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GARRET 1969

Vol. 4, No. 2

Jon Jackson, Editor; Elizabeth Libbey, Business Manager; Earl Ganz, Faculty Adviser. Cover Photo by Lee Nye.

GARRET is published at least once a year by the Associated Students of the University of Montana. ASUM publications are responsible to Publications Board, a committee of Central Board. Correspondence should be addressed to GARRET, Box 37, University Center, U of M, Missoula, Montana 59801. Copyright 1969, by ASUM with copyright privileges reverting to authors and artists. Contributions from all sources are invited, precedence is given, however, to material contributed by students, faculty and alumni of UM.

Single copy price: 50 cents.

Entered as Second class mail.

Ruth Alexander

THE FIRST GOOD YEAR

Anna Borgenson, waiting, counted again her chickens. Standing on the stone which was her front step she could see them beyond the well moving in a cloud across the prairie. It was hot and they walked slowly through the grass making short pecks at bugs and seeds.

She counted twelve first—twelve round white Plymouth Rock hens—and then the thirteenth: a white Plymouth Rock also, but with a fist-sized black spot on its neck. She did not know why the thirteenth hen had a spot, and neither did Bjorn—they had both seen the solid white rooster and setting hen that Chris Christianson had pointed out as the parents, wrapping each yellow fuzz chick in a rag like a Christmas ornament before putting it into the feed sack.

To the west, beyond the Christianson place and seeming closer to the sun than to her, she could see dust. Past Christiansons she could tell it was Bjorn; he was walking the mare in the heat, the horses's blowing tying together lengths of grass with glistening strings of mucous. He was tall above the horse, and she knew he was sitting straight not to wrinkle badly his town overalls. She looked at his frowning face aimed between the horses's ears, and saw as if new his beginning of wrinkles. He had learned just in North Dakota to tighten his eyes against sun and his mouth against dust and so she had seen it happen suddenly, that his face cracked and dust crowded in. Watching him dismount, she wanted to touch his shoulder and he to pull her close to him, but she could see he had to hold the mare's bit. Sometimes the mare waiting, looking calmly into the hills, would jerk her head suddenly and slash out with her teeth, as if something had come out of the hills where she watched to anger her.

Bjorn handed her the Mason jar of wheat. He did not smile, and Anna felt fear for a moment that this last field of wheat was not as heavy as they hoped, but then she remembered that he smiled little in the evenings when he was tired. "Good, Barney?" He still did not smile looking at her, "Ja, 61 pound."

61 pound wheat! That, she knew, was good. She did not know

how good or what made it good, as she did not understand the huge thresher that stood in the field to separate the wheat from its stalks, and with its frantic hissing and explosions sent the chickens far into the hills and her into the house till sundown. But that did not matter now, because the crop had brought in money extra—for the first time since homesteading in '11, and she could fix the log house up. She could buy curtains, a bedspread, and make white church shirts for Bjorn and the boy.

Gunnar came from the barn with his father. He was tall for ten, and also like his father quiet, and when at supper she said, "I will make both of you church shirts," he nodded once without smiling just as his father would, but Bjorn did not nod. She waited for him to look up from his plate, and when he did his eyes looked serious. "We don't need jewels," he said slowly, and his "j" was Swedish with a "y" sound, and it reminded her again how he had coming from town, once told her that he was now Barney, not Bjorn, because the store in town and the depot were not run by Swedes, and so they spelled his name like it sounded. She had been angry, but she had said nothing at supper, waiting till the best time when they were alone. But that night he had gone to bed before her, and when she had finished the dishes and put on water to heat for the next day, he was asleep in the bed.

And the next morning, there had been the season's first calf. It was lying by the well; perfect Hereford markings—a white head and brisket, and the body solid brown to where it ended before the hind-quarters, ripped away by a bobcat. So Anna had said nothing, feeling ashamed to talk to him about a name when he had lost a good heifer calf.

Now she did not know what he meant, looking at her, tired lines sprayed from his eyes. "Nay, Barney?" She watched him pack his pipe, looking serious, light it with a wooden match scratched on his overalls. "We don't got to have them," he said. "Christiansons never worn fancy clothes to church, and neither do the Russians to the south." It was true, she knew, of Christiansons. They came to church each Sunday looking like the last—he in the deep blue overalls that had never been washed, she tied at the waist in her one good dress, or not tied if it was spring and she was pregnant. She had four more children than Anna, and four more years of homesteading. She was stronger than Anna, round from the potatoes that kept them through the winter, and 40—a concise chunk of aging muscle.

Anna saw Bjorn push away from the table and walk toward the bedroom. She did not call after him, but doing the dishes, she told the boy: "You will have a blue-checked curtain for your bedroom win-

dow." Gunnar looked up from the dish he was drying and nodded. She saw him look at the dish and frown. She saw at once that it was as his father frowned, and his fine-featured face—her family's face—seemed more his father's. That was what he had learned on the homestead, she thought, because he had not always frowned. He had learned like his father to walk leaning against the wind frowning to the fields, and there to work the horses hard before the day got hot, and then fast again in the long cool after sundown and before dark.

She could remember Gunnar before they had come west. He was six and like Anna he had liked to walk in the city parks. She had drawn him pictures of the prairies, of long stretches of land with flowers and birds, and then he had drawn his own pictures, as well as hers with more flowers and birds, and he had made her promise they would go on long walks on their land to find nests of hatching birds. But in the first North Dakota spring Bjorn had needed the boy—to follow the plow picking rocks—and there had been no time for walks. And at eight the boy had learned to shoot, and with his own gun had spent summer evenings blasting magpies and black-birds who dived at the mounds of seed wheat drying.

When the dishes were done, Anna slipped into the bed beside Bjorn. He did not turn to her, stretched with his arms over his head, looking at the ceiling. She wanted to turn to him, but she hesitated, smelling him in the underwear he'd worn for several days. On Saturday nights they made love, both clean from baths, and they sometimes made love again on Sunday mornings if there was time to get milking done before church. They talked then, and Anna would ask him how long before the future when they could live like they had in Milwaukee. And Bjorn would say the first good year, and then he would want to talk about the land, and when he was finished, she was too tired to talk more of themselves. Now, she thought, this may be the future. She turned to him, he did not look happy, but she asked still: "How much extra after we lay in supplies?" She thought of Milwaukee when he had looked happy. Holding her he had said: "Anna, it may be hard at first, but the first good year and we'll have a house as beautiful as you." And kissing him she had known she was beautiful, and she was beautiful still, but Bjorn did not kiss her now staring upwards. He did not look at her as she spoke. "I don't know, Anna," he said slowly, "I been talking to Christianson. He's willing to give me that five acres of bottom land next to our place." He still did not look at her. "It would take all our extra money."

Anna looked at him, but it was not a joke, he was not laughing at the ceiling. He would really take the money they had waited for and buy more land. And that would mean more work—more field work

for Bjorn, more rocks for the boy, and a hired hand at least during the harvest that she'd have to grow a garden and cook for. She thought, he is taking money that I earned, too, with the chickens and the garden. She was angry. She would say: "Bjorn, I can't live another year without the things a house needs." She looked at the ceiling; she would turn again to him when she thought of the best words. She would go outside to walk awhile, and then tell him. But then she remembered it would be solid black outside and she would not know where she stepped. She listened and she could hear that the night too had a wind. The windmill gave unexpected groans turning when there was a strong gust at its height; somewhere a pail twanged against a barbed wire fence. Anna lay still in the dark a few minutes longer. At last she looked at him to speak—his eyes were closed. There was at once hurt inside her that he had forgotten about her and fallen asleep. She thought, touch him, wake him up, but she did not move. She remembered, he has to work early in the morning. We can talk in the morning, she decided, before he goes to milk.

The next morning when she awoke, Bjorn was already up and finished milking, and he had the boy awakened when she came into the front room. They were hurriedly pushing chunks of wood into the fire. "Gotta get to the county seat," Bjorn said seeing her, "get the boundaries of that land figured out before Christianson changes his mind."

Anna watched them get ready without her. They would take the rig; they would be back at dark. At the door Bjorn turned to her, "Anna, we don't need a fancy house—the neighbors don't." He stared at her and she saw that he believed it. He frowned, like the boy had learned, and she wondered where had he learned to frown? She thought of him and Christianson talking; they frowned even when they laughed.

Bjorn was laying a silver dollar on the washstand beside the purse with the land money. "I promised you curtains," he said not looking at her, "you could buy dish towels that would do. Take the mare into town and get what suits your fancy."

She watched the rig slowly leave her sight to the east. She sat on the step; it would be another hot day—in the barn the horses were already beginning to stamp at flies. She would feed the chickens before the heat.

In 20 days she would be 31. She tossed barley high into the air, watched the hens scratch the ground around them before it had landed. And what had she to look forward to when she was 31? Perhaps by that time the potatoes would be ready to dig and she

could count on two days of following Bjorn finding potatoes in the dirt he overturned.

She sat on the step not wanting to move, wanting to remember what had happened to make her almost 31. But the chickens clustered about her clucking hungrily, waiting for her to dump out the slop pail that they would scavenge in. She rose, and in the house found not only the full slop pail, but green beans waiting to be cooked for canning, clothes to be scrubbed, bread rising that would be ready to be baked in three more hours. And that would mean, in this heat, another hod of coal in the stove to keep a hot oven, and it meant also, Anna knew, that there would be no time to go to town.

She lifted the slop pail from the floor beside the washstand. It was heavy, an old five-gallon grease pail nearly brimming with liquid, and she set it down before the doorway. She noticed, on the washstand, the silver dollar, and beside that the coin purse Bjorn had put the land money in. She opened it, there were two 20 dollar bills inside. What would \$40 buy? Five acres of bottom land, new dresses and shoes, books and paints for Gunnar, or, she thought, even a one-way train ticket to Milwaukee. She threw the purse down and lifted up hard on the pail; too hard so it slammed against the doorway dumping several gallons of greasy water on her dress.

She set the pail down feeling anger, hating the warm liquid on her legs, and pulled off her dress and tossed it into the pile of dirty clothing in the corner. In the next room she saw she had only one unsoiled dress hanging on the row of nails above the bed. She was angry, but she felt like laughing discovering it was her best dress—the blue wool she'd worn four years ago on the trip west, and she was going to empty a slop pail wearing this dress she'd tried so carefully to protect from dust on the train trip. At the doorway she paused again setting down the pail with its now greasy handle, and her eye caught the folded twenty dollar bills on the washstand. She saw suddenly a picture of herself at the depot in town in her traveling dress, easily exchanging the twenty dollar bills for a train ticket, and she felt laughter rise. She thought of not scrubbing the clothes this afternoon, of leaving the floor of the chicken coop scraped exactly one-half clean, the wheelbarrow piled with manure halfway up the hill to the field it would fertilize. It struck her suddenly funny to think of her leaving it, it next January whited with snow still leaning towards the field like an old woman hunched against the storm. And on the table were jars washed for the green beans she had to can, and how long would it be before they were once again as she had found them, dusty homes for spiders? She felt herself start to laugh thinking of it, and then there was more to laugh about on the place. Would the chicken coop fill with eggs if she never

gathered another one; would her rising bread take over the house, the dish towel covering it like a doily near the ceiling? She sat on the step and felt herself laughing, not able to stop, like Bjorn and Christianson sometimes, and it felt good and strange at once, not being able to stop.

But then she did stop, and when she had quit gasping, she felt happy. She wanted to leave the step, and she found herself walking toward the corral where the mare was.

The mare was not wild, but she did not want to be ridden in the heat, so she shied in the corral, and at last slipped by Anna heading for pasture. But Anna ran for a pail of chicken feed, and shook it until the horse slowly returned, and Anna slipped the bridle onto her. Anna was sweating and panting even before she had gotten the heavy saddle down from its hook. And then she saw she could not set it on the horse's back—the mare had rolled in mud in the heat. She walked into the barn and found finally a feed sack hanging from a nail, to rub the horse down. She pulled it, and was too late to duck the shower of mice droppings. She was hotter now, and it was slow work to rub down the horse. She stood on a pail to lift the saddle up, hearing little stitches in her dress's underarms give way. Then the saddle was in position, and she closed her eyes thinking, all I have to do is tighten the cinch. She pulled the strap, and too late remembered that the mare nipped and needed to be tied close to the fence. The mare's head came around, she heard the rip, saw the sleeve of her left arm pulled from the dress. She let her head fall against the saddle, and she thought, I am tired, and she was aware once more of the sun on her back. She felt hot and dizzy, and she could only think of the house, where she was certain it was a little cooler. She loosened the cinch and let the saddle fall to the ground.

She turned to the house, and in there, where it was a little cooler, she sat. Her eyes adjusted to the dim room, and she looked all around it. It was full of the things Bjorn had made in four years—the birch chairs, cupboards pieced together from hoarded apple boxes. She still felt tired, too tired to punch down the bread for another rising, but it was spilling out the bowl, and if it folded onto one of the chairs, it would be she, whose work was the house, who would clean it up. She looked up; she could see by the sun the afternoon had gotten late, without her noticing it, and that meant Bjorn and the boy would be home soon.

ALL MISTAKES MADE ON A TYPEWRITER

They shook the green leaves down,
those men that rattled
in their sleep. Truth became
a nightmare to their fox.
He turned their horses into fish,
or was it horses strung
like fish, or fish like fish
hung naked in the wind?

Stars fell upon their catch.
A girl, not yet twenty-four
but blond as morning birds, began
a dance that drew the men in
green around her skirts.
In dust her music jangled memories
of grief, till fox and grief
turned nightmare in their sleep.

And this: fish not fish but stars
that fell upon their dreams.

James Welch

THE WORLD'S ONLY CORN PALACE

They came with knives and sticks —
no one called, no one reminded
the wild man of his right to scream,
to fall sobbing to his knees.
With sticks they came — this pack
so bent on killing all his bones.

Some looked away; others in their throats
began to laugh, not loud but blue,
a winter blue that followed
mongrels out the door. With knives
those killers carved initials on his heart
till his eyes grew white with wonder.

Muscatel came heavy on our heads.
Too much of a good thing
can spoil it for poets, you said.
I agreed. Down by the river we sang
sad tunes and O the stars
were bright that melancholy night.

James Welch

THE MOORS

Brown and deep green and high.
Occasional sheep, flanks red-streaked
huddled in round sod and stone huts
or shying at the bike.
Once a burned out farm and naked chimney,
dark birds in the scrub.
And out in the heather
a green Morris off the road
and two old guys standing around
as I come pushing my bike uphill.
I think to ask if I can help,
they are quicker:
"Would you like a cup of tea?"
And Christ yes, they've made tea
on a small stove in the middle of the afternoon
in the moors, and I say yes.
One hands me a small cake
with a cherry on top,
says he baked it himself.
The talkative one left a leg in France,
stumps on wood — he was nineteen.
The quiet one with false teeth
drips tea on his splendid tweed jacket
and they tell me how in winter
when snow is up to the sills
and a man can't potter in his garden
or paint his gate
it is very cold,
especially in bed at night.
They eat bananas and sandwiches,
but haven't enough for me,
and put a pill in my tea,
for they can't take sugar.
The talkative one loses the rubber band
he was trying to put around waxed paper
over the milk bottle
and I find it in the road gravel.
Before I ride off
they say to tell 'em back in Montana
that I met a couple of guys, anyway,
over here that weren't so bad.

After, I pump downhill
and across a narrow bridge at the bottom,
grinning so wide
horse's tails sweep a hundred miles of sky
overhead.

Roger Dunsmore

THE CAREFUL EXPLORER

At noon through my thin sole I feel
those crooked lines in cement on the walk
to the office. My feet, even through shoes,
know those little ridges in the pavement.

Across the arctic out there — the city —
many numb people are entering their harness.
Watch them, their snarls that they think anger:—
snarls are our time's scurvy.

William Stafford

PROLOGUE FOR A TRAGEDY

This is the queen, who will die
screaming. This is the king
whose brow already is burdened
with iron. Yonder the aimless
courtiers await some ricochet doom.
Beyond this door are the lives that
brought this play home.

After the scream, when we
let the lights come on, that is
the exit; there you will follow a friend,
or converge, toward your own place
on that endless road where the wind
brings its own weather report
right to your door.

This play will quiet then.

William Stafford

William Kittredge

BREAKER OF HORSES

Hector of Troy was a prince and a warrior. Hector's wife was Andromache, and she wept for him on the walls above his city when Hector was killed in honorable battle. But the poet of the Iliad finally remembered Hector not as warrior, prince or husband; rather, in the final line of that poem, eulogized him as a breaker of horses.

Old man Russell had labored through that book of conflict and pride in the quiet among the dust-motes in the shafts of sunlight which patterned the oil-clean floors in the last schoolroom of his childhood. Each afternoon, while other voices droned over arithmetic, fifth grade fractions, the tall and thin, black-haired boy he had been spent an hour reading from the only printed book he could now remember, and through all his life he had thought it just and proper that there had once been a people, inhabitants of what seemed a righteous and simpler age, among whom the breaker of horses was the proudest of all men. The old man's formal education had ended the spring of 1901, when he was thirteen and his father drowned in floodwater while attempting to save the wagon bridge across the Mary's River just south of Corvallis, and in the last years of his life seemed to have given him only Hector as a model of conduct and manhood.

On the vernal equinox of his 80th year, the 21st day of March, 1968, the calendar beginning of the spring he had been awaiting for no other reason than warmth, the end of constant wood-splitting and fire-building, even though the warmth could not be expected for another month in the high desert country, he woke to blindness, muteness and immobility. He was dying and would not sit warm in the sun before his cabin again. He knew at once. His first thought was of warmth. He was awake but could not see. He attempted to move and could not. He was breathing, could hear his own breath beneath the more insistent sound of the wind blowing, but could not speak. He knew his name, which was Abraham Vernon Russell, and knew he could hear and feel, but could not see, speak, or move. He was alone

in his cabin, which stood beneath trees near a creek in an eastern Oregon ranching valley just north of Steens Mountain, and he knew that he was at last dying. The expected thing was happening. He was trapped within himself to await cessation, imprisoned like a living rodent within the darkness of a snake's digesting belly.

His first panic was to desire escape. He wanted back his freedom to be always cold and too old and alone. He knew that he was dying, and that he had desired death, but now this entombment seemed only that, a black and endless lack of motion, and the quiet of death seemed nothing he could believe. His mind was as it had been: he had been granted nothing, no illumination, no shadowy sight of pastures in which white robed people wandered, sometimes talking, no solace.

For months he had been preoccupied with the idea of death, anticipating it without regret, and now he felt nothing but himself, only fear and terror which was impossible to resist. He was ceasing to exist and he felt himself to be like an animal, to be animal, cringing, and yet he could not truly believe he was dying. Everything was the same.

The blankets he slept between, which he knew so perfectly to be light, stained and dirty gray, were wadded slightly beneath his right hip, and the bones of the joint pained him, must have awakened him, and disturbed the sinking comfort he had been anticipating as the sensation of death. He wished he could move and knew he would never move again, and again became aware of the sound of the spring wind blowing through the leafless poplar trees above the cabin's roof, and of a familiar moaning in the rusted pipe of his stove which meant it was no longer drawing and that the fire had gone out.

He wondered if this day was like the previous one, cold and overlunged with gray and blank cloud; the motionless sky to the east, through the cabin's single window, only occasionally inhabited by the quick passage of early ducks moving north before the wind.

He wondered then, with surprise, if it was daylight, morning. He had been imagining morning without any way of knowing. The heavy Big Ben alarm clock was ticking on the table in the center of his single room, on the oilcloth whose pattern, so often traced by his finger when there was nothing else to do, faded orange roses with flecked green leaves, was perfect in his mind. The sound of the clock gave no indication of the time, only ticked away its passing. It could be night.

And then Abe Russell began to feel alone, this isolation being different than he had experienced before in his life, even in the most distant and stranded places—line camps, unpainted single room cabins, almost identical to this cabin, near the widely separated

springs on the desert south and west of the valley, where he had lived so many of the later summers of his life with only the company of his horses and the rodents. This loneliness was absolute, mental, and it was becoming fear. His fear of this dying had come on him quick and as the shadow of a cloud and the fact of death became real while remaining unimaginable. Nothing changed. He understood only what he had always understood. The moment was barren as he had sometimes imagined it, and contained none of the warmth he had hoped would gratuitously appear. The sound of wind yielded to that of the vivid clock and his mind spun on a center which was the pain in his hip.

Then his thoughts began to clear and it was as if he was passing through a barrier. He became increasingly calm and began to wonder if he would be missed and discovered before death. Perhaps they would miss him at the Post Office when the check came. But that wouldn't be until the first of the month. He would be dead then, and rotting, and they would hate him more than they did. Perhaps they would miss him anyway. He hoped for discovery, because he was uncomfortable and wanted to be discovered so that perhaps this isolation, while unbreakable, could be eased, so that he could be moved off his hip and saved from dying in pain. Because he did not want to die as he was. There had to be another chance.

But that was hopeless. There was no one to come. Because people now ignored him as he ignored and despised them. They were fools, subjugated to their trucks and their grease and the cheapness of easy work, and they lived like the fools they were. He thought again, as he had for months, how fortunate he was to be old, to be close to dying and ready to escape the sight of men who beat horses,

GHOST

What I mean by ghost
you ridicule upon this
plot which holds my love
(she may have died a suicide,
no one will know for sure)
might better be explained:

I sense her pulsing through
solutions in bluegrass and
flowery branches girdling
us upon her windy grave,
for leaves are cocking
shells to catch our music.

Lee Boyd

forcing them into hollow aluminum trailers, who smudged everything touched with the black grease from their machines. He was well off without the stained and ignorant men now on the ranches. These new men, impatient and rough-handed, lacked the nobility of their animals.

Abe Russell remembered a man who complained of dizziness, a young man with a scarred and broken face who had complained of aching dizziness before leaving a desert branding crew in the middle of a summer work day, whose saddled horse had come with its head cocked sideways, trailing broken bridal reins. Whose body had been found the next day, sightless and dead, lying face upward, open eyes fixed on the sun, trousers down, dead of a stroke while defecating among clumps of tall sage along a dry gravel-strewn stream bed. Abe Russell wondered if that man had died in discomfort or relief and what he would do himself when his bowels filled from the meal of stew and sourdough bread he had eaten the night before. And if his own eyes were open, staring sightlessly, fixed. He had no way of finding out.

He felt his mind to be his own again, and would have smiled had

THE WAY A GOOD FELLOW FISHES WHEN HE'S SKUNKED

Shall I tie this string to my toe
and go fishing down by the river
when moths gang up on the moon,
off that log jammed round the bend
last spring, feet ahead of that deep
hole? And shall I have questions
to solve before the river dissolves,
some grounds for a morning stroll?

Let me remind you . . . this is the place
a patient face is put on the line
and limits of myths are taken.
It isn't enough to hide in the dime
It isn't enough to hide in the lime
light of fame or stake your name
on streaks to empty the luck of a pool.
You might butter up the fool on the moon,
but deep down lie the chances of grace.

John Holbrook

he been able. His finest discovery seemed to be that death, when confronted without grief, as fulfilled expectation, could not stay long before the mind of an aged man accustomed to habitual concern with the minute functions of life, of the body.

His right hip ached, the wind blew, the clock untwisted its spring and ticked, the cabin creaked, something rattled. His right ear, beneath him on the pillow, itched. He wondered if death came like that, as an itch abruptly erased.

Panic again edged his thoughts. He concentrated on the young and broken man whose name he had forgotten, who died while squatting. That man had been a horse breaker, had at least hired out under that title, but had been rough and unskilled in his touch and voice, unable to soothe a colt even while alone in a corral, a rodeo hand who had grown up on the idea of force and beatings. A man kicked too often by the animals he had terrified. His skull had been fractured four times, the doctors said. The horses, in the end, had killed him. His brutality had come home.

Abe Russell knew he didn't want to die thinking of that. He wanted to remember a breaker of horses and not a man broken by horses. That man had been killed by his quick and rude idea, modern and wrong as the idea of horses lugged out to work in trucks with their saddles on, of how the breaking should be done. He wanted to remember slow afternoons just north of the Black Flat barns, in a round corral built of willow thatch by the crew of Paiute Indians from the shanties near the creek.

Once he had possessed those afternoons. There had been an endless future of them. He had been young, and the work of the day completed, and the summer had been forever and sure around everything, sheltering the valley like a fine blue bowl. There had been a three year old bay gelding colt almost full grown and shy as a nervous girl in the corral. He had smelled the dry and hot manure dust and there had been only the horse and himself and the hours before supper. There had been conditions under which a horse could be properly and slowly started.

Slowly, without regard for the passage of days. The animal had to be gentled firmly and then trained completely, brought into the bridle so that it would turn with just a touch on the neck, so it would work, when its time came, with sense and enthusiasm. The animal had to finally understand the obligation of its intelligence, and know that the long rawhide riata was nothing to be feared, only something to be worked with, and that everything lay in the value of work correctly performed. Those had been the standards Abe Russell had learned from Ambrose Vega, and had been, he imagined, the standards of Hector, of all true breakers of horses.

He remembered trying to tell Ambrose Vega, his boss at the Black Flat and the man who taught him to break horses, about Hector and being remembered as a breaker of horses when you had also been a prince and warrior. About Andromache weeping while Hector was dragged around the walls of Troy. He remembered the old Mexican's smile and wave of the hand.

Ambrose Vega died just before the first war in France. He had been an old man when Abe Russell was young and learning about breaking horses, and had come out to the breaking corral every afternoon and had said the same words. "Slow and gentle," he had said. "Break a working horse, not a fighter."

Boss Vega, who had been head man at the Black Flat Ranch before Abe Russell was born. Abe saw him clearly, remembered him walking slowly away, toward the cookhouse, a tall Mexican with thin legs and a huge and cavernous chest from which the hollow and abrupt voice grated. That chest was crushed when he died.

His most trusted and experienced horse, a strong and delicate long-legged nine year old, floundered and fell backward with him while scrambling up a shale rockslide in the dry canyon above the Black Flat headquarters. Ambrose Vega was caught between the descending tree of his saddle and a gnarled lava boulder. They sat in their own saddles and looked and waited for him to move as the frantic and ashamed horse scrambled away and the blood began to seep from his mouth and nose. His stillness, crumpled there on the moss-edged rock, was incomprehensible, impossible. He had been old, but years from death, and they had been unable to believe he was dead or to imagine the unnatural future which would now follow his death.

At last it was Abe Russell, the old man now blind and locked in his solitary bed and cabin beneath leafless poplar trees by paralysis, young then, the educated son of a drowned veterinarian from Philomath in the Willamette Valley, just south of Corvallis, who climbed down and saw that no one could be alive with their nose and mouth filled and bubbling with blood. He knelt over Ambrose Vega and, for reasons he did not understand, touched his fingers to the blood and then tasted the saltiness of the drop on the tip of his right index finger. He looked upward toward the other figures, who were above him horseback and black against the sun, and said, "He's dead," and realized for the first time a fact which seemed at that moment to be of enormous importance. He understood that the man and his horse were not inseparable and the same organism. One was stronger than the other and could be dead while the other was alive.

The discovery seemed a secret abruptly revealed that day in the canyon stillness above the Black Flat headquarters while the numb

body of Ambrose Vega lay on its bloodcovered rock bier, a volcanic boulder Abe Russell was to pass innumerable times during the rest of his life, the seven or eight man file of his own crew on the trail behind him. Thinking now, in the cell of his body, the old man knew he had that day discovered nothing but what any fool would know, and again, as he had many times in the past, he wondered at the changes which had begun in him during that first moment of confrontation with human death and animal life.

All death seemed quite equal now, only the absence of pulsation, and not fearful at all, nor mysterious. He had been waiting for it since becoming too old to ride, really since, years before, becoming too old to be the cow boss at the Black Flat. His sure serenity and distance had returned. He tried to imagine the surging feel of an active and sure-footed horse beneath his thighs and could not. Only the clotted blanket was there, hurting his hip. He wanted death.

He had returned for Ambrose Vega later in that day with a yellow-colored and dog-gentle Belgian work mare wearing blinders and had hauled the body to the Black Flat headquarters. He and another man, also young and a horse breaker, who had remained behind to keep the already circling vultures and the coyotes from the body, loaded the already stiffening and blood crusted remains of the man who had been The Boss: the man who even while old had been the surest roper among them, first to notice a stray in a dust-concealed herd, who carried the work plans secretly in his head, dribbling them out each morning, keeping the crew informed only one or maybe two days ahead, as if they were children and could not hope to remember more.

The other riders fanned out, carrying the news that Ambrose Vega was dead and would be kept two days in the ice house and then buried on the sand hill back of the house, just beneath the rim and the canyon where he died.

"Bring your whiskey," was the message. "The Boss is dead." Abe Russell wondered if his own burial would be like that and if people would bring whiskey and knew they wouldn't, that a man had to die horseback and working to inspire the fear that brought men to drink while they buried. Boss Vega had been killed in the combat of his life, as Hector had been. Abe Russell knew he had been too careful and had outlived that sort of burial, had lived past the importance of his own life, and perhaps past the kind of life in which the burial given the dead mattered to those left alive. He wanted only death and oblivion, an end to thoughts of disgust and burial and ceremony.

They had begun coming the second day, in the middle of a hot and still afternoon while whirls of dust walked over the sandhills, wagon loads of children from the nearest ranches, women in dusty

and gray long dresses shepherding them, and the men sitting a little drunk on the wagon seats and dressed in newly clean, patched and homemade clothing. Lone riders, silent bitterfaced men who lived by themselves in range camps or on some dusty 160 acres of hand-cleared homestead where they were attempting to grow winter rye—land soon to be abandoned and sealed back into the desert, leaving only the trace of an eroded and sandfilled cabin—began to appear far out on the flat to the west, specks of black against the distant alkali whiteness of dry Floating Dog Lake. Those men carried rolled blankets behind their saddles and the grease blackened leather bags hanging by their horses' flanks occasionally clanked as earthenware jugs of cherished whiskey bought months before, with early spring supplies, knocked together. Those jugs had been hauled out with sacks of flour and sugar and jars of candy and preserves in wagons on roads that twisted through the high brush along wet weather creeks. Now they were to be opened and used as intended, as medicine against the isolation and knowledge of death, compounded by futility, with which the desert continually confronted its people.

Toward evening of that day The Owner arrived. A short and white-haired man of only a little more than fifty, his given name was Eldridge and his last name was Carrier, but as he was rich and seldom spoke, he was known on the desert as simply "The Owner." He was the son-in-law of a United States Senator from California and he had bought three other ranches beside the Black Flat when he came to Oregon with the Senator's money. His business office was in Prineville, over a hundred miles north and west, in Crook County. No one knew how he had learned of the death of Ambrose Vega, or how he came that distance so quickly. He brought his own Scotch whiskey and spread his bedroll on the sand hill behind the house, away from the mosquitoes that came off the meadows in the evening, toward the place where Ambrose Vega was to be buried.

A fire was built up and lighted in the courtyard before the stone and rough plank house, which was really just a cook shack and eating room for the crew with a wing of bedrooms added. The crew did not sleep in those bedrooms, nor did the funeral guests. They were reserved for the ranch boss, his cook, and important visitors. The crew slept on straw-filled bunks in a shack near the barns. Everyone was surprised The Owner did not claim one of those bedrooms, but no one questioned him. The firelight burned the whiskey-shaded eyes of the desert men who were used to looking plain at twilight and then going to bed, and they squatted far back from the blaze and watched their women and small children, who crowded the fire, some resting and others cooking, all talking away months of isolation with vivid, burnished and excited faces. Older children ran

and shouted in the dimness beyond the firelight, among the trees on the backside of the house and the willows that marked the meadow edge. The leaf-heavy lower branches of the cottonwood and Box Elder crowding the courtyard were illuminated among flickering and somnolent shadows.

Abe Russell sat far back, his shoulders against the rough outer stone wall of the house, in darkness watching the other, seemingly less withdrawn men, whose talk grew louder as they drank. He could not stop feeling the dried crust of blood on Ambrose Vega's clothing, nor stop smelling the dim and fecund odor of the body he had lifted onto the docile and blinkered Belgian mare. **He lay still and blind on his bed, awaiting death, and could remember that first lesson in the animal availability of human flesh to putrefaction. He hoped his own body would be discovered while it stank sweetly, with the love-like odor of recent death and blood, and not after decay began.**

He had been watching the figures between himself and the fire, elongated by the light, and sunk in his own feelings, in what seemed the destruction of the future, when a hand surprised him on his shoulder. It was The Owner. The man was unevenly lighted and hatless and carried a bottle of the Scotch whiskey. The dim firelight reflected off the surfaces of the man's wide, flat face and his white hair appeared yellow and was surprisingly long. Abe Russell had never seen him hatless before.

The Owner uncorked the bottle of whiskey and pressed it into Abe Russell's hand. "Take a swallow," he said, and his voice, almost as if it had been imagined, was nearly too slight to hear. Abe Russell sipped and handed back the bottle. The Owner drank and then recorked the bottle. "Come over to the kitchen," he said. "I want to talk in the light."

The huge room was illuminated dimly by two oil lanterns, and around its perimeter, like a frieze, women were resting on stools and benches, their clothes gray and voluminous and their faces old and blank and red. They rose and fled when The Owner entered, gathering sleeping babies and thumbsucking children as they went.

"You can read," The Owner said, when the women were gone. It was a statement and not a question. The man set the bottle of Scotch whiskey on the table and the light from the oil lanterns shone through the liquid and cast gold patterns on the table. "If you stay in this business," the man said, beginning to speak after what had seemed an endless time of concentration. "You can drink Scotch whiskey."

Then they were silent again. Finally The Owner uncapped the bottle and sipped it, then passed it to Abe Russell. "Nip on that bot-

tle," he said. "That's fine Scotch whiskey. Some men drink it all the time. I do."

"It is," Abe Russell said. "It's fine whiskey." He sipped twice on the bottle. It seemed to him that Ambrose Vega, dead and awaiting celebration in the ice house, covered deep under damp sawdust with the stream-cut block ice preserved into summer, would have kept the bottle in his hand and continued sipping it. He wanted to approach being like Ambrose Vega.

"Then it's settled," The Owner said. "We've made a business deal. You are now The Boss."

Those unexpected words, uttered by a man Abe Russell then perceived to be drunk, were like the fingertip of God, sudden and arbitrary, and granted to Abe Russell an idea of himself and of his life he had not until then imagined. He saw that the drunken man before him was fallible and even stupid, and that until now his own life had not been determined by intent and will, rather by luck and circumstance and the whimsy of men who were less than he, of fools. It was as if a shadow fell away. He saw clearly that he could become the kind of man Ambrose Vega had been. He had only to plan and order his desires.

"You send me a case of that Scotch wiskey," he said, "Boss's wages and a case every other month."

The Owner smiled. "That's good," he said. "I'm stuck with that. I must remember that." Gold teeth glittered far back in his mouth. "Now we'll see the books," he said. He rose, picking up the bottle as he went.

The door to Ambrose Vega's room opened onto the courtyard and was locked, as it had been in the memory of everyone. The Owner, surprisingly, knew the combination to the lock. "I'll tell it to you," he said while Abe Russell held one of the oil lanterns above the lock, leaning close and whispering so the crowd of now silent, watching desert men and their women could not hear. "You work the lock. My fingers are awkward." Abe Russell could smell the whiskey on his breath and beneath that odor was another, which seemed carion-like and putrefying, as if the man had fed on the abrupt silence, the cessation, his presence had caused in the crowd around the courtyard fire.

The locked door opened easily when the numbers were known. The room was stark and plain. On the far side, beneath the window, was a heavy, home-built table. On the left back corner of the table its edges exactly matching that of the wood, set a heavy strongbox bound in metal. Above the strongbox, which was dented and worn and showed signs of having once been painted green, in the far left corner of the room, spurs and wool-covered winter shotgun chaps

and a new gray hat with a bulbous, uncreased crown hung from wooden pegs. Four pairs of worn-out, limp-topped boots were lined neatly on the floor beneath.

A key lay on the metal-bound box and shone dull gold in the light. The brass lock worked easily and the heavy lid rose soundlessly. Three books lay inside, bound in reddish leather, thick books with covers soiled and smoothed by the handling of Ambrose Vega. They fell open to the break between used and unused pages.

The first book was titled MONEY, the second NUMBERS, and the third JOURNAL. The used pages were covered with script and calculations in an elaborate hand which seemed to have no relationship with the man Abe Russell remembered as Ambrose Vega. The first book was a record of finance, the second an accounting primarily of livestock numbers, and the third was a daybook which told of each day's events and accomplishments, together with private evaluations of the men and their horses, of the prospects for feed and water, and of mistakes, their reasons and consequences.

Abe Russell spent an hour listening to The Owner's rambling talk about the first two books, about the importance of thrift and accurate accounting. "But you can read," the man said when nearing the end of each rambling monologue. "You'll have no trouble. You're the one that can read."

The third book was dismissed with a sip of whiskey and a vague upward motion of the hand. "You keep that book for yourself. I'll never want to see that one. It's your book." The man stood with the bottle in his hand, slumped, his face red in the light and greasy with sweat. He emphasized his final word with what seemed a further protrudence of his already bulging eyes, an opening. Abe Russell wondered what he would need with a book of his own, then understood that he was to be alone and keep council only with that book. "I'll leave your bottle," The Owner said, then set the open bottle on the table beside the book and seemed to rush from the room, slamming the door.

Abe Russell cleaned the mouth of the bottle with his shirttail and sat leafing slowly through the pages of Ambrose Vega's secret book. They revealed no secrets, no private confessions, no agonies of the spirit, only judgements of facts and events. Each day was evoked and recorded with a few sentences. One line from the 14th day of January of that year had been crossed out with a single slow and heavy and wavering stroke of the pen.

It read: THE SNOW ALWAYS COMES FROM THE SOUTH.

Even the women were drunk at the burial. Children ran loose through the brush, following and leading the procession which followed the board slab on which the body was carried. Ambrose Vega

was under a blanket from his own bed. His head was exposed. Dried and black rivulets of blood ran down his cheeks.

The slab was too large and would not fit into the narrow, gravel-lined hole which had been dug the evening before. There was no way of lowering it into the hole as had been planned, with the body proudly riding it.

The crowd, their various prayers and their lamentations finished, stood back from the hole and waited for someone, that someone being himself, Abe Russell knew, because he was now the inheritor, The Boss, to tip the slab and slide the body off. The other men who had helped carry the body were stepping backward, and he was being left alone in the center of their opening. Then he was saved.

A crippled, middle-aged Indian man from the group of Paiutes at the back of the crowd, Indians from the valley, who lived in three shacks and beneath a willow ramada near the creek, came limping forward. His name was Davy Horse and he had been named after his right leg was crushed against the ten foot high, rocksolid juniper gatepost by a stampeding green colt he had tried to ride while drunk on a Sunday afternoon, showing off for women.

The accident had happened nearly ten years before, when he had been a rider in Ambrose Vega's crew, and since that time he had never ridden another horse. He had vowed he never would. His name had evolved out of the vow. He walked the places he went, moving slowly and brokenlegged like a crab.

Davy Horse was drunk, and he carried a half-full bottle of dollar whiskey. He set the bottle carefully in the sand, then bent over the body of Ambrose Vega, encircling it with his arms, his head pressed against the head of the dead man, raised the body and then staggered sideways and fell with it into the grave.

The crowd was very quiet. Abe Russell watched the Indian struggle from beneath the body and saw him stand, one foot on Ambrose Vega's left thigh, his shoulders just at the level of the ground surface. He silently raised his hand toward Abe Russell, who stared at him a moment, then realized the man wanted a lift out of the hole. He reached down and took the sweaty palm of Davy Horse.

Then Davy Horse stood over the grave of Ambrose Vega and up-ended his bottle of whiskey into the hole. The crowd of desert men and their women and those children who had come to the sandhill remained quiet, then turned and went back down the hill to the ranch house and their wagons and saddle horses and their places in southeastern Oregon. The burial of Ambrose Vega was finished.

Then Abe Russell was The Boss. He lay alone now, and blind in his bed, and remembered the different man he had become, the lesson of conduct he had learned, the life he had constructed from that

lesson. He had learned first to expect nothing, second to do properly what had to be done. He had learned the first principle from The Owner, Eldridge Carrier, and the second from Davy Horse, and all his life his code had been that he had imagined to be Hector's, to be Ambrose Vega's, to be that of the true breaker of horses.

The wind had stopped, the clock was no longer ticking. He was warm and pain in his chest covered that in his hip. He thought of the blue bowl of summer sky and of his mother weeping the nights after his father drowned and of a small Paiute woman named Martha who cooked for him one winter in the Black Flat house, of her laughter in his bed, of horses in trucks, and as he died he was weeping for things he had never allowed himself to expect, could feel the tears on his face.

IN THE HELLGATE WIND

Winter zeroes in. January ice drifts
downriver thirty years below the dizzy
bridge. Careening traffic past my narrow walk
tells me a little warmth spells disaster. Sun
lies floating on ice, slants low and late,
and can't thaw my lips. I know a hand's breadth
lower could freeze me solid or dissolve me beyond reassembling.
Farther down the scale, freezing and combustion are the same.
Experts jostle my elbow. Divorced from what I feel,
they tell me my name. My sleeves wear out from too much heart.

When I went back to pick up my interrupted life
the habit fit strangely. My hair escaped. The frigidaire
worked hard all night while I slept my last solo before the cold
trip home. Roots of that passage go deeper than a razor
can reach. Dead lights in the station proclaim another
merger. The end of access by rail has already
been announced. I could stand still to fail the danger, freeze
a slash at a time, using altitude for anaesthetic.
Could follow my feet in the Hellgate wind wherever
the dance invites them. The pure leap I cannot take
into the ice-jammed river mouth stiffens downstream,
a millrace churned to murder.

The siren cries at my wrist,
flicks my throat, routine as the river. I cross over.

Sister Madeline DeFrees

LEAVING SOUTH SIXTH EAST

When I go, it can't be any state, you
at the back of a month reading horoscopes
to find my favorite line. Someplace famous
or New England, not the blurred figure upstream
worried about fish. Water with salt, a glass bridge
and God, no crickets when I go.

If I taught geese as make believe,
would you look up or walk the shore the way
a river draws me in? My efforts are torn grammar
that jars the lid of an oil drum. Corrected for reference:
opera at five A.M., brandy, then spaghetti, but why go?
Didn't we find lemonade across town below zero?
Doesn't the talk in your sleep start
my index under personality,
changes I can't make?

Take your clothes and oyster stew.
I've heard enough of Houston and diarrhea
on the bus. Your sister at nursing school
wouldn't approve my bathroom or double solitaire
on an odd cigarette-burned sheet. You want me to go.
Early where the floor creaks, the woman with cats
in her basement of electric wire has a slow limp
to the piano I play. The end, I think,
doesn't fit the same dream.

Stop me. It will be a pink wall
with two paintings mostly black. I'll smoke
more, pull the curtains before dusk. I may plant
cactus, a window box of herbs. No peonies. No Wednesday.
No Perry Mason reruns. Maine, perhaps
and less wind if you come back.

Dennice M. Scanlon

NOTE FOUND ON THE BACK OF THE GREAT SEAL OF MONTANA

1.

Gun barrel blue, red thistles.
He exercises the room's treadmill,
knowing this won't be fun.

Wet feathers imitate a minnow,
pain hooks cartilage from
memories of spruce flies at dawn.

Whiskey bottles have bumps
at the bottom, containing a residue
at sunrise that won't pour.

Friends call from town,
but something holds him here:
loneliness, this empty-bottle poem,

or a wife who wants him home
to buckle his shoe, pick up sticks,
close the door of love's room.

2.

Wait in the river every morning,
with an undershot jaw like J. Edgar Hoover,
for the current's pull to bring
an accidental breakfast: salmon eggs
bits of claw, shrimp and black shore worms,
your fins do a Hong Kong fandango
to keep you stable in this confluence.
Everything that enters from the surface, bends.

3.

An ant hill big as a land mine
waits for H. D. Thoreau.
I draw nothing from it. Sure,
it reminds me of my mind.
I've got one, today.

Mrs. Ruffed Grouse squats on her egg
like a state secret.
We're going to meet, mrs. and I,
in an extension of trajectory,
her pin feathers and these lead finers.
She's a good mommy, and me:
slug of a husband, poor provider
out of the house and on the make.

Copper wires frizzed like a giant's hairdo
bring me a connection without insulation,
but someone's hacking the underwater cable,
I see his flippers screw off in green water,
and Paris doesn't know for a few days
what Washington is saying.

4.

Its barrel first touches your lips,
so you stick your tongue in it
as if it were a woman or a man.
Get over that. It's metal, has its job to do.
A long-armed American, you can release
the safety with your thumb,
and smoke this final pipe with the chiefs.

5.

Ducks lift from a marsh's glue,
honking into low clouds.
Near the grouse's drumming log, spattered white
spells "lost" on the ground. We pace again
over a dry wash, crash into brush.
My hunting partner's out of sight,
I see his gun barrel glint,
hear him thrash in red thistles.
This is as close as I'll ever:

J. D. Reed

I'M A TECHNICIAN

O I've tried for it — down on my knees and forearms
pounding the dirt I pray to God

"Pig-Mary!

Make me a fanatic!

Gimme that greasy fleece!"

From the abyss She hisses at me

I'm a technician

Certainty hasn't been given to me

I've never seen that burnished shield

Holiness hasn't been given to me

so I must put on Intellect

I'm a technician

I see into double doubt

a concave mirror reflecting a mocking magnification

This inflated image

sends me back to examine my fabrications

again and again

in multiple simplicities

construction adds and divides its rigors

All for a song

And when I sing I always mean

countervelocities coiling

in lubricity

And when I sing I always mean

a multiplex with hinges and thighs

equal in daring

And when I sing I always mean

the city of the heart

poised in high glee and a rubbing chuckle

And when I sing I always mean

Engineering

I'm a technician

John Ingwersen

ODE TO PSYCHOLOGY (IN THIRTY-FIVE LINES) WRITTEN WHILE WAITING PLANARIA

In the lab I waited planaria,
think of armored knights cutting caliphs' heads
that regenerate more infidel,
fewments cherished as facts.
Lobotomied rats lie like rags in a corner
of a psychic office,
while more meaningful data is compiled by white-frocked crocodiles.
Strangers who speak at public urinals
otherwise say nothing.
It would be worthwhile to study such behavior.
 Please, bring me my planaria!
Each tree, fish, bird, and bug is laced
with seven categories of Latin
(Rome had a large vocabulary.)
Weathered men scoop the sea to feed
the world with plankton and trash fish,
delicacies not yet available in restaurants.
 I want my phagograta gracilis,
 or is it cura formani, or dugesia dorotocephala,
 all them planaria look alike anyhow.
I have a gooseneck lamp,
a six volt battery, a planaria trough,
 but no planaria.
After I expose it to light,
I'm supposed to shock the worm
until it learns to cringe
at a hint of goose's neck.
It may learn instead to stay away from lightning,
that water is a good conductor.
I don't want to be a wormy educator!
Let them school themselves. With my time, why,
I could work a cure for toxic taxicabs,
make suitable sewers instead of rock sumps,
insecticide for scientists,
 but I play with planaria.

Chris Anderson

Edmund Apffel

I AM THE SHADOW ON THE LAKE

I am the shadow on the lake
Remote ancestor thief or king
Has fashioned for his soul to take
When death's dark birth-throes put to wing
The precious, secret poet worn
By mean affairs or jails or age.
I am his hint of madness born
To fly and dance and sing and rage.

Ruth U. **Bardamir** (1854 - -), American poetess and Classicist, was born in Charleston, West Virginia, on April 11, 1854. Her mother, "A loud, opinionated woman, terrified at the thought of death," was a remarkably gifted, if neurotic, poetess in her own right. In 1875, after graduation from Bryn Mawr, Ruth set sail with Sir Arthur Edgemeyer to Egypt on an archaeological expedition. She returned sixteen months later and spent two years in readings and studies at Sorbonne. In 1879, she sailed for Greece and eventually published her book, **The Grecian Way**, a study of Classical poetry from Homer to Aristotle. About this time, she began work on her Classically-styled **Illusions**, published posthumously in 1894, with miscellaneous letters. By far her most important work, **The Season In Flame**, a long narrative poem of some 10,000 lines, was not published until 1889, after five years of research. **The Season In Flame** describes, in brilliant pentameters, the adventures of a group of Phoenician pirates and displays the great wealth of Classical knowledge that Ruth was able to draw upon.

A paragraph will suffice, and besides (my cap is doffed to you, dear reader) that is all I can tell you off the top of my head. I remember her mainly because of the vain attempts I once made to cage a childhood poem in similar pristine rhymes. Hers flow and sparkle so effortlessly that they will always outshine in tinsel

memory my own dismal efforts. And somehow, because of this primal exercise, those inimitably melancholy lines:

Their widows on the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen.

(students beware) seem to have been wrung in vicarious mourning from **my** heart.

I never read the Greek Way thing, substituting for its perusal an imaginative conjuring of dust-laden, dimly lit libraries with iron cross-work at the frosted windowpanes, and long, faintly gleaming mahogany tables at which are seated tweed-coated students (immovable as yet . . . a nod and they will start slightly and then fall into the lovely pattern of sedate movement which I have arranged for them), their fine heads bowed reverently over the yellowing pages of Ruth's immortal study. And when those gentle youths are old and study with less and less detachment, their faces, with faintly amused eyes, will arouse the hushed admiration of their fortunate, respectable children, or (as in some cases — and I witness them with growing impatience) sad, slow shakes of the head. The **Illusions**, (and its, no doubt, titled readers) has my unblinking respect, but here I see that my attention to it has waxed and there my concentration wanes, when I try to recall the poetry after all the years of sadder cares. But the "Season", written for a less obscure audience, continues to haunt me and it is in the composing of a sonnet (again, that childhood thrill of loosing fourteen knots to complete the inevitable unchaining — and can I bear it? Fulfillment? Is not the challenge more artistic than the almost vulgar interest with which readers will view my polished work and then stupidly question me? — of a dream. Like the work of animated mice who, with a broad, impossible brush, hastily begin at the top of their canvas and, with noisy horizontal strokes, work their way down to create in a flash, a green hill, a house atop, an infinite blue universe behind, delicate blackbirds streaking toward translucent blowing clouds — a sudden panorama full of the nictitating undulation of fantasy.) that I am reminded of those blurry frontispieces gracing the later editions of her works. Her hair in a thin, fine part at the very middle of her forehead, the eyebrows a little thick and arching over her lovely eyes, looking at you as if hastily arrested for a moment, a tiny point of white in each — the reflection of the photographer's reflective flash. And, of course, the small mouth and thin lips, the fur collar open at the throat and raised elegantly high behind her head. Other photographs, picturing her in, say, white cotton and knapsack, with grinning anonymous colleagues amid sweltering ruins, are available to researchers (may they profit at their smug tasks) but are of only oblique interest to me. In fact, my mem-

ory of her should survive even without that metropolitan shot, and I have mentioned it to you only by way of introducing the painting I have made of her, and so that you'll be able to appreciate the astonishing likeness I have achieved at no expense to true personal artistic expression.

I paint as time and thinning patience demand of me. My art is not so much with the brush, and it is often only as a last resort that I am driven to the easel. It's the children (even now raising a howl that will soon interrupt my thoughts completely . . . but for now I can show this to you with comparative calm . . . now they are watching, too). I paint and they become rapt spectators to each slow stroke. As you can see, the technique and coloring are highly original. The strokes are deliberately curved so that each one spirals into a new color to depict the contour of a braid, the suggestion of a hidden eyelid, the melting of the ruddy jaw into the heightened gold of the cheek bone. Do not think of the crude apple peels of Van Gogh; my strokes are like the open cut of the scalp, narrow and clean, on the canvas skin. You see the pale blues and whites behind the head and the way each swirling shade of space glows and darkens into the intricate tangle of hair, and those browns and violets stream into the golds and whites of the forehead. And the black eyes mystically superimposed over this writhing mass of living color as if the intertwining hair and moulded nose and the air around her may one day lose its breath and movement, sliding off like sand to the floor, leaving only the immovable eyes forever. And ever.

And there is the peculiar scent of my painting. The scent, it seems, of magnolias and . . . apricots, is it? An inadvertent triggering device that transforms the walls of my gallery into wavy, dream-like scenes of childhood . . . summer. Hot glittering sidewalks. A woolen blanket spread on the warm grass. Perhaps a plastic swimming pool with the happily painted fish and seals soft and burning to the touch. Nonsense! More and more, magnolia blooms and apricots (how did I separate the two?) remind me of soap. In a pensive mood I raise my hand, palm outward, to my face and rest my nose and lips on my curved fingers. Or is it the smell of laundry detergent and liquid starch, bringing to mind grotesque apparitions of long lines of steel institution washing machines roaring with the sloshing glass faces staring from the vibrating walls and an occasional boyish scream echoing from the ceiling into thunder? Pinned. Intolerable.

And in the third place! The painting is enlargening! Each stroke widens with imperceptible slowness and if you come tomorrow we shall measure it and you will see with what insidious languor the thing is spreading. Someday it will be a sky of widely separated shadows twisting slowly like dark clouds in the gigantic shape of

that face, apparent only to the myopic eremite dreaming on a wet grass hill amid frost and stars.

Of course, the weight increases with the same nightmarish slowness as the expansion, and at night as it settles with incongruous waviness on my chest, I am struck by the maddening idea of its process slyly speeding up. "Caught at last!" with the awful thing on top of me. And only this torment keeps the children quiet while I sleep. They sit silent and staring, trying not to blink. They are waiting patiently to see if I will merely smother in my leaden sleep, prayerless, or waken with a groan one dreadful morning, unable to move under its suddenly gigantic proportions.

The painting is not a monster and I can dismiss it at any time I choose. But tell the poor man who suffers in his dream because he thinks he is in the path of an onrushing locomotive or a crashing airliner that he need only step two feet to his left and lightly avoid being crushed to death. Tell the man who is pursued by strangely comic policemen, pistols drawn and spitting, that he has committed no crime, that he is not even being chased. Tell the man slowly tumbling over a cliff that the whole thing is a hoax. Advise the man on the invented gallows to walk away from his own execution.

And as for Miss Bardamir, she too is an expendable in this production. You see her sitting in a chair in her dark room, finger trembling on the trigger of the revolver pressed to her lightly pulsing temple; need I even load it? Will she not suddenly curl up like a blackened ash and blow away, forgotten at the clap of my hand?

The color of the objects we perceive below us in flight, even that of our cruciform shadow as it glides over rooftops, obediently swooping in and out of small valleys, clouding for an instant the upturned faces of uncomprehending gardeners, is different, better perhaps, than their colors as we perceive them in waking walking.

The reflection in the pool elongates the street lamps' golden light, softens the outline of our face as we peer jealously into its depths. And if we look into the industriously artless mirror over the bathroom sink, don't we see merely the tedious inversion as a sad attempt to compensate for the actual drabness of the original?

In sleep a spirit works on me
As troubling as my thief's desire
An impulse to fine lunacy
To find my unchained shadow's fire
And struggle from his nighttime lands
The blistering music with my hands.

A STUDY OF SHINTO WATER PURITY RITES

"27XII67 Past the cemetery where we went for the view of Kiyomizo Temple, saw a naked pilgrim head bowed and motionless in a tiny grotto waterfall. Chuck wanted me to take a picture but I didn't."

Henry Maxwell's flume is falling apart
from where it begins, an hour's walk
above abandoned Sumpter's graveyard.
Blue Rock Spring is clear enough
to wash before you'd climb Hiei
above Lake Biwa. Swirls
into the trough, flattens
out through jack-pine, seems to climb
a scree, drops around the sagebrush face
of Shirley Mountain, splitting braces
set in basalt cairns. A green furrow runs
this beeline, skirts a cliff, takes a hard
left into Harvey Creek that's dry
this time of year. Now a mile
by one square foot of water, flat, slow, the only
sane event in all these ugly hills, where everyone
went broke or mad in search of what's hidden
in the rock. Quicksilver stripped the gold
free, immortal in its worth,
its loveliness. Around a bowl it cuts
an arc you can taste like water, down,
two hundred feet of dripping trestles rise
like pallbearers above Lost Cabin Gulch,
then shoved out of shape by growing ponderosas.
Slides on its belly across the bench,
nearly lost in three-inch needles,
snakes into alder you walk around
to see it skim boulders the mill
backed up against, and shoot free,
spinning the invisible wheel,
to crash on the granite slab. A spring blow
has scattered Henry Maxwell's mill.
If you pretend to be some pilgrim
throwing off your simple whites and beads
to walk out on the speckled stone
where remnants of the placid two-mile stream
break from the splintering spout,
that water will weigh on your shoulders
like a drunken god, and knock you to the ground.

David Slabaugh

Elmer Cole

THE TELEPHONE

Albert thought of pulling taffy and bobbing apples, but he had never done those things.

"I want a white Hathaway shirt, size 14½, 32 sleeve," Albert told the lady, while remembering the advertisement of the debonair fellow with the black patch on his eye and the beautiful girl bending around his shoulder.

He walked to the display of Trappist jams, and picked up a jar of currant jam. While the saleslady was writing up the charge slip, Albert scrutinized the label on the jar rather than stand disarmed before the clerk and a new customer who had just approached the jam display.

"Now, what else was I going to get?" he wondered, moving away with his jam and shirt. He couldn't remember.

In the morning Albert turned on WOR, then went to his tiny kitchen. He took a grapefruit out of the Frigidaire, set it on the counter, reached over for a tea kettle, poured it half full of cold water, and set it on the gas stove. He took a two-cup dripolator out of the cabinet, put one and a half spoonfuls of coffee into it, and set it in the center of the stove. He picked up the grapefruit and was about to cut it when the phone rang. He set down the grapefruit and the knife, started toward the other end of the apartment as the phone rang again. Suddenly he stopped, darted into the kitchen and lowered the burner under the teakettle. The phone kept ringing, methodically and impersonally.

Albert strode to the phone, and with his hand pressing the receiver, he said out loud, "Hello. Good morning. This is Albert here. How do you do?"

The phone rang. He took his hand off the phone, lowered the radio, and as soon as the next ring died, he snapped the receiver to his ear.

"Albert here," he announced.

The phone was silent. "Hello," he said, dropping his voice on the final syllable so as not to sound inquisitive. "Albert here."

"Fink," the phone screamed. "Fink. Fink. Fink. Fink."

"Wait a moment," Albert said, "I want to turn off the stove."

He went back to the kitchen where the kettle was whistling softly. He turned off the stove and poured water into the top of the dripolator. He started back to the phone, but hesitated a moment and picked up the grapefruit before returning to the phone.

The phone was silent as he spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Hello."

"Fink," screeched the voice. "Fink. Fink. Fink. Fink."

"Who are you? Why do you call me that?" Albert asked moderately.

The voice was quiet. Albert rolled the grapefruit around his stomach. He waited and rolled.

"Fink," the voice shrieked. "Fink. Fink. Fink."

Albert kept rolling the grapefruit around his navel. He spoke calmly into the phone. "See here. I don't have to stand here and listen to you call me names. If you want to talk to me, be civil."

The phone was silent. Albert held the grapefruit tightly against his loin. The voice remained silent.

Albert spoke authoritatively into the phone. "Now, what is it that you wanted?"

"Fink," blared the voice. "Fink. Fink. Fink. Fink."

Albert was stunned. Slowly he became angry. "Look. I told you to quit it. I refuse to stand for any more of your insults. So stop it."

No sound.

"I'm going to switch ears," Albert said. "Oh, and wait—I want to get a cup of coffee."

He set the receiver down on his pillow, placed the grapefruit within the ends of it, and started for the kitchen. He took his time pouring the coffee. He noticed the Trappist jam and decided to make a slice of toast. He put the bread into the toaster, pushed the lever down, and slowly opened the jar of jam. Then he thought of the phone.

"It might not wait," he thought. "What should I care? Let it hang up. What's it to me?"

But suddenly he started toward the phone, and just as his hand slid over the grapefruit to grasp the receiver, he heard that toast pop up.

"Look, I'm making some toast. Hold on a while."

No response. Albert hesitated a moment, listening, but the voice was silent. He put the receiver back on the pillow, being careful to enclose the grapefruit between the two ends.

In the kitchen, he spread a thin layer of butter over the slice of

toast and spooned three teaspoons of jam systematically around the center of the slice of toast. With a broad butter knife, he spread the jam thickly and evenly over the toast. He took a sip of coffee, and licked a drop of jam that had slipped over the edge of the toast. He bit a small piece off one corner and quietly chewed it. Soon the toast was gone. Albert poured another cup of coffee and returned to the phone. He sat on the edge of the bed, sipped his coffee, placed the cup and saucer on the table, and picked up the receiver. The voice had not assaulted him the last time he had spoken to it, so he felt rather confident that he had overcome its animosity. He leaned back on his elbows, placing his left palm over the grapefruit, and spoke firmly.

"Thank you for waiting."

He waited, anticipating a reply, but there was no sound. He rolled his left palm over and around the grapefruit, thinking of what to say next.

"I'm glad you didn't shout this time. If you had been this reasonable at first, we could have got off to a much better start."

"Fink," came the muttered reply. Albert gripped the grapefruit with his fingertips.

"What did you say?" No sound. Albert waited, pressing the grapefruit into the pillow with his palm.

"Fink," the dull monotone said.

Albert said nothing. He started to pick at the grapefruit with his thumbnail. He nipped a small hole in the skin of the grapefruit and squished his thumb slowly in the juicy pulp.

"Fink," reported the voice flatly.

Albert continued to press his thumb into the cold, wet center of the grapefruit. Every so often he would rotate his thumb around in the pulp, then he would stiffen his thumb and jab it hard into the center of the wet mass. The juice poured over the skin, staining the pillow.

"Fink," came the methodical intonation.

Albert twisted his thumb, ripping the inside of the grapefruit with his thumbnail. The skin began to tear away from the hole, and Albert increased his gouging. The sticky juice poured over the grapefruit and ran over his fingers. When the voice declared, "Fink," Albert was nearly startled. He held the phone in front of his face, looking into the mouthpiece, then looking around the room. He raised his left hand. The grapefruit stuck on his thumb. He looked back and forth at the grapefruit and the phone. He held them together in front of his face, staring furiously, trembling, breathing deeply and grinding his teeth.

He heard the voice. "Fink."

"You can't do that. You can't call me that. Stop it. Stop it." He

screamed, his voice growing to a shriek.

"Fink," stated the voice calmly.

"Oh no," Albert breathed out, "You're not going to get away with it. You're not going to get me." He pronounced the last two words sharply, and his voice became louder.

No answer. He thought maybe that he hadn't heard the voice, so he put the phone back to his ear.

"You hear me?" he shouted. No answer. "I said you're not going to get me."

"Fink," the voice replied moderately.

"I won't. I won't. I won't." Albert yelled into the phone.

"Fink."

"Wait," Albert screeched. "What have I done to you? What have I done?"

Silence. Albert waited, looking at the grapefruit on his left thumb. His hand felt sticky. He licked his fingers, turning his hand around to get his tongue between his fingers.

"Fink," intoned the dull voice.

Albert leaped up. "Fuck you," he screamed. "Fuck you. Fuck you, Fuck you. Fuck you."

He pulled the receiver away from his ear and mashed the grapefruit against the mouthpiece. He twisted the grapefruit against the phone, grinding the skin and pulp on the hard plastic. Then, he sat down on the edge of the bed, holding the phone weakly to his ear.

As the voice shrieked, "Fink! Fink! Fink! Fink! Fink!" Albert slowly nibbled the remains of his grapefruit.

□

BOG

The mossy hummocks under my sneakers
go soft and the brackish water, all black,
climbs my ankles. Everywhere I look
is bog; the trunks and arms of tamarack,
a water-loving tree, are dead and reach
contorted to the sky as if they died
in a convulsion of horror, then froze.

A place of bad dreams, this;
yet I come back summer after summer
to give my mite of flesh
to this water and these midges hovering
like blindness in the air.

I think
I am always returning somewhere in
this circle of being, tracking up the kitchen
with my wet.

John Moore

ALICE HOLLOW

Fall in Vermont, time for owls,
a few slow wrens and a canoe
gliding through the cedar leaves.
A man stands idle on the library porch
and the train master cuts
summer schedules in half.

You think this is all there is
til legends of the praying mantis
creep out.

They lean so slow,
lock the beetle in razor knees
and drain larvae from the head down.

Turks call them divine,
long green birds, older than elephants,
with skulls turned toward Mecca.
At night you cannot hear them,
secret as bats at the screen,
mating along the pond bank or tuning
their wings in cool rows of corn.

Pat Todd

MISSOULA'S DOUGHBOY

Tonight the doughboy lays his rifle on the lawn.
A bronze door rolls open from the back
and a man steps out,
slinks across the grass and nods
to a late nurse musing at the bus stop.

He is careful not to startle her calm
or threaten the routine
of her bus ride home.
The rough map he follows is only a hunch,
a scrap some stranger left on a park bench.

Just beyond the depot
he finds the manhole cover ajar,
in the deep tunnel,
walls like old wet apples
and whole families huddled around tiny fires.

Pat Todd

CLEGGAN

(For Richard Murphy)

The mackerel are in. Came on the in tide
inside the quay. Word went from boy to boy
and now they're trapped, a net between them
and the open sea, the out tide on the way.
A day of gift. The early out tide
left two sting ray on the flat. Two years ago today
lightning ruined the Martello tower.
The English ghost ran from Ireland free.

Boys throw rocks at mackerel and mackerel
go frantic up and down the draining trap.
Years of thick hands beating grief against
wild air that roared the hooker fleet to hell
and now a meal comes easy. We can wait,
drink stout and sing, certain
prayers unanswered all those years were heard.

Ireland is free. The young leave every year
for England and the bad jobs there. Pretty girls
stay virgin and the old men brag of nothing.
It's something to go on when life's as empty
as the sea of anything but life, swimming
way down aimless, most of it uncaught.
The mackerel are out. Went on the out tide
through a faint gap between net and quay.
It's an Irish day. A tinker boy, eyes far
on the Atlantic, asks why water angers
without warning and takes back unwanted meat.

Richard Hugo

THE TINKER CAMP

(For Susan Lydiatt)

Whatever they promise for money, luck,
a lifetime of love, they promise empty.
They beg us cruel ways, forlorn hand
stuck at us, pathetic face, or watch us
with dead eyes through rags they hung to dry.
They have cheated the last two centuries,
have lied and are hated, have stolen from
the unorganized poor. Even pans they sell
seem made of mean tin, and their wagons
gypsy as kisses you imagine when young.
Always the necessary, dreaded 'move on'.

They never park where we might picnic,
but camp on bare ground, just off roads
where dust from traffic cakes food,
police can eye and insult them, and access
to that long road out of scorn is near.
Our accent and our rental car are signals:
Steal. Beg. Don't feel anything. Don't dream.
They sleep well with our money. We
are the world that will not let them weep.

Richard Hugo

I LOVE MOZART THE WAY SOMEBODY STEALS MY CAR

It was done *Adagio con Moto*, nothing spontaneous,
And that *modus operandi* is a fiction in the reviews.
What I hate about neighborhood kids, and newspapers,
is how they gloat for a thief. Say the perpetrator
was sixteen, and then just think back. The beauty is
he'll get caught broke and with no excuses, nametags
in his pockets, the haul decked out as another model.

But it can't be that simple. Our daughters know more
about poor Juan than the police. You smashed his head,
the shop replaced it with mine. That antique love seat
in the window is familiar, and so is the couple on it.
She wants her name sung, and the boy dressed as Mozart
obliges her, tells her his wife thinks he's writing
act three of *Don Giovanni*. He finished it hours ago.

Do we know what music we love? The glad laughter of brats
fools us, a newspaper trial entertains us. The notes burn
and we hear they were lit to stave off the cold, or soften
a poet's dead fingers. A mob of reporters says no wonder
he went, blocked up and rusting in the yard. Our ears ring
with an air that muffles most growing things, till we learn
the great juvenile genius is gone, and we were his audience.

William Velde

NIGHT DRIVING

Back through woods, past forks, roadblocks,
forgotten falls, colors that film my eyes,
steady as a child's. Tonight I will pay again
for the call that never connects. Already, rain
intones Greek, Old French, late Latin.
Words are maudlin: tears, my only tongue.
My voice, sentenced for fifty years,
wants to get out. Waiting won't do.
I hear the hiss of cuttings
green with their own life. It clings
to my hair. Oxidized air comes through.
Cold in the oven mitt her smoky hand dissolves.
Half of her wide wedding band crushes my finger.
One more accident: an old-fashioned wringer,
gold driven through skin. An artist friend
puts wrenches in all his works, unwilling
to settle for curves or angles. I drive ahead
towards a dead end, a new freeway. Which?
The labels don't match. Signs double back
between the eyes. On two-lane roads
I list towards open sea and salt, kill
my plants at home with small attentions.
Nobody's fault. Wreckage the stars relate
in drifting light out to form a scene.
Even on Mars there is water. What
does it all mean, this neighborliness of disaster?
Barnacles stud the necklace of my bones.

Sister Madeline DeFrees

THE WHITE BUTTERFLY

I fish a dead snake and lead pipe from the pond,
dream pieces of sea things:
crab shells and coral,
the pelvic bones of a whale.

White butterflies lie on their backs on the pond.
Their quivering, outspread wings
ripple the clear water,
cast shadows on stones where small fish glide.

I lift one on a finger,
touch his ragged wing,
the black veins in his wing.

Roger Dunsmore

Drew H. Finley

ONE LITTLE CANDLE

Albert Murdo had the idea of using all black girls, so he tried it. He borrowed five hundred from Mr. Thomas, he had Battle get him a real beauty, and he bought her a dress—a real nice one with white lace on it and black belt, breasts, and legs all working against and with each other.

He had her hair done—straight, and it caressed her bare shoulders. He bought her shoes, a purse, a floor-length negligee, a hanky, and a suite at the Jack Tar. And everything he bought was white, like the dress, except her, and she was beautiful.

He gave her fifty for drinks and sent her to the Top of the Mark in a rented Thunderbird. The first night she made two hundred dollars. And her name was Janice, from Oakland.

And he loved her.

He paid Mr. Thomas his money, then borrowed some more. He got another girl from Battle and dressed her the same way, except that her hair was too short to touch her shoulders. But that was silly, and didn't really matter.

She had blue eyes, and that kind of full, little-girl rear end that blacks have.

Her eyes held you, fascinated, when she faced you, and Albert felt cheated in watching them, because she wore little half-bras that pushed her breasts up and held them apart as though she were laying on her back, and freed her nipples to push against the dress.

He didn't rent her a room or a car, because Janice said they were not necessary, and she worked Fisherman's Wharf.

She thought the Bell Captain at the Grant was funny, and she slept with him on Tuesday.

When she walked away, Albert would watch that beautiful ass work against itself under the dress, and he hated the Bell Captain.

She was from Oakland, and he fell in love with her the first day. He looked into his old broken mirror and wished he was black. Or rich. Or both.

And her name was Norma.

He paid Mr. Thomas, but didn't have to borrow any more. On good nights Janice and Norma would make five hundred, and he soon had enough to get a girl for North Beach.

The North Beach girl was tall, with those just slightly knock knees that make tall girls move their hips as a unit instead of two halves, like the little red-now-green things by railroad switches. He loved those legs, and he bought them net things to go with the dress.

The white dress.

She talked about her mom in St. Louis, and wrote little poems with bad words in them. The first night some sailor beat her up in the Workshop, and she was mad about it—not so much from the pain as from missing Charlie Mingus, who was across the street at the El Matador, and Albert sent her some roses and a card that said: To Jesse from Al, with love.

Battle called him sir when he ordered girls now, and he ordered two more, twin sisters with puffy natural hair and beautiful white teeth. He sent them together to Sausalito.

He ate dinner in the Trident on Friday, and as they worked, he stared at their crossed legs unashamed, excited by the dark area between hose and white girdle, and imagined how it would be to lay deep inside those basket hips, but an old man with no hair on top took them in his Mercedes, sitting on each other's laps, ducking to avoid the roof, and playing with his ear as he drove off, tires squealing.

And Albert felt rotten, because he loved them.

One day, looking into his broken mirror, he discovered that he was rich. He moved out of his walk-up, and into an apartment on Cathedral Hill. There was a swimming pool under a big plastic dome, a tennis court, putting green, sauna bath, pool room, and a gym. He needed a key to get in the front door, and every Sunday a string quartet played in the lobby—over next to the mail boxes.

He bought a Porsche, on credit, and sometimes drove it down to Monterey and back, going too fast and scaring himself. He had the garage boy fix it so it sounded neat, and he put in a big signal-seeker radio in it, which he never played.

He bought a Buddha for his apartment and had the garage boy paint it black. He put a piece of white glass in its navel, and shined a small blue spot light on it.

He bought records for his stereo, and had the janitor put them on the wall. Ray Brown, Charlie Byrd, The Double Six, Nancy Wilson, Wes Montgomery—but he never played them because he didn't want to take them off the wall. He bought Slim Whitman, but he didn't put it on the wall, and played it real soft so that nobody would hear it and know.

And he bought a dog. A St. Bernard, with feet too big for his body and a gold collar. He had the dog dyed white, and the stupid dog loved him.

And he threw the mirror away.

He had parties, inviting people in the building, but they always drank his scotch and took his records off the wall, and excited his stupid dog so that he had erections and peed on the rug.

He told everybody that he was a pimp, and had business cards printed that said: Albert T. Murdo—Procurer.

He had little pictures made of his girls, and Battle took them around to all the Bell Captains, along with his phone number. Soon, Battle got so many calls that Albert pulled them out of clubs altogether, and got three more.

He had enlargements made of the pictures, and put them in his bedroom. He wrote little notes on their corners: To Al, with all my love. And he studied them sitting naked on the bed, wishing he could go to bed with them.

He sat on his balcony and watched Oakland, wishing he could go there.

But knowing.

He took dates to North Beach, but he had erections in the topless clubs and they didn't like him.

One of his dates agreed to go to his apartment, but she didn't like the pictures of "Them little niggas." When she stretched on the rug, the stupid dog tried to mount her, and she told Albert to take her home. He was going to kick the dog, but instead they took some cigarettes to the balcony and smoked and watched Oakland. He played Slim Whitman, and sometimes the dog would look up long enough to sing along and wag his tail.

And they petted each other—and that stupid dog loved him.

But they knew.

Albert drove his Porsche down to Monterey on Thursday. He parked at night and walked down to where the sea crashed into the cliffs, disappointed because it had hoped to find a beach instead. He watched as it climbed high above the rocks, then slowed, exhausted, and fell sadly down, only to be swept away, almost too efficiently, to make room for the next sacrifice.

A Killdeer bird ran on a small beach, darting just out of reach of the waves.

Albert listened to a sea shell, and he could see the lights of Carmel to his right, but he didn't look because the world and all its lights and Killdeer birds really—were in his sea shell.

He loved that shell, and also the sea. But he feared it. He knew that if he tried to touch it, the sea would grab him and throw him on

the rocks, avoiding guilt by killing that of itself which killed Albert. He threw his shell at Killdeer bird, but he ignored it, laughing. Killdeer bird knew that the sea protected him from Albert, and he loved the sea.

And the shell washed slowly away.

Albert sat in his Porsche and smoked a cigarette. Tears crashed into his shirt, and the dog came back from hunting and shook salt water on the Porsche, showing his love for Albert.

Battle told him the twins were the best he ever had. It was as if one body had been cut in half, and each half turned around so that the head and breasts kissed you from above, while the hips and buttocks kissed from below. And the bed was legs. Beautiful, sweaty, black, legs.

Held wide apart.

He got a room in the Grant, where the Bell Captain was funny, and put the girls and the phone there, sending them out one or two at a time as it rang—always missing and watching as they went. Always glad that he was more alone with the remaining ones.

And when only Janice was there, he asked her to go to bed with him.

She told him that she was too tired to be any good. She was very polite and maybe-next-time about it though, because she knew.

And when the phone rang, she walked too fast away—hips waving happily good-by through that goddamn white dress.

And he hated himself for buying that goddamn dress.

And he hated beautiful Janice, from Oakland.

They were gone from the Trident.

She wasn't at the Workshop, or the El Matador, or Basin Street West.

Fisherman's Wharf was empty, except for stupid tourists buying crabs that they'd only have to leave at the stupid border. Nobody would fix the crabs for them. Unless they paid.

And the Top of the Mark turned sadly on its rollers, lonely without her.

He drove to the Oakland Bay bridge and started across. Half-way over, just past Treasure Island he stopped.

He could see the lights of Oakland, and he knew. And tonight, Oakland knew. And smiled.

The bay was very still and very dark, and his tears, happy to be home at last, made little waves that marched triumphantly toward Oakland, distorting the bridges' reflection like the broken edges of his old mirror.

And the dog, white coat glowing in the bridge lights, sat quietly in the express lane and watched until an old Cadillac with a foxtail on its antenna chased him to Albert.

That stupid dog loved him.

IN MY THREE-ACT DREAM

I'm underground again
with Crazy Dan the buzzy wrecker,
hands hooked up to a widow-maker,
mind burned out by what I know of men
with many mouths and palms
rubbed slick and thin
by polishing the shifter's boot.
The powder whip, the heave of bleeding
ruby silver from a high grade round
runs red the turnsheet
of another man's cutter.

On a rocking cage and payday's just a shack
at the edge of the great pit's lip
where my green-eyed girl with the apple breasts
shakes out stars like laundered linen
as she walks in her lovely way.
Swag lines my pocket. My belt buckles
at the side of the springing bone,
love's the game, and laughter,
lush as the good corn bourbon
smoking in my liver.

Topside and out of cribbing timber
a well-cast drill chuckles like a hammer.
She rubs the ache, and after,
I take the day easy in the lap of the girl
with the white round hips.
Her brown hair braids my waist,
lifts me from the wings of pitch black stopes
up raises of the night and free
of the working earth,
the candle of the smelter stack
laves copper rings around the moon.

Ed Lahey

COUNTY LAND

Millions of leaves have turned
to dirt. They fill the horse-road
where a man, late from town,
dismounted to lead his spooked horse.
He saw his neighbor in nightshirt
and was astonished when the neighbor
passed by without answer.
The neighbor was dead,
as the horseman is dead.
They clamber from shallow patches
in the hillside to dry in spring sun,
and watch the barns fall
as mortar turns to sand
and gently lets the stones down.

Jon Jackson

APERCU

I hear the hollowed-log trick,
KFBM sends it to my ear
from Omaha. My voice is Roosevelt
and mobilization. *Falling in Love*
Is Wonderful but not believable.
Hoagy Carmichael dusted the stars.
Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?
Over waters of a shallow sea,
divided by a hot sirocco
and layed on me is a Madison
Avenue Miracle. Christ, what Jesus
could have done if Batton, Barton,
Durstine and Osborne had handled
his copy and appearance schedules.
With each drunken birthday, I get
older than everything but I don't
move rocks. Stegosaurus did a diet
of five tons of grass a day
to feed his two and a half ounce brain.
My femur lies white on the African
plain. It glistens in the sun,
green below with mold. Ford stitched
America together with gumbo country
roads. Now, the baby clatter
of four cylinders rattle to a
hollow echo in sagebrush prairies.

*Howdy, and Better sit and take
supper with us is the thing*

that made Gershwin possible. I don't
get older to be smarter; I just
like living. The nuttiest thing:
A moon shot: Astronauts found
Santa Claus, sitting cross-legged
cracking his knuckles. Amos and Andy
and The Kingfish just passed away.
Harry James is a moustache. Gable
gave hope to assless housewives caught
on Ma Perkins. The fruit of prunes
and virgins is crinkled. Hunt's
made it with red ripe tomatoes.
Hooray! OPA screwed up on my issue
of gas stamps. Uncle Sam wants
you. Hey, buy bonds and keep
it strong. Erect your sign anywhere
and homestead any piece you like.
A squatter is somebody after
a building site. The reason Abel
died: He was born deaf. One died
the other day and now there's only
forty-four whooping cranes left.

Lee Nye

A MILESTONE

Faster than the candle I carry
you are a child waiting for voices
in the dark. Love us. Everything turns
to age: these buildings ride dust
to the end of the street. What we wear
is foreign, our throb of belief
dancing in the desert. I travel
a thousand miles for water. A satellite
or a star. I find you wherever I am
a child bent against the wall. Look over.
Dust my face at midnight. I know the moon
pumping thin as a veil. Salt
to tell stars from blood. Are we submerged
staring up at mountains through our hands?
The world tilts and we adjust our balance
uphill toward the edge. Enough clouds
to move the sun. I'm a woman old
as water. Your face speaks water.
We were born a stone's distance
from here, that familiar lake breaking us down
to the final sign for beginning.

Elizabeth Libbey

Earl Ganz

CAPTAIN BLIGH MEETS THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

the

Confessions of a Semi-literate Vampire

Screw the bare bulb hanging by a braided wire. What's the hour? Eleventh. Late. Bad clock, et up all da time. But I don't despair. No slough of despond for me. Will simply count this sleep as a retreat which has refreshed my soul, steeled my will. Now for the sexual freedom of the religious quest. To arms! Dungarees — gird my loins! T-shirt — coat my breast! Tennies — the speed of mercury! O nightly armor, blessed be the hook-nosed artificer who fashioned thee!

Mother of God, look at the street! Silversmiths — Leather-workers — Bennington girls with babies — Gingeronis with biceps! Everybody out! Portrait painters with charcoal — Black fags with shaved foreheads — Acid boppers tripping their light fantastic! Everybody! Macdougall Street — Sixth Avenue — Sheridan Square. Elect over here with me, damned there by the wine press! It's Greenwich Village, orthodox nightmare of the end of the world outerboros! Terrible.

So don't look. Write on the walls of public toilets, Bishop Berkeley Si! Aristotle No! Humanity? Bah! People? Humbug! Only you, the inner X-ray vision, the Superman eye turned round in your head, not caring if you bare your blind genitals to gaping Westchester squares. "Look at this one," quoths a bearded matron to a seersucker husband. Don't notice. Let 'em look. They don't exist. Thus we refute you Dr. Johnson and blindly boot the pompous pedant in the ass! Inward!

Seventeen years ago. The summer before college. A huge crane fallen across the intersection, red warning flags limp in the heat, my cab cursing, honking, everybody cursing, honking. Lemme out!

I'll pay! Mechanical bleating amplifying human anger. Over my shoulder the great herd about to crack the steel corral. I don't know it then, but New York is dread; noise, heat, people, but mostly furtive over-the-shoulder dread. Faster. Don't look back. Hear 'em? Thousands of horses! Stampede! Stampeede!

Due to a fortuitous swerve, I'm saved. Ninth Avenue ends at 14th Street. Traffic bears east, crosstown, and I continue south on Hudson, still looking over my shoulder, still doing it today. I enter a dark room, imagine I have been struck blind. I'm very young then, impressionable, a stranger on a journey. Youth, journey, blindness. And then? Of course! A naked urchin shouting to a lecherous bishop. An angry sunstroke on the road to Damascus.

"All the moon long I heard blessed among stables . . ." His resonant actor's tone materializes to angel form. Gabriel's clarion call. "And the farm like a wanderer . . ." Michael of the flaming word. "It was Adam and maiden . . ." Uriel, keeper of the sun in a bottle, reciting while sitting up on the bar. Someone pulls my arm, leads to a corner. "Who's he?" I ask. "Don't know," she answers. Who cares. The sun grew round that very day. He died that very winter. And conversions too young don't stick. I know the traffic patterns now and what's worse, I know who's in the Whitehorse.

Look! To the north end! See. Around the short L-leg that parallels 11th Street. There, in front of the glass-doored meat locker. Who? Why the management and staff of that redoubtable firm of teamster scabs, The Padded Wagon. What's so special? Nothing really, except that a popular American novelist in his apologia pro vita sua promoted the Village moving man to the rank of White Negro, epitome of Hip. Since then there's no stopping 'em. Gone is the poet, gone from the bar. Home is the hipster, home on the rail and the mover home from the job.

"There I am! Four cartons a books on my back and the lady a the house whisperin' at my ear."

"Hi," the girl interrupts. I nod, glance shyly down at her enormous boobs.

"Couldn't believe it," he continues. I put my last dollar on the mahogany, order an Irish and Ice. "Guess what she wants?"

"What?" asks the girl. I look at my dollar. The father of our country's lying exactly where the poet sat, his dirty face smiling seductively. "What already?"

"To ride in the van with us! Says she wants to make sure nothin' gets broke."

"So?" The girl is Susan. "Maybe she did." The guy is Tim, Tiny Tim to his enemies. "Did yah let her?"

"Nah." Disappointing silence. A weak story, no ending.

"What's new?" She turns to me. "You look terrible. Why don't yah get a job?"

"I got a job." You just can't tell a girl like Susan you're looking for the Holy Grail. You need a metaphor. "Working for a private detective, a tracer of lost persons, looking for this girl. Harelip." Draw a split under my nose. "Cleft palate." Jut out my lower jaw. Can't talk but grunts a lot." The Irish arrives. George Washington leaves. "Seen anyone like that?"

"I couldn't look at such a person." She's going to be sick. I rush my drink to my lips, see Tim glaring.

"Have you?" Thinks I'm putting him on. White Negroes must not be put on, first step to being put down.

"Drop it," he warns. "Not funny." Sips his ale, eyes me over the thick stein. Careful.

"She talks like this. Nang-nang, nang-nang." Two quarters come back to the spot where the poet sat, two markers where his magic bottom dehydrated before our very eyes. "There's this one rotten tooth growing out of the roof of her mouth and a . . ."

"Shuttup dammit!" Tim reaches but his arms are too short, can't cross the Alps of Susan's chest.

"Hands off," she hisses as if they were chocolate cake. I've seen 'em. Nothing much. Great mudslides into her armpits.

"Another Irish, Jimmy!" In loving memory of her protective bosom. "Lemme buy you one, Susan."

"Fuck off!"

"She's got these white scars leakin' out of her nose like snot and . . ."

"I seen a couple like dat." Another small man steps to the bar. "But not lately," Merton Whaley, Merton the Mover, another great of the cut-rate van world. "Need a TV?" he whispers. "Thirty-five bills. GE portable. Brand new."

"Naaaah. I'm broke." My drink arrives. Ashes of the poet's ass depart.

"Twenty-one inch screen," he murmurs, "remote control tuner."

"I'm broke." A long swallow. "My last buck." Another swallow. "They've turned off my electricity." A lie. I always tap the hall fixture.

"Why don't yah get a job?" Susan's color is returning. "You could be a mover." She smiles at their boss, Don O'Connell, a red-bearded IRA refugee.

"Is it work you're needin?" asks the king of the little people, slight muscle spasm beneath the red fluff.

"No."

"Could use an extra man."

"No. Thanks anyway."

"C'mon. It wouldn't hurt."

"I got a job." Time to play dumb. "Her nose goes to one side." I push my nose to one side, show 'em the good black hairs.

"Whatta yah afraid of, man?"

"Gotta find her, a sick girl, leaking berry aneurysm." Used to work for Ben Casey, no credit, just research. My Hollywood period. "The descending aorta. Gotta have this operation or she'll go any time." My arms open theatrically. "A blood bath." Rain on the little people. "Shplat!" They scurry under the mushroom of Don's beard, talk among themselves. I wager my last Ben Franklin, win another Irish and Ice.

I'm looking at the wall behind the bar, the liquor bottles arranged in tiers, gold labels, blue ribbons, red sashes, a regular, light opera reviewing stand. And there he is among them, between Jimmy Walker and Mr. Boston, the great creation of my advertising period, that white plastic statuette, quondam symbol of Old Stagg, the working man's scotch. Look at him, Bullwinkle's head on Eglevsky's body. Everyone remembers the campaign, the dancer's glorious leaps across the cathode, his gorgeous stag's rack worn high and proud. What was Market Analysis' report? What had the sexually unsure proletariat stopped asking for? That's right. You guessed it. Old Fag, the only trademark ever to almost ruin a national brand.

From the Emperor's entourage I turn to the ball itself, the dancers milling about, waiting for the music, the young faces at the tables or standing in groups, faces full of poetry and hair, the hard girls shining like rubies among the brittle chips of boys. I love 'em. The grand cotillion. The hope, the pomp. The poet loved 'em too, loved me when I was like 'em, gave me things, kissed my face, said he lied. He begged my forgiveness and I gave it. But if he returned now, fell on his knees, I wouldn't forgive. I'd tell him to get up, that if he wanted forgiveness to go to the children. I'd tell him youth is a lie.

"Did yah hear about Mailer?" I've turned round again, am addressing Jimmy, put my last fiver down on another Irish. "They say he doesn't exist that Buckley's a ventriloquist." Jimmy nods.

"Where'd yah hear that?" I turn to my right. Begorrah! A seven foot leprechaun?

"This is the guy I was tellin you about." Tiny Tim is beside the giant explaining me. "Remember when Mailer had that run-in with the fuzz?" So long ago, Tim. Forgive and forget. "This creep asks me why he couldn't solve his literary problems like he does his domestic?" An imitation of a pedant's voice, not at all like mine. "By judicious cutting."

"Hello." I extend my hand. "My name's Owen." It's taken but in

the Hollywood way, thumb around pinky. "Owen Glandowner." Can't be giving your real name to every thyroid elf that comes along.

"Mine's Fergus, Fergus O'Shaughnessy." Tara's balls! Haven't we met. Ah, here's my drink, my winnings erected in a neat pile to one side. "You've got a good grip," says Fergus. "How about a mano a mano for drinks?"

"Sorry." I take my drink in my left hand. "Didn't bring my cape."

"No," he smiles patiently, "hand to hand up on the bar. Like this." And by putting his right elbow down on the wood he raises my right hand up into position. That's their plot, an arm wrestle, going to literally put me down, eh? "Go ahead," he advises, "finish your drink." But he doesn't let go. I look up, serious, sip.

"May I ask a question?" A last request. He can't refuse. "Not about Mailer but his work." He doesn't nod. "In his novels he seems to give equal weight to good and evil, a kind of Manichean principle." In my graduate school period now. Never able to get by Old English. "But the argument in *The White Negro* is based on a Rousseauistic belief in the goodness of man."

"Gonna be sick," moans Susan.

"What's he talkin about?" asks Merton.

"Ain't gonna fight," taunts Tim.

"Put a fiver on me, little man!" Cheap bastard. Hides all his gold under Don's chin hair. "And I'll wrestle Hackenschmidt himself!" Why not? He's dead.

"Let'm finish," says Fergus.

"Do you feel this inconsistency is the basis of Mailer's literary difficulty?" Now for the old academic knife. "Or have I simply caught the author at differing periods of development?" Coup de grace. The gracious quibble. "Anyone can change his mind."

"I'll bet five on you!" Flower girls and Ivy boys, what snakes are yah hiding! "I'm on your side now." It's Susan who's come around behind. She takes my glass, drinks its watery remains.

"I'll take that bet," says Don. And the milling dancers begin to form into ranks, girls in the front, boys behind. The Lancers.

"Your drink's finished," notes Merton.

"And you answered your own question," observes Tim.

"There's this girl," I keep punching. "Sad. Can't breathe, had to put a hole in her neck." Tracheotomy? Casey's a brain surgeon, idiot! "You hardly notice except when you kiss. Then it leaks a . . ."

"Anymore bets!" shouts Don. "Five to one! Ten to one!" Peeping out of the jar of Fergus's hand are four little fresh-packed sausages. "OK! On three!" Knuckles white, steeped in their own jelly. "One!"

"He's got a hand like a foot!"

"Two!"

"An arm thicker than my leg!"

"Three!" And from the shout alone I leap straight into the air. As luck would have it I land on the bar at, of course, exactly the spot where the poet sat.

"Jimmy! Am I right or am I right?" Jimmy nods, his hands groping under the bar for his Louisville Slugger, an old 36 ounce Jimmy Foxx model. He showed it to the poet once, wanted to use it, hates drunks. "Is this not the exact spot?" He nods again, delivers an unordered Irish to my gesturing left, takes the coins, leaves the bills. Fergus's arms around my lower back, his squeezing apparatus tucked safely under my arm. I turn to the young faces. "Who, you may ask?" The name of the poet's already dancing in their educated mouths. "The bard himself! The true Druid!"

"Shit!" says Tiny Tim. Don is sneaking away.

"Comfortable, sweetie?" I squeeze Fergus's hand affectionately against my breast. The young people laugh. They are nervous, eager. The eve of battle. "Let's drink to him that lived and drank here and the words spoken on this very spot!" They raise their glasses. "To the poet!" Even the hipsters, even Fergus, even the impish twitching Don over by the silent jukebox. "Long may he live!" Three quick swallows and I'm done, my eyes glazed with tears.

But their faces are still raised, expectant, their hands joined, the powerful currents of their young minds calling him back. I cannot resist. They will not let me. "Do yet go gentle into that good night." I can hear myself, my imitation of his dead drunken voice. "Old age should learn to save at close of day." I feel possessed, a medium, the rewrite from beyond the grave. I have the power. Parody! The apology of an aging Bacchus. I will yet prevent this war. "Peace, peace against the dying of the night."

"A regular Nabokov!" Someone notes from the back. I can't see her face. There! Sitting near the door, a Bronx Bagel knitting a baby. What do you expect from a poet, madam? Leadership? A man to take you into the field, marshal your youth? "A regular Ozzie Wilde!" she answers, not dropping a stitch, not raising her face. Don't argue, I tell myself. Go on. The spell is cracking. I can hear it, like the tinkle of a distant coin. At last my bet is covered.

"Because wise men at their end . . ." I raise my glass, futile symbol of authority. "Know dark is right."

"Do not go gentle into that good night." Fairy ring dancing impishly, twitching Don has played the jukebox. A trick, I want to cry. Aaron's rod! Clark Gable's lighter! A cheap mixture of technology and theater! "Old age should learn to rage at close of day." But the old leader is falling, Fergus O'Shaughnessy's grim reaping arm cutting him down, their faces turning to the new, the south wall, between the

Men's Room and the dart board, pink neon bubbling seductively. I turn away, to Old Fag, to salamis drying in the locker, to small bones smashing against weed. "Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Beneath the bare bulb it swells, the red skin stretched shiny tight. Crushed immobile fingers, an abstract lump, beautifully simple, full of meaning, the shape of the grail itself. Eureka! I've found it! And guess what? It's full of pain. "You all right?" Susan has helped me home. My left hand raises my right by the wrist, tries to show her. "I almost forgot. Here's your money. You left it on the bar." She stuffs the four wadded bills into the offering. "Sorry," picks them up, waits till my writhing stops, puts them in the other hand, doesn't go.

"Wh-What?" I finally manage.

"Did you really know that guy on the record?" I sit up, hand falling between my legs, pain coming in nauseating waves. "I bet he was somethin." The skin's glistening like glass. "What'd he look like?" She sits down next to me, gently takes it, rubs its smoothness. The grail has become a bottle. Out roars the genie. It's my pain, my task to answer. "Like an actor I bet," she prompts. "Whatta voice!" And I look up hopefully, seeing her huge baby eyes, uncut black curls, shapeless potato face.

"Like — like two actors," I groan, trying to get it just right. It's important, the winning of one's freedom. "Like Elsa Lanchester," and Susan's young mouth is wide with expectancy, "in — in Charles Laughton's suit."

"Elsa Lanchester?" She shakes her head thoughtfully, lets go of my hand. "Before my time." It falls between my knees again. "But he looked like a girl, eh?" It sinks lower. "Small, eh?" Lower still. "I thought so," and unconsciously she wipes something unseen from her right breast. "You know, I have a thing for small men." I nod. She takes my hand again. "They're so . . ."

Uptown the horses of traffic are raging. Two blocks west the world ends in a frenzy of trinkets and coffee. But here on the bed under the braided wire it's quiet, my fingers moving, my hand taking form again. And Susan is with me. All her wishes granted she lies on her back asleep. It is obvious I've not been fair to her, her breasts not like mud at all. They're warmer, richer, more fertile, more like loaves of delicious new-baked bread. Think of young Ben Franklin entering Philadelphia for the first time, a loaf under each arm, an honest look on his face and a will to survive in his heart. That's Susan. Not a feast but sustenance.

MOON AND TREES

The Dutchmen are famous for deep bushy maples,
rows of ragged elm and alder,
the oak creaking near a crude stone bridge.
Now passed by millions as dull and sullen,
this one has the moon brazing a mountain,
a peddler's cart against the shed.
Only eroded corn seems odd
and a magpie pecking the lettuce to mush.

Maybe Brueghel liked his work,
heard the magpie's muffled cackle at dawn
and saw a peddler's face sag
when he found his vegetables in the heat.
Most think paintings need people,
if only a crab hunter with a torch
or fierce horseman racing through the woods.

Behind the shed the world dips
across the pond, a field beyond a field,
and further out, sea birds running in the foam.
Inside the peddler must be dreaming,
his wife humming to ward off creatures, raw and mean,
softer when her man rolls over, grumbles
and snorts to bring back the golden shore,
cheddar, wine running from a spout.

Wind on the golden shore is blue.
The sails are women folding sheets.
A girl molding sand
breaks a soft melon on a stone.
She cuts a fish open, slides it on a stick,
dreams of colored robes and white tents.
Closer she is real and ignores him.

Up with the bells at dawn
village women jabber to the church.
The peddler greases the axle and waters his horse.
Only the road waits golden, a fixed promise
like the mangy cat tearing at the heap.
Under maples, some odd couple flees to Egypt.

Pat Todd

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