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TO GUNNISON

Breakfast in Fairplay, freshest eggs I've ever eaten off a farm.
First of November and the town's closing down for winter,
layers of drifting clothes.
In vast quonset huts the county keeps road-clearing equipment,
lizards of the rust age.
On I go through South Park:
Arabian horses, Charolais cattle
the color of old Meerschaum,
haystacks that look drenched but they're dry (it's the strained light in the sky that makes them look that way). I go along the Arkansas, its meanders so turned back on themselves that any of its cottonwoods stands at the bulb of a cul-de-sac,
tree in the eye of a needle.
The road goes as straight as it could be laid along the valley.
The river goes east and I go on west, dry for a while but over the divide I follow the Tomichi in to Gunnison, Western State College, huge Holsteins grazing next to the campus. I read some poems.
Off to the Cattleman’s Hotel,
home tomorrow. Snow sifts through
the mercury lights in the parking
lot, orange flecks, sediment.
I say something to myself
in Slur, and it’s funny.
Hotel beds are all too short.
Carapace of sleep.
Snow’s rising in the passes
but I’ll get through.
LOVE

Sometimes it gets to where I can't stand to hear another word. Lips up, eyes wide. I smash your face, close fist. It changes for a minute then it's back, the same.

So don't ask why, half-way through slicing fresh salad, I slash the left side of your face—eye to chin, and the knife is clean again at the tip. You cry two days and I think, now we can start again.
The blood you left on the piano keys had dried. Webs and dust lay heavy on the dull flat strings. Winter beats closer than death at my temples, pounding its same black note to the walls again. And this morning I could feel once more the sharp jerk of the room, watched as the pedals jumped, and with one hand resting on the chair’s straight back my fingers twisted around the cool black bar, the arc of my foot holds tight against my knee.

In the grey light I watch now as a shadow bends itself backward, the arm’s thin stretch leading it down, then the quick crash of your feet on the pedals and somewhere women begin moaning and the window shakes and I see the shadow unfurl itself across the walls, the easy split and crack of such unsure bones and the sounds of the women are screams now and the screams and the music are one smooth chord until the final fall of the shadow, until the white keys drip red to your feet; the music fading to its own liquid stillness. But the women with their constant screams are strong, are pulling open our faces and moving in.
YOUR CHANCE TO SING

Your wife says that Judy Garland will make a fine singer if she ever forgets all that posturing in those pretty pink shoes. That & hurling out of the sky housefirst onto the backs of old women in partyhats. You sip beer, try to hold onto your stomach.

For the 17th straight year you watch Dorothy drop from the eye of the storm into living color. As always, the sky is a deep green. Pink & white flowers chatter at her feet like false teeth. Dorothy says My Goodness. Then a moment later she says it again, a little more shrilly, while the hot air balloon from the Omaha State Fair pops upward like a fishing bobber or like her mother embarrassed in the garden, huge skirts slapping.

& she is left with the staring faces. Their cheeks are white & slack as clams. They touch their heads & hearts as if that explained something. The balloon is slurped upward. As always, when Bert Lahr barks you scramble crabfashion out of the crowd. There is a lightbulb screwed into your skull & a bright pink heart pinned to your belly throbbing. You are used to balloons getting away & girls’ faces going sad. You curtsy & tap your magnificent shoes & start to sing. For Kansas, you sing.
WOMAN IN A YELLOW ROBE

The lifeguard's chair lies overturned like the bones of a dead cowboy, legs up, out of his element. On the rise above, your mother sits in a flapping yellow robe. Having given up the girdle you see propped at her feet like a collapsed birdcage, she waits for your father to row in. Right now your twin sisters play havoc inside her belly, she can see lumps where a hard right punches into sunlight. She can also see down there with the beercans on the beach you her first son uttering sharp cries like a gull. Your arms are white & spindly as something reared under tons of green water. You want to learn how to swim, you barge back & forth on the beach flapping, scan for your father to row in carving black stairs on the water.

When she gets to her feet forcing a grin, the sand sticks to her robe, & her robe, orange where it is moistened, sticks to her rump. But the front of her, that part facing the water, facing you, is yellow & flapping as a huge butterfly drilled into the grass. & the wind off the water blows sand like snow or like glittering confetti through her white broken cage.
The rowboat is nowhere in sight.  
But you notice a swimmer making her way down the beach.  
You see that her legs are brown & sturdy as logs,  
her sloped shoulders roll.  
She talks to herself, sucks in her breath.  

Somehow you know who it is she's always looking for,  
who it is that agreed to pose with her today  
in a striped oldfashioned swimsuit.  
Instead he has escaped into the woods with a bottle  
leaving shreds of his suit snagged on branches.  
She's angry now, but doesn't want to muss her hair.  

You watch this, as she approaches.  

How she rails, playing out her ghost lines.  
& when she plunges over you, when her hatchetsharp heels  
plunge into your chest slicing waterlogged ribs,  
she glances down & smiles.  
It is her son she sees, this drowned man swollen like  
a potato. With a grin she reaches for you.  

Let's attend to this little problem of yours, she says  
looking up then darkly, & we'll take care of your father later.  
O God won't we though? Won't we, my poor drowned boy?
I HAVE BEEN IN A MILLION BAD MOVIES

turned on thousands of lights.
A woman steals a coin & thinks of herself
not as a thief but as a deserving woman.
My child sleeps restlessly.
He dreams of adults with knives
& cars wild with anger.
When he wakes he will know of only three-wheeled things
& the retarded girl next door.
His eyes play back the fear.

At lunch time I hold a thick loaf to my breast.
A slice, lopped off like an ear
falls into the child’s hands.
His mouth, open & serious,
breathes a moist silence.

Coins rain from heaven, my belly rolls flat.
I hear him sleep in the dark.
I turn the lights on.
I turn them off.
His legs pump. He dreams like a dog.
Millie passed her finger across her tongue and flipped the page. She frowned over the small print and leaned nearer a table lamp beside the bed. Her skin puffed around the straps of her satin slip as she bent over the magazine. She was a small woman and her flesh, freckled with age, was soft and full.

"Elena," Millie called, pushing herself off the bed, "listen to this." She padded across the thick red carpeting and stood at the bathroom door. "Just listen to this."

Elena wiped a space in the steamed bathroom mirror. "Go ahead," she said, dotting a wrinkle stick under her eyes.

"'Now, if they could only have peace of mind,' " Millie read, glancing up at Elena’s face in the mirror. "'It is our silent prayer. Let's all hope and yes, pray that Sonny and Cher soon have this awful business behind them.'"

Elena raised her eyebrows and blotted her lipstick with a tissue.

"This time it's really happened," Millie said, sighing. She closed the magazine and laid it on the long vanity in front of Elena. On its cover, Sonny and Cher strode down a corridor. Millie was certain the picture had been taken in an airport. She couldn’t make out Sonny’s face. It was hidden by the blonde-haired daughter he carried on his shoulder while Cher walked behind, trailing a white feather stole.

Millie shook her head. "I never saw Cher look so irritated. She's really left him this time. And that poor child. It says Cher is going to take her but if I know Sonny, it won't be without a fight. He adores Chastity."

"Listen, Millie, if you don't get dressed we're going to be late," Elena said, brushing powder from the collar of her gray knit jacket. "I don't know why you want to upset yourself with the things they write in those trashy magazines. Sonny and Cher are probably out in Hollywood laughing about the whole thing. You just shouldn't believe those stories." She patted Millie's shoulder and switched off the bathroom light. "Now, you get dressed. We'll pick up a copy of *Time* in the lobby. If Sonny and Cher have separated, it'll be in there."

Millie and Elena stepped off the elevator into the lobby of the Red Carpet Motor Lodge. It was one of Reno's smaller hotels and had no
Joanne Meschery

casino. However, it was only two blocks from Virginia Street. Millie
and Elena thought the Red Carpet was one of the best motels in the
city. They liked the gold chandeliers and wine-red flocked wallpaper
in the lobby. And they liked coming back to a quiet place after a night
in the casinos. Their room was large with two queen-sized beds and
on the bureau there was always a fat envelope full of casino coupons
for free drinks and two dollar's worth of nickels for slot machines.
Millie and Elena had used all of the coupons on their first trips to
Reno but now, six years later, they used only a few. Elena chose the
casinos carefully. Her game was blackjack and she wouldn't sit at a
table with a three-deck deal. "Diminishes your odds," she told Millie.
"Might as well be throwing nickels into a machine." Millie played
only slot machines. The tables made her nervous. When she lost at the
machines, as she had the night before, she knew she was not to blame.

There were two quarter slot machines beside the front entrance of
the Red Carpet. Millie sorted through the change in her coin purse
while she waited for Elena at the magazine rack.

"You want that magazine?" the red-headed woman behind the
counter asked Elena. The woman sprayed a foamy trail of glass
cleaner across the counter top. "That'll be fifty cents," she said, not
looking up.

Elena moved over to the counter, watching the woman wipe the
glass in slow circles. "You have lovely nails, dear." She smiled,
turning the woman's hand in her own. "I don't believe I've ever seen
such perfect cuticles."

The woman drew her hand away, examining it. "My hands are my
best feature," she said, a little shyly. "Sleep with gloves on—that's the
secret." She smiled. "Rub a little glycerin with rosewater on your
hands and put gloves on—you know, the white cotton ones you get at
the drugstore." She took a sidelong glance at Elena's veiny hands.
They were as transparent and yellowed as the skin on an onion. "You
just try it. It works."

"Well, I surely will," Elena said, dabbing at a spot on the counter
the woman had missed. "But tell me, dear, we're trying to get some
news on Sonny and Cher, have you read anything recently about their
marriage? My friend and I have heard some disturbing things." Elena
eyed the woman behind the counter and pursed her thin lips.

"You can believe everything you heard," the woman answered.
"Sonny's in Vegas right now and it doesn't look good. Cher's got
around-the-clock guards looking after Chastity. Rona Barrett had it on her show this noon. Now myself, I'm not a bit surprised..."

Millie and Elena walked toward the casinos, crossing the Truckee River at Sierra Street. It was a pale, September night and the river was low and noisy. Millie could imagine Cher standing there on the bridge in a silvery dress. Everything about her sparkled; her mouth shining deep crimson and her teeth provocative, uneven. Wet and glistening. She saw Cher remove the flashing diamond from her finger and hurl it slowly, trailing a shower of sparks like a comet, into the water.

Elena turned, waiting for Millie to catch up. "Millie, if we don't hurry we'll miss the Deer Drawing."

Millie and Elena came to Reno twice a year. They came in early May, before the heat and the tourists, and they came for the third weekend in September. At dawn, on the third Sunday of September, deer hunting season opens in Nevada. Harold's Club hold its annual Deer Drawing on Saturday night.

Millie and Elena stood on the heated sidewalk outside Harold's Club. Inside, a young woman dressed in brown velvet leotards with pink spots across her hips and tiny pink antlers crowning her hair, was reading off a list of prizes. There were rifles and boxes of cartridges, Swiss army knives, Coleman stoves, free taxidermy for head and hooves, free dressing and freezer storage, and ten doe permits. The grand prize was a four passenger Land Rover with all the optionals.

Millie and Elena thought Reno was never more exciting than on the opening of deer hunting season. "The men have a nice smell about them," Millie told her friends in Seattle. "Like campfires and mountain pines."

Traffic stood still on Virginia Street. "Would you look at all those California license plates," Millie said. "It gives me a homesick feeling seeing them."

"Millie, there's not a thing left in California to be lonely for," Elena said. "I don't imagine there's even a deer left on the other side of the Sierras."

Millie nodded, re-arranging her red fox fur stole over her small shoulders. Millie had lived most of her life in California. She remembered the years of her marriage by the houses she had lived in. She had followed her husband, Jimmy, from one bedroom
community to another as he moved to new printing jobs on the peninsula south of San Francisco. "My Jimmy," Millie thought. "You went too soon." She thought of Jimmy lying in the funeral home in his blue suit, his fingernails like black half moons.

"Let's go in," Elena said. "They're getting ready to start."

There were no doors on the casino, only spacious openings with forced air heat coming up from the sills. The warmth seemed to sweep hundreds of men in off the street. Millie followed Elena inside, feeling the men's rough wool jackets brush the blue cotton lace of her dress.

Ticket stubs flew like confetti inside a revolving plastic ball and the young woman on the stage smiled at the crowd. The ball stopped. She pulled out a card, keeping her eyes, teasing and mysterious, on the men below her. Her lips brushed the microphone as she read the winner's name in a low, breathless voice.

A man standing in front of Millie rocked back on his heels and whistled. He wore a fluorescent orange vest. The sight of it rocking back and forth, nearly touching the tip of her nose, made Millie dizzy.

"Elena, I can't see a thing back here," she said, pulling herself up on her toes as more cards were withdrawn, more names announced. "I can't see a thing but that girl's antlers." She looked around her. So many men. She could almost feel their breathing; see it riffling the fox fur at her neck. She watched their faces and thought of them in the woods. She thought of their faces with a day's growth of beard.

"Let's get out of the crowd," Elena said. She stopped clapping and looked past Millie. "We can watch the rest from the bar. We have time for a drink before we leave."

Millie was relieved to see several women sitting at the bar. "Probably waiting for their husbands," she thought, looking back at the men gathered around the stage. She ordered a Tom Collins and Elena had a gin and tonic with a twist of lemon. Millie swirled the plastic stick in her drink and then sucked on the cherry. She had a fine view of the Deer Drawing from the bar stool. The lights over the bar were dim, golden pin points turning above her. She imagined how the light softened the blue-white curls about her face; how the rhinestones in the frame of her glasses gleamed.

Millie smoothed her dress over her knees and smiled at Elena. She always felt things were more special when she was with Elena. Elena was special; she had dignity. She was the only friend of Millie's who wore contact lenses and tinted support-hose. And she had been a
professional woman. She had expense accounts and had taken vacations to Egypt and to Mexico. People noticed Elena. She had a youthful figure and she kept her hair as dark as it was when she was twenty except for a streak of silver that began at her forehead and coiled through the full chignon at her neck.

They had met at a Christmas get-together in their apartment building soon after Millie moved to Seattle. It was Millie's habit to notice a ring finger before a face and she could not take her eyes away from the dinner ring on Elena's hand. Its stone was as large as a purple grape. She invited Elena for coffee and dessert the following Wednesday. After that, they spent every Wednesday together. One week Millie would go to Elena's apartment and the next week Elena would come to hers. Millie bought demitasse cups for those nights and tiny silver spoons made in Amsterdam with windmills carved on the handles. On Wednesday night, she always wore a dress.

The first time they watched Sonny and Cher on television, Millie worried that Elena was humoring her, simply keeping her company as they sat without speaking, cups and saucers balanced in their laps. But then Elena had laughed, rattling the cup in its saucer. "What an odd pair," she said, laughing until her eyes grew watery. "How do you suppose they found each other?" Millie laughed, too. It was something the way Sonny and Cher carried on. How they teased. How they clowneded and hugged and sang and afterward walked off leading little Chastity. Later, Millie looked across the room, fingering her neck absently, feeling how the skin had turned to crepe. "That's the way love is," she had said.

Millie sipped the last of her drink and dangled the cherry between her fingers before she popped it into her mouth. Applause broke out, loud and final, as the winner of the Land Rover was announced.

"He looks like a youngster," Millie said, watching the young man accept the keys to the Land Rover, his face flushed and grinning. She slipped off the stool and hurried to the back of the crowd. "Good luck!" she called, waving the tiny fur legs of her fur stole. "Bring home a big one."

Outside, Elena hailed a cab. "The Nugget, young man," she said. "We have reservations for the late show. Can you get us there in time?"
The cabbie reached back and opened the door. “Burl Ives, huh?” He pushed his dark glasses onto the top of his thick, curly hair. “Yeah, I'll get you there, no sweat. Had Burl Ives in my cab last year when he was here. Picked him up at the Overland Cafe. He was wearing a Tyrolean hat. It's his trademark. You can't miss him on the street.”

“Step on it,” Millie said. “Please,” she added.

“Where you ladies from, New York City or something?” The driver turned off Virginia Street, following the river east. “This is no big city we got here, you know. I can get you across town in ten minutes.”

Millie leaned back in the seat as they waited for a light. She watched couples crossing a concrete bridge over the river, some of them laughing, their arms about each other, as they walked toward the casinos. Near the edge of the water, two boys sat on the rocks and passed a cigarette back and forth. Millie watched them until the light changed. Not far from here, in the foothills, it was dark enough to see the glowing ash of a cigarette. The hunters would be making camp.

“Now, Vegas is different,” the driver continued. “I drove there for a couple of years. Traffic's a mess. Everything's growing too fast. It's a boom town.”

Elena nodded though she had never been there. “Las Vegas is an abomination,” she said, pinning a strand of hair back into her chignon. “That's why we come here. Reno has more charm. More culture, if you know what I mean.”

“But you can't beat Vegas for big names. I had them all in my cab, one time or another, when I was there. You name 'em, I've met 'em.”

“Sonny and Cher,” Millie said as they pulled up in front of the Nugget. She handed the driver a bill.

“Cher,” he said, shaking his head. “Skinniest woman I ever met. Skin and bones.” He opened the ear door and gave Millie three silver dollars in change. “T.V. makes you look fatter, you know.”

“Can you imagine?” Millie said as they pushed open the big glass doors. “I forgot to tip him. And he was so friendly.”

“Never mind.” Elena pulled off her leather gloves. “I gave him something though I think all his talk was jabber. What do you suppose he took us for? Celebrities don't go around riding in cabs, for heaven's sake.”

“Maybe not,” Millie said. “But I'll play this one for him, anyway.” Millie had always wanted to play the gigantic dollar machine. It
caught her eye the moment she stepped through the door. The machine looked brand new with shiny chrome dollar signs on top of it and colored lights running like ribbons around its frame. Its three reels were as large as the window panes in Millie's apartment. Millie had to stretch to reach the coin slot and finally to jump slightly to reach the big handle. The knob on the end of the handle was the size of a soft ball.

Millie let the handle carry her down. The smooth, low sound of the machine pleased her. She closed her eyes because it was her idea that to watch the reels was bad luck. She listened as the machine clicked off three deeper tones like the last chords of an organ recital and then she opened her eyes. Lights flashed above her. A bell rang. Silver dollars clattered into a tray. The sound was nothing like the shallow jingling of the nickel machines Millie usually played.

"Good Lord, I've won," Millie said in a half whisper. The bell stopped abruptly and a red light flashed on: "Deposit one to four dollars". "Elena, I won!"

"Three cherries. My, they pay a lot for three cherries," Elena said. She gathered the silver dollars and stacked them into Millie's hands. "Eighteen dollars. Well, you've paid for the show plus some."

Millie let the silver dollars fall to the bottom of her purse. They walked quickly across the casino to where a long line had formed for the late show. Millie could still see the big red ball on the machine's handle from where she stood.

A middle-aged man in a blue plaid sports coat tried to stand as Millie and Elena were seated at his table. "They really pack 'em in," he said apologetically, moving his chair slightly to give Millie more room.

"Don't worry," Millie smiled. "We're used to it. We've seen several shows here and never once had a table to ourselves. You'd think for eleven dollars they could make it a little more comfortable, though."

The Circus Room was dim and the closed curtain rippled here and there. It was difficult to talk over the loud, bright music of the band.

"At least they give you your money's worth in drinks," the man said. He gestured to the row of glasses in front of him. "Six of any drink you can name. Of course, this is just beer. Never touch the hard stuff, myself. Not tonight, anyway. I've got a date with a deer
Joanne Meschery

tomorrow.” He took aim with his finger and winked at Millie.
Millie turned, taking a closer look at him. “Is that so. We just came
from the Deer Drawing at Harold’s Club.” She leaned nearer the
man. “Elena and I go every year. Oh, forgive me.” She touched
Elena’s hand. “This is Elena Talcott and I’m Mrs. Mildred Corson.
We’re from Seattle.”

“Ed Hacker,” the man grinned, putting down his beer. “Auburn,
California. Happy to meet you.”

“Millie,” Elena said, gesturing to a waiter in a red cotton jacket and
black pants. “Do you want your drinks all at once or three at a time?”

“Tom Collins,” Millie said, beaming up at the waiter. She reached
into her purse and handed him two silver dollars. “All at once.” She
winked back at the hunter. “I just won eighteen dollars from the big
machine out there, the one by the door. I won on the first dollar.
Never had a thing like that happen.”

Ed Hacker looked mildly surprised, his thin brows lost in the deep
creases of his forehead. “That’s wonderful. I don’t do a heck of a lot of
gambling but those machines by the door are set loose.” Millie
noticed that his eyes were blue and serious. Bright blue, not grayish
like her own. He tapped the table for emphasis. “Remember that.
They keep those machines paying off to get people through the doors.
You remember that.”

Millie felt extravagant as she looked down at their table. It
reminded her of the pictures of posh Hollywood parties that she saw
in magazines: tables covered with glasses and bottles where only two
people sat. The room was warm but she gathered her stole around her
remembering the photographs; the sables hanging open over deep
bosoms.

The band played *Cabaret*, the music loud and brassy. Millie sang
softly, “When I go I’m going like Elsie.” She lifted her glass to Elena.

Ed Hacker chuckled. He touched the stole at Millie’s shoulder. “I
wouldn’t go walking all over Reno in this fur tonight if I were you.
You’re liable to get shot at by some plastered hunter.”

The lights flickered and then dropped, and the band went into
*Elephant Walk*. The curtains came apart, quick and crisp. A young
woman with smooth, pale skin skipped onto the stage. Behind her
came “Tina”, a smallish elephant who had opened the show for as
long as Millie and Elena could remember. Tina circled the stage in a
loping hesitation step. The girl smiled brightly at the elephant and
then tapped Tina’s leg with a gold baton. Millie and Elena laughed as Tina stumbled into her drunk act. Millie nodded from time to time to Ed Hacker.

“I’ve hunted all my life,” he said, draining his beer. “I’d be out at camp now but I couldn’t stand that son-in-law of mine another minute. But mark my words, I’ll be up before he is in the morning. He’s no hunter. You ever hear of an accountant who could hunt, I mean really hunt? Why Cissy married him I’ll never know.”

“Elena, that girl’s got a terrible bruise.” Millie frowned as Tina swept the young woman up in her trunk.

“It’s just her skin,” Elena whispered. “I can tell by looking at her she bruises easily. Mine’s that way, you know.”

Millie stared at the bruise. It was high above the young woman’s thigh where her tights were cut almost to her pelvis. Millie marvelled at how tight her flesh was, even in that tender place. Millie had been kissed there. Many times. Such a tender place and Jimmy tracing those small hollows with his tongue.

“Well,” Millie said loudly as though waking up, “the best thing for a bruise is Vitamin C.”

“You don’t say,” Ed Hacker said. He studied the bruise. “She’s a beautiful woman, all right. I wouldn’t be surprised if she got that from some man. Girl like that.” Hacker opened his palm and closed it slowly.

“Someone should tell her about Vitamin C,” Elena said.

“ ‘Course someone should tell her,” Millie said. She took a long drink from her Tom Collins. “Maybe I’ll just write her a little note. She could save herself a lot of trouble.”

Millie picked up one of the postcards the Nugget left on each table and reached into her purse for a pen. She wrote carefully trying to think exactly how she should phrase it. Then she put down the pen. “Dear,” she read aloud to Elena, “if you take 500 mg. of Vitamin C a day, you’ll find that you won’t bruise. Best wishes, Mildred R. Corson, Seattle, Washington.”

“Put my name on it, too,” Elena said. “And put your address down there at the bottom. You never know. She might want to write a little ‘thank you’ or something. I removed a wine stain from that lady’s dress in the rest room at the Oyster House years ago and she’s sent me ‘secret pal’ cards ever since. People like to do those things.” She signalled a waiter. “It makes them feel better.”
Millie put a few extra postcards into her purse. The picture on each card was of Burl Ives, only his face, and he was not wearing a Tyrolean hat. “Elena was right about the cabbie,” Millie thought. “Burl Ives doesn’t wear a Tyrolean hat. And Cher is not skinny.” She sighed. “Cher is willowy, yes, but not skinny. She’s almost too beautiful when she stands next to Sonny. And so witty. Sonny’s no match for her there.”

She whispered across the table to Elena. “She’s too much woman for him. I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s another man.”

Ed Hacker put down his drink and stared at Millie.

“What are you talking about, Millie?” Elena said and frowned.

“Sonny and Cher,” Millie whispered again, and then she turned to Ed Hacker. “Oh, forgive me, Mr. Hunter, I don’t suppose you know—”

“Hacker.”

“Yes, well, it’s just that Sonny and Cher have split up. Such a lovely couple. It was a terrible shock. So much unhappiness—”

“Well, we don’t know that it was another man,” Elena said.

“Oh, I’m sure of it,” Millie said. “And those things never work out, you know. It always ends in tragedy. You’re a married man, Mr. Hacker, you must know.”

Ed Hacker cleared his throat. “I’ve seen a lot of it, if that’s what you mean. But I couldn’t speak for that Hollywood crowd. Those people don’t play with a full deck. Now, I’m not saying I have a perfect marriage but I lay all my cards on the table with my wife. Honesty. And respect. I’d say most of all respect.”

Millie nodded. “Cher ought to be here to hear this.”

Then Burl Ives was standing at the side of the stage in a circle of light. Millie had thought his hair would be gray but it was blonde, blondish-red, and he wore a dark green suit with a green string tie. His shoes were green, too, wide-toed and solid as he was.

“Elevator shoes,” Ed Hacker said.

The room grew quiet. The guitar music was easy and gentle.

“Delia, let your hair hang down.
I’ll give you a ring,
And a wedding in the spring.”

Songs came one after another. After a while the curtain opened and two young women in long, green velvet dresses with lace collars joined Burl Ives for Mary Ann Regrets and A Little Bitty Tear Let Me Down.
Millie took a sip of her drink and kept it in her mouth waiting for the applause before she swallowed. “He’s a wonderful man,” she said to Elena. “I believe he’s seen real sadness.”

“Oh, yes, I imagine,” Elena nodded. “You can’t sing like that if you haven’t.”

“I gave my little girl a chipmunk once,” Ed Hacker said, touching Millie’s wrist. “Got it out in the woods—wild little thing. She wanted to tame it. She didn’t like just watching it run around in this wheel I fixed up for it. I told her she’d never tame it but everyday she took it into the bathroom and closed the door.”

The audience was singing the chorus of *Blue Tail Fly* along with Burl Ives. At each chorus the voices grew more confident, echoing from the balcony to the floor where Millie and Elena sat listening to Ed Hacker.

“One day I went in there with her, into the bathroom. We lay on the floor, just the two of us, all spread out so the chipmunk would have to touch us. And we didn’t move. Cissy’s legs looked so long. The tiles on the floor were cold. We didn’t say a word to each other. We just lay there trying not to move when we breathed, and I watched Cissy. We were lying real close, you know, and I wanted that chipmunk to run right up her leg and sit on her shoulder. Don’t think I ever wanted anything so much in my life. But he never moved. The little thing sat behind the toilet the whole time. Cissy started to cry. I held her. She hugged me for a long time.”

Applause broke out and Ed Hacker straightened in his chair. “Of course, those little things smell. Oh, they look clean, all right, but they have a funny smell.” He laughed. “Sometimes I think I still smell it in the bathroom.”

“Elena,” Millie said, “did you have many lovers?”

Elena looked from Ed Hacker to Millie. Her eyes widened. “I believe I’ll take these contacts out.” She reached for her purse. “There’s too much smoke in here.”

Millie draped her fox fur over the chair back. The room was growing very warm and the dress shields under her arms felt hot and sticky. Her mouth was dry. “I had a lover once,” she said. “Oh, I suppose not what you’d call a real lover. Just someone I knew. We used to talk about it, though. About really being together.” She gave Ed Hacker a meaningful look. “I’d turned forty six that year. He was married, but I never saw his wife. He said she was beautiful. And
when he said that I thought I must be beautiful, too, because he loved me. We used to take walks, and I always wore my light coat so I could feel his arm around me. One day we drove to Inverness and it was so cold on the beach, so cold walking in my light coat.” Millie laughed quietly, her finger following a wet ring on a cocktail napkin. “But then, we couldn’t do that forever, could we? I mean you get tired, finally, just walking. You get tired and you know nothing will ever happen.”

Ed Hacker squeezed Millie’s hand. “Your husband’s a lucky man, Millie. You’re a fine woman.”

“Jimmy passed on seven years ago,” Millie said, feeling the lines in Ed Hacker’s coarse palm. “But he went to his grave knowing I was faithful. Thirty four years we had and all of it for him.”

“Well, if I weren’t a married man myself, I’d take both you ladies out to camp with me right now,” Ed Hacker said and grinned.

“The man’s a born entertainer,” Elena said as they walked through the casino.

“He sure put on one heck of a show,” Ed Hacker said. He buttoned and unbuttoned his sport coat. “Well, look, it’s nearly one and I’d better shove off. I’ll be glad to give you ladies a ride. Save cab fare.”

Millie smiled at the thought of riding through Reno in Ed Hacker’s big camper. She looked from Elena to Ed Hacker. “It’s nice of you to offer, Mr. Hacker, but I think we’ll try our luck a little before we go back to the hotel. We leave tomorrow, you know.” She smiled up at him thinking how he was already gone, as though they had never been sitting together at the table. “I hope you get a deer.”

“Oh, I’ll get one, all right,” Hacker said. His face brightened. “Get one every year. I have a trellis in my back yard covered with antlers. All deer. Darndest thing you ever saw.”

Millie and Elena laughed. Then Ed Hacker laughed, leaning over them with his hands in his pockets.

“And I have a nice set of elk antlers in the den—twelve points. Got that one in Idaho. The missus antiqued it gold. Now, that’s another sight. You ought to stop in if you ever get near Auburn.”

“Well, we just might,” Millie said. “You never know where we’ll turn up. Isn’t that right, Elena?” She took a postcard of Burl Ives out of her purse and handed it to Ed Hacker. “Why don’t you write your
address, just in case. And I'll give you ours. You never know.”

Millie studied the postcard for a moment after Ed Hacker had moved on. “Auburn, California,” she said. “Well, you never know.”

“I'm going over there,” Elena said as they left the ladies' room. She nodded at a blackjack table.

Millie’s hand was in her purse, sifting through the silver dollars. “I'll be at the big machine when you want to leave,” she said.

“For heaven’s sake, Millie,” Elena said. “Don’t waste your dollars.” But Millie was already making her way between the tables.

Elena sat at the blackjack table and waited until the dealer, a tall buxom woman with “Jessie” embroidered on the pocket of her western blouse, shuffled the cards. Then she put a silver dollar in front of her. A man sitting to Elena’s right cut the cards.

“Cut ’em deep, win a heap,” he said and chuckled. He drew sharply on a cigarette and ran his thumb along the thin stack of chips before him.

The dealer didn’t smile. Cards glided from her fingers. Elena admired her long, red nails, so much like the bright red hearts on the card the dealer had turned up.

Elena stared at the card. “Oh, Lord,” she said, “I forgot to put my contacts back in.”

The dealer gave the man beside Elena another card and then paused. She looked beyond Elena, her eyes flat and staring, and tapped her finger on the table.

“Let’s see what you have here,” the man said, lifting the edge of Elena’s cards. “Well, will you look at that.”

Elena could see them. Two aces. She turned them over quickly, face up, and put another dollar out.

“Double down,” she said.

A few people stood watching Millie play the big machine.

“I saw an old lady play that thing sixteen hours straight one night,” a young man said. “Funny how they go for that machine.”

Millie didn’t turn around. She had her eyes closed, listening to the tumble of lemons, oranges and cherries falling past the glass. Then she pushed the “change” button.

“Give it to me in silver dollars,” Millie said, handing the change girl a twenty dollar bill. “This machine’s about ready to pay off.”
She thought of Ed Hacker as she played. He had said the machine was set loose. He had held her hand and told her she was a fine woman. Millie swept a loose curl from her forehead and felt the mist of sweat on her face. She stretched up again with a little jump and pushed a silver dollar into the machine. “Only men and women,” she thought as she pulled the handle. “That’s all there is in the world.”

She rode the handle down. The dress shield under her right arm had come loose. It flapped out, yellow-white, from the sleeve of her dress, and the fur legs of her fox stole flew around her.
I AM TIRED OF LOVE

An old wooden boat
carried
upon my back... 
each time it rains
I set it down
waiting for enough water
to sail

the rain stops
leaving the boat partially
filled

I tip it sideways
drain the water
then heave it again
upon my back

my oars are my hands
you can see them
moving toward you
as I walk

do not cry
or spill your drink
else I will set
my boat upon your lap
when you rise to leave
I will capsize
becoming trapped
underneath myself

it will be dark
I will be dreaming
how calm the sea
how smooth your body

the old wooden boat moored
safely to your bones
TUGS AND BARGES

Tugs pull barges back beyond the sand
the rushing seagulls never leave,
ever falling back to where the light
falls close and old.

Close enough to see what light we can,
we crowd before the barges looking
light inside our eyes.

Old enough to know what barges bring,
we try old songs, the ones we used
to think we knew by heart.

The barges break. Tugs no longer pull
what we thought was brimming wheat.
Empty lines are dragging in the Sound.
Gulls fly up to watch. The boats turn,
moving north and out to sea.
SHE'D BEEN A BALLERINA

Red flowers by the window and it is evening
My aunt is sleeping and I am a guest

In Maine that season the weather was cold the birches loud
My cabin had white walls and I built a fire daily

One of my friends was a woman from Belgium
Who enjoyed dancing out of the shadows of chairs

She cooed she kissed my shoulders and she lay on my table
The moon was stable I was trying to write a novel

She liked me to see her unclothed her husband was sterile
Her face was lined and her eyes narrow she stared into the fire

She sat on my lap she wanted to be my daughter
But I was twentysix and I didn’t know better

Her dresses were thin and her panties colored
Her father had died in the war I touched her breasts lightly

Her English was broken and often I didn’t understand her
My floor was unswept her skin was clean and tender

Once a great horned owl sat on the hemlock bough
Outside of my window I was waiting and I stood on my porch

Once a badger ate my lunch I’d left the door ajar
I walked the gravel road to the store

I loved her smell and it stayed on my sweater
We rocked in the chair by the fire snow scratched over the glass

Last night it rained and the wallpaper trembled in thunder
I felt like a child I cringed under covers

I wonder if she looks like a grandmother now I hope not
My aunt is sleeping and I am reading the newspaper
COMMENCEMENTS

Dans l’œil de cette biche on voit
Un étang noir, une cabane
D’un autre monde diaphane
Où boit un cerf parmi ses bois.

De ce futur cheval n’existe
Encor que le hennissement
Et la crinière dans sa fuite
Que se disputent quatre vents.

De loin voici que m’arrive
Un clair visage sans maître
Cherchant un corps pour que vive
Sa passion de connaître.

Nulle lèvre ne le colore
Mais avec un soin studieux,
Double, une natte de cheveux
Tombe sur un fragment d’épaule.

Virez chevelures de femmes,
Virez beaux gestes sans bras,
Audaces qui cherechez une âme,
Violences qui voulez un bras,

Regards sans iris ni racines
Rôdant dans l’espace argentin,
O regards, serez-vous enfin
Retenus par une rétine?

Jules Supervielle
BEGINNINGS

In the eye of this deer we see a black pool, a scene from a transparent world where a deer drinks alone in a wood.

In this future, the horse exists only in the neighing and the mane flying as it races the 4 winds.

From far away a face comes to me, clear and calm, looking for some body to hold its desire to believe.

Two pale lips, set with care, a lock of hair falls on part of the shoulder.

Lovely feminine hair. Beautiful movement without arms, audacities who search for a soul, violences who long for those arms,

glances without iris or root roaming in the silver air, glances, will you finally secure yourselves to a retina?

—Jules Supervielle
Translated by Quinton Duval & Andrew Grossbardt
Grands yeux dans ce visage,
Qui vous a placés là?

De quel vaisseau sans mâts
Êtes-vous l’équipage,

Depuis quel abordage
Attendez-vous ainsi
Ouverts toute la nuit?

Feux noirs d’un bastingage
Étonnés mais soumis
A la lio des orages,

Prisonniers des mirages,
Quand sonnera minuit

Baissez un peu les cils
Pour reprendre courage.

Jules Supervielle
THESE EYES

Who put these eyes
in this face?

What broken-down ship
are you the crew of?

How long have you waited,
captured, wide open
all night long?

The dark lights of the barricade
dazzle, but give in
to the power of the storm.

You prisoners of mirage,
when midnight strikes

lower the eyelids a little
and find courage again.

—Jules Supervielle
Translated by Quinton Duval
& Andrew Grossbardt
LE PETIT BOIS

J'étais un petit bois de France
Avec douze rouges furets,
Mais je n'ai jamais eu de chance
Ah! que m'est-il donc arrivé?

Je crains fort de n'être plus rien
Qu'un souvenir, une peinture
Ou le restant d'une aventure,
Un parfum, je ne sais pas bien.

Ne suis-je plus qu'en la mémoire
De quelle folle ou bien d'enfants,
Ils vous diraient mieux mon histoire
Que je ne fais en ce moment.

Mais où sont-ils donc sur la terre
Pour que vous les interrogez,
Eux qui savent que je dis vrai
Et jamais je ne désespère.

Mon Dieu comme c'est difficile
D'être un petit bois disparu
Quand on avait tant de racines
Comment faire pour n'être plus?

Jules Supervielle
THE SMALL WOOD

I was a small wood in France, with twelve red ferrets, but I was never lucky... Ah! How did I get into this?

I want to be more than a souvenir or a painting or the end of an adventure or a familiar smell... I don't know.

Am I just a tale for children or some madwoman's vision? They could tell my story better than I can at this point.

There might still be people around who would tell you if you asked them. Tell you that I'm telling you the truth and that I'm not that depressed.

My God, it's so hard not to be here anymore. When I had so many roots, how can they all be gone now?

—Jules Supervielle

*Translated by Quinton Duval & Andrew Grossbardt*
LITTLE FALL DEMON

after sulfur stinks up your yellow crest
those hands hold a coal fire
those eyes glitter huge
and there is mouse blood in your pot

you dance like shiny elms over the roof
with long spindly finger
keep numerous brown mongrels in the dungeon
and create the surly trouble

your pipe blows the smoke of leaves
and death’s hand over the countryside
and like a tin bell’s song
you soon fade into the marsh

there you sleep like fortune for the year
until saint stephan wakes you strangely
with the frantic quadrille
and great death constant with crickets

—hans magnus enzensberger
Translated by Rich Ives
KITCHEN CHAIN

on a nothing but lazy afternoon, today
i see in my house
through the open kitchen door
a milk can an onion board
a cat dish.
on the table lies a telegram.
i have not read it.

in a museum in amsterdam
i see in an old picture
through the open kitchen door
a milk can a bread basket
a cat dish.
on the table lies the newspaper.
i have not read it.

in a summerhouse on the moskwa
i see for a few weeks
through the open kitchen door
a bread basket an onion board
a cat dish.
on the table lies the newspaper.
i have not read it.

through the open kitchen door
i see gutter-running milk
thirty-year-old wars
teardrops on onionboards
anti-rocket rockets
breadbaskets
class struggles.

to the left at the foot of it all in the angle
i see a cat dish.

—hans magnus enzensberger
Translated by Rich Ives
Cette vie est un hôpital où chaque malade est possédé du désir de changer de lit. Celui-ci voudrait souffrir en face du poêle, et celui-là croit qu’il guérirait à côté de la fenêtre.

Il me semble que je serais toujours bien là où je ne suis pas, et cette question de déménagement en est une que je discute sans cesse avec mon âme.

≈Dis-moi, mon âme, pauvre âme refroidie, que penserais-tu d’habiter Lisbonne? Il doit y faire chaud, et tu t’y ragaillardirais comme un lézard. Cette ville est au bord de l’eau; on dit qu’elle est bâtie en marbre, et que le peuple y a une telle haine du végétal, qu’il arrache tous les arbres. Voilà un paysage selon ton goût; un paysage fait avec la lumière et le minéral, et le liquide pour les réfléchir!

Mon âme ne répond pas.

<<Puisque tu aimes tant le repos, avec le spectacle du mouvement, veux-tu venir habiter la Hollande, cette terre béatifiante? Peut-être te divertiras-tu dans cette contrée dont tu as souvent admiré l’image dans les musées. Que penserais-tu de Rotterdam, toi qui aimes les forêts de mâts, et les navires amarrés au pied des maisons?»

Mon âme reste muette.


Pas un mot.—Mon âme serait-elle morte?

<<En es-tu donc venue à ce point d’engourdissement que tu ne te plaises que dans ton mal? S’il en est ainsi, fuyons vers les pays qui sont les analogies de la Mort.—Je tiens notre affaire, pauvre âme! Nous ferons nos malles pour Tornéo. Allons plus loin encore, à l’extrême bout de la Baltique; encore plus loin de la vie, si c’est possible; installons-nous au pôle. Là le soleil ne frise qu’obliquement la terre, et les lentes alternatives de la lumière et de la nuit suppriment la variété et augmentent la monotonie, cette moitié du néant. Là, nous pourrons prendre de longs bains de ténèbres, cependant que, pour nous divertir, les aurores boréales nous enverront de temps en temps leurs gerbes roses, comme des reflets d’un feu d’artifice de l’Enfer!»

Enfin, mon âme fait explosion, et sagement elle me crie: <<N’importe où! n’importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!»

—Charles Baudelaire
ANY WHERE OUT OF THE WORLD
N’IMPORTE OÙ HORS DU MONDE

This life is a hospital in which each patient is possessed by the desire to change his bed. This one would want to suffer opposite the stove, and that one thinks he’d be cured next to the window.

It seems to me that I’d always be fine in the place where I’m not, and this question of changing residence is one that I discuss unceasingly with my soul.

“Tell me, my soul, poor chilled soul, what would you think of living in Lisbon? It must be warm there, and there you’d liven up like a lizard. This city is at the water’s edge; they say it’s built of marble, and that people there have such a hatred of plant life, that they uproot all the trees. There is a landscape according to your taste; a landscape made with light and mineral, and liquid to reflect them!”

My soul doesn’t answer.

“Since you love repose so much, with the spectacle of movement, do you want to come and dwell in Holland, this beatifying land? Perhaps you’d amuse yourself in this country whose image you’ve so often admired in museums. What would you think of Rotterdam, you who love forests of masts, and ships moored on the site of houses?”

My soul remains mute.

“Batavia perhaps would be more appealing to you? We’d find there, besides, the spirit of Europe wed to tropical beauty.”

Not a word.—Would my soul be dead?

“Have you then come to this point of numbness that you take pleasure only in your malady? If that’s the case, let’s flee toward the lands that are the analogies of Death.—I am pursuing our venture, poor soul! We’ll pack our trunks for Torneo. Let’s go even further, to the extreme end of the Baltic; even further from life, if it’s possible; let’s settle at the Pole. There the sun only skims the earth obliquely, and the slow alternatives of light and of night suppress variety and increase monotony, that half of nothingness. There, we’ll be able to take long baths of darkness, yet, to divert us, the northern lights will send us from time to time their rosy sprays, like the reflections of a fireworks of Hell.”

At last, my soul explodes, and wisely it cries to me: “Anywhere! anywhere! provided that it is out of this world!”

—Charles Baudelaire

Translated by Enid Rhodes Peschel
"It's in back," Jerry said.

Voisin drove off the road through tall grass and weeds behind the hospital to a tiny cement-block house. A crowd had gathered at the open door.

"I should speak with the hospital director," Voisin said, "These weeds are disgusting."

He stopped, then backed the landrover up to the door, forcing the gawkers aside. Jerry hopped out and was joined by several classmates who had been waiting on the little porch. Voisin stayed in the truck to keep the motor running. Sweat trickled down his neck. No one knew where to plant shade trees. To the north, near the river, the clouds were forming a dark line. No wind. Perhaps it would rain. Later in the afternoon, perhaps.

Jerry and his friends opened the rear door of the rover and slid a thin corpse on a tarp into the space between the bench seats built along the sides. The space was too short for the body.

"We could leave the tools," Cédric, Jerry's friend, said.

"No way," Voisin said.

He reached back over the tool box and grabbed the corpse by the collar and pulled forward. As he strained, his foot pressed the accelerator; the engine raced. Jerry dropped the leg he was holding and jumped back. Laughing, Voisin turned the body on its side. It was male. Its skin was grey. A bandage was tied around its face and under its chin, as if it had died of toothache. The engine sputtered, then died. "Merde!" Voisin said. They had to bend the corpse's legs and neck and remove its shoes in order to close the door. Poor corpse. Its toes were long and thin.

"Okay, start pushing," Voisin said.

"Wait a minute." Jerry weaved through the crowd that had begun to press against the truck. "We have to take its wife." Jerry leaned in the passenger window. Two of his friends, twins, opened the rear door and a tall woman dressed in black climbed in and scooted on the bench until she was directly behind Voisin.

"Let's go," he said. He squeezed the steering wheel and sat up straight.

"That's not the wife," Jerry said and smiled. He rocked back and forth.
“Who the hell is she then?”
“The sister. Hot day, huh?” He smiled again.

A big woman, who wailed and moaned in what Voisin considered a disgusting display, climbed heavily into the truck and fell on top of the corpse. She began crying and kissing its dead cheeks. Pulling herself to her knees, she touched the body jerkily: face, chest, crotch, and she sang in a deep voice. “My husband,” She bent and kissed its face, then straightened herself, “A good man, is dead. He’s dead.” The people outside the truck groaned.

Voisin touched the naugahyde where the sunlight fell in on the seat and quickly pulled his hand back. That woman’s song went on and on and reverberated off the metal ceiling. Voisin’s clothes were dark with sweat. It took some time to get the truck started.

He took off, then stopped after several hundred meters to wait for Jerry. Wheezing, Jerry got into the front, and four of his friends opened up the back and began climbing in.

“Just look at this poor woman. She is very sad,” Cédric said in answer to Voisin’s puzzled look. He scrambled over the body and sat down behind Jerry.

“So sad she might kill herself,” Charles said, following Cédric.

“Don’t worry, we’ll protect her,” the twins said and smiled as they closed the door behind them. Some other boys surrounded the vehicle and pleaded to go along. Voisin shouted firmly over the woman’s chants that anyone not in the truck would have to wait for the next death, then popped the clutch and the rover lurched away from the crowd.

As they roared off, Voisin pushed the knobs of the open vents to try to get a little more air into the cab. He bounced up and down a couple of times, then settled to the shifting of gears. When the truck was rolling smoothly, he reached up behind his head and opened a roof vent to give the people in back some air. The thin woman immediately closed it.

The northerly clouds were getting darker, but no nearer. The fat woman’s chants continued until they were out of sight of the hospital, then she stopped. Cédric gave her a handkerchief and she dabbed her eyes. She sat back, her calves and feet tucked uncomfortably under her heavy butt.

The little engine ticked as it strained against the hills. Everyone was silent. They whizzed past tall grass and bushes that grew in the sand alongside the road. In silence they listened to motor noise and watched the thin, green stalks and stunted shrubs. In the silence the
corpse didn’t smell at all. Voisin felt dirty, as if a layer of sadness emanating from that little grey body lay heavily on his skin. He could hardly breathe; he drove faster to get more air. He looked around and noticed that the others indifferently rocked with the motion of the truck. He kept the accelerator floored. Then they hit a chuckhole.

The right front wheel dipped into the rut and rose and a little later the rear wheel followed. The landrover balanced on two left wheels, then slammed down hard on all four as the passengers bounced up out of their seats. The corpse floated up level with Voisin, whose head at the ceiling was bent to the side. It opened one eye and said through dead lips, “Drive carefully! Do you want to get us killed?”, then fell to the floor, bounced once and settled on its fat wife as if it hadn’t spoken at all. The thin woman fell on top of the corpse as Voisin plopped back to his seat and pushed the brake softly to avoid skidding.

The truck finally stopped and the thin woman regained her seat. The stiff little body was on its back, its knees and feet in the air, its neck bent. Its eyes had come open; it was looking at its crotch. Underneath the corpse the fat woman groaned and pushed herself up and the body fell heavily away.

“Is everyone all right?” Voisin asked, looking at each person and wondering if anyone else had heard it. No blood. A small bump on Charles’ nose. They quietly turned the body back on its side.

“Please stop at the hotel in town,” the thin woman said as she scraped dirt from under her fingernails. Voisin noticed in the rear view mirror that the twins were smiling, sharing some joke in that private way twins have. Suddenly it was unbearably hot again in the truck.

The hotel had a long, pillared veranda where people could sit and drink beer. A crowd collected around the rover and stared at the corpse inside. The fat woman chanted; people groaned. Voisin closed his window and pressed his nose against the glass, then laughed nervously and looked around to see if anyone had noticed. “He’s dead,” the fat woman sang. “My husband, a good man, is dead.” Voisin watched her ritualized gesture and thought of the slow kisses of an oil pump, a rhythmic muslim in unending prayer. He listened to the creakings of her song: My dead husband is a good man.

Jerry got out of the truck and opened the rear door for the thin woman. She jumped out, pushed her way through the crowd and went into the hotel. After a minute or so she returned carrying a large,
brown-wrapped package which she handed up to Voisin as she climbed in. He set the soft bundle on the seat beside him. They drove off, the fat woman stopping her chants at the city limits.

They came slowly down a hill and entered a forest where it was cool and dark, and the air was rich with the odors of anise and rotting vegetation. Ivy and vines crawled up the smooth, white trunks of umbrella trees. Parasol-shaped leaves blocked out the sun thirty meters above the truck. The forest floor was thick with bracken, large leafed rhododendron, spiny bushes and tangle plants that Voisin could not name. At the bridge Voisin switched off the motor and he and the boys walked down to a bare spot under a bamboo stand at the edge of the stream. The water was tinted rust-red, and clear. Without the noise of the truck motor, the gentle splash of the current seemed enormous, exquisite. Small birds chattered in the branches above and tree frogs peeped. Hornbills or monkeys whooped and somewhere a gore crow harshly squawked.

Cédric carried a capful of water back to the women and the fat one scrubbed the corpse's face with a wet handkerchief while the thin woman rubbed a palmful of water back and forth across her forehead, then with thumb and forefinger stretched wide, she squeegeed droplets down over the rest of her face.

"Off, off, damned death," Voisin said as he washed his arms and neck. The boys smiled, more at the relief of water than at the allusion. Swarms of yellow and white butterflies scattered and fed on the damp sand. Voisin bent and dipped his beard, then his whole face into the stream. He stood and flapped water out of his beard.

"Can we swim a while?" Charles asked.

"No, we'd best get on," Voisin said slowly in his best pioneer voice, "It might rain."

They looked up through the branches and thick foliage and could see no clouds in the little mosaics of blue sky.

"Or it may get dark," the twins added.

"And the dead man's ghost would get us," Jerry said and giggling, ran back to the truck.
The dead man’s village was hot. They came up behind a slow funeral procession, followed it through the only street. Close to the river it was humid; even the leaves of the palms that lined the road seemed to be wilting. The clouds were nearer but no darker. The fat woman wailed, softly so as not to distract from the funeral ahead of them. Fat flies buzzed and bounced against the inside of the windshield.

“Stop here,” the thin woman said.

Voisin pulled into the sandy yard of an unpainted adobe house and stopped the truck. The boys helped the trembling fat woman out. She let out a yelp and fell to her knees. The thin woman stepped down as family and friends gathered in the yard, wept and carried the fat woman into the house. “My package,” the thin woman said. Voisin handed it through the window to her and she walked away and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Using the tarp as a stretcher, he and the boys lifted out the corpse and carried it to the back door. Inside, they set down the body and rolled it onto a grass mat in a windowless room. As Voisin stood a fat man dressed in a grey business suit held out his hand and introduced himself as the body’s brother. He led Voisin outside to a wicker chair under an almond tree in the front yard.

“You have been so kind,” the fat man said. He pinned a crepe band to his sleeve and gave it a little pat. “If there is anything I can do to repay you. . .”

“You can pay for rent of the truck,” Voisin said, “It’s 450 kilometers round trip at seven francs a click.”

The man turned away with a hand to his face and wept.

“As you can see,” he said, “I’m much too sad to go into such details right now.”

Voisin looked off into the distance, very bored, very tired. He waved for Jerry to come.

“Tell the boys to put the body back into the truck,” he said softly.

“No, wait!” The fat man produced his wallet and quickly counted some money. “Thirty-one fifty, correct? Well, we’ll just make it thirty-two hundred.” He slowly added a bill to the pile in Voisin’s hand.

“Anything else?”

Voisin stuffed the money into his pocket and sat down in the chair, and sighed. “I’d like a cold beer if you have one,” he said.

The fat man smiled and called to his wife who quickly approached.
They whispered; Voisin thought he heard "a real businessman, a banker!" and he smiled. The wife left and three young women carrying a small table, a liter of beer, and a glass appeared from around the side of the house.

"By the way, Mr. . . ."

"Voisin."

"Yes. Are you married, Mr. Voisin?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I'm not."

The fat man smiled as the shortest of the young ladies brought the neck of the bottle down sharply against the edge of the table and knocked off the cap. She carefully poured beer into the glass, looked up, smiled and handed it to Voisin. Behind her the neighbors were wandering around the yard, some of them craned at a draped window to see inside.

"My youngest, who will be seventeen next month, has a very nice smile," the fat man said. His hands were clasped over his round belly and he rocked on his heels.

"An asset," Voisin said, sipping his beer.

"Well, let us know if you need anything." The fat man and his daughters walked back to the house.

Voisin propped up his ankle on his knee and untied his shoelace, as Jerry, who had been waiting beside the truck, came up to the chair.

"Sir, Cédric went to see his mother and Charles went with him. They won't be long. The twins and I are going to look for some fruit. Want some? The citrus is cheap and usually good."

"Get me a basket of grapefruit," he said handing Jerry some money, "But only if it's ripe."

"Oh, and don't forget to ask for the chicken."

"What chicken? What do we want a chicken for?" Voisin removed his shoe.

"Well, because he'll give you one if you ask. He'll understand," Jerry said and walked away.

Voisin took off his other shoe and then his socks and he wiggled his toes. Beer in hand, he leaned back and lifted his feet off the hot sand. He finished his glass of beer, and before he could reach for the bottle, one of the daughters was there, smiling and pouring beer into his glass. He watched her return to the house. The man's daughters were really quite beautiful, with taut little bottoms in their long, tight skirts. And, as the man had said, the youngest (only sixteen) did have a nice smile. Having had no food since breakfast, Voisin felt more of a
pleasant glow with each sip. He downed his beer and felt a cool hand on his cheek. The oldest daughter walked around from behind him and exchanged the empty bottle for a full one. He held out his glass for a refill. Beer is a food.

The door of the house opened and several women carried out the corpse and set it in a chair across the yard from Voisin. The body had been washed and wrapped tightly from neck to shins in clean, white sheets. Only its thin arms up to the elbows and its feet stuck out of the shroud. A new bandage was tied around its chin. The crowd of friends sat in a circle at the corpse's feet and the thin woman came from the house and began winding strips of linen around the corpse's hands.

One of the men in the circle jumped up and sang and danced with a slow rotation of his hips until a woman pulled him down by his belt. The dead man's wife was brought out and she collapsed in front of the chair. She sang very softly, patting the ground in rhythm to her song, and she increased the volume with each repetition. Others joined in with different rhythms and notes.

"The best man," they all sang.

"My husband, friend, brother, uncle, neighbor, cousin, father is dead.

He's dead."

The chant became too confusing for Voisin to tell exactly what was being sung. He finished his second beer and a third arrived. He pinched the girl's butt and she smiled and slapped his hand away. The mourners sat up and waved their arms from side to side above their heads. Voisin snapped his fingers to what he thought was the beat as the noise of the chant diminished, augmented, softened again.

Voisin realized he had been too drunk to notice when the wind had started. He glanced up at the near, dark clouds; he smelled approaching rain. He quickly put on his socks and shoes; the boys arrived and put some baskets of fruit into the back of the truck. The wind blew strongly in gusts, picking up leaves and shooting sheets of sand against the sides of the house. The branches of the almond tree whipped back and forth. The sky suddenly turned dark.

The fat man, the body's brother, approached holding his armband to his sleeve. Voisin stood and set his glass on the table.

"You're not going are you?" the fat man shouted over the howl of
the storm, "It's going to rain!"
"Yes, I'd better get started before it rains," Voisin shouted back.
He's dead, he's dead sang between gusts. Voisin could hardly see
the mourners through the dust that surrounded them.
"You're welcome to spend the night."
"Better not. I work tomorrow."
"Well," The fat man extended his hand. "I really don't know how to
thank you."
"Uh... how about a chicken?"
"A what?" The fat man shook his head and pointed to his ear.
Voisin repeated his request, the man nodded then ran back to the
house. After a few moments he returned carrying a small bird which
had a thin, featherless neck. He handed it to Voisin, smiled and waved
goodbye. Voisin ran to the truck. The boys climbed out, pushed the
vehicle until the engine caught and roared, then scrambled back
inside.
Voisin gave the chicken to Cédric. "Well, I got the chicken," he
said, hoping for an explanation.
"Good," they said.
"I got the grapefruit," Jerry said.
Voisin looked back at the funeral. He saw little except bodyless
hands waving above a fog of sand. He thought of wheat rippling in a
breeze, turned, and drove silently away. At the edge of town the dark
clouds passed over quickly, leaving a high, uniform blanket of grey;
the wind slowed to a breeze. Voisin shrugged. False storm. Not a
drop.
SONATA FOR THREE HANDS

1
The skim and slant of sunlight
on a white wall,
the spontaneous grass, the cloud ensemble
improvise
in our minor signature,
echoes and ricochets
from a shifting source, severe by turns
or tender,
by turns reckless and equivocal.
In this show, the props
are evasive, the script illegible,
the orchestra
blindly scraping
its incidental music.
Mother Tongue, it's time
to sing of the world
in a major key,
the world in a major key.
In swivelling terms
we inflict ourselves
on the shrewd lynx, the cold
spoiled lakes
and the five chambers of the columbine;
and cannot advance
the grammar of elation, though we hunker—
clerical, obscure—
on the brink of a brute admission.
We stop, by the slack rose we stop,
and the cables slung
like latitudes—the flesh humble,
the heart in repose, a clutch of spines
sliding on a slippery pivot.
But nothing displaces
these nervous illustrations:
the slow pig
under a cancelling knife, silence
rebuking the chirrup
of a flexible bird, contempt
uncoiling in the hollow of a hand;
however the seeds swell, wherever
the gutters escape with their inventory,
whatever the mirrors blurt—
these dark flickers make us flinch.
Can we survive
the night, its tail in its mouth,
rolling soundlessly into morning
where the luminous clocks
drag us bitchy from our blue dreams,
where the dearest dead
hang back and malinger, and we hear
the glass tones of a flute
splinter in the first light?
We will rise
from a bend in the temperament
to the ruthless total of things, loud and inexhaustible,
to an air instinct with love
that labors from basement to rooftop,
brims through the slats and doors and windows
into the world, the world
in a major key,
and back—
and we sing as the air glides
through a resonant house
in the harmonies of our Mother Tongue.
FABLE

I stepped out of the house one morning
returned to find it gone
my husband, children, gone
I told the police my house is gone
how can I get my work done?
Huddled in their blue like hunchbacks
all day, such massive energy—
the stiffening of continents like this—
(how proud to be a citizen)
They said:
accept your losses, burn your bridges
call us anytime you need.
I did the modern thing; went back to school.
Afternoons like a child insignificant before
an empty blackboard writing
YOU WERE NEVER HERE a thousand times.
OVERNIGHTER

This motel registers only after you’ve passed it, so pale and insecure on the other edge of any road that you’re never sure whether you’ve seen a sign at all or witnessed the window a convention of clouds like blunt cheroots close on the scrubbed sky. Immediately in love with its vacancies you scour your pockets for change spare enough to purchase it; you want to tuck it snugly under your bony arm, a worn and grabbed bag for whenever you and your business go about. The ceilings do not stoop to idle chatter, the doors won’t admit indiscretions beyond disclosing the towel fingered, snapped, and snatched so vigorously entire chapters of a ten-cent romance go blind to their own brassy purity: here even the keyholes wink.
Framed by those peeling sills
goings on go on and on.
The hallway for instance
saunters past the undeniably
welcome mat your heart wears
like a lobster bib each time
you near this motel, until,
sick with kneeling neon
invitations you slink
guiltily up to the night desk.
The clerk tells you you
can't buy it it is not for sale
at any price except tonight
for the rest of your life.
DIRECTIVE

Her lair: landscape of dark wood
in a ragged season. At night animal eye
and baying of wolf make her brave. Owls glide
to their kill. Near the river's swollen tongue
moss caves keep her warm. She sees children
bathing in pools. They eat the air. They remain.
Their shrill play lets the hounds loose
under the roar of timber crackling to the ground.
In cellar-holes she finds their abandoned toys.
Head out-of-mind she hears the din
of skillet and spoon. Once upon a time.

She frowns on the shadow of a thorn,
gazes at steel-bright water in the pool—
mirrors of coolness. Coolness of spoons.
With her deep-sea hands she fingers
a stone. It is a bell sharpening
the song of dancing children.

I am hanged by the roots of my hair."
What nimble terror of play—shadows
carved from bone. And it is too
far to hear the singing.
THE LANTERNS

Up the wind’s sleeve, one bird.
Down my collar
The thrill of something padding
On an empty stomach,
Out of earshot,
So lean a shape it could make bed
In a crosshairs’ horizontal.

Under the shoulderblade
Of the grist mill,
The creek
Runs its faulty wiring, sparks
Fish and foam
At the heel
Of the wheelbite.

Just enough current gets through.
The light in the flour
Comes on, a mote-sift
Wattage
Dusting the air,

Those lanterns by which
The poor see
The nothing there is
To eat, stacked
Double, piled five deep
In the twelve-shelf pantry.
THE DIVER'S BUBBLES

A stone cares nothing for the breathless
Passages, the diarists of the inner life.
For all along, it has been
A constant diving
Into itself, deeper
Than what a hand picks up in the road.

And this, which the fist tendrils around?
The soul's scoria, a bad eye
Or testicle jettisoned
That its grayness be lightfooted,
Its journey, pure gyre.

How deep must a stone go?
Here on the path shoulder, in
Shin-high weed, the little
Diver's bubbles
Rise, will not break.
See how much they themselves
Resemble stones?

With that much confusion above
On the earth,
You too would go
Spelunking into your own darkest
Corners,
Shedding all remembrances
Of self,
Wanting, in a stone's case,
To prove
How hardness
Picked clean

Is air, is fire, is water.
AFTER YEARS OF CAREFUL INDIFFERENCE

I am still interested in my skin.
Good it has stayed
This long
Like a revival tent sewn tight around
An evening of dubious
Miracles.

I am passed about inside there,
A fedora
In whose shallow crown
The days collect like tooth fillings,
A pocket knife
Digging at a knuckle wart
Between hymns.

What is mind
But a row of knees over which
A hat shadow passes, a
Wheelchair battery
Whose charge is the sum
Of bruises got by running against
The edge's of one's
Redoubtable name?

I am still interested in my skin
And dream of the balcony
Where I will be shaken out
Like a blanket of cracker crumbs,
The lap
On which I'll be stitched
With a field of thirteen stars... 

My wounds, my beautiful colonies
Slipping back
Into the sea.
I have always practised in the dark. Everything from those first pieces in John Thompson’s “Teaching Little Fingers to Play,” to a repertoire of Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and the melody of that concerto for huge hands, the Rachmaninoff Third. My hands are small. Therefore it has always been necessary, before falling asleep, to practise the scales, major and minor, separated by a third, sixth and tenth, and all the arpeggios, major, minor, dominant and diminished. I no longer play the piano for real, but I still find myself practising in the air, and lately, driving Montana, I am tapping the rhythms of remembered passages on the steering wheel while Cripple Creek Road disappears into the past, and I am feeling my way over that Canyon Road known as Highway 37.

Thirty-five miles an hour around every curve and I vomit as the road straightens at the door of the Big Sky Motel. In bed I am practising again. The entire repertoire. It’s always worse if I’m ill. And I realize I’ve been doing this since I was five. I would play the violin with two curtain rods, humming my own tunes in my softest voice. That way I could avoid the terrible squeaky phase of the beginning student of strings. Father taught violin and cello by refined methods of torture. He never allowed a moment’s rest, but rather, by attaching the left hand to his left hand, he had what might be known as a finger stretching rack, and then, by taking hold of the right elbow with his right hand, he had a continuous-motion machine. It was intolerably boring. Thus I opted for piano, taught by Mother, even though she shouted and cracked knuckles with her thin, white, willowlike baton. By practising in the dark, I acquired such skill that I could reduce her to silence, holding her in rapture so that she’d forget that wretched stick. Father was my lover, which was not so boring. Mother was deranged. Not at all boring. And the music held us together, the bond of sound mixing itself with some absurd dream of greatness.
Yesterday, caught in the middle of the highway behind St. Regis High School Marching Band, I remembered Sylvia Zaremba. The band, led by a high-stepping majorette wrapped in furs, marched in perfect order, their knees knocking their chins. So many child prodigies stopping, for one hour of the day, the entire world. Even the cows came running across the field to see what was going on. Sylvia Zaremba was a seventeen-year-old concert pianist who came to town when I was eleven. Mother went crazy. Surely I could learn Mendelssohn's “Rondo Capriccioso” when Sylvia, a child prodigy, had played Mozart's “A Major Concerto” with a symphony orchestra at age six. She made me my first long dress, and there in the living room, before all her students' parents, I played the Mendelssohn. But there were signs with which she was not at all pleased. I had spent the entire hour before the performance giggling hysterically in the bedroom, and the week afterwards, vomiting. The house stood silent. Mother always gave everyone a vacation after the annual recital. Then she would sleep, waking occasionally to eat, or measure the depth of her grief. I lay in the dark, the piece playing itself over and over, there at the side of the bed, or in the toilet, my spirit heaving itself upon its own invented waves of purgation.

Waking to wind and rain coming through a hole in the window at the Big Sky Motel I realize that for hours I have not been practising, and though my tongue looks like the majorette's fur hat, I have recovered from my car sickness. I am grateful that I no longer play a real piano, and I recall how it was I lost my music. After Mother died, I began to see shapes. The notes became dots to follow. During practice hours the emerging forms would haunt me until I could not play two measures. Technique began to deteriorate. Practice hours disappeared in the wake of magnificent fantasies as language aligned itself with the shapes. I sat there weeping that I could no longer see the music. And so it was that the ethereal, abstract, virginal muse of pure sound was seduced by an earth-bound growling lover, who boomed his words from a thicket for all the world to miss.

All the shy children peer from behind the playground fence. They stand, like deer or antelope, knee-deep in grass. I ask my lover not to startle them. To go gently lest they hallucinate. They draw beautiful
shapes and I feel the second movement of the Beethoven Pathétique in my fingers. I want to tell them about the long line, how they must learn not to breathe until the cadence and how the third, fourth and fifth fingers must sing. They must lean towards their wrists, all the fragile bones moving together, their gestures, a language for the deaf and dumb.

I am lying in a Johns-Mansville insulated attic. The silence is absolute. Even the children, their breathing rapid as animals’, have fallen still. I see shapes in the aluminum foil. This morning there is an African man lying on his left arm. The right shoulder looms, cavernous, as in a Henry Moore sculpture. It is the thinness of those who have been forced not to grow. It is not a flabby thinness, or the thinness of the old. It is the thinness of bone.

November and driving the edge of a leaf. Suddenly I am in a huge wasteland. Outside the C-Bar-J Motel, six deer, thoroughly gutted, hang by their heels. I search the map for the schools, shown as dark squares with flags on top. There is a church. A dark square with a cross on top. Ten motels circle Rattlebone Lake.

“They are too poor here for fancy poetry,” Miss Collins says. And winter comes down. The ragged clouds. Snow.

Miss Collins was my first grade teacher. She was a spindly woman. Forever ill. Something bilious, we thought, given the grey, slightly jaundiced complexion. Each week she had someone perform for the class at the Red Cross Meeting.

“Ann played well this morning,” she wrote Mother. “The class especially liked ‘Witches’ Dance.’ However, Ann was sick. We gave her soda crackers but it didn’t seem to help. Therefore we have found it necessary to send her home with the school nurse. Perhaps she has been practising too hard. She continues to be unsatisfactory in Arithmetic.”
Numbers disturbed me. Undoing themselves, hanging there in the air or flowing into each other, giant amoebae ingesting my entire world, extending every part of themselves, then turning into letters, 3 becoming M, 2 . . .Z, and 10 . . .to. Upside down and sideways, floating there before me, then descending, spreading themselves across the page, random pieces of a giant puzzle.

At the Ten Spot Truck Stop, veal cutlets come with washed-out peas. I am given a real dish of lemon custard. No reason now not to make it through the storm. I am reminded of Amparo Iturbi. She came to town with the first snow. I can see her now. The long black dress. Mantilla. Circles under her eyes. In the dining room at the Crown Point Hotel she rapped on the table for service. I imagine the waitress swallowing her chewing gum. We were, after all, just a small mining town. Amparo floated on stage that night, circling and bowing, then sitting before the keys in long silence, her hands folded on her lap until she’d set the muscles in her jaw exactly right. She played de Falla’s “Ritual Fire Dance,’ on bone, curling her fingers with all the pressure placed on the first knuckle above the fingernail. It was the Spanish way.

Mother bought the de Falla the next day. She began to concentrate on muscle building. There had been moments when Amparo’s muscles bulged from wrist to elbow as she struck those great forttes. Lessons became exercises in weight lifting. Mother, slicing the air with her baton, raising her arm. . .count to ten. . .then dropping it. . .another count to ten. It was as bad as the motion machine. One day I slipped a disc. Mother was heartbroken; the doctor, amused, suggesting I try the controlled clarity of the youthful Mozart.

I have bought a blizzard candle and a sleeping bag for protection from the storm. I am told that if I stay in the car I’ll be found. In all this space there is nothing that would harm. I note the finely strung sound of the wind. It will be hours before it breaks.

I like it when I go into a motel and there are no pictures. Right now I am happy, the walls a stark white. Clinically sterile. No ugly
lampshades, flowered drapes. Just terry towels over the windows. I sit here counting the holes in the tiled ceiling, the million tiny dots a backwards running film, the children, pushing into the wind, biting their scarves, and Mr. Morgan, the club-footed principal, tapping his way home from school.

I'm on the worst highway in America. In twenty-five miles there are seventeen crosses leading to the Weatherford Funeral Home. I pull over to the side of the road for some coffee from my thermos. A black car stops beside me. The faces leer and one looks perilously like the devil. I wonder what I'm doing out in the dark. Perhaps it's a dream. At night, I wake in any number of places. I am at the Stardust Motel but it could be the Midtown or El Centro. I walk into the closet as I try to find the bathroom. I feel my way back to bed on my hands and knees. Any second I expect to fall down a long staircase. I am not managing the dark at all well.

For weeks I have not seen a single shape. I stare into the dark, waiting. Who's this in the mirror, the bird-claw hands, terrible beak? Why does she show herself, then disappear? I must loose her from the spine, the left knee. I sit hours in the tub. The waters of forgiveness.

I am standing in a phone booth just off the highway. I have come here with my blizzard candle. Speak a little louder, please. There seems to have been an avalanche. Yes, just yesterday I saw the ghost of myself banging her fists together. A grave development, the rhythm slowly metronomic, as when Father used to play "Air on a G String" by Bach.
Father was a magician. At the annual recital he performed for Mother's audience. He would come in like an orchestra conductor, waving his baton, causing things to disappear. There were only a few tricks. Mostly with money and cards. He tried to teach them to me but it was the fingerstretching rack again. In magic you need huge hands for hiding things. He wore a tuxedo, tails and bowtie. It was the only time of the year his sleeves were rolled down, the shirt collar starched and stiff cuffs with gold cuff-links. He never looked more handsome. He was my lover.

The storm has become worse, the edges of the road meeting at the center. I am in the middle of the ocean, or a desert, everything the wind ever lifted whirling about me. The land heaves and I feel myself pulled to the left, spinning backwards, then forwards and towards the right. The whole earth opens before me as I plunge towards its heart.

I have found shelter in a library. On the map it is shown simply as a dark square. My eyes burn. I would like to devour the books. I think of the desert man who ate the scrolls, and another, who, after he had been drinking nine days, began to speak. In the middle of the night, so as not to be alone, words for the dark.

I am travelling west now. I have put on glasses for snowblindness. There is a fire on the horizon. Something more than the sun, and it startles, as if from the center, there might be voices and singing. I would like to go closer but I'm afraid, the flames ominous against the snow.

Friday, and I have settled myself at the center of the world. I am at the Shanty Motel, in Havre, Montana. To the right of my cabin, a bar, lounge, cafe and pool table. To the left, Ginger's Hairport. Up the street, the Citizens' Bank, and a block from there, a church and the hospital. The hospital looms like a medieval monastery, its cross lighting the whole scene. All night the pipeliners have been coming and going, spilling out of the bar and roaring down the alley behind me. I am content, muttering alone here in the dark.
This morning the whole world shines. Sun on the frozen reservoir, the grain bins. That’s all. The sky and lines of the hills like Pacific waves or the patterns we see on a heart screen, the rise and fall of a good beat. This is a strong heart. No abnormal thickness or thinness along the wall, the blood running clear, running hard.
GIVING IN

Like a last look
a skull full of thorns
in the center of a meadow,
and the scratching of bird claws
covering the sockets with dust,
and the veiled woman
lifting the dark gauze to look:

Death takes the backroads,
the harvesters beside
the glinting arc of sickles,
the shortcuts off cliffs,
and the dreamer who jolts awake
to his fingers drumming
the dank sheets of a bed.

Like moving targets
the dead man down moves on
among us; out of the corners
of our eyes the shadowy motion.
Behind our backs, tapping to get in,
the moths return
to the light of our fires.

The dead give in to the living
by slow degrees, stubborn
to be born again of a dormant shape
born of the breather's hands.
After the grief of a darker night,
the mourners give in to living
and the rising bones reply.
FAMILY BUSK

I wish this stuff would catch
and cuss us out the way it used to
when we ripped up the blackberry
patch. It's too wet. The hay
on top is caked, half compost clogged
with steam, the smoke inside like
thick, curdled milk.

I wish these were the tangled
bedsprings of those briars we used
to burn; they coiled like whips,
their thorns the size of thumbnails;
when they clung, they could tear
a sweater up into loose string.

That stuff piled up almost too
fast for us—a dried rage.
When we lit the fuse on it, we had
to circle it with rakes, beat away
its heat, sneak in under to scuff out
the skirmishes it set. And there

it goes, all the times I banged
upstairs behind my brother, flung
him on the bed where he contracted,
shrunk his head like a turtle inside
the pillows, bared his arm; the years
I farmed a purple garden on it
with my fist. There go all
the bitter silences my father
kept behind closed doors, trying
to work; the times my mother valiantly
explained what made him tick. There
goes the core: that one, malicious,
carrot-colored tongue, lolling
out of control above our heads—it
spoke for us, it simplified everything
again.

More smoke blooms up, this warm
mist, it almost smothers us. My mother
bravely shovels some wet leaves, working
around the edges with the same deft
patience that she cooks a duck.
This stuff won’t burn, and, still,
she won’t let go of that stupid
rake she doesn’t need.
THE SONG OF THE ASSASSIN

The knife is a prayer
the flesh answers.

Kneel, an old woman
planting tulips:
I come to bless you.

The isolation
is so beautiful.

To live outside,
to be an alien
in this skin,

to be perfect
beyond your belief.

If there were some other
god I would know him.
OLD WOMAN IN THE DESERT

Her arms are dead rainbows
holding neither light
nor dreams. The sun
is no child of hers.
Her hands stiff as antlers,
her breasts dry washes.
Drunk, on your way home
from dying,
you would not sleep with her.
You would pass her by
like the dead mother of your dreams
who sulks in a stone chimney
somewhere in Oklahoma.
But you will remember her eyes.
Petrified fish in an ancient
ocean. You will carry them
in your pocket. An atonement.
A last rite.
LIKE A COILED WIRE

i am sitting in a hallway
ahead of me i feel the sound
of my legs brushing against
each other through the stiff
new pants

like a coiled wire i am walking
through friends and relatives

we each had to tell each other
that we didn’t belong
to be far away from home
away from the idea of what
we should be

in this hallway i woke up
into a fog wearing brightly
colored clothes and i found myself
again

even then i couldn’t believe
the presence of mountains

and when after three days
had gone into my life
i decided to walk
to the mountains

i kept walking over and coming
upon hills and rows and rows
of houses
and the white rocks on their roofs finally made me realize that the mountains were too far

i thought to myself
they're going to take that away from me too

trying to fill the empty spaces in my mind
i became the train i rode on

racing through dark tunnels gently asleep
my body still believing itself to be home because of the way the birds sing and that echo telling me this has to be home
Down the bar at Vic's Tap
a man sits loosely
filling his Mobil uniform
like a robe
every few minutes he motions
to the bartender and points
a finger thick as a young carrot
at his empty shot glass

Quietly I sip my beer
glance at his heavy face
the cheeks glazed with dirt
the three day growth of beard that looks
like it won't come off

After his third he turns to me
says "bet you can't drink em like this"
with his head he guides me back
to the glass and I watch him
grab a salt shaker in one hand
and clutch it like another thumb

as he dusts the clenched fist
of his other hand I notice
the dead skin on his knuckles
gleaming like fish scales
around his finger the thick circle
of gold crusted with grease

A huge tongue protrudes
from its border of lips he licks
the salt hard swallows
the brown liquid and grunts
when he turns again his eyes
wet and flecked with blood I smile
back at him in my dumb way
The next morning I am up early
in the cold finding the quilt
drawn to your curled body
like a child I dress in the dark
and leave you sleeping

It is October 1st and the first
real frost coats everything
I drive through
the low hills of southern Iowa
I can hear the corn dying
in their wilted sheaths
the sumac reclaiming its color
as sun breaks loose in the eastern sky

The first rays slanting west
strike me through the car’s window
like a sudden blow
already the cows are up
licking ice from the grain
in the creek bottoms it is still
dark the brush stands white
and rigid like frozen hair I remember
yours standing by Lolo Hot Springs
shivering in twenty below

I know by now you must be awake
drinking coffee by yourself sorry
you missed me leaving
and somewhere close he’s been up
hours his hands numb from the touch
of metal his terrific headache
fading in the fumes of gasoline

I come over a rise
through a grove of maple
hickory and elm turning orange with fall
it is nearly eight nearly Missouri
nearly another day
EAST-WEST MEETING

When John Haines kindly invited me to come to Missoula in April of this year to deliver the lead-off talk at a conference on the relation of the writer to his community, I accepted with several kinds of trepidation. One of them, which developed on the way from Boston, was a well-founded fear that the airline wouldn't get me there on time. (It almost didn't, thanks to the fact that our plane, loaded to the doors, got pinned down in Butte by a strong tailwind. When, after waiting a half hour, the pilot finally decided to risk a takeoff, we just did clear the last marking-strips on the runway. At that point I was wondering if the airline would get me there at all. An hour or so later, in Missoula, as I started my talk, the alarms were still going off in my nervous system, which probably made my opening remarks energetic if not particularly coherent.)

My main misgivings concerned the meeting itself. I had heard and read about the disagreeableness that often sets in when literary people get together. I had, in fact, seen much the same thing, although in colder form, at many scientific meetings. And as a scientific type myself, I wondered how I might be received, the sciences being even more suspect now than they were when C. P. Snow first wrote about the Two Cultures. Had I known, moreover, the remarkable variety of writers who would be coming, I'd have been uneasier still.

But for a miracle, it all worked out. From Ishmael Reed's witty fancies, Hjorstberg's incredibly fluent satire, or Paul Krassner's shticks, to the poetry readings by Tess Gallagher and Madeline DeFrees, or the readings by various regional novelists on the last night, there was a kind of coherence to the proceedings, and on the whole, great openness and good will. I doubt very much that things would have gone that way had the same people met back East. The genius of place is, I believe, a reality, and in this case may have made the difference.

The trouble with intellectuals on the East Coast is the obsession we have with never slipping up—never being caught in a naive thought or an emotion which might be considered silly or old hat. This is one reason, perhaps, aside from the cost of living, that younger writers
It was the opposite in my youth. One of the standing jokes at Ann Arbor, Roethke's alma mater, was that at commencement, there was a line of buses waiting outside to take the graduating class to New York. Manhattan was where it all was. For poets, that is still true. Even Boston is drained of them. And in proportion as New York has displaced Paris as the world capital for painting, painting itself has evaporated into modishness, a quirky sophistication that makes stripes the "in" thing one minute and splotches or who knows what, the vogue next.*

What we back here, New Yorkers in particular, do not realize is our naivete' in trying always to appear sophisticated. For one thing, if you live in a place like Manhattan, you almost automatically are sophisticated; for another, that may help you to get published, but may also ruin what real gifts you have. The reason is that sophistication is simply a better-educated form of what the man-in-the-street used to call savvy; it is knowingness, formularized knowledge. What makes it seem freer and more spontaneous than it really is is that part of the formula is to be cynical, to deal offhandedly with things that simpler people treat with respect.

Sophistication, one might say, is a specialty of insiders— is what men of the world agree goes without saying. And what goes without saying all too often goes without thinking. The new recruit is as apt to pick up his ideas by imitation, as by concluding for himself what he should doubt and deride in the world around him. He has some precedent in the fact that the modern sciences appear to present him, readymade, a variety of reasons for believing in next to nothing. And in that, of course, he is wrong.

For science, as scientists themselves insist, has nothing to tell us about ultimate meanings; it only tells us something about how things work. The fact that lovemaking depends upon endocrine secretions and "pleasure" centers in the brain as well as upon the more familiar external apparatus, has somehow become an excuse for demoting love to sex. And with that the intangible or purely psychic aspect of

* It is interesting that this movement appeared to begin in post WW II Paris with American expatriates such as Nikki Saint-Phalle.
the erotic—love as it began to exist in the days of the troubadours—is being talked out of existence again in this century. It is absurd that a slightly improved knowledge of physiology should have that effect.

But that is how sophistication works. It is the attitude of men who, before all else, never want to be caught making fools of themselves; and so naive are they in that particular form of vanity, that they will go to any lengths to protect it—will stunt their feelings and constrict their imaginations, cultivate what they consider rational prejudices and live lives of a most suffocating self-indulgence.

Much modern poetry, I think, suffers from this sort of urban closed-mindedness. What poet, for instance, has been struck by the strange marvels in the universe revealed by astronomy—by Cygnus X-1, the star being slowly swallowed up by its invisible companion, the Black Hole from which even light cannot escape?

We are surrounded, in short, by wonders, of a kind and on a scale beyond anything our forebears dreamt of, and yet make little use of them, the reason being that, transposed from science or philosophy into literature, skepticism has tended to become pure destructiveness. One can attribute this phenomenon, in part, to our ignorance of history. We seem unaware that the mania for sophistication, for knowing the very latest in what not to believe, is a recurrent social disorder, and most of the civilizations in which it reached the epidemic stage were made sterile by it. We commemorate that fact in a word—Alexandrianism—without apparently ever thinking out what it means. The Alexandrians were sophisticated; they played games—writing poems for instance in the shape of trees—the way Larry Rivers and Andy Warhol play art games, the way Gertrude Stein, the Great Mistress of Camp, played word games.

As the stepchild of skeptical materialism, the writer-sophisticate has two ways to go. He can become a camp tragedian à la Beckett or use the more straight approach of writers such as Susan Sontag. Beckett’s technique is a kind of double mockery. He mocks existence and at the same time (in plays like Waiting for Godot or Krapp’s Last Tape) baits his audience, by being deliberately maddeningly boring. (The Dadaists, of course, anticipated him in this. At their meetings in post-war I Paris, they used to stun their audiences with boredom by giving nonstop readings from old newspapers or from the Paris phonebook).

The more straight approach, typified by much of the writing in The
New York Review of Books, relies heavily on the doctrinaire use of Received Opinion, particularly as derived from Freud or Marx or that strangely illiberal body of ideas that has given liberalism its present bad name. To pick faults, to dogmatize, to display in depth the authorities one is familiar with, may make for dreary reading, but it protects one professionally. However dull and ugly one’s work, it still meets the main requirement; it isn’t naive.

In this accentuation of the negative the New York writer frequently includes himself. When Susan Sontag, in an interview with the Harvard University Gazette (April 19, 1975), said that “‘of art’s basic capital’. . .she works ‘with a fundamental cesspool of obsessions’ which she guessed every artist works with” I felt I couldn’t have put it better. If you unscramble the metaphor, it’s even orthodox Freud (“art’s basic capital” = “cesspool”; or art = money = shit).*

I was reminded of New York and Ms Sontag again this April when John Haines showed me some of the stunning photographs he had taken of the Alaskan landscape during his homesteading days up there. In her articles on photography in The New York Review, Ms S first classified the photographer as another “anal” type, who wanted to own the past by freezing it into pictures. The trade jargon reveals other unpleasant things about him too. He “shoots” his subjects and is also (have you guessed?) a Peeping Tom who gets his kicks by invading others’ privacy.

As an ex-New Yorker myself, always mindful of Received Opinion, however threadbare, I tried applying Ms Sontag’s ideas to John’s pictures. Was he really just spying on the mountains and the snow, or trying, by capturing them on film, to make them his own forever? Not that there aren’t photographers, probably, who do work that way. One thinks of urban photojournalists in particular. But is that what photography as an art boils down to—another “fundamental cesspool of obsessions”? Apart from the sublimation of essentially sordid

*Orthodox Freudianism equated money, the money-making type, with “anality”—i.e. the retention of feces. For the same reason very rich men tend to be collectors. A German slang expression, describing someone very rich, says “He shits gold”; and in the German folk-tale, the enchanted money or Devil’s Gold found in the woods turns to shit.
motives, is there no such thing as the aesthetic? Can we never simply love The Other or the world, each for its own sake, without strings?

That actually is the issue—the possibility of a love which has no ulterior motives. In my opinion that's what aesthetics is. The struggle of the artist is not to express his biases but to absorb and go beyond them—to achieve something like clear sight and through that, something like humanity—the forgotten Christian ideal of being which said: Understand the world for what it is, and love and forgive it nonetheless, and all will open unto you.

It is exactly that spirit of open imaginativeness that I feel is dead on the East Coast. We have killed it with Freud and ethology and our devouring success ethic. At the meeting in Missoula, that same spirit, although often inchoate and perhaps ashamed of itself, dreading to appear "naive", was nevertheless there, still alive. The audiences were eager to listen, forgiving of what they heard—not that forgiveness in the usual sense was often necessary—and the people on the platform, for all their diversity, seemed to reciprocate. Under other circumstances there might have been much backbiting among them. In this case, there appeared to be very little; we got along surprisingly well. The genius of place prevailed.

On the plane going home, talking with Tess Gallagher (who is herself a native of Seattle) I wondered if the West wasn't even yet the escape-valve and hope of the Union, a frontier now in another less material sense. I thought of the people I'd met, like Tess and Dan Tabish and Jim Welch, and found my habitual pessimism giving way to something else. I remembered how John Haines and Gala, one of his students, had come to see me off, so warmly—so unlike the way I had left dozens of scientific meetings in the past. And reluctantly, an ex-New Yorker still, I recognized the emotion I was feeling. It was—do I dare be that naive?—love.
AGAINST SENTIMENT
(for Jocelyn and C. Brown)

Don't fear the loss of houses
and furniture. A piano
is an old and awkward piece.
Set your mind on the slow curve
of the Lamoille, a river walk
on thin morning frost. Remember
the smell of the LaHouya farm, coffee
in your kitchen, mounds
of cucumber, the scent of apples
that near knocked you over.
Find your initials
on any bridge railing and walk
the woods in winter. Love someone new
in the still-warm imprint
of deer. And when you sleep, search out
the sheets' cold corners,
hunker down
into the night.
REVELATION
(for H.C.)

In a moment, you will be there, through the back pasture and over that last hill. He will wait for you on the front stoop, watch you as he calls his pet goose, breathes deep his Revelation tobacco. Then, after a moment, he will grasp the screen door handle, open it slow and deliberate as the packing of his pipe. He will offer you a chair, one next to the fire, the sharp crack of apple wood. And he will take your poems one by one, gather them like onions his wife braids by the shed. And in a moment, he will give you coffee, a warm slice of apple bread. You will know: There is nothing to fear from a man who drips butter, nothing of those quiet rages with drink, or hard times in Waterbury. Days aren't marked like lines on a quick diminishing bottle. Writing, he says, is just this cabin, more tobacco in your pipe.
FOR A NEWBORN CHILD WHO CRIES TOO MUCH
for Devin Charles Gallagher

For weeks you have delivered
your anger up to us, nonstop as an express,
until your mother cannot believe she brought
such an unwelcome guest into her house:
frightened, half-mad, wondering why,
of all babes on this earth, you chose
to be special in such a harrowing way.

Will there be no end? No one can imagine
your lungs holding out for another minute.
The doctor and his cronies have read and re-read
shelves of medical texts, and there is not one left
less dog-eared than the last book in the world.
They have X-rayed you more carefully than airport luggage,
and poured enough Milltown down you to calm the sea.

Psychologists have come, trooping by your crib
with pads and notebooks flipping
back and forth like uncertain tongues, and still
they cannot say what devils haunt you.

More desperate than cornered criminals,
your parents call in a minister. You greet him
with a voice worn so thin it cracks
and rasps like old trees in mild winds.
But the man of God has no more luck than science,
and baffled, angry, disposed to cry all night himself,
he leaves. Your mother and father
fall into silence, like the drowned.
Eventually your fame spreads: letters flow in like your tears. The world sends charms and spells, powerful potions and remedies for the damned: one a voodoo doll from Haiti, with instructions in a hand untranslatable for all the scrawl and symbols of it—yet clear the meaning of the chubby child, eyes closed, perfect in each detail, with real red hair and mouth sewn tightly shut.

But these fail too, and as you scream, I ask myself why entering this world has been so bad. Or was it the shock of leaving your last one? I read somewhere that babies who cry too much are trying to say the names they had in their former lives, and when someone says them, they will stop crying.

So I stand here, in a nursery lit only by the priest's thin candles, all other ears in this house well-cottoned three rooms from you, while I, a grown man, your uncle, am reading aloud from a book of all the names of men this past millennium, and as the century is closing its last unmystical pages, I am caught up in the rhythms of my whispered bass tones and of your screams: your mouth moving with mine, your breathing the same as mine, continually afraid that in your last life you never spoke this language—

until my voice trembles and rises, breaks into a chant like a Shaman, beginning to sing now, louder, higher, while the candles turn suddenly into torches that flicker and dance among the blue shadows:
and a procession of mourners
appears, moving by my strained, inhuman eyes
now fixed trancelike on your crib that has become
a grave, with the pale gray eyes of an old man
staring up at me, staring through me
into his own death, beyond death, the mouth open
as one who sees
all his acts in this world relived:

and like a projector run in reverse,
his life runs backwards through age after age,
his form continually changing,
shifting, becoming old, then young, over and over,
face after face looking through me, now living, now dead,

and even the mourners changing with the man,
their clothes becoming unstyled, out-of-style,
stranger and stranger, ancient as the earth,
until all of them turn into wraiths, into sad,
hooded faces, become transformed to savages,
hopping about old stones, receding farther
into the past, and deeper, as you, child, are deepening,
as you are changing with them, appearing girded
with cloth, then skins, and finally nothing at all—

the mourners dressed in nothing, the cave-lights
smouldering, sputtering, the chants of the elders
shifting farther back in their throats, falling away
like the cave walls, the lights strange—
nothing ever seen by man—
all receding until there is no face, no crib,
no troop of mourners—only an ape or toad or lizard
and then a shadow
that slithers back down some beach, a fish-god,
with three moons watching it, slipping into the surf,
back to its beginning and beyond. . .
I wake to my latest self,  
shaken out of a heavy trance by the hands 
of my brother, half-robed and frightened 
of his mad relative perched like a raven 
on the end of the crib and screeching at his babe, 
calling all the names of man down from the heavens— 
later said by the neighbors to be speaking 
unknown and unutterable tongues—

and his wife rushing in 
to snatch her boy up from the pit of the crib, 
who would have struck me dead there 
if she were not amazed 
at her child glancing curiously up at the shadow 
of the book crumbling to dust in my numb hands: 
the baby now finished crying for all the lives of man, 
wide awake, and as quiet as a smile.
TORNADO WATCH IN THE BERKSHIRES

I want to taste this storm or feel the air clear.
I listen to the forecast, lick
my finger to test the wind.

You're out there somewhere smack in the middle of it for a whole week.
And you're not alone, either,
in your cozy cabin.
You've taken no precautions:
her sandal still holds
the window open so;
this low pressure area has the two of you tied together in a cold sweat, too busy to send a postcard.

If the pressure plummets,
don't hope for the best—
come to the south-west corner of your life.
You will come home
if this is to be home;
once the saltcellar is overturned
the wind dies down
& you can't look back.
The Day Before the Rains
And Then Some

We wake.

Twelve hours later
the sky still looks the same,
only now
it's turned backwards,
over-exposed and red,
the sun
like a burned hand
dipped into its back pocket
looking for a billfold—

Tomorrow,
it will rain as predicted.

It is already raining
on towns
with strange names
hundreds of miles
to the west.
The rain is as delicate
as deer's breath
or it approaches in warm folds
like the scarves
of daughters
we have not fathered. . .

Everything in this life
becomes a search for milk.
The moon spreads gauze sheets
on windows closed
for evening
and steam lifts
from pavement
we have never seen,
like the loose sleeves
of Chinese dancers:

We know the chimneys
will collapse;
the undercover police
will toss off their disguises;
a plane will drop
into the lecture-hall
after brilliant maneuvers—

And rain ten days straight
must quit:

We have been sleeping on our hands.
We are closer
than we think,
closer than we would like to be,
without knowing,
where things seem to work
because of our ignorance,
like a slide
we have held up
to the light for a moment,
and seen through. . .
BY THE TEETH OF MY SKIN

The dog shakes and sneezes
for sharp joy of the air,
barks and that bark
strikes the hill like a hoof
leaving the moon’s faint print: O

to shake the skin
right off me! It is close
and smooth from doing all the things I do
and stiples at the merest nudge of cold,
drawing close to hide in stuff
white as a cabbage foot.

While blowing like a field in his fur
the dog snoozes or pounces on the light
or rolls and scatters himself among the leaves,
then yawns and takes the sun
upon a thousand points of fire,

while my blind skin
fugitive from a mine
and salt with the wisdom of the cave
tests the air with a rutabaga fear
of tusk and tooth:

We fit each other too well, my skin and I.
We are myself and so unlike the dog
I can’t leap out of it without a thought.
ALL THE KING'S HORSES

The wall goes all around our garden. Kleenex flowers quietly on the grass. It is Monday, a day content to be.

Unlike Sunday, when with nicker and crash squadrons of women men and children come to put us together again.

Sitting still we stare through the colored paper words of these damp philosophers, professors of the bored,

whose focus fails us until we climb the green oak tree where it bends to the top of the wall where we can just see

below the blood-flecked horses drag through the town something armless and headless bouncing up and down,

then look down on our garden as God made it the first day of the week with time folding green hands, waiting breathless for our shriek.
STANDING ALONE

The Goose Lady lived down the road and she was dying. No longer was her small acreage the scene for games and tricks when visitors came. Johan remembered those days, how at sunset he and his friends would walk down the road after he knew the Goose Lady was in her upstairs bedroom. How in unison they would scream from the ditch and watch the quick response from the house—her skinny face and neck appearing over the sill of the upstairs window at the same instant the heads and necks of a dozen geese appeared from the first-floor windows, all the heads coming up at once like two-story jacks-in-the-box. He remembered the lingering image of the geese heads bobbing as if they were set on springs, the Goose Lady peering from side to side, shaking her fist.

Things were different now. He had turned fourteen last spring and the Goose Lady was dying. No more tricks. His father had warned him, "The Goose Lady will not be around much longer." No doctors came to see her, but Johan didn't argue with his father: it was serious enough to hear the news, no sense talking about it. But when summer vacation came, he decided to watch death happen. See what it was. Find out why his father insisted that the Goose Lady not be bothered and why all the neighbors had begun to speak quietly of her, if at all. The new, strange respect.

Johan made his place in the ditch across from the Goose Lady's orchard. Wild barley, alfalfa, red clover, milkweeds. Smell of oats, sweet clover, wild roses, on the soft south wind coming in from the fields behind him. Meadowlark songs, meadowlarks answering each other across the fields. Small clouds of gnats hovering over the gravel road. And then, closer than he thought, the sounds of the Goose Lady's hands working. He leaned forward, looked through the blind of grass and honeysuckle. There she was—thirty feet away, bent over, teetering from the fulcrum of her hips, her knees unbent—a boomerang—hands busily sorting through the twigs, pebbles, leaves, on the orchard floor. Her long blue-gray skirt ruffling slightly in the breeze, her gray hair tied over her head, the green kerchief a tight band across her forehead and tied behind under the large bundle of
hair, the thin neck stretching down, the small, the very small, face
close to the ground, the pursed lips, sharp nose, the small eyes in
profile, glaring, the torso bobbing from the hips, the face almost
pecking the ground, the fingers working methodically as if they were
gathering a scattered string of precious beads from the earth.

Every day. As he had seen her before, as the whole neighborhood
had seen her before, from morning until evening, from early spring
until early winter. It was what the Goose Lady did. It was what she
had always done, what everyone would have seen her doing now, if
they had looked. The simple but frantic work of gathering anything
the small fingers could hold from the orchard floor, carrying the
debris in little bundles to the edge of the orchard, and dropping them
over the fence into the ditch. It was not so scary to watch at this close
range as Johan thought it would be. The world was singing around
her, the smell of fallen cherry blossoms was still in the air, the clouds
were slow, wide brush strokes, the sparrows ruffled and mated. From
the distant fields, a soft muffled rattling of machinery. Pungent root
and mulch smell near the ground. The steady dance of the hands.

Death, where is your sting.

Until he no longer believed what his father said, returning after a
week of clouds and rain, seeing more of the forceful earth life
blossoming everywhere—the small acreage a silent symphony of
verdant smells and colors, the earth rising under his knees where he
hid. Small fruit hung on the trees, thick, bending the boughs toward
the earth. Perhaps what the Goose Lady did was good for the soil.
Her hands spoke to the roots. She was working steadily, between the
trees, under them. And to his right, back farther from the road, the
old house looked peaceful and good, the faded wood still dark from
the rains, the ornate upstairs gables sharp and steeple-like against the
still-clouded sky, and the geese waddling in a flock near the house, a
slow, mannered, contentment, stark white in spite of the mud. He
lifted the view into his mind like a picture, stood back, and saw that it
was good. Looking again at the Goose Lady, he saw her hands were
dark with wet earth. Her dress was green. Her kerchief was blue.
Little showers of debris fell over the fence. Johan saw progress on the
orchard floor: the earth was cleaner. His own legs grew numb beneath
him. He touched them, found them senseless, but the trousers were
wet, like the grass. He touched the grass, then his legs. It was as if he
had become part of the earth. He waited for the tingling to start, the
ants inside his legs as the feeling returned, and he started crawling through the ditch toward his home, almost laughing at the strange sensation that followed him in his thighs.

That night he thought of Marie. A classmate. From the door on his father's milkbarn he could see the yardlight of the farm where she lived, a mile down the road past a neighbor's farm, past the Goose Lady's acreage. He wanted to tell her the Goose Lady was not dying. Marie liked important news. He wanted to tell her there would be cherries and apples to filch in a few months. Marie would have a plan. And he wanted to make a sack swing with a thirty foot rope tied to the extending barnpeak rafter and to give her a push on it. The summer was still young, everything was possible.

But when the hot weather came in July, he returned to that other dream, a mission he could not forget. And in the heat of that clear day he found the sudden change—the cherry and apple trees blighted at the top, the leaves curling and brown, an odor of goose dung thick in the air. The Goose Lady stood sixty yards away, her geese around her gaggling and beating their wings, small goose feathers and down mushrooming around them. He remembered the voices of the oats-harvesting crew who had been working in his father's fields for the past several days. The repeated words of 'price' and 'yield,' the scorn for enemy 'corporation,' the smiles for friend 'progress.' The Goose Lady waved her arms like an old wooden windmill. She was not enough today, Johan knew—a painful realization. The geese were thinner than last month, standing around hungry and thirsty. She pumped water, she threw crumbs. Somewhere beyond them was a world Johan had only begun to know and one which the Goose Lady had never seen, where cattle came running not to the sound of a voice but the sound of the electric motor auguring feed through their trough. With his own eyes Johan had seen a sow on a cold night turn on the switch for the heat lamp with her snout. While the Goose Lady talked to the geese, speaking in the same voice as theirs. It squeaked, and they gaggled. The hungry geese looked up and the empty hands waved. There was death here after all.

And after death, what then? Who would dare eat these apples? these plums? these cherries? And who would dare touch her, carry the body from the upstairs? Johan imagined that afterwards the house would be burned like the one-room school house when it closed. The house burned, the thin geese slaughtered, and the orchard leveled.
Next year the Goose Lady's home would be cornfields. How short, how untrue, last month's beauty had been.

A hand brushed Johan's sleeve. When he looked up, the same hand was brushing dark bangs from a lovely face. Marie. She sat on her knees beside him, staring at him.

“What are you doing?”

Marie had changed since he last saw her stepping off the bus. The eyes were larger than before and didn't flit shyly from side to side, the eyes were larger and more piercing, fixed and deep, looking directly into his. Johan felt a blush rise on his neck. He looked down, only to see Marie's breasts bulging under her blue work shirt, not tiny and pointed as they were last spring, but fuller, round breasts.

“I've been watching her.” He nodded toward the Goose Lady. Marie looked.

“Why? Can't steal those apples yet—they're too little.” Again her eyes met his directly.

“Because she's dying.”

Marie looked. The Goose Lady had moved into the orchard. The geese were standing near the water troughs staring after her as if dumbfounded, betrayed. She bent over, began working, her fingers moving quickly as a pianist's.

“No she isn't,” said Marie. “She's always like that.”

“No, really. She's dying. You can see it.”

“I don't believe it.” She started chewing her gum, looking at Johan askance, as if she were questioning more than his credibility. He looked again at her, trying to see her whole body without moving his eyes, without letting her know that he was staring. The change scared him. The front shirt-tails of her blue work shirt were tied in front. Her jeans were tight and low, leaving a large span of tanned midrif between the jeans and shirt. The hands, the fingers, were longer and more slender. But mostly the face, the large eyes, and the cheeks which were no longer round and glowing but hollowed just below the cheek-bones.

“I thought I'd see more of you this summer,” she said. “Why don't you ever come to the bridge? There's a nest of little swallows under the bridge. I've been watching them all summer. They're almost ready to fly.”

“Well, I've been watching the Goose Lady.” His voice was firm, he tried not to lose Marie, looking, focusing his attention once more on
the Goose Lady. “Death is terrible.” Marie tensed and looked again at the old woman, then again at Johan. Her jaw froze. She believed. Speaking softly, as if she were rescuing him from the horror, she said, “Come with me.”

Johan followed, crawling out of view and walking down the road to the bridge half way between their fathers’ farms. They went under the bridge where only a small stream trickled through the wide creek bed. She showed him the bridge piling where the young swallows were nesting. Four of them, their eyes staring out over the edge of the nest. They looked like a covey of little men with black helmets. When he approached, the small pointed wings spread over the edge of the nest, a gesture that was almost flight. A full-grown swallow swept down from one side of the bridge, made one threatening weave in his direction, and continued on out the other side of the bridge and disappeared.

“That’s the Mother,” said Marie. “She knows I won’t hurt them, but she doesn’t trust you yet.” She put a finger into Johan’s ribs, emphasizing the you.

“I’m gonna eat ’um,” said Johan, smirking.

“Big meany.” She tickled him with five fingers. They laughed.

“Watch it. I’ll throw you in the crick.”

“Oh yeah?” She tickled him with both hands. Johan grabbed her shoulders, but she continued to tickle him. They squirmed, trying to get position on each other. When she stepped back to maintain her balance, one foot slipped into the creek. She started to fall, and pulled him with her. Together into the creek. A free-for-all of mud and water, splashing, constant giggling, and suddenly they were sitting across from each other in the shallow creek, Marie’s blue work shirt unbuttoned and open with one breast fully exposed.

Johan felt the chill. It was as if he had broken a fragile and precious trust. “Marie, I’m sorry.” She was leaning back with both hands wrist-deep in mud. The playful smile had turned into a tight grimace.

“You son of a bitch.” It was almost a whisper but had the intensity of a low snarl from a trapped beast. She leaned to one side, trying to pull a hand free from the mud. The breast swayed. The anger grew. Then desperation. She lunged from side to side, her hands still stuck in the mud wrist-deep. Johan looked away.

“Don’t be mad, Marie. Please don’t be mad. I didn’t mean it.”

Marie was breathing long and deep, and then the crying began,
long agonized wailing. She hung her head down, trying to conceal the breast with her hair.

Johan looked in both directions. Nothing. Fields. Cows and fields. He turned towards her, stood over her. "Please, don't, Marie. Please don't cry." The muscles in his own throat released, and he was crying too. It was easier to move now: he stooped down and lifted her under her arms. The hands came free like little suction cups and she was standing, both breasts exposed now, wet, beautifully white. Her hands were covered with mud and she held them away from her body. He pulled her to him, held her tightly. They began to breathe more easily, evenly, interrupted only by an occasional quick hiccough.

"Don't tell anyone, Johan. Please don't tell."

He held her tighter. "I won't, Marie. I won't tell anybody."

"I feel so ashamed of myself."

"Marie, don't be ashamed to me. Don't ever be ashamed to me."

He released his arms and held her shoulders. He looked at her breasts. She watched his face. He touched a breast with his hand. He put a palm over it. He held it until his hand grew warm. They kissed. They looked into each other's eyes, and Johan felt something he had never felt before, in his chest, in his stomach. Everywhere.

Marie pulled back. "Johan?"

He looked around quickly.

"Look at us. We'd better get cleaned up."

They began the task together, standing beside each other in the creek, washing their hands and faces, rubbing dirt from each other's clothing with handkerchiefs.

"We could always tell our folks we were making mud pies together," said Johan. They laughed. Immediately, it was hysterical laughter. They embraced. They kissed again. Johan put his hands under Marie's shirt and held her breasts. He wanted to say "good growing season." He didn't.

"Do you think it's all right?" he asked. "I mean, do you think we can still be friends?"

Marie seemed to understand why he asked the question. "Let's come back here after supper and talk," she said.

"That's a good idea." He took her hand and kissed her forehead. Marie left from one side of the bridge, Johan from the other.

After a few steps he looked back, saw Marie walking lightly in the opposite direction, the sharp orbs of her buttocks firm under the
jeans, the long hair flowing behind her, her arms swinging freely. He thought of her crying, the helpless and awkward position, the shame written on her face. It hurt to think of it—that such beauty could be brought to such quick shame and humiliation, her lovely manner broken in one painful instant. Instead, he would remember this, what he saw now, and the laughter, the promises, the embrace.

Walking back past the Goose Lady’s house, Johan stopped for a second time that afternoon to watch her. It was like walking back into a fire-parched forest after touching the first fruit of the first tree of Eden. He thought it would be different returning to the Goose Lady’s place, that the sweetness of Marie would be here too, that it would be everywhere for the rest of his life. He sat down in what had become his regular hiding place, an oval of pressed grass, and did not look at the Goose Lady. He touched his face, he reached under his shirt, touched his nipples lightly and imagined the softness of Marie. He rubbed his nipples and it felt good. He rubbed his own thighs and imagined Marie. He put his moist sweating arm to his lips and kissed it lovingly. He lay rolled up, arms across his ribs, embracing himself. It was as if Marie were there with him, within him, inside him, her love in his lips kissing him as he kissed himself. He felt the young woman’s desire in his breasts, a desire to please Johan with them, and to be given pleasure by Johan. He rubbed his breasts, her breasts, with both hands. He felt the pain in his thighs, Marie’s thighs, opening for him, Marie for Johan, and the desire which was Johan’s, which was Marie’s.

Nearby, he heard a rustling, a scratching on the orchard floor. He looked, saw the nibbling frail hands of the Goose Lady, a few yards away, through the huckleberries. There was death in the dry wind, in the heat waves shimmering over the orchard, in the motionless forms of the geese near the house with their heads under their wings, in the house itself, its gray faded siding, the dirty scuff marks of the geese on the doors. Overhead, he heard a jagged caw—a blue jay in the top of a withering cherry tree pecking hard, all muscle, devouring, halving the cherries in one motion, and closer, a few feet from him, he saw only the small hands of the Goose Lady and the cuffs of a gray soiled dress through the thick bushes. It was as if these were all that were left of her body, hands that would forever roam the orchard, scratching, like self-propelled cultivator blades. On his arm he could feel his spittle drying, a reminder of Marie’s love still close. At once there was the
sweetness of Marie and the cold presence of the Goose Lady all around him. Her hands, his hands, Marie's hands. Then it was only the Goose Lady. Two handfuls of garden debris spilled over the fence near his face, the small pieces of twigs, feathers, and leaves suspended in the tall grass like a shattered nest, and, just above the debris, the gray uncombed hair of the Goose Lady, and below the hair, through the small honeysuckle leaves, her shining piercing eyes looking directly into his.

The face was gentle, softness around the intense eyes. Her mouth opened in surprise shaping a small o, the voice emitted a small "oh." She turned, walked away. Johan stood up, without thinking shouted, "Goose Lady!" She stooped down where she had been working. "Goose Lady!" he yelled. He ran up the side of the ditch, through the honeysuckles, pulled himself over the fence. "Goose Lady!" He was in her orchard, his feet on the ground that she had been tidying for years. In the orchard that was dying, the orchard where she was dying. "Goose Lady!" He tapped her on the back. Surprised, she stood up. She couldn't hear me, he thought. She is deaf. Like her trees, she is dying at the top first. Johan felt that he was standing alone, though the Goose Lady was only a few feet from him, facing him, and she too seemed to be alone, her arms akimbo, her head cocked toward him as if she were trying to share just a bit of this voice from a different world. A strange, bewildered look on her face: as if she had never seen anyone standing in her orchard before. And then she spoke in a high, kind voice: "Hello, young man." She twisted her lips as she spoke, exposing her gums, an awkward movement, as if she were using a part of her body that did not often function.

There was a long pause. It felt warmer and quieter here among the dying trees, quieter and warmer than in the ditch. Death's odor was everywhere—in the strong smell of goose dung, in the rotting plums; everywhere there was the smell of an empty room that had been closed long to fresh air. Johan leaned close. "Do you like it here?"

"I do not hear well." She leaned towards him. From her mouth came the smell of wet wallpaper. Her face, now close, was dark complexioned with darker, almost wine-colored spots on it. Deeply wrinkled, not in straight lines but in strange patterns with oddly shaped triangular and rectangular islands of flesh within the boundaries of wrinkles. Bobby pins over her forehead angled up and under the blue kerchief. Everything about her face was small, closely
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knit, yet ageless, polished, like granite. Even the wrinkles seemed sculpted. Except for the flesh around her eyes, the gray, piercing eyes. There were no eyelashes and the eyes met his from little chambers of soft flesh.

Johan pointed. "I live over there!"

The Goose Lady looked. Nodded. She held her hands folded on her stomach, politely. It all seemed all right to Johan—the Goose Lady, the fact that he had come here. Just another person who had things to do, that's what she was. Johan looked down and saw the orchard as she saw it. The infinite number of little pock marks her fingers had left on the soil, the little bits of leaves, the seeds, the small glittering grains of sand.

"Would you like some help?" he shouted.

The Goose Lady looked puzzled, as if she had not heard, or as if he had asked the important question.

"When you have been there three times, the trees will listen."

Johan looked at the trees. Their leaves were still. The rotting fruit was still. From the doorway of the house, the geese stood watching them, frozen in observation. Johan's shoulders tightened.

"In a good year," she continued, her small voice rising in pitch, "there will be seven or eight." She lifted a finger as if emphasizing a truth. The forefinger did not straighten—a small hook. Then she fidgeted nervously. She looked down, as if she were unsure of her statement. "Better fix things up. More every time. They'll get in the way of the best of them." She shook her head as if it were a pitiful shame. "You can't get rich that way." She shook her head again, more vigorously than before. "Sixty of them. And Herb got hailed out in the lower forty last year."

Johan stooped down and started picking up the smallest grains of sand he could see, picking them up under his fingernails. The Goose Lady stooped down too, began working beside him, very fast, as if demonstrating how it was done. He walked with her to the fence with his smaller handfuls. She threw hers over, he his. He pointed toward home. She smiled. He climbed the fence. She waved good bye, he waved.

Later, under the bridge, Johan sat alone waiting, wishing the moon were less bright, wondering what he would say to Marie. Crazy and deaf. The Goose Lady was crazy and deaf, what his father must have known. Or would Marie rather not hear? Above him the dark bulge
of the mother swallow, almost teetering on top of her young, the water trickling at his feet, the smell of dew on oats stubble in the air, the undulating and continuous sounds of the crickets. Then she was beside him, a smell of perfume, a very sweet perfume.

"Do your folks know you’re out?"

"No," said Johan. "Do yours?"

"No."

They sat beside each other, not touching.

"It’s kind of scary out here," said Johan. Marie turned towards him, laughed a short nervous laugh. There was sweetness on her breath too. Butterscotch.

"You’re supposed to be a man."

They sat silently, looking at the water. Their tracks were still in the mud.

"I’ve been thinking about you," said Johan. "It’s hard to talk after you’ve been thinking about somebody. It’s so easy when you’re thinking about somebody."

"Do you want me to go away so you can think about me?"

"Oh, no. No, don’t go away. Let’s talk."

"Okay."

They sat quietly again. The creek trickled by.

"I milked all the cows alone tonight," said Johan.

"How many?"

"Nine."

"I gathered all the eggs," said Marie.

"Ever wish you lived in town?"

"Sometimes."

They sat, motionless. The water said ‘galloup.’

"What was that?"

"Just a clod falling off the bank, scaredie-cat," said Marie. They looked upstream. The water kept coming.

"Sometimes I wish I did. Not now."

"Not now what?" said Johan.

"Sometimes I wish I lived in town, but not now."

"Why not?"

"Because then I wouldn’t be here talking with you."

"Oh." Johan shifted his weight, nearly facing her. "I wouldn’t want to live in town either. I like being here with you. Town kids don’t have anywhere to go and talk."
She breathed in his face again. She was all sweetness. She had changed her shirt since earlier in the day. It was a blouse now, a light pink blouse. A shiny material, like silk. And she had on a skirt, naked knees just a few inches from his. Her shoes were different too—white tennies. Johan wanted to touch her. He couldn’t. She must have thought about everything that happened. Now she would say, “No, don’t. Not this again.” It would be terrible. He would walk away embarrassed and never be able to talk to her again.

“Let’s go for a walk,” said Marie.

“Okay.”

They started walking along the creek, into a pasture. Holstein cows lay like large rocks in the distance. The moon was still bright, but a mist was starting to rise from the creek. Their shoulders touched as they walked, and she took his hand. Immediately, they turned and walked back to the bridge. They sat again, holding hands.

A car approached on the gravel road. “Listen!” They sat, frozen. The rumble like logs rolling overhead. They looked up. It continued on, sand clicking under its fenders. They sighed.

“Look—the swallows didn’t even scare,” said Marie.

“Of course not. I ate ’um.”

“Johan!” Marie shrieked, laughing. “You big meany!” She tickled him. He giggled helplessly, grabbing at her, pulling her to him. She threw her arms around him.

“Not the crick, Johan!”

“No, not the crick.”

“I have a blanket right out there,” Marie said, pointing.

“What? How did you get it out of the house?”

“It’s okay.” She ran to get it. They each held two corners and spread it on the dry dirt beside the creek.

“This is nice,” said Johan, rubbing the blanket with his hands.

“Yeah, it’s a quilt my grandmother made.”

“Oh,” Johan sighed, lying down and stretching his arms out.

“Hmm, that looks good.” Marie lay down beside him, her head resting on his shoulder.

The mist billowed from the creek. It was as if the earth were breathing, its visible white breath becoming a cloud into which they floated. The creek flowed by, its sound next to them. Until its sound was in the center of their heads, its direction unclear, and their hands moved without plan, without forethought, discovering, the mind no
more than a question, imagining what was under the moist clothing, the clothing loosening, the cool flesh on flesh, the flesh warming to the touch of another's, the edges of all things blurring, neither knowing where the earth began under them, nor the mist around them.

And that other presence hovering for a moment in the mist, disappearing, then reappearing as if the moon had found its way into the mist and lit for a moment the small human figure which stepped toward them, stopped, and stepped back into the dense cloud.

"Marie . . ." a hoarse whisper. "Look."

They stared, seeing the same figure, stationary, then moving, the color of the earth, a rock in the mist, a faint shuffling sound.

"Get your clothes! Get them! She can't hear us!"

"Is it the Goose Lady?"

"Yes! Yes! She's crazy!"

It was everyone for himself, Johan scrambling for his clothing, Marie for hers, Marie rolling the quilt on her arm, each scrambling up the bank to the road, saying nothing, asking nothing, running from each other, towards their homes. Johan watched the ditches for the Goose Lady, glanced up at her bedroom window as he ran past her acreage, imagining that somehow she had gotten home before him.

Later, he did not know how much later, though he had not slept, Johan heard sirens, heard his parents downstairs scrambling from bed, got up himself, slipped on his clothing which were still moist beside the bed. And through his bedroom window he saw the flames.

The flashing lights of the fire trucks, the headlights of scores of cars following, yardlights on farms across the flat lands blinking on, the whole neighborhood awakening, responding to the night excitement. The event! The event! The flames like a beacon. Hearts leaping everywhere.

The building was a hog barn on a neighbor's farm, adjacent to the Goose Lady's acreage, set far back from the road. Johan heard his parents leave by car. He followed, running. The fire had eaten a hole through the roof and the flames shot up into the night sky like a torch, not eating now from the the edges of the gaping hole but feeding on the straw in the mow. The fire was the sound of a rushing wind, but as Johan came closer he heard shouts of firemen and farmers and the din of trapped animals squealing, a sustained and horrible scream that was almost human.
Cars were parked on the roadway, on the neighbor's lawn. Cars with loud mufflers came skidding to a stop on the gravel road. Men, women, children, some half dressed, tying their shirts as they came. Teen-age boys, old men carrying small fire extinguishers. All their faces were excited, joyous, as if they had come to a celebration. Until they were close enough to hear the animals. Some turned immediately and left, not wanting to see the outcome.

The attention of the firemen focused on the animals, the unison sounds of bedlam, punctuated now and then by a suddenly higher squeal that rose over the others as one was trampled or caught directly in the flames. Finally, a plan was put into action. Two firemen ran toward the building with axes, their bodies engulfed in a misting blast of water. They swung madly at the siding of the building at a corner where the animals seemed to be huddled. They ran back for air and relief from the heat, then ran in again, swinging. The wood split, a hole, a pig snout, and the animals came streaming out. Some fell and died as they reached freedom. All were dark with smoke and scorch marks. Firemen turned the water on them as they emerged. Their flesh sizzled when the water touched it. The air filled with the stench of burning flesh, a horrible pungent smell that clung like tear gas in their nasal cavities. A woman braced herself against a car and vomited on the ground. Everyone held his nose. Gagging passed through the crowd. Then a large pig emerged totally covered with fire, squealing, spinning like a rodeo bronco, then running headlong and blindly into the crowd. Firemen tried to follow the animal with hoses, lost it in the crowd—the crowd scrambling, leaping on cars, screaming in fear of the maniacal torch of flesh that seemed to pursue each of them. Men beat at it with their jackets as it passed. There was a shotgun blast, another, and the animal lay dead between the cars. The old men were there with their fire extinguishers putting out the corpse.

Johan stumbled onto the road, his hand over his nose. He started toward home, but Marie's voice stopped him. "Johan!" She was dressed in her skirt and blouse, horror in her eyes. They met, speechless for a moment, and walked away from the flames.

"Johan, I'm so scared, I'm so scared."
"It's all over."
"What, Johan? What's all over?"
"Everything that was happening. Everything."
They stood tense, questions swarming in their minds, questions like flames that burned without consuming, that began nowhere and reached nowhere, questions that hovered like the beginning of eternal torment, flames falling down around them. Throats aching with nothing to say, they stood next to each other, staring down.

“She’s crazy.” Johan’s voice cracked.

“You don’t think—”

“I don’t know. I don’t even know if we saw her by the bridge. It was misty. It’s all crazy.”

“I’ve never been so scared.”

“She’s so crazy, maybe she started the fire. Maybe she’s still in it.”

“No, don’t. We don’t know. Maybe an electric short. Or combustion of new hay. That happens. And maybe we didn’t see her.”

Johan breathed heavily, fighting his sobs. Marie responded with new strength. “She can’t be that crazy. And why would she want to do that to us? It’s not our barn. And we didn’t do anything anyhow.”

“I don’t want to do anything again.” He began sobbing. His voice was tight, broken, his throat muscles sore from having cried earlier that day. “I’m not going to do—to do anything again. Everything’s terrible. Everything’s dying. Did you see those pigs? They were burning alive. Stupid pigs sleeping in their own shit and all of a sudden they wake up burning to death. What if that had been a house? We could have burned to death. Maybe she’s burning everything down. Kill everything before she dies. Get everybody else first.”

“Don’t, Johan. Don’t. We don’t know.”

They both saw it—movement in the Goose Lady’s orchard, a sweeping movement like a curtain, then clearer—the long skirt ruffling beneath the trees, and the whole figure emerged, standing, staring in the direction of the fire.

“Johan, Let’s run!”

“No. No.” He took her hand, tugged toward the Goose Lady.

“No. Please. I can’t go near her.”

“We’ve got to.” His voice was strong again. “We’ve got to talk to her. We’ve got to know.” He started toward her. Numb, Marie followed. They walked toward her where she stood alone and motionless near the fence. But suddenly she knelt down on all fours and disappeared in the dark shadows near the fence, and what rose all around her like white skeletal arms were the sleek necks of the geese,
dozens of necks close around her, their napes reflecting in the light of the fire like fists. Johan and Marie stopped, for they knew that if they had gone closer the geese would have attacked. The head of the Goose Lady rose to the level of the geese. She stared at them. Johan reached for Marie’s hand, felt his fear pass into her. The fire behind them was like hideous laughter. Before them the geese necks were steel and savage instruments of death, the Goose Lady herself but one of many demons. They let go of each other’s hands, started walking away from the Goose Lady, away from the fire, away from each other.
GREEN PIANO

Her hands on the green piano
were sudden and sharp, thin bones
of a bird treading the keys.

And the tune they plucked
came through a throat of wires,
like a wind in bare trees.

She searched the melody harsher
and deeper, hunting downward
among slashes of sunlight,
furrows stricken with shadow,
her fingernails stabbing the earth.

Ponderous and slow, the ivory
and black tongues of an elephant. . .

And her music soared, scale
upon scale, into a dazzling cloud,
a high and furious clapping that broke,

crashed as thunder, and stopped
in a waste of echoing rock.
Disappearance begins with you,  
always ready to turn,  
seeking a change,  
a mask, a face not your own...  
a hollow filled with roots  
and angry sighs.  

You leave at an inner distance  
a shadow, or the shell  
of a shadow,  
standing, sleeping beside me.  

All the landmarks drained  
by the wind of your passing—  
fields and rivers, streets  
I do not know, your name itself...  

Your face a tunnel of lights  
which I no longer see.
ALL I HAVE NOT REQUIRED

It's true, this is the kind of world where anyone's dog could bite you. I knew a dog like that once. He refused to wag, though it was painful at first to live without signs of recognition.

He made up for it barking long into the night at fenceposts, at stars falling without his permission into distant fields. He could not hear himself when the night flared over the footsteps of the lone prowler.

His doggy heart swelled, cankerous, in his silky breast. He found himself on the street with an inexplicable desire.

There you have it, a seeming explanation for the dog still attached to my ankle. I've grown used to it, moving this way, dragging it now with a certain affection over the cobbles, over these words daring you to mention it.

I know the operation you're thinking of, the one where I give up part of my leg and go on with a slight impairment.
I could stop telling this story,  
invent a wound  
so terrible, so beneficial  
you would spend the rest of your life  
helping me get over it.

SHELTER

You would not turn back  
once that meadow had entered  
like a face with nowhere left  
to go. We found you that day  
stumbling in the hedge. The gun  
shattered again the plaster, a sky  
he proved would fall.

You thought his head was blasted  
on the porch. A cloud  
hung in your arms  
for days, his corpse  
rattling the bushes, your:  
“Why won’t he come in?”

Those nights our welcome  
was unpitying, clean sheets,  
whispers when we thought you slept.  
“These angels,” you said once,  
your hand shadowed in the car lights  
on the wall. “They always  
want something back.”
LOVE STORY

"The waterfall does not marry the wolf."

Indian Legend

Her hair has turned
to water. Kept or gone to
she might empty with the air, with
the mountain, its blood, its separations
carried into hiding. What could she wear out
besides a life?

The sides of arrows or ribs broken
across the woodsman’s horse
meant what wasn’t understood could still be
significant, caves not emptied
by conclusions nor dread
of the mountain, the wolf
lingering in the knot of pines. His
heart of straw, his sheep’s
clothing wrapped around him to fail
and charm in failing that disguise.

Even the mountain owes stillness
to the sky. So the ribs
are to the blood, and the heavy flesh
of her side to each caress.
The sound of water
in one place. “Let me. Let me.”

Already the wings ruffling his lips.
THE FIRE

We sat by a house on fire. I was sitting, was with you. You, stopped by this fire as a woman stops by a mirror to step in. You stepped in. The fire looked out of you. I think it had a face like yours, the one so full of remorse. What was it I was saying to you? I was sitting with you and the fire moved toward us in little gasps and barks.

Your upper arm, white as shark's belly. Dancers broke and gathered in the round of it. An animal glow in the nest of your hair. Again to be coming back from the remembered first light in ordinary clothes into the flesh of the human day.
THE DOG

This dog which walks beside me
or seems to
and which seems barely constrained
by the chain
and which is indeed barely constrained
and which perhaps is not at all led by me
but which is leading me instead
stopping here to sniff a flower
stopping there to paw the ground
I have named My Life
or the life which I wish I had lived

having been born as usual
with little energy
and only the accustomed hungers
and who would have settled for anything
and indeed for many years has done exactly that
but who secretly craved
the great lunge of flesh
the morning of appetite
which never subsides

has poetically or logically
acquired this vastest beast
who walks beside me now
or seems to
placing one then two gentle paws down
but who seems always too on the verge
of breaking free
tearing off through the hedge
or up the hillside where the fragile children
play at their marbles and kites
and who at night
halfway into your dreams
you have heard howling at some moon.
Terrible, terrible,
you mutter,
and try to walk away,
as I have tried.
reviews
SOME POETRY FROM THE SMALL PRESSSES

Editors Note: We hope this Small Press review section will be a regular feature from now on. So far the publishers have responded very well and we apologize for not being able to comment on all the books received. If the overall tone of the section seems unusually favorable, well... We confess. This is as much to promote the little guys as anything else. If we don't like it, we won't tell you about it. PATRONIZE THE SMALL PRESSSES! Since many of them are doing such fine work, you'll be giving yourself a gift and giving the guys at Atheneum a raspberry.

R.W.

LOONY
William Kloefkorn
Apple
Box 2271
Springfield, Illinois 62705, $2.95

This is a book-length poem. Sixty-five sections, monologues, soliloquies and beautiful passages from the life of loony, the village idiot. He is, of course, something of an outcast, though like all such local characters, he is looked upon by the townspeople as community property.

...no respectable
God-fearing Nebraska town,
without a fight,
lets its loony die.

(11)
Still, he is different. Where the “normal” children are cruel and teasing, loony is genuinely gay and good-natured. Where the majority of the adults are obtuse and narrow, loony possesses a simple, lovely wisdom: the wisdom of the heart, of innocence and naivete.

Usually loony’s language is our language, a diction only slightly different from Lloyd Fetrow’s or the Chevy dealer’s or any of the other townsfolk. But William Kloefkorn’s power is subtle, and by a single word or phrase or sentence, each section becomes loony’s exclusively. Every poem/section—the whole book—turns on the quiet introduction of loony’s point of view. He speaks for 16 lines or so of the Santa Fe train, then, in closing the section, says:

If I move just one step closer
I can smell the wheels,
O bigger than the biggest boy in town,
and maybe gentler.

So, turn by turn, on every page, we discover loony, his life and most importantly, his relationship to his fellow men.

There are lines and phrases in the book that seem bothersome at first. Some are simply trite and others smack of schmaltz. But it is not so much Kloefkorn speaking as it is the village idiot, and that perfect innocence comes back and allows lines like “some sweet starry night” or, when talking to a dog, “O loyal little friend.” Sometimes a section will even grow from a cliche. loony says: “I know what I know” or “(I) wasn’t born yesterday.” Late in the poem he says:

Mr. Terrell says that sometimes he thinks
everybody in the world
has at least one screw loose,
except me and thee.
And sometimes, Mr. Terrell says,
he wonders about thee.

Language is fresh for loony. And that outlook is infectious. One passes right over the cliches without recognizing them, for the next line is often perfect: ‘I can feel their handholds,/bruises thick as thumbs.” Or “. . .the night is sweet as malt/upon the tongue.” Or, describing Bert the mechanic at work:
And Bert not far away
his head and chest cut off
inside the open catfish mouth
of a Ford or a Mercury.

(14)

There is no way to give a sense of loony in a review, except perhaps to reprint a whole section. Even then, you see only one sixty-fifth of a poem. And finally, of those sixty-five sections, I have at least 58 favorites. Below is section 13. In it, there is the actual situation of the poem/section; there is, in front of that like a scrim sheet or a gauze, loony’s retelling of the action, his reality; there is the relationship between loony and the townspeople; and finally, there is a conclusion, loony’s synthesis of all the above elements. Not what it means—just what things seem to come to for loony. Meanings are not loony’s concern. Perhaps because we can abstract such things as meanings, we envy loony. Kloefkorn makes it work: loony, the poor slob, how lucky he is.

13

That hot August night
I was the first to reach her,
her face laid open like a movie.
There was rubber in the air,
and the driver of the car,
not able to ungrip his fingers,
stuck like a fly on glue behind the wheel.
And the girl seemed not much heavier
than a scrap of pine,
hers little blood
a warm uneasy tickling at my hands.
And someone said later
he had never noticed them before,
the hands,
how brown,
how big as buckets.
And the child hung on,
its face full grown now—
saying hello hello to loony
from its twisted smile.

loony takes the place of the magazine Apple, at least for numbers 10 and 11. It was printed in a first edition of 1200 copies on economical but high-quality stock, perfectly bound. Some presses use better paper, fancier print or more elaborate covers, but Apple
has done exactly as more small presses should. They've printed a fine looking, affordable and wonderfully written book. With a Harper & Row print job, *loony* would cost $5 in paper. Even then it would be a good deal.

BITTERSWEET
James Tipton
Cold Mountain Press
4406 Duval
Austin, Texas 78751, $1.50

*Bittersweet* is also a book-length poem. Sort of. It's a pamphlet or a mini-book filled with mini-poems. That is to say, there are three lines on every page. No more, for these are forms, Americanized forms, of the haiku. Syllabically, they don't fit, none of that five/seven/five stuff. And thematically, there is not often that leap between two disparate images that occurs in the Japanese. Still, the book works, as a whole and in sections, and these nicely done little poems come as close to the real spirit of the haiku as anything else in our language. Perhaps the best, the most striking poem in the book is this:

```
all day
shoveling sheep manure
the mind clear at last
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The printing is very impressive. Each tercet is shifted slightly up or down from the poem on the opposite page, so the three lines don't become monotonous after ten or eleven times. It is the tiniest perfectly bound book I've ever seen, and somehow, that makes it even more appealing. Bookshelves swallow it, and I suppose from the outside, *Bittersweet* seems awfully slight for $1.50. But Tipton is a superb craftsman. His poems are small and valuable. At $1.50, *Playboy* is a five-foot square plateglass window, while *Bittersweet* is a thumbnail-sized diamond.
Another of Tom McKeown's full length books is called *The House of Water*. That title seems significant not only to the book that wears it, but also to this one. Both collections are filled with such structures: water houses, malevolent clouds, bulging darknesses...things that ought not to stand, but that do. Dozens of startling, vivid images. In fact, when you move into *The Luminous Revolver*, you are crossing the border into a strange country, a map detailed with images. And McKeown is the master cartographer, a virtuoso imagist.

From the first poem we are impressed by images. There seems to be no limit to the poet's imaginative powers; no limit to the possibilities of images. Imagesimagesimages. And that is what soon becomes the problem. That is why the word "images" has already appeared half a dozen times in this review. Beyond, once again, the images, there is very little to say about these poems. They are well done, of course, finely crafted. But like water houses and bulging darknesses, they are all too often, empty. Beyond the analysis of certain metaphors, the intellect goes hungry: the reader does no unnecessary thinking. And, despite an imagistic rendering of any number of emotional states, the poems show, most of the time, no feeling at all.

Here is a poem called "Watching the Storm."

> I listen to the ticking
> in the storm's eye
>
> to the shrill alarms
> that have been set for us
>
> Above the flashing fingernails
> of the leaves
>
> the bulky clouds break down
> like old cars
The heavy air collects its toll
and enters us

How much we have given up
will never be known

Well, the images are fine—at least five of them, one per couplet til the last two lines. And the close seems only appropriate: the summing up of what came before. However, it’s the sum that eludes me. My long addition comes up zero and the formula seems to go: images + knot = So What?

But it’s a successful way to write. McKeown is a fine writer who knows how to use his language. You can find these poems everywhere from The New Yorker to kayak, from Harper’s to Happiness Holding Tank. It’s not as though McKeown cannot do otherwise. There are passages, lines and stanzas in The Luminous Revolver that prove he can. There are places in this book where a marvelous talent comes through. There are poems now and then that will simply astound a reader. To sort of parallel the poem quoted above, here’s another called “Watching the Horse.”

I am tired of cars
& all the heavy weights
of the city

I drop everything

sit by a pasture
& watch a chestnut horse

as he winds the clock
of my body
with his cantering

Call it an emotional stance, a rich feeling, but this poem shows an ability beyond the formulaic image/knot routine. There is a sense of the poet here, and of the poet’s world and the relationship between the two. There is a warmth here that is rare and ought to be cherished.

The Luminous Revolver is not a bad book. It is, frankly, a pretty good book—McKeown’s first full-length volume—and by anyone else it would be very impressive. But we can expect far better from Tom McKeown and I think we’ll get it. He can write. And most of us, after all, are very comfortable with images. The ease with which image-laden poems find their way into print ought to tell us
something: that we have gone astray? or gotten cold and distant. . . ?
Perhaps we sometimes forget that poetry needs to be more than just
words and cleverness. McKeown knows that, and someday soon he’ll
show us how good he really is.

*Revolver* could have been printed by Harper & Row or Norton.
The workmanship and layout is flawless, breathing down the necks of
the biggest New York publishers. Sumac fills an empty spot. Where
the big houses fail, the little ones, like Sumac, succeed.

**LONG EYE LOST WIND FORGIVE ME**
Edward Harkness
Copperhead
Port Townsend, Washington, $2.50 (paper)

There is a sense of authority in the poems of Edward Harkness, the
confidence a man has in his ability to survive, the poet in his work.
Ours is a world he takes little stock in: “Almost everything/leaves
much to be desired.” And yet, he knows he belongs here. He’s aware
of his inadequacies, aware of his failures, and that makes his attitude
even more courageous. He makes concessions and they lead him to
victory, to success.

Just this once we
make ourselves
blind, remember
nettles and
not fitting in.

Harkness knows his strategy well: give ground, then let the poem
swallow us. We are had.

The poems in this chapbook become a way of taking a stand. They
demand and establish the dignity our world denies most of its
inhabitants. They shove the despair and ugliness of our lives under
our noses and then, rather than lapsing into a nihilistic funk, affirm
the whole damned mess. The reader is infected by a strange hopefulness, one that grows from the decay, from the concessions. In “Three Ducks,” Harkness weaves a beautiful metaphor about time: the passing of it and, in those certain anxious moments like awaiting the birth of a child, the way it drags its cumbersome feet. He speaks to his unborn son:

Three ducks define the fragile sky, make it wild. The sky will wait for you. Linda and her dream will wait. You'll be banging on the cellar door after the tornado crying Is it okay to come out. And Linda, sunrise, singing the battered sky, singing Yes, the light is real.

How real it is. And what a fine celebration. It is an infectious optimism and Harkness has it in his blood. To prove it, here’s a poem, complete, to show how beautiful things are made of scars, how life survives its own despairs and how poems grow from this ink, these simple words:

*5th Grade Scar*

Jimmy D. Martini had this fountain pen with peacock ink.

In the can we stared and said Neat. It wrote thick, spread on a paper towel blue you wished was your blood.

Jimmy was writing when I poked him, writing love. I think her name was Meridee. Furious, he stabbed me, right here on the invisible side of my face, below the eye.

Which I grabbed, hollered Ah God, squinted into my hand and there she was, blood. There she was, peacock ink.

For the past several years I've been making more scars on my face. I too have been writing love, love of my face, becoming fog.
Love of Jimmy and his ink
that mized in my veins so now I bleed burgandy.
And love of peacocks,
their useless feathers,
their thousand ruined eyes.

Edward Harkness will keep on writing love. This chapbook,
promising and perfect as it seems, is surely just a note, a lovely
example of things to come.

Copperhead chapbooks, if they all look like this, are almost
impossible to beat. The printing and choice paper and the sewn
wrappers show that, like the poets they print, they are masters.

Robert Wrigley

RAIN FIVE DAYS AND I LOVE IT
Richard Hugo
Graywolf Press
PO Box 142
Port Townsend, Washington 98368, $2.50 (paper)

More often than not, a chapbook bespeaks a cohesion (of subject
and emotional intensity) rarely found in a full-length collection of
poems, and this beautifully produced new chapbook by Richard
Hugo is no exception. Comprised of eight poems printed on three
colors of heavy stock and in three colors of ink, it draws its
cohesiveness from a place—the Port Townsend area—and from
Hugo's complex attitude toward that place. As he does so frequently
and so well, Hugo grounds us in the richness of local detail, and then
allows those details to speak. But through some manner of alchemy,
the eloquence of things is not separable from the things themselves; in
their very being, they cut deep, becoming emblems of the poet's emotional life, moving freely between the imaginative and experiential realms. In "Letter to Wagoner from Port Townsend," Hugo tells his fellow poet, "Here, the grass explodes and trees / rage black green deep as the distance they rage in."

While Hugo's poetry, almost by definition, bursts with emotionality, these poems are most touching because they celebrate, they affirm that place and the life it holds within its boundaries, that "home between the forest and the sea," as Malcolm Lowry puts it, where "ferryboats would pass, ferrying song upstream—" This affirmation finds its center, as it must, in that "crashing source," the sea. The first poem, "Port Townsend, 1974" gives us the seductive call of the sea, that call back to the womb, away from what Beckett calls the "great trouble:"

On this dishonored, this perverted globe
we go back to the sea and the sea opens for us.
It spreads a comforting green we knew when children—

Aches of what we wanted to be and reluctantly are
play out in the wash, wash up the sand and die
and slip back placid to the crashing source.

But Hugo does not simply present us with the primordial image of sea as great equalizer; he knows we still have our lives to live—"The power / to make us better is limited even in the democratic sea." These poems recognize the violence inherent in living one's life, the small slights, the bitternesses engendered, but they still seek the untroubled moments and when they find them, no questions are asked—there is "no real / accounting for calm." Most markedly, this chapbook is filled with the inevitability of hope, the yearning for substance, for value—"Call those high birds hungry and your vision meat." Let Hugo speak his own affirmation, in a language that never hedges and thus rings true:

Discovery of cancer, a broken back, our inability to pass
our final exam—I guess the rain is finally getting me down.
What matter? I plan to spend my life dependent on moon
and tide and the tide is coming, creeping over the rocks,
washing the remains of crippled fish back deep to the source,
renewing the driftwood supply and the promise of all night
fires on the beach, stars and dreams of girls, and that's
as rich as I'll ever get. We are called human. C'iao. Dick.
Graywolf Press is to be commended for the publication of this beautiful chapbook. Not only is the level of craftsmanship remarkable, but there is something magical about an editorial staff with the good sense to give us these poems, poems that cohere not only to each other but to our lives as well.

Rick Newby

. . . AND SOME FICTION

CLASS WARFARE
Selected Fiction by D. M. Fraser
Pulp Press, 1974, $3.00

"We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities."

Thomas Pynchon

Which stories should we choose to remember and then recount in an ambience already glutted with messages from the dead, silent reproaches and writing on the walls, the consciousness of dreams that have gone awry? Which doors should we put the shoulder to in a display of strength and conviction? Which passageways, with either the suggestion of different scenarios or familiar landmarks that can be seen from a different angle, should we explore?

There is such a thing as heartbreak, and we have all at least once seen the flaming sword, and nothing beyond. And how many of us have lived off the
By using Gerard Macklewain’s recognition as a point of departure, *Class Warfare* can be approached as a fictionalized documentary of the past decade, a decade that contains a major transition from an active revolutionary stage, where bombs were detonated in the middle of the night, hostages held for political leverage, and even internecine clashes where a friend must be executed because “he allowed himself to become a conspicuous personality”, to an overly introspective stage in which a reassessment of these earlier actions turns inward upon itself and becomes the self-consciousness of culpability; that is, these “selected fictions” derive both their narrative and thematic continuity from Fraser’s notion of history and personality and, without insisting upon the validity of cause and the viability of effect, the ways in which they affect an individual’s consciousness. This mode of operation not only provides Fraser with an insight into the machinery that produces the infamous sequence of events, but it enables him to anticipate advents such as the female-urban-guerilla before it becomes a new typology or the property of the front page. Moreover, the sense of loss and impending personal disaster that multiply in a geometric riot of Malthusian illogic from the opening chapters to the wasteland of Lonesome Town are conterminous with the tension generated between ideals and what are taken to be the existential realities in a post-ideological age.

We were aboard ship, indeed, in our innocence, in the merciful night, toot-toot and then gone, and who remembers the manic jazz-loud parties there were, whooping and hollering in every bottle-strewn stateroom, every streamered corridor, love in the lifeboats, everything allowed, the band swinging into the Muskrat Ramble now, and why not, dance you buggers get it on yeah, and every bleery eye blind to the icebergs, the treacherous heaving water, fog sneaking up closer and closer with none of that pretended majesty of final, absolute things . . . It didn’t last long. We were children in those times.

Structurally, the collection is divided into three sections—The Intricate Designs of the Bourgeoisie, Class Warfare, and Lonesome Town. These numbered sections correspond to the different levels of involvement as they are portrayed in the collection. In the first section Santa Claus drops out of the business, renounces his old clients, and proudly proclaims himself to be a Republican; Marie Tyrell, the literary Patty Hearst prototype, refuses absolution and the mouthpiece of Extreme Unction. In the second section, the state of siege, the narrator vacillates between paranoia and a strong conviction in the Movement’s policies. In the third section, the setting of withdrawal, the watering hole of down-and-out dissidents, Jamie
McIvor, who becomes a recognizable voice, is worked over by feelings of guilt that ultimately lead to extended monologues of misplaced faith and tape recorded professions of passion.

In one of the early chapters, entitled “The Sweetness of Life,” there is a discussion centering around “the efficacy of love” and the stability of ideals in a world speeding towards entropy, pulling the metaphoric rug from beneath the gentry’s feet. This concept of “the sweetness of life” is a mere abstraction, in that, it “lusts constantly after equilibrium, a stasis amidst the flux”. Fraser juxtaposes this chapter with the penultimate section of the collected fictions. This section, which can be read as a journal, an evolving manifesto, or an apologia, presents its own system of beliefs and ideals. There is, however, the same compulsion to somehow capture the fleeting moments that precede the day of reckoning, to indulge in a feeling of uniqueness, to evoke the personality amidst the rumble of group actions.

Enough, enough. How can I explain, justify to the collective, the compulsion under which I fill these pages? It is surely no more than foolishness, no more than presumption, to expect that an arbitrary arrangement of words—words no other eyes than mine may ever see—will in some fashion advance our cause. I know better. Even Alex, toward the end, knew better. What was it he said? We were walking home from an incident, a rally we’d done our best to disrupt; it was raining; I had been holding forth on Revolutionary Art, the need for it, the function it could perform in the pre-revolutionary state. All at once Alex stopped walking, and turned on me: ‘Ah you dumb bastard you think you’re so fucking tough such a brilliant hardliner and you’re soft as a baby’s arse. Admit it. Look at yourself, sitting up scribbling your pretty words in the middle of the night, digging every moment of it, that’s the way to fight for the masses, sure it is. Do you imagine they love you for it? Or care at all? Who’re you trying to kid? Do you seriously believe you’re defending anything, liberating anything, redeeming anything, inciting anyone to action, feeding one empty belly except your own? Some shit-hot revolutionary you are, yapping all the time about your precious Art, just like any other faggot lackey, as if a goddamed word of it is ever going to change a thing on earth. Ah yes, wonderful, isn’t it. People are out there working and dying like animals while you sit on your ass and dither about Style, about aesthetics, world without end amen. That’s great, you’re just what we’ve all been waiting for, a raving consymp who writes Nice Prose. With all the punctuation in the right place, too. Next you’ll be telling us the story of your life: How I Forsook the Bourgeoisie And Became a Fearless Urban Guerilla. Big deal, buddy. When are you going to wake up to what’s going down in this world? When are you going to wake the fuck up? I had heard the argument before: in the revolutionary society there would be no artists, no need for them. Come the day, I’ll have to accept it...
Acceptance rides over enthusiasm, the sense of a viable change is loss amidst "expedient adjustments". The breadth of an individual’s ideals, whether they be an approximation of a new age or merely the reflection of a middle existence, is unimportant. Ideals too easily accommodated—the car in the garage, the kids tucked in, the table cleared of the day’s waste—and those that erode in the wake of an ever changing situation produce the same basic effect of alienation.

Everywhere I looked I saw ordinary life, ordinary travail, assembly lines of men, women, little children, all of them doing what was there to be done. Whatever they were doing, they were absorbed in it, as spilled fluids are absorbed, soaked up, by commercial tissues. I couldn’t speak to them... My friends fell away, one by one: some to wives, some to jails, asylums, the stringencies of the working world. They made their excuses, and went. At the farewell parties, the best of them blushed and grinned, promised an early return... but who’s returned, and from what? Eh?... One day I alone remained, awake and frightened, in a universe of strangeness. I’d missed the boat. I heard the weeping then, louder than ever, and I knew it was aimed at me. It was a summons. Summoning me here (Lonesome Town), perhaps. To this, to you. I should never have asked you to help me.

John Updike, in *Rabbit Redux*, addresses this same problem of endangered ideals and desires that exist outside any theoretical framework, but in an entirely different manner. Not only is the tone, and what I suspect to be his sympathies, at odds with Fraser’s outlook and treatment, but, more importantly, the irony of *Rabbit Redux* results from information denied the reader following Rabbit’s reunion with his wife at the motel. In this sense, Rabbit only encounters what Jamie McLvor and Marie Tyrell must confront head on in *Class Warfare*; a heritage sustained by quick recognitions and the ability to act before the moment collapses upon itself, adding to the list of what are known as historical casualties, those plagued by poor timing or the impedimenta of a conscience or sentimentality. Even the lyrical passages, the snatches of song provided by “Gladys Gorman and the Gamins” in a tremulous shuffle, the upbeat of favorite anecdotes, and the camp humor throughout the collection fail to unhinge the trap of relevance, a decade’s password that parodies itself in an altered situation with its own demands and center of gravity.

*Class Warfare* is not, however, merely a theoretical collection or the anatomy of a revolutionary. Fraser does not insist upon a
philosophical position in order to account for the mood of paranoia and the desperate tone that undermine the creative spirit and prefigure the withdrawal to Lonesome Town. Its mythos is grounded more in phenomenology than propaganda, in a “history that seduces (us)” rather than determines us.

You'll be cold, shivering, if the wind comes off the sea. It often does. You'll sit there, or stand, chilled to the bone, cursing no doubt the history that seduced you, that drew you to that destination. And then you'll hear the weeping, a sound like no other, the weeping of the lost.

"Dream Visions" are shattered and, in the process, the implosion of solipsism is reinforced.

An analysis of *Class Warfare* necessitates a catalogue of different impressions. It is concerned with the consciousness of a decade and the destiny of its survivors' spirit; it is concerned with the alienation of people from old friends and the environment they live in. These basic concerns direct the mythos of the collected fictions, a mythos Fraser describes as “a movement and a rest”. It is a train trip or spiritual odyssey through the white wastes of the government subsidized art program called “Canadian Content”; it is an interrogation of a critical consciousness that has boxed itself in by way of sidelong glances, the conjugations of the past tense; it is the dialect of poor connections, broken speech, and impersonal serenades; it is the emptiness of symbolic living where occupation and place define an identity; it is the sound of “last epoch’s bell-bottoms colliding.” But more than anything, it is the feeling of suspension and energy derived from invocations, the lyrical prose and lucidity that sketch Fraser's signature.

DON'T SING YET: we have a situation developing here. It's a good night for situations, a good night for tramping about the streets, disturbing the peace. Midwinter drizzle, a smear of fog, this tubercular chill in the air: all the ancient, appropriate ingredients. By all means let's look menacing, if we can; it shouldn't be difficult, in these shadows. . .too bad there's not a saxophone playing somewhere, just down the block. The lady would appreciate that. But never mind, here she comes now; button up that overcoat, buddy. . .

As for me, I take delight in commas, which hark of unfinished things, of memories still aborning, but I find comfort in the period I shall someday place, a token ring upon a beloved finger, at the certain and only end. . .

Pulp Press is a small, anarchist collective operating out of Vancouver, B.C. They “do not wish to be respectable, and heavily
subsidized, and quoted solemnly in the pages of the national magazines.” They publish works of drama, fiction, poetry, and discursive prose. And their bi-weekly magazine bears the title, “3¢ Pulp”—the world’s only three cent magazine. They welcome any correspondence and their address is: Pulp Press, Box 8806, Station Bentall, Vancouver, Canada.

John O’Neill

OF PLACES THAT NEVER WERE

PAGES FROM A COLD ISLAND
By Frederick Exley
Random House, 1975, $7.95

This is a journey through the various drunken landscapes that contained the presence of Frederick Exley in 1972. A little background: Exley’s first novel, A Fan’s Notes, was published in 1968. By many accounts, it was one of the strongest statements to come out of the Sixties. Although it was not a big seller, it did receive several prizes and was nominated for the National Book Award. In A Fan’s Notes, a “fictional memoir,” Exley takes the reader a long painful way through the mind of a man who is always perilously close to destruction. In that book he relates a series of unfortunate involvements with his father, his wife, various lovers, jobs, and the omnipresent bottle. Besides the fact that it is a great book, A Fan’s Notes must be recognized for the courage it took to write. To quote
James Dickey: “This is the horrible account of a long failure, but a failure which turns into success: the success that this book is.”

With *Pages From a Cold Island*, Exley immediately dispels any illusion the reader might be willing to entertain that this is another “fictional memoir” by informing us, in an introductory note, that this is a work of non-fiction. On the dust cover we are also told that this should be considered the middle leg of an autobiographical trilogy; that the final stand has already found title in *Last Notes From Home*.

*Pages From a Cold Island* begins with Exley discovering that Edmund Wilson, the literary critic, has just died at his home not far from where Exley is staying with his mother in a Thousand Islands resort village in upstate New York. Exley is a Wilson devotee from way back and, although he never met Wilson, the knowledge of the critic’s passing on has sufficient impact to cause Exley to initiate an amazing tirade against various members of the news media for what he righteously considers to be slights against the memory of Wilson. He then goes off on a four page rampage against Ben Gazzara for being what Exley terms “a sentimental McGovernite;” Annette Funicello for growing tits; Patty Duke for backing Humphrey; finally getting back to Wilson with another three page rave directed at Walter Cronkite for mispronouncing “Hecate” when referring to Wilson’s *Memoirs of Hecate County*.

Exley is in a dilemma in *Pages From a Cold Island* and he is the first to admit it. Early on we read:

Because of the autobiographical and confessional character of *A Fan’s Notes*—what Edward Hoagland writing in the Sunday *Times* called “a splurging of personal history”—I knew from both my late editor and my agent (she told me this to prompt me into proving the experts wrong) that on those very infrequent occasions when my name came up at all I was summarily and disparagingly dismissed as having “shot my wad”. . .

In his own words, Exley expresses a good part of the problem in *Pages From a Cold Island*. Very rarely does this book achieve the intensity of *A Fan's Notes*.

We are told early in the book that Exley already has the first draft—almost five hundred pages—sequestered in the trunk of his rusting Nova on Singer Island, off the Florida coast. He considers this first attempt “unrelievedly desolate” and decides that a good interview with Gloria Steinem is just what the book needs to brighten it up a little. Steinem is a woman for whom Exley entertains feelings that run from contempt to lust. This bizarre interview, along with a
couple of sexual reminiscences, are combined to make Chapters Six and Seven high points in the novel. Exley recounts his early education that came from listening to the older boys impart their expertise on the street corners of Watertown, N.Y.:

Dong had an absolute passion for what he called the button or the man in the boat. Looking straight ahead but aware of our vacuous breathless attention, Dong told us if we really desired to drive women mad the thing to do was get the clitoris—Dong never of course called it anything as grand as that—between the front teeth and ever so tenderly roll it back and forth between the jaws. Letting his cowlike brown eyes fall dementedly cross-eyed to the bridge of his tanned nose, as one loonily hypnotized or demonically in thrall to the urgency of his art, Dong made his tenderly gnashing motion and in dumb hilarious imitation we all followed suit!

Exley then goes on to describe his first love affair, with Gretchen, when he was a sophomore at USC. But, on to the interview with Steinem. He gets right to the heart of the matter:

"One of those articles said you had small boobs. You aren't too grand in the fucking jug department, are you?"

But I could not pursue this nastiness. Quite angry, Gloria tried to come back with The Movement's cliche reply. She tried to say, "I wouldn't ask you how big your prick is, would I?" but, oh Lord, gentle reader, she couldn't bring it off, she stumbled on the word prick, delicately and stutteringly substituted penis, the blood rose becomingly in those lovely cheekbones, and I smiled apologetically and thought, and I was sincere, I like this girl. I really do like this girl.

Exley is of the breed of male chauvinist pig. Needless to say, the interview does not go well.

The last part of the novel deals chiefly with Exley's indepth study of the final days of Edmund Wilson. He arranges an interview with Wilson's secretary and protegee in his last years, and has a series of stormy encounters with Wilson's daughter. If you were unaware of the inside dope on Wilson before, then, by the time you finish the book, you may know more than you ever cared to.

The final adventure Exley takes us on before he once more retreats to the sterility of his cold Florida island is to Iowa City and a one semester's stint as guest lecturer with the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. Of his stay there we learn that his overriding goal is to have a "last fling with young flesh." While there he sports a silver-handled walking stick he claims was Edmund Wilson's. He eventually discontinues this practice because the walking stick actually had belonged to his own great-grandfather Champ.
Although Exley does occasionally shine in *Pages From a Cold Island*, I finished the book wishing he had waited; had more last flings; anything rather than coming out with this book before it was ready. My thoughts keep going back to the rough draft that isn’t working—the first attempt—that resides in the trunk of the rusting Nova throughout the novel. I have the feeling he’s hiding the real thing from us. Ex has me hooked. I’m waiting expectantly for *Last Notes From Home*, but, at the same time, hope it contains something closer to the detailed agony of *A Fan’s Notes*, rather than the agony of unimportant detail that this book is so often concerned with.

*William Turner*
KIM ANDERSON is a freshman at the University of Montana. This is her first published poem.

J.CHRIS ANDERSON is a student in the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa.

MICHELE BIRCH is former co-ordinator of the Montana Poets in the Schools. DOUGLAS BLAZEK’s pamphlet of poems, I Am A Weapon, was published by Oxhead Press earlier this year. Another book, Edible Fire, will be published next year by Twowindows Press.

SYLVIA CLARK is from Seattle and is currently enrolled in the MFA Program at the University of Montana. MICHAEL CRUMMETT attended Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara and is currently working as a photographer for the Crow Office of Coal Research. MONTE DOLACK has his studio in The Warehouse Artists’ Co-op in Missoula. He is a past contributor to CutBank. QUINTON DUVAL received his MFA from the University of Montana in 1974 and has had poems in Poetry Northwest, Chariton Review, Intro, and New Letters. CHARLES FAIR writes a regular column for The American Poetry Review and plays a fine jazz piano. GALA FITZGERALD loves the Northwest and has been to Bella Coola. She is an MFA candidate at the University of Montana. CLYDE FIXMER teaches in the Poets in the Schools program in Michigan and is a part-time ambulance driver. TESS GALLAGHER’s first full-length collection, Instructions to the Double is due this winter from Graywolf Press. ELTON GLASER recently had work in Poetry NOW. He lives in Akron, Ohio. ANDREW GROSSBARDT has been published in many small magazines. He currently teaches at Northeast Missouri State University and edits Chariton Review. JOHN HAINES is working on a new volume of poetry to be published by Wesleyan University Press. He lives in Missoula. JIM HEYNEN is publishing two collections of poems this fall: Notes From Custer, Bear Claw Press, 215 Bucholz Ct., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48103, $3.00 paper; and The Funeral Parlor, Graywolf Press, P.O. Box 142, Port Townsend, Wash. 98368, $2.00, or $3.00 signed.

RICH IVES has poems forthcoming in *The Malahat Review* and is finishing his MFA at the University of Montana.

THOMAS JOHNSON edits *Stinktree*. A recent volume of his poems was published by the Stone-Marrow Press.

LINDA KITTELL is a previous contributor to *CutBank*. She's a graduate student at the University of Montana.

GREG KUZMA edits the magazine *Pebble*, Volume 13 of which is a special Robert Frost issue with essays by Richard Wilbur, Maxine Kumin, and others. Buy it! 118 Boswell, Crete NB 68333. $4.

ROBERT LIETZ is in the writing workshop at Syracuse University; his chapbook, *Side Booths*, will soon be published by Best Cellar Press.

WILLIAM MATTHEW's books include *Ruining the New Road* and *Sleek for the Long Flight*, both from Random House. He teaches at the University of Colorado.

ED MEEK has a white panama hat.

JOANNE MESCHERY had stories in *Gilt Edge* and *Intro 7*. She lives in Truckee, California and chops wood in her basement.

JOHN O’NEILL, originally from Champaign, Illinois, is a senior in English at the University of Montana, and a mad Irishman to boot.

ENID RHODES PESCHEL has translated Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell* and *The Illuminations*, Oxford University Press, 1973.

KIM PAHLAS lives in Waseca, Wisconsin, works as a grease monkey and sometime sign painter, and has a parrot named Ralph who can sing “O Holy Night” in three languages.

PHILIP PIERSON has poems in *Shenandoah, New Letters, Kansas Quarterly, Ohio Review* and others.

RANDY RASMUSSEN is a photographer for *The Missoulian*. He’s a junior in journalism at the University of Montana.

HERBERT SCOTT’s books include *Disguises*, from University of Pittsburgh Press, *The Shoplifter’s Handbook*, from Blue Mountain Press. He teaches at Western Michigan University.

LESLEY SENNETT lives in Missoula. This is her first appearance in *CutBank*.

ROBERT SIEGEL is currently teaching in the creative program at Princeton. His book, *The Beasts and the Elders* was published by the University Press of New England.

JEFF SILVA is a full-time watch maker in East Providence, RI.

LINDA SWANBERG lives and writes in Missoula.

ROBERT VANDER MOLEN is the author of *Along the River and Other Poems*, soon to be published by New Rivers Press.

NANCE VAN WINCKEL lives in Denver.

ELLEN WATSON sends us her poems from Sunderland, Massachusetts.

RAY A. YOUNG BEAR’s poems have appeared in *APR* and the anthology *From the Belly of the Shark*. He’s working on a manuscript for Harper & Row.
MAGAZINES RECEIVED

The Agni Review (No. 4), David Ghitelman & Askold Melnyczuk, eds., P.O. Box 663, Cranford, N.J. 07016. $2/yr.
Cafe Solo (No. 7), Glenna Luschei, ed., 1209 Drake Circle, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401 $2/ea.
Cape Rock Journal (Winter 1974), Max Cordonnier, et al, eds., Department of English, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701. $1.50/yr.
Carolina Quarterly Jeff Richards, ed. P.O. Box 1117, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. $4.50/yr.
Crosscurrents, James Tindall, ed. University of Puget Sound, Tacome, WA. No price listed.
Dacotah Territory (No. 10), Mark Vinz, ed., P.O. Box 775, Moorhead, MN 56560. $2.50/yr.
Field (No. 12), Stuart Friebert & David Young, eds., Rice Hall, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH 44704. $4/yr.
Free Quarter (Vol. 1, No. 2), C.M. Bickenheuser, et al, eds., Student Union Building, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59715. No price listed.
Garland Court Review (Spring 1975), Loop College, 64 East Lake Street, Chicago, IL 60601. No price listed.
Hawaii Review (No. 5), Christine Cook, ed., 2465 Campus Road, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. $3/yr.
Kayak (Nos. 39 & 40), George Hitchcock, ed., 325 Ocean View Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95062. $4/4 issues.
Manchac Magazine (1975), Camden Griffin, ed., Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. No price listed.
Mazagine (Vol. 3), Pima Community College, 2202 West Anklam Road, Tucson, Arizona 85709. $1.50/yr.
Mountain Summer, Tennessee Avenue, Sewanee, TE 37375. No price listed.
Northwoods Journal (Vol. 3, Nos. 1 & 2), Box 24, Bigfork, MN 56628. $3.50/yr.
Pebble (No. 12), Greg Kuzma, ed., 118 So. Boswell Ave., Crete, NB 68333. $8/4 issues.
Rocky Mountain Creative Arts Journal (No. 3), Paul Dilsaver, ed., P.O. Box 3185, Casper, WY 82601. $5/yr.
Salthouse (No. 1), D. Clinton, ed., English Department, BGSU, Bowling Green, OH 43403. $1.50/yr.
The Sou'wester (Vol. 3, Nos. 2 & 3), Terry Perkins & Lana Hayes, eds., English Department, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL 62025. $3/yr.
Tales (Vol. 2, No. 3), Barry Glassner & Patricia Ensworth, eds., Box 24226, St. Louis, MO 63130. $3/yr.
Unicorn (Vol. 5, No. 1), Mary Claire Helldorfer, ed., Loyola College of Baltimore, Baltimore, MD. No price listed.
Western Humanities Review (Vol. XXIX, No. 1), Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. $5/yr.
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