *good.*

"I always liked him."

"I know."

She's asleep in her chair. I look at the TV and I see Jimmy Stewart. I look at the chair and I see her sleeping. I've seen this before too. She's sleeping and sleeping and sleeping. Her head has fallen back. Her mouth has fallen a little open. I think, This is how she will look when she's dead. I look away. She's practicing for death. I'm practicing for her death. We're both getting a little too good at it.

Jimmy Stewart's not dead. Yet. (More good news from the Bright Side.) But everyone else in this movie is dead. I mean, *really* dead. But inside this movie they are always alive. And inside this living room, we're alive. Will we always be alive? Immortal like the dead movie actors? No. It only seems that way.

But right now Mama is alive in her chair, asleep. And I'm alive on the sofa, watching her sleep. Jimmy Stewart's alive. In his own living room, probably. Maybe he's watching this movie. Maybe he's asleep in *his* chair. Maybe he has his feet elevated above his

heart. Maybe his daughter is watching him sleep. Mama and I and Jimmy Stewart, and maybe his daughter, we're alive. We've survived practically everybody. Haven't we? The other actors in this movie are deader than dead. But not our Jimmy. The other actors in Mama's and my movie are dead too. Dead, dead, dead. But not Mama. And not me. We aren't dead. We're only practicing.

It's bedtime.

"I don't know why, but I don't feel sleepy."

I don't laugh. "Maybe when you lie down," I say.

I am sleepy. I am dead tired. I want to lie down in my bed in the darkness and fall asleep where no one can see me. Where no one can see me if my mouth falls open, or hear me if I should snore. I want to disappear. I never want to be found. By anyone. Ever. Not even by myself. But more than anything in the world, at this exact moment, I want to turn off this television. I push the button. Silence. We can hear the faucet dripping in the kitchen.

"There," I say.

Mama looks frightened.

The next morning I open the paper and read: Jimmy Stewart, Dead. It's a shock. I tell Mama. If I don't Peter Jennings will. But by afternoon, she's forgotten, she is sleeping in her chair. I'm watching *Brideshead Revisited*. Actually watching it. Today Lady Marchmain is dying. Her daughter sits with her. Lady Marchmain is in a bed with a pink satin coverlet, and if you buy that, you can't have had much experience with the dying. Lady Marchmain's feet, I notice, are not elevated either. Things were different then. They had laundresses, and the doctor came right to the house. Lady Marchmain dies anyway. Then the scene switches to North Africa. Sebastian is sick; he looks like he's probably dying too. But for now he's up, limping around, with a wracking cough, serving his unworthy, German companion, Kurt.

"I reckon that's Sebastian's job now," Kurt lisps to Charles, Sebastian's friend from Oxford. (Kurt's dying too. Remember, he's not naturally mean, but he's not very nice either.)

I remember this part. I sit forward. Of course, I know what Sebastian is doing. Sebastian is serving Christ in Man. It plays better on the screen than it is playing here in this house. That's what I think.

But still. Even after seeing this scene so many times, and forgetting it so many times, I feel a tear well up. For whom? For Sebastian? For Kurt? For Charles?

Handsome, aloof Charles, who cannot save his friend, and cannot even recognize, as even *we* can, his friend's redemption in the person of the comic-tragic character, Kurt. (Poor Charles. He's still an atheist in this episode.) Or is this tasty tear I lick from my own chin for Suffering Humanity in general? Or is it for Mama? Or maybe for me?

But I am softened. No, I am *quickened*. Because of this old River Flowing Between its Banks-Brideshead-TV-Drama, I am *feeling* something! For just a second I am actually alive. I'm excited. I look at Mama. Her head's fallen back. Her mouth has fallen a little open. I look away. This is never how I think of her. This is not the Queen of the Night—formerly my mother. My mother—formerly the light of my father's life, formerly my grandfather's darling daughter and my aunts' and uncle's merry little sister. This is not her, I think. But then who is it?

It's her.

The light is going. I get up to turn on the lamps. Later I will turn them off. The theme music swells under the last scene. It's time to make supper.

"Well?" I say to Mama. I give it two beats. I wait for her to say, "I don't remember having seen this one before."

For once she doesn't say it. I pour a glass of wine. I'm thinking about Sebastian. Well, you have to love someone that beautiful,

don't you? You *have* to love someone who lives so large but who is willing, in the end, to pay such a steep price for it. Who is *humble* about paying the price. (Remember, Sebastian never complains.) He made his bed. He lies in it. Later, he even gets up from the bed he made, to make the hapless Kurt's bed.

I bring my wine and sit back down on the sofa. I say, "I'll tell you the truth, Mama, *I* didn't remember that one. Not really remember-remember it, you know what I mean?"

But she doesn't answer. And I look at her. Oh, I've seen this before, and I look away, back at the screen where the credits are still rolling and the music is still plangently coursing up and down its simple-minded scale. And I look back at her, and I've seen this before and before and before. But I'm still seeing it.

"Mama?"

Silence.

"I'm going to go ahead and start supper."

But you know what they say about practice—making perfect and all.

So, there she is. Big, as we like to say, as Life. But this isn't Life I'm seeing in the chair. It's bigger, no it's smaller, well, actually, it's just Death.

This is what we'd together despaired of ever coming for her. This is the guest who stood us up so many times, in so many rooms that we'd gotten in the habit of laughing every time his name came up; that we told stories on—the way we used to tell stories on a suitor of my late sister's—the one Daddy had arrested that time. This particular guest is, of course, the one neither of us were expecting. Despite all our practice. Ever. At all.

"This is not a test..." Remember that phrase? Of course you don't, because you never actually *heard* it, did you? Nevertheless, you remember it. I rest my case.

I don't move. I don't stand up. I don't go to touch her. I pretend she's still asleep. I am very quiet. *King Lear* is coming on next. So,

would it be all right to watch *King Lear* first? Before, I mean, making the necessary calls? Under the circumstances obtaining, would it be so wrong to watch a great classic? By Shakespeare? A play, from my perspective, about daughters? My question is, Is it all right to go on watching television when your mother has just died in her chair? (Herself, watching television, I could add.)

And my answer is, I'd like to know why not.

And anyway, I've been through all this; I've seen her imitation of death so many times before. I am not a fool. You see something once, what does that mean? It means you'll see it again. Am I right?

I drink my wine. I watch *King Lear*. I refill my glass. I bring the wine in from the kitchen and set the bottle on the rug at my feet. I've seen this *Lear* before; every time I look up, there it is. Again. But I'm thinking about Sebastian.

I'm trying to remember what Sebastian did when Kurt died. What did he do when there was no one left—no person even weaker than his own exquisite, weak, weak self—to stand in for his God? What did my hero do then?

I don't remember. You know, I don't think I *saw* that episode. Maybe I did. Maybe I forgot. But it will be on again. I'll watch for it next time.

CYNTHIA CRUZ

Winter, relentless

Emily says in Arkansas the weeds grow heavy and fierce,
Unkempt. I am, it seems, one of them.
The seed is grown dark.
It is a wild pod shadowing on a blond platform of wheat.

The stew served in the hall had, I think, rabbit, and
I believe I could feel the animal's soul enter mine.
It was beautiful, like a hush, and still.
The box my voice once lived in
Is hushed with reticence like a church.

A cough, the pod pollinized the house.
I could barely feel the meat of my limbs.
I began, then, to die:
My bones starting to chalk.
Soon the animals began to sicken.

You must come for me
For, as you know,
Winter is quickening.

I have begun now
To assemble, in the dark field of my mind.

CYNTHIA CRUZ

Disturbance in Atmosphere

All day am I waiting:
Wild hair and rabbit eyed.
Then, the night.

I painted my toenails a bluesy hue
And cooked whole milk in a rusted tin pot.
Once for chocolate and once for butterscotch.

I miss you and swear
I hear the spin of train wheels
Rushing the track.

The bedroom is hot in the bed
Where I warmed myself
In an invisible square of light.

I am, at times, minxy and prized.
I am queasy; mad with waiting.
When you arrive, I will be blonded like a harlot,

Wearing a worsted gown of ice blue silk.
Thighs pink with cold, bare arms feathered in fur,
I will come all undone.

When you descend the engine's steel metal,
I'll dance a funked-up fox-trot
Beckoning the quick of your heart,

Come down now, it is not too late.
I am not ashamed to admit this: I will wait.
My arms and legs are always far too thin

In winter. Now is no exception.
But I've thought hard how best
To execute this hunger; this awful blue thinness—

I will have eaten butter noodles
And drunk red wine
Drug up from granddaddy's cellar.

Though, as you know,
I am not made entirely of girl-stuff
I will if you want.

PHYLLIS STOWELL

Stripped of all circumstance

How could you be marginal, an afterimage merely?
When did it happen?
Erased before you, the talk and the smiles,
you walk through them like a cat, a ghost cat.
Handed a name tag you scrawl the wrong name
—the overseer knows
you don't belong here anymore.

The physician nods her considerate head,
no help for it, death digs in
never goes away. You resemble your impatience
borne along, kitetail crazily swooping
mouth-hook trailing its broken line.

At the ossuary by the Taluga River a skull
waits three thousand years
waits for embarkation, expectant, listening
rainwater seeping through limestone.
The rest is bonemush, vessels and jade.
All these years and not a soul knows.

In a crypt dusky among ravaged effigies,
their patient hands folded, as at St Denis'
chalk-white tomb with its stale lime air
purified of blood and corruption, something
rises to grab hold, to bless you.

Bless, exonerate
wash away wash away all—oh judgments!
thou forborne and foregone: something
allowed, phosphorous, quickened
in the depths, *de profundis.*

Not the deft remark
with its clever owner and guttering tongue,
not the heartbreak of the left-behind boy
with his high-pitched homemade song,
not that part of you, whoever you are.
Believe you are.
In the below. In the outside
of time, timely. Undeferrable. Something
shadowing under water, luminous
vermillion flame—here, gone—

And when will it happen? How will it be?

Only to you, one by one
scorched by the wind, stripped of all
your foreground, your aftermaths
your helpmate wobbly at the night bedside
exhaling at a loss.

ROBERT LOPEZ

Monkey in the Middle

I looked around to see if anyone was watching. Later I made the mistake of socialization.

For the most part there was Mother and Sister and I. They both would call me the man of the house, although everyone knew better.

When I say everyone I mean Mother and Sister and me.

Growing up, I was not entirely friendless.

Certainly an array of people, relationships fostered, dissolved. Weaknesses discovered and exploited. Action sometimes brought consequence.

As youths, we would stick an unfortunate in between two of us and toss a ball back and forth just over his head. Monkey in the middle, we'd taunt.

Mother would often accuse Sister and me of wrongdoing. Mother'd say, Who broke the needle on Grandmother's Victrola? Sister'd say, Not I said the blind man to the deaf mute.

Sister'd also say, This is not a dress rehearsal.

Those are the two things I remember her saying. Sister wasn't much of a talker. I think she may have spoken some with Mother, though. They always seemed to be in cahoots with each other, like it was them against the world.

I believe the second thing she said was intended as motivation to tackle some obstacle I had successfully been avoiding.

But that must have been years later.

I was mistaken when I said Mother would accuse Sister and me of wrongdoing. It was Mother and Sister who would accuse *me* of wrongdoing.

I'm not certain if Sister didn't talk to me because I'd done something to her. I don't remember having done anything that would have prompted her to not speak to me but women are peculiar that way. She may have been shy, too.

There was never any discussion as to why things were the way they were. Why didn't Sister talk to Brother? for instance.

And how exactly did Father die? If he did, in fact, die.

Mother didn't encourage us to play together. Go play with your friends, she'd often say. Leave Sister alone, was another thing she said quite a bit. I'd spend most of the time in my room doing I don't remember what. What went on in Sister's room I don't know, either. Although I am assuming when I was in my room doing I don't remember what she was in her room doing likewise.

And when I say the mistake of socialization I mean it in the broadest sense imaginable.

The time a kid named Brian got hit in the head with a rock thrown by a kid named Danny. It got him just above his left eye, which ballooned up three or four inches. We all thought he'd die, but he didn't.

Mother'd also say, You'll see how they turn out.

Mother was present in the house most of the time. I'd smell the cigarette smoke and hear the television going from my room.

I'd stick my head out into the hallway. I'd listen. I wanted to know what went on when I wasn't around. There were few phone calls, fewer visitors. No family to speak of, only Grandmother who'd stay with us from time to time and whose Victrola I broke playing a Fats Domino record.

Otherwise there were occasions and events. Happenstances. Balls flying overhead, out of reach.

I'm not sure specificity is necessary.

This one did this, that one did that, this happened then that happened and where the hell are you?

Another thing is I'm not someone who looks for reasons or excuses or the causal relationships between experience and behavior.

Does the fact that no one's watching change what is not being watched?

I've come to learn that Sister was unexpected but I was planned on. What that means exactly is unknown.

As a child I was rarely seen and seldom heard.

And I'm sure the memories of childhood would be pleasant ones if I had them.

The blind man and the deaf mute didn't have to be dragged into this, after all.

What I think I remember is that my bedroom was situated between Mother's and Sister's and I smelled smoke and heard the television going.

I've come to realize that what goes on when I'm not around is none of my business.

Mostly.

SILAS ZOBAL

Camp of Low Angels

We send the children out on missions. Out you go, we say, out to build teepees from pine poles and wool blankets. Out to howl like a wolf, whine like a coyote, growl like a bear. Out to glean an understanding of tragedy through skinned knees. Pick blackberries for blackberry pie. Plant roadside tomato, cucumber, green pepper seeds. Demonstrate how to remove leeches with a waterproof match. Point out the high grasses infested with ticks. Observe how a magnifying glass can turn sunshine into fire. Notice the reddish color of the ground. Realize the earth is heavy with clay. Eat wild blueberries until fingers turn maroon. Decorate the lodges in nature scenes cut from construction paper. Lie on picnic tables and watch for satellites, shooting stars, comets. Dance round the bonfire. Make ice cream.

We stay in to contemplate guide books. We are counselors, we wear brown uniforms, we feel we have a certain standard of dignity to uphold. We write our morning speeches in longhand and find ourselves inspired. Find a centipede, we say, a gypsy moth, a carpenter ant, a wolf spider, a garter snake. Yes, we tell Johnny Millwood, alive, *please,* Johnny, *alive.*

Find rocks which look to have come from the moon. See how twenty arms can lift Ozzy Green high above little heads. Draw a family tree and then climb it. Don't speak for an entire day. Examine the geodesic dome we call the Mess Hall. Identify dogwood, cottonwood, cypress, oak, cedar, willow. Paddle a canoe across the Kishwaukee River at sunset. Wear a life jacket. Invent a language with your trusted friends. Distinguish between deciduous and evergreen. Remember how white berries are never to be eaten. Write down dirty jokes and burn the lined paper in the campfire.

Wear white on Monday and black on Friday to celebrate and mourn the passage of time. Draw maps of all the routes between the lodges and the latrine. Build a fort in an apple tree. Use a compass to find north. Reflect on the forces which can rend a heart in two. Watch a caterpillar form a cocoon. Fish for bluegill before sunrise. Find fossils and identify them. Hunt for arrowheads and round civil war bullets near the site where a fort once stood. Come upon a geode and discuss how certain people exist who, like the geode, don't reveal their glory until they're broken. Learn to weave complicated structures out of yarn. Use fingers as joinery. Take apart owl pellets and reconstruct mouse bones, find translucent snake skins, stumble upon elk antlers. Know that these are the times which will later haunt you. Sleep in the wide open. Understand that dirt smells different when wet. Taste wild mint, clover, rose hips. Chew grass as an announcement that you have nothing better to do. Commune with nature until the tap-tap of the woodpecker rhymes with your pulse. Learn how to make chicken noodle soup, how to cook flat bread, how pepperoni and cheese suits anybody after a day's hike. Learn to tell time by the lines in your palm, how to walk without sound, how to dance in high wind. Make wings out of branches and oak leaves. Memorize a new song. Chart the stars.

This is Camp Winnebago and this is your mission.

When, over oatmeal and peaches at breakfast, we relay how they shouldn't ever, never ever, pick their noses in public, Adam O'Rourke asks how about his bottom? The children find this uproarious. We say it's best to avoid even speaking of the nether regions, young Mr O'Rourke.

Johnny Millwood tells us how we're better than his father any day. We clap one another's shoulders and say how we have set the standard for well done. Good god, we deserve a thousand rewards. As counselors we bring a stylish bearing to our brown uniforms. This is a course which history has never taken before. Patrick

Levin desists in his bed wetting. Eddie Mundoon stops screaming in the night. We stand straight, we swagger. Write, we instruct, true stories from your neighborhoods to be shared around the campfire. The word of the day is contentment. Theodore Muntz relents and makes his bed. Little Adam O'Rourke, too short for his age, grows a good two centimeters taller. In the latrine, we admit to ourselves how the children have grown close to our hearts. We've done the impossible, we have. Ozzy Green, who previously would scream at the sight of a hairbrush, compromises and agrees to comb his cowlicked hair. As a present, Aaron Bushel carves us fish hooks out of wood. Manny Pulinski draws and colors a highly detailed map of the world to be hung in the Mess Hall. A group of children led by Philip Bell sculpt a totem pole with hatchets. Theodore Muntz vows to masturbate less frequently. Good Theodore, we say, *bravo!* Camp Winnebago gives him a round of applause.

Then Theodore Muntz says we stink. That's right stink, he says, stank, stunk. We scowl. Stink how? we ask ourselves. We shower before supper and after supper. We rub our skin raw. We iron our uniforms mercilessly. Theodore Muntz says our stink, stank, stunk runs deeper.

We say, right after the campfire, Theodore Muntz, you'll go to bed early. We notice T.J. Wilde insists on carrying a yard rule over his shoulder. Someone starts a rumor saying it's used to scare the littlest children. Theodore Muntz displays a dead robin. Johnny Millwood hits Theodore with his moonrock. We argue whether young Millwood signifies a problem or just qualifies as precocious.

Gathered around the fire in pajamas, the children read their neighborhood stories aloud. Adam O'Rourke tells how his next door neighbor never goes outside, only sits in a lightless room in front of a pocket-sized television, eating spaghetti and meatballs out of the can. Manny Pulinski says he has nothing to tell about his

neighbors, they're all ignoramuses. The children's eyes hold a frightening, animal gleam.

Theodore Muntz says one day he looked out the window and every last neighbor had packed up and departed to destinations unknown. Johnny Millwood relates how the neighbor's iguana, Maurice, crawled into the infrastructure of his mother's Volkswagen, died, decayed, and began to stink so rotten they had to drive with the sunroof open, windows down, handkerchiefs wrapped around their faces like bandits. Even in winter.

Theodore Muntz bets Johnny Millwood a slice of blueberry pie that our stink's worse that Maurice's. Any day. Johnny Millwood says his mother hung a dozen deodorant Jesuses, poured bleach into available crevasses, and eventually gave the Volkswagen away to a man who had lost his nose in the Second World War.

A baker's dozen children sit listlessly on felled logs. The lodges reek of dried urine. At night twenty anonymous arms take to lifting Ozzy Green and dropping him on rocks. Ozzy, we say, you can talk to us. Word among the children is that Ozzy has decided never to speak again. Theodore Muntz gathers thirty children, divides them into nose- vs. butt-pickers, talks them up, and starts a rock fight between them. We begin to suspect the children swear at us in a few dozen invented languages. Aaron Bushel shaves Ozzy Green bald. T.J. Wilde sets fire to the apple tree.

We agree that the nightly dance around the bonfire has taken on a ghastly spirit. It gives us goose bumps. Eddie Mundoon tells how, kittycorner from his house, two children live in the root cellar. They go naked and sometimes roll in their barren lawn for fun. Their parents are hollow-eyed, pale as winter, and allow the children inside their home only when relatives arrive. Eddie would watch them being shoved into dresses and slacks like marionettes, hair cut and combed, settled into kitchen chairs, and screamed at to clean their plates of peas during supper. Rich Kent says his sister decided she liked to kiss girls, not boys, and his parents told her to

live on the street. The street wasn't much good to her, Rich Kent says. She'd been so upset she'd stopped eating altogether and started injecting poisonous liquids straight into her veins.

Good lord! we say.

Donnie Farkle says his neighbors howl at night. Like whupped dogs. Which sometimes makes him wet the bed. Buzz DeLint relates how his parents purchased an olive-skinned foreigner to take care of the housework and make her sleep in the shed.

Oh, we say, how ghastly! We suggest a sing-a-long. Maybe Johnny Appleseed?

We counselors, we confer and decide there isn't crap to be done about it. That's what we decide. Simply can't be helped. We put all our eggs in one basket and the bottom gave out. Right? we say, *right?* Every last one of them, we say to ourselves, needs a hiding. We debate who has the sturdiest leather belt for strapping. We decide any resort to the physical would be just plain wrong. The set-an-example cliche gets bandied about like a frisbee. We discuss tying a number of children to their beds. We remind ourselves how we know knots.

The stories cannot be stopped from coming. We set a seven o'clock curfew. We patrol. We start rumors of a dungeon. We put the chief mischief-makers in one lodge and watch the doors. Chocolates are offered as incentives for those who don't throw rocks. Johnny Millwood begins a mud war. We practice scowls before the latrine mirror. We call a camp meeting in the Mess Hall to lecture on the nature of authority, the futility of resistance, the inevitability of surrender. Theodore Muntz pounds on the table and begins a chant of *Screw you!* Someone throws a soup spoon. The key lime pie scheduled for dessert is not served. Off to bed, we say, guardians will most certainly be informed. Fear delayed reprisals, we say. The children bundle off to bed, many of them howling. Animals, we whisper among ourselves, beasts and mental cripples. Symptoms indicate a deficiency in parenting we announce. Yes, *yes,* we clap one another on the back. Buck up, we say.

Above his lodge's entrance way, Buzz DeLint pastes a penis cut from red construction paper. Theodore Muntz clogs all the toilets in the latrine with Camp Winnebago t-shirts, and most of the boys begin crapping in our finest canoe. We find Adam O'Rourke puking in our shoes. We notice how our heads itch with lice. T.J. Wilde starts a bonfire in the poop canoe and sets it adrift on the Kishwaukee River.

We console one another by saying we hadn't bargained on an arsonist in our midst.

Rich Kent says his neighbor has lived one-hundred-and-two years and does nothing with his remaining hours but sob. Philip Bell says he lives in the country. He doesn't have any neighbors. He doesn't have any brothers or sisters. His mama died in a train accident, his papa lost a leg.

It's okay, Philip, we say, it *is* okay.

Philip says it's not okay with him.

Johnny Millwood tells how a mother and two little girls who lived next to him were butchered by the father with an army-issue shovel. He can still see the blood splattered on the inside of the windows. He's tracing patterns in the air with an index finger.

Stop, we say, *stop!*

We suggest an expedition to gather four-leaf clovers, but Donnie Farkle spits on our shoes. T.J. Wilde calls Patrick Levin a butt-licker. We pry the lighter from T.J. Wilde's grubby paws. We find ourselves required to restrain Patrick Levin by twisting his arm. We sit on Theodore Muntz until he cries uncle.

T.J. Wilde force-feeds bald Ozzy Green a handful of white berries. The berries cause Ozzy to hallucinate. Adam O'Rourke pisses in our pot of chicken noodle soup. Ozzy Green scales the mess hall and jumps from its peak with oak-leaf wings. Ozzy dislocates his shoulder. Outside the Counselor's Lodge, Johnny Millwood sets booby traps which hoist us, feet first, into trees. You little *shit!* we say, you're dead. A hundred eyes turn our way. Hands cover mouths.

We're gonna tell, the children say.

In the latrine, we bite our knuckles. We wipe our faces with wrinkled brown camp uniforms. We tell ourselves we look stalwart. We stand before the children and say we are sorry, *so sorry.* We take to our knees. We're inappropriate. We're sad.

It's okay, they say, much better than last year.

We lower the Camp Winnebago flag to half mast. Someone has used it to wipe their bottom.

You just don't get us, they say. We insist it's they who do not understand us. We are certain of it. Hey, they say, no hard feelings. We shake hands and have Fudgesicles all around. T.J. Wilde says all of us are in the same poop canoe. We hug.

Tell us, Adam O'Rourke says.

What? we ask.

Stories, he says.

All of us sit on the ground. In a circle. We tell how we've seen a neighbor child burying a headless cat. How there's a man we know who has artificial legs. How we found a human skeleton buried in our lawn. How once we saw a father drag his boy and a beagle into the backyard and snap the dog's spine over his knee. We fall silent.

You forgive us? we say.

Forgive *what?* say the children. Philip Bell pats our shoulders and says everything will turn out okay. Theodore Muntz says he's thinking of a few things we could do. By way of making it up.

The children send us out on missions. Get Jujubes, they say, S'mores, Icey Pops.

Never heard of them, we say.

Get them anyway.

There is this matter of sending a letter to each parent telling how we believe their child to really actually be an angel.

Pick up giant cans of fruit cocktail, Frosted Flakes, jawbreakers the size of our heads. Get a supply of saltwater taffy, of rubber

footballs, of resiliency. Get ready to dance with them around the campfire. Get ready to whoop and holler.

Hear that? we say, maybe we taught them the word *resiliency.*

And go ahead, they say, get something for yourselves.

We make haste. We slap our thighs. We go. We get.

PHILIP DACEY

Thomas Eakins' Between Rounds
(Philadelphia Museum of Art)

The towel flapping
is like the flag
for a country of one,

the hand of the timekeeper
a small animal
about to pounce.

The fighter, feet together,
arms extended, seems missing only
nails and a cross.

But the lemon—
see there, on the mat,
by the bucket and sponge—

the lemon is the sun,
shrunken, tamed, sliced even,
but the center around which

all the men orbit. The lemon,
humble, ignored in its poverty,
is champion.

PHILIP DACEY

Thomas Eakins' Portait of Miss Elizabeth Burton

(Minneapolis Institute of Arts)

In a year, she'll marry and leave for Borneo,
"missionary work." Hers or her husband's?
But for now she's the girl next door, a painter, too.
Tom's sixty-one and frequently offends

his models by requesting they pose nude.
How tell the story of sex in Victoria's reign?
Her left hand's on her hip—the attitude
of Whitman's pose! And that off-center lean

spells energy. Elbows spill outside the frame—
there's no containing her. Wide open eyes
meet the world. As to her index finger's aim—
don't ask. But it's her dress, the fabric's rise

and crest and scoop, that's Eakins' last, best word:
all that cool silk, so agitated, so astir.

PHILIP DACEY

The Bonfire

> Scores of photographs of female nudes were destroyed
> by a well-meaning but tragically misguided family friend.
> —*Thomas Eakins: 21 Photographs*, from the introduction.

So many burning women's bodies,
I could have been in hell,
but this was Philadelphia, the year 1938,
and Susan Eakins had just died.
Stopping by to comfort Addie Williams,
long Susan's boarder, even longer Tom's friend,
I saw from the street first a drift of smoke
in the backyard and then her bent over
a flaming pile of rubble. Or so I thought:
easing her grief by burning insignificant
accumulations from the attic.

At my approach, she lifted a box
like someone before an altar with an offering,
then overturned it, releasing
a storm of photographs,
windfall figures,
into so many waiting tongues, consuming gossips,
that once killed women as witches,
the devil's concubines, fire
to answer fire.

I reached out, my right hand
a self-sacrificing lover, and plucked one

from the crackling passion
but too late: she turned black
in my fingers and I let her fall—
float, rocking on updraft, then subside,
a sigh, surrender, into such a temperature
as the imagination must feel
forging stories and pictures that cool hard—
her who had been kneeling, long slope of back
to the camera, buttocks on wrinkled heels
and soles, head
turned round to look into the lens, face
the shape of surprise, as if Eakins
had just called her name.

I turned to Addie, calling her name.
The word "why" curled weakly
from my mouth like smoke.
I heard her say "fetishes"
as if she'd picked a bone from her teeth.

A wall of heat
shimmered the scene it kept me from
though I could not not watch
skin blister, arms, heads eaten without warning,
a nightmare plague—
behind that wall beauty all vulnerable,
the corners of beauty
curling, corruption
its own beauty.

And then of course they began to rise, the women,
out of this world,
as ashes, flecks
of flesh,
papery breasts on a breeze, thighs pulsing upward
with red light, abstract hollows and dunes
once waists and hips,
a host of bodies purified
to weightlessness, models to angels,
beings beyond what the painter as scientist
could ever know, if not beyond
his dreams, which went with them,
though he would have observed, the realist,
they all returned to earth as soot:
bodies, angels, dreams—
something I was quick (or was I slow?)
to brush off my boot.

MARY A. MCCAY

Harry Potter: Literature or the Rubbish Heap of History?

On September 6, 2000, a short two months after *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* hit bookstores in an unprecedented book-buying frenzy, Harold Bloom, Professor Emeritus at Yale University, Shakespeare scholar, and author of several books on the decline of learning in America, wrote in the *New York Times* that he wasn't wild about Harry Potter. When I read the article, I was curious as to why Bloom, the man who is always telling us that we do not read enough, that our culture is without redeeming literature, and that our children have lost all respect for books, should turn so against J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series. At least the young are reading—that is a first step. What is more curious, however, is Bloom's claim that the books, *The Sorcerer's Stone, The Chamber of Secrets, The Prisoner of Azkaban,* and *The Goblet of Fire* are not "superior fare." Bloom goes on to decry the fact that children today choose the Harry Potter books over "Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* or the Alice books of Lewis Carroll." With a longing for literature that is the product of an age of colonialism, child labor, and the oppression of women and which does very little about those social atrocities, Bloom hopes that children will graduate from Harry Potter to the world enshrined in *Tom Brown's School Days,* a world that reasserts his own vision of how people ought to live and who ought to be in charge.

That the Harry Potter series upsets all those preconceived notions of the rightly ordered society is probably more to the point in Bloom's criticism than his aesthetic shiver at the clichés in *The Sorcerer's Stone.* His contention that the book is full of clichés and

that one can pick any page (he chose page four) and find them running rampant through the plot like Muggles trying to escape the Quidditch World Cup Finals, is, in fact, a red herring. Indeed, J.K. Rowling does sometimes resort to clichés because children's dialogue is full of it, and because language says to readers that the author connects to their world. Young people want nothing more than to speak to each other in language that signals their place in the group. But Rowling also places her characters in situations that require them to challenge the assumptions of the group and question adults, not simply to accept them as icons of probity and authority as the characters in the Tom Brown books do with Headmaster Thomas Arnold. Rowling often employs the cliché to upset the very social notions that the cliché represents, so that both reader and character are forced to rethink the way they look at the world.

The books do not, as Bloom asserts, simply paint a picture of a divided society in which Muggles (human beings) represent everyday society, and magicians represent a magical escape. Were that the case, I doubt many children would be very impressed for very long. What the books do is force us all to reconsider the social presumptions we have about others and about our own place in the world. Clearly, the world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the school for sorcery attended by Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and many other hopeful wizards, is a world that not only mirrors our own, but encourages us to look at it. "Tell the truth, but tell it slant," warns Emily Dickinson, and that is precisely what Rowling does in the first four books of the projected seven-book series. In the seven books, she plans to follow Harry Potter, boy wizard, through each of his years at Hogwarts School, and each book so far challenges particular prejudices of our own society.

The author doesn't pit two worlds "the mundane and the magical" boringly against each other, as Bloom complains; rather she

deconstructs one world, our own, in the world of Hogwarts school. The Dursleys, Harry Potter's Muggle guardians, have little to do with the real issues of the book; they are a frame to take us into the real world, for they are about as unreal as any story book characters could manage to be, and their ridiculous behavior warns readers that they are the opening act, the warm-up for the real thing. They are the vaudeville to the high drama that is to follow. We can deal with the visibly ridiculous, so we laugh at the Dursleys—Vernon, Petunia, and their dreadful son, Dudley. What we don't often deal with are the more subtle issues of character and belief that life at Hogwarts uncovers.

The Sorcerer's Stone (entitled *The Philosopher's Stone* in England) opens with a recognizable world, but also introduces a boy who is clearly different from others in his family. I wonder why Bloom, while criticizing the derivative nature of this book and of the series, comparing it unfavorably to the Tolkien series and to *Tom Brown's School Days,* never looks to the original source, or refuses to grant that source—Arthurian legend. Harry, if he is anyone, is Arthur, the orphan boy, reared by others without knowledge of his true origins—until the test. Then he rises to his true status. Harry, reared by Muggles until his eleventh birthday, does not know his true power until Hagrid, the Hogwarts groundskeeper, comes to rescue him and take him to the school where his real education will begin. It is not that the Harry Potter Series is derivative, so are the C.S. Lewis's Narnia Chronicles and Tolkien's books; it is that they don't conform to Bloom's preconceived world view. Bloom isn't really criticizing use of old sources. It is what Rowling does with the sources that worries him. She is not reconfirming an unbroken link with the hegemonic myths of the power structure; rather she is showing how those myths also work to empower the once powerless—women, minorities, the poor, and the otherwise disenfranchised. If those groups can use the myths, then the very power of those myths to maintain the status

quo and to preserve the ascendancy of a particular group in the social structure is also at risk.

The very first myth that Hogwarts undercuts is the myth of education that Bloom himself continues to insist upon. The trivium and quadrivium, the hierarchical structure of Bloom's ideal authoritarian classroom disappears in the classrooms of Hogwarts. What we see instead is a world in which children must solve their own problems. There are no secret answers, no way simply to blacken the bubble on a standardized test. Here is a world in which one must weigh the consequences of every act.

When deep in the Forbidden Forest, Harry learns a lesson from Firenze, a centaur. Centaurs, according to Hagrid, "know things...jus' don' let on much." However, Firenze does let on a bit, when Harry discovers that a unicorn has been slain in the forest. Firenze explains, "it is a monstrous thing to slay a unicorn... Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself." That message is a very different one from the violent messages of power that we see daily on television and on film. It is a message that asks children to think of the consequences of their behavior and to realize that there are issues larger than those of individual power, happiness, or even personal need. Indeed, even Professor McGonagall, head of Gryffindor House, Harry's own house (there are four houses at Hogwarts), tries to help Harry and Ron see that there are more important issues than just winning.

Finally, however, the lesson is brought home to Harry that he cannot depend entirely on himself to find the answers; he needs a group, he is not the center of the school, nor completely competent on his own. He finally understands that, for the entire year, he has interpreted events all wrong. Those interpretations led Harry to conclude that Professor Severus Snape, a man he does not like

and who seems not to like him very much, was working for Voldemort, Harry's evil nemesis. In fact, Snape, Head of Slytherin House, despite his own personal dislike of Harry, does spend much of the book secretly protecting the boy. Harry is quite surprised to learn that the man he thought his enemy has virtues he has refused to see and that his enemy is someone he has trusted all along.

When the error has been cleared up, Rowling goes one step further and introduces the idea of death, not the death of TV adventure shows, but real death, an idea that Harry does not want to tackle. Professor Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, gives him a lesson to think on when he returns for the summer to the Muggle world. Dumbledore's friends, Nicolas Falmel and his wife Perenelle, will die; Harry has not been able to save them. But the wizard explains: "To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very *very* long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." That idea, introduced to children who are presented images of violent death that are either totally horrifying or totally unreal, is an entirely new concept to contemplate. (In a later book the idea of death will be broached again, and the issues surrounding loss will be dealt with on a more immediate level when a classmate whom Harry respects dies because he and Harry have agreed to share a prize—hardly a trite or clichéd idea, Mr Bloom.)

At Hogwarts there is not the comforting panacea of C.S.Lewis's Christian eternity, nor is there the comfort that the world is protected by a Christ-like savior. Perhaps this is why seventeen school districts in America have bowed to the wishes of Christian Fundamentalists to ban the books. The children of Hogwarts do not have the luxury of an unexamined life; they must learn quickly and well, as children today must if they are to survive in a world that neither C. S. Lewis nor J.R.R. Tolkien could have imagined.

The second book in the series, *The Chamber of Secrets,* introduces another issue that is central to our own perceptions about ourselves and others. It tackles the problem of the Muggles. On one level, Muggles are not so different from the Wizards, but Wizards, harassed for centuries by Muggle civil and religious authorities, have gone underground, or beyond the visible world. Once outside Muggle control, they treat Muggles, when they encounter them, much the way Muggles used to treat them. Muggles come in for the common garden variety of prejudice, especially when they are singled out at Hogwarts School, where Albus Dumbledore, a truly enlightened Headmaster, has granted Muggles with special powers admittance to the school. Hermione Granger is especially vulnerable because she is a Muggle. She has no idea she has a gift for wizardry until she receives her letter from Hogwarts (at the time Harry receives his). Hermione is definitely a Mud Blood, as Muggles are sometimes called, and she suffers a good deal of racist sniping from some of the meaner would-be wizards. In the second book, her life and the lives of other Muggle students are at risk when the Chamber of Secrets is opened.

The problems surrounding racism are even more complex than those dealing with education. Rowling, in the second book, challenges her readers more and tests their own prejudices. She recognizes how racism goes hand in hand with power struggles and with colonization, an issue that the first world countries of the world seem curiously unable to deal with in a post-colonial world. Perhaps the world is only chronologically post-colonial because issues of colonial oppression and racism continue to haunt us. Those problems haunt Hogwarts as well. Wizards, we learn, have house elves, a fact that particularly upsets Hermione. These little creatures, bound to a wizard family for all eternity, work for no money and have no status in the community; they aren't even allowed to wear clothes. Hermione, new to the wizard community, wonders how people who have had to live their lives hidden from Muggles

in order to avoid persecution can oppress others the way, historically, they have been oppressed? That is a question Hermione continues to ask throughout the series, and it is a question that resonates with a multitude of uncertainties and ambiguities.

Hermione's status as one of the few completely Muggle students at Hogwarts makes her more sensitive to oppression; she sees in the position of the house elf, a parallel to her own uncertain status at the school. Harry's lineage is mixed. Muggle on his mother's side, Wizard on his father's, he is made uneasy by Hermione's crusade on behalf of house elves. He recognizes what she sees in the lot of the little creatures, but remains unwilling to take a stand that might call attention to his Muggle half. It is hard for pure wizards, such as Ron Weasley, to see the ways in which Hermione and Harry are sometimes snidely treated, but it is Hermione who brings the whole issue of prejudice and colonization of a marginalized group to a head.

When Hermione introduces her parents to Ron Weasley's parents, Ron's father, a perfectly nice wizard who loves all things Muggle much the way Lawrence loved all things Arabian, shows how prejudice works even when the person is trying to overcome it. He greets Hermione's parents with: "But you're *Muggles!*" He then goes on, "We must have a drink! What's that you've got there? Oh, you're changing Muggle money. Molly, look!" That exchange is a perfect example of marginalization. The Grangers become, for Mr Weasley, ethnographic objects to observe, exclaim over, and delight in, but it is the otherness that is noticed, not the things the two groups have in common. It is up to Hermione, during her second year at Hogwarts, to show the commonalities.

However, it is not in Hermione and in her uncertain status that the issue of oppression of marginalized groups is really tackled. It is in Dobby, the house elf, that all the political ramifications of colonization and the psychological impact of slavery become clear. Dobby wants to be free but has no place to go. Luckily,

Dumbledore has given him a place in the kitchens at Hogwarts, and Hermione discovers that all the food Hogwarts students eat is cooked by house elves. Where is justice, she wonders? How can the wizard world, which she wants to be fairer than the Muggle world, accept such injustice? The situation becomes more complex when Hermione tries to free the house elves and discovers that they resent her crusade as much as they resent Dobby, who works for money, which they feel is demeaning. In their fear of losing the little they have, the elves claim to love their position and not to want freedom. The complex issues of psychological imprinting as a part of the colonizing and enslaving process might be too heavy for Harry, but it opens up worlds of consideration for readers who live in places where there are two societies: one that succeeds in the world as it is, and one that doesn't. The fact that trusted teachers and heads of houses have accepted the condition of the house elf for centuries not only causes Hermione to question the order of that world, but might make the comfortable young who are reading the series question the worlds they inhabit.

As the series grows, each book becomes more complex. Harry finds out things about his parents in book three, *The Prisoner of Azkaban,* which refocus his view of the world. He also learns that Sirius Black, a man whom his father trusted, is serving a life sentence in prison for a crime that it becomes increasingly clear he did not commit. The ultimate punishment, having one's soul sucked out by the Dementor's kiss, almost befalls Harry and Hermione, so the very personal implications of injustice hit him very hard.

During the struggle to free Black, Severus Snape becomes involved, but he sees the situation very differently from Harry, and, while it is easier to accept Harry's version of reality, the book makes its readers consider why Snape's version is so different. He is not lying about what has happened to him or about how he interprets the experience. The nature of knowledge, justified true belief, becomes more and more relative as accounts of experiences

differ and as the series progresses. The world of Hogwarts becomes increasingly complicated as Harry and the reader encounter characters whose views of the world vary widely.

By the fourth book, *The Goblet of Fire,* nothing is as stable as it seemed in the first book. Readers have accepted that girls play Quidditch just as well as, and sometimes better than, boys. Certainly, the Gryffindor House team depends upon the talents of Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, and Katie Bell, excellent Chasers all, to win the House Cup in book three. Those same readers have begun to question sexual and racial stereotypes, the nature of authority, and the difficulty of assessing good and evil in a world that is not so easily defined as much children's literature would have it classified. It is in the fourth book, however, that the limits of a young man's trust is truly tested and the nature of his opposition is more clearly defined. In the test of the champions, the Triwizard Tournament, Harry and Cedric Diggory, the two entrants from Hogwarts, must complete challenges against Fleur Delacoeur and Krum, opponents from rival schools of wizardry. The contests form the core of book four, but Harry's relationship with Sirius Black, his father's boyhood friend and his true guardian, is more fully developed as well. Also, the issue of house elves has not been resolved, nor has the issue of Voldemort's power over the school and over Harry's life.

Voldemort has slowly been recouping the strength and power he lost when he killed Harry's parents and tried to kill Harry almost fourteen years earlier. Finally, Harry will have to confront that evil, the evil that has been stalking him since he was an infant. In the course of book four, readers also see Harry's weaknesses more clearly. He wants very badly to go to the Triwizard Ball with Cho Chang, an excellent Quidditch player from Ravenclaw House, but she has agreed to go with Cedric Diggory, and Harry almost destroys his own chances of gaining the Triwizard Cup because he rejects information that Diggory has given him out of a sense of

fair play. Harry is angry that Diggory got the girl he wanted to take to the ball, and he impunes the other boy's motives for helping him. Until dangerously late in the game, he puts off taking Diggory's advice for overcoming the second challenge, and is almost unable to do so.

By the end of the novel, while Harry acquits himself well enough to escape Voldemort, it is clear that the truly heroic character is Cedric Diggory because he is able to accept his limitations and grant others theirs with a sense of equanimity and fairness. Harry, always keeping the evil of Voldemort in the forefront of his mind, fails to see the evil that lurks in his own heart. In this book there are times when Harry seems more like Draco Malfoy, the stage villain of Slytherin House, than he does the hero on a quest. Tested, he often fails on the most elementary levels of human friendship.

Rowling has also lightened up the humor of book four, even as she makes the social and moral issues more multifaceted. Her characterization of Rita Skeeter, the special correspondent for *The Daily Prophet,* the newspaper where all the wizards get and propagate their news, is at once funny and devastatingly to the point. Rita is a cross between a yellow journalist and a gossip columnist, and the more she shows up to uncover the news at Hogwarts, the more distorted that news becomes.

Hagrid, too, is more fully fleshed out. He is discovered to be in love and to be a giant, another group that wizards have an age-old animosity against. When students at the school find out that he is half giant, their attitudes range from terrified to "I knew there was something wrong with him." Hagrid, the most gentle of souls, is cast in the role of a terrifying opponent, and it becomes clear how prejudice can grow on a tiny bud of fear.

In the course of the series, Harry grows from an eleven-year old boy who never heard of Muggles and Wizards, to a young man who questions both his power and the structure of the powers

around him. Because Rowling develops each book to add to Harry's growing sense of identity and to the increasingly difficult issues he must deal with, the early two books are stylistically much simpler and plotted in a more undemanding fashion than the next two. Books three and four add more subtle and difficult moral issues as well as more ambiguous characters, thus expanding the readers' challenges as well. As Harry grows, so do his readers. Those who read him at age eleven, when the first book was published in 1997, are now fourteen years old. They will be seventeen or eighteen if they stick with Potter through all his years at Hogwarts. Many adults will also continue with the series either because they are teachers and need to keep up with the literature their students are reading or because they are parents and want to understand what interests their children. Possibly some will continue to read the series because they see in the Potter books an attempt to look at our world and understand both its strengths and foibles.

James Joyce, in response to a complaint about the way he reviewed books, told the editor that he always asked the question: "has the author really come to understand something about human life?" If the author hasn't, Joyce said, "then consign it [the book] to the rubbish heap of history." The Harry Potter books reveal that J.K. Rowling has learned something about life, and she is imparting that knowledge to millions of readers around the world.

JULIAN WASSERMAN

Still Epic After All These Years

A thousand years after its Initial Public Offering, *Beowulf*'s stock has soared in a year that has included the big screen release of *The 13th Warrior,* Michael Crichton's retelling of the Anglo-Saxon epic, in addition to Tulane medievalist Roy Liuzza's excellent academic translation of the poem. Yet the most surprising sign of life in this first millennium classic about a hero's battles against two monsters and a dragon has been Seamus Heaney's new verse translation of the poem edging out of the high-flying Harry Potter for the Whitbread Award.

Translating *Beowulf* has always been a tricky business. In the original, the poem reflects the Anglo-Saxon love of indirection, of leisurely renaming, of poetic elaboration at the expense of directness and verbal economy, qualities that are difficult to appreciate by modern readers bound by constraints of time and deadlines. Old English which relies heavily on case endings as opposed to word order, provides a syntax difficult to capture in modern English. Above all there is the imagery. Sure, Old English has the word "swerd" (sword). But no self-respecting hero carries one. Instead, they wield the "foe-hammer" or "lightning-slasher." Beowulf doesn't "speak," he deals treasure from his "word-hoard." It's easy to lose the narrative thread in the midst of such creative compounding. At heart has been a choice between capturing one of two elements, the smooth flow of narrative or the looping indirectness of the poem's seventh to tenth century poetics and the idiosyncrasies of heroic speech.

Part of the reason that Heaney has captured imaginations is that he steers a middle ground, avoiding both options in order to highlight what will come as a surprise to many who think of the poem

solely as a work about the slaying of monsters. If each translator has brought a different gift to the task of rendering the epic, Heaney's is a recognition of the poem's inherent, but often overlooked, lyricism. Indeed, *Beowulf* is, foremost, a product of an oral culture, one that finds the ability to speak well as important as strength of arm.

That means that there's far more speaking than fighting in this poem, including melancholy laments about human nature, the Grendels inside all beings and our heroic struggle to overcome them. There's the sorrowful wisdom of the once-strong Hrothgar, the lament over gold once held by earls but now the decayed hoard of the dragon. Then there's the last battle boast of the doomed hero, and Wiglaf's scornful reproach of those who desert the now aged Beowulf in his final hour of need against the dragon. For what Heaney understands is that *Beowulf* is not simply a heroic tale. It is also a meditation on the human condition, on life in a mutable world that sets snares for human weakness and creates opportunities for greatness.

To capture the elegiac music of the poem, Heaney has, however, refused to surrender the heroic. Even in the battle scenes, there is unusual lyricism. The rendering of Grendel's attack hints at the internal dimension of attack on the feast-hall from which he is eternally excluded:

> Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open
> the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,
> pacing the length of the patterned floor
> with his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,
> flame more than light, flared from his eyes.

There is awe and poetry in details often minimized in translation, such as when the giant's sword used to slay Grendel's mother,

began to wilt into gory icicles,
to slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,
the way it all melted as ice melts
when the Father eases the fetters off the frost
and unravels the water-ropes.

The unnatural melting of the sword into the gory, prosaic "icicles" stands in counterpoint to the Father's natural melting of the "water-rope," icicles made over by poetic compounding.

Is such poetry the result of Heaney's poetic gifts, or the unlocking of what was there all along in the original? No doubt even the non-specialist might want to take a quick look at the original Old English. The edition reviewed here is a bilingual one, but one that is curiously impractical. Without a glossary, there is of course very little of the original, other than the proper names, that an untrained reader might follow. Even more curious is that, despite a splendid introduction by Heaney and a brief note on names by Alfred David, the volume does not contain even a hint as to the pronunciation of the Old English, so readers are denied the opportunity to read/hear the poem's cadences aloud. Even more curious is the fact that there is no note or explanation of the two runic letters (both of which are pronounced "th") that appear regularly in the text.

In short, the Old English original seems to present an assurance, largely unnecessary here, that the translation is faithfully anchored to the original text. In translating *Beowulf*'s "word hoard" for the modern reader, Heaney does indeed show why the poem—unlike the dragon's ancient, moldering gold—is a lasting treasure.

CONTRIBUTORS

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PATRICIA JABBEH WESLEY, who immigrated in 1991 with her husband and small children to the United States during the Liberian civil war, is the author of *Before The Palm Could Bloom: Poems of Africa,* (New Issues Press Poetry, 1998). Her poetry is anthologized in *Echoes Across The Valley: Poets Of Africa.* She is completing her next book of poems, *Around The Mountains: A Poetry Memoir.* She teaches Creative Writing and African Literature at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, where she is finishing up a Ph.D.

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PALO TUNG

Fish Is Fish

My father wasn't what you could fairly call a fisherman, but to hear him tell it fishing was a lofty endeavor which he alone understood in its fine subtleties, an art whose secrets were so privileged he would willingly impart them only to his first-born. Being not only his first but only born, I looked forward to this baptism of hook and line as toward a birthday or Christmas. I tortured us both with questions about fishing and demanded to know when our day was coming. With typical imperviousness, and evident glee, my father's only answer was, "Shhh, fish doesn't like impatient little boy."

The day of my initiation finally did arrive, and as we loaded the icebox into the Oldsmobile's trunk, I asked my father what I thought was a very pertinent question.

"Dad," I said, "don't we need some fishing rods or something?"

He thought about it a moment. His hands came up to his bony cheeks and then he held them out in front of himself, staring at the fingertips, as if waiting for them to speak.

"Fishing rods," he said. "Where are the fishing rods?"

"We have to buy them, I think."

"Hmm." He stood there, staring at his fingertips.

"They got 'em at K-Mart, dad. They got all kinds of stuff with fish on 'em and that catches fish."

"K-Mart?"

"You sure you know about fishing, dad?"

"Do I know about fishing! What kind of question is this, ah? Do you know, before you are born, your uncle Sam and I go fishing very much. There has a bridge, near San Francisco—oh! Gigantic