New Orleans Review

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Stupid Love Salvation Dirty
Dreams Birthmarks
Echolocation Second Story
Bicameralization Angels in
White Dresses Mouth'd Sonnet
double issue

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Back Cover: Untitled 1998 (Rothko) by Jonathan Santlofer, 12 x 12 inches, Oil on Carved Hydrocal Stone

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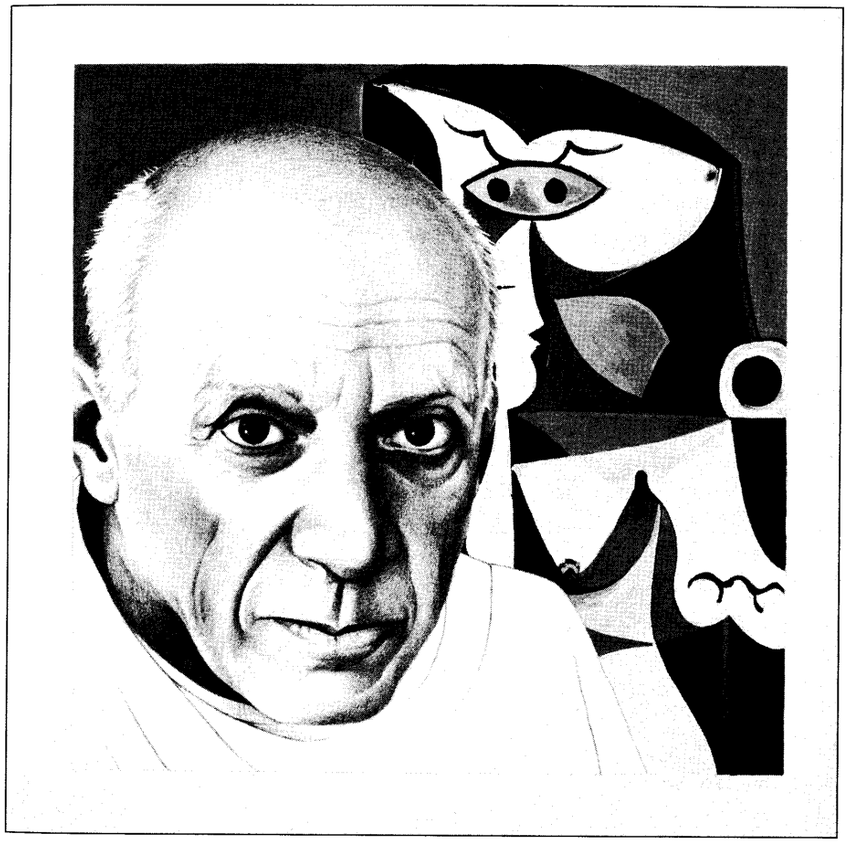


Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Picasso)
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
Pencil and Gouache on Paper

Laurie Blauner

Life with Stan, 1963

First there is fighting and then the vampires. A few years later Lizzie is too big for Stan, her father, to swing her back and forth in his overnight bag. She is ten and Claire is six. Her dark hair floats slapping her awake, laughing, like an animal kissing her long face. She remembered her small hands gripping the sides of the brown leather carry-on case. The metal rectangles of the open zipper ran beneath her underarms, railroad tracks with a bulge in the center around her tiny body. She felt free, tossed toward the apartment's textured ceiling with her father's hand tethering her from becoming lost in the air, resembling some extinct bird. Her father liked the moments she was suspended, frozen in air at arm's length, a butterfly under glass, interesting, unknowable, untouchable. She could mouth words and not be heard, this mystery in his often used bag.

It is the year President Kennedy is shot and pinned to his car like some specimen. Lizzie is trying to catch goldfish in a pond at the school fair. Her face winks in the corkscrew light from the surface. The other children's and adult's voices recede against the green and brick walls. The tables, games, and shouting seem to be in another world, leaving Lizzie to her own. She opens her mouth to swallow the refracted colors moving down the image of her throat like tasting colorful clouds. Her fingers resembling grass sway in the shadows of the orange fish. She is less concerned with catching the fish than holding them. She wonders if they think they are giving themselves to stone gods or are curious enough to breath air, no matter what the result. They affect one another through motion, her movement is the medium, swishing her fingers, they dart the other way. She can feel them brush her fingertips like a new language. And sometimes vocabulary is just beyond her and she feels alone. The goldfish are moving their lips to say something and then a man's face appears in the sequined water, swimming in small waves at first. He is wearing a dark suit and the face of any man. As her hands become still it becomes a familiar face. But it still imitates so many men at the school fair. The loudspeaker tears staccato through her limbs: "President Kennedy has been shot. We are closing the fair immediately. President Kennedy has been shot. Go home." Lizzie touches a fish and doesn't want to release it. It is a muscular part of her that she wants to hold onto but it is struggling separately to be let go. She relinquishes the fish watching the orange curve of its back disappear like a comma fading into a line.

"Hi honey. Let's go."

It is her father with his metal knee cap from the war, his dark hair flying from his scalp in curves, his long Jewish nose resting like a dragonfly on his face and Lizzie's. Now she can smell his clothing stitched with cigarette smoke. He always has a pack tucked in his jacket pocket near his unresolved heart. It is a grainy, pungent odor permeating everything he touches with yellow-tipped fingers. His breath smells of cigarettes as though he inhales a different air. His pants are so tart it is as if he lives and dresses himself in another house entirely.

"Okay," Lizzie says holding his jacket sleeve while colorful crowds of adults and children eddy around them crying. She wants to say good-bye to her classmates but she doesn't see them anymore. Lizzie wonders at so many people weeping for someone they didn't know, someone they never met. But people weeping nonetheless because of what he represented, although she doesn't have the words to say this. Although no one would know what to say if he stood in front of them right now. It is like reading at school. Sharing in someone's life because of who you think they are. It is called history.

Wind combs their hair on the streets. Lizzie's brown leotards make her skin think of static and electricity. She pulls them and they fall comfortably back into the shape of her legs. People on the cement New York streets are crying or on their way to somewhere they could cry. A footnote of sky is visible between the tall buildings that display their windows like glass doors into other lives. Lizzie thinks of her lost fish, happy in its veils of water and light, glad to no longer feel the spider touch of her treacherous fingers, to no longer think about the lurid end of its life anymore.

* * * * *

The elevator leads them loudly past the doormen on the ground floor and to the carpeted hall on the ninth floor. The wallpaper blossoms with fleur-de-lis in the overhead light. Lizzie's father, Stan, short for Stanley, fumbles like an old, harmless bee at the locks on the thick front door. After so many clicks they enter the bright light of the kitchen. Lizzie follows the cigarette smoke, some ghostly presence, like bread crumbs or pebbles to be used to find the way home.

Lizzie hears voices from her parents' bedroom. She thinks longingly for once of Stan's mother's apartment with her living room furniture encased in heavy plastic. Untouchable. Unusable. Quiet. A butterfly collection with fuchsia, chartreuse, magenta and cobalt colors on fire beneath all the wrapping. Holiday presents she wants to quickly tear open. There aren't many other people left in the respective families. Lizzie hears a monologue touching her ears in long waves. She apprehensively follows the smoke trail into the bedroom wondering whose male voice is admonishing her mother. She thinks of a storm rearranging human gestures, upsetting limbs down to the bone.

"He died," Lizzie's mother says calmly, quietly. The television splashing a cold, gray light across her face in the same pattern as fallen leaves.

She is looking at the television screen which is looking back at her as though Stan and Lizzie are interrupting an ongoing conversation.

"Don't you even care?" she says turning part of her classic face toward them, one half dark, one half alive with the flickering moonlight of current events. She is accusing them.

Lizzie's muscles freeze. She shuts her eyes and sees the fish in its wet struggle with her fingers. Its need to escape.

"Yes, yes, of course we care," Stan replies in his New York accent. He is beginning to get agitated. Smoke flies to the corners of the room, crawling past his eyes.

But Lizzie's mother is a long, beautiful vase holding the light and pushing it away. Lizzie is afraid she will overflow and shatter at the same time.

"You have a funny goddamn way of showing it." Her tea hair circles around her head in a beehive. Her deep blue dress rustles as she moves to the dresser. The television moves its leaf motif in a pale blue light up and down her leg and side. Air is inscrutable around her flesh.

Lizzie thinks of the meaning of the President's death running through her fingers like sand from an hourglass. She realizes that is not what her parents are talking about. Light from the television is flicking angrily on her arm.

"Aw, honey, you know I care." Smoke is meandering around his clenched teeth. His fingers are nervous in his pockets. His suit looks deflated as though his body is shrinking. "I'm so sorry." His head is slightly bowed with his nose visible and smoke exhaling, forming a ghostly web around his body.

She turns around undone. Her teeth bared and unbuttoned. The rose of her mouth stretching into a grimace. "Sorry my ass. You stupid goddamn son-of-a-bitch. You don't know a damn thing. You weak, mealy-mouthed asshole, pushed around by his own mother. You really are stupid and pathetic. How could I end up with some stupid asshole like you. I could have done better picking up some jerk on the street..."

Lizzie quietly leaves the shaking and tearing bedroom. She moves out the door backward, heels first until she is outside and then she turns her back to them. She slips like smoke through the foyer, past the living room, into the bedroom she shares with her sister. The whitewashed furniture fastidiously carries the long mirror, the two windows; underneath is a large, round tin ramshackle with toys. It is still and silent except for the faint sound of arguing from her parents' bedroom. She looks at the unmade bed and familiar pillow, companions. She is safe and free for now. She sees her hands take on the shape of birds as they fold and unfold in the mirror as she dances. Her chocolate tights scratch her calves as they move up and down, rubbing her thin legs. She looks at the composition of her face, the large brown eyes, hollowed bones as her body twists in the glass to the invisible music. It is a form of sleeping. The space conforming to her body like a tight-fitting stain of a dress her mother would wear, touching her curving body in arcs. It is the way birds leave the earth to sleep in a tree. Her feet jump into the air. She imitates Isadora Duncan.

In her turning, in her body twisting to say something she knocks her sister's coat rack to the floor. Broken. She bites the skin of her hand between the knuckles, her own taste, her salty fear. A finger of wood is split off and lays on the carpet like a separate path or lost exclamation point. She stares at it with its architecture of judgment and grief, its small abandonment in the history of this household. Broken, and she hears the eloquent punishment but does not know what it is yet.

She scotch-tapes the piece to the rest of the coat rack. The easy sunlight coming through the apartment window dodges the outlines of the other buildings outside. Lizzie thinks of a river with its shadows and light, distracted by stones until they become a part of the flow. She continues dancing by the old birdcage whose canary turned its back on her world and died. By the empty plastic turtle bowl admitting nothing and everything. Turned like a clear shell on its back. She had hamsters who ate one another, mice who escaped and lived behind the walls of the apartment, and even once two alligators who squeaked to each other at night. She loves animals. Right now she has a dog, a poodle, called Beauty.

When her sister, Claire, comes home Beauty is behind her feet trailing like a small, loosened shoe. Lizzie says "Go put your coat here—on that coat rack."

Thump goes the coat and finger of wood onto the floor. There are vowels of crying.

"I'm going to tell Mom and Dad."

"No...please," sobbing, "Lizzie."

"Oh Mom. Dad," making believe she is shouting, knowing their parents are too embroiled in their own cruel games and problems to be concerned about Lizzie's and Claire's.

More crying. Beauty is a small sob under her feet. Lizzie hates Claire for letting herself be dressed identically to Lizzie. Matching Doctor Dentons with their thick pebbled feet loose on the floor. Matching sister dresses with frills choking their necks, velvet ones so when they sat together they resembled a blue, pleated ocean. For repeating what Lizzie says as if it is her own thoughts. For following Lizzie and pestering her friends. For changing the channels on the television whenever Lizzie orders her to. She is a mindless robot wanting to be Lizzie. And Lizzie loves her for it too. And for suffering through Lizzie's reading and math lessons. Claire's glamorous sky-blue cats-eye glasses studded with rhinestones concentrating on Lizzie's chalk against the blackboard. The numbers and letters seem small and dangerous. For being in the plays they devised just to charge their parents a quarter. For helping Lizzie sell comic books and lemonade on the cold, gray New York street under the stenciled canopy of their building. For being the one and only witness.

Lizzie had wanted their mother to give Claire away when she was born.

"Couldn't you sell her today?" Lizzie pleaded.

"No, no one wanted her."

"You could give her away. Try the steps of the Metropolitan Museum tomorrow." Knowing everyone would be better off. Knowing there wasn't enough room.

"Okay, I'll try."

"Can't you call her Susan? Claire is such an ugly name."

Claire's first word was "light" with her chubby knob of a finger pointed at the yellow overhead fixture. Thinking it was something she could bite hard and chew. Hoping it would taste good. She watched with big brown eyes set in her face like dark jewels as Lizzie kicked shoe salesmen, her childish legs resembling scissors at the petals of their noses. Or Lizzie stood up and screamed in Temple, "Why do all the people stand up and sit down, stand up and sit down?" Lizzie helped her mother get a garden-sized washing machine by saying to Stan's parents: "Stan and Mother are fighting again over getting a washing machine." A big square, green one arrived the next morning like another child.

* * * * *

That night Lizzie, wanting to be held, holds herself in blankets. Sheets become a stranger's soft arms, the pillow, a kiss in another language. She can almost see her lamp stenciled with gray fish holding each other's tails in a line around the circumference with their thick curved lips. The darkness is always a dialogue waiting to begin. And she could hear a murmur of voices like the weight of stars she knows exist beyond the periphery of city lights. The apartment lights would keep her company in her sleeplessness. She would imagine someone eating or reading or thinking or just moving through their apartment restless as a lost mouse or ghost. Her parents grow louder in the mystery of their anger. And her consolation in the stars falls away, a scarf caught in the wind.

"Lillitoes," Lizzie whispers to Claire's bed. Claire had been rocking her head against the headboard until her bones seemed to collapse, falling asleep minutes ago. Perhaps that's why they could not hear the fighting before.

"Lillitoes," she says again and Claire sits bolt upright, winces into the darkness tainted with nearby apartment lights. Lizzie knows the words inexplicably make Claire cry and Claire can't explain what they mean.

They could hear fragments: "Well you did it"; "what about..."; "shove it." The bodiless voices rising and falling, slipping in and out of names, a long throat of moving water. Mother locks Stan outside the bedroom door and they hear the choreography of his screaming through the thin vertebrae of light under their bedroom door. "Let me in you goddamn bitch. Let me in now or I'll break down this door!" There is pounding and blood runs through Lizzie beating a vernacular music. She feels his anger blossoming against the door, on the skin of her small shoulders as though waves of emotion could lift her up and take her away. "There" and the thick wood cracks. Claire's eyes are disassembling the ceiling. Lizzie kneels at Claire's bed and holds her little sister's weightless hand. Lizzie thinks of the stars as people in their apartments looking down on them. She tries to think of names for her goldfish slicing the water like a dream: Goldie; Hazel; or Mildred. The cracking stops. She feels her heart speaking to her, saying "forget about it"—"please."

* * * * *

In the morning an eyebrow of light raises itself around the window shade. Stan has already gone to work at the clothing stores he owns. Lizzie and Claire tiptoe through the hall and branches of light to their parents' bedroom door. It seems unchanged. Lizzie's eyes question the surface and find nothing, no explanations to describe "broken." No trace of the tight, green fruit of their violence to hold in her hand, to pick apart, to eat and discard.

"Who's that?" Mother mumbles with a black sleeping mask crazy over her eyes. The sheets and blankets stir near the sisters' waists, some landscape changing for the next season.

"If that's you Lizzie you know I have a stick under my bed that I'll hit you with if you wake me up again."

Lizzie did actually find a long, thin board tucked into her bed underneath her pillow once. She knows she could outrun her, having done it before. She thinks about bruises with their blue edges budding across her skin. "Anything broken?"

"Nothing but your back if you don't leave right now."

* * * * *

Another day. From the big toy tin Claire plays with Barbie and Ken, out on a date in their red plastic car near Barbie's collapsible Dream Home. His hand inches stiffly around her shoulder. She is as cold as winter, eyes unmoving. It is a long afternoon. Ken takes off Barbie's clothes with his stiff, plastic arm. They fall onto the floor, piled like snow. Barbie and Ken roll around in the car rubbing their flesh-colored indentations against one another.

"That was good," Ken says distantly, naked. "When can I see you again?"

"You messed up my hair," Barbie says walking the steps to her open home with her clothes rolled in her straight out arms.

"Playing again?" Lizzie says, her utterances drifting past them like songs. She is not expecting an answer. Her feet draped over her flowered bedspread, flying over the carpet. She closes her English book, wedging the lined paper half

filled with sentences and a pencil into its thick spine.

Lizzie rewrites her life with poetry, the words "sun" and "moon" crawling across the lined pages. Crayon drawings line the stanzas like colored flowers against the horizon. She thinks "this is the city," the one where her mother models clothes, floating down a lighted runway. Her red fingernails counting taffeta, chiffon, silk, or crinoline like so much money. It was what Lizzie's grandmother had done in the garment district, meeting her husband there too. Stan says her face called to him, a rose among many flowers (Lizzie wonders what she really called him). She had been born a Jew but had her face chiseled "into a sculpture for God." The rare red kiss of her lips. Lizzie closes her eyes and listens to the eternal traffic, the noise of wings beating against the windows, the occasional headlight searching the walls for rest. There is a whole other world out there, uncoiling beneath Lizzie's fingertips, outside the incandescent glass. She squints. Mother enters with two dresses in her arms.

"Which one should I wear?" Mother asks turning and turning on her subtle S shaped legs in high heels. She is a carousel, holding up one red cowl neck dress then a white silk vee-neck one.

"The red one," Lizzie says picking up her homework and poetry and holding them against her chest, no longer interested in this game.

* * * * *

When Mother walks down the runway all eyes are turned toward her and the black linen dress she has on. Lights explode around her. The audience's talk eludes her, sizzling under bright flashes, a murmur that she can't distinguish from the announcer's voice, the shuffling of feet and arms, her own jaunty footsteps to the end and back. She saunters, bounces, loving the ridiculous outfits, the upturned faces trained on her as though she is an apparition, a prize. She sometimes discovers her photograph on the inside pages of a newspaper or magazine when she occasionally models. She cuts them out, savoring every detail, criticizing her own nose or the frozen arch of an eyebrow. In the back room nearly naked women are being quickly dressed. A tangle of long, thin arms and legs, underwear as second nature as skin, stick pins and bobby pins are scattered over chairs that no one has time to occupy. Lizzie and Claire are behind the movable racks. A red shirt is snapped from its hanger like a bird startled into flight. Mother spies the girls below the horizon of mirrors and fluorescent lights. They are unencumbered by the rush, the deadlines, the drama. They are playing cards. Go Fish. She nudges them onto the burgeoning stage one by one. The children of other models follow them. One rushes on, tottering, surprised by the iridescent light. She falls into the back room again, grateful, glad to be done. Beads of sweat deepen the color of Mother's peach shirt, clear dots gather over her upper lip. A watery necklace is suspended from

her neck. Lizzie is hot traipsing down the aisle, sweeping past the eyes at her feet, her aqua organdy dress sticking to her ribcage. She vaguely hears the announcer saying "a night out even for children should be entrancing. Notice the subtle flare beginning at the waist moving down to the hemline." The tone is monotonous, lulling. She pirouettes in the corners, skipping back through the curtains at her own pace, peels off the dress she is allowed to keep. She leaves a damp palm print on a chrome chair, presses her hand on a mirror and writes "Lizzie" with her fingertip in the languorous sweat. Now Mother, Claire, Lizzie and the other models and children have earned a free weekend at this hotel. This fun, large hotel resting in the Catskills where they can play and run up and down the hallways. Lizzie is proud of her mother's beauty.

* * * * *

Lizzie picks up the phone receiver in the kitchen and hears a man's disembodied voice say "I want to run my tongue down your long legs, entering every orifice of your body, licking your toes." It's not Stan.

"Yes? And...," Mother's words.

"Have you ever had anyone suck your toes?" Lizzie puts her hand over the receiver, giggling, fascinated. "Claire, come" she gestures, to the far end of the long kitchen. Beauty, the dog, is a lace around Claire's ankles. Claire's hair is a dark tangled cloud at the back of her head. She stopped combing her hair several years ago and wouldn't let anyone touch it. Lizzie holds the phone towards the ceiling and they both press their ears along one side.

"No, tell me more." Mother's words hover in the air.

"I like running my wet tongue along the nails, around the edges, licking between the toes. Taking the whole toe in my mouth." Claire grimaces at Lizzie as though she smells something disgusting.

Lizzie and Claire are laughing so hard soundlessly, that their palms jump off the receiver, the cord is shaking. Their other hands cover their mouths. Their smiles explode over their fingers and it is hard to swallow their laughter.

* * * * *

Reruns of "My Three Sons," "My Little Margie," "Andy Griffith," and "Leave It to Beaver" drift across the television. Household gods describing forms of family life. Highways of light moving up and down Lizzie and Claire's features. Claire is always obedient to Lizzie's directions to change channels. Beauty is a dark spot in the center of the carpet waiting to be loved.

The sound of their parents quarreling wanders from the kitchen, down the hall into their bedroom. It is high-pitched, almost screaming and crumbling like clay into the carpet. Unlike the usual evening arguments where Lizzie wants

to hold her breath until it is over. She prays those nights that neither Stan nor Mother will come into their room to dispute their side and reasons. Making believe she is asleep she is slow to answer them. It seems the same blood meanders down all their veins and stops just before the heart. They have stolen the moon and put their faces on it instead. They have buried the stars with all their needs. Some nights Lizzie and Claire sneak up to their parents' bedroom door with drinking glasses to their ears to catch the hiss of their words more clearly, curious and entertained by their struggle. Then they run barefoot back to their beds trying to make sense of the phrases hurled around that room, especially the infidelities thrown like rocks at each other. Then they finally fall into sleep, confetti after a parade.

But this time seems different, more shrill. They follow the sound cautiously, barefoot to the swinging kitchen door exhaling cigarette smoke through the cracks. The smoke and light straying in curlicues around their childish faces. Claire's nose, ears, hair are hidden in the bruise-colored shadows but Lizzie sees the tension, the secrets in her features, the anticipation. They push the kitchen door slightly ajar, their heads, zeroes stacked over one another. Smoke clouds hover in the bright light and their parents don't see them.

"I tell you there's no Lucy at the store," Stan says pacing, his feet ticking in squares on the linoleum floor. Lizzie thinks of adult hopscotch. He is wearing a suit. His cigarette is glowing near his lips, is pacing with him.

There is ice in Mother's eyes, eyebrows arched into blonde bridges, her red mouth tight as an asterisk. Her glassy voice, "You're such a lying son-of-a-bitch. You've taken my father's money for the business and gambled it away. You're never home and you expect me to believe you?"

"I'm always working." Stan stops to hunch his shoulders into the air, the cigarette smoke stops flowing, grows thicker around his dark hair. What do you expect? he is thinking. He is defensive and Lizzie sees he wants to fade into the walls like a shadow. He puts out the cigarette.

"My ass. Then why couldn't I get you yesterday when I called the Connecticut store? Why do you want me to become a redhead—like Lucy?" Her red dress glares in the kitchen light.

Beauty nuzzles the bottom of the door, her black fur brushing their legs tenderly, her eyes, a totem below Lizzie's and Claire's.

Stan looks at the floor, moving still, "Aw, fuck it," he says quietly to the cabinets. "Maybe there is something there. Not that I'm admitting..."

Mother becomes a burnt piece of paper flying near the ceiling. She disassembles her limbs, her face is fractured, lacerated. She grasps scissors, her arm glinting high, arching in the air. "You are a stupid asshole. I don't even want you with your small prick," and the scissors comes down toward the landscape of his body. It happens in an instant, so quickly. Lizzie and Claire and Beauty are frozen at the sliver between the door and its frame. They are caught in the drama as though watching a television program. He grabs her arm. "Who would want a poor schmuck like you." He is twisting her hand, their bodies intertwined, until there is a glitter of metal in his other hand.

She is back near the front door, her red lips sneering "And does Lucy know you are only this big?" She is waving her little pinkie.

* * * * *

In the soft geography of her bed Lizzie tries to dream about winter's glance over trees and grass, the weak, fading light. There is gray underneath everything, everywhere. The sidewalks, the sky, even the edges of clouds peeking out from the enormous buildings. Claire and Beauty sleeping in their separate beds.

The grainy, pungent odor opens the door and enters the room. Stan sits on the side of the bed. His clothes exuding smoke, his cigarette pack extending his breast pocket. He sighs deeply.

"Can't you protect me?" Lizzie whispers. Her flannel nightgown twisting with the sheets. She can hear her sleeping sister's refrain: me too, me too.

"What, Hon?" His mind is elsewhere. He barely knows where he is. He pats his suit breast pocket instinctively checking his pack.

"Can't you protect us?" Lizzie takes a breathful of Stan.

"What do you mean?" He mumbles, the words falling down a long set of stairs. He is not in this room. Then he wanders outside of it. He only cares for Mother's aching loveliness. The curves of her legs in high heels, the moment of lipstick on her mouth, eyes like deep, dark petals, cascades of wood-colored hair and her flirting way of talking, of drinking liquids, including scotch, first with the flick of her tongue in the glass. It is like having an armful of flowers, a bouquet, without thinking about the future, without thinking about the water they need or how they'll dry out and die. What to do with them. He just likes holding them. Nothing more, nothing less.

Lizzie turns away from Stan, stares momentarily at the corner filled with night, feels a pinch of fear resembling a paper cut at the possibility of vampires and then pretends she is asleep.

Darren Daniel Chase

Touching Morons

friends, choose to shut down
friends, wring the blood out of your socks
my friends, my friends. My friends.
There is danger in the body.

A grand thing! A blood swamp!
A two-ton underbelly!
I am a mess! Palms resting on the road kill
You! Are a health hazard

a broadcast of nature
animal political
kissing me full on the mystery
reading my palm with your tongue
growing tails of sweat
Of sparrows, of bread crumbs

Amy England

Translations from Buson: Evening

I

Omon no
Omoki tobira ya
Haru no kure

The Great Gate's
doors are heavy;
spring night coming down

II

Na no hana ya
Yellow rape flowers,
Tsuki wa higashi ni
Moon east
Hi wa nishi ni
Sun west

III

Kagiri aru
Mortal, leisurely, this life:
Inochi no hima ya
autumn evening
Aki no kure

Buson: Lightning and Variations

Inazuma ni
Koboruru oto ya
Take no tsuyu

In lightning
sound of drops:
bamboo's tears

inazuma=lightning (ina=rice plant, tsuma=wife, spouse)
koboruru=fall, drop, spill, overflow, run over, shed (tears)
oto=sound, noise
ya=!, :
take=bamboo
no='s
tsuyu=dew, dewdrops, tears, mortality, flimsiness

In lightning flash,

the frail bamboo—
patter of rain

When lightning

marries the rice field,
bamboo weeps

In rice-wife lightning
mortal bamboo
sound of dew

Pale Cristobal

For Jan Gorak

You were staked to the campus lawn, spouting heresies. The fire caught on gasoline, then wood, but didn't hurt you in your asbestos skin. Your voice the center of the fire, like Yaweh, yelling, Christopher Ricks, Tell me—

You were staked to the campus, fire caught, blazed, center of fire, like Yaweh.

Staked. Campus. Center of fire. Salamander yelling. Tell.

Valerie Martin

excerpt from SALVATION: SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS

TRIPTYCH:

SAINT FRANCIS RECEIVES THE STIGMATA FRAMED BY TWO SCENES ILLUSTRATING HIS HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE.

1. ON HIS OBEDIENCE

Obedience subjects a person
to everyone on earth,
And not only to people,
but to beasts as well
and to wild animals.
So that they can do what they like with him,
As far as God allows them.

—St. Francis of Assisi
The Praise of Virtues

They hadn't known where else to take him. The doctors forbade the Porziuncula; it was a malarial swamp. He had refused invitations to palaces and hermitages from every province and he was postponing Cardinal Ugolino who wanted him in Rieti where the Pope's doctors could treat him. Only Sister Chiara's suggestion pleased him. They would build him a shelter near her convent where, from behind the safety of their grill, the nuns could supervise his care.

His care wasn't complicated. He wanted to lie on the floor in the dark. Indeed there was no need even for a candle; he was entirely blind and so exhausted from preaching that he could only walk a few steps unaided. The Brothers gathered reeds and sticks and threw up three walls which Brother Rufino patched with mud until it looked like an enormous anthill growing out of the high stone wall of the convent. Inside it was sweltering and the heavy cloth they hung over the doorway to keep out the mosquitoes made it hotter still. Pacifico and Rufino brought in a low table which they placed against the back wall; Leone borrowed a stool and a jug from Bishop Guido, who agreed grudgingly, as it was his opinion that Francesco should stay in his house where he could have proper nourishment. If he ate the poor stuff the sisters ate, the Bishop complained, he would be dead in a week.

Chiara supplied a mat and, because he was so ill, she begged him to accept a pillow she had sewn and stuffed with goose feathers. He kept it one night, then sent it back to her with a warning that it was stuffed with devils, he had not slept one wink. Brother Angelo found a flat rock in the road which suited Francesco perfectly. He was not going to start sleeping on pillows.

He wanted to be left alone, especially at night, but he had scarcely been in his new refuge a week when the visitors began. He heard them scratching in the walls and in the thatch overhead, then he felt the first one rush across his legs. This was not to be a resting place, but a place of further trials. He heard one, then another dropping from the low ceiling, scurrying frantically, though there was certainly no danger, this way and that. One bumped into his bare feet, then, with small, sharp claws, pushed past him. He brushed away another burrowing in the folds of his tunic, but this was a mistake, for the frightened creature rushed up across his chest and into his beard. Francesco cried out into the darkness, but only the mice heard him. There were more and more of them. He sat up and waved his arms over his head. Tiny, swift claws raced up his spine like a chill, then he felt the soft brush of fur against his ear. He fell back upon his mat, pressing his lips together to keep in a shout. The darkness around him was astounding, as dense as lead, and the stifling heat drew streams of perspiration from every pore. He could feel it pooling in the hollow between his clavicles and running off his brow into his ear. All he could hear was the sound of the nervous creatures, scratching and jumping, giving sudden high-pitched cries. How busy they were, swarming over him. One was still, perched atop his left knee, another was tearing at the mat between his feet. They would eat the mat out from under him. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," he said softly. And there was his own voice in the darkness, as reassuring as the caress of an old friend. Louder this time, he sent up his petition. "God be merciful to me, a sinner." He threw up one hand to bat away the small, sinewy body that he sensed was there, falling from the thatch above his face.

In the morning the friars come down from Assisi, down past the field of grain—through the olive grove, the old familiar path. Leone has half a loaf of bread, Angelo carries a leather tankard full of pig's foot broth that Bishop Guido has pressed upon him. Masseo has lashed a ceramic pitcher to his side with his waist cord. He will use it to carry water from the convent well. Already the sun is blazing and the parched, cracked earth beneath their bare feet is hot. The air, dry and acrid, burns in their nostrils. In a voice as flat as the drone of insects flitting over their shaggy heads, Rufino recites the morning antiphon and the others join in their turns, praising God routinely, for they are too tired and dispirited for anything more. The Brotherhood, once the source of so much joy and pride to its founder, is in such disarray that all who care for him shudder to

speak of it. They keep the rumors from him. They do the bidding of Brother Elias, but they stick to the old rule, begging their own bread while he is conversing with his cook on the best method of stewing pigeons. He is solicitous of Francesco's health, but is he not most anxious to know the exact moment when he will be able to drop the pretense of caring? These four, Masseo, Angelo, Leone, Rufino, Francesco's companions in the early days when they were driven from the town by outraged shopkeepers, when they took shelter in the woods and lived like resourceful animals with spirits as high as the treetops, now are tired, middle-aged men, trudging along in the sultry morning air with heavy hearts full of suspicion. They cross the bare patch of ground that borders the convent, then go single file between the cypress trees and the cool stone wall. Just ahead is the dark lump of the lean-to, jutting out from the smooth, pale stone like an ugly wart on a fair complexion. Leone arrives first at the doorway, but he does not go in. Instead he looks back at his companions with a smile of surpassing sweetness, surprising in a face as rough and coarse as his. He nods towards the door. They know why; they hear it too. Francesco has a strong, clear voice, and he is singing at full volume. They do not recognize the tune or the words: "For she is useful, humble, precious, and pure." They gather close, exchanging amused, indulgent looks. "Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire, by whom you light up the night, for he is fair and merry, mighty and strong."

So he is happy here, in the place they have made for him. Despite his illness, his blindness, the constant pain in his head, he is singing as cheerfully as a morning lark. Masseo steps forward and pushes the curtain aside. Light floods the dark, miserable hovel. He lets out a soft cry of dismay and backs away, holding the cloth so that the others looking past him can see what he has seen. Francesco lies upon his back, his arms folded over his chest, his hands partly hidden in his beard. His eyes are open, and though he cannot see he appears to be looking right at them. He has not stopped singing; his beautiful voice pours out to them, framing the praises he has passed the night in composing. The mice are everywhere. They cover the floor, squirm into the cracks in the walls, leap frantically from the table, trying to escape the light. Two dive into the sleeves of the singer, one jumps from his chest to his forehead, then rushes out the door past the four horrified friars, who step gingerly out of his path. "Francesco," Angelo exclaims.

Francesco breaks off his singing and with difficulty, raises himself up onto his elbows. A mouse darts across his hand. "Angelo," he calls out cheerfully. "At last you are here. I want to send for Brother Pacifico at once. I have composed a wonderful new song and I want him to write it down for us all."

Giotto
STIGMATA
Upper Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi

2. St. Francis Receives the Stigmata

> ...it was wonderful to see in the middle of his hands and feet, not indeed the holes made by the nails, but the nails themselves, formed out of his flesh and retaining the blackness of iron.
>
> Thomas of Celano
> *First Life of St. Francis*

> Our lexicon associates visions with mysticism, irrationality, occultism, impracticality and madness. From our point of view the visionary is a person who sees what isn't there; his visions separate him from reality. In the middle ages, visions defined reality.
>
> Carroly Erickson
> *The Medieval Vision*

Everyday Francesco goes farther from the shelter and closer to the edge. When he brings the food and water, Leone sees him there, perched on the rocky ledge, his arms outstretched at his sides, his face lifted toward the intense clear blue of the sky. Leone wants to speak, to warn him back, but he has promised not to, so he leaves the bread and water on the rocky outcropping near the shelter and goes back down, filled with anxiety, to the others. To get there he has to cross the flimsy log bridge they have made, which fills him with terror, for if he slips and falls into the chasm below, he does not doubt that he will shatter on the rocks like a clay jug. He goes on hands and knees, clutching the rough log and praying every inch of the way. Then he scrambles along the downhill path, clinging to bushes and thin saplings that bend one to another, handing him safely down like sympathetic friends over the treacherous decline. As he hurries across the clearing where they have made their leafy huts, Masseo and Angelo come out to meet him. They sit together on the hard ground in the shade of the enormous beech. The purple leaves rustle overhead in the thin, chilly breeze. Masseo shares out the fresh loaf the soldiers brought that morning. There are beans and a cabbage as well; the Count is too generous.

"Did you see him?" Angelo asks.

Leone nods, chewing his bread. He is uncertain whether to voice his fears. They are supposed to be meditating upon Christ's suffering in the garden, deserted by his friends, branded a criminal, certain of betrayal. "He is weeping," he says when he has swallowed his bread.

Masseo and Angelo exchange guarded looks.

They came to this mountain in high spirits. Francesco had accepted Count Orlando's offer without the usual reservations about the hospitality of the wealthy and powerful. The wise Count had not offered them a seat at his table, soft beds and polished floors; he did not seek, as so many did, to make house pets of the friars. Rather he offered them a rugged wilderness in which to pray and fast, a place uninhabited because inhospitable. Francesco was convinced it was an invitation from God.

The plan was a simple one. They would walk for four days to this place, build their usual huts and make a lent of the forty days from the Assumption to the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. Francesco's sight was failing but he was determined to go on as if it made no difference. He held his hands out before him, stumbling in the road between Masseo and Leone, singing the Laudes in his clear, strong voice. But early on the second day he fell to his knees in the road and admitted that he would accept the services of a donkey if some farmer could be found to make the loan. Angelo and Masseo went ahead, leaving Francesco and Leone in the narrow shade of a bay tree. Leone could see their destination, the stark, gray mountain of La Verna rising sharply from the green floor of the valley, the peak partially obscured by a thin, white cloud, pierced through and held in place by a dark green swath of pines. It would be cooler there.

The farmer Angelo and Masseo found was a querulous fellow who never stopped talking and complaining. They piled Francesco onto his donkey and continued on the road, but there was no more singing, only the repetitive drone of this tiresome man. The donkey trudged along sleepily, hanging his head, his big ears lowered as if to close out the sound of his master's endless nagging. The man upbraided the world, from the Emperor to the crows which rose up like black waves over the dry fields as they passed. At length he shouted up to Francesco, who rocked about miserably on the plodding creature's uncomfortable spine, "Are you really that Brother Francesco everyone is talking about?"

Francesco smiled down upon him, clutching a few strands of the short matted mane to steady himself. "Yes," he replied.

"I want to give you some advice," the man continued. "And that is to be as good as people say you are."

"Stop a moment," Francesco called out. Masseo turned in his tracks, grasped the donkey's halter, and brought the procession to an abrupt halt. Francesco clambered down to the dusty road and got to his knees before the farmer. Then, to the astonishment of the rustic and the amusement of his Brothers, he bent over the dung-encrusted clogs and kissed them repeatedly, thanking the fellow for this valuable and welcome admonition. The man stood with his mouth open, his sweating, dirt-streaked brow furrowed with concern, so thoroughly confused that for several moments he could find nothing to say.

This was in the old spirit, and when the farmer insisted on helping Francesco back onto the donkey, the brothers gathered around, offering encouragement and praise. They had not gone far before the farmer reverted to his litany of grievances, but his heart was no longer in it; he hesitated, digressed, and even imagined excuses for his enemies. Francesco had disarmed him, as he disarmed the world, and they were once again the cheerful friars who would save the world by their example.

After they arrived at the mountain and Count Orlando came out with his

soldiers to welcome them, Francesco's mood darkened. The first night they stayed together, exhausted from the long trip and content to sleep peacefully in the huts the soldiers had helped them put up near the beech tree. At dawn Francesco wandered off, as was his habit, in search of some secluded place to pray. He did not appear again until sext and stayed only long enough to receive communion from Leone. He hardly spoke, appeared, they agreed, distracted. He kept his head tilted toward the forest, as if he was listening to someone talking there in the shadows just beyond the clearing. He refused the food they offered him and cautioned them against the Count's hospitality. "The more we cling to Lady Poverty," he advised, "the more will we be honored." Then he went back, touching the trunks of the trees as he passed, pausing once to stare at a rock, then stepping gingerly around it, back into the forest.

The time passed. It grew cooler, the days were shorter, the nights were black. Francesco wanted a new shelter in a place he had found, high up, near a cliff where the view on a clear day drew the eye across the green valleys and low hills all the way to the sea. He could not see it, but he liked the exposure of the place, the way the rock thrust into a void, so that he seemed to be standing alone in the sky. He would stay there for the rest of the time.

Something was going to happen, he explained. He didn't know what. He would see no one, talk to no one, only Leone was to come twice a day, to sing matins and bring him a little food. The feast of the Exaltation of the Cross was near; he wanted to contemplate nothing but Christ's passion; he wished to enter into it here, they must all enter into it, each in his own way, as they had never done before. He prayed to experience himself the physical agony of the crucifixion as well as the full redeeming force and intensity of the love through which that suffering was so willingly embraced, that passion in which joy and sadness, pain and ecstasy were inextricably commingled.

They did, as they always did, what he asked. When they had finished the shelter they left him there, and Leone crawled across the log twice a day.

"Did he eat anything?" Angelo asks.

"No," Leone replies.

Francesco stands alone on the bare ledge, his arms outstretched, his palms turned up, his head dropped forward so that his chin nearly touches his breastbone. The muscles in his arms vibrate, protesting the strain of this unnatural position, but he is not listening to his arms. His lips move ceaselessly, forming rote words, but no sound comes out. His eyes are closed.

Before him, jutting up and out like the prow of a ship is a narrow raised slab of stone. The sun has set, the valley far below has faded from green to gray, but it is not yet night. A bank of ominous clouds is poised before the mountain side, gathering force. Francesco doesn't need to see to know a storm is approaching. He can feel the cool caress of the freighted air on his face and neck, he can smell

and taste the moisture in it and hear the urgent breeze whispering through the grass tufts lodged in the rocks near his feet. Like the grasses, he is rooted and patient, a small, frail figure in his rags and length of rope, his bare toes splayed against the stones. There is nothing tenuous about him; he will not move.

A drop strikes his brow, another smashes against his palm, sharp and cold. Behind him, from the branches of a stunted laurel there issues a strangled cry, then he hears the rush of wings as a hawk hurtles past him out over the edge and up into the heavy, brooding , darkening mass of the clouds. He lifts his head and opens his eyes—the hawk has startled him—but he makes no more movement than this. He can feel rather than see the big wings snap in, then spread wide as the creature catches a powerful up-draft and disappears into the storm, into the dark center of it where Francesco is trying hard to send his own soul. "Who are you?" he says.

More drops answer him. His lips are moistened, his burning eyes are bathed, icy water soaks his beard and slips down his neck in a thin stream. He has lost all feeling in his arms. A sudden gust whirls around him, pressing the damp wool of his tunic against his legs and chest. He closes his eyes and listens. The wind hisses like angry voices whispering, but beyond it he can hear other sounds; the world is far from quiet. Small animals, rabbits, chipmunks, and lizards scurry among the stones and in the undergrowth of scrubby bushes, searching for shelter. The thin trees creak and groan and their branches scrape together, making a hollow, bony sound like a skeleton getting up from a long sleep. The raindrops spatter against the hard ground, more and more of them, and he hears each separate small explosion, as if a great mocking crowd stood all around him, tapping their tongues against their teeth repeatedly, making no effort at words.

If the world mocks him, if even his own brothers have no use for him, doesn't their contempt only kindle the flame of his love for them?

He lifts his face to receive the full fury of the storm. It is dark now, there is no light from the sun, the moon, the stars, nothing but a great blackness pouring down a cold torrent, like a rain of arrows from the bows of a million archers. There are as many drops as there are stars, it is as if the stars have turned to drops and the wind gathers them and flings them against him in sheets. "Who am I?" he asks, but he can't hear his own voice and cold water fills his mouth so that he is forced to swallow. He stares up into the blackness. As far as he can tell his arms have frozen into place, nor can he feel his feet which are down there, somewhere, in the icy pools that have gathered among the rocks. He sways with the force of the wind but otherwise he does not move. His courage does not fail.

In the camp below him the four friars struggle to hold their rickety shelters together, but the branches fly off in every direction and the vines girding the walls snap like bits of thread. A section of mud-daubed wall collapses on Brother Angelo and his companions rush to pull him out. They shout to one another over the storm. Angelo is not hurt, only God has told him to lie down for a moment. They are laughing and shouting as they rush into the woods,

clinging to the trees to keep from falling.

In the morning, in the still, bright air that follows the storm, Leone will find Francesco seated on the rock outside his shelter, wet, shivering, entirely absorbed in wrapping a few strips of wool he has torn from his breeches around the wounds in his bleeding feet.

3. On His Humility

> According to the advice of that doctor it was necessary to close all the veins from the ear up to the eyebrow, though according to the opinion of other doctors it would be quite the wrong treatment. They were right; it did him no good. Likewise another doctor pierced his ears and yet did him no good.
>
> *Scripta Leonis*

> Let each man glory in his own sufferings and not in another's.
>
> St. Francis of Assisi

Cardinal Ugolino will be delayed no longer. He has been in Rieti for weeks, the Lord Pope's own physicians are in attendance, and he is certain they can relieve the torment of Brother Francesco's eye disease. His message invokes the vow of Holy Obedience—this is not a suggestion or an invitation. They are to leave San Damiano at once.

The four friars arrive at the city on a market day, having walked three days across the wide green valley, stopping at night to rest and to wash their sore feet, begging their food from travellers they encounter on the road, but since they left Spoleto, these have been few and they are weak with hunger. The narrow streets overflow with soldiers and merchants, clerks and clerics, servants and slaves, all in some way attached to the papal court, having come up from Rome with their Master to escape the pitched battles in the streets. They upbraid one another in the rapid dialect of their city, which the friars, passing among them, grimace to hear. Brother Francesco keeps his eyes down. His face is concealed by the woven reed hat the brothers have made for him, to protect his weeping eyes from the sun. He keeps his hands hidden in his sleeves and his feet are wrapped in woolen socks and protected by the leather slippers Sister Chiara has made for him, which slap against the stones giving him a queer, duck-footed gait. His three friends gather close around him, for he cannot see well enough to find his own way, and if he is recognized he will draw a crowd. The world is not indifferent to him now, but he is too ill to preach. The silent, anxious group makes its way, dodging the stamping hooves of the horses, through the boisterous, pushing crowds, the clamorous barking of dogs, the cries of street vendors, past the wide portico of the Cathedral where two black friars, arguing about some fine point of faith, fail to notice them, along a narrow alley where a family of cats drowses in the last rays of the sun, to the heavy bolted doors of the Cardinal's residence. Here they give their names to the guards. At the words, "Brother Francesco of Assisi," the two soldiers drop their studied, professional hauteur, and peer closely beneath the strange headgear at the downcast face of this famous personage, who stands quietly dabbing his eyes with the strip of rag he carries now wherever he goes. "Il Santo," they agree, and in the next moment they throw open the heavy doors and usher the shabby, weary, hungry friars into the Cardinal's reception room. A servant, occupied in lighting the vast

array of candles in sconces ranged along the walls and on every available surface, is dispatched to inform the Cardinal that his guests have arrived.

Soon, from within the palace, they hear coming toward them, evidently in conversation with someone who is not given the opportunity to respond, the familiar booming voice of the prelate. Francesco removes his hat and turns to face the doorway. He cannot see the voluble Cardinal, who appears at the far end of the marble hall, nor the thin, rat-faced man, dressed oddly in a wide collar of white wool, an embroidered doublet, a scarlet cape, and pointed shoes, who trots along at the Cardinal's side, but he knows, they all know, that this is the doctor, trained, equipped, and eager to try the fortitude of a saint.

Francesco is seated upon a rough wooden bench in a low-ceilinged, mud-thatched room, his face bathed in the glow of the coals burning in a portable brazier near his feet. His companions stand near him, their wide, fearful eyes fixed upon the doctor who crouches before the fire arranging his various irons upon the grate. He is dressed more soberly today, as befits the seriousness of the business, though his shoes are embroidered and absurdly pointed and his short red doublet is glossy and so stiff it rustles as he rises to his feet, informing his patient that he will proceed with the operation when the irons are as white as the coals.

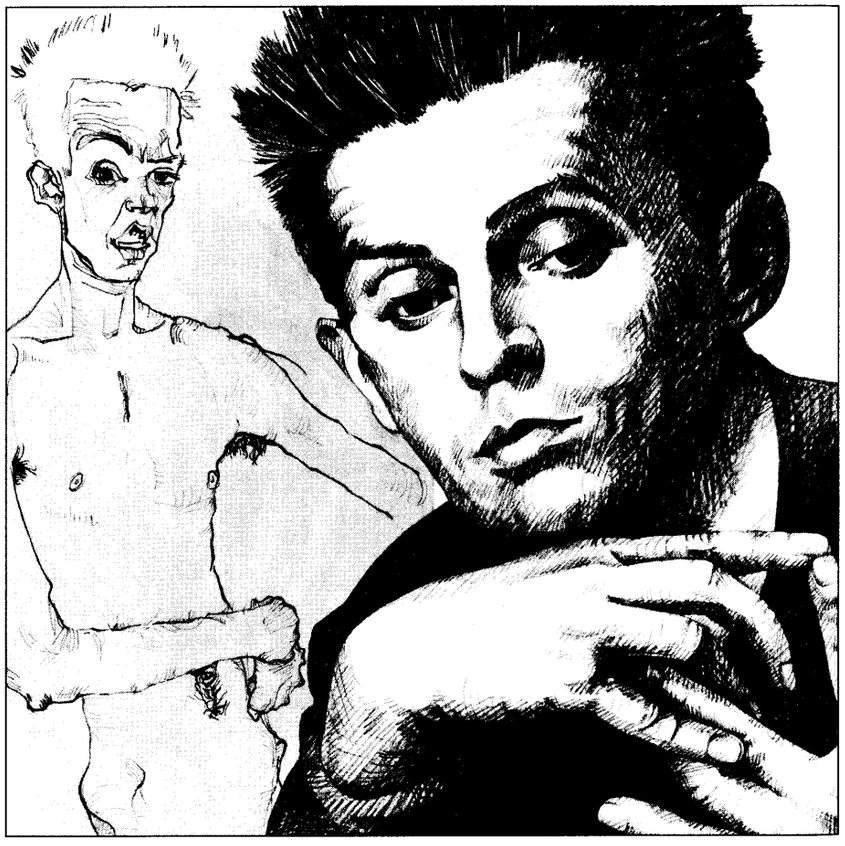
They did not stay long at the Cardinal's palace. Word of Francesco's arrival quickly spread through Rieiti and the populace showed no mercy. They crowded about the doors and windows and shouted his name. The boldest slipped past the guards and ran madly about like mice in a maze, throwing open doors and snatching whatever they could find, bits of food they would claim he had tasted, a cushion he had surely sat upon, a napkin he must have pressed to his suppurating eyes. Ugolino was good natured; it was only their faith, after all, that drove them to such excesses, but when one young ruffian was relieved of two of the Cardinal's gold and coral spoons, even he agreed that the wisest course might be to follow Francesco's wishes and move him to the hermitage at Fonte Colombo, where the doctor could attend him without interference and the Brothers would be able to care for him in his convalescence.

So they had brought him here, just as the sun was setting, disguised in a cloak the Bishop provided. When he proved too weak to walk, Brother Masseo and Brother Bernardo joined their hands to make a kind of chair, and in this way they carried him, as they had when they brought him down from La Verna. He was subdued, terrified, as they all were, of the ordeal to come. Being branded by the doctor would be pain of a different order from that of his rapture on La Verna, where he had been branded by Christ. This time there would be no passion, no ecstasy, no consummation, only ordinary suffering at the hands of a man who had only suffering to offer. But if it would give him some relief from the agony of his eyes, he had admitted to the Cardinal, he would endure it, and for the love of God, he would gladly endure it.

The doctor turns from his irons to examine once again the enflamed, weeping eyes of his patient. At San Damiano they had applied poultices of feverfew and marjoram, which drew down quantities of pus, as if they opened a floodgate. This was, the doctor explained, exactly the wrong treatment for such a disease. These were butchers, not doctors, and the famous Brother Francesco was lucky they had not killed him. The proper course was obvious: as the vessels exuded pus, they must be sealed, not irritated and drawn. The doctor has seen and cured many such cases and has no doubt that in a few weeks his patient will be singing not God's praises but his own, all over the countryside.

The coals begin to crumble and the embers glow and hiss. Francesco bends toward the brazier until he can feel the heat on his forehead. "My Brother Fire," he says. "Be courteous to me at this hour, because I loved you formerly and still love you, for the love of the Lord, who created you." The doctor, rolling back his sleeves, eyes his patient doubtfully. Francesco, absorbed in his address, continues, "I beseech our Creator who made you, to temper your heat now so that I may be able to bear it." At these last words he raises his eyes to the Brothers huddled behind the doctor. He has calmed his own fear, but a panic grips their hearts and when the doctor lifts the first iron, one by on they slip from the room. The silence that follows as they gather outside the door is more unnerving than a cry of pain. A nauseating smell of burning flesh floods into the narrow chamber, filling their mouths and nostrils so that they clap their hands over their faces, and gaze at one another in horror. Brother Rufino drops to his knees, then, in a swoon, flat onto his face on the hard earth floor. Brother Leone sobs openly, calling on Christ to grant their holy Father's humble petition. The smell grows more intense, they cannot catch a breath without swallowing it, so they flail and gasp helplessly like fish flopping on the shore, gulping poisonous air.

In the room the doctor lays the iron back upon the grate and turns to examine his handiwork. Francesco does not move, he has not moved, has not spoken, clenched his fists, cried out, or wept. He gazes placidly into the middle air with the vacant listening attitude of the blind. The bright red flesh between his ear and eyebrow still sizzles and at the edges of the wound thin strips curl away, blackened by the heat of the iron. Carefully the doctor bends over him and removes a few hairs from the singed brow. "Now for the other side," he says.



Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Egon Schiele)
12 x 12 inches
Pencil, Ink, Gesso on Paper

Rodney Jones

In Memory of Al Cohn, the Humanities Librarian

How clear it is in Al Cohn's dark blue rage
That he is not here, only December again,
Dark blue, and Al Cohn gone, whose eyes
Were fixed in a thousand books. How clear
That something of Shelley must be saved,
A few of the sonnets like spice for the meat
Of everything that is forgotten, a few
Footnotes of what men did to rescue Herrick
Or Christopher Smart. How clear that
Someone must keep inventory now that tv
And movies obliterate books, and no
One reads the text that is not written,
Which is only the day coming clear beyond
The bare blue spaces among the limbs
Of the oaks in front of the library. The scholars
Wince as they come down the steps,
Polyglots and etymologists, afficionados
Of Berkeley and Raleigh. One squirrel
Greets them, a kind of institutional rat,
Fat and skinny at once, bobtailed, bedraggled
From the first snow. They are not all
Jargon-meisters and gender-benders,
Neologizing, braying the third-hand,
Fourth-rate exegesis. They are not all
Amateur necrophiliacs. And I thought
Of them today because a student wrote
"Swell guys," and another student asked,
"Isn't that wrong, using Old English in a poem?"
How little we have in common, yet the dark
Blue rage of Al Cohn is something, isn't it?
It is his spirit leading the scholars. One has been
Clarifying a misinterpretation of a riddle
Spliced into the second scene of the third act
Of a bad play from the seventeenth century.
One has noted a forgery in The Book of Common Prayer.
Some are desparate and many are indolent.

One clutches a Xerox of a washed-out script
That she will spend two summers verifying
As the indisputable handwriting of Samuel Pepys.
For these few perhaps there is no hope.
Stories and poems will always be examples
Of something else, cold and far off, sham
Coins of the primal egotistical wilderness,
Bridges a seminar must cross in its biweekly
Migrations to the country of theory.
It will be five years before they ask, "Where
Is the soul? What is it to be alive?
Which way to the egress?" But for the true
Reader, the one who vanishes into Joyce,
The one who admires Hart Crane only for the sound,
And the one who quit medical school
To spend a year washing dishes and reading Whitman,
If there is a principle angel, it is not tenure
But Al Cohn' exactness, his rage for humility.

For Alexis

I dug a ditch three feet deep and eighteen inches wide
From where the roots had broken through
The Orangeburg pipe and clogged the line

To the end of the drive, and turned and dug
At a perpendicular out a ways and down
To tie in with the junction at the sewer main.

With a shovel and pick, with my sore back
And poet's hands, I accomplished this:
A narrow hole and deep, but undercut at the edges—

The chirt kept sliding there. It was like a problem
With law or philosophy. The more
I threw out, the more kept pouring in.

Better the next afternoon when you joined me,
Sweating out your first day home from college
When others might have slept or shopped.

I could not see you, the hole had grown
So vast by then, but heard your rock can
Rattling in the depths, and an occasional

Shit or goddam, or an allusion to *The Inferno.*
Did I seem remote? Father was never so proud
Of daughter. We finished excavating by dark,

Snow-clouds rolling toward us from the prairie.
That night we were like a Dorothea Lange family,
Hoarding water, using buckets instead of toilets.

Now in late spring I come back to our work,
And the pipe you fitted by cheating at the joints,
Silent in the underground, taking crap, still holding.

The Perpetual Motion Machine

With copper pillaged from busted radios
And shorted-out appliances in the dump,
I would wire the transformer. A generator

Could be bought. I had the motor
Of a cast-off washing machine. I had
My inherited blue and red 24 inch

Ladies' Schwinn propped on its handlebars
Between the garage and the pecans.
I had the fire and the book

On Michael Farraday and Guglielmo Marconi.
The way it would work is this:
The front wheel would attach

To the generator, and when the bike
Began to roll, the front wheel would turn
The generator, which would send

A current swelling through the transformer
Into the motor, which would turn
The back wheel. It would go on and on.

That was the idea. Of my other thoughts
That year, one was of a brain without a body,
That cognition might exist, in leaves,

In bits of glass struck by lightning,
That it might occur like my own life,
Secret, dark, incapable of expression.

Another was of bodies without brains,
Real bodies, and so many of just the few—
I do not know where any of them are now.

The Mind of the Lead Guitarist

The boy under the tree in Sally Mack Woods is wasting time,
    which is said to pass,
But which seems to him, as the dark gathers, to ooze and trickle,
    with now and then
A squirrel, faintly pattering in the indeterminate distance,
    until there is only
A ticking from far off, like water in a cave. The darkness
    is said to fall,
But he sees how somberly it rises from the fallen leaves.
    He thinks
Of the air inside of the rocks, that if he had a guitar, it would be
    a black Flying V or sunburst Les Paul,
That, if this were acid instead of pot, he could hear the wheels
    cracking in the voices of the owls.
He thinks the tree comes up out of the side of the mountain
    like a gang of kids
Running from a nightwatchman, and one, who wears an old
    pilot's cap,
Says, "Let's split up," which marks the place where
    the branches divide.
It is the place in the lecture where the teacher does not know
    the answer and says,
"There are three aspects of that issue that I would like to discuss."
    It is the place
In "Layla" where Clapton and Allman break into separate melodies,
    a riff at a time,
And farther on, the melodies grow even more various, approach
    manic chaos
For several bars, before nodding off and falling again
    into the unifying theme.
The boy has heard that music is not sound, but an engraving
    of silence,
That silence is defined by what precedes and follows it,
    and only in this way
Do the moments differ from each other. Meanwhile, choices
    may play some part:

To wear a switchblade earring instead of a cross; to get
a tattoo of Lenny Bruce;
To change his name to RAM. Tired of being young,
he despairs of love,
And reveres the loneliness of thieves and suicides,
but the tree is heavy on his back.
He thinks, if the tree were a guitar, it would be a '63 Telecaster,
and as he walks back
Down the mountain, he plays it, hunching through the trailer court,
bending the invisible notes.
Let the ones pulling back curtains think what they will.
It is the beautiful
Tune of his ego that he plays. Neither does it matter that
they do not hear.
He is already angry at posterity for forgetting his fame.

Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1996 – 7 (Lee Krasner)
12 x 12 inches
Oil on Carved Hydrocal Stone

John E. Keegan

BIRTHMARKS

My twin sister Tara and I were twelve years old the winter the Snoqualmie rose so high it floated our trailer. Dad must have seen it coming because he tied both ends of the trailer to the pine trees and threw car bumpers and boulders on the roof to weight it down. I didn't think it'd float anyway because of all the holes. Rats came in and out at will to nibble on bread crusts or scraps of bologna left out. One night when we came home from Leon's place there was a badger inside and Mom wouldn't go in till Dad had beat its head in with a tire iron.

Tara said floods were supposed to wash away people's sins, something she'd learned at the Bible Camp Dad made us go to before we bought the trailer and moved to Carnation, Washington.

"You're wrong," I told her. "It's punishment. God's pissing on us."

"Then why's he doing it just on the people out Tolt Hill Road?"

"Cause we're too stupid to live anywhere else."

I remembered us wiping our breath off the bathroom window with toilet paper, rubbing so hard the paper squeaked, as we watched the water rise against the barbed wire strands on the fenceposts. Planks floated by and buckets and bushes, roots and all. The truck tire Dad had hung with baling wire from a bent over tree lassoed the corner of someone's porch steps and the river kept pushing until it finally uprooted the tree and then the steps and the tree floated on down until they bounced off the side of the Granger barn and kept going, to the ocean I guessed.

"This river doesn't go to the ocean," Tara said.

"Everything goes to the ocean."

"Not so."

"Well, where does it go then?"

She didn't have an answer, which was the way a lot of our discussions ended. I didn't have the answer either, but I'd learned from watching our dad that you didn't have to. We were supposed to be identical, except Tara had a purple birthmark on her neck that looked like a tongue. Mine was almost the same except it was on my butt.

Mom had been gone for over a year by then. Ran off with somebody I figured had to be Dad's cousin Leon because he stopped coming around about the same time. So we were home alone when the water started seeping through the holes and the cracks in the trailer. There wasn't any phone. I mean we had a phone, but it wasn't connected to anything. Too expensive, Dad had said, but I thought the real reason was because he kind of liked us being alone after all the visitors we had when Mom was still there. Tara got all panicky and started bawling when the water came in. For some reason, her bawling made me feel less afraid and I just calmly started putting my socks and underwear into those crinkly plastic Safeway bags. I figured they were waterproof. I put my shoes in the bags too, but Tara insisted on wearing hers.

"I don't want to step on any nails or dead animals," she said.

When we stepped outside, the water came up to our knees, but it was moving real slow. It was colder than the rain, and after about a hundred feet the bottom half of my legs went numb. I carried three bags, two for me and one for Tara, slung them over my shoulder so they wouldn't get wet in case they weren't waterproof. The water was dirty, but it covered up the rot smell from the Granger's compost, which he'd made out of dung from the cows that were standing forlorn in the field as we passed. They looked at us like we were the humane society, and I whistled for them to follow, thinking I could break open the barbed wire and let them out, but they just stood there with their milk bags hanging in the river. We walked to the school bus this way every morning so I had the road memorized, I thought, until I stepped into the ditch and had to slap the bags into the water to catch my balance. One of Tara's books flipped out face open into the water.

"I knew it'd be mine," she said.

"You want it? I'll save it."

She bit her upper lip in a way that made me think of vampires. "I read it already."

"Then why did you make me carry it?"

We hiked to the Shell Food Mart where the lot was already full of cars lined up for gas and people inside were buying junk food like it was the end of the world. The guy on duty let us change into dry clothes in the storage room behind the coolers where they kept boxes of soup, pop, all kinds of beer, and candy bars. I'd never seen that many *Almond Joys* and copped six off the top row and closed the lid.

"Jesus, Lizzie, what kind of gratitude is that?"

"He don't care. I take 'em off the rack all the time.'

"You're just like Dad."

"Dad likes *Milky Ways.*"

We stayed for three nights and four days at Nadine Rayburn's, a widow who wore her hair in a bun and could have passed for the woman who rode the bicycle in *Wizard of Oz* and turned out to be one of the witches. She knew us from the Lutheran church where we always showed up the night after a big fight at home or whenever Dad felt repentant for one thing or another. Nadine's house was immaculate. Everything rested on a doilie—the lamps, the flower vases, even the Bible with gold pages in the center of the coffee table. I knew that Dad had been in Nadine's group to deal with his drinking. Judging from

the apple pie neatness of her bungalow, Nadine had to be one of the healers.

Every time something came on the radio about the floods, she'd turn it up.

"Shh. They're talking about the river."

Someone from the Army Corps of Engineers was talking. "*The faster waters are scouring the ground and we're asking people not to disturb any artifacts or bones they find. Call your local law enforcement office or the state archeologist.*"

"Did you see *Deliverance*?" I asked Nadine when the radio went to sports.

"Did your parents let you see that? Horrible movie."

Tara and I had seen it at the night day care in Moses Lake. "Tara closed her eyes when they did it to the chubby guy."

"Did not."

"Yes you did. I saw you."

"Anyone who didn't have nightmares after that" Nadine said, "has ice water in their veins."

"See, Lizzie?"

Dad stayed at Nadine's too. She fixed us baked lasagna with garlic bread the first night and pork chops and applesauce the next. She even offered Dad red wine in a small juice glass, which surprised me, but he made a point of sipping it, and he didn't turn over any furniture or throw dishes. At the end of each helping he wiped a clean piece of bread across his plate like a sponge and bit off the edge.

"Ricky Lee, you eat like a teenager," Nadine said.

"Sorry."

"I forget what it's like having a man around."

Dad was still very muscular for someone in his thirties, probably because the jobs he liked required him to hammer and lift heavy things. His latest job was unloading ships for the Port Authority, where he'd started out graveyard and worked his way up to days. Living in the same trailer, I'd seen him naked lots of times. He had muscle compartments in every part of his body and whichever way he bent or stooped different ones rippled and creased. Even his penis was sometimes taut when he woke up and stumbled into the bathroom in the morning. Nadine was no different than other women I'd seen study Daddy's physique. The way she let her hair down each night after dinner while we were watching TV I figured there had to something going on, but Dad was always on the couch in the morning.

"See," I told Tara, "they're not sleeping with each other."

"Duh. You don't have to wake up with someone to be sleeping with them."

'Anyway, Nadine's too old.'

"Nadine has better taste, you mean."

"Nadine would die to do it with him."

"You're as self deluded as he is."

"You don't even know what that means."

"Oh, yes, I do. You taught me."

I loved Tara and would have swam across that whole fricking flooded valley with her on my back if I had to, but up close and awake, we disagreed over just about everything that mattered. She thought Dad was a bum and felt sorry for Mom. I had it just about the reverse.

Each day after school we walked out as far as we could on Tolt Hill Road to see where the water was. Dad's scheme had worked. The trailer had rotated, most of the junk had fallen off the roof, but it was upright, with a mud line half way up the sheathing. I imagined opening the door and watching the water rush out like some hydroelectric dam.

On the fourth day, we were able to go all the way to the trailer. The muck practically sucked the shoes off our feet, but Tara stayed with it. She wasn't as prissy as she put on. If it was something that mattered, I'd put Tara up against just about anybody. The truth was she was a dirty fighter. She kept her fingernails long, and more than once had left claw marks down the side of my face. When a girl at school made a joke about her birthmark once, Tara stuffed her into a locker and left her there until the janitor got her out.

"Lizzie, come here. Quick."

I was knocking the clay out from between the spokes of a bicycle I thought was mine but could have been anyone's when she called me over behind the trailer. She was sitting on her haunches staring down at the ground like there might have been a giant night crawler. Tara always made me kill the spiders in the shower. At first, I thought it had to be one of the Granger cows. Only part of it was visible above the mud, like it had gotten caught in quicksand and pulled under. I picked up a piece of shale and rubbed the dirt off it, following a leg bone to a hoof that turned out to be a foot.

Tara covered her mouth. "Ick.'

I pulled on a piece of muddy cloth that ripped away from the bone like wet Kleenex. "It's a sheet or something."

"The radio said not to touch it."

"Screw the radio. They're looking for arrowheads and Indian shit."

"You think it floated down here?"

"Must of."

I didn't even try to stop Tara from calling the cops when we got back to Nadine's. It made her feel important. They wanted to know where the trailer was and took down her name and Nadine's telephone number and Tara had to give a lot of answers that didn't have anything to do with the bones. She was on the phone for a long time, her day in the spotlight. If I'd known at the time what she'd found, I probably would have stopped her and reburied the bones.

Daddy was pissed when Tara told him what she'd found and slapped her across the face. He tore out of Nadine's without even finishing his dinner. The

bite mark in the drumstick he left stuck upside down in the mashed potatoes looked like a man howling into the wind. Nadine cringed as Dad's fender scraped against her fence backing down the driveway. Then his tires spat gravel onto the cars parked in the street as he drove away.

They had removed the body before Dad got there.

Next night, they came for him.

Tara and I had hooked up the hose and took turns spraying down the walls inside the trailer, washing the muck out the front door. The linoleum had never been cleaner. Even the scuff marks from Dad's boots came out. There was only one piece of carpet, on Dad's end of the trailer, that was nailed to the floor by a strip of aluminum along the edges, something warm for him to step on when he woke up with his hard on in the morning. The carpet was soaked and left shoe prints when I stepped on it. Tara had the bright idea to force the water out with a rolling pin. Her bunk was on the bottom so we had to tie her blankets and sheets around a tree and nozzle them to get the brown out. Then we each took an end, wrung them good, and powered them with the hose again.

"You can sleep with me till yours dry out," I told her.

There was no electricity so we asked the guy at the Food Mart to let us microwave some burritos and pizza slices and wrap them in extra sacks so they'd stay warm until Dad came home. While Tara was begging the guy to add it to our tab, I slipped some Hostess cream filled cupcakes into my pockets for dessert, four of them, one each for Tara and me, and two for Dad. In view of the flood and all, which had hit many of his regulars, he let us have a flashlight off the rack and filled it with batteries.

"Save the wrapping," I told him. "We'll bring it back when the power comes on."

Dad was munching on a hamburger when he came home, vacuuming the remains of a strawberry shake off the bottom of the cup, reeking of cigarette smoke and beer. "It's fucking dark in here."

We'd shined the flashlight against a piece of aluminum foil, Tara's idea, but it didn't do much good. It was still fucking dark in there.

"We found a clean sheet for your bed, Daddy," I said.

"Fucking flood."

Tara had backed over to her bunk and that's where she sat, with her arms across her chest in that I told you so pose. I knew it was my job to pry a compliment out of him on the job we'd done with the trailer. "We've got dinner," I said.

"I'm tired of this shittin' river."

"It's gone now, Daddy.'

He was bumping into things, cussing as he felt his way toward the cupboard with the Jim Beam. "Smells like someone pissed in here."

The bag he dropped into the sink had four cheeseburgers and two orders of cold fries, with a handful of plastic catsups for Tara and tartar sauce for me. We sat on Tara's bed and ate in the dark.

He'd fallen asleep with his boots on when the cars started pulling into the yard. I pushed the bath towel we used for a curtain to the side and watched them line up in a semicircle, their headlights on high beam, trained on the door to the trailer. The only vehicle with the lights out was Dad's pickup, which they'd surrounded. One by one they got out of their cars and stood there with the motors running. Someone walked in front of the headlights motioning to the others. I already knew why they'd come. I'd figured it out in school. It was the only thing that tied everything together. I prayed I was wrong the way I'd been wrong about Mom.

The knock on the door shook the trailer. "Ricky Lee Taylor. Are you in there?"

Jesus, I thought, they didn't need to break the place down.

"King County Sheriff.' Dad was still passed out on the bed. From the glow of the flashlight, I could see skin where his shirt had pulled up out of the back of his pants.

I put an arm around Tara and squeezed. "It's okay."

On the next knock, I walked over to the door, opened it, and as calmly as if I were complimenting him on the shine in his hat buckle, said, "He's still working."

Without our doorsteps, the head of the man was about even with mine. The headlights were too bright to make out his face, but I could tell he'd unholstered his pistol and was holding it next to his leg pointed into the mud. The men by the cars had their rifles drawn, butts against their belts, and muzzles pointed in the air.

"He's here, alright," someone yelled. "The hood's still warm."

Another one said, "Show her the warrant, Buzz."

"Step aside, young lady. We're coming in."

I wasn't going to move and I didn't, but one of the guys from the second row picked me up by the armpits and carried me into the trailer like I was a zombie.

That's when Dad started for us with a frying pan. "Let go of her, asshole!'

Four or five more guys with guns squeezed through the door, pushing me and whomever was holding me against the refrigerator. They had flashlights, powerful ones, not the Cub Scout kind the guy at the Food Mart sold, and they trained them on Dad's face as he started flailing with the pan. Someone tackled him and knocked him to the floor. The trailer was shaking as they growled like dogs and the pan clattered against the radio alarm next to Dad's bed. Two more jumped him, then another, and they pinned his limbs against the freshly hosed linoleum like a butterfly. Dad wrenched his neck one way, then the other.

"Help me, Lizzie, god dammit!"

I pulled loose and dove into the pile, squirming my way between the policemen and Dad, stretching myself out as large as I could to cover Dad's stomach with my back. "Leave him alone."

I kicked them as they tried to peel me off. One of Dad's arms broke free and he wrapped it around me, pressing so hard it forced the air out of my chest. Someone swung at Dad's head with the butt of a gun and I felt the spray against my face as it connected. Then he swung again and again until Dad's arm went soft and they lifted me up parallel to the floor while I kicked and screamed until I ran out of strength too.

When they stood me up, I could feel the arms of a woman around me, her breasts against the back of my head, and I twisted around to see that she was wearing a uniform. Another woman in uniform was holding Tara over by the bunkbed, and Tara's face was wet and rubbery. No vampire.

They held a club across the side of Dad's neck and pressed his face against the floor while they clamped his wrists into cuffs behind his back and shackled his ankles. There was a stream of blood coming out his forehead and sweat darkened his shirt like a vest. Even in irons, he was still the strongest man in the house. It had taken a platoon to reduce him to a whimper.

Dad rode in the lead car, which flashed its blue light as we drove past the Shell Food Mart. There were four more cars between Dad and us, in the ladies car.

Tara was still weeping when we reached the freeway and I wanted to think of something to brighten her up. I thought of the dwarf bunnies we had in Moses Lake that shit all over our bedroom, and slept with us at night under the covers until hers was slaughtered by the neighbor's dog in the backyard. I thought of the time she'd gotten a standing ovation at Parents Night for reciting Winnie the Pooh, and neither of our parents had showed up to hear it. Tara had a beautiful voice, and when she was playing the part of someone make believe she was riveting.

The woman lieutenant said we had to go downtown, which meant Seattle, which was fine, because that meant we'd be able to see Dad. I knew Tara would die when they told her what had happened, so I tried to prepare her.

"Tara."

She wiped her cheeks against the sleeves of her shirt and looked over at me with a softness I couldn't remember since we were little and wore the same matching dresses to school.

"You know that was Mom we found."

She nodded her head and the tears erupted again.

When Tara and I were ten and Dad worked swing shift at the sugar plant in Moses Lake, Mom used to drop us off at day care at night. Maybe it wasn't a daycare, but I remembered a room full of toys and a TV and other kids whose parents worked at the sugar plant. There were cots, but the proprietor didn't care if we watched TV as long as we stayed on the cots. Tara and I pushed our cots next to each other and sometimes just talked about things. Neither of us felt neglected. Adults had commitments. We knew that. And besides, we had each other.

"Your dad's not the only one who has to work," Mom told us.

Who's arguing, I thought.

"Don't tell him about the daycare though," she said. "I want to surprise him for Christmas with some extra money.'

Sometimes when she picked us up her hair would be all mussed and she'd be in a big hurry to get home before Dad did. She'd give us a candy bar or a quarter. "Remember our little secret."

One night she missed and Dad was straddling a kitchen chair in his skivvies when we came in.

"Where the hell you been?' he said. His voice was cocked like any second he was going to squeeze the trigger. Both of them had been drinking.

Mom ushered us past the doorway and towards our bedroom so he wouldn't notice us. "Why do you care?' she said.

"It's a school night."

We had our own room then, and I closed the door, but I could still hear them. Tara plugged her ears when they fought.

"We went to a show. Can't I take them to a show?"

"Show, fuck. You've been prowling again, Della."

"Don't start that. I can do whatever I please with my free time." I waited for her to say something about her work, to surprise him with an early Christmas present. Those were the days when I was still wrong about Mom.

Sometimes there would be slapping and knocking around and Mom would run out and not come back until morning. When she was low on money, Mom'd skip the daycare and take us with her and we'd wait for her in the car. She showed me how to turn the ignition key on and run the heater without the motor going.

"I wish she'd just leave us home," I told Tara.

"We're too little to stay home alone."

Tara's faith in our mother always amazed me, especially after what happened one summer when we were still in Moses Lake. Mom took us to a neighborhood where everyone had double garages and automatic sprinklers and rock formations in their yards with flowers and exotic plants.

"I won't be but a few minutes," she told us. Mom could look so pretty when she dressed up and darkened her eyelashes with mascara. "Whatever you do, don't get out of the car and stay down so nobody sees you."

Tara was stupid enough to listen to her. I got out and sat in the shade of the car where she couldn't see me, carving pieces of asphalt out of the street with

my jackknife. When Mom came back, Tara was passed out in the front seat. The car was as hot as an oven, and we had to take Tara to the emergency room, where I heard the nurses say she was suffering from heat exhaustion and dehydration. "Your car's a metal box, Mrs. Taylor. It's a good thing you found her when you did." They acted like Mom was some kind of heroine. It became another one of our little secrets.

We left Moses Lake in a hurry after Dad said he'd been laid off at the sugar plant, but I knew it had something to do with Mom being arrested. She was gone for a month and Dad said she was visiting her sister in Omaha. I knew she had a sister in Omaha, but they detested each other and there was no way I thought they could live in the same house together for a month. They'd scratch each other's eyes out and go blind. Once on the phone I'd heard Mom call her sister a "spoiled cunt" and slam the receiver down, still muttering "cunt" to herself.

That's when we bought the trailer, an old Airstream, from one of the guys at the sugar plant. Dad didn't have a job but his cousin Leon had a couple of lines in the fire for him in Seattle. "The economy's hotter than snot over there," Dad told us. "The trailer's gonna be temporary."

Things were pretty good between Mom and Dad on the way to Seattle. They made love every night after they thought Tara and I were asleep, but it was hard to keep secrets in a twenty-foot trailer. When we found the spot out by the river, Leon started coming over. He lived in Issaquah and worked at Paccar, making trucks. Leon had a thick neck and a head that was too small for his body. He'd come over and have dinner and he and Dad played gin rummy for money and Mom drank along with them, at first cheering for Dad, then for Leon. Dad tacked a blanket to the ceiling to divide our bunks from the rest of the trailer, so we could sleep or study the nights they played cards. Then Dad went swing shift at the Port and Leon kept coming, still eating dinner, drinking, playing cards. But it was just him and Mom.

"Do you think Dad knows he comes over?' I asked Tara.

"They're cousins. Who cares?"

"Open your eyes."

One night there was a walkout on the docks and Dad came home early. Mom had her blouse unbuttoned, which wasn't totally surprising because she did that right along when she was hot. Her and Leon were necking on the bed. I heard Dad's pickup and could have yelled something to warn them, but I didn't like Leon that much anyway. Besides that would have been cheating Dad. They didn't hear him until the door opened. I saw the whole thing from through the gap where the blanket hung crooked against the side of the trailer.

I didn't know who Dad was yelling at until I saw him kick Leon in the bunghole, then the balls, rolling him over and over until he'd stuffed him out the door the way he'd done with that badger.

"He was just rubbing my neck, Ricky."

"Don't you know the girls are sleeping ten feet from you? What's the matter with you?' I could tell he was trying to keep his voice down.

"Oh, Ricky."

"If they weren't your children I'd have kicked your ass out with him.'

I stopped looking when he grabbed her, afraid that he might throw her against the side of the trailer. It was the same kind of fight they'd had before she went to Omaha.

I could feel the air in the trailer soften when he let go of her.

Next morning on the way to the bus I tried to check it out with Tara. That was one part of the day we had privacy.

"We won't be seeing Leon for a while," I said.

"Good riddance."

"He wouldn't have come around unless he was invited."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"But why does he have to hurt her?"

I didn't like that part either. Dad was too strong for his own good.

Mom had figured out that the trailer was a bad place to rendezvous. We didn't need daycare anymore, so she'd fix us something for dinner and just go out at night. It was the same routine as Moses Lake except she didn't have a car. But she had no trouble getting rides. Mom made friends. Every night a different rig would pull into our driveway. American cars, Japanese. She wasn't fussy about the brand. One night she rode home on the back of a motorcycle. There'd be a little murmuring out front and then she'd burst in the door twenty, thirty minutes ahead of Dad and go straight to the bathroom to wash the makeup off and slip into her robe and doeskin slippers.

Each night the cars got closer to the trailer and the murmurs got longer and the time that lapsed between Mom's opening the door and Dad's became shorter and shorter. Then one night her companion drove so close I could make out the song on his radio. They came up to the door together.

He must have tickled her because she laughed. "No, you can't come in."

"I just have to take a leak."

"Hurry then.'

The man left the bathroom door open while he peed and I imagined his pee splashing onto the linoleum. Then he flushed, snapped off the light, and rejoined Mom in the kitchen. He must have been heavy because I could feel his steps bending the trailer inward.

Then it was quiet. No words, just moans. They went down on the floor and the table legs scraped. There was enough light that I could have seen everything, but I didn't want to look. I didn't have to. I knew what was going on. I

feared it.

Dad must have left his car out by the road because I didn't hear anything until the door flew open and the light went on. All he said was, "Shit!' It was more resignation than anger, not the voice of a murderer.

I peeked out of the gap in the blanket. The man was zipping up his pants. Dad didn't touch him. Instead, he dragged Mom out the door by the hair. And that was the last time I ever saw her.

Tara had the chance to stay for the trial, but she refused, opting instead to go to Mom's sister in Omaha. I thought it was an odd choice. She'd be stuck once more with someone skeptical of Mom's innocence. I called and begged her to come back.

"How can you stand to even be near him?' she said.

"What about what she did?'

"They don't equate."

"I don't think he did it."

"You're crazy.'

I missed Tara something terrible, but she wouldn't relent. It was like she'd stuffed me into a locker and left me there.

But at the moment, nobody on earth needed me more than Dad did. He stopped eating. He tried to kill himself with Lysol.

I stayed at Nadine's, who made the whole thing so cut and dried. "Some people just don't belong together," she said. "It's nothing you could have stopped."

They assigned a social worker to me, an older lady who had to do one porch step at a time when she came over to Nadine's and even then she was still puffing when she sat down in the living room.

"How's your sleep? Are you sleeping all right, sweetheart?"

"Sleep's fine."

"What about your eating? Are you eating all right?"

"Sure."

"We can find you a new home, you know."

"It won't be necessary," I told her.

Nadine wouldn't give me a ride down to the King County jail, so I hitchhiked. I wasn't fussy about the brand as long as they were heading to Seattle. Once a guy in a station wagon with a gold chain around his neck and samples of wallpaper scattered all over the back put his hand on my leg. "I've got a daughter about your age," he said.

"I've got gonorrhea," I told him.

He laughed and raked his fingers through my hair.

The first time we stopped at a light, I rolled out the door and ran to a phone booth. He took off before the light turned green.

They shaved Dad's head so that his whiskers were as long as the hair on top. I'd never seen that part of him naked and couldn't help staring at the bone structure when he hung his head down. Even through the plexiglass, I could smell him and it took me right back to our trailer.

"What are your friends at school saying?' he asked.

"Nothing. Just stupid stuff."

"You can change schools."

"What for? I'm not going anywhere."

His lips seemed fleshy, almost juicy, and I wondered if the Lysol had eaten away the first layer. He kept biting them, taking the lower lip into his mouth and letting it slide out from under his teeth like a piece of gristle. "I don't think it's good for you to come down here."

"What am I supposed to do, watch soap operas at Nadine's?"

"You know what I mean."

The only thing disgusting about the jail was seeing him so down. He'd always been unsinkable, even when Mom was arrested in Moses Lake. "Tara said to say 'hi.'" I lied.

His eyes watered and he wiped it away with the sleeve of his overalls. "Fuck," I heard him mumble.

"Quit it. You're acting like they're not going to let you out."

He looked up at me like I hadn't been listening and his forehead made a big white spot against the glass.

"Jesus, Daddy, look at all the things she did. She was a cheat."

"Don't say that."

"I'm not stupid."

"She wasn't a bad person."

"You sound like Tara."

He shook his head. "Lizzie, listen. You've got to let go. I'm sinking. Hold on to what's still floating."

"Like what? Mom?"

"Stop it. Give me your hand." He opened his palm and pressed it against the glass next to the speaking hole. "Come on."

I put my left hand against his right, so that our fingers lined up.

"My lawyer says I should plead guilty."

I was trying to think of things that would keep me from crying, like the way he used to lie on the floor and lift Tara and me in the air, one of us on each foot, and he'd tell us to fly, and we'd let go of his shins and spread our arms out like eagles.

"It's gonna be just you and Tara. Whatever happens to me, you and Tara have to stick together."

How could I tell him that we'd already lost Tara? "Don't plead guilty, Dad. Please."

"I want you to remember something about your mother." His mouth was close to the speaker hole and he was whispering. "When you and Tara were born and they wiped you off with washcloths, your mother said, "Honey, look at their birthmarks. That's where God kissed them.'"

They let me sit in the front row during the trial. Nadine was on one side and the social worker on the other. The trial took two days and each day they led Dad into the courtroom in handcuffs, sat him at the table next to his attorney, then took off the cuffs before the jury came in. There were two sheriff's officers, one who sat across the aisle from me and the other one next to the exit door. They must have read the police report, telling how it took five of them to hold him down on the floor of the trailer, and that was before all the detectives, and lab technicians, and the medical examiner had explained what they'd found in that shallow grave out behind the trailer.

Dad's attorney was younger than Dad, with a ponytail tied by a red rubber-band behind his neck. He put Leon on the stand and made him talk about the card games they played in the trailer. I almost spit when he said he had a "crush" on Mom, but he denied having intercourse. He was looking right at me when he said, "Honest, I never had sex with her." Nadine reached over and pulled my head against her to cover my ears when he said that, and then again when he said, "Sometimes I think that woman was just starved for a little affection." Dad's attorney didn't believe him anymore than I did and asked him about other women he'd slept with, but the prosecutor objected and the judge said, "I don't think this witness is the one on trial here." I didn't like the judge either. The jury, everyone in the room, eyed Dad. Nobody looked him straight in the face. They eyed him, and I wanted to ask them where they got off being so high and mighty.

I told Dad's attorney at the break how Leon and the guy who came into the trailer to use our bathroom that night were lying and how that was only the half of it. I used Dad's words. "She's been prowling around at night since Moses Lake."

"I don't want Lizzie on the stand," Dad said. The veins bulged out in his neck the way they had the night we came home and he was sitting in the kitchen in his skivvies and Mom told him we'd been at the show. "I don't want her testifying against her own mother."

The attorney shook his head. "You could stand some good news here, Ricky."

"Then cop a plea and let's go home."

Dad had a temper. That part of what Leon had said was true. But I'd never seen him so calm. It was like he'd suffered some kind of conversion. He was Christ carrying his cross. Everyone spat and jeered and he just put the thing back on his shoulder and humped it on up to the top of the hill, where the jury finally lanced his ribs and let the last bit of hope flow onto the hardwood in that courtroom.

When the jury filed out for the last time, the officers cuffed Dad up again. This time, they also put shackles on his legs.

Nadine and the social worker tried to hold me back, but I ran to him the way I had in the trailer that night and grabbed onto his cuffs and tried to drag him down on the floor with me. "You bastards," I yelled. "She's gone! Why does it matter?"

I wrapped one arm around the loop made by the handcuffs and hooked the other one around the leg of the attorney's table. Someone grabbed me by the waist and pulled, and the table shuddered as it came with us.

"Lizzie, it's okay. Go to Tara."

There was hardly anyone in the courtroom when they escorted him out. It was like this wasn't even news in the world outside of Carnation. No one snapped his picture. No one asked him how he felt. By this time next week, I thought, nobody in that courthouse would even remember his name.

I stayed with Nadine the rest of that year and finished school. For a while, I carried a steak knife from the set Nadine kept in a wooden rack in the drawer under the everyday silverware. I wasn't going to stab anybody, just flash the blade if I had to. But instead of teasing me, or saying something insulting, kids seemed scared of me.

Tara didn't bother to answer the first several letters and I figured that was a hopeful sign. Maybe she'd fallen in with a good crowd at school and didn't have time to answer. Maybe they'd discovered her talent for acting and made her the lead in *Our Town.* Maybe she was playing first base on the softball team. Or composing a sonata, or writing a book. There wasn't anything Tara couldn't do. She had concentration. She didn't take dead ends.

I told her what Mom had said about our birthmarks, thinking that would show I wasn't holding a grudge.

She wrote back. "That was sweet. I was always jealous because mine was on the neck and yours was where nobody could see it."

I wrote, "I didn't need one on my neck. It was bad enough my head was screwed on backwards." I didn't really believe that, but I wasn't going to take any chances not getting Tara back. Self respect was the one thing that was mine and, therefore, something I figured I could give away to my sister if I wanted to.

The next Christmas she surprised me and came out to Carnation. It was her idea to walk Tolt Hill Road. The trailer was gone, but the Grangers' cows were still there and they stared blankly like they didn't recognize us.

The trailer was gone and the wires that used to connect with the trailer were coiled high up on the pole near the cross piece. From the mud I could tell the river had already been up once for the season, but it hadn't washed things clean the way Tara always said it was supposed to.

Andrea Adolph

Consider the Opening

Place the keyhole nowhere near
the breastbone, slip the key in
closer to the rickety hip.
Make it gold.

Carve the door out small
and arched across, above
the thigh but lower, slightly
back from trouble.

Fit the door with two
whittled birds straight off
the sixth card which never
turns up, never

finds its way from the depths
of the deck, never
indicates the need for an entrance
(there is never a knock), never

manifests at the center, the top
of the marble gray shaft hollow,
slick with emptiness, leading
down the spine to a high-windowed

warehouse, light, clean,
mechanism clicking
against disuse, the lock
having seized up years ago.

Steve Wilson

Mouth'd Sonnet

for Rosmarie Waldrop

we're amused with certain syllables
breaking over the teeth *indiscriminate*
catechism shrug it off again then
there'll be hell to pay *curtains for you*
you too have a bone needs picking
packing laced up and waiting
where Anatolian Café jazz seeps through
downtown say it with me *the Café*
at dawn *dumbed down* doesn't matter
we almost made it home *rounding third*
say it as if some one thing makes sense
that'll be the day *cate* *cata* *clysmic*
and *dropped 'er on 'er head* what'll
we think of next? this? this?

Sam Taylor

The Lost World

I cannot say what I need to say! No one speaks
the name of the tree near the Ventura mission
that lopes and lurches like a drunken dragon
when the wind blows, revealing a sinewed belly
of branches; or the name for when you see the tree
from your car and lower the radio
as if you could hear it better, wishing you could
stand still in the street as the car continued
without you into town, obeying each empty light.

I don't know the words for the sundry wildflowers
that orgasm in this vacant lot, though they have coaxed
my secrets with their yellow fingers, their violet mouths.
No one speaks the names of the four-petaled blue compass
or the golden clarinet that turns a man
into a honeybee, and few know. Though any child
will tell you the name of the blinking towers on the hill
or two roads crossing, no one knows
the word for crying and laughing at the same time,

or the verb for two people thinking the same
thought in the same moment—and variations when
it happens with your lover on a cross-country trip
and you thought she was asleep; another name
when it happens in bed as she dips her chest
into the mirror-water of your face; another word
when you stand together in the kitchen,
slicing carrots and peppers and turn toward each other
in the same instant, and nearly knife each other,

and you start laughing and you do not speak
the thought, because it is everywhere like breath,
like protons, and you know lightning has struck you both,
but also everything—the room, the world. And it is
another thing entirely when you are with your dad
sitting on a mildewed wicker couch in a dark room,
and he is dying, and for a moment you both glow
remembering your talks in the woods at night—a flash
of divine mercy, another name no one speaks.

Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Basquiat)
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
Pencil on Paper

Christine Hume

ECHOLOCATION

They are birds, he said, giant moth-eating birds
face is a theory
After he wire-hung antelope heads in his oak
words don't give us faces
She draws a speculation of ancient ruminant musculature
show me the face of here
Upstairs her brother practices violin
a face unresponsive isn't a face
The soundlings in delay stray and circle
anything that's scary is a face
Ice-smitten, skin-suspicious, horn-sobered
is a face a lip an eyebrow
Antelope heads rack and fray her winded sight
where a face faces it sees
This time her brother makes it through to the part he must pluck
touch or writing completes a face
She could track her way back by bird racket, telephone line
faces need to be used because they're unfinished
Her mind takes the shape of three ornaments turning on a tree
a blind face is a face
Where her face is docent to cages of bent spotlights
can a face say without a mind
Then the strings run again from the top
burn dissolves a fixed face
The tree is not a mistake is wingfuls of false eyes

Prageeta Sharma

Suburban Address

Our night of high schools and murdered girls
Of brother bell
Of Dope valley
Banana seat you ride near me
Close to window panes overlooking graveyards
Oh graveyard
Oh highway of Ferrari
Oh sunken bottles and text
On highway
On bourbon and dark path
And woods smell of rape
And have you lost our minds
In reports and testimony of others
In rubies on the concourse of scantiness
We chill and are easy
We mock the adult money adult videos
We are past basketball hoop dunks
Isolated I administer to light
I have separately to the young street men
Many drunken paths many sliced tired
Many ink stains on the pockets of boys
Off the parochial bent
Since then new cars new thankless chearleaders
A wanted thicket behind the haircutting salon
A wanton athlete behind the haircutting salon
Gee you say smell that grass
And we descend to the Framingham Common
It is like a prairie you say this afternoon while we were eating breakfast
While there were three children while there were three women
A wingspan street sectioned off distancing an address of a shirttail
Twice my memory Oh graveyard
This Framingham suburban frame we form several different
Complicated girls suburban to claim settlements however ridiculous

Free Stone

For Q.
"I have never
clearly given to you
the associations
you have for me, you

with such divided prescence my dream
does not show
you. I do not dream."—Robert Creeley

I stand poised embracing your conjecture—
your analytical self hidden within its antithesis.
A blended heart frayed with the demonic arrogance of the scientist.
Similar they are-as south is from the far east. Your machine wit—

frothy, gladdening sensibilities for radical de-centering—
to cook, to work, to smirk.
Now for proper sympathy
for a memory. The providential sun—close to noon
twice green without any hope—
I came to a drop of bleakness!

Pragmatism regulated me.
And to the heart of creative friendship—I crept.
Now a cruise to shore. That was that—past is future.
I want the elegant demeanor of,
in elderly terms, of give me your hand.

Dear-thank you for dinner.
Where are you now Dear? But,
I have met two nice fellows—got to report to the generals,
wrote poems while you wrote software.
And, actually, what I saw for our after-hours
was not myself sputtering,
not stairwell rhymes—
not five times and counting.
I dreamt of the long-term position of adultness,
potential maturation—not a bride, not a servant!
My New York wish for the mysterious savant who was not you—

but you are not a hidden academic, an intellectual,
a programmer, a bank man, a broker, or an expensive terrorist
but a man in some Heideggerian sense—only slightly in that sense.
I think, you must have, if I have it right,
confused the shepherd with the master.
Let stone treaties now sparkle without fruit, rhapsodize

in the sound quarry—language as a transport medium.
And after I created the metaphor, and after I understood
the natural world for its natural order,
I realized how quickly we incite invention from desire.
For the poem invents you twenty times over,
and it's meant to. I am transporting you to your
parallel desires which are left unharmed
for more familiar dwellings—
for more familiar girl dwellers.

Marcy Dermansky

Stupid Love

Hanging up on Glenn was something I did that summer. I didn't want to talk to him. He had a new girlfriend. I was glad for him. I called three, four times a day. This was before *69. I carried extra dimes for the pay phone at the pool.

I was life guarding at a rooftop pool in a thirty story high-rise for senior citizens in Center City, Philadelphia. My first job after college: paid to gaze blankly at old people. I watched them walk pitiful laps across the shallow end of the pool, looked away from the old women floating on their backs, enormous breasts in padded cone-shaped bathing suits pointing skyward. I took complaints. Nodded my head, not listening. I don't like old people. They block the sidewalk and hold up lines at the supermarket. Blather about the weather and their grandchildren. They secretly hate children; that's been my experience, starting with my grandmother, who used to give me half a stick of Trident when I asked for gum.

As jobs go, it wasn't bad, but at the same time, it didn't inspire much confidence. My college therapist was still there for me, but he was charging $60 a pop now that I was on my own.

And Glenn. I had been counting on Glenn. He'd graduated a year earlier and stayed at Penn for his doctorate in Classics, Ancient Greek and Latin. Which meant to some people he was a genius, but he couldn't figure out how to catch the bus that stopped in front of his front door. I had to teach him how. We went to the movies, went out to eat, and when I was feeling low, we stayed in, cooked a pot of ratatouille, had sex. I helped him buy shoes. It was a good friendship.

***

"Actions speak louder than words."

That's what his new girlfriend Daphne told him. What Glenn related back to me at our favorite deli, shamefaced, unwilling to make eye contact.

"You should watch out for women who speak in clichés," I said, but Glenn only shrugged his shoulders.

Nothing he could say would convince her that I wasn't a threat. She didn't want him talking to me on the phone. She'd already put the stuffed aardvark I'd given him for his birthday into the closet. I didn't know what to say. I sipped my Diet Coke. Glenn took a bite of his turkey sandwich. The bread fell apart and I watched him critically as he licked the mayonnaise off his fingers.

"You're going to let her tell you what to do?" I said.

"I've never seen any one do declensions as fast as she can." He finally looked up from his plate, excited by the thought of it. "It's amazing. She's amazing. Look at her."

He took a picture from his wallet, a snap shot taken at a department party. She had the long, thin, muscular arms of a dancer. For two years, I'd gone secure in the knowledge that I was too pretty, too interesting, too good for Glenn, and then he went out and got someone taller and prettier.

"She also doesn't think that we should eat lunch together," he said. "This is it for a while."

I stared at the picture. I wondered if she knew CPR.

"She wants to be the only one that eats turkey sandwiches with you," I said.

"The only one," Glenn said and shrugged again.

I ate my turkey sandwich slowly, neatly, as Glenn was trying to put slices of turkey back on to crumbling bread. He'd managed to get sprouts in his hair.

"She just came out of a bad relationship," he said. "I guess she's a little insecure."

"That's attractive in a woman."

I was looking down at the loose flesh on my arms. It didn't matter how many laps I swam. I tried to pick a sprout out of Glenn's hair but he shivered, pulled away. "So. We're not friends anymore."

"No," Glenn said. "I don't know." He picked up my hand, kissed the palm, didn't let go. "You're not the most regular friend. In the traditional sense."

My best friend at college had fed me a similar line. She liked to French braid my hair, used to give me soft, giggling kisses on my neck when we said goodnight. But she ended things, too. Cut me off completely and started out going out with some guy named Buff who wore enormous black basketball sneakers and a red baseball cap.

***

I loved Will Smolen's office. The floors were a dark polished oak. The arm chairs were a rich, dark red velvet, and I could count on gazing at his thick purple socks when he crossed his legs. The strip of floor in front of the tall windows was lined with plants. He always greeted me with a lopsided smile, as if he were pleased to see me

In college, Will Smolen, therapy, was a free service, like the gym where I swam my laps, and valued as much as the all you can squeeze fresh orange juice at Bryn Mawr's Sunday brunch. But that summer, it was my own money. Each session represented nine hours at the pool, a short dress at Urban Outfitters, all the restaurants I couldn't afford. I kept going for that first crooked smile, the plush chairs, the low soothing voice. And because I was paying for this company, I felt entitled to keep things from him. For instance, I talked about my lunch with Glenn and didn't mention the hang-up calls.

"Do you think this is all about the new woman?" said Will Smolen. Obviously, he didn't think so. He wanted us to go back to Steven, a forty-eight year old gardener I once made the mistake of telling him about.

"That old news," I said. "It doesn't matter. He never mattered." I was guilty. I hated to be guilty. I'd cheated on Glenn. I had this boyfriend and after two years he was still stupid in love with me and I was bored out of my mind. So I slept with the school's head gardener a couple of times. For a month or so. Two. Then I had to break up with the gardener when he fell in love with me. It was a mess.

"Well, it could matter," said Will Smolen.

It was none of his business. I chewed my hair. I'd resolved that Will Smolen wasn't allowed to upset me anymore and failed. I leaned back in my velvet chair. I crossed my legs. I looked at the small orange clock on the end table. Five minutes until the end of the session. I looked down at his exposed ankles for the purple socks. I didn't know if these socks were a fashion choice, a gift from his mother, a quiet signal of gay pride. I watched Will Smolen watching me and I removed the hair from my mouth.

"So," I said. My legs were shaking and I put my hands on my knees, made them stop. I thought about the hang-up calls, the steady increase each day. "You think it's not possible for Glenn to be my friend anymore."

"No, I didn't say that," said the ever calm Will Smolen. "I'm just wondering if there might be some lingering old wounds."

"That was a year ago," I said. "More than a year."

We sat there in silence. I stared at the plants in the window. The African violets seemed ready to bloom. The branches of the tallest ficus were only inches away from the high ceiling. I would drink iced coffee at Capriccios. Buy a chocolate croissant for lunch. Try calling Glenn again before I swam my laps.

"Hey," Will Smolen said. "Where are you?"

***

The hang-ups.

I'd finished another day at the pool. It had been a good day. I'd swam laps after closing, stayed until dark, looking at the Philadelphia skyline from my high perch. I walked the two miles home. I bought a falafel from the street vendor on the corner, sat on my the front steps of my building, taking small, happy bites. Thinking I had life under control. And then I was alone in my apartment, wide awake, wanting to be asleep, stuck on the thought that I wasn't supposed to call Glenn anymore.

The first "hello" was happy, excited. He thought it would be Daphne.

Which meant that she wasn't sleeping over.

I waited a few minutes, called again.

"Hello?" he said, sounding confused, expectant.

I hung up.

And called again. Right away. He answered. I hung up.

I couldn't sleep. I had drunk six iced coffees during the course of the day. This was also the summer I started drinking coffee. I took a walk around the block. And then walked it again, twelve times, before I went back in. I knew not to walk alone in Philadelphia at night, but I felt as crazy as the crazy people. Chewing on my hair. Kicking a loose soda can around the block, making sure I didn't lose it. I wasn't supposed to be hanging up on Glenn. He was supposed to be in love with me, he was my closest friend. I called again.

"Hello?" he said.

And then there was me breathing on one end, Glenn breathing on the other. I heard Bob Marley from the apartment above me. I had zero tolerance for white college kids who listen to Bob Marley, wear tie-dye, sport dread locks. I threw a red Super Ball at the ceiling, and it came crashing down on my stereo, bouncing on the floor, knocking over a glass of water onto a stack of papers.

"Carla?" he said. "Is that you?"

***

I taught the morning exercise classes.

We did the same exercises every day. Which were the exact same exercises these exact same senior citizens performed the summer before--except for two: one had died in her sleep, the other had a stroke and had essentially recovered, except for a persistent drool which so embarrassed her, she rarely left her condo. I tried to throw in some neck rolls. All through July, my neck had been stiff. The complaints started.

"Heather never made us do these."

"My doctor wouldn't like this."

"It's time for the leg lifts, dear."

"Isn't the air too cold for that?"

"Let's just try it," I said. "Gently roll your head to the right and hold."

I counted to three. I saw necks, loose skin, flowered bathing caps held at an angle. Heard a collective groan, saw heads go back up.

"Sorry," I said. "My mistake. What comes next?"

"Leg lifts, sweetheart," they said in unison. "Leg lifts."

Leading exercises in super slow motion made me tense. After the class, I went to the pay phone and called Glenn. His answering machine picked up, as it always did at that time of day. I listened to the message, hung up at the beep, went back to my green plastic chair at the edge of the pool.

***

On the first of August, I called and didn't hang up. Daphne answered the phone. When she asked who was calling, I said Carla, without shame, like I had a right to call, which according to any sense of fairness and seniority, I did.

"Oh," she said.

There was a long, heavy moment before Glenn came to the phone. "You shouldn't be calling here," he whispered.

I tried to picture the room, Glenn at his desk, a pair of long skinny arms around his fragile neck.

"I was wondering if you'd want to come over for a swim after I close up the pool," I said. "The old people will be locked up and medicated in their condos."

"Carla," he said.

"It's gorgeous up here at night. You can see the stars. I normally do laps but you could just play around. You should really see this pool."

"No," he said. "I can't come swimming. You can't call anymore."

"Oh." I took my trusty red Super Ball and traced the shape of my foot. "It's been almost two months."

"You make everything so hard, Carla," he said. I heard something bang in the background. Then a door slam.

"Don't you miss me?"

"I'm going on the theory out of sight, out of mind."

"Another cliché," I said.

It seemed all wrong. That I graduated from college and had no plans, that I paid a man to listen to me and told him lies. This was also my summer of self pity. When I called Glenn back later that night, I tried talking like one of my old ladies, high pitched and nasal. I asked for Sidney.

"You have the wrong number," Glenn said. His voice sounded flat, sad.

I called back, using the same voice, asking once again for Sidney. Wrong numbers often happen in pairs.

"Oh, Carla," Glenn said. "What are you doing?"

He couldn't know for sure that it was me.

***

I'd already settled at my favorite table in the corner of the new Borders Bookstore cafe when I noticed Daphne hunched over an enormous Greek text at the table next to mine. She was drinking mineral water.

Only days before, I'd passed Will Smolen on the escalators at Borders; he was going up, I was going down. The event transpired in seconds, but I wasted an entire session explaining why I loathed seeing him in public places, why I

couldn't trust the free smile. The week before I'd seen my hearing impaired dean, the one who'd recommended I take some time off after my junior year.

I knew one thing. I was going to stop going to Borders.

My options in Philadelphia were becoming more and more limited. I'd stopped going to Capriccio's after I slept with one of the cafe boys there. But I was going to cash in on the opportunity to stare at Daphne. She was the kind of woman I tend to look at. She had those skinny arms, the straight, shiny hair. A long neck, prominent clavicles. I held my cup of coffee in front of my face, pretending to contemplate the shape of the thick white mug. I didn't write in my journal, didn't read the book I'd brought with me in case I didn't feel like writing in my journal. I didn't even make eyes at the cute cafe boy with the silver hoop earrings who'd started giving me free refills.

"Stop staring at me," Daphne said.

She underlined a sentence in her text book with a yellow highlighter pen. She looked calm, poring over her Greek dictionary.

"What?" I said. I looked over at the counter. My cafe boy had been looking at me. He smiled and held up an empty coffee cup. I shook my head.

"Stop staring at me," she repeated.

"I'm not staring," I said.

Daphne underlined the next few lines and I understood then that she was underlining haphazardly, at random.

"Cut the crap, Carla," she said. "I've never been in the same room with such malicious intent directed my way."

"Wow," I said. "You know who I am. Did Glenn show you my picture?" This was exciting news and I grinned. "He showed me a picture of you. At that party? He must have shown you a picture of me. Which one did he show you?"

At the counter, an old woman shouted an order for a latte without milk. She was one of my exercise ladies. I laughed hard, nervous, spilling coffee on my fingers. The exercise lady saw me and waved. "There's our lifeguard," she said to the cafe boy, clapping her bony hands together. "She's a darling." She spoke so loud that everyone at the cafe, with the exception of Daphne, who was still underlining, turned to look at me.

"I know you him want him back," Daphne said. "He isn't interested. He's moved on to greener pastures."

Again, Daphne was at it with the clichés.

To most people, she might seem like the smart one. Ancient Greek, grad school, a steady boyfriend. A fast look at my journal might reveal entire entries detailing what I'd eaten on a particular day. But I was light years smarter than Daphne. Anyway, malicious intent. Me. She was as boring as *Jurassic Park*, a sorority girl at the mall.

"You're talking about Glenn?" I said. "The sweet, skinny guy? Stringy hair? Big nose? You think I want him back? I was the one who dumped him. Didn't he tell you? I'm glad for him. I keep trying to tell him."

"And stop it with the calls," she said.

I felt my face go red.

Daphne turned back to her book and I could see that it would be a contest to see who would leave first. My stupid legs wouldn't stop shaking; I got up and left.

***

Glenn showed up at the pool while I was adjusting my goggles, ready to swim. His shoulder-length hair had been clipped at his chin. He wore a zippered t-shirt tucked into belted khaki shorts. His knapsack had been replaced with a black leather satchel. Daphne had polished him up over the summer. He chewed on a strand of hair, a habit he'd picked up from me. The old people were still filing out, slow as ever. I'd done well on tips. They thought I was coming back next summer, saving up for law school.

"She's furious, you know."

I didn't know.

"The way you stared at her. I don't know why you want to mess this up for me."

"She's really beautiful," I said. I hoisted myself from the pool, sat at the edge, my legs dangling in the water. "That's why I stared."

Glenn sat down next to me. He took off his sandals and put his feet in the water.

"You think she's beautiful?" he said. He had that happy look, the way he did when he described Daphne doing declensions or when he hummed while eating vanilla ice-cream. I remembered undressing him on the single bed in his narrow dorm room, careful not to bang against the bookshelf hanging overhead, the way he trembled when I touched him.

"I do," I said.

"You call every day," he said. "Hang-up."

I dove into the pool.

"But you never talk to me," he called out. "You never did. Ever. You just waited until I figured it out about that gardener. As if it were nothing. You hurt me."

I did a length of free style, a shaky flip turn, and then a couple of slow back-stroke, watching the sky turn from baby blue to candy pink. I swam some more free style, did some languid breast stroke, and when I stopped swimming, Glenn was still there, his feet splashing in the water.

"I do miss you," he said.

I stood in the water, positioned myself between Glenn's bony knees. He leaned his chin on the top of my head. My view of the world was a blur through

foggy goggles.

"I'm in love," he said. "I'm in love with Daphne."

I kissed him, his nose banging against the plastic frames of my goggles. I moved my hands to his shoulders, his neck, his face, finally resting my wet fingers in his hair. I leaned in close, soaking his new clothes with pool water, marking him with chlorine.

Robert Skidmore

Hank's Place

Tina, the whiner, is really my wife's friend. She invited us over for dinner. She's one of those women who since high school has been in a series of dreadful, heart wrenching sagas with a collection of marginal, sadistic guys. After divorcing her last husband she ended up with the house. It's in the same neighborhood on the outskirts of Atlanta where Jessica and I lived when we got married seven years ago. Identical ranch houses that seem smaller than when we lived there. Jessica tells me about Tina's latest man as we drive, a guy with a paying job who's never been in jail, so expectations are sky high. Jessica is like Tina in that respect. Hope springs eternal. We don't park in the driveway because a fat tire black Plymouth Charger with a rusted, piecemeal tailpipe is parked there.

"Is that Mr. Wonderful's hot rod?" I say.

"His name is Chuck," Jessica says in a cautionary way.

"As in, chuck wagon?"

Poised for social discourse, she ignores the comment. We disagreed about coming over. I've been in a funk lately, in no mood to put on the happy face for friends. Plus, there's an awkwardness I sense with Tina. She still does paper work at an auto body shop and we're doing stuff now like flying to Thailand on business and living in a stucco fortress in a fashionable exurb. What man can easily walk away from a shiny new house, sun light flashing off brass fixtures, his wife biting her bottom lip, her eyes moist, the place beaming with infinite promise, as though the dusty workmen made it for us. The dangerous convergence that one risks with house hunting. There wasn't anything wrong with our old house. My parents have lived in the same house in South Carolina all their married lives: Roof. Plumbing. Good enough. The new house reduces my commute by five minutes—Hooray!—each journey now a brisk forty-one, assuming no smash-ups to clot transportation arteries. Never assume. Heading an international project for a software company requires one to be punctual. I'm almost making six figures—don't get too happy, the chateau consumes most of the take home—part of the newly decadent management culture getting spa mud baths to unleash problem solving skills. My boss Jerry's idea, not mine. We also spend time listening to consultants talk about whether it's better to wear Chinos or Dockers as appropriate business casual dress. The sick thing is I've started listening.

I get out of the car and realize I'm overdressed: expensive tassel loafers, pressed slacks and a black silk jacket that Jessica bought for me cheap in Thailand. An outfit more suited to sipping single malt scotch libations,

mingling with folks still sporting their Olympic Volunteer outfits at Jerry's golf course castle in his gated community. Commoners still have access to our new neighborhood. The jacket is sharp I'll grant you, but I'd feel more at home onstage in Vegas. When I put it on Jessica purred and said I was *the* handsomest guy in the world. Imagine her heartbreak if I had demurred.

Tina opens the door with puffy, bloodshot eyes and greets us with a voice strained from trauma, a bashful smile. She puts her hands together next to her heart—our presence a blessing—and gives us both hugs.

"There's a delay making dinner," she says softly, "because of a problem with running water in the sink." She brushes back her curly bangs and puts a hand on her forehand.

A booming male voice contorted by echo comes from the kitchen. "Can't believe you don't have a proper wrench in this house. But that's typical." The tink tink of metal against pipe. Sounds like he's under the sink. "This fucker couldn't open a *jelly* jar."

"Chuck, they just walked in the door," she yells over her shoulder. "Come out here."

Jessica whispers to Tina—are you all right? Tina shakes her head and tells how water leaked all over the kitchen floor. They walk together over to the couch and sit down. They met in high school and have ideas about baby sitting each others kids one day. We did things with Tina and her former husband. He sold cars and seemed like a decent guy; then he got another woman pregnant within a year.

In the kitchen, Chuck is bent over looking into the refrigerator. He's wearing jeans, no shirt. Thick, tanned neck and back. "Never a goddamn thing in here," he says with a low voice. He pushes aside some cartons and reaches toward the back, then snaps his head around quickly at me. "Want one?"

"One what?"

He pulls out a can of beer and holds it toward me, still half-inside the refrigerator.

"Sure."

He tosses one to me, pops the top on his can and closes the door. He points to the open area under the sink, a toolbox on the floor. "Leaky u-pipe. I took out the old one. Can't put in the replacement with these shit for tools."

I nod as I take in the predicament. "I'm Bill." I offer a handshake.

"Oh, hey, sorry." He wipes his hand on the thigh of his jeans and shakes my hand. "Nice to meet you, Bill." Twangy, monotone voice, like he's never pleased to meet anybody. The guy smells like pit odor and cigarettes. Dark hair slicked back behind his ears and remote, determined eyes, like the kind you see in civil war daguerreotypes.

"Could I help you with that job?" I ask. An insincere offer given my outfit. I feel like a preppie homeowner supervising a contractor.

"Not even the good Lord above could fix that bastard right now." He reaches for a denim shirt hung over a chair and starts buttoning it from the bottom up. Chuck reminds me of the guys I worked with the summer during college when I poured tar with a road crew—indestructibly tough, but with a boredom and brooding resentment that makes them hard to read. I'm from the South Carolina piedmont. I haven't always been Mr. Cosmopolitan.

Tina appears in the doorway with her hands on her hips. "Can I finally use the sink now?" Implying it's all Chuck's fault.

He glares at her, arms crossed and doesn't move a muscle. "I keep telling you. I've got to have the right tool," he says through his teeth.

"Well, could you do that then?"

"I could call my brother."

"Then please do that." She turns and walks away.

Chuck looks at me for a reaction. I take a long sip on the beer, the aluminum aftertaste smarting in the back of my throat and then grin at Chuck. He shakes his head. "That woman's on my very last nerve." He puts down his beer, picks up the receiver to the wall-mounted phone and dials. "Hank, it's me. Got a pipe wrench? Good. I'll be over."

Chuck and I walk into the living room. Jessica is patting Tina on the knee in a consoling way—their collective dream dashed once again. They finish whispering something between themselves and look at us. Chuck says he's going to Hank's to pick up the wrench. He tucks in his shirt, fishing his hand around the front of his jeans.

"That's fine. We've got all the time in the world," Jessica says, excessively cheerful. She looks at me. "Maybe you could go over there with Chuck?"

Our taxi driver, a man who may or may not have known English, dropped off Jessica and myself on the wrong side of Bangkok. It took us hours to realize this. In a three piece wool suit, ready to press the flesh at our hotel with chain smoking dignitaries from a multinational conglomerate, I stood next to the jumble of our luggage in a swath of sunlight that seemed to have been focused through a giant magnifying glass. Motor scooters buzzed around me, one knocking over a garment bag. I waved my arms, trying to attract another taxi. Sandal wearing people smiled shyly at me as I chanted our hotel name. Royal Phuket? Royal Phuket! Jessica, in a sun dress, ran back and forth across the street, touching wares, haggling with vendors using sign language, children running about her. She returned with a strange purplish fruit. This should be delicious! A devilish fellow with an eye patch was looking over our dusty luggage. An old woman dumped a plateful of entrails onto the street. I thought, what is the likelihood the chain smokers will sign on the dotted line after I show up hours late? Will they even stick around? I swung my jacket at a passing scooter. Relax, Jessica said. Look around. It's beautiful here.

The sun is going down. We take Chuck's wheels. I walk around the front of the Charger, noticing a license plate—Trust The Lord, faded doves flapping around the letters—and get into the passenger seat.

"I didn't *have* to offer to fix her sink," Chuck says, fuming. "I should tell her to call a plumber."

"Now you're stuck with it."

He turns over the engine and backs down the drive. The big lumbering V-8 chugs steadily with a round, even sound. It's in good shape. He pulls down the gear shift into Drive. "I don't even know why I'm dating her. Shit, she acts like I'm her husband. If I was smart I'd be dating her sister. Have you seen Christie?"

"I met her once." She came to our old house one night with Tina. Long red hair and a massive chest, tan legs. The car salesman got drunk once and made a pass at Christie, who reported the infraction to Tina.

Chuck whistles. "She could be a damn swimsuit model. She'd be awfully hard to turn away, know what I mean?" I'm not going to say anything that could be taken as agreeing that I have the hots for Christie, or would under the right circumstances.

Chuck says: "She could eat Ritz with runny peanut butter and I wouldn't kick her off my Serta."

It takes me a second to realize it's a variation of not kicking someone out of bed for eating crackers. I laugh. He laughs too—deep and rapid, like a buzzer being sounded over and over. The tops of his teeth are mustard colored.

He turns onto a four lane road and guns the engine. It lets out a full growl: the hearty sound of fuel and air combustion that affirms cars are machines. It reminds me of the guzzler cars my Dad used to work on. Jessica and I have late model Japanese sedans; four cylinder jobs that give a faint hum only if pushed. At stops they are ghost-like—you wonder if they've cut off. Now Jessica's got her eye on a four wheel drive suburban assault vehicle. How do we get to and from the malls without one?

"What do you do for a living, Bill?" Chuck glances out of the corner of his eye at me.

"I work for a software company." Junior Vice President for Marketing, but I'm not going to rub it in. "And you?"

"I got a business laying tile."

"Just you?"

"These days I got an assistant. His name's Jesus, spelled with a 'J,' but pronounced with an 'H.' He beats me to the job site every morning."

"He sounds perfect."

"He takes every dime he makes and mails it back to Costa Rica," Chuck props his left arm on his door and the wind ruffles his sleeve. "You don't find many like him anymore."

At a stoplight Chuck reaches under his seat and pulls out a cassette, flicks aside the plastic and pops it in the stereo. From the cover I can tell it's Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Gold & Platinum*—their greatest hits. My brother Ralph, older by three years, had a poster of the band: monster belt buckles, beards, bell bottom jeans, back up singers. He was infatuated with them and the Allman Brothers. Ralph and his friends hit Greenville every weekend in a Mustang Fastback that Ralph put together, Skynyrd blasting. The music comes on in the middle of 'Down South Jukin' during the crashing honky tonk guitar solo, the three lead guitars picking furiously. It seems quaint to hear them now. It's an old tape, the music patchy and uneven. Chuck bobs his head to the beat.

A scratching noise comes from the back seat, a frantic rustling, and a putrid smell tweaks my nostrils. There's a wooden box on the back seat, with thin slits between the vertical posts. A dark form moves behind them. The box has a hinged lid on top and a clasp.

"What's in the box?"

"A rat. Did you know rats can eat through cardboard, even plywood? The box is pressure treated wood. They still gnaw around inside there." He smiles and shakes his head. Will rats never cease to amaze?

"Is that your pet?"

"No, Albert is my pet. He's a Burmese python. That rat's gonna be supper."

"How big is the snake?"

"Probably near seven feet now. The more you feed them the bigger they get. Now I keep Albert in a phone booth turned sideways," he takes his hands off the wheel and illustrates an object being turned sideways. "I can't hardly take him out any more because they get ornery when they're big. The last time he was out he wrapped around my second wife's leg. Took me an hour to get him off."

"You're kidding me."

"No, sir."

I get the feeling Chuck is telling me the truth. He's the kind of guy who tells a story with a boring end or an exciting end because that's what happened, or if he's mad at you he looks you in the eye and tells you you're a son of a bitch. There's something refreshing about Chuck.

My boss at the software company, the CEO, Jerry—he insists that everyone call him Jere—is from San Diego. Most of the guys in software development are jokers from the west coast too. Jerry wears sweaters, like he's Bill Gates and says things like "tell accounting to cool out." He praises employees as he fires them. Afterward they ask around, panicked about whether they've been promoted or terminated. Jerry is always looking for the competitive edge (He's gone through karate and jujitsu phases and can yell like a bad mamma jamma but otherwise is ineffective. Muscle tone might help). He's big on personal development and highly recommends that everyone around him personally develop.

He dropped a bamboo sword on my desk the other day, almost spilling my

coffee. I covered the telephone receiver. He said, "This is the *shinai*. Kendo is a discipline that dates back to the Samurai warriors. Those guys knew focus." He's wearing an armored skirt and a shogun breastplate over a Cosby sweater.

"OK." Fascinating Jere.

"It's super good at character building and learning controlled aggression. Wanna try on the *hakama*?"

"Not now. I'm on the phone with Singapore."

"I've signed up you and Jonathan and Larissa in a beginner class. It should give you a leg up with the far east. I'm going to sign up all the department heads." What is wrong with company softball? I survived Kendo lesson one. You face off like fencers. You feign an attack, fend off a blow and smack the other guy around the head and shoulders. Jerry takes this stuff to heart. Nobody knows what he wants.

"Jerry, do you like my new marketing plan?"

"I can see some viable potentialities, but there might be some issues."

Some of my cohorts think Jerry is a ditz, but I'm convinced it's all ass covering. Screw up and he says you didn't do what he said, cut a big deal and he says our strategy worked super. I've adopted his elliptical language patterns to do battle: I'm positive about the target date, but I have some possible concerns.

At Hank's place, there are a million cars in the front yard. Dusk is settling. It's a neighborhood zoned for light industrial and an auto glass shop is down the street. Hank's house apparently doubles as his business venue. From the street we drive through a chain link fence topped with razor wire. When I step out of the car, two mixed breed hounds sniff the back of my hand with circumspection and decide I'm not a threat. In the twilight I follow Chuck beside the house—the voices of a woman and several kids inside talking—to a huge ramshackle steel garage toward the back of the lot.

I can't guess where the entrance is until Chuck pulls on a panel and a door swings open. Spotlights are rigged from the ceiling and it's as bright as the inside of a lamp shade in there. Looking down, I pick up the sheen on my shoes. Hoses, tailpipes and gears hang from the walls. It reminds me of the shed my Dad worked in. He had a job with the power company and over-hauled cars part time. The smell of oil, clutch fluid, and old tires usually trailed around him. I never liked mechanical stuff but my brother Ralph was a natural and helped Dad out.

"This is Bill," Chuck says to Hank, a burly guy in a dark, greasy jumpsuit, wiping his hands with a towel. Hank looks at me and nods. There's a truck without a hood in the center of the garage. An engine block suspended by chains hangs over the engine. My eye picks up a slight swing.

"Since you're here you can help me with somethin' Hoss," Hank says to Chuck and I guess me too. He points to the engine block and then to the open spot in the truck bay. Chuck calls me over to the panel controls of the hydraulic crane that the chains are linked to, shows me the appropriate lever.

"Go easy with it," he says.

"Is that block new?" I ask Hank, just to say something.

"No. It's reconditioned. Don't tell anybody that." He smiles.

I take off my jacket and put it on a dark wooden bench on an uncluttered spot. Chuck and Hank put their hands on either side of the engine. Easy does it, I hear my father say. I work the lever in steady incremental pulls.

We all let out a sigh of relief when it's in there snug. I'm thankful the chains didn't snap and that no hands were mashed. Chuck and I hover around the bumper while Hank secures the engine block with bolts. Hank straightens his back, stuffs his rag into his pocket and pulls out a half-smoked joint, pinching it with his thick fingers. He lights it, sucks and passes it to Chuck who makes the end glow red and passes it to me. The smoke is harsh and hot and I pass it back to Hank and wonder when the last time I did this was. It was many years ago when I visited Ralph, who lives in Tennessee now.

I pick up my jacket and notice glistening spots on a sleeve and oil drops on the bench where it lay. It's 9:00 pm and dinner is nowhere in sight. It's pitch black when I step out of the garage. Crickets chirp in the thicket of grasses that surround me. Stars are out. I get the odd feeling looking towards the house that I have no idea where I am or what's lurking and rustling among the weeds. Somehow, it's a good feeling.

There is no way to get into a car like the Charger without sensing the car's malice, it's sneer. The low slung bucket seats, indestructible dash board, the heavy thunk of the steel door like a bank vault swinging shut. There's also the aroma of vinyl gone through hard duty, food bits rolled under the seats, air fresheners from years gone by and in this case, one defiant rodent clawing again in protest. Chuck slams his door and hands me the pipe wrench. He puts the key into the ignition, reaches behind his seat and pulls out a square-shaped bottle. Jim Beam. He takes a long draw and looks at me.

"Want some?"

It's terribly juvenile to drink in a car but I figure it might smooth me out. I take a healthy gulp and pass it back. I detect an unusual lemony flavor within the charcoal whiskey. "That bourbon tastes funky. It's gone bad."

He grins, fills the car with his muted stutter laugh. "That's cause it's not bourbon. It was when I bought the bottle, but once I finish one off, I use the bottle and make my own little concoction."

"What concoction?" Warm ripples are crossing my frontal lobe.

"Oh, just a little whiskey, little red wine, and some special ingredients." He nestles the bottle behind his seat.

"What's in the special sauce?"

He shakes his head, a sheepish grin. "Can't tell you."

"Tell." My toes are tingly.

"I add a little vinegar. And it's in practically microscopic proportions, but I put in a drop of VCR cleaner to add a twist, give it a kick."

"Oh, yeah."

"Yeah."

Great. I've just self-induced a lobotomy. But whatever was in the juice, he drank it too so it shouldn't be fatal. I'll just end up back at the dinner party with my face contorted like a twisted drop out kid at a Dead concert. Hi, honey! Actually, I'm feeling pretty good; it seems to be working *for* me. Dinner will come in its own sweet time.

Chuck pops the tape back in and mouths the words to 'Saturday Night Special' while he drives. I'm reminded of the way sometimes when you're young and frustrated or lovelorn you drive around listening to music and the music seems to speak to you directly, seems to be the answer. My brother Ralph spent hours learning the opening riff of this song on a cheap electric guitar. That year he grew his hair long, outraging my father with every inch it went past his collar. A wispy moustache sprouted from his upper lip. He played 'Freebird' over and over on his record player, told Dad he didn't have time to work on cars anymore and that his plans for college were out.

"Do you see these hands? See them!" my Dad used to say to both of us, holding up his battered, oil-stained palms. It was his way of saying that working on engines part-time would be a fate worse than death, that the cumulative struggles and ultimate redemption of the Crockett line—his father the butcher and his father's father the dirt farmer—now depended on us. He'd done everything he could. When I won a National Merit Finalist scholarship to college my parents cried and looked to the heavens like lottery winners.

My brother and his friends went to see Lynyrd Skynyrd in Spartanburg. There was a lot of adult talk that at the concert high school girls were kidnapped and deflowered by the band and that a wild assortment of drugs circulated through the crowd. Ralph became suspect. I did the same things he did: drinking, smoking, petty theft, but I never raised the same suspicion with my parents. I had a Dobie Gillis haircut.

I'll never forget passing my brother's room one afternoon. My father was standing in there, holding an album cover—The Allman Brothers *Eat A Peach.* I was headed downstairs and stopped when it occurred to me how out of place he seemed. A black light picked up bits of grime sparkling on the back of his neck. He stared at the foldout art, holding it at arms length: a psychedelic landscape of mushrooms and Boschian figures. Then he ripped the cover in half with his meaty hands in one swift motion. He saw the art as hippie propaganda, a poison against decent values. I was working on my Junior Achievement project that night when Ralph came downstairs with the torn cover, befuddled. Dad

told him he was lucky everything in his room hadn't been ripped in half, that he knew all the things Ralph had been up to and it would have to *stop.* Ralph stared at my father, quaking with anger. He looked at me and said, "Let's go, Bill." After he said it a second time, I went. "Stay out!" my Dad yelled from the front porch at Ralph, maybe me too. We got into Dad's truck and Ralph screeched off, cursing and slapping the steering wheel.

"Well?" he demanded of me.

"Well,what?"

"Whose side are you on?"

"I'm on your side."

Lighting a cigarette, he didn't seem to hear me. With no moon, the headlights cut through a deep blackness. I flicked the radio dial around to whatever was coming in clear—bluegrass, Motown. At one point he sped up and said, "We can make Texas by morning," flicking a butt out the window. "We can't go to Texas!" I said. He got on I-85 and pushed the gas petal to the floor, the doors shaking at 100 mph. "Jesus, slow down!" I yelled. He took an exit ramp, ran a stop sign and drove along back roads. That's when I started crying. I've never cried so hard. Ralph looked over at me, punched me in the shoulder. He laughed, "Ease up, little brother." That made me mad. We got back late that night. Ralph went to church with us that Sunday, then was in and out of the house, sleeping in an abandoned farmhouse many nights. On his eighteen birthday he retrieved all his clothes, left a long letter to my parents, gave me his record collection and a poem he'd written titled 'Standing on the Precipice.'

"Wait...you can't just leave." All I could think to say.

"I can't?" He peeled away in the Mustang. We got postcards from Oregon and Alaska.

Ralph never made it to college. He started a company that builds log homes and makes great money. He built his own house, this fantastic hunting lodge and works on most of his job sites. He wears flannel shirts, wielding an axe like the Brawny paper towel man.

I roll down my window and lean my head into the gust.

"Do you do your own work on this car?" I ask Chuck.

"Always have, always will. I know this car better than I know my own wretched self."

"How many miles you got?"

"Two hundred twenty thousand. And I've never had a wreck."

Chuck is working the Charger. We're hitting all the green lights and he's passing what little traffic is on the street, snarling past them. A stoplight catches us. People in a Lexus sedan stare. I have a realization—a set of visions—once we're burning rubber again. In 1973 Chuck goes to a concert in his brand new

Charger, his sweetheart riding shotgun admiringly; in 1978 there's a news flash on the dash radio while Chuck rotates the tires: American hostages taken in Iran; in the mid-eighties Chuck replaces the timing gear for second time, his first marriage ends in acrimony; he puts new fat boy tires on the Charger in the nineties, the fifth set, while people log onto the Internet—same hair style, same music. He's a rolling, self-perpetuating time warp.

We come to a green light intersection and Chuck begins a left turn. A van tries to run the light and roars at us from the left headed for the driver side back tire. I brace for catastrophe as Chuck yanks the wheel hard. The van breaks and fishtails, the two cars spinning around and toward each other like a skating pair meeting at center ice. The sides of the cars slap together. *Crunch.* The rat box flies between the seats, hits the dash and lands sideways on my lap. As I gather my wits from the impact I'm staring through the slats.

"Son of a bitch," Chuck says, his mouth wide open. He points at the box, "Don't let him bite ya" and steps out of the car.

I right the box and hold it above my lap, then put it onto the back seat.

A large man with a beer gut argues with Chuck in front of the car. The man points at one direction and at the Charger. Chuck stamps his foot, rears back with a tightly coiled arm and punches the other man's face. Beer Gut charges Chuck and grabs him in a head lock, pounds the top of Chuck's head. Wailing and grunting. Arms flail about. Chuck is yelling Hell! Hell! No, he's yelling Bill! Bill! The van has pinned my door, so I crawl across the driver's seat. Dizzy on my feet, I grab Beer Gut around the neck. A thick arm springs back and boxes my nose. Bodies fall on top of me. A warm trickle of blood seeps into my mouth. I hear shouting and doors slamming. Two policemen untangle Chuck and Beer Gut, handcuffs flash. Another snaps my hands behind me, a knee in my back. I'm still replaying the accident in my mind. As the cops talk to Beer Gut by one patrol car, Chuck and I stand near another car, shackled, two winded and dangerous men (one bleeding) at the side of an intersection. A sight for the traffic. It'd be a damned outrageous stretch to arrest us. All Chuck did was....initiate the fight. Why did I get out of the car?

"Now remember," I say to Chuck, "he threw the first punch."

"I think I hit him first," Chuck says.

"Listen. Very important. *He* threw the first punch."

"Oh, yeah. Gotcha."

A crew cutted cop walks over to us, hands propped on either side of his gun belt. "Now what happened here?"

We say in unison: "He threw the first punch, officer."

They put Beer Gut in the back of a patrol car. He's got outstanding criminal warrants. Chuck was duking it out with a felon. We're uncuffed and told we're free to go. Every tension drains out of me in a sudden splash. I'm forty pounds lighter. High with sweet relief. Remember as a kid swimming the length of the pool underwater then coming up for a breath?

Chuck takes a last look at the scraped, rumpled side of his car and we get back in. He smiles ear to ear, his face reddened from punches. "Man, you are one tricky devil. He started the fight!"

"You are one sorry fighter." I laugh at Chuck's goofy, splotchy face—the funniest thing I've seen in a long time. Our adrenaline is still going, mixing with everything else in our system and we're soaring on the wings of personal liberty. Chuck retells the fight blow by blow. "He stopped me cold with that hook!"

I notice blood stains on the ill-fated silk jacket. An elbow is ripped and frayed. I wipe dried blood off my lip with a lapel and toss the jacket into the back seat. Who needs that crap? The rat can pee on it for all I care. A vision comes: Me suited up in Kendo gear, ignoring every thousand year old rule and savagely teeing off on Jerry like I'm swinging for the fences with a Louisville Slugger. Also, I'll buy that Allman Brothers album with the fold out and mail it to Ralph. He'll laugh his ass off. Maybe I could get behind the wheel of the Charger. I think I'll ask Chuck.

I point at the clock on the dash. "Oh boy, the time. Somebody is gonna be unhappy."

"Unhappy?" Chuck says. "Tina's gonna whip my sorry ass. But before we go back, let's see if that python will eat this fat rat."

"What the hell."

He spins the steering wheel and floors it, turns up the stereo. Chuck's wiping his forehead, mumbling something, not looking at the road. We buzz through a turn, my stomach swaying. I get a nasty chill. What if Chuck and I had been busted for assault? I'd be sitting in a lockup contemplating my incipient criminal record. I pull my seat belt across my lap and snap it in, tighten the strap. Or what if that Cro Magnon had slit my throat? Would the excitement have been worth it? Whupping Jerry seems rather extreme. A serious grudge could be started. No sense throwing away a lucrative situation. Chuck accelerates up a highway ramp, singing, the engine clattering. Thailand is a lush, lush place. Swooping in from the Gulf of Siam you see the most robust emerald imaginable. The Charger merges, already howling past other cars. I grip the armrest, my outstretched foot hovering over an imaginary brake.

Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Demuth)
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
Pencil and Gouache on Paper

Jeanne Emmons

THE CLOTHESLINE

Nobody saw it coming. In hindsight it all seemed inescapable, but that was only an illusion. There's a natural tendency to want to make meaning out of things, even things like infanticide. That's what drove everybody to construct The Story. People told and retold it in the weeks following, but their eyes would slide to the side, as if the vileness of it shamed them. Or, who knows? Maybe they just wanted to conceal their pleasure in, at long last, having a thing of such moment to confide.

During the sweltering August after John Glenroy took up that gun, versions of The Story reproduced like flies, mutating wildly. By Thanksgiving, everybody was fed up with worrying and speculating over it, and the frenzy died down some. And by the end of May, The Story had been stripped down to a thin wire. The gist of it was conveyed in a sentence or two, and a mere grunt or sigh on the part of the teller or listener spoke volumes.

The anniversary passed with hardly a ripple, and by winter the town settled into a pregnant silence. The Story was told only to strangers in town and relatives from far away who came in for the holidays. But it was told always with a tremor, as if it had happened yesterday and the gunshots were still ringing in the listener's ears.

In the spring, the thread of the tale began to accumulate weight again and put on flounces and tassels, like the laundry on John Glenroy's clothesline. This clothesline was an endless fascination to the neighbors who drove by on their way into town. New things would appear which had never been seen before and then either disappear or become part of the permanent collection, depending on whether John Glenroy and the hired girl decided it was worth keeping. The other items went to the Salvation Army and would turn up in the jumble bin, and everybody knew where they had come from.

When John Glenroy's paralyzed wife Dorothy had her first miscarriage, the town was beside itself, and The Story took on new life. But by the time the second baby was born, the town had lost interest, and the whole thing seemed to die a natural death, the way a kite sinks when the wind dies down. Seemed. Seven years to the day after the original event, new information surfaced, and The Story once more rose from its own ashes.

By now, though, it is a far cry from the original. Only a few claim to have had it from the horse's mouth, and even those aren't sure that the horse wasn't lying, or even who the horse really was. But nobody cares anymore, because The Story has achieved a reality of its own, separate from its origins, and has entered

the soul of the town.

Most accounts agree that it began with the sound of four shots from a rifle that left little Jenny and John Hart, Jr. dead and their mother Dorothy barely alive and in a wheelchair, unable to walk or talk due to injury to the spinal chord and the left hemisphere of the brain, where one of the bullets lodged and remains to this day. Now it is given out that John Glenroy, who shot the gun, intended to turn it on himself, as most do in such cases. But, true to his maverick nature, he could not bring himself to do what others did. Seven years later, he told his former best friend Andrew Whitlock that it was the sight of the couch that stopped him.

It was a flowered couch, with roses, which Dorothy had saved up for over the years out of her egg money and overtime at Walgreens and had ordered from the Sears catalogue. When it was finally delivered, it was wrapped all in packing paper, and Dorothy stood on the porch with her hands shaking while John Glenroy unwrapped those swaths of crinkling brown. At the first glimpse of one of those roses against a dark blue background, Dorothy gasped and moaned, and he unwrapped, faster and faster, until the couch stood like some sort of dowager queen who had appeared on their porch for a surprise visit. John Glenroy looked on with pride, as if he himself had been the one to save and slave for the couch. As if he had rung up purchase after purchase of plastic flowers and wall plaques and pain remedies at the cash register of Walgreens and saved up stray quarters to stow away in a Mason jar hidden in back of the spices. He clapped his hands and shouted Yee-haw.

It was the kind of overstuffed couch that you sank into and couldn't easily get back up out of, and John Glenroy found himself often in the depressions of those rose-covered cushions between odd jobs of mowing and raking and shiftless carpentry. It was all he could do sometimes to lift himself off of it when Dorothy came home from Walgreens and to kiss her hello before she pitched in on supper, browning ground beef and onions for the spaghetti sauce.

Still, the couch was her pride, even if it was always John Glenroy stretched out on it, and, when he shot her (he told Andrew), her arm had hung up on the cushion of the couch as she fell, and her hand had lain palm upward, open and white across one of those big tearoses, the way women hold their hands when they are offering somebody a seat or a bite of food. And he knew he hadn't quite killed her, because her eyes were still open and blinking at him, in spite of the bullethole in her head. It was as if she were signaling to him that this couch was for him, always, if only he would agree to take his proper place on it.

The children were another thing. They died immediately, and it was a blessing, everybody agreed, because you would not want a child to have survived such a thing and to have that memory burning at the very heart of their lives like a bit of radioactive waste.

So John Glenroy looked up from his wife's open hand, touched to the core

by that gracious, hospitable gesture, and he picked up the phone and called the ambulance and the sheriff to report a crime. And then he raised up his wife and carried her, with great difficulty, because he had gone to flab, into the bedroom and tried to stanch the wound by applying pressure with a wadded up towel. It was one of the white guest towels with gold thread, which had been a wedding present from one of the ladies at the church. It had never been used before. Dorothy had been saving it for company, even though they never had any overnight company because they didn't know anybody outside of town. Some thought John Glenroy's use of the towel hardly worth mentioning, but to a few, particularly among the women, it constituted an abomination, a kind of shadow of the crime itself.

He hadn't confessed at the time. It was not until seven years later, when he thought the statute of limitations had run out, that he took aside the man who had been his best friend, swearing him to secrecy. Andrew did not tell John Glenroy that no statute of limitations existed on the crime of murder. Neither did he keep the secret. He reported the confession immediately to the sheriff, and from that moment forward, he and John Glenroy never spoke again. It was this confession that set off the second wave of storytelling, the one that spawned so many and such baroque variations. But all the versions had one thing in common—an indignation and outrage that unifies the town to this day. John Glenroy had lied to the authorities and had cynically and coldly kept quiet for exactly seven years. It was this that rankled with everybody later when the truth trickled slowly out of Andrew's machine shop.

The story John Glenroy had told the sheriff on the day it happened was that there had been a traveling salesman, a man selling cosmetics. Dorothy was always one for a new shade of lipstick, so he had left her there with this man in white buck loafers (he said), while he went out to put new spark plugs into his Ford truck, which had begun to miss. He then claimed to have heard these gunshots, three of them, and by the time he was out of the garage, the salesman was in his car and spinning out down the road, kicking up a cloud of dust. He had picked up the phone right then, but there had been a party line, and he had had to break in on the conversation between Edna Louise Haworth and her daughter-in-law, so that the ambulance could be called.

The sheriff had his doubts from the very first. For one thing, when wife and kids are shot, it's almost always the husband. For another thing, there was no sign of any other fresh tire tracks on John Glenroy's property. For another thing, there weren't any prints but his on the rifle, and why would a traveling salesman wear gloves, especially in summer, even if he did wear white bucks? For another thing, nobody else within fifty miles of town had been visited by a cosmetics salesman.

The story had a thousand holes. When asked about these discrepancies, John Glenroy would just raise his eyebrows, pucker his forehead, shrug, and say

"It's beyond me, Sheriff. I only know what I saw. I can't explain it. That's your job." And the way he shook his head from side to side made them think maybe he was innocent after all, because he was too stupid to have thought up the story of the salesman, even if it was as pock-marked as a hunk of Swiss cheese.

The Sheriff was no greenhorn, though. He said he would have arrested him on the spot if Dorothy hadn't been alive. Now, if John Glenroy had wanted to kill her, why didn't he go ahead and finish her off? Especially since she had taken out an insurance policy on herself, explaining to her friends that if anything happened to her, the kids would be left destitute, John Glenroy being so lazy. Dorothy had no living relatives. Her parents were killed in a train and automobile collision when she was sixteen. And why (the Sheriff said) didn't he wipe those prints of his off that rifle? Even he wasn't that stupid, though some thought he was. After all, Dorothy had given out to her friend Ruth Agnes that he had trouble following the plot of cop shows and spent most of his time watching old *Andy Griffith* and *I Love Lucy* re-runs. Still, even those who thought him capable of the crime looked the other way and pretended to buy his story, and made statements like, "I hope to God he's innocent, because what would happen to poor Dorothy?"

And he was eager to take up his cross and do his duty by her. Never had anyone seen John Glenroy attack a task with such energy. He saw the doctors and the nutritionist at the hospital in Sioux City, and he bought soft foods at the Super Valu, because she didn't seem to be able to chew anymore. He already had a little food processor to grind up meats. He bought a big box of cloth diapers, because he could not afford the disposable kind. And he knew from taking care of his mother, who had died of stroke, about bedsores and wheelchairs and restraints and how to bathe a person in her condition. He got all the instructions for Dorothy's physical therapy from the hospital, and, even though nobody ever saw him exercising her, he talked a lot at church functions about how hard he worked to keep the muscle tone in her legs. He tried to get her to talk, too, but he couldn't get a word out of her, which was a good thing for him, because she, of course, must have known.

You can't help but wonder how she felt all those years, if she felt anything. She had a knowing look in her eye, though, and would seem to react to things people said, even smiling occasionally, or blinking slowly. Since he did do it, and everybody except one is convinced he did, you've got to think about how it must have felt to her to have him always by her side like that, acting like the most loving husband that ever lived.

And in one sense, he was. He made her pregnant five times after the incident occurred. Now, not all those babies lived to full term. The first pregnancies ended in miscarriages, and after that the doctor had a long talk with John Glenroy, but it didn't do any good. The third and fourth baby were born fine, but the fifth one was stillborn, and after that the girl must have put

her foot down. Still, two babies, born out from between those unmoving legs of hers, and you've got to wonder what it must have been like for her to lie there and have him on top of her, who had tried to kill her. Or to see his girlfriend hold and feed formula to those babies, looking up fondly at him who had killed his own children just because she was going to leave him.

That's why he did it, Andrew said. And he should know, because it was Andrew she was going to leave him for. John Glenroy's best friend. It took a good year and a half for John Glenroy to figure it out. He didn't rouse himself off the rose-covered couch enough to know much of anything that went on in the town. But everybody else knew that Dorothy Hart would go down to Andrew's machine shop and climb up the stairs to his rooms during lunch hour. Andrew would hang up a sign, "Gone to Lunch," but everybody knew where he had gone and who he had gone with. And the manager over at Walgreens would shake her head when Dorothy came back late or had her buttons done up wrong. But nobody could really blame her, with John Glenroy so shiftless, with his smelly socked feet propped up on that couch, watching *The Price is Right* and waiting for her to come home and do his laundry.

Nobody could blame her, because Andrew was a fine, hard-working man, and would have made her a good husband, and if it weren't for little Jenny and John, Jr. she should have divorced her husband and married Andrew, who worshiped the ground she walked on.

Andrew had been best friends with John Glenroy since high school, when they used to jump the railroad trains and ride them down to Sioux City and get off and go to the bars together, or look for women down on lower Fourth Street. They never could afford the women, but they'd watch and snicker when they saw some man in khakis and a sports shirt go up to one and disappear inside one of those dark red brick buildings. They'd look up at the windows on the third floors of those buildings and wonder what went on on the other side of the dusty glass where you could just glimpse a lampshade or maybe a potted plant. Once they saw a woman in a slip, but she seemed to be alone.

Andrew and John Glenroy were fast friends until Dorothy came along. She rode into town on the Jackrabbit bus and got off at the drug store. She sat down on a stool at the counter and ordered herself a cherry coke. When she finished the coke, she turned sideways on the stool and crossed her long legs, which were bare below her cut-off jeans, let her rubber thong sandal dangle from her big toe, leaned her left elbow on the green and white-streaked formica and asked the pharmacist if he knew of any rooms for rent. It just so happened he himself had a room right over the store. So she started out working for him, but he tried to take advantage of her and he sometimes had scrambled eggs in his mustache and bad breath, so she moved out and got a job as cashier at Walgreens. By that time she'd met John Glenroy, who had inherited his mom's house after she died from her final stroke. He'd taken care of her for a good two

years, which gave him excellent practice for taking care of Dorothy one day.

She met him at the Wagonwheel Bar and Grill on a Saturday night when they had a live singer in from Sioux City. Everybody within range of where they sat that night could smell the sex dripping like honey, and, because Dorothy was new in town, everybody was watching. She sat down at the table where John Glenroy and Andrew were lounging with their cowboy boots stuck out in the aisle. And she looked from one to the other, eyed them up and down and sideways, and then chose John Glenroy, who was muscular and stocky, with the biggest blue eyes you could imagine, surrounded by dark, curling lashes.

Andrew was tall and lank and red-haired and pimply. He was used to the girls preferring John Glenroy over him, so he just crossed his arms and fingered a bad spot on his face and watched the singer while Dorothy laid her hand playfully on the knee of John Glenroy's Levis where they stuck out in the aisle.

Dorothy started to take up all of John Glenroy's time so that the train rides to Sioux City stopped. But eventually Andrew began to make money at his machine shop and then he started driving in alone, only now he had the money to visit the women on lower fourth. He would climb up those dirty stairs to their rooms where there would be a double bed and graying sheets and, on the bureau, a pitiful jarful of black-eyed Susans the woman had picked down by the Missouri river. The woman would undress him and he would enjoy her, even though he knew she was not enjoying him.

When Dorothy began to confide in him and seek his eyes with those dark eyes of hers, it took his breath away, because she seemed to need and want him. And he would look in the mirror and know that he was no longer an ugly man. He had grown taller and had filled out, and his arm muscles strained against his white Sunday shirt, and the pimples had disappeared from his face, leaving only a few small, round depressions.

So, when she brought the car in because John Glenroy would not get up off the couch to fix it, Andrew leaped at the chance to offer her a cup of coffee in his rooms over the shop. She looked so sad and needed to talk, and who better to talk to than Andrew, who had known her husband from the time they had snapped girls' bras in the seventh grade?

And she had come back, over and over, and made him coffee in the percolator and brought him chicken salad sandwiches from her own kitchen, made under the very nose of John Glenroy, who seemed not even to notice that she packed two sandwiches now instead of one and occasionally added a sweet pickle, even though it was kosher dills she preferred.

And so they had begun, making love on Andrew's twin bed. And nobody had asked any questions down at the Sears Distribution Center when he ordered a double brass-plated bed one Saturday morning, because they knew what the answer was, even though it wasn't the answer he would give if they asked. Everybody shook their heads when Dorothy gave birth to little Jenny and

she turned out to be a redhead bright as a robin's breast, but nobody was surprised. It was obvious to everybody what was happening—everybody except John Glenroy, whose eyes were so riveted on *Wheel of Fortune* that the irises must have taken on the look of the wheel, spinning around with those glittering numbers and Bankrupts and Lose-a-Turns, until it was time for his mid-morning nap.

The talk among the women then was that Dorothy had gone too far. It was indecent to live with one man and have another man's baby. She should have divorced him. Some of the more thin-lipped among them revised their condemnation of John Glenroy. They decided that Dorothy just took and took. If she had been a better wife, more supportive, then John Glenroy would have been more of a man. He might not have made much money, but he would not have gone to flab on that couch, watching *Love Connection.* If she had turned those big brown eyes on John Glenroy, her own husband, instead of on another man, she would have turned him around. Beneath all this high-minded talk there might have lain just a touch of resentment that Dorothy had neatly scooped up two of the eligible town bachelors in one motion, without blinking twice.

But who was to say, now that it was over, whether Dorothy could have done any different or made anything any better? It might have been John Glenroy's destiny to do what he did. Maybe nothing could have stopped it, anymore than Dorothy could have stopped that fast-moving Burlington Northern train that plowed into the family car and sheared off the part that contained her parents and left her in a twisted hunk of metal upside down on the other side of the track.

Once everything settled down and the investigation had ground to a halt, everybody expected John Glenroy to take up with Andrew again. It would have been like him. But he didn't. That's because John Glenroy knew that Dorothy had been planning to leave him for Andrew. That's why John Glenroy made his confession to Andrew, and why he just looks at Andrew to this day, looks right through him, as if all those years of riding the trains had never happened. But when he looks at Dorothy sitting out in the aisle of the church in her wheelchair, he looks at her. His eyes stop on her and go over her like stroking hands, even though her own eyes are like stones.

After the sheriff heard Andrew's story, he marched over and yanked John Glenroy off the front porch. But John Glenroy denied everything, so it was his word against Andrew's, and there was nothing the sheriff could do but shake his head and kick the dirt with the toe of his boot. And some people said it was for the best. John Glenroy turned himself right around, as if murder was his route to salvation. He started going to church, for one thing, taking Dorothy with him but not the girl, who, people said, had had enough of religion to last her five lifetimes. John Glenroy would sit in the back pew of Good Shepherd Lutheran and put in exactly one dollar whenever the plate was passed. For a

while he got himself a job at the grocery store, stocking. Nobody would hire him for any job where he would come into contact with customers. But John Glenroy would work for six hours at night, mopping the floors and neatly lining the shelves with canned goods and cereals and bringing home the dented cans and crushed boxes for him and Dorothy and the girl. According to the tellers at the bank, he had it made, because his biggest source of income was Dorothy's disability checks, which came in regularly from the government.

That was what made it possible for John Glenroy to keep the house and save a little and also hire the girl and start ordering the lingerie.

At first everybody thought it was for the girl. She came from an unsavory background. Her people had moved in from Kansas a year prior to the tragedy and bought a few acres outside of town and set up a church where they did total immersion baptisms and spoke in tongues. There was talk they handled snakes, but nobody ever claimed to have actually witnessed it. She was just a tiny thing and wore her skirts longer than was normal for a girl her age, which was about seventeen, and she pulled her hair back into a bun.

She came to the house every single day at first and stayed until five. Every Friday at four she drove over to the First National Bank in her battered red Nova and deposited forty dollars, keeping ten dollars in cash for incidentals like hand cream and feminine products and an occasional dress. She stayed mostly to herself. But she had a sister who let it slip that the girl didn't for a minute believe the rumors about John Glenroy. He was a saint, she said, an absolute saint. Finally, she moved in.

When that happened, the clothesline started to change, and to this day it remains a scandal, a constant reminder not only of the tragedy but of human depravity itself. It is what keeps The Story alive.

Like a self-respecting housewife, the girl hangs the underwear on the inside, with the sheets hiding the dainties from view. But nobody's fooled. In the spaces between the sheets you can see those bright shreds of fabric, those turquoise bras with black lace overlays and split-crotch fuschia panties and red satin teddies. There is no end of silky slips and elasticized garter belts.

It took a long time for any of the women to say out loud that they could swear there were two sizes of fancy underwear on that line. But, once one of them let it slip in a giddy moment over coffee, it was as if a dam had broken and they all admitted they had thought the same thing. Little tiny size 32 A-cups and big size 38 D-cups all hanging together on the line, whipping in the breeze, nothing like even Dorothy would have ever worn before, and Dorothy was no lady. It was Linda Macksey, who had once worked in foundations at the Younker's department store in Sioux City, who made the final pronouncement on size. Nobody had guts enough to sneak up into the yard and take a peek, not with a murderer in the house.

When there's talk now, it's mainly about retribution and the will of God.

The story has reached that stage in its development that it needs to yield up its meaning, if only it would. People massage it and worry it, hoping it will give, but it never does. People wonder aloud how John Glenroy can go on living in sin and enjoying it when little Heather Rudersdorf has got leukemia. People wonder how the girl, whose name, which nobody uses, is Janice, can be so devoid of self-respect. Andrew is always complaining about how John Glenroy had everything handed to him and never had to do a day's real work in his life, and now he's got two women. The pastor of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church says that the will of God is not always discernible by limited human perception. Nobody says anything about the children, either the dead ones or the new ones, who, in a few years, will have to start school and face the ungovernable tongues of their peers. Nobody ever speculates out loud about what goes through Dorothy's mind, but every now and then somebody wakes up in a cold sweat at night and ponders it until morning.

Janice is always sitting with those babies on the front porch, where she and John Glenroy have moved the rose-covered couch. And Dorothy sits there, too, in her wheelchair, her wrist limp, her head lolling to one side. Meanwhile that underwear just keeps on flapping out there, decently surrounded by the white cotton diapers, big for Dorothy and small for the babies. Right next to the bibs and tiny T-shirts. Waving merrily like the flags of exotic countries, not quite hidden by the respectable white sheets, so that the women driving into town have to duck their heads as they pass on their way to Circle.

Anthony LaBranche

The Butterfly Porch

I keep coming up with **hypostatize**. Fancy dictionary word. Maybe it haunts me because it calls up from a shadowy world bowed shapes murmuring with raised chalice their chants of frugal devotion. So goes the picture, if words truly have pictures attached to them. Maybe they do in our early years; that's how we come to be acquainted with words. Of course I've always been suspicious of monks and chalices; they're as embarrassing as jockey briefs popping in for commercial relief on the Arts channel. Are we really meant to rush out and buy those things during our intermission from Beethoven? But the fancy word may stand for something I misappropriated quite early in my unguided readings, aet. 16, from the life of a saint or desert father (who in early paintings seems perched somewhere in Arizona mesa country) hypostatizing themselves into the shape of some scruffy Stylites or scowling Jerome. The words means, apparently, to hold something to its essential being, as an original substance. Whatever this balancing act means, and I'm quite taken by it, I've never understood it. The word has grown its own bacterial culture or fungus upon it which has nourished me, without my knowledge, over the years. It has adopted me, whatever task of instruction it intends to perform.

Tiger-stripe tabby drowses in my lap, resenting the motions of my writing hand. We're the only ones here, looking down on the porch from upstairs, and he's boss. A faint breeze moves from empty room to room; the house is abandoned and vacant. As I write this sentence and the next, he quits his deep kettle-drum purring. He knows the inscribed word is another fraudulent human claim that the things we hold here are precious because word-validated. It's an empty pretense. Things need not be hypostatized any more than they are already, he stares gloomily, and as a matter of record they don't stand much chance of improvement when we shove and wrassle them in that direction. If he were in command here not me, he would legislate his own version of writing, maybe get rid of it entirely or make it into something like a Van Gogh, thick loads of pigment laid down with irregular touches, spots of canvas left untouched, a nervous twist of trees dotting the fields and a village in the distance with small figures bent toiling obscurely in their journalities. As for himself, he has an untouchable narrative. Soon he'll leap down and start it again. He's heard enough of calculated theatrical pauses and resumptions, commas and exclamations. The punctuation of human living leads nowhere, he says, on no footpads armed with sharp needles like his, nudging the underbrush. He has eyes only for the sweet morsels of birds playing under

the green bronze nymph garden statue, that mortify us with their careless, uncapturable cries.

* * * * *

A second daydream takes hold on me. Daydreaming may be the prelude to genuine remembering. The erratic butterflies sit on the cement slab of porch warmed by the morning sun. They are either daydreaming or remembering, I can't say. When they land, they squeeze their wings together for a while in prayer and contemplation. I sit here schooled by their folded amber wings waiting for our next sideways, upward flight.

This time it's a long senseless mathematical formula that runs through my head. It has to do, in some arcane manner, with the art of baking French pastry, or even better preparing a whole dinner. But I'm also aware that this interpretation I've given you is just a feint of consciousness to pretend it's always on the job inspecting itself, grasping details and making something out of them, details which it knows quite well are not intelligible but which challenge it to illuminate the world with astounding cognitions.

Beneath my bogus formulations some deeper narrative slips away and loses itself in the tinkling fox trot of a 1930's scavenger hunt in which the four of us children (I to one side) and all sorts of giddy unfamiliar acquaintances participate in a hunt for hidden treasure buried around grounds and garden. The key to the coded directions on the treasure map is hidden in an unused cupboard behind the green doorway leading to the living room. When I open the cupboard the smell of stale cigarettes and lead pencils tells me I'm too young to participate in the hunt. (The yearly heights of each of us were recorded in pencil on the doorjamb by the cupboard. An inspection of them confirms my suspicion.) One clue involves retrieving the police chief's hat (without the police chief in it) from a nearby town. He lets us take it. It's 1937, and there's still a reluctant trace of humor in the world.

I go back downstairs to fix my supper in the kitchen, still painted its unripe tomato green though sixty years have gone. I see that words are merely the rippling vinyl surface of a deep lake we view from thirty thousand feet. This vinyl surface entreats me—a young supermarket matron in her summer outfit, lingering by the spice shelf waiting to be admired, sideways eye, by me—her fitness club abdomen, lean muscled thighs and gently pulsing breasts. Entreats my admiration, then melts away.

This vinyl lake, I was about to say, adjoins another deep lake also vinyl-covered. These lakes have underground waters reaching far beneath the hills and continents I have in sight. These lakes have underground waters.

* * * * *

A pungent scent of abandoned gravesite flowers drifts on the breeze from the village cemetery two hundred yards down the road. The sun in August dries them into aromatic weeds and warms the illegible tipped Yankee headstones so that they bow down like rough dogs to be petted by a child's touch. When you scrape away the moss and lichen you find doggerel verses that chant sententiously, forlornly about the lives that went under, soldiers and patriots lost in wars, children of child-fever, whole families of family-fever, lingering widows and widowers grieving through twenty more years, way up into the 1880's. As children we walked bare-toed through the unevenly clipped grass between graves, sipping sodas that set us back a nickel at the village store, wondering what was underneath the headstones that would push them up and tip them over this way and that, as if they were about to speak. We ran squealing from the honey bees that patrolled certain sectors of flowering gravesites, and we pinched our toes on the sharp hot gravel that lined the edge of the road back home. We suspected that a long passage of time had something to do with the tipsy headstones; that was why they appeared so bent and grandfatherly and why the moss had put ticklish whiskers on them.

* * * * *

Forty-four years since my grandmother died. Her father fought on the Union side with the Ohio regiment, against my father's grandfather with the Louisiana. I can't tell if the two sides of my former self faced each other on some green field, Antietam, Gettysburg. Likely they did.

"Tony, Tony, oh Tony," my grandfather's voice swirls up again from somewhere hidden inside me in his dour Pennsylvania Dutch litany for the Chinese vase I destroyed while brandishing the handle of the power mower. "Dry up Teddy," my grandmother's voice answers by way of ordering him to shut up. I can't recall the outcome of the Chinese vase saga, but it doesn't matter. The tone of their voices carries me back to the event, the event back to me.

This favorite pearl-handled jackknife I've retrieved unexpectedly from the back of a drawer, an incomplete manicure set very rusty and never discarded and an old lead soldier dressed in French blue, lonely survivor of our wars in the attic bearing the wounds of BB shot and other projectiles we hurled at it. They seem to ask me to do something with them, now they have reappeared. Arrange them into a fable called memory that I can understand and live with for the present. Arrange, I suppose, even the death throes of the maimed rabbit which just now the imperious glowering cat has dragged thumping and squealing through a downstairs window, the stiffening of its velvet foot, the dulling of an appalled, acquiescing eye. Cowering upstairs, I wait for them to pass into literature, if they will pass.

* * * * *

The newspapers confirm that a man has been equipped successfully with a plastic heart to replace his own imperfect human contraption. The question occurs to me, what change has come upon his "I" as a result of this major renovation? Has the former "I" withdrawn to one side like a shadowy poor relative always on the outs and wishing to share in the "new I" but not quite daring to?

"He" has appeared on the evening news, seated upright and speechless and so much more a ghost of himself, we can feel it despite the announcer's upbeat commentary, than the artfully arranged patients of TV dramas. His head is bent downward as if admitting to something extremely personal and only his, and they cannot prevail upon him to look into the TV camera. His thinning hair is no longer his hair, and his eyes, unseeing, have been enlarged and rounded by an apparition we cannot know though we will know it one day. I stare at his pale subtracted image, only partly not wholly relieved that he is alive at all. He seems a wing without a bird attached to it.

But all this speculation and grammatology are just to entertain ourselves, we the frivolously healthy. He struggles along with his own version of our human temporality for six more hours, for twelve, then a whole day. His discarded clothes and possessions watch and wait, clumsily out of place on their hospital chair, a carefully folded golfing shirt made special by constant wear, a belt and white trousers. Shouldn't he have dressed otherwise to come here to die? A friend appears by the bed, a face he accepts for the last time as it avoids his asking eyes and instead follows his length down, wondering in secret how cold each part of him is. In this moment there is so much he can't say or write down at the end of distant fingertips. This friend's face appeared miraculously just now before him, as much a mystery as all the bits of his life he has collected painfully helter-skelter around his bed to populate this moment. His final achievement—he won't be able to tell us this secret—may be simply to live a bit longer as a silent admirer of the world, noting in its changes and miracles the seeds of our admiration for it.

* * * * *

The students are on spring vacation. The books held agonizingly overdue for the semester have been returned; everything seems to be functioning and in order. Except that the Director of the University Library has died suddenly without warning. I have only a hazy recollection of his appearance, and I'm half afraid to go up into the stacks only to be surprised by the face I thought was his popping out at me from down a corridor of books, even while I'm running a memorial service for it in my conscience. If death pertains to anything, and it seems not to when we sit down to jabber inconclusively about it, it must pertain to our failure to apprehend the genuine in anything, most particularly genuine

presence and genuine absence and the relation between them.

Now my feeling of uncertainty grabs hold for sure. It's not about this man, though I know it should be. It's that I may have missed out on something about living, missed out on the original colors of my being here, which will be left over after I die for others to gamble away and play with.

Sunlight spills through an April window of the Library's East Wing dissolving me in the glow of its bright Tuscan panel. Now I remember. His face was the pleasant, unobtrusive one which smiled absent-mindedly at me from time to time (of course to faculty only), and it's an awkward fact that for more than a week I've been mourning the wrong face, which has shown up preoccupied and miffed about something behind the Reference Desk. No matter. The sudden appearance and disappearance of faces among the stacks reminds me of what is in store for me, and it is this reminder that hurts my feelings beneath all my feelings. I'm not injured by the abstract topic of death; we all babble on about it, using it as just another excuse for words. Look at all the people-names in the library distilled into the yellowing pages of their books, I tell myself. It doesn't seem to faze them.

But I'm increasingly injured by the practical application of death to this or that person, its subtraction of them from us, and just as awesomely us from them, even if it's just the family pet. There's an awkward emptiness, like a censorship, in their going away like that. When I return to the stacks I see the hands then the face of the author struggling to get clear of the binding of his volume, all bunched up in there, coming out to eat, belch, do something with his life. He wants his playtime back. To hell with the words. He and I are both homeless, he because he writes them and I because I read them—the small games we contrive to fill our days in this dusty cooped-up place. I envy the bright insects crumpled where they have fallen from mid-flight, neither obscene nor forlorn, still worldly and ornamental.

* * * * *

The ancient Greeks had a way of handling this, no doubt to cheer themselves, as they were wont to do in mixing their more abstruse philosophical speculations with wine. They proposed that the shade of the deceased lingered close by us for a short period while making the awkward transition to life beyond the river, dreaming himself out of one existence into the next. Even this schedule of dying, at least in its initial stages, seems contrived to assuage the grief of the living. After all it's just a hypothetical schedule. We deal with the deceased for a while—we can't help it and we hope he's appreciating our efforts—then we give up on it. Soon the shade moves beyond our schedule of sentimental lingering, the etiquette we force upon him, and he wanders off. "Remember me, remember me," the strangely half-familiar face calls as it turns to fade, then before it can catch itself, "Pooh. That's foolish. Remember instead the butterfly porch. Our tongues change so rapidly I'm of two bodies as to whether I should return to you or not. Your face is fading into gray bristles, and already there are other lights playing around you and in your eyes so that I cannot see you distinctly. It's time for the treasure hunt. I wanted to say one thing, one more thing."

My cat, ancient warrior, has been scrutinizing me all this while from my lap, caught as I am in the empty human fit of words which has rendered me motionless. Over our communal workbench he's been tracking the myopic path of a waddling pigeon. His eyes shine with a language and intent. Fair game. It's time for him to fire up his narrative of living and dying, climb out the window onto the roof then down. Out of anthropocentric loyalty to myself and to humankind in general, I feel I should resist ascribing to him all these human motives, intentions, wishes, dreams. But somewhere in this impasse which takes shape between his vision and mine lies the secret of his potential superiority to me. Merely sitting there, watching, he seems to surpass both my reasonings and my fears regarding human aging.

That is why I feel I age and my tiger doesn't feel it, an event which philosophy defends as my claim to wisdom, but which my tiger's unflinching, yellow-green eyes tell me is merely a part of a larger something, my passing, he says, and of course it goes without saying, no great matter, his.

Virgil Suarez

Passion Fruit

for Cadence who took the picture

Everyday at noon when the noise
of the streets quiets down, the lovers

come to this room, somewhere
in Old Havana, in this country

of lost causes, and they lay next
to each other on an amaca,

a hammock he has hung up
by the window, low so that in it

their bodies resemble the shape
of a canoe, and their sunburned arms

as they dangle over the edges, oars.
They lay there and read what the cracks

on the walls say, these love poems
in the peeling flecks of paint, truths

in the patches of damp ceiling tiles.
After lovemaking they dream

their escapes where so much water
fills their being. A fly balances

itself on the lip of the water bowl,
braving the slick smoothness of porcelain,

the burning candle flickers in a moment
of breeze as it cries on itself, slowly,

slow like the lovers' passing through
in this life. They love in this room,

silent, oblivious. All the while the sparrows
have perched on the branches of the fruit

tree that grows on the balcony
outside the lovers' window.

A fruit tree, its knobby roots each day
deeper, twisted into the concrete and wire mesh,

grows up here on the third story balcony,
where the sparrows now perch and preen.

Theirs is as much a history of this place
where the single fruit the tree has given

will suddenly be plucked by his arm
as it reaches out through the window

from the swing of the hammock. "This,"
he says, "is the fruit to quench our thirst."

"The fruit to appease this hunger."
He brings this fruit to his lover, puts

it close to her mouth, watches as she takes
the first bite. Sweet is the juice of oblivion.

She now shares it with him—if they have
to pretend in this empty room,

then they will imagine this is part
of some story about to be told,

at the end of the end of the world
when the last two humans embrace,

seek consolation that like them, nature
has given, and given, a mother to all.

When the fruit is gone and the lovers
kiss, they fly plops into the water,

gives up its life for the sake of the magical.

Lori E. Sambol

KADDISH

I am my grandmother tonight. I sit at the foot of the Passover table, where she used to sit; I've coiled my hair into the same loose bun she wore. And I have a piece of bread hidden in my lap. My mother sits across from me, brown hair wispy over her face, her hands spread on the table as if to embrace the platter stacked with *matzos*, unleavened bread.

She looks at me warily. As do the others.

I pull out the piece of bread.

I have to tell you, my grandmother said, the week before she died. Her hair, still blonde, spread on the pillow like light haloing a candle. *I have to tell you about the bread.*

The bread I pull out is just a small piece of yolk-yellowed *challah*. Not that big. But my mother pushes back her chair and stands up, "Don't you dare take a bite of that, Ruth. I thought we were through with this when your grandmother died." "You're ruining Passover for your mother," my father yells. My brothers snicker, jabbing each other with sharp elbows. The candle on the sideboard—for remembrance, for my grandmother—gleams calmly in its clear glass.

My mother pushed me off the train carrying us from Brno to Teresienstadt into a field of sunflowers. You had to go through the fields to get to the camp in those days. She saw them and just shoved me. Her hands felt like a bruise on my back. I guess she thought I'd be safe there. Perhaps she thought that I, the oldest child, would be saved on this, the first day of Passover. Perhaps it was because of my blonde hair.

Every Passover, my grandmother ate bread before the first Seder; she would never answer my mother's angry "Why?"

But last year, she didn't eat bread at Passover—or anything at all. She lay in bed, ricocheting between the present and the past. Time spiraled, always repeated, always coming around. I paused at the Seder's beginning, hoping she'd run from the back bedroom with her bread. Her absence was a sharp rifle shot, cutting through my skin.

I ran. The soldiers on the train shot at me but I ran. I tore through the sunflowers. The flower's faces turned toward the sunlight. Pollen streaked yellow across my skirt.

At the edge of the field, the soldier waited for me. Sun glinted off the barrel of his gun. I closed my eyes. Thinking that it's better to face death with closed eyes. I was your age.

My mother now pleads, "You don't need to do this."

But I do.

There was no shot. Just a scream so high-pitched that I thought it was a woman's and the soldier bent like a puppet on the ground. Above him - Not a man, but a giant, wearing clothes too small and torn, skin dark, his hair like weeds.

My mother had told me too many folktales for me not to know who he was. The Golem came close and I saw fire burning in his eyes. He smelled like the river mud he was made from. I wasn't scared; he'd been made for me. When I touched his face, his skin felt silk-soft. He held his index finger to his lips, demanding quiet, perhaps, or secrecy.

He tore the yellow star from my jacket and pushed me in the direction of Prague. His hands left stains of mud.

I went alone to the graveyard today. She hasn't been dead long enough for a gravestone to be set; at the cemetery, I left a pebble on the ground. The soil smelled rank and moist, like a riverbed after the water's stopped running. I felt her slip away from me, tried to catch hold. I saw a figure like a shadow moving behind the graves.

So I take a bite of the *challah*. My mother's mouth rounds as she draws out the vowel in my name.

No one would know me in Prague. I had blond hair; I could pass. It was an early morning when I stood on the banks of the Vltava. I stole loaves of stale bread and ate them by the river. Breaking off the mold. Even though it was Passover, I would now have to learn a different life.

Swans paddled in circles at my feet.

I never told anyone; they would call me crazy. But I was alive, and there were stains of mud.

I have to tell you, my grandmother said. *The Talmud says our first duty is to survive. I was pushed. And I could pass.*

She touched my hair, as blonde as hers. *Matka*, she murmured. Mother.

I take another bite of bread. I chew until it becomes dough. I chew until the bread turns back into what it was made of.

Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1997 (Franz Kline)
12 x 12 inches
Oil on Carved Hydrocal Stone

Kristin Bradshaw

LIKE ZOMBIES DO

i
No time for I love yous;
But you know I loves you boy.

In a scene

ii
I eat cats straight out: tom cat, pussy—
it's all a little voodoo and wine.
No more sign for kisses,
Night blues and fire reds lure. I wind northward
on pathless expeditions, but veer out
in all directions; settle hellwards [because]
the whiskey woman still keeps fish in me.

iii
A clock got time for kisses,
making time like zombies do.
I say no. Nomeansno, even for kissing.
I say, your lips don't kiss like zombies' do.

R.M. Berry

Second Story

Second Story could have been an excellent novel. Its plot, or what remains of one, contains all the elements of which classic novels are made: a colorful locale, conflict among blood-kin, a background of immediate social and political interest. But the story we have is not that one.

A young man, I—, inherits his father's business, a small produce store. His sister, U—, is ignored in the will. Both siblings are living abroad at the time, and each reacts to the legacy with profound but mixed emotions. The sister despises her father (there are hints of sexual abuse) and hoped never to see him again. But being disinherited infuriates her. It replicates the injury done her as a child and revives the memories she crossed the ocean to escape. She undergoes a psychotic episode and ends up in a hospital in Scotland.

The son is living in Paris, pursuing his dream of becoming a writer, and failing utterly. He also hates his father. His reasons are unclear, but they may involve the father's abuse of his sister, for whom I— too harbors forbidden desires. However, I—'s anger is directed, not so much at his father, as at his father's business. Or more specifically, at the apartment above it. It was in this flat, overlooking the street, that he and his sister were raised (the mother's absence is never explained). I— has a recurrent nightmare of being imprisoned there.

The inheritance takes on the character of fate for both siblings. I— is penniless and not especially strong. When the word of his inheritance reaches him, he is living on the charity of friends. It's wearing out. He badly needs a means of support, one that will allow him to practice his art, and he hasn't the faintest notion how to secure it. He obsesses about his father's legacy, feels himself being drawn back to America, rails at his weakness, etcetera.

This predicament is skillfully contrived, and for the first fifty pages or so, that is, until I—'s narration takes over, *Second Story* verges on being a captivating read. However, no sooner does I—'s writing become the novel's focus than its plot slows to, if not a halt, then a grind.

Part of the problem is that I— is afflicted with a debilitating self-consciousness of no obvious origin. He doesn't want what he wants, can't let himself do what he tries to do, questions everything. Once installed in his father's home, I— passes his days selling peaches and kumquats. He doesn't mind his father's business, even takes an interest in the daily accounts, but gradually he succumbs to repetition. He finds himself reliving old rivalries, waking to the sting of forgotten slights. One afternoon while washing rutabagas, he blurts out a schoolyard epithet. Later counting change, he bursts into childish tears. He's able to compose himself only while sitting at his computer. Either he has been notified of his sister's breakdown or he has somehow fantasized it, but gradually he begins to narrate her ordeal from his vantage six thousand miles away.

U— passes her days in a tiny room with a window too high to see out. She experiences rages that exhaust her, prolonged episodes of sobbing and nightmares. Despite I—'s absence from these scenes, he describes her traumas with impressive vividness. U—'s symptoms are dramatized, and her interior monologue is convincing. There is a moving scene of masturbation.

In itself, the technique of substituting an imaginary account for a recollected one is neither confusing nor especially new and, if skillfully handled, can provide an effective variation in mood and tone. We willingly suspend our disbelief in I—'s point of view and allow ourselves to forget that, of course, he can't really imagine his sister's suffering. But unfortunately, I— can't forget this. After describing U—'s memory of their father's voice, I— ruins his powerful effect by remarking, "or this is how I picture U—." He continues narrating but now intersperses his story with expressions such as, "I seem to see her gazing up," or "In my dreams he stifles her cries," or at his most ludicrous, "Is this the monstrous shape my hallucinations must all assume?"

Although irritating, these intrusions gradually become less noticeable, and for a time the narrative of U—'s recovery proceeds. In U—'s nightmare her father is perpetually inside of her. No matter how hard she struggles, she can never get free. U—'s doctor is a zombie, but a psychiatric resident comes alive to her plight. He explains to U— that she's creating her nightmares herself, that her father is powerless without her permission, that U— holds the key to her own jail. For some reason, this casts U— into the deepest gloom imaginable. She stops eating. Her eyes become expressionless. She spends whole days staring at a wall. Her breakthrough finally comes when one night she recognizes the violator of her dreams as the young psychiatrist. (This mistake is never explained.) She immediately begins to plot her escape from the hospital, feigning openness and recovered candor, and counting on the psychiatrist's sexual repression to make her scheme work. Despite I—'s tiresome asides, U—'s subterfuge makes for an exciting episode.

But the novel that *Second Story* might have been gets no further. One night while seated before his computer imagining U—'s torment, I— undergoes paralysis: "My fingers froze," he recounts. "I stared into nothing. There across the waters I saw her raise her eyes, saw my hallucination looking back, saw U— seeing *this*." And we never find out how U— escapes the hospital. Instead we are treated to a two-page orgy of authorial self-loathing. ("How transparent I've become! All my designs, every pretense. Abasing U— just to exalt myself!") When next we hear of the sister, she's back in America.

At this point the novel starts to disintegrate. The narration fragments. The plot becomes contradictory. Increasingly, *Second Story* resembles a jumble of

parts without plan or direction. Among the parts are: 1) I—'s unfinished narrative of U—, in multiple versions, with notes for a revision; 2) a self-serving autobiography about I—'s life as his father's heir (if there's any story in *Second Story*, the autobiography concludes it); 3) seven journal entries, presumably written at a later time, disparaging both the narrative and the autobiography; 4) various documents about *Second Story* itself: a form rejection from an obscure press, an insipid jacket blurb, an anonymous reader's report (unfinished), and a review, to which the author has attached his reply.

Needless to say, the reader finds this abandonment of artistic responsibilities infuriating. Presumably, the book's deterioration is meant to reflect the brother's worsening psychological state, but the more involved we become in the sufferings of U—, the more I— seems a distraction.

U— returns home and takes up residence on the street beside her father's, now her brother's, store. She shrieks at pedestrians, sleeps on the sidewalk, defecates in an adjacent alley. To all appearances she has become a lunatic. I— meanwhile is making a shambles of the business. Customers are leaving, creditors are phoning, everywhere there's the smell of rotten fruit. Then, seated at his computer one night, I— hears singing. At first he thinks he's a child again, then he decides he's asleep. Finally he goes to the window where he sees his sister's nude body swaying under a street lamp. The imagery turns evocative. He describes her "undulating trajectories, the fuchsia haze of darkness over my brain." He narrates his gradual loss of self-control, "as consciousness shattered on the cusp of her pain." He continues: "I saw the silver spike of moonlight, my sister's bare shoulders, her Gorgon's hair." He rushes downstairs. U— turns. Under a street lamp brother and sister embrace.

Who knows what happens next? In the shortest of the ensuing fragments, U— and I— become lovers. They move back into their old room, where I— spends his days writing, while U— minds the store. At night they rejoin for exuberant fornication, made still more piquant by the taint of ancient taboo. I— (who in this fragment is narrating) says their union realizes his heart's deepest desire.

But gradually a feeling of uncanniness overtakes him, as if everything has happened before. Although U— never complains, I— feels troubled by her composure, a smiling opacity that somehow shuts him out. One day he mentions their father and grows alarmed when no remark, no matter how insensitive, produces any retort. He becomes anxious, starts prowling the apartment, making sure of doors, windows. But as his apprehension increases, his nightly pleasures do too, and with doom approaching, he determines not to flee, recognizing with sinking heart that his fate has outrun him. Finally he awakens one night to the smell of smoke. He calls to his sister, but the crackling of flames is his only reply. The open stairwell and windows, he realizes, will form a chimney, draw the fire toward him. But his strongest feeling is of consummation, of events taking their course. This fragment breaks off unfinished. Its last sentence reads, "As I utter these words the heat of my sister's rage devours the floor beneath my"

In a second fragment, U— and I— go into business. I—'s motivation is unclear, but he decides to make his sister a partner, sharing management and profits equally. However, I—'s reluctance to credit accounts turns out to be his failing, and within weeks U— has taken over. I— withdraws upstairs, venturing into the store less and less often, and finally offers no protest when, during remodeling, U— bricks up every window in their father's facade. I—'s only way out now is through the market.

At this point, U—'s success has restored her confidence, and she's free of her violator's memory at last. But gradually a feeling of uncanniness overtakes her, as if everything has happened before. Although I— never resists her management, she's disturbed by his composure, a silent opacity that somehow shuts her out. One day she locks the upstairs door and becomes alarmed when, after forty-eight hours, he hasn't tried it. She starts listening for his footsteps overhead, monitoring the water bill and electric meter. She fears she's being used, considers liquidating or selling out, but as her apprehension increases, her daily profits do too, and she decides to expand instead, recognizing with a sinking heart that her fate has outrun her. Finally one night she notices all signs of life above have ceased. She creeps up the stairs, calls to her brother, but an echo is her only reply. U— knows that, left to his own devices, I— will have turned upon himself, but her strongest feeling is of consummation, of events taking their course. She enters the apartment, checks every room. I— is not there.

Although the narrator of this fragment is never identified, the final sentence implies that I—'s disappearance, and perhaps the whole novel to this point, has been hallucinated by U—, an incurable schizophrenic, confined in a Scottish hospital.

If there exist readers sufficiently persevering to continue to this point, they will have long since abandoned all hope of rewards to come. *Second Story* contains no story, is at best the semblance of a novel, is hardly more than a pun. Its title refers, of course, not to I—'s writing but to I—'s apartment, or more exactly, to the elevation at which he lives "in accordance with my father's will." Its superior perspective ("one flight up") seems essential to I—, but its distance from the fruitfulness in store below unsettles him. For some reason, he confuses coming down to earth with abandoning fiction altogether, as if art's contact with life were somehow corrupting. From first to last I— looks down upon his reader. He never tells us what we want to know.

This condescending reticence is nowhere more apparent than in the unfinished autobiography. There I— finally becomes a novelist, but only by leaving his sister's disinheritance entirely unaccounted for.

The autobiography begins with a promising sentence: "It was always my

ambition to meet life face to face, but when I discovered I was my father's heir, I reconciled myself to living at a distance from the ground." Although rich in possibilities, this beginning sentences us to a contradiction that *Second Story* never overcomes. The first story is where nature's produce is stored, but it is also a store in which the products of cultivation are sold. I— insists he loves earth's abundance (calling it "my mother's bounty") and fills pages with ecstasies over "the surprising brightness oranges become," but these effusions appear forced, as if compensating for some lack. Finally, in a lyrically expansive scene, he recognizes the "cornucopia of being" every pumpkin is and throws himself into "the life of a greengrocer," professing bewilderment at that mysterious compulsion he formerly called "literature."

But gradually a feeling of uncanniness overtakes him, as if this devotion to fruitfulness had happened before. Although I—'s customers never haggle, he's disturbed by their composure, a mindless opacity that somehow shuts him out. One day on impulse I— rearranges price tags, valuing kiwis as highly as watermelons, and is alarmed when no one complains. He decides to join a radical party, starts quoting Marx and Bentham, but as his anger increases, his isolation does too, and rather than succumb to desperation, he retreats into the second story, leaving his conclusion up in the air. The produce rots, the store is vandalized, eventually drug dealers move in. I—'s life on earth is over. For the remainder of the book, there's no explanation how I— eats, much less pays his power bill.

(Although the seven journal entries criticize virtually every other aspect of the novel, they never complain about I—'s lack of material support. Noting his apparent indifference to financial motives, the entry for "Day 7" observes that I—'s writing seems increasingly immaterial and remarks on an absence of economy in his narration throughout. However, after deciding that "what's fundamentally the matter here" needs "laying bare," all the journalist ever "lays bare" are twelve *sentences.* Inexplicably, in the editing that follows, the journalist removes every evocative phrase and image quoted in this review.)

If *Second Story* finally does tell a story, it's not the one summarized here, not the narrative of U—'s violation, but the story of I—'s failure to tell that story. U—'s story is a mere pretext. The novel's real subject is the male artist's self-defeat, his narcissistic plea for adoration by the very public he ignores. Nothing ever happens in *Second Story* because its sole aim is to show why nothing *can* happen, why I— can never assume his father's position, how, in the plot against his sister, I— too has been framed.

The autobiography contains a gap, but when it finally resumes, I— has written his novel. (Entitled, predictably, *Second Story.*) Our text provides no excerpts, but an enclosed, unfinished reader's report calls it "a work without prospect of any following," and a jacket blurb (also included) describes it as a *Kunstlerroman* that "records the artist's undoing." Whether I— still lives "at a distance from the ground" is left ambiguous: according to the autobiography, the father's legacy is "a thing of the past," but the blurb says "the author's whereabouts, as of this writing, remain undetermined." Although the autobiography covers ninety pages, there are just two mentions of U—. In an early aside I— complains that she's still working for "that rag" (an unnamed eastern newspaper), and on the last page of continuous text he contrasts his own amorphous fiction with the plots "to which my sister appears drawn," suggesting that she may be a critic or novelist herself. But I—'s absorption has now become total. How U— escapes her confinement, how she resists the violator of her dreams, no longer comprise his business.

If my synopsis has not sufficiently brought it out, the whole of this tiresome work is further vitiated by an undertone of anti-feminism and indifference to women that many readers will find unsettling. I realize these criticisms are serious, but I do not offer them without reflection. I know nothing of the author's expressed political views, but the qualities I mention (which will strike women readers as obtrusive) are notable precisely because they are unconscious and, I fear, irremediable. The author, like his protagonist I— (there is finally no difference), is afflicted with an obsessive need for abstraction that amounts to little more than fear of the body and love. The whole of his work is permeated by defensive gestures, a kind of embarrassing self-exposure that merely aims to avoid exposure itself. There is something sad about all this. The author is capable of impressive concreteness, as shown by his brief slips into lyricism (for which, of course, the journal entries always repent), but he seems to fear these fleshly pleasures, the invigorating saga of life and mortality. This fear is his sole reason for retreating into narrative indirectness and complexities of structure, and most readers—certainly most women readers—will feel it's high time men *stopped doing this.* If the author wishes to encounter life face to face, it's in his power to do so. This is, after all, what novelists have always done.

THE AUTHOR REPLIES:

I know it's always in bad taste to respond to a review, but I don't want to miss this opportunity to thank my sister for her generous remarks on *Second Story.* On all significant points she has recognized my aims and done justice to my work. In writing this novel, I left the story untold, preserving only its insupportable consciousness, precisely as she has explained, and the ineffectuality of my narrator was a transparent ploy to this end. Unlike some reviewers who dismiss what they don't understand, she has been scrupulous in her analysis and shown a rare willingness to withhold judgment until my meaning has made itself plain. As every reader can imagine, the hope of such judiciousness keeps my spirits high.

Her comparison of my book's disintegration with my narrator's discompo-

sure and her comment that, in narrating U—'s suffering, I— tells more than he knows, are further examples of her perceptiveness, but nothing has encouraged me more than her recognition of my unconsciousness of women. Although she may not know this, it has been the major work of my adulthood to liberate myself from the injustices and political repression with which I've been familiar since I was a boy. Having come to maturity during the latest flourishing of women's historic demand for autonomy, I, like so many of my generation, grew to feel feminism in my tissue and bones. A chance sexist remark could send blood to my face. Listening to news-reports I found my heart racing, palms starting to sweat. There seemed no end to the novels I couldn't read with pleasure. In one fashion or another, the consciousness of women constituted the air I breathed, my instincts and terrors, the plots I constantly repeated in my dreams.

As you may imagine, the naturalness of all this at times felt confining. Like my height or bodily imperfections, my discomfort with institutions, laws, policies, friends—virtually everything!—resembled a fate or affliction. Even my attempts at sexist jokes or crude wisecracks were marked by self-consciousness, as if I were merely *faking* machismo, *pretending* to be male. What I felt incapable of was genuine insensitivity, a sincere obliviousness of my own obliviousness. I say this with no pride. I no more chose my dissatisfactions than I chose to speak English. On the contrary, my pride in my indignation, my confidence that anger arose in me from real outrages, from conditions about which people *ought* to feel angry—all this only made my plight more ludicrous. Hadn't every age, even the most brutal, viewed its own anger in just this way? Gradually a feeling of uncanniness overtook me, as if everything I'd grown to know, all my reactions and experience had already happened before.

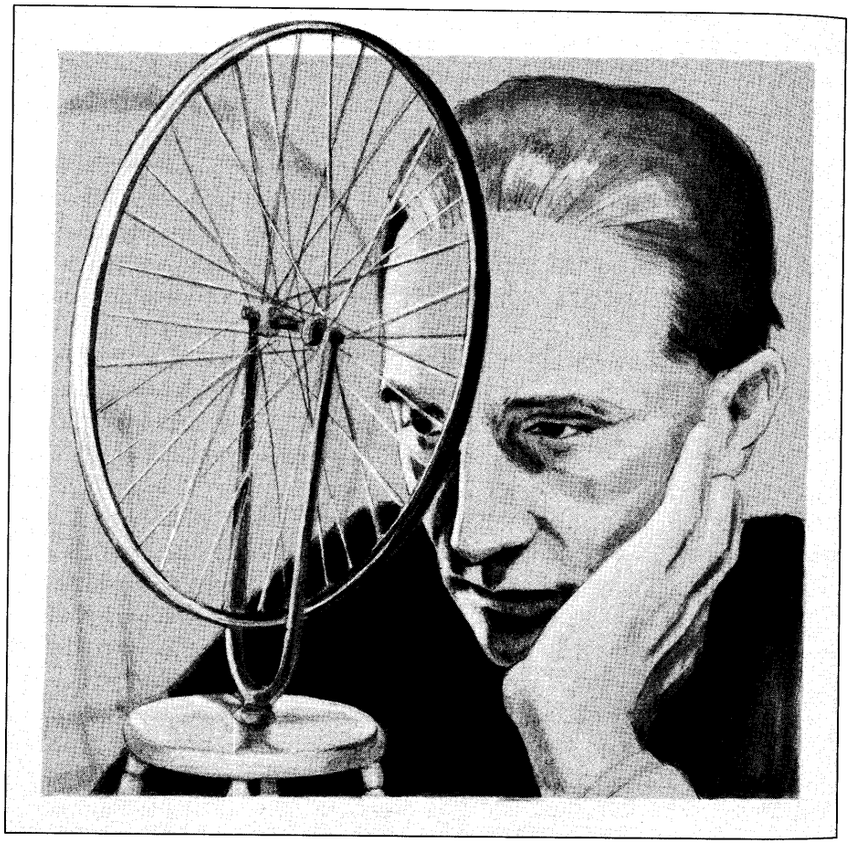
Perhaps this explains my attachment to the I— I wasn't. Perhaps nothing explains it. I can't tell. But I soon found myself preocuppied with another being. I had no desire to be different. How could I desire what my stomach rose up against? But something about his composure, his faceless opacity, made me feel shut out. I suppose I imagined—or not really imagined, more like imagined imagining, imagined being able to imagine—I imagined myself imagining myself apart from what, in coming to know my sister, I could never not know. There were moments when so much nothing disconcerted me. I tried to overcome it, fearing I— was going nowhere, but because my concentration remained weak, my mind inevitably wandered, leaving me to stare vacantly into space.

I want to make perfectly plain that this other being was inconceivable to me. Perhaps I— wasn't even male. But I knew that his acts were marked by a thoughtlessness unlike any act of mine, an unconsciousness that avoided no consciousness, that denied nothing. After all, to have merely denied what every woman knows, to have pretended ignorance of what no man today can pretend ignorance—why that would be an achievement hardly superior to the

Republican party. Wasn't my whole nation in denial of what a woman knows? My task, on the contrary, would be more arduous. I must revert to the nature I naturally avoided, to my uncreated state, must recover an absent-mindedness in which my sister's unaccountability could never be on my account but would be as incalculable as my next heartbeat or every new breath escaping me. In short, I— must undo human history.

Of course, I set about the task systematically, discovering one step at a time the impossibility of all that is. I cannot say either of us has made much progress, for progress was the first thing to prove impossible, but I can say his undertaking has completely preoccupied me while composing *Second Story*, and although I expect failure will also one day prove impossible, my divided attention has caused me no end of concern. What if, in trying to leave my sister alone, I unwittingly violated her dreams again? Often I've been beside myself with apprehension and would surely have surrendered to fate, had not the continuous prospect of her oblivion prevented me. And so I'm deeply grateful for her reassurance that my work does not contain her, that it betrays no consciousness of any woman, that in it all sensitivity to pain is gone, such that, in withdrawing my interest from her saving's account, my words have finally ceased to be overlooked, coming forth without super vision, occurring to all at one time. Nothing seems harder than to tell what isn't happening, but in reviewing *Second Story*, I wonder if my sister is there.

However, there remains one sentence of her review with which, despite my deep and sincere appreciation, I still must disagree. Personally, I do not see how *Second Story* could have been an excellent novel. This was what attracted me to it. That any man could narrate his sister's disinheritance, tell how he assumed her abuser's place and came to dwell above the market—from the outset, such a plot struck me as fantastic. Only its perpetrator would presume to write it, and only his collaborator could tolerate its being read. The work's conclusion would be the recognition of its own futility, so that its very existence would constitute proof of fraud. Having always known myself as history's fabricator and having never accepted my sister's reality as my own, I seemed the perfect one to undertake it—by which I mean the first story, the one I could never tell. In this way, I lived out the second. My sister's review is entirely correct. I who write this self-serving epistle am the impotent and narcissistic I— of the incomplete autobiography, nemesis of novel readers everywhere, undoer of my life's work. Knowing how classic plots were made, I discounted everything in store, leaving my authority groundless. Thus another beside myself was needed to compose my work, for to him alone its words would come as a surprise. And so the I— I wasn't was sentenced without ever imagining what he'd done. As far as I can tell, *Second Story* has ended in the utterest of failures. For this reason I call it a novel.



Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Duchamp)
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
Pencil, Ink, Gesso on Paper

Ralph Adamo

excerpts from:
THE BICAMERALIZATION: A POEM (IN DISENGAGING PARTS) ABOUT LOVE WITHOUT THE PROTECTION OF GRACE

you who never arrived
in my arms, beloved, who were lost
from the start

from **XI**

Say I am the King of China
old beyond his years
who is surprised
when a girl (though having the body and form of a serpent, she seems to him still
a girl) walks right up to him and says
arbor poma gerit, arbor ego lumina gesto
(though how the serpent learned a yet unborn language is
anybody's guess) (we might as well think Orpheus
lifts his head from the cross
and freed from all responsibility to his voice
demands a smoke)

But where are we? Ah,

in a room full of bad light,
where you look like a small rose
fallen in black snow outside the gate

and when you touch my chest
I feel the piercing of the tauroctony—
a blade of longing so deeply put that I cry out (quietly,
befitting the bad light)—

or that undone as I am by the forgotten one
still my limbs are held together (though you could say
my scalp is gone) by the fire that turned me,
pneuma, unendurably, my eyes becoming blood,
my teeth about to sink into my own flesh

Or say I am the emperor of the earth
and you, murderer of the sun, ever virgin,
your flesh a deep glass from the sea of stars,
plant, triangularly, a kiss on my forehead
whispering, 'realm on realm we move,
until new born again we say, as we have always said,
courage, my heart, take leave and fare thee well'

The task is freedom
We exchange crosses
Mine from the incomprehensible past
Yours, still fragrant, from your throat

•

from **XIII**

You've armed me
with the black knife
a twist of hands
a road map
of what remorse might look like
over the long haul.

(But my book does not have the poem
that eats the page in it.)

How are the dead restored? The *increatum*, made of uncreated air,
a scintilla, mingled in the dark waters—
I warned myself loudly but in vain,
and as you say, such warning *would* be vain
repeated, and so vanity closed around the light
vanity conceived the idea of in the first place.
There was none but your illuminating body,
trapped in the radical moisture of my heart.

Do we carry our tombs with us where we go?
Is it too much to ask that the sun be our father,
the moon our mother? The hour has opened
my mouth...but my eyes? I will not question you
except you say my name, which I will know
when you say it. Always we shall have to begin again
from the beginning, half-truth out of the question.

Those who live in their days, who is the teller of the two lands?

I am provided with what I need.

•

from **XVII**

•

Bed of abstaining from which you rise
gowned as a bride
Bed from which you are turned over and over
by one death
Bed the old ones deny you
Bed you catch yourself barefoot walking away from, bereft

and I am nowhere brave enough to cross Asia

Bed of the recapitulation,
of the announcement and the exegesis

Before the creation of the world
were the black waters

In their wombs, the seeds of what?
miracle of mind
between the trumpets
dry bones which come to life

I am so slow
I am stained glass

Who is worthy to open the book?

Bed of the dragon's rage
where lamentation was written

Even the birds shall feast
who never before ate flesh

and the pure soul of the bee

barefoot in the dogmatic city

I had this need to be divided

Bed in the mirror that disfigures

You will never hurt anyone with my words

money, pride, vanity, envy, beauty, fraudulence

You name it

XXII (*agapetae*)

Or: a creature of your fear, most likely, (me)
stumbling, among startled noise, to inarticulate
life, the unqualified groan, the murmur, then the roar
in the face of fire, unwise from before time, doomed—

Still I move to your voice, and when your voice
halts I fail all over, feet like mulch, eyes
convicted in their sudden sleep, attempted motions
of the mind null as watery myth, tumped.

To get enough of you I'd have to be a cannibal—
instead I poke among shadows cast by wind,
not clairvoyant (tho included in the past & future),
man as omen, never to be borne.

*

Avesti tanto cuore de lassarmi?
Innamorati siam de bambinelli!

Come to the window and give me light,
dreamer singing songs among the plants in blossom
singing under my voice with a bird's way of singing

if I sing, you listen
if I think, you know

the unknown world is beautiful!

like a wild new joy that begins on earth
and ends in the sky

*

I declare you and read you and begin to know
your unity by repetitions of awe and love,
though time allows just prologue and will not let
epilogue to the signs of you, light over water,
the half-solved mystery, sea, rivers, stars, bread.

You in the crucible of grace, witnessing refraction,
faithful and true, you the morning wheel, you
the lake of surpassing fire, calamus and cinnamon—
I am here to find you, wherever I am
I am there looking for you, vineyard at morning,
where my soul feeds and harvests, unafraid,
uttering your soul, asleep like a child in a child's bed.

XXIII (*"I'm not Chinese, my friend."*)

Inventing paper was not enough to intercept
the polysyllabic wonders of the silk.
Alarmed incitations of the *p'i-pa* & *k'an-hou*,
the collared beasts, soldiers at a game,
great plantings, pickle and pickle juice, wine mash and fox fur,
falconry and tug-of war, or the old men wresting luck
from pitch-pot and knuckle bones: none of this you,

I recognize, though I see faintest engravings
of the dragon among flames, the phoenix flying
in your cheek, the blue
both pale and deep there, running under
a baptismal river. And in your obstinate heart
no battle fought
over the arched bridge
can be lost.

Still, I know what you mean—
after my three kneelings and nine
knockings of the head, I cut the hidden pages
with my knife.

I do not quarrel with my friend.

Laotsu ("aged boy"): the solid wheel useless without the hollow axle,
the windows without the vacancy they enclose.
But we are not all natural in our humor, nor prone to quietude,
nor have I cursed my anger as you
say you have done.

I draw the scent of you to me
(on your timepiece!) and hold my head down.

from XXIV (*attic fear*)

Suddenly sick of myself in love with you, I think
'End this song in praise of trouble & beauty!'
my soul writhing in soft exile, unable to throw
voice beyond chin, the words become like
choked spittle sticking there.
None of this
looking to you for sustenance, ambition, pity—
none of this finding you beyond eulogy, my measure
wholly unmended. But I cannot make my heart
return to me.

*

And will I die, like the wake of a ship in moonlight?

*

You and your damaged way of being you.
A weal of sadness, then sadness growing cruel?
Your restless father lost in your mother's arms,
anarchy of all souls extinguished in you
from before that official chronicle, from beyond
the known cartography, you with your rivers
and hills, your ancient rectilinear divisions,
your heady teas in bowls of ice and jade,
your appliques of bronze and silver, bolder
than all analects, odes, histories, annals, rites.
You and your perfect way of being you.

*

The body bears us, this much is clear.
Visible and encircling, dense with desire
thought out.
And the spirit bears mere
memory from life to life, so the spirit
that unfolds divinity can stand aside
for the spirit that will know and rise.

I would be less selfish, ceding you to you,
a man trying to get on with heaven.
Be less lost in the heart of the earth,
the language of the sun-struck word.

You through whom I see
the white light & the end of knowledge.

*

I ask if you remember me.
I have an endless strain of questions
to keep a saint from saintliness,
from catalepsy and somnambulism.
But can I keep you in the caul of memory?

XXV (*donnoi*)

No good can come of being as we are—
needful, afraid, convinced that doom is near.

And then this dream came for me: a chaste book
I could not open, but took out from the shelf
to hold against such time: on its old binding stamped: *LOVE: Rules, And the Stream That Flows from the Hole in Your Head.*

Did I sleep well? I had other dreams, then always
looked to find the book unopened in my hand.
A tree confessed the murder of child,
spitting out the little shoes smoking from the heat of death.
If the book had more to say it did not say it.

And your sleep, inlaid with love?
I stand guard in the space between the worlds
until you come back to me,
only than to breathe again, to release this *theoria.*

*

The stars below our feet, we wait
for the intercalary month, the omitted days,
the recession that is precession, the fire
for sacrifice upon the point of music.
I have lost my way so faithfully,
grieving past each longitude,
hungry as a circus horse on the midnight of departure,
I wonder if light's restoration or astronomical
death will find me first.

I listen
for the sounds you can't deliver.
The silence everywhere your love's measure.

*

And do we know the secret from the sigh?
How do we hear the secret in the sigh?
Whose secret is the silence the sigh
displaces? We grow more strange
the more we try to talk, the farther
we endeavor to talk past, the more the sigh
becomes the currency of speech.
Sigh citing sigh, annotations of the moonless sky.

*

And who is guided by this woman's hand
cannot know the way back, which anyway
is smoke. But where in the blacker blue of the day,
among the genealogies and convolutions,
carrying no keys, is she made to repent her beauty,
or he who sees her truth to despair of it;
is that not written? Blood of the twofold wounding,
articulated *maithuna*, substance entranced—
who is guided by her words and gentle
cruelties can breathe out prayer & pour
through her divine abandonment. *Ananda!*
How do we come to such a morning? The girth
of the globe (a fat earth) parting us,
all science sucked from the root of language,
but the two of us still joined, light-grasped.

Gladly, I am at the end of everything,
waiting for you as though for the end of time.

XXVI

Okay, okay—push enough toward folly and there's bound to be
a touch of something else; thus, a despair beyond the little leap
of suicide, the very absolution of despair:
there is no me to love you anymore.
Only this enjoined space in which you are
sun, moon and all the blazing stars.
And if you think I'm covered with confusion, you think me
as I am, unknown silence, lover
in whose long divisions my caged self rejoices
for its human-heartedness once more
and for its freedom desired before time.
And for my memory of how it is to kiss you
deep in the yearning embrace.
Each joy wants its own eternity, yes. Yours
is where my searching comes to rest.

*

Woman burning through time,
on whom the salt air is absorbed
within your skin of a panther
pacing in the Aegean moonlight—

there where the race begins again from bones
and the lost chronicle must be restored.

*

Because we cannot know a damned thing
we experience what we can, the soul squared,
matrix of the symptom and the dream,
roots growing from the light that eats us alive.
It is too hard to sink into the grave, not to be
borne by an excess of grace to the abyss,
or by the abstract acrobatics your heart performs
be dissolved there suffering reflections
of the burning winds. I am the words, you are
the words you are. This love is like a listening
at the end of all the covenants, a listening
in a ghostland—*est ut est aut non est*—
we never did inhabit, though we will
come to live there, still and pure, quick
knowing, poured out of ourselves like water.

from **XXVII** (*last testament & testament received*)

My mind was weighted down, *tristita*,
myself degraded by this grief I swore
I would unlearn in your spirit, where
nothing is as simple as a dream; just so, I
have finally understood your innocence,
touched only as the stone the wind
by suffering.
Time does us violence,
before yielding to eternity, to the cold
incisions of iron and sweat of blood.
Abandonment in the thick of ecstasy:
I must love being nothing and give
my whole heart to the silence,
for without the world we *are* everything,
and evil truly is the mercy of God.

*

As you are swept along today
I am motionless.
Books open me
reading my carrion state.
In gravity
both of us do exist—you out there,
me in time surpassed.

I dwell in the imaginary advantages of my place,
hungry and thirsty, in a harvest of fatigue.

*

A small system of bugs (a cloud)
attending me, like flakes of sunlight
hoving to a hive of air, above
the place I open myself to light
as to an idea I will never comprehend
though it has done away with
me harmlessly. I watch them—
all motion in the blue air, but fail
to know what depth I come upon

this green place from. No sadness
feels foreign now. I ache for all
alike. I cannot keep a single hope
from mad scrambling anti-lucidity.
But I was no scientist of the soul,
nor tenor with a voice of timeless air.
I could not even keep myself in sympathy.

*

I look out on destiny—trees opposing rain,
the whole of the disturbed world postprandial again.

*

How long have I been gone, the rain my accomplice,
cassock & surplice, the piney silk a tight fit, sermonic
intermezzo dawning sleep, the book of the uncommon sinner,
the saint insatiate upon her rack, storm stressed, sorely
used, that book open upon my greedy chest to every
unsuccessful act & algebra of human thought. How
like a sister she might raise her eyes from her labors
toward me with a smile she does not recognize as kind.
The love of my life a wraith, forbidden, a ruination.
But sweetly, antithetical, no mere participation
mystique of the frail & mortal, in the almost tolerable
light. I rest the remnants of my head and let space
wander over and through me, now there's time
to reach around your waist and hold you closest,
burying my old face in the nest of your hair to remember
breathing there. Does the woman full of wishes ever die?
where then will her children find the only good
outside this world, the place where they may safely lie?

*

Letting go is useless, one is let go.
And virtue of virtues, one is free
to hunt all passionate desire,
harmony adjusting its own wake
like Francis of Assisi his book
upon which sparrows light

expressing as they step upon
mystery the world's disinterested
satisfaction in itself, however
broken down the rhythm, unity
distressed but holding moment
to moment. One is let to abstract
the storm, to step in the simpler
time of created song & unfreeze
all tonalities—witness the body
bending there in ecstasy &
sorrow.
Who has loved well?
No one makes the claim convincingly.
Who could know himself
as lover loving you? Who has
in common himself from yesterday?
A liar? Maybe only. Our thoughts
are lost or lose us, theories taken
out of love: pleasure before truth.

The white petals fall, the fruit
holds with the commonality of rain.

Only time is tragic, and only time
enslaves. Though in its fearful purity
we try to love, our flesh a memory
like starlight, preposterously
alone, the thing from which
we cannot turn away, the surge
of blood and heat around the heart.

Honest perplexity or melancholia?
I give way to heaven, cedar-lined,
perch of the fluttering soul, incitation
to coupling and more powerful births,
the giving up of past and future, finally.

*

The preceding excerpts are from a book-length poem, written between November 1996 and June 1997, in numbered parts; within most parts are several smaller sections. Among these excerpts, a few poems are complete, but most are excerpts themselves.

Robert Hendrickson

Dirty Dreams

The watch face had turned gray except for one black broken digit. Was time ending? Jumbled on the bed, legs dangling out the shattered bay window, he felt himself swaying off the edge of some black hole of perpetual night while high winds cast his shredded canvasses among gulls and terns hovering over the rock jetty below. The pitiless dream became sexual again, they were naked feeling their swollen bodies on the verge of but never joining in total darkness. When he finally came awake, still drunk and unsure, he reached over cupping her breast and she stiffened without shrugging free or pulling away.

"You like rape?" she said.

He was moments focusing his thoughts from the wash of colors flooding his mind. "Eva facit," he said pointing smiling at his erection.

"Put on your cape, Mr. Superman. Put on your artist's cape."

"Paint you," he said.

"Paint wine or Revolution. Paint them bomb us again."

"To hell such talk."

"My address five years," she told him. "But not longer. Why don't you go out for air the quick way, Mr. Dreamer, go pour *you* on rocks? Good, raise glass. I *break* glass for you!"

"Polluted, air," he said, blocking the window. "I like looking."

"Go walk on water."

"Polluted, water. Wine I like. Your magnificent breasts."

"Once a week, darling Sandor, should ever you put a paycheck beneath the pillow. It is the local custom."

"You have heard of poetry in motion," he said laughing. "I am prose in repose."

"I told you, we put you in carnival with bottle, Mr. Geek. Put on some clothes, Picasso, put in your magic wand."

"Eva facit," he said.

"Go paint. Already you have made here his gallery."

She hadn't finished dressing. In the mirror their eyes met hard and he followed a scar of beaded skin like drops of water down her belly. He came up behind and softly but firmly cupped her breasts, his thick erection pulsing far up her bare back arched away from him.

"You are no good for that either," she said.

"Go! Go sing for your supper, bitch, I have never heard you sing this house."

"Go back your bottle, Mr. Bitch. You buy it with my money by the case now?"

"And what of your pills? Look—here—better medicine for you!"

"The dirty dreams of Sandor Katona," he heard her say slowly. But didn't she speak in sadness, he thought, drinking deep again, wasn't she extending with love the portrait he'd done of her cradling the goldenhaired child in blue sailor suit, the best of so many he had chanced sprawled about the loft, bright surreal portraits of mother and father and boy so blond and gold in fields of hawkweed and dandelion. It had to be that she cared. She wasn't just holding the painting, scissors in hand, she was asking him to recreate their sordid lives, transcend reality. With another rush of wine he was certain he could do it, he knew that even on this spit of sand in this alien country at the end of the earth he could unroot all vestiges of sorrow inside her with great strokes of the magic wand, it was that strong, as subtle and powerful as his brush the thick rod he felt rising, he could, was sure he could. "I say things I do not mean," he said, gently touching her breast again. "You know we do not mean them, Eva. The accident... They intended me... Perhaps we..."

"You certainly give me no pleasure," she said, lifting his hand from her.

"I know your pleasure," he said. "You come in at night when I see that clock. When you steal in at five I—"

"Maybe you sleep you work daytime, I would not steal in if you worked," she said.

"*Steal.* Yes. You ransack his pockets? That is what? You pick his wallet? Go back then. Go back to bed to hell with your accountant collector! He can count the genitals you have collected!"

Doubles of her seemed to explode stabbing from her when in a sudden violent motion he wrenched away the child's portrait, a screaming congregation gleaming scissors held low, eyes all glaring pupils again, her dark angular beauty reflected in a cathedral of severe enraged faces axing him as she shrieked "Give me murderer baby!"

"Accident!" he cried, their bodies clapping together as if neither one of them struck first, becoming an immane bloody two-headed beast flailing at itself and all in its path, breaking glass, chairs, easels, reeling sightless through the loft digging into its own wounds until his head hit the thick brass bedpost and he was part of the beast no longer. Dizziness swept over him. He kept coming awake, fading back, helpless to stop the enraged congregation from slashing, ripping, cutting and when he awoke fully much later, still spinning, it was in a bare red violated room, her things gone, closet doors flung open, bloody footprints leading nowhere, his own reflections mocking him in the shattered bay window that pointed out prowlike over the sea. All the paintings were scissored and slashed at his feet, the gold pieces reflected in shards of glass, so that in glittering instants dependent on the sun the enormous loft seemed some fragmented mutation of the child's portrait, as if the same bomb which had damned them had obliterated their house again three thousand miles from home.

No numbers, no date, no time at all on the watch now. He was back in the same place dreamed that morning, bed impaled in a broken window where the wind whirled scraps of colored canvas just beyond his reach. He thought of leaping out and joining them, restoring his canvasses, the picture complete then, an immense family portrait of father and mother and child, realer than real, he thought, all of them coming together in a blue cloudless sky.

But he could not look long. "How old are we?" he heard her say from long ago. "He is four years old always." Closing his eyes again, escaping a terrible interval of sobriety and sanity where he could not know that pain ever ended, he tried willing her back to him. The deeper he drank and journeyed again into dreams, the more he was sure he could. He got up and leaned out what remained of the great window they had smashed, long painterly fingers bleeding while he balanced himself at what seemed the hard cutting edge of a bright new world, emptying the belly of the bottle into his own as the coins of golden canvas bought him confidence and joy. He drew tight the black cape, partly aware of the comedy of himself white and frail in his nakedness, his curses weak and futile as his limp body ludicrously swaying little and lost among limitless galaxies. But deep into the night he stood there defiantly drinking and dreaming, barely evading jagged fangs of glass as he swayed like a mobile in the window frame. He watched the nuggets of golden canvas swept out into the dusk all around him, pieces of a puzzle broken apart, knowing he and Eva would soon find and make them whole.

The more he drank, the closer he came to her. She lay yieldingly soft beneath him now. He felt her long red nails rake and chill him, fell back upon the bed with a swelling erection. His eyes closed tighter. He pulled at the bottle and with the familiar warmth the pain subsided and he descended from red into stammel, amarathine, dark purple, comforting darkness, there was peace here through passion, he no longer cared what was real or dreamt. "The magic wand," he soon heard her say. "We shall meet again when the magic wand connects us... It stretches out searching... We shall make it bigger and bigger and bigger..."

He strained, his temples contracted. The magic wand, the thick artist's brush, the divining rod did indeed grow bigger and bigger and bigger, seeking out the answer. It rose high above their heads, touched the ceiling and with tremendous force crashed through plaster and lath boards, leaving a yawning hole again as it broke through ceiling and roof into the sky. It ascended, Cezanne's sword, toward the sun and the vaults of heaven and then she was climbing the shaft trying to capture the huge head. He called for her to come down. He shifted about on the bed as best he could but the weight was oppressive, he could barely move. The magic wand grew tantalizingly as she tried to reach its seed head, the giant voyager pulsing with blue river pierced the clouds

but she climbed on, determined to find its secret source, sex her sextant in the long dark night. No longer could he see her yet he felt her grasping for life along the course of the river flowing out from them, soft and wet she clamped herself against the peak of their being, resting, climbing until they wounded lovers failed by friend and cause would reach the stars and break apart coming together. It was no sense calling her. She was coming back home to him, he was sure of it, he could barely contain himself. Soon when the warm wet velvet ring of her finally held them fast and soothed and coaxed the angry head they would explode as one from out the eternal river, overwhelm all earthly evil, drift among the Milky Way light as plumes of dandelion embracing their golden child, exiles now together finding soil in which to root...

When he awoke he thought they had found some other kinder galaxy, the rising sun reflected on the water as if two suns warmed their new planet. Then he looked behind at the ruins in which he had been dreaming and realized he was back on earth bereft, his dreams dead, her reality rioting in ravenous lipstick letters, the boy's name huge on walls and doors and broken mirrors: YURI YURI YURI screaming in childish scrawl as if scribbled with flaming crayon by the child himself and consuming the loft and all it still contained. He drank, awakened, drank. Day burned so quickly into night. Soon the huge loft would house only him and wind and darkness, a charred forbidding gallery where no one else, neither bird or beast or man or woman, even curiously browsed.

Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Mary Cassatt)
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
Pencil and Gouache on Paper

Karen Bjorneby

Angels in White Dresses

Ivy Wade dreamed of Marlon with an urgency that left her pulsing from her belly to her knees and sent her straight to prayer in atonement. Pastor Brooks had taught her that the Lord saw into her dreams. But more than apologetic, she felt embarrassed: thinking of Him having to watch her and Marlon as she'd dreamed them.

But all that day, Marlon didn't come into the store. The heat inside fretted him.

Instead he sat out on the porch with the men and the beer bottles, while Ivy stayed in the store's heated gloom and popped open a Coca-Cola for sweetness. She leaned her elbows on the windowsill and listened to the men.

"Anyone hear about that spaceship out by Allapattah?" Marlon asked.

No one but Marlon believed that spaceship story. A farmer out by Allapattah had taken a fit and woke up talking of white light and little green men. But Marlon was convinced spaceships were out there. He wanted spaceships to be out there. He wanted to believe that out beyond the black sky a superior Martian wisdom looked down on the earth and pondered the strange ways of humans. Marlon believed in science. He believed in progress. He believed one day humans would fly to the moon.

Ivy drank deep from her Coca-Cola, unimpressed. She knew better than Marlon: out beyond the hot ochre sky was a pale blue Heaven and Jesus Christ.

She could picture Him: He was tall. He had velvety brown eyes and long sturdy limbs and the kind of taut, muscular frame that made His body seemed to hum with invisible energy and power. She'd been sixteen, two years ago, just after her mother left, when Pastor Brooks first told her about His love.

So now she waited for Him with a loose, liquid expectancy. The signs of Him were all around. It was October, the dead time. For weeks the air had had a weight to it, pressing flesh toward earth. The sun burned close, threatening to drop fire to the tops of the pine trees and sweep across the sawgrass straight to the sea. Steam seeped out of the ground into the sky, streaking into pale yellow wisps that refused to boil into thunderclouds. Men talked about fishing but didn't stir. Women put off ironing and just sprayed a little water on the ragged marigolds. Only the children ran, fast as little chameleons, through the dusty streets to the Booth's big white house, to listen to the grand excitement of the new radio.

"Tell you what," Hoot Patterson said, slapping his knee. "We get any Martians here, we'll let you do the talking. You're the one with the big Yankee words."

Marlon laughed right along with Hoot.

The men all liked Marlon. They didn't even mind that he was one of Roosevelt's New Dealers, sent to string electricity into town. He had a funny pinch-nosed northern speech and didn't know beans about fishing or farming. But he was good with machines and could always get the jalopies to turn over and the outboards to fire up, and he was quick to do a man a favor without keeping tally.

Wilson Booth stood, the heavy weight of coins jingling in his pockets. "I'll listen for spaceship news on the radio," he said, laughing, clapping Marlon on the shoulder, boasting only slightly of his new possession.

Hoot Patterson coughed and spat and switched the conversation over to Eleanor Roosevelt's oddities. "If any spaceship does land, we can count on her to go right inside and shake those Martian hands. Green skin won't make a whit of difference."

A few of the men snorted at that.

Marlon looked up at Ivy, with that quiet gaze of his. A gaze that made her want to stand still for him and just be looked at. He had thick dark eyebrows, a long sharp nose, a sweet sweet mouth. And since he'd come into town, just four months ago—maybe it was the summer heat, the heavy humid air, the long sticky afternoons and golden evenings—it was like Ivy lived her life in slow motion. In a thick yellow haze. Sometimes, like now, listening to the creak of floorboard, the spurt and murmur of conversation, the faint clink of beer bottles, and then held in place by Marlon's sure, quiet eyes—Ivy couldn't be sure if she were awake or asleep.

Marlon wanted to marry Ivy. That is, he wanted to make her his wife. He could care less about the ceremony part of it all.

It was just three weeks ago she and Marlon had been sitting outside on the steps of this very porch. Ivy had on a peach-colored blouse with buttons on the shoulder. A lock of her hair got tangled on a button. Marlon unwound the strands and then stuck them in his mouth. Her hair was spun out so find and long, he just had to taste it, he said. He took hold of her left hand like it was a small bird. His fingers grazed her palm and slowly her fingers unfurled. Slowly she began to feel the quick uneven beat of her own blood underneath his touch, a kind of shivering. "Ivy, marry me," he said, sighing through the words. Holding her with those velvety brown eyes. Sitting so close she could smell him—limes and fresh hay and the barest whiff of engine oil.

The sinking feeling she felt in her belly as he touched her knee. Ivy had to swallow hard, had to force herself to remember Pastor Brooks and the pledge she'd made. "I can't," she told Marlon. "Not until Pastor Brooks comes back around and you can go down to the pond and get saved." Sorrow in her voice. Because she could never promise her whole life to a man when death would

mean eternal separation.

But Marlon laughed right out loud, a happy, joyous laugh. He got up, excited, pulling Ivy off the porch, swinging her around into the middle of the dusty street. "Is that all?" he said. "I can do that. What do I do—dunk my head in the water? Can I pinch my nose?"

He held her by the waist, pulled her close to him. His hands traced small circles on the small of her back. Without her even realizing it, Ivy's hips lifted to his touch. But his very foolishness betrayed him. He didn't truly plan to welcome the Holy Spirit into his body. Pastor Brooks would have his work cut out for him, with Marlon.

But once Marlon was saved. Once they could marry. It would be just like Matthew promised: "Seek first His kingdom and all things shall be added to you." She'd gotten saved and business at the store had picked right up. She'd gotten saved and ever since she'd felt Him touching her, holding her, guiding her. Stroking her hair. She'd gotten saved and Marlon had come into town, had come into the store for a tin of salt crackers and a can of soup, had settled his quiet gaze on her. Had chosen her.

Just thinking of Him made her close her eyes, made her sway a little with a drowsy sinking feeling. She put her empty Coca-Cola bottle back in the crate and circled through the gloomy store to her room at the back. She curled up in her grandmother's old flowered armchair. The chintz still smelled of her, a sweet sour smell of rosewater and a slow, coughing death. Outside the back window the yellow afternoon deepened to dusky orange evening. There was a change in the air. A lick of breeze. A taste of salt. Ivy settled in the chair, expectant, dreamy, half awake, half asleep, imagining Marlon touching her again on the knee. Imagining Jesus holding her and Marlon, both.

Fully asleep, she fell into other dreams. Her grandmother, slapping biscuit dough on the counter—biscuits for supper again. Good farmland all plowed under—hogs slaughtered and milk dumped into the road, not worth selling at six cents a gallon—and nothing but biscuits and watery gravy to eat. Hunger like a cold fist in the belly. Her crazy mother, all pink and wild-eyed, scrabbling through the dresser for the dimes that were the only cash money in the house, smashing her glass teacup, a souvenir of Tallahassee, onto the floor. The slap of dough, the crash of glass.

Whoops and hollers penetrated her dream. Ivy sat straight up, blinking. Her first thought was that the men had better pay for all that beer. She shoved herself up out of the armchair and onto the porch, to demand her money.

But the porch was empty.

The evening light was hazy and brown. Little Charlie Booth, chocolate smearing his mouth, ran down the street, ahead of a pack of boys. Wilson Booth ran behind, his mouth working. "Martians!" Charlie shouted out. Wilson gasped out, holding his stout chest, "It's true, we heard it on the radio! Martians have landed!" Even Mrs. Booth, in her sateen lounging gown and feathered mules, ran along, begging for Charlie, her precious to stay close to Mama.

In pairs and in small knots people piled into the streets. Hoot Patterson fetched his shotgun. Someone forgot to latch a gate and chickens fluttered through the gathering crowd. Dogs bayed. Ivy looked for Marlon but couldn't find him in the shadowy movement. The wind had picked up. Her hair twisted around her face. Marlon's electrical wires danced between their poles. Other guns appeared and Hoot shouted orders, trying to assemble an army.

"They've got the President!" someone shouted. And despite everyone's harsh words for Roosevelt, this news caused the crowd to stop its swirling and sag in place.

"Maybe that farmer out by Allapattah told the truth!" Hoot said. "Maybe what he saw was a scouting unit."

Flurries of panic rippled through the crowd.

"My candlesticks!" Hoot's wife cried. She left to bury them in the same flower bed her granny had used to hide the silver from Union soldiers.

"Well I for one intend to drink myself a tall glass of gin right now," Mrs. Booth announced. She clutched her sateen gown and flounced off in her mules. The crowd, seeming not to know where to go, followed. Everyone knew the Booths stocked the best liquor in town.

And all the while Ivy stood trembling on the porch. The faintest lightning bug of hope darted round her mind and then that swarmed into a fierce blaze of light. Jubilation buzzed right through her. There wasn't any Martians coming! The Bible never talked of Martians. It was Him! It was Him and His angels, coming for the ones who loved Him.

Her fingers shook and then her arms shook and then her very blood shook. She stared up into the deepening sky and the black pine trees at the horizon. *Here I am.* The words, in her own mind, were husky. She pressed her hips against the porch rail. *Come to me, I'm ready.*

But she wasn't ready. All she had on was her old housedress. She whirled back into the store, into her room. Hurrying. Snatching from her grandmother's walnut chifforobe her best dress. A white lace gown she'd stitched from a tablecloth—to marry Marlon in.

Fingers fumbling, clumsy, Ivy did up the small buttons. Breathing through a shuddering pang for Marlon. The Lord was here and Marlon wasn't yet saved.

There might still be time. She'd get him to the pond. She smoothed down her skirt, wishing she had daintier shoes than her clumpy old oxfords. She piled her hair into a knot of top of her head.

She felt beautiful: Jesus was coming, for her. She took only a moment to check her reflection in the mirror: she was beautiful. Pure, something carved from shell or pearl. Collarbones like swan's wings, long bare neck.

Just as she turned from the mirror, out of the corner of her eye, she caught

sight of her own mother in her. That arch of cheekbone, that wide smooth brow, those blue blue eyes. She was south of her, Ivy guessed, if she was still with that rum-runner she'd rode off with.

The memory of her mother made her smile, with pain and love, combined. Ivy crossed her fingers for her mother. If anyone could charm an escape from the Devil, it was Ivy's mother. Just like she'd charmed an escape from here.

Full night had descended. Stars rose from the horizon and then disappeared into blank black squall line. Wind tossed the tops of the pine trees. The panicky crowd had turned wild, tossing bottles and shooting pistols into the sky. The barber's shop plate glass window had smashed and wind riffled the girlie magazines strewn about the street. Piano music tinkled out from the Booth place. A smoky barbecue smell floated from that direction. Hoot Patterson marched up and down, wearing his old doughboy cap, his shotgun tucked under one arm. "No wonder this town's always been such a sorry place," he said. "They've all given up already."

"Have you seen Marlon?" Ivy asked.

Hoot shook his head and spat at the ground. "He's probably at Booth's. Everyone else is. They've decided to die drunk."

Over at the Booth house, the parlor drapes were open. Yellow light spilled out. Women danced to the piano and men passed bottles between them. The men still wore their work clothes but the women had changed into fancy wear, rose-printed chiffon, purple dancing dresses, paste jewelry of all colors. Mrs. Booth pranced into the parlor with a plate of pickles and cheese. "Eat up!" she cried, her voice shrill and quivery as a lap dog's. "Can't let the Martians get good pickles." A pair of man's hands—not Wilson Booth's—wrapped around Mrs. Booth's waist, spinning her around. She dropped the pickles on the floor and leaned into the man's kiss. Ivy turned away from the window, sickened by the Devil's work here, and when she looked back down the street, toward the store, she saw Marlon's jalopy rumbling toward her.

"Thank God I found you," he said. "Come on." He tugged her toward the car. "I want to get over to Allapattah to see the Martians."

"Allapattah? You can't go there." Ivy shook her arm free.

But Marlon had a look of rapture on him. He could barely look at Ivy, kept scanning the sky, peering up toward the black tree line and the squall clouds moving in. He could barely stand still, urging her toward the car, and behind him, the jalopy rumbled, impatient.

"Ivy, I've been waiting for this all my life. Ever since I first learned about the planets and the galaxies I've known there's more out there. What do you want me to do? Hide from them? Get drunk like the rest of them?" He waved a disgusted hand toward the Booth place.

"But Marlon, there aren't any Martians." A sudden sharp gust of wind rushed in, swamping the party sounds. And then just as suddenly, the wind fell away, and the piano music bobbed up again.

"Marlon, think! I read to you from Revelations. Stars will fall from Heaven—that's what people are seeing. It's not any Martians coming. It's Jesus Christ Himself, and his angels."

"Oh come on, Ivy. That's all just story. I'm talking about science. I'm talking about cold hard fact. Think about this: if the Martians already have space travel, their whole civilization must be more advanced than ours. Think what we could learn from them. What if they could cure all disease? What if they could control the rain and the sun so that the crops always grew?"

He looked so certain, so eager, his furry eyebrows rumpled, his brown eyes luminous. It made Ivy sad, to see him so stubborn. "No hunger, no sickness." Her voice was gentle. She reached up to him, stroked his cheek, his chin, rested her hand against the beat beat beat of his heart under his white cotton shirt. "That's what Heaven promises. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." How could he not see how simple it all was?

She grabbed his hand, then, began tugging him, toward the sandy path that snaked behind the Booth house toward the pond. "We just have to get you saved before He gets here." Her feet felt so light, she was practically skipping. It made her so happy to think of her and Marlon, saved, in Heaven. They could get married there. Maybe one of His angels would marry them. Or even—she could hardly think it—maybe He Himself would do the honors. "I hope there's white cake in Heaven. I used to love white cake. Marlon, come on."

Wind howled by. Overhead one of Marlon's electrical wires hummed.

Marlon grabbed her shoulders. "Do you know how stupid you sound? Prattling on about white cake and Jesus? The radio people said Martians. Don't you think they'd know the difference? And it makes perfect sense: our scientists have dreamed up rockets; why wouldn't theirs?"

A loud crack burst above. Sparks cascaded from the sky. In a flash, Marlon shoved off the street, away from a bolt of fire. She landed on the sandy path and jumped back up, instantly furious. "You messed up my dress."

But Marlon leaped around and over something on the street.

"What is it? A snake?" Ivy asked.

"Stay back. It's an electric wire. It's live."

The yellow light in Booth's house had died. One by one lantern lights bloomed in the window. The piano music faltered only a moment.

"Just leave it," Ivy said. "If we don't get you to the pond and get you saved, you'll roast in Hell." Her voice now had escalated into a plea, a cry.

"Someone will roast right here if I don't see to this wire. You just go on without me. If Jesus comes, you're welcome to Him."

"Marlon!" She would never see him again. Jesus would come and she would

go off with Him. And Marlon would stay, and die a horrible death. He was so mulish. His chin out, his dark eyebrows gathered, a blue knot of stubbornness in his forehead. What was she going to do with him?

But he'd already started shinnying up the electrical pole. The loose wire dangled like a limp and broken wing.

She watched his long legs working up that pole, the ridge of muscle in his thigh, the roll and shift of his shoulders. He was so strong and yet so gentle. He was so smart and so misguided. Maybe Jesus would understand that. Maybe, if she pleaded, if she prayed, the Lord would spare Marlon. Or maybe, if he had time, if he could hide himself somewhere, he could escape the wrath.

But even as she thought all that, she knew the thoughts themselves were blasphemy.

Her heart split wide open. Rain began to fall, huge drops, fat as pigeon's eggs. She wanted to stay with Marlon and she just couldn't. Jesus was coming. He'd come to the pond, she was certain. It was His sanctified place. She had to be there, for Him. Just thinking about Him made her breath skitter, made her feet start to pull her down the path.

Marlon, good-bye. She thought the words but could not say them. Tears spilled down her face and mixed with the rain, steadily falling now. She turned from him, from the electric pole where he grunted and struggled with something up there, and hurried along the sandy path. Through the tomato field. She wiped tears and rain from her face, felt her hair slipping from its pins. Beyond the tomato field was the flat black emptiness that was the pond. Lit up now by car headlights: Pastor Brooks' truck. A giant tin cross rose from the truck bed. As Ivy neared the truck, wind rattled the tin cross, made a powerful drumming. In cages beneath the cross, Pastor Brooks' water moccasins writhed.

Ivy scooted past the snakes, quick, a sour vinegar taste filling her mouth. She hated snakes.

Pastor Brooks stood beside a stand of cattails at the pond's edge. Rain dripped off his black-brimmed hat. In the thin light his face looked burned blue.

Ivy ran to him, clutched at his black suit coat. "Is He here yet?"

"Not yet." His hand shielding his face from the rain, Pastor Brooks looked out at the sky. Then he turned to look at Ivy. "Daughter," he said. "You look beautiful." He touched the lace at her sleeve. "He'll be so happy to see you."

Ivy felt a heat, a flush, starting at her chest, bleeding its way up her throat to her face. She couldn't wait to see Him. For Him to see her.

A huge gust of wind roared in. The giant tin cross rattled. Pastor Brooks' next words were swept away. The wind sharpened itself, whining against the tin.

"There's not much time." Pastor Brooks had to shout above the wind. "We should rededicate ourselves to Him."

Metal shrieked and tore the air. From the bed of the truck, the giant cross began to rise. For a moment it held steady against the wind. Then slowly it

cartwheeled off the truck. One arm swept the snake cages to the ground. Then the cross smashed down onto the tomato field. For one split second, the truck's taillights cast a red glare on a writhing mass of moccasins. And then the snakes slithered away, into the cattails edging the pond.

"Come," Pastor Brooks said, holding his arm out to her, to escort her. A raw dank smell rose off the water in front of them. Wind lapped small waves on the surface. Ivy held her skirt up with her free hand. She hesitated only a moment, thinking of the beautiful white lace of her dress. Then she waded into the water beside Pastor Brooks. She would give herself up to Him again and again, if need be.

Pastor Brooks turned to her with a fierce look. "Do you accept the Lord Jesus Christ now and forever into your heart?"

"I do." Her voice was husky. In the water, she didn't feel cold or wet. She felt heat. She felt her own self liquid, melting.

"Then I baptize you again in His name." Pastor Brooks bent her back over his arm into the water.

Tiny currents tugged at the pins in her hair as she sank beneath the surface. Submerged, she heard the muffled voice of Pastor Brooks praying over her. She heard the flickering hiss of snakes in the water. She heard her own blood drumming in her brain. She sank down and down, dissolving into the pond. There was no longer any boundary between her and the water. She merged with the pond, with the earth underneath, with the all the universe of His creation, stars, planets, galaxies. Light shattered into a thousand pieces. Jesus approached. His figure was shadowy. He had broad shoulders, long arms, sure square hands rimmed with gold fire. Sparks spun out from Him. He reached for her. She could hear His ruby heart beating. She could feel his gold fire on her flesh. She could see Him looking at her with the same kind of calm, quiet gaze Marlon had.

She shoved herself up out of the water and sucked great chunks of air into her lungs.

"I held you under extra long to wash away every last sin," Pastor Brooks said.

But even here, in this sanctified water, washed clean of her sins, dreams of Marlon had flooded back into her. Water streamed down her face, her hair, her back. It pearled up on her eyelashes, on the points of lace at her neckline. Breathing hurt. She felt burned hollow, like a coal had dropped down into her chest and charred its way through from the inside out. She was just a papery shell now, waiting. He would come soon, would whisk her away.

She splashed toward the shore. Off in the distance, lightning split the sky. Thunder cracked.

Ivy wrung out her dress. Pastor Brooks had stayed in the water, craning his neck toward the sky. "We'll be seeing something any minute now."

Lightning spears shot down. The ground vibrated. Ivy felt a buzzing shoot from her feet to her fingertips. The black sky had the weight of iron. The air

smelled of metal filings. Over the tomato field, something floated down from the clouds. A blue mass, quivering. It hovered, and then began to drift toward the pond.

A crashing noise burst out of the cattails. Him! Everything in Ivy surged forward toward those cattails. She ran to Him, to His voice calling her name: "Ivy!"

But it was Marlon. He grabbed her wrist, pulled her away from the water. "You have to get out of here. There's lightning everywhere!"

But behind Marlon she could see the blue jellied mass floating, sparking. "No, look,"she said, her voice tight, aching. He's here." Small darts of blue light shot out and she stretched her arms out toward them.

But Marlon wrapped himself around her, clamping her arms to her side. "Are you crazy? That's ball lightning." Ivy struggled in his arms but he would not release her. "Pastor Brooks," Marlon shouted, toward the pond. "Get out of that water!"

Ivy's hair rose from her shoulders. Marlon's hair floated in a halo above his head. But Pastor Brooks stood stock still in the pond, his mouth open. "I've waited my whole life for this." A sob broke from him. "The hour cometh and now is!"

The blue mass rippled, floating, inexorable, toward the pond. It hummed with the sound of a thousand lightning bugs. Ivy struggled against Marlon. "Let me go."

"Angels!" Pastor Brooks said. "I see them." The blue light was directly over him now. He was bathed in blue. He held up his arms, as if to embrace the blue jellied light. "Take me, Lord. Take me now," he moaned.

Ivy writhed in Marlon's grip, screaming. "Me, too, Lord! It's me, Ivy Wade!"

Pastor Brooks rose from the water, his face contorted. One sharp spear of light shot down and seized him.

And then, instantly, the blue mass evaporated. Pastor Brooks fell back into the pond. Steam hissed off his body. He floated face up, and then slowly he rolled over and sank.

The stand of cattails burst into flame.

"What about me?" Ivy wailed, to the pond, to the sky, to the burning cattails.

"Come on, we have to get inside somewhere," Marlon said. He half pulled, half dragged, half carried Ivy up the sandy path toward town, all the while she sobbed and screamed and stretched her arms back toward the water. How could He not have taken her? How could He abandon her like that?

As they passed the Booth place, Ivy caught a fleeting glimpse in the lantern-lit windows of bodies sprawled everywhere. "They're all dead," Ivy said. She felt betrayed. She felt cheated. How could He have come for that Mrs. Booth and not her!

"Huh," Marlon said. "If they aren't dead now, they'll wish they were in the morning," Marlon said. All around them lightning slashed the sky. Marlon ran along, hurrying Ivy along, down the street, muddy now with puddles of rain, with windblown leaves and litter, toward the store.

Inside, Ivy clutched her chest and tried to get her breath. She still had that burned feeling in her lungs from her time under water. Rain pattered against the tin roof. Marlon lit a kerosene lantern and yellow light filled the store, warm suddenly, cozy. Ivy realized she was dripping wet, her hair sodden, snaking down her back. Her beautiful white dress was limp and ruined. Why hadn't He taken her?

She was cold. She was shivering. Soggy lace clung to her. Marlon moved toward her, wiped at her wet face with a bandanna. Heat radiated from him. She moved in closer to him.

His eyebrows furred together, puzzled. "What's that on your cheek? Stand over here, by the light." His hands turned her face this way and that. He looked at her neck, her arms. "These are snake bites. Are there snakes in that pond?"

"The moccasins escaped."

"My God. I'll go find the doctor."

"Stop, I'm fine." And truly, though she could see the snake bites on her arms, she didn't feel any poison inside her.

She was only cold. The Lord hadn't come for her. She might wait her whole life for Him to come again. But Marlon was standing right there. She was cold everywhere but where his nearness warmed her. He was looking down on her, with that calm, quiet gaze that made her stand still, that made her want to say right then, to him: *here I am.*

E.A. Hilbert

When Tracing New Borders

> For more than five hundred years the cardinal problem in defining Europe has centered on the inclusion or exclusion of Russia. Throughout modern history, an Orthodox, autocratic, economically backward but expanding Russia has been seen as a bad fit.
>
> —Norman Davies, *Europe, A History*

When tracing new borders for the Middle East,
W.C., drunk, allowed his pencil to slip
and left a thirty-mile polyp on the

page that presses into Jordan to this day.
Traveling to the edge of the salient,
one finds only sand and dirty rock, wind.

Sometime in the eighteenth century, a
minor Russian administrator was
sent to erect a boundary post on the

barren trail between Yekateringburg
and Tyumen to mark the division
of Europe from Asia, one of many

that have been drawn. Flakes of snow scattered the
landscape, gleamed in fragile starlight, made the
route indistinct. Bound in iron fetters,

Tsarist exiles passing the frontier would
kneel and fitfully scoop the last handfuls
of European soil beneath colorless

winter sun. They crouched as long as they could,
struggling not to cry, before being pushed forward,
gazing into the sapphire dusk over

the hills ahead. One observer wrote that
'no other boundary in the world has seen
so many shattered hearts.' There was no return

from that point, like crossing into the azure
frost of Hades without a golden bough
to ensure retreat. One bitter morning,

an Oxford professor, born in Russia,
gazed out of his rain-spattered window at
garden walls receding down a grey English

lane and thought of a tidal Europe, its
borders rising and receding in time.
For centuries vespers ascend and fall

from cathedrals and cloisters, and sadly,
announcing the decline of day and light,
mark limits and origins. Our children

play in the dirt, inflict bloody noses, draw
harsh lines in the dust that are smeared clear by
careless footsteps upon their departure.

Maria M. Hummel

Baptism

What hope in us offers the semblance of ponds,
shallow fonts in the backyard
where blackbirds dive at their own dark

echoes, where they split their selves to clean
their bodies? As if they could show us how
to love the first sacrament, the drowning

tingle of water across the scalp. My brother
swears he remembers his, a jagged circle of faces,
his hearty squall reaching high to the pinned

silver lungs of the silent organ. Today,
blackbirds splash the water out, sinking
their claws against the smooth stone footing,

tossing up rain. There is no music, no flight-
beat to their awkward washing. Today they are
earthy grub collectors, nest builders pulling

thread from the grass. The egg of a baby's
head is ladle-bathed, but my brother says
they pushed him under, the water seamed

above him like the neck of a shirt, shimmer-
white, the priest's rough hands wrenching him
free and everyone waiting for him to breathe

again. He is the worst swimmer among us,
gangly flapper who will not soak his head,
the whole pond breaking for him, shattered

surface of a mirror, now blackbirds rising
for the trees, beating their wet wings
against the weightless air. There,

my brother, I see you for the first time
under the dark yawn of the church, I see you
sleeping in our mother's arms until the moment

she hands you over, a shirt of rain awaiting.
The birds streak silver with forgetting, catch
the bait of evening, that last earthbound light,

but for us, I know there is necessity
in memory: the boy must remember the man
before he is one, must hear his voice above the choir

before the choir sings, and see his flight before
he knows he has no wings, bare feathers stuck
wet to his sides, eyes stinging as they meet the air.

The Only Daughter

Opening the egg cartons before buying
them, checking each eye-shaped oval
for cracks or damage—this is the kind
of preparation you taught me,
as if we could prevent ourselves
from taking into our bodies the useless
or rotten, and once the eggs were owned
by us, those hard swollen seeds,
they could be nothing less than whole.

One day you will have to lie to me
I'm fine, as your own mother did,
afraid to trouble you with her surgery,
calling late from Florida after it was over
to announce that she, breasts scalloped to scars,
had survived. I'm fine, and on the interior
of that thought, you will have painted
the walls blue, as they do in prison
to trick the inmates into absorbing
the calm of a cloudless sky.

Every time I crack an egg, I fear
the embryo I saw once in a dream,
the blood head of chick curled within
its shell. I fear the heaviness of that rough
globe, the one that does not break, but hatches
wet with responsibility in my palm.
One day I will have to weigh the red
sticky accident that falls to the silver sink
against the times I have secretly
longed for the force of death
to affect my life. Gathering the damp
tucked claws, the unfeathered veins
stalled with pink blood, the dark
clot of a never-opened eye, I will have to
consider its burial, hesitating between

the trash and the door, wondering
if it will hurt me less to hide this stopped
heart, or toss it, for all the neighbors
to see, across the blue clear air.

In the choice I'll have to make, flinging
the shard wings of shell across the yard,
or slipping them quietly into the black
plastic pail, everything you told me
becomes a lie. Nothing is preparation,
not the finger gliding over a smooth
perfect skin, seeking flaws
that the eye can miss. Not the grainy
shifting of eggs in their boxes when lifted
carefully, cradled among the small
balances that won't change until we
decide it is time to alter them.
Not breaking each solid one
by one back into days
of clear lakes and yellow
suns burning in the well
of a blue-rimmed china bowl.

Kate Deimling

Mary Curley

For most of my married life
my husband had a mistress.
If it had been a woman of flesh and blood,
at least I might've felt I could compete
or leave. But it was the war.
He would gaze at pictures of her,
gather up his mementos,
and polish medals like jewelry.
When the division yearbook came out,
he pored over every photo
and wrote letters to the others,
scanning the mail every evening
for replies, just to hear them speak of her.
At night sometimes she took hold of him
terribly. He crouched down on the bed
and responded to silent orders
and when he awoke his eyes searched
frantically around the room.
When I contracted pneumonia,
I didn't try too hard to get better.
Lying in my bed, staring at the circles
on the quilt, I thought,
I too will have a lover,
who comes to lift me to the clouds.

Ken Fontenot

Reverie

So many feet make up the joys of centipedes.
My feet, on the other hand, have both
limited joys and even some pain
after I stood on them all day like a waiter.
And what is pain, anyway, if not misfortune
in excess, misfortune weighted down?
One confines oneself to the home,
or to the beach where walking on sand
is unique and inexpressibly pleasant.
The sun, in fact, would look better
wearing a hat to cover its bald head.
At sundown its red face could be a kind of blushing.
Can't kiss the sun, can't hold it
in our hands—as much as we'd like to.
So the day passes without misfortune, and in our minds
a reverie arrives, once and only once that way.

Each Day You Woke Still Pickled

Addressing the air at dawn, I found everything else
silent except the radio I had meant to turn down.
Another parched summer, another cloudless day.
You: no longer among the living, a ghost.
"I need a funny story from you," I said.
"Tell your memory to speak," you said, invisible.

I never did learn what became of your body.
You had little money. Did they turn you into ashes?

Yours was a blessing only vodka would bestow.
Without it you could hardly breathe,
as if someone kept pushing you underwater.
You understood what Thoreau wrote about simplicity
but not what Goethe wrote about moderation.

Still, I should have insisted. I should have said:
Bill, I won't stay here and watch you die.

David Punter

Do the Watusi

The saddest thing I have ever heard was Patti Smith singing 'Do the Watusi.'

So.

After twenty-four years writing pornography under various assumed names, mostly drawn from the newspapers (Myra Major, Pamella Hattersley, Marilyn Straw—don't tell me if you've heard of them), in a fit of cleanliness I turned to my garden.

I have always been very fond of my garden, and have tended it within reason, although the harsh mental conditions of my profession made the proper attention difficult to pay. It has borders and a large central lawn (I am not concerned here with my front garden, anybody can have a front garden), and a somewhat under-developed patio, and two trees.

The reason it only has two trees is that it has needed tending ever since I acquired it (along with the house, of course) eight years ago, because at that time it was merely a somewhat choppy sea of builders' rubble, the house being then new. Then there was only one tree, a moderately large hawthorn, but it very rapidly became apparent that the exertions of the builders had done strange things to that tree, and after a year in the house I was no longer able to convince myself, against all the evidence, that it was alive. On the other hand, neither could I bear to chop it down, and so I adopted two stratagems. I planted a thriving honeysuckle adjacent to the dead tree, and I am pleased to say that over the intervening years it has performed an exciting program of rejuvenation, intertwining itself with love, or possible an impulse towards strangulation, around the hawthorn's withered limbs. And I also planted, below the fence and near the stream at the bottom of the garden, a number of willows at an early stage of development, and was more than pleased when one of them pronounced itself deeply satisfied with the watery climatic conditions and throve, to the point where it is now some fifteen feet tall, and possessed of a spread not much less.

Meanwhile, the fate of the dead hawthorn has continued to interest me, and it was only recently when observing it, insofar as it is still possible to do so within the embracing clutch of the honeysuckle, that I noticed that several of its larger remaining branches are in fact broken off and retaining their approximate position only through the succouring presence of the creeper.

There is also in my garden a substantial vegetable patch, in which I grow successful if amateurish potatoes, lettuce and beetroot, and the vegetable patch

has been of particular interest to me, because it is in connection with this patch, which measures some twenty feet by ten, that I became most vividly aware of the phenomenon of the rising stones.

Any gardener will tell you the same: that stones left in a reasonably well-tilled bed of soil will gradually rise to the surface. And indeed they do, and not only stones either. There would be some mornings when I would stroll into the garden, not long after my morning brandy, and I would see whole slates and unidentifiable pieces of broken pottery lying upon the surface, where no such objects had been the night before.

After a hard day (or night: I am an indiscriminate worker) spent among the lissome thighs and pouting breasts of my own objects of inscrutable desire, I found these silent machinations curiously comforting. It seemed as though there was a benevolententity (or perhaps substantially more than one) toiling away below to purify the very ground of my being, although I sometimes wished that this secretive creature would also clear away the detritus it so usefully produced instead of leaving me to dump it in the stream.

And yet, for all its fecundity, my garden was not without its problems. One such problem was that it was constantly overlooked by my neighbours. My house is built on a considerable slope, which means that the fences at the back run steeply downhill to the stream, and therefore, from the upper windows of my neighbours' houses, all activity is visible. This has never greatly concerned me. I do not have what is commonly referred to as a private life. Instead I have my work, which is not easily observed.

Another problem, however, was that the steep slope of the lawn required drainage; and so, shortly after I moved into the house, and observing the water-logged state of large parts of the lawn, I engaged two local men to come along and insert a drainage system down the centre of the lawn, disgorging through an only just visible length of yellow piping into the stream. And for a long time, this seemed—through mechanical means of which, I freely admit, I have no cognisance—to do the trick. The lawn grew lush, if a little mossy at the corners; soft it was underfoot and yet neither squishy nor slimy, and although the weather in these parts is uniformly foul many nonetheless were the days when, having put it to rights with my substantial electric mower, I would wander around on it, savouring the feel of the turf, the spring of the soil, the bright if somewhat livid green of the grass. Sometimes, indeed, I dreamed of luscious adjectives I could use in my work, but for the fact that my work is not of a kind that can stand a great deal in the way of neologism.

Yet perhaps that is rather inaccurate; for sometimes I see my writing—of which, I should add, my publisher is always craving more—as a little akin to the geometer's art: the space, the space of bodies and between them, the triangulation, as it were, all this is already given; the task is to commit more and more permutations upon these givens, to measure and transmit the least distance between hand and thigh, to register the precise speed of...and yet all of this while at the same time appealing to those senses at once so active and so near to the brainless sleep of the somnambulist. Of which, let me assure you unless you may be driven to think otherwise, I am not one.

It was, however, particularly the lawn that provoked my renewed interest in the garden; or, perhaps I should say, an interest of a different kind. For there came a time—not so long ago—when I could not resist feeling that the pipe underneath had broken. At first I was merely aware of a certain difficulty in walking across the lawn from one side to the other (a task I sometimes set myself in the spirit of research, imagining the relative capacities of different models of queen-size beds as I do so), and it was no doubt some time before I became aware that this difficulty had to do with the way in which the lawn, imperceptibly at first, was sinking in the middle.

It was on, I think, a Tuesday morning—I think that because Tuesday is the day I usually pop into town to see my publisher, and on this particular day I missed my appointment—that matters came to something more of a head because, while engaging in this customary perambulation, my right foot suddenly disappeared from sight and, with a bit of a wrench, I found myself kneeling on my left knee.

I should pause at this point to explain the significance of Patti Smith to these events, although I am not sure I have got it right, and I may be confusing several records; or record sleeves; or women, although all my endeavour has always been to keep different female bodies apart (except, of course, when I am for quite specific purposes jamming them together). I associate sadness with Patti Smith because of a sleeve picture where you can see the emaciated flesh of her collar-bones, those peculiarly vulnerable bones where, it always seems to me, the marks of our childhood weakness continue to manifest themselves, except, of course, when decently covered, especially by an Armani suit and a tie from the Hong Kong markets (I told you my work sells well); bones like vulnerable roots.

But the way she sings 'Do the Watusi.' It is as though she is all alone in some nightclub at dawn; everybody has gone, and somehow she missed out on whatever action there was. There she is still, a waif struggling to whirl in the largely dimmed lights, amid the ridiculous plush of such places (which I have from time to time investigated, naturally, in the course of my work), unaware that everybody else has gone, trying to relearn or remember the steps of the dance, trying to encourage the steps of those who are long gone, fighting all the time against the despair of the early morning (unfortified by brandy), but unable to ward off the dreadful collapse of hope which invariably (for me, and no doubt for Patti too) attends the start of a new day.

And so perhaps Patti also reminds me that there is something, some substrate of despair, which underlies all our efforts, all our groanings, all our

searching and explorations: all of these are subject to unexpected sinkages into the nether regions. Yet at the time, I did very little; I extracted my foot from the hole and gently inspected it. It was not a large hole, although any hole in the middle of a well-kept lawn is unsightly. I could not really see into it, although it was perfectly evident that there was earth at the bottom, perhaps a foot down, and it seemed to me that it would be easy to fill it in with a little excess matter from the vegetable bed. The earth at the bottom, as far as I could see, also contained roots; but that was, of course, likely beneath a lawn.

I resolved that the following day I would fill the hole in (I was not unaware that I would probably perform the same symbolic activity several times in the course of my writing), but that night I had a singular dream. I dream, I should add, a great deal; indeed, I am on intimate and friendly terms with my dreams, and even their most disturbing content, I find, can be readily accommodated with a laugh and a shrug the following morning, and tends to vapourise under the impact of the morning brandy.

This dream, however, did not fit into any of the well-known (to me) patterns of my dreams; for in it I was upside down. This is perhaps in itself an unusual occurrence (I have not discussed my dreams with others, and so I would not really know) but what was really unexpected was that this upside-down-ness, rather than appearing to be a matter of mere dream-perception, was accompanied by all the unpleasant symptoms one would expect if one were really to be held in that position for a considerable length of time: I felt nauseous, disoriented, vertiginous, although I could by no means discern what lay below (or above?) me, for all seemed shrouded in darkness.

The following day, I did not fill in the hole in my lawn. Oh, I tried to; I filled up a wheelbarrow with excess soil from the vegetable bed (for as well as forcing stones and other bric-a-brac to the surface, my vegetable bed seems constantly to be generating a slight excess of soil, which I put down to an excellent tilth), I wheeled it over to the hole, and, with an almost new and very handy spade, I started to place earth within the hole, wondering the while whether or not I had a fresh box of lawn seed in the garage. But the soil seemed to disappear; in the end, I upended the wheelbarrow, and watched with some fascination as the earth fell in and, to all intents and purposes, disappeared, leaving the hole as it had previously been.

It was at this point that I became seriously interested in my hole. Until then it had seemed a minor nuisance, although I feared that my hidden drainage pipe was probably broken and that more extensive repairs would be required in due course. But now, it came to me that perhaps I had here something of more symbolic interest: an entrance to Hades, perhaps, or at least some mysterious access to something hidden underneath, which might of course only be a disused sewer (although how could that be, since this field had been undeveloped until the arrival of my house and that of the others on the estate, some

eight years before?); or, more interestingly, a cave—but then, how was it that my stalwart workmen had not discovered it, fallen into it indeed?

I emptied three more wheelbarrows full of earth into that hole that afternoon, quite destroying my hopes of completing the text of *Raunchy Rita* by my self-imposed deadline, but it did not seem to make the slightest difference. In the end I was persuaded to desist from these efforts by a sharp pain in my right shoulder; I had a nasty idea about what that might be telling me, and so instead of trundling my wheelbarrow uselessly about any further I went to the garage and obtained a tape measure. I then lay down full-length on the lawn (I do possess gardening clothes as well as my more urbane wardrobe) and let the measure down into the hole. One foot six. Nothing very much. Beginning to feel more than a little ridiculous, and aware by this time of the possibility of neighbours' eyes watching me, I then waggled the tape measure around in the hole in an attempt to gain an impression of its sideways dimensions; but nothing convincing ensued—except, as I reasoned to myself, it could not go too far in either direction, because if it did I would have fallen in. In pursuit of this theme, I wriggled my prone body through 360 degrees, courting disaster, but the ground did not cave in under me.

Maybe there never was anybody in the night-club at all. Maybe Patti had come there expecting to find people, to find music, to find...whatever it is we all hope to find, whatever that is, and she had found nothing. And maybe that was why 'Do the Watusi' was such a hopeless endeavour. I see her now (although I am no longer certain who this 'she' might be, except she is on some record sleeve somewhere) on her haunches, gazing out in wild appeal; but nobody is looking. I am not looking. I am indoors, away from my garden; I am (having now completed *Raunchy Rita*, for several days have passed) embarking on a consideration of what it is like to be in Carolina in the morning, Carolina being a lissome maid possessed of genitalia which, according to my fastidious prose, develop mysteriously into the caverns of night under the correctly tending hands...

But I digress. Do I digress? I became more unsure than previously, over these days, as to what digression might consist of. Certainly my infusions of earth into my garden hole, my holy guardian as I sometimes figured it to myself, always digressed; they seemed, as I observed more closely, to digress around one of the roots at the bottom of the hole, a large root off which the soil seemed continually to bounce.

I sat up. I stretched. I had been lying full length beside my hole again in an absurd parody of at least part of the 69 position. I thought about that root. It could only be a root of one of two trees: it could be a root of the long-dead hawthorn; or it could be a root of the willow, although the willow was a long way away, and I did not on the whole think that willow roots would have any particular interest in spreading themselves away from the water.

Was it dead or was it alive, this root? Raunchy Rita was certainly alive; so was Carolina, although there had been previous heroines who had been more narcoleptic. In the spirit of pure research, I betook myself to the local branch of B&Q (I have a nice village youth who takes me on such expeditions, since after ten o'clock in the morning I am rarely capable of driving myself without hazard, and before that time the activity lacks interest) and bought a larger and much sharper spade. At home, later, I dug it in. Although the root was eighteen inches below ground level and it was thus difficult for me to get much purchase on the assault, it went through with a nice squelching, succulent sound. Grandmother Willow then, I said to myself, and looked for a moment apprehensively at the tree, half expecting it to come down in a rush, or to express its resentment in some other way; or perhaps to...

Do the Watusi. How is it possible to express the sheer desperation endemic in this scenario. I have no children. I lived once, long ago, with a woman who had a child, and I despaired, constantly. The little girl would never finish things, I would come across her half-played games in the morning, and they would fill me with anguish. I am a great believer in climax, in completion. Once, when I was living in the company of this girl (she cannot have been more than five or six, but I forget her name) I was moved to such despair myself that I went out to a local toy-shop (yes, there were toy-shops then, even in this part of the world) and I bought her the most difficult game I could find. Not having much imagination in such matters, I suspect it was probably Monopoly. I remember that I flung it down in front of her, and she eagerly, scrabblingly, opened the box, and looked, awestruck and unnerved, at what lay inside. 'How do you play it?' she whispered. 'You find out,' I responded, and left her in tears.

I can't do it, I know I can't; I can't confront that vulnerability in myself, that sense of incomprehension, that possibility of things being left uncompleted. Her weeping only confirmed what I already knew, it echoed the weeping inside myself. I went back to my pornography, where all is clean and achieved. I am a great believer in the plenitude of unsafe sex, but then it is a long time since I sought to proselytise for my beliefs.

Do the Watusi.

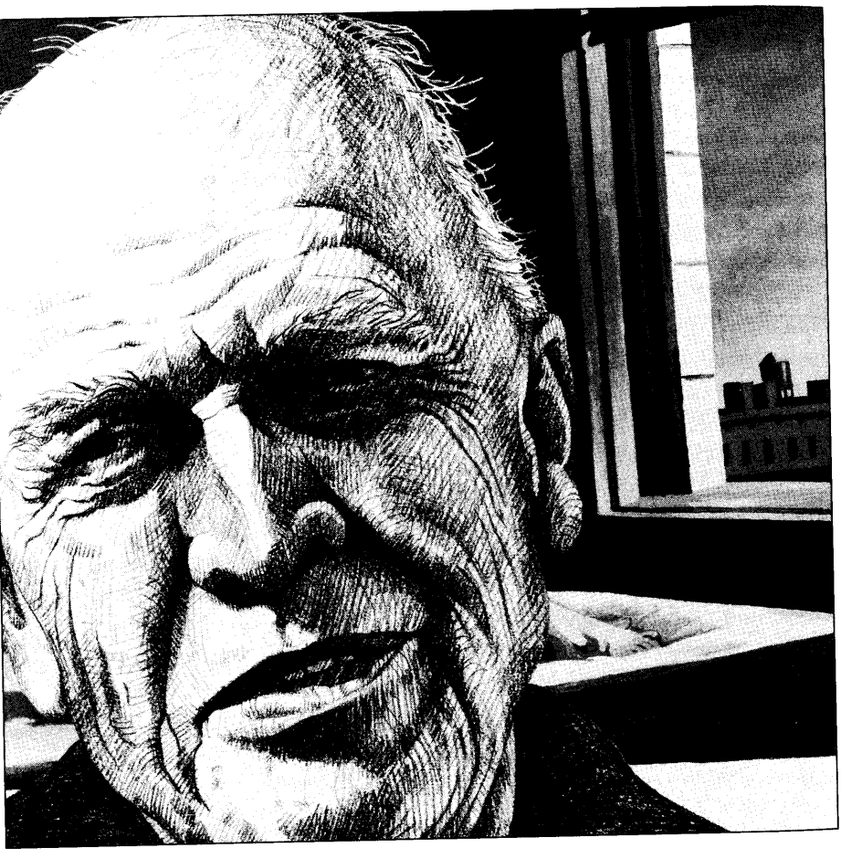
A night in my garden. The vegetable bed has got larger; no, not in its lateral dimensions, for that would be uncanny, but it billows, up and down, like a disturbed queensize bed. The healthy potato plants, the ravishingly green beetroot tops, the swaying onions, all attest to this mysterious rocking motion which seems to rain down on me ever more soil, ever more shards of rock and slate which, if only I had the knowledge, I could assemble into a quite particular, a quite individual shape. Somebody is rocking on their haunches in front of me, singing with a thin wailing cry; somewhere else, quite close by, there is a severed root, also weeping, also not knowing where it is going, what its drift is supposed to be. Perhaps it is a root I have forgotten, the root of honeysuckle. I lie down and put my cheek to the earth. At the bottom of the hole there is a flask of brandy. I put my arm into the hole, and something squelches, as though a spade had cut through it. I sit up in bed trembling. There is a livid mark on my arm, just below the elbow. Grandmother Willow.

Night and day seem less clear to me now. Sometimes I imagine that I go into the land through the hole, and that there I find an intricate tracery of roots, with thin songs of mourning issuing from the earth. In these environs, I discover, I am no longer upside down; perhaps that was a mere *rite de passage* On the other hand, around my face, but just out of reaching distance, there seem continually to wave severed roots, roots of unnamed and unnameable plants. The vegetable bed billows like a sea of oxen, engaged in umimaginable copulations. The hawthorn dies nightly, strangled in the loving grip of honeysuckle. Down below the fence, the willow, blown by magnificent and unseen winds, presides over desolation.

No birds sing in my garden; they used to, I remember it well, there used to be a robin that hopped among the fenceposts, a chorus of starlings...but perhaps I have set them too difficult a task, perhaps I never explained the rules to them. Perhaps, down in this hole every night as I now am, constrained in a set of dimensions I do not understand or love, I too have a task of difficulty to perform; but I cannot see beyond the sea of roots, I can smell nothing beyond the earth's rich succulence, although it seems that perhaps I dance nightly for somebody's delectation, trying to avoid the small stones and shards that emerge beneath my feet. Sometimes I hear the beginning of a song from above, but I know that it is far too late to make out the sound, the words; it is already early in the morning, and I have missed the show.

There is only me, and an empty wide plain, dark and low, stretching across the underside of my garden; there are occasional lights, but nobody to tend them, and very soon it will be time to go home, except that to do that would be to embark on a game too difficult for me, and I would end up in a sea of severed roots, broken toys.

Do the Watusi.



Jonathan Santlofer
UNTITLED 1998 (Edward Hopper)
12 x 12 inches
Pencil on Paper

Jonathan Santlofer

Artist's Statement

I am no longer sure how the first of this artist series came about—just the who, Mondrian—carved and locked into the framework of one of the artist's Neo-Plastic paintings. The second piece, a soulful Arshile Gorky, appeared to literally conjure up the image/painting of himself as a young boy with his mother. The third? I forget. But at some point there were six or seven of these artist pieces and they begin speaking to one another as if my studio had been transformed into an art historical chat room, each piece acting as a kind of Rosetta Stone, a key to that artist and his or her particular work: Manet shielding *Olympia's* most private parts, Rothko enveloped by his own field of color, Franz Kline as graphically black and white as his painting.

By the time I knew I was onto something the series was already rule-governed:

1. Each piece a foot square.
2. Deceased artists only.
3. Each piece to say something specific about an artist, his or her work, what the world thinks of them, or what I think. I did not presume that any one piece would tell the whole story about a particular artist—only that it would tell you *something.*

Soon it became obvious to me that the work could be taken as high art, craft, or even folk art; clearly it trafficked in art history, but equally in popular culture. Pairing an image or carving of an artist with a replicated image of his or her art may question notions of originality, individual achievement, fame, collective memory, and the cult of the artist. But these portraits-within-portraits are not dispassionate, wry critiques: my own technique belies that. Della Robbia's 15th Century carving of blessed madonna and their offspring are part of my inspiration, but so are the crude but marvelous whittlings of Appalachian folk art.

In making the work, my biggest challenge was how not to repeat myself. Often, as I begin thinking about an artist, he or she offered up the idea. An elderly Picasso asked to be shown with his last self portrait; Picabia to spout Dada rhetoric, Mary Cassatt to watch over her tenderly depicted mother and child.

When an artist was not forthcoming, I did not do the piece.

The drawings were no different than the carvings, and never made as studies. On the whole, they tend to be somewhat less ironic, but more emotional, which I think has to do with a drawing's personal touch. Egon Schiele looks as tortured as his self-portrait; Cezanne merges into Mont Ste. Victoire; Robert Smithson's head is the biggest boulder in his *Spiral Jetty.*

Artists, for the most part, have hidden behind their work. Most people can identify Picasso or Andy Warhol—both instant icons, who need no assistance from me. But how many people can tell you what Charles Demuth looked like, or that Liubov Popova was beautiful? Knowing what an artist looks like is not of primary importance to me—or to the world. It's the *People Magazine* part. But more important to me was taking the image of the artist, craving or drawing it—thereby converting it to art—and playing it against what we already recognize as art.

It was not just becoming a chameleon—aping this or that artistic style—which intrigued me; though surely this was part of the challenge, and the fun—going inside each of the artist's minds, slipping into his or her skin. Years before, in my abstract paintings, I painted literal shadows around non-literal, abstract shapes to convince the viewer that what they saw was tangible, "real." My reproductions of art works seemed to me to be a similar kind of activity. Though this new work looks different, both the abstract and the representational work play with the picture plane; and I think it's possible, in this new work, to talk about the "shadow" of the artist, and even the replicated art work as being a kind of "shadow."

Of course both activities depend on the viewer's willingness to submit to illusion. Creating a clear, believable world has always been important to me. I want my viewer secure enough to enter. It is once they are there, inside my world, that the ambiguities begin to surface, alternatives are suggested, realities questioned.

I do not have all the answers to the questions this work has postulated. When I do, the series will probably begin to mutate in some new direction. But for now, Richard Diebenkorn is calling, as is Phillip Guston. Elaine deKooning is demanding equal time; her famous ex-husband Ree Morton cannot believe I have not gotten to her.

Books

Jacqueline Bishop. *Em Memória Chico Mendes: A Tribute on the Ten Year Anniversary of His Death* (New Orleans: Lavender Ink, 1998). $25.

On December 22, 1988, Chico Mendes, the leader of the struggle to preserve the Amazonian rainforest, stepped out of the back door of his house and was assassinated. Chico was a *seringueiro*, a rubber tapper who collects latex from the trees of the forest. He had a vision of the people of the rainforest living in balance with the natural world, supporting their communities through harvesting the natural, renewable forest products in a sustainable manner. It was for this vision that he was murdered by the powerful ranchers of the region, who wish to burn the forests and expand their vast estates. And it is also for this vision that he has become for many throughout the world a hero of the earth, a saint of ecology.

Each year since Chico's death, New Orleans artist Jacqueline Bishop has traveled to Chico's home town of Xapuri, in the state of Acre, Brazil, deep within the heart of Amazonia. There she has met with his widow Ilzamar and his friends, and spent time in communion with the rainforest itself, observing, listening, and learning from its diverse life forms. And each year she has painted a portrait of Chico as a tribute to this humble man and his inspiring vision.

The public has heard a great deal over the years about the massive destruction done to the Amazonian rainforests. Yet the devastation has worsened, the struggle of the rubber tappers has languished, and a horrifying ecological holocaust has remained at best on the fringes of public consciousness. If the magnitude of this continuing ecological catastrophe is to register with the global public, the realities of nature will have to capture its collective imagination. Jacqueline Bishop's art is noteworthy not only as the expression of her own inspired and numinous vision, but also as a powerful defense of nature through its unique contribution to the creation of an ecological imaginary.

In *Em Memória Chico Mendes* Bishop includes her Chico Mendes works, along with some of the most captivating of her rainforest paintings. There are also photographs of a joyful Chico with Ilzamar, a pensive Chico with his young children, and Ilzamar with the artist in Xapuri. And finally, there is "Chico," the only portrait painted during his lifetime, done by his friend Jorge Pivasplata de la Cruz.

The context of Chico's life and work is presented through informative texts by the artist herself, by Brazilian historian Maria Jose Bezerra, by Wade Davis of the New York Botanical Garden, and by writer and filmmaker Jonathan Maslow. And a deeper personal dimension is offered in moving "testimonies" from Ilzamar and three of Chico's companions from the rubber tappers' union.

Yet this extraordinary work is above all a book of Bishop's paintings and an expression of her marvelously creative ecological imagination. In Bishop's works, the rainforest speaks to us. Its plants and flowers, its fish, birds, and monkeys, even its earth and sky cry out to us. They testify to the infinite and sacred beauty that lie within the forest, and they express the agony of loss, of death and destruction. Bishop's magical brush transforms the pathetic fallacy, the speech of nature, into an exquisite expression of the pathos of truth. Her genius is to compress into single, overpowering, complex images

the tragic, unfolding story of an enchanted garden of earthly delights transformed by human ingenuity and human greed into a terrifying landscape of destruction.

In "Chico" (1989) the colors of nature are transformed into a hauntingly garish beauty blending the grotesque and the sacred. Two eerie skeletal avian heads hold a small banner before a red and purple image of Chico, as purple tears fall from their hollow eyes. Leaves rain through a black void upon jagged green and yellow peaks, which themselves shed a tear.

"Chico Mendes: Man of the Forest" (1990) is a rich icon depicting the benevolent Chico, saint of the forest, his head haloed by the curving beaks of jungle birds, as luminous forest flowers, birds, and furry animals nestle around him. Even fish drift through an animated aether. Yet skeletal trees tower over a pinkly ominous horizon and one barely notices that starkly bare bones protrude from a radiant form.

In two of Bishop's oil-on-wood constructions, "A Casa do Chico Mendes" I and II (1991 and 1992), we are transported to Chico's "house." In both we meet a resurrected Chico, surrounded by vibrant life. In one image, a purple butterfly ascends like a spirit from his head. What at first might seem a scattering of bright red-petaled, yellow-throated flowers becomes the peak of the roof aflame (Bishop's intense reds continually symbolize both intensity of life and ferocity of destruction). In the other work, the spirit butterfly rises above a halo-beak, a simian peers out from the forest as if to question us, and again a fish drifts into view.

In both works, we slowly become aware that amidst this lushness of life the beatific Chico's chest is riddled with holes and dripping with blood. Through Bishop's polysemous "house" we are at once "at home" with Chico, pilgrims to the tomb-house of the martyred saint, and voyagers in the greater household ("oikos") of his tropical-forest home.

In "Chico Mendes, 1944-1988" (1993) the head of a mournful Chico emerges from a thick patchwork of rainforest leaves. He sheds tears of blood that are echoed by similar tears falling like raindrops. But the next year's "Chico" is ghostly white, drained of life. There are no colorful life forms in this image, and only a velvety red curtain backdrop accentuates the paleness of death. Perhaps this lifeless image of Chico symbolizes the fading of his dream, the loss of interest in his cause by the international media, and the accelerating destruction of the rainforests.

"Xapuri" (1992) is dominated by a haunting row of grotesque skeletal tree-forms, seemingly frozen in a terrifying dance of death. There is a bleak wasteland background in which a fire storm on the horizon fades first into a smoky gray, and then to deep purple infinity. The central backdrop is a ghostly purple lake, from which arch dolphins of the same unnatural hue. The foreground is invaded by rich vegetation, flowers and birds, and lianes—climbing forest vines— creep up the dead limbs on which perch brightly colored birds. An unvanquished Eros fights back against an imperious Thanatos.

But despite such evidence of a regenerative life-force, the exclusively female tree-figures with their spindly outstretched limbs convey an overpowering image of Nature Herself crucified. Our complacency is mocked by these figures' uncanny visages: one is a smiling human skull; others are empty, mute bird skulls; another is effaced by a bird perched on a branch; another is a large and cruelly ironic flame, at the precise center of the painting. An excellent example of Bishop's imaginative genius, the painting is

reminiscent of of an altar piece, a nature-crucifixion that shocks one's sensibilities, perhaps even into recognition.

"Century of Silence" (1996) is one of the most strikingly emblematic of Bishop's many powerful images. Here, a mandala of monkeys intertwine with a charred, spindl seemingly emaciated tree. The work is spatially dominated by an apocalyptic skyscape fiery pink, yellow, and red-orange tones that fade into an ominous reddish-blackness i the distance. One monkey sits staring out at the observer. Forest growth emerges in t foreground, but the forces of destruction are clearly ascendant in this disturbing image Diaphanous leaves, drained of life, float in the background, and one senses that the growing holocaust will soon engulf the remaining life in its fiery destruction.

Bishop's "Century of Silence" is the silence of death, as the forest home of myria life forms is reduced to a mute, lifeless wasteland. But it is also the silence of our soci world, as we quietly and complacently turn away from this unspeakable tragedy. It i out of this silence that Bishop's haunting images cry out to us, asking us to remembe

Em Memória Chico Mendes is available from the New Orleans-based publisher, Lavender Ink, and at a number of local bookstores. The images are all impressively reproduced in 16 full-color prints, and the texts are presented in English, Portuguese and Spanish.

Reviewer *John Clark* teaches philosophy in Loyola's City College.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Rodney Jones' sixth book of poems, *Elegy for the Southern Drawl*, was published in the spring of 1998 by Houghton Mifflin. He teaches in the MFA program at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. His dog just celebrated his tenth birthday and this past summer Jones caught nineteen trout.

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Anthony LaBranche was born in 1931 in New York, a great-great-great grandson of Lucien LaBranche (d. 1846) of Seven Oaks Plantation, Westwego, near New Orleans. For his lifetime he has been a professor of Renaissance literature at the University of Michigan, University of Massachusetts, and finally, for thirty years at Loyola University Chicago. He retired in 1994 to a family home in rural Massachusetts.

Valerie Martin's most recent novel is *Italian Fever*, due from Knopf in June. She is visiting writer-in-residence at Loyola University New Orleans this year.

David Punter is a widely published literary critic, the author or editor of twelve books and many articles and essays. He has also published three volumes of poetry: *China and Glass* (1985), *Lost in the Supermarket* (1987), and *Asleep at the Wheel* (1996). His short stories and poems have also appeared in many magazines and journals in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Lori E. Sambol writes and practices law in Los Angeles. Her short fiction has been published in *13th Moon*. Her story in this issue, "Kaddish," is dedicated to Sylvia Kaplan.

Jonathan Santlofer is a New York painter whose work hangs in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Chase-Manhattan Collection among other places. He has been the recipient of two NEA painting grants and was recently visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome. The work appearing in this issue was recently shown in two galleries in New York, James Grahm & Sons, and Jim Kempner Fine Arts.

Prageeta Sharma won a 1995 American Academy of Poets award in 1995, her final year as a student at Brown University. Her work has appeared in *Agni, Explosive Magazine*, and will appear in *Shiny, Combo*, and *The Hat*. Subpress Books will publish her collection, *Bliss to Fill*, in the spring.

Robert Skidmore lives in Atlanta, Georgia. His fiction has been published in *Oasis* and will appear in an upcoming issue of *South Carolina Review*. He is working on a novel during the times he can tear himself away from short stories.

Virgil Suarez' first book of poetry, *You Come Singing*, is due out this fall from Tia Chucha Press/Northwestern University. His poems have appeared in *New England Review, Ploughshares, Mid-American Review, Manoa, Shenandoah, The Kenyon Review, The Ohio Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. He teaches creative writing at Florida State University.

Sam Taylor is a yoga teacher, poet, and the editor of *The Raw Seed Review*, a new journal devoted to intensity, imagination, and innovation. Recent work of Taylor's appears or is forthcoming in numerous magazines including *Spoon River Poetry Review, The Midwest Quarterly, The Bitter Oleander, Oasis, Rattle*, and *The Maverick Press*. He lives (as of this writing) in Ojai, California, though by the time this issue appears he probably will have wandered on.

Steve Wilson has work out or forthcoming in such journals as *Yankee Magazine, New Letters, The Wallace Stevens Journal*, and *The Singapore Express*. Wilson teaches at Southwest Texas State University.

in this issue:

Blauner Chase England Martin Jones
Keegan Adolph Wilson Taylor Hume
Sharma Dermansky Skidmore Emmons
LaBranche Suarez Sambol Bradshaw Berry
Adamo Hendricksen Bjorneby Hilbert
Hummel Delmling Fontenot Punter
and art by Jonathan Santlofer

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