CutBank
Spring, 1977

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When horses are nosing the cold on grass
say pearls cluster on their damp backs
and toadstools mildew under a sleeve of moon,
a velvet ear. But it is morning and green
and horses are nosing the cold on grass.

The maker of viols turns his other ear
to rosewood, to rhythms that move there,
dreams of spruce, where the violin sleeps.
But it is morning and green curds glisten
on mushrooms and ponies are nosing the cold grass.

Say the viol is a bell of water, an hourglass,
the body of a woman, the pear inside,
and it hangs there, in the motion of things.

Say the viol shapes a blue sound
of words freezing, surrounds fog
riding low on lips of horses, that it is summer
and spotted ponies are nosing ground from grass.
Their pink tongues curl like scrolls.

The violin lacquers velvet in the moon
but it is morning and spotted horses turn.
CAESAR, YOU KNEW ALL ABOUT THE IDES
BUT MORNING CAME CEREBRAL

A woman taps at the window,  
her knuckles white with import.  
Snow falls loose in her hair.

Wind raw and rattling,  
your eyelids fat with sleep.

Only your woman talks through full  
eyes of cataract—Tonight  
a lioness drops her boychild  
in the sprawling street and armies march  
without fire in their eyes,  
the air sharp as new wine.

Tonight she sends nancy boys  
running to the senate and you waltz  
like a mad prophet  
to indifferent chorus, the private  
language of friends, its false abrazo.

In the black moss of pine  
last voices turn. You taste  
red wine sharp in your throat, far back.  
Snow falls on the woman,  
glitters in her hair.  
Malingering knives grin past  
the patio and the pines say Now.  
You wake. Sequins beat and blur.
DAWN

The sky looks torn at the mountaintops
Where light burns into the blue dissolving
The star freckled night.
The sun curtain drapes the western slopes.
Our moments sinking.
We climb the stairs several times.
The rug shadow of the mountain is again
Pulling eastward across the valley.
Our faces pale because of it.
The broken streetlamps of sleep
The shredded hours of day.
We must clutch our images
Behind secret eyelids of light
And drive beyond the hillside in fever.
SUNDAY WITHOUT RAIN

Back from nightwork and the pale hours heavy
as they rise with casted light through fog.
The flare of morning as quiet as a hospital,
and my wife combs out her hair to sleep.
‘There was a Dr. Blue,’ she said, ‘sometime
around three a.m., everyone taken out of breath
to the fourth floor.’

The fog a ridge now unclear
with the hills. Pine trees knife it
with green, a blow of moisture
to a window. Blankness the topping
of the nearest fir.
And the combing continues with a boy
falling from a high limb, the sudden
word of it like snow. The thought
of the mother upset, sleeping there
on a cot in the hospital primary.

A solitude was gathering.
Something gone blind past
the afternoon of play, the
fallen hand like the one holding
a field mouse, the coming words still damp
with the excitement. The fog always
the boy’s freedom of imagination.

But now she will tell me how he was,
roped with a swollen neck, the vital signs
unstable towards morning. The sudden code
Dr. Blue to pass finally the last comfort
of pillow, of oxygen and little cellophane
bags of instruments, of the intercom distress. More tubes to the arm, one down his throat, everyone there, all science standing in white, hands above the blue head like an operation. The mother waited.

This morning is cluttered like a Sunday held up to itself and shaken. A threat of rain is no promise. The day becomes like piled leaves. My wife asleep. The street to happen to the noise of cars, the rush of tires peel the moisture away, into the opening light of broken lines, of dry words marking this day.
the first thing I took
was the river bend
muddy where it broke
through ice dragging
away in hunks the
heavy snow. then I turned
to my children stomping
in the deep white
holes. Lie down I said
and I will make you
swimming away
in water like sharks
Like this Mama? Like
we are dead?
Yes I said trying
to focus and steady
my icy hand
SATURDAY NIGHT

Saturday night. Barrett had promised Lee they would have the whole night together, no work, no kids. When the phone rang, Barrett did his shouting and screaming and swearing and threatening and when he finally shut up, she handed him a paper stating who needed him and he climbed into the pickup with his pants half on and his shirt unbuttoned and his hair frizzing crazily all over his head. He didn’t care if people saw him with noodle soup in his beard when they called him out in the middle of the night.

“I’m sorry, Lee.”

“You go ahead and be careful.” She smiled and hugged his plaid robe tight against the cold.

Barrett coasted down the road and saw Lee standing alone in the yard watching until he turned onto the highway. The clutch was starting to go, too, one goddamn thing after another. The cab was cold; the heater didn’t work. Barrett drove and finished the scotch he kept under the seat. He rubbed his eyes and yelled a tone deaf song with the radio. The road pulled him on with its broken white line flashing into the left highbeam, white white white white. He began to stare.

Barrett did not know how cattle could be so damned efficient at ruining his life. They always got him out of bed in the middle of the night. Barrett had a long drive, the calving was difficult and by the time it was over, he was tired and nervous and knew he could not make the long drive home. He called Lee. Her voice sounded sleepy and as he stood shifting from foot to foot in the cold of a roadside phonebooth he could picture her warm and drowsy in bed.

Barrett told her not to worry and felt very alone and tired when he hung up. His balls ached and his hands shook and now he was chain smoking and felt weak and dizzy. His thoughts raced. None of them formed into anything sensible. Barrett felt his heart beating too fast. Tachycardia. Barrett dropped the cigarette and ground it out. The only way he could slow himself was to drink and he’d drunk the scotch.

He climbed in the truck and slammed his foot at the clutch and drove ten miles out of his way to an all-night bar. Barrett did not like
the people there and they did not like him but it never stopped them from calling him. People drove Barrett crazy. They acted friendly if they needed him and unfriendly if they didn’t, they never paid him on time and he did not think he should have to beg. They never said what they meant. If Barrett hurt an animal, it would try to hurt him back and he could tell about them. People made no sense and if it weren’t for Lee, Barrett thought maybe he’d go crazy.

He left the pickup in a back lot and heard the crunch of gravel as he walked. The bar’s neon sign buzzed. Barrett heard the heavy pull of a diesel engine far away. The town was quiet, one street with circles of light under the lamps and dark on both ends. Barrett saw no one. He pushed the door open and stepped inside.

The bar was loud with Saturday night drinkers and the thump of bass from the juke. Barrett lit a smoke and walked to the bar without looking around. The air was hot and smoky. A big mirror hung behind the bottles lined against the wall. Barrett leaned on a stool and stared at himself, saw red eyes and shaking hands. He did not see what Lee loved. He saw a crazy man who spent his life getting nowhere.

When Barrett looked past his face at the crowd behind him, he saw men and women drinking and laughing and smoking, sitting at tables that glittered with pitchers and glasses of beer. The smoky light swirled. Some leaned back. They all yelled to hear. Faces looked red. One woman’s nipples stood large and pointy through her sweater. Barrett looked over his shoulder at her, at the man across the table from her who did not look into her face. When Barrett turned back, the bartender was standing in his way. Barrett looked up.

“Hello, Barrett.”
“Evening.”
“What’s for you?”
“Scotch.”
“And water?”
“Scotch.”

Barrett looked up at the bartender’s sneering smile. Everyone knew Barrett drank too much and he had to keep from being sensitive about their talk because it was the truth. It was none of their business how much he drank or whether he slept around or cheated on his taxes but they liked to talk him up. Lee told him what they said did not matter but Barrett always got mad first. Thought about it later.
"You waiting for something?"
The bartender shook his head; the sneer stuck.
Barrett ground out his cigarette and stood. "Just sell me a bottle."
"Huh?"
"You heard me."
"What's the matter?"
Barrett laid a ten on the bar and made himself speak softly.
"Scotch."
People around him were watching now and Barrett knew he'd done it again. To hear them tell it, he was crazy. Maybe. He had no patience for people any more and their bullshit. They did not care about honesty or good work. Money they cared about. Money and things and a good fuck. When the bartender set the bottle on the bar, Barrett pulled off the sack and crumpled the ten into it and dropped the wad on the floor as he went out.
The door hissed shut behind him. As he walked to the truck, Barrett felt very weak and dizzy and tired. He sat down and stared at a bug splat on the windshield. Barrett took a big pull from the bottle and put it on the seat. Thinking of Lee and that she could make him ease up, Barrett wanted to get home. He turned on the engine and started off and told himself to keep it on the road.
Barrett kept changing the radio stations to avoid commercials, tapping rhythms on the wheel with his palms, singing, telling himself to keep it on the road. In an hour, a little more, he'd be home. The white line began to pull him back into a trance. Brights flashed at him. Barrett saw the State Patrol go by the other way.
He opened the window and smelled earth and sage and clover. The road ran away beyond his lights into a dull grey point far off. Barrett felt good remembering the calf, its white face and big eyes, the wetness of it when he rubbed it off with straw. He had not felt cold while he worked but afterward, standing in the yard and washing blood off his chest and arms with water from a bucket, Barrett began to shiver and did not bother to clean himself well.
Barrett smiled and smelled the night air. September, full of smells. Barrett loved autumn, loved all the changes of the year. When he smelled the cool night air he sensed the change coming. The aspens turned gold and the hot white summer light became golden, too. Up in the mountains the leaves died with the snap, went red and yellow, the colors of fire. Far off the hills looked impressionistic, reds, golds,
Irene Wanner

greens, deciduous mixed with evergreen.

"You take yourself too seriously," Barrett told the eyes that looked at him from the rearview. Red eyes, but he felt better. He lit a smoke and did not speak again to himself. The amber point of the cigarette stook up in the dark near his hand gripping the wheel.

He would be home soon and Lee would be glad and surprised he had decided not to sleep. They could still have some of the night together. Jen would be home in the morning. Barrett was very happy thinking of the early morning with Lee and the way her hair slid undone in bed and later Jen coming home and how all his girls had the same bright blue eyes.

Barrett saw light over the crest of the hill and slowed because he knew people always got in wrecks there. At the top he saw a tractor-trailer tilted into the ditch and the lights on the box pointing off in lines at angles to the road. The rig's headlights lit the ditch and rayed up into trees. Barrett saw the bright red of a Hereford bull lying in the road, his quarters and sides rising up huge against the pavement. The shoulder was crushed and the head was partly torn off. Barrett pulled over and walked back to the bull.

"How can you look at that?"

Barrett turned. The truck driver's face was dead white, sheened with sweat. He steadied himself by the tractor.

"You okay?"

"Think so."

"Call on the CB?"

The man nodded. Barrett led him past the bull to his pickup and handed him the scotch bottle.

"Take a shot."

The trucker sat, then slumped and took the bottle, set it in his lap and rested his head on the seat back. He shut his eyes. Barrett went back to the bull. There was a lot of blood on the pavement and it was drying now and sticky. Barrett knelt, squeezed the flank and felt the crunch of dead muscle. Barrett ran his hands along the forelegs and looked at the huge testicles flattened on the blacktop and then he heard a car and was glad the State Patrol had reached him before Rogers.

"Hello, Boo."

The cop yawned and wiped his nose. "Hello, Will. You know this bull?"
"It’s Rogers’.”
"Figured."

Barrett saw Booth had been on duty too long and wanted to get home to bed. Booth stepped around the front of the truck. Barrett followed. Booth shined his flashlight up at the hole in the fence, then scrambled up the side of the ditch. Barrett watched him play the light around.

“Anything?”
“No.”

Booth slid down the bank and snapped off the light. Beams from the tractor’s headlights still raked off cut stone into the treetops. Booth had a heavy black shade of stubble. He rubbed his eyes and scowled.

“Where’s the guy?”
Barrett gestured toward the truck with his head. “Resting.”
“He okay?”
“Yeah.”

“I didn’t see footprints or cut wire,” Booth said. He looked up at the bank, back at Barrett. “Rogers’ll want insurance.”

“I know.”
Barrett looked at the bull again. Rogers bought it for a lot of money, too much money not to check the validity of its papers and everybody knew now that the bull was sterile. Barrett knew it was no coincidence this particular bull had gone through a fence and wandered into a truck. Booth saw no traces of Rogers’ work up by the fence but it was dark and Barrett guessed Rogers was not far away. He looked at Booth who stood hipshot, one arm straight and his hand propped against the cab of the truck. He was tired and mad as hell to have to fool with Rogers.

“That’s the bull?” Booth asked.
“That’s him.”

“Rogers’ll have everything perfect for the insurance folks.”

Booth shook his head and moved around the front of the truck. He was so tired he stood staring at the bull. Barrett saw Rogers coming up the highway, walking like a dancing bear, belly out and shoulders stooped, no chest, all gut and limping. The light hit the underside of his chin and nose.

“Here he comes.”

Booth looked up. “Shit kicker.” He turned to Barrett. “I’m not letting him get the money.”
"Okay."

Rogers' belly hung over a big gold belt buckle. "Heard noise all the way back to the house."

"I'll bet," Booth said. Booth was too tired to have much control so Barrett stepped beside him. "That's yours, Rogers."

"God." Rogers stared at what was left of the head.

"You could have killed the trucker."

Rogers looked up. "What?"

"You could have killed a man, Rogers, you asshole."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you driving your bull in front of this truck, Rogers."


"Tell him what?" Barrett said.

"I was home."

"Cut the act," Booth said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Listen, Rogers. I'd rather bust your ass than look at it." Booth stepped to the bull and kicked its spine. Rogers looked away. Barrett's stomach knotted. A fresh gush of blood squirted from the neck. "You get this fucking thing off the road."

"I'll file a complaint about you, Booth. You got no right to treat me like this."

Barrett stepped forward so he was between Booth and Rogers. "Do like he says."

"Eat shit," Rogers said.

Barrett felt Booth grab his elbow and push by. Rogers took a couple fast backward steps when he saw how angry Booth was.

"Don't," Barrett told Booth. "He's not worth it."

Booth pointed at Rogers. "You about killed a guy, Rogers. I know it does no good to tell you that but I'm tired so I'll say what I want. You get that thing off the road or you're going in."

"I don't have to take this," Rogers yelled.

"Jesus. You could've killed a guy." Booth got his voice down soft and it scared Barrett to hear the hatred in it. "You get a tractor and get this thing off the road."

Rogers opened his mouth and shut it again and turned away, limping back down the highway into the dark. Barrett put his hand on Booth's shoulder.
“Worried about his insurance,” Booth muttered.
“Let’s check the driver,” Barrett said.
They walked to Barrett’s pickup. Booth woke the trucker, shaking his leg. For a moment the man did not know where he was, then he saw the uniform and swung his feet out onto the shoulder. Booth saw the bottle.
“‘You okay?’
“Yeah.”
“Listen,” Booth said, “The guy who owns that bull ran him at your rig.”
The trucker looked at them and shook his head. He set the bottle on the floor. Barrett did not know whether the man’s steadiness was exhaustion or calm.
“I’ll need your papers,” Booth said.
“Hank Weber,” he said, holding out his hand. Booth and Barrett shook hands with Weber and followed him back to the truck. Weber climbed up and handed down the papers.
Booth wrote and did not look up when he heard the sound of Roger’s tractor. Barrett leaned against the truck and watched Rogers struggle to get the chains on the bull. Rogers stopped to vomit. When he finished he saw Barrett watching, then Barrett turned away and did not look back. The tractor started off and he heard the chain rattle, then the heavy dragging scrape of the carcass. Barrett heard the bull’s spine snap as it worked into the chains.
Weber stowed his papers and looked at Barrett. “Insurance money?”
“Yeah.”
Weber scratched his head, shook it and swung his legs under the wheel. The diesel caught as he hit the starter. Weber checked his mirrors.
“You get this thing out?” Booth asked.
“Yeah.”
Weber eased the rig back. He jumped down when it was lined on the road again and walked all around beaming a flashlight, looking, thumping tires. He threw the flashlight on the seat and climbed up.
Weber looked at Booth. “You know how to find me.”
“IF.”
Weber nodded and started away. Barrett saw him shake his head again as the truck passed over the blood on the road.
“Quiet guy,” Booth said. “You spare me a shot?”
"Sure."

At the pickup Booth took a pull off the bottle. A little scotch ran from the corner of his mouth and he let air out over his tongue, feeling the burn going down his throat.

Barrett stashed the bottle. "Night, Boo."

"Too late for that." Booth pointed east where a thin line of pale red edged the horizon. "Morning, Will."

On the way again, Barrett checked his watch. Six. In the rearview he saw the red tail lights of Booth's cruiser in the murky light of early dawn and then the lights crested the hill and winked out. Barrett was alone on the road. Weber was long out of sight, making up time.

Barrett drove and tried not to think. He drove too fast and did not care so long as he got home. Had to get home. The quiet dark before dawn made Barrett uneasy and gave him a crazy unreasoning fear. He couldn't get any noise from the radio.

"Keep it on the road."

As he looked down at the speedometer, something caught his eye in the road. Barrett had his foot off the gas the second he saw the deer. Too late, too fast. He yelled at the doe to turn back and slammed the brakes. No time. The truck began to skid. Barrett couldn't get his eyes off the huge light-pinked ears of the mule deer. His hands worked the wheel and he kept watching the doe's fine head, the ears in the light and then she turned and stepped off the road.

Barrett gripped the wheel, stared. His stomach went tight and he shivered. The truck settled back on the right side. Barrett kept it straight and coasted. He drove very slowly, blank, until he reached a side road. Then he turned off and followed the dirt road into a stand of aspen. Barrett turned off the engine and got out to take a leak. His hands shook and his heart pounded again. He walked quickly up the road and started to get a hard on, then the dizziness hit him and he went back to the truck for the bottle. He walked behind the truck and held the bottle in both hands, sat down and leaned against an aspen.

Facing east he could watch the sunrise as he drank. The dew chilled him. Barrett sat leaning against the tree all morning and when he finished the bottle he was too dizzy to stand. Barrett could not tell what he was thinking, if he was thinking. He didn't know he was falling asleep but it was dark when he woke and he was stiff and cold and nauseous.

He climbed in the truck and headed home. Barrett wanted to keep
his mind empty but he kept thinking of Lee and wondering how the hell any woman could stand him coming home drunk and gone so long and filthy and needing her. He did not understand how the hell it worked and Barrett started to cry when he turned off the highway up his own road and saw Lee waiting for him at the back door. He did not move and watched her walk toward him, then he felt her arm across his back, her hand, her shoulder strong and warm in his armpit and their legs moving together as she helped him across the yard into the house.
JOHN SPIZZIRI

“My father immigrated to New York so’s he could make his choice in life, and I walked a girl home who wasn’t Catholic.

He said I was no better than him or God, if I wanted his ice-truck when he was through let her go. So I immigrated here to San Diego and tuna, and I’ve fished for the tuna since there was ice-trucks. It's starting to show in my footsteps.

Hit by booms, as many slits in my face by nets as there are states, overside once every time out, these two fingertips gone by a knife, and I guess I would do this again.

Last trip out when I looked in the hatch at the fish packed in ice, I thought of him.

I wish he’d known me when my bones and eyes were better, when my hands were hard as anchors and the ladies moved under me breathing like the sea.”
BENEATH THE K.A.

toward homilies for Ginnie

1.
On the eve of his retirement, my father
darkens all of the house’s lights but
one candle, and sits with his moon face
reflecting it fully, all night, the whole
skeletal, fissured, night long, till just the
old moon his smile is left
like a chair runner rocking his features
sleepy at last. That smile,

the shit it ate. . . He sold insurance, Hello
Mrs. Kojzki what a nice frock oh and look
how pretty Giselle is. The smile. His little
square of customers The Company sectioned out, each
year smaller, each month ten p.m., every day
three floors up: Hello Mrs. Partolini. The smile, a
rag he buffed his life with. He called it rubbing
shoulders with the world, how you got along,
how you got. And he had his reasons,
okay, I know, the Depression and his own father my
Grandpa Albert blind. The wink the smile. For every
penny a star darkened in the sky and

tonight, on the eve of his retirement, for the
gold watch, the last free star
blinks out. And the few that remain
burn the old constellation more clear
than a dictum against black expanse,
The Kissed Ass, what
we live under.

20
2.
"Xmbert, it's so bad here! It's riflepping!"

Ginnie, long distance "lonely" an army base
"and the creeps" an Iranian army base "drudgery"
teaching Iranian soldiers English "I . . want . .
a . . loaf . . of . . bread" She wouldn't
kiss, though it hung in her window all night
like a huge gouda moon, that constellation, Ginnie
wouldn't kiss. "can't win" I don't know a thing
about Iran "if you don't play the game" but picture it
deal, a large dead length of dust and salt formations
with Ginnie going "loaf" lobe "no loaf, listen:
lobe, now you say it" lobe Desperation
makes strange jobs "not that I didn't have connections,
I didn't want conneczhmp" The transatlantic
cable spasms and tics "My last job, The Academy of
Emorgeflee Pramkits, the day I saw the editor of
Plachpis Review flounce in with this pretty
blowfish on his arm and in the next grepstymish
issue there she is, Albert, with this
terrible poem." I look it up. It's a
terrible poem. And Ginnie's only connection
is terrible, sputtering through the water. "I'm delbmunk!"
And Ginnie isn't pretty, just good. And a
loaf of bread never cost so much. And it's night, at
least I assume it's night for her (here, Chicago, a
fishbelly light says it's day) and I don't know anything
about Iran, or the Pentagon's plans for Iran, but I
see Ginnie walking its dark salt fields,
the whole country clasped for a cape on her shoulders,
her burly shoulders, her shoulders she wouldn't rub,
let the stars be a talcum tonight. Just once, soft
and accomodating. For her, for someone who didn't
play kiss. I see her out there, telling the sky "loaf,
goddam you, loaf!" but it all comes back wrong.
3.
In his own time, in his own country, when the work was done my father would fall from the world’s pincer-tipped connections through the day’s last door, his own, and leave his lips kissed onto his wife’s cheek, and rest on the borscht-red rug or in the gray bath. But first, every night, a kiss on the doorpost’s time-blackened bar of mezuzah, its star’s six points were the real address he drove home to —this as prescribed by his father’s father in a more transcendent land. It was a kind of cleansing off of the long hours’ lies from his mouth before the pillow took his face into its dark spaces. / And

in my time it seems important, how replenishing the homes my friends return to, what banner above. In my country tonight, the sated fox cub is an auburn blur on blackness with loud henblood smearing the blunt end, and it too will curl against a mother. A nurse is watching the clock, at a quarter to three it’s a hug. A black whore’s auburn wig rides thousands of bloodcolored rollercoaster cars of stoplight glare up its ringlets. When she smacks a certain latch open she’s a mother. The rest falls off with the boa. Somewhere near Foster a barge’s store of oil finds voice in a moan. Maybe from the oxygen tent a man beneath his aegis, the clock at a quarter to three, is sitting up, rising with time’s black hand for his last aware fifteen minutes. So many, so much . . . There are people I love with slow steps taking them out of this for a while, to where they can toggle light on in a room they know, and lay in a lap that out of caring past sex makes no demands and asks no questions. / Though
first it requires their strength to bypass
those other lit windows, a sort of constellation
set in the city's back, that say it's
warm in here and so cold outside tonight now
November's a shock in the lungs come
in relax oh and just if you will purse
up and kiss this little
ass at the door and then make yourself comfy

4.
And the cold frosts
terrible stars, gray
encroachments, up the window. My father
finally goes to bed. In a few more
hours it'll be morning here, Ginnie
can rest in her far Iranian night. His
teeth are false and on the bureau, it's a
way of saving the day's last, only
honest, smile "for Fan and the kids." Ginnie,
he couldn't help it. I love him, his were
different times, different responsibilities. Let the only
ones we can't forgive be ourselves. I know
how the salt builds, every dawn you wake and Iran's
a hard, mineral, taste on your pillow. It's
okay. I promise. What counts —really counts—
goes up to ten and we hold our weary faces in them.
Here's the homilies:
Everyone dies and everyone's buried, shoulders
rub world soon enough. Every stone was a star once.
Need isn't want. I promise: I'm
not so cold I'll pucker.
LET BE

You'll split the earth in half,
my son tells me as I spade a plot
for lady slippers and cosmos.
I pull at the burdock
root that winds like veins. See
those trees over there will fall. The ground makes
sense to my son. Spring is a soft, particular tangle.
We look at the leaning trees,
which have dimensions of green
only a child wants. He doesn't pick out the nest
I describe. He senses a trillion
minutes without counting. He sings
four and twenty blackbirds and
when the pie was opened the birds
began to sing. The blood in his heart
is certain as pitch
how to heal. He hands me a wish flower.
He has ten crescent moons under his nails.
APOGEE

In my thoughts I lean over water
letting a boat tip in such a manner
that you on shore miles away
will somehow know my body
arches as if I skim the back of my head
along the waves, as if you feel hard
in me.

In the tide and century
of this dream I am sea mare.
You can put your palm on my flank.
I will not quake
or entirely yield.

In each other’s arms
it’s this way after a long time.
Or first.

Last year I read your mind.

I can’t do more.
THE MODERN MUSEUM OF ART

Because we have not scheduled our trip to coincide with free Tuesday at the Modern Museum of Art, we buy our tickets, check our coats, and enter. Pretentious in its own way, this is at least not one of those yet more pretentious museums which ask you to make up your own mind how much to pay and then coyly suggest how much you ought to pay. This museum, we are aware as we walk hand in hand across the lobby to the plate glass windows that look out onto the sculpture garden, is forthright and honest in its pretentiousness. It invites you out into its gardens — “enter,” it says, “here” — and the invitation is taken for granted. There's a couple screwing at the foot of Rodin's “Homage to Victor Hugo,” for example, and no one but us seems to be paying them the least bit of attention.

I wonder why, says my companion, brushing at her skirt, they have not taken their clothes off.

Well, I speculate, as we lean together watching them, it's the City, after all, probably they're afraid everything would be stolen by the time they're finished.

Hmmmm. We turn. The man confronting himself in that mirrored bit of modernity against the opposite wall, preening, sidling towards an angle that will nestle his image against the image of the naked woman painted on the mirror, is at least no more pretentious than the work of art.

Maybe that's the nice thing about this museum, she suggests: we're neither humbled or awed or uplifted by it, we just fit right in here. It's us.

We turn again, shoulder to shoulder. The couple in the garden is finished. They are admiring Rodin's paunchy, muscular statuary. If I ask her why she is rubbing her hand on my thigh, the subsequent conversation is obvious. Perhaps we shouldn't have checked our coats when we came in: this museum may well be us, but possibly we are too much for ourselves. Looking through the window into the
sculpture garden, we can both clearly see certain more extreme possibilities had either the sculptor or his subject been American.

Europe, I announce, protects its statuary.

An enraging fact, she counters, which no doubt explains that vicious attack on the “Mona Lisa” in Japan.

And the desecration of the “Pieta” in Italy, I remind her.

And, she adds, the vituperation of the “Picasso” in Chicago.

Ah, Chicago! We fill our museums with French Impressionist paintings and then claim we have culture! With Egyptian tombs! With the masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance! I'm getting worked up.

The thing I like about the restaurant here, she says, leading me off in that direction, is that you can always get a bottle of cold beer.

We stand in the cafeteria line while she fishes through her purse for her wallet, promising that this is “her treat.” The same damn thing in music, I tell her, the symphony orchestra plays nineteenth century German Romantics and we have culture. Italian Opera! Iced tea, if you don't mind, I have a feeling a beer would give me a headache just now.

She smiles as she pays: Shall I carry the tray?

From our table on the terrace at the edge of the sculpture garden, we can see that nothing much is happening. The pond has been drained: a little more concrete, a little more of the City, exposed. There is a kind of listlessness to the people wandering about among the sculpture, as if they are all moving in slow motion, as if they have all had too much beer to drink, as if they are all behind glass. An extravagant and untouchable malaise. Behind the large plate glass windows facing out onto the sculpture garden from the museum proper stand a man and a woman, leaning in two directions at once, both into each other and into the window, as if they were about to join together in pushing right through it — no, slipping through it seems
to be more their intention — into the garden. Their faces are blurred by the glare on the glass, but it is obvious from the tension in their joint posture that they must see something quite remarkable going on in the garden. Each has one arm now about the other's waist, so that when they lean forward with such intensity, each with one arm out against the glass, their heads tilted together, they appear as a single person, seen in a terribly critical act of observation.

Why is he standing there like that, asks my companion, isn't that sort of dangerous?

Who? I ask, looking up, gulping quickly at my iced tea.

That man leaning so hard against the glass, she says, back there, in the museum, or is it a woman? By the time I follow her gaze back past Rodin's "Homage to Victor Hugo" to the plate glass windows, there is no one there. The interior of the museum is too dark to see further into it.

Well, I say most reasonably, if he wanted to get into the garden, there's a door right beside the window, or you can just come around through the restaurant, like we did.

Ah, she says, adopting her most playful and conspiratorial literary tone, perhaps he — or was it she? is it a case of mysterious identity as well? — didn't want to come into the garden.

And, says the straight man, why not, pray tell? After all, he — she — they! — were certainly looking hard enough.

Ah, she says again, but perhaps what they saw there was something both too terrific to encounter more closely and at the same time too fascinating to draw back from.

Like what? I ask, looking around the garden. There is no longer anyone here at all. The tables on the restaurant terrace are all empty, even the sleepwalkers who just moments ago were wandering among the statuary have all gone.
She just smiles, silently, rolling her brown eyes up at me from under her blond bangs: Like us?

O quit it, I blurt out, then quickly add: Are you finished with your beer?

She is, so we rise and walk down into the empty sculpture garden — empty, that is, except for the sculpture, bronze and monumental and untouchable, like Rodin’s enormous “Victor Hugo,” that most disproportionate of human beings. Inside the museum, in a second floor gallery as I seem to recall from a previous visit, there is another rendition of the same figure in bronze, also by Rodin, but on a considerably smaller scale. In the museum shop you can buy a three inch high replica, also in bronze, which you can clutch in your hand.

The thing about statuary is, I tell her as we wander hand in hand among it, you want to touch it.

You can’t, she says, remember? It’s European. Rodin? Giacometti? Moore?

To say nothing, I suppose, of the American guards, wherever they are. If you make your culture out of someone else’s stuff, then you have to guard it extra closely, because if anything happens to it, you haven’t got anything of your own to replace it with. We can only touch what’s really ours.

That’s right, she says, in the empty garden.


O, like us?

Like this? I ask, putting my free hand on her hip.

Like this, she says, hers on mine.

We kiss, very softly, very gently, our hands slide, mine into the small of her back, then down, hers at once around my ass. It’s very hot here
in the garden, hot and humid, perhaps that's why all the others have left. We are embracing. I have a slight headache, perhaps from the iced tea. Everything seems slightly fuzzy. Clutching each other tightly, we edge into the shadow of an enormous piece of sculture, her hand at my fly, mine tugging her skirt up. It's a shame we can't take our clothes off here, but the concrete is so hard. We lean hard into each other. "Victor Hugo" towers over us, untouchable. We sink to the concrete at his base, our hands moving slowly all over each other. Out of the corner of my eye, as we move into each other on this hard surface, I can see that a couple has just come out onto the restaurant terrace. In this sudden heat, in the glare of sunlight on them, flashing off the white concrete, reflected from the plate glass windows, I cannot see what they look like. The woman leads the way, carrying a tray of drinks.
FOR MY LIBRARY LOVER I LEAVE THIS
POEM PRESSED BETWEEN PAGES 9 & 10 OF
MY SECRET LIFE

You know I work from nine to three
so every night you leave me
notes scrawled in a school-boy hand
on the dust between book and book-end.
Once, when I shelved Sin-ema, the blue-
movie book, a scrap — "Velvet I love you" —
fell out. It had been stuck
between Linda Lovelace and a sixway fuck.
It tempts me to imagine you in the stacks.
I know you aren't the kind that jacks-
off sitting hidden at a back desk.
Honey I'm willing to take a risk.
Catch me as I shelve The Story of O
take my hand, I'll bring the book, do
lead me to your secret corner.
I want your hands to touch me and begin to whisper.
WHORES DO NOT PLAY BEETHOVEN

Whore's ovaries produce
Tiny deformed grains of sand
That lodge along the walls
Like black lung,
Never a pearl.

Hors d'oeuvres offer
Tightly wrapped rolls
Of meat and cheese,
Spiced spinach on plump mushrooms
Or tiny black eggs
On crisp white crackers.
They stuff the stomach
And leave bits of grease
On the fingertips.

Whores never send out
For hors d'oeuvres.
They order a sloe gin fizz
From room service
And wait for the bell boy
While smoothing their black taffeta gowns.
Isabelle Modene
Slept with her violin.
She was never afraid
Of cracking the case
Or pulling the bow hairs
Because she slept very carefully
On top of the sheets,
Her music spread around her
Like white Spring daisies
With black centers.
Her fingers made vibrato movements
In sleep
And her eyelids tracked
Over deep scores
Running the tiny intricate notes
To their final resting place.
The first thing she touched
When she woke up
Was its dear neck,
Then the strings,
Gently fine tuning
On her back.
And when she played
It was a public love affair
With the sweet brown box
Where we all shouted more
And were unembarrassed
By excess.
THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 31ST

The flickering light makes your eyes sparkle. On the screen, Lady Wakasa serves Genjuro tea in his exquisite cup.

Walking back to your place from the Tower, we see a dove twitching in the wet gutter that borders the park’s chilled pastoral.

Your bare shoulders gleam above your black dress: “Do you want some honey in your tea?” “I should leave.” “Stay until I fall asleep.”

From behind the couch, you bend over me. Your hair covers my eyes; I reach up blindly—Fire has broken what the potter made.

* * *

“The men in Ugetsu were dumb, or confused.” “Wakasa’s ghost trembled for renewal as flesh—your skin and hair remind me of hers.”

“I’ve heard enough of such trash from poets. Palely loitering, they moan ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ between Troubadouric tears.”

“If the Temptress was created by men, then she mouths all her lines simply by rote. Poets invented woman’s shrieks—and her revolt.”

“Since romantic sorrow is man’s making, let him wear it like a filthy coat. It’s midnight, be still—listen to the New Year.”
COMES THE HARVEST

Carrion birds patiently wait;  
they play cards with old leaves.

A horse screams, runs away.  
The black birds rise in a cloud,  
settle on the shoulders  
of their mother.  
The outlaw with a silver earring  
dances with the wind.

No one dares to cut him down—  
his body melts like sugar.  
Candied skull, grinning bone,  
don't look at me:

You sang "laugh and be light  
in this wind and the rain Angelika,  
for on that morning  
they will find us before we awaken.

The steaming hill at my back  
takes the sun, puts it in a drawer.  
Lie back in the damp weeds  
that smell of straw, Angelika."

Tell the children playing  
in the sun  
to gather at the wagons;  
it is harvest time—  
Dark fruit is heavy on the bough.
ON THE THERAPEUTIST, A SCULPTURE
BY RENÉ MAGRITTE

—for Norman Dubie

There is a man whose heart
is an open cage. There, two doves,
one inside on a swing at rest,
another at the door. In wingbeat time,
they are alternately doves
with promise and doves whose hollow
bones are filled with bronze,
飞行, as long as you watch them,
between flight and no-flight.
The man, his cane, and his bag
are also bronze and partake
of the doves’ problem, the cane
wanting to walk but anchored,
the bag bulging like clouds
but staying the same. Like all men,
this man tries now and then
to affix wings to his body.
DEAR BIRD BANDERS

Something worth telling
will have happened,
if I do not come back.
—Icelandic Saga

On the beach at Indian Island,
military reserve and bird refuge,
walking the tide line I found
one of your bands on the ankle
of a small skeleton.
    Both wings
were broken; the ants had cleaned
the bones. The whole assemblage
fit into two hands.

The tides here are unpredictable;
currents come from deep
in the Pacific, slow and far.
This coast takes a beating.
The number on your band
is illegible, though the last
digit might be 7.
At Sixth and Main of Mitchell, South Dakota, sparrows swarm on the bicentennial mural of corn—all colors of grain spreading in the sun the patriotic scene. In the rising wind our fathers are alive with birds, their arms, guns and drums plucked for food, kernel by kernel, seed by seed.

We are driving east to a storm suspended so tall and wide it is the losers' history, deep mountains of defeat, in clouds the many colors of darkness—then by the road a sign: "Lost Indian Motel."

At any dangerous time we are in exodus toward the past, migration without return, and now a double rainbow arches over the road; the car rocks in the shuddering wind like an ark of animals lost at sea; gray rain shrouds the earth and us, pavement a river of foam.

East of dusk, out from the storm, I drive toward where the moon will rise—Worthington, Sleepy Eye, Albert Lea—my wife beside me knitting in the dark.
Dear Anastasia:

I write to you now meaning no harm while certain questions hang from me like a brakeman's keys.

The Union Pacific, I'm certain, has seen to showing you the world. I've been away from Carpston, but I returned. I sell insurance and serve on the city council. I don't ask for things made easy. I work hard. I have made much of the peace with myself that I'll have to make. Sometimes I take Wednesday afternoon off and make puppets with my kids and we have lavish shows in the basement. Most of my neighbors consider me an honest and useful person.

Honest and useful. I suppose that's what I am. Yes, I'm proud of being honest and useful. But the trains still come through Carpston, and I reach up and scratch where I'm getting bald and try to hold my breath until all the cars have passed. And I wonder, Anastasia. I wonder if all that dirt and noise and rattle is going somewhere to see you.

I hope this finds you well and happy. I have tried to fill in a little for you so that the questions make sense after all these years. We knew each other for such a short time. I hope also that the Union Pacific has been kind to you. I send this in the name of the sound of trains.

***************

When I was twelve years old, I was in the Christmas play at the First Methodist Church of Carpston, Wisconsin. I played snow. My part was to lie round about the teetering shepherds, crisp and even, still and deep if possible. Down the back stairs to the right of the altar where the pipe organ was eroding the plaster walls with Sunday after Sunday of reverent rumbles, I went early and alone to where the choir robes were kept. There I was designed by the choir director beginning with a sheet pinned to my socks. Then I was covered with wads of cotton and fluffed out and swirled to a Bethlehem blizzard. To get the round-about effect, I carried a cotton drift in each hand and two lesser drifts were attached to my feet. The snow had to be mobile in this play, because the scene had to change quickly, and snow, shepherds, star and all had to disappear to make way for the more complicated and permanent manger scene.
Two hours later I felt my way up the back stairway without my glasses, following the frowning vibrations of the organ and was led behind the improvised curtain and drifted into position. Once the narrator was through, the shepherds dribbled onto the stage from three directions, and the star creaked its careful way across the heavens above.

Alfred Charles Podgorney, age thirteen with hair the color of fire damage and hands that flapped like incredible dying birds, felt he had to stand with one foot in the snow for realism. First my thigh, then my right kidney and then the soft drift between my shoulder blades supported his rag-wrapped foot while he blurted his lines. Finally Alfred buried his foot behind my ear, and his big toe came to rest with an even, strong pressure.

Alfred’s droning and the star’s unoiled flight to the west became faint blurs to the throbbing in my head. Then into the interminable thumping glaze between my eyes, just as the star on the wire was multiplying in my brain to a brilliant burst, the word “Bethlehem” broke through, and Alfred pivoted on the rapidly cooling drift and headed off to follow his star. And as life rushed back into my head I saw over the brink just ahead in a shimmering pageant of reflections cut into tinsel strips waving together to form and dissolve in a glittering wind, Alfred Charles Podgorney and what he really was. I knew then as the blood returned to my head and washed it clean of the last glimmer, I knew in a spot just behind my throbbing left ear that theater would be unkind to Alfred.

Arrive Anastasia Alvarez. Your father worked for the Union Pacific Railroad you said. The Monon, The Nickle Plate, The Penn Central, The Chicago and Northwestern, The Great Northern, The Milwaukee Road all came through Carpston. I watched them religiously for thumps and rattles and clacks and other signs of having been somewhere else. But never the Union Pacific, Anastasia. Was your father a freight agent, a yard clerk, a conductor, a brakeman, a fireman, an engineer? What was your father anyway, Anastasia Alvarez?

Anastasia, I’ve found there is a great deal of difference between girls with dark eyes that dart like forest eyes behind willow lashes and girls with airy blue and gold marble eyes that roll slowly in goat’s cream orbits. It must be unlucky to call two things so different by the same name. Anastasia, you were thirteen years old and had forest eyes standing there outside the fence.
Two days before you came to classes that early spring, you arrived at the fence of the football field where our gym class covered the soggy earth like a meadow full of grounded seagulls. You were alone and deliciously curved like a plump peach ripened by the long train ride to market, Anastasia Alvarez.

Inside the fence we were going to play a game invented by the gym teacher, Carroll Caruthers, or "coach" to generations of ex-students in Carpston who had chugged and raved through puberty on his field. In his game an inflated canvas ball, nine feet in diameter, was placed in the middle of the football field. On each side of the ball twenty students waited for the beginning whistle blown by Coach. The object of the game was to push the giant ball to the opposite end of the field and then through the goal posts. There were no rules in the game—only an object. It was more ritual than sport.

Anastasia, you arrived just before the starting whistle. And as you pressed close to the chain-link fence to watch, Coach blasted his whistle once and then turned his back and ambled off toward his office.

But the game never really started when Coach blew the whistle. It started when he turned his back. Since there were no rules as to how the ball should be moved, and since we had all played "Giant Canvas Ball" for as long as we were physically able, there was no sense in going through the entire meaningless dance of offense and defense. Things like goals and the final score could be decided quickly and fairly just before the end of the class. But first there were more important things. There were grudges to settle, water spittings and pen stealings to answer for.

And also there was in our gym class sixty-seven pounds of Billy Plotz. Billy was short, and Billy was light. But Billy was brave, and once a week in our class his bravery was allowed by common consent to fill the football field. Billy would charge the ball and leap and scramble to a standing position on top and then lunge off with all 67 pounds into the opposing team. In our gym class we had agreed like round table knights that Billy's consuming weekly grudge against the world came first.

On this particularly chill-less spring day with clovers poking their heads above the soggy turf, Coach blew his whistle and retreated. Billy flapped toward the ball intent upon its largeness, its inert, consuming size, while someone (Alfred Podgorney?) gave a low
whistle and pointed to the fence and Anastasia Alvarez. To the man we wheeled toward you, Anastasia, as Billy poised in ecstasy on top of the ball, his eyes rolled back. And then he launched himself in blind retribution into space above our team. With our backs to the ball like loose-order formation, we spread apart to better see the apparition at the fence, and Billy Plotz came spread-eagle into our midst, miraculously missing every man-jack and landing with a blind smack three inches into the warm, wet grass.

No one moved on either team (including the fallen angel Billy). All eyes were on the fence where the playful spring wind lifted and toyed with your light green dress and fluttered it up to your waist where it flapped like a giant mint moth sucking sweet light. With the back of one hand you brushed absently at it and stared back into our cage while we, like the moth, sought the fascinating light. And then instinctively, on the cloudy side of cunning, Alfred Podgorney put one foot up on the prostrate carcass of Billy and shouted toward the fence.

"Helloooo, sunshine!"

With the spell broken, both teams (minus Billy) began snapping each other’s jockstraps in a melee that included flips and cartwheels from the more talented, and whistles, tongue noises and grunts from the rest of us.

But you, Anastasia, as if you had found out what you came to find out, turned and floated off down the street where the lilacs forevermore smelled sweeter.

Anastasia, were you only practicing on Billy Plotz? Had the Union Pacific taken you places and shown you things we couldn’t even dream of there in Carpston, Wisconsin? Did your father send you to the fence outside our gym class to show us to you as we really were? How did we look to you and your Union Pacific that wouldn’t even send an engine through our town? You told me your father worked for the Union Pacific. Alfred Podgorney and the others didn’t know the Union Pacific from the Chatanooga Choo-Choo. But I suppose you knew that, Anastasia.

Just the other side of the Methodist Church where I’d had my vision of the real Alfred Podgorney and where the ravine dips down along side the railroad track, I caught up with you after your first day of school. You were carrying two heavy books against your warm belly.

“How’d you like the game the other day?” I asked. (Was one of
those books about railroads, Anastasia?)

“What game?” Your voice like bits of glass tossed into the wind.
“G.C.B., the Giant Canvas Ball game.”
“Oh that,” you said. “It didn’t last very long, did it? What happened to that boy who fell?”
“He’ll be all right,” I said. “His nose has sort of a dent on one side and a lump on the other. But he’ll be all right.”
“Is that supposed to be a part of the game or something?”

I almost saw the thick book you were carrying, but you covered it with your arm in time and held it tight against you. Railroads, Anastasia?

“Not exactly. He was supposed to land on our team. That’s the part of the game Billy added.”
“I don’t remember seeing you there.” Had you practiced lifting one eyebrow at a time?
“I was there.”
“My father works for the Union Pacific. Trains, you know.”
“Yeah, I know.”
“How could you know? I just told you.”
“I mean I know about trains. About the Union Pacific and a lot of other lines,” I said.
“So what.”
“So nothing. I just happen to know about trains, that’s all. Are you trying out for the play next week?”
“No,” you said. “It’s so stupid.” You turned off out of my way home, but still I followed.
“What’s so stupid about it, anyway?” I said.
“The whole idea of being something you’re not. That’s what my father says. It’s stupid to try to be something you’re not.”
“Well, here’s where I turn, bye,” I said. But as soon as I got around the corner I looked back through the new hedges and watched your dress sway in the long shadows where the new flowers were gathering the mud around them for the evening.

The school play that spring was to be done with a seventh and eighth grade talent pool and performed just before exams at the end of school. It was called “The Day the Woods Walked” with apologies to William Shakespeare. The scripts were stacked in the hall outside the eighth grade English teacher’s room with a sign saying, “take one and try out.” I took one. I saw Alfred take his. And, Anastasia

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Alvarez, you I thought I already knew about.

Alfred and I found ourselves on either side of the gym facing each other early the first day of tryouts. The first day was really the only day, since stage hands, scenery painters, prompters and a variety of soldier, maid, and guard parts would be all that remained for the second day.

My name was called before Alfred’s, and I walked to the stage. As I began to read, muffled coughing and shuffling came from the floor of the gym. I read the part of Mr. McDuff where he promises to do his best to stamp the hell out of that shuffling and coughing bastard Alfred, because Alfred had tried to screw him up again. At least that’s the way I read the part, mentally substituting Alfred’s bloated face (his mother made him drink three glasses of water every day because his skin was oily) for the face of that merely misguided Mr. McBeth.

“And when I get the chance, I promise my dead family to fix that dog McBeth and have his head sent to the taxidermist and his teeth all gleaming for a keychain. And if I fail may the ghosts of my children gnaw my worthless bones into bits too small to rise up again when that day comes.”

As I finished, the silence in the gym murmured congratulations from the tumbling mats in the corner to the chicken-wire cage where the G.C.B. was kept. I turned to the eighth grade teacher (she was also the fundamentalist adapter of the play). She smiled and nodded, smiled and nodded and then wrote quickly and surely on her clipboard.

I’m in, I thought! The hell with you Alfred. I hope they let you paint the scenery or carry a tree. For Alfred, better late humility than an undeveloped character. And so I returned to fourth period social studies without even staying to watch Alfred paw the air like a trained horse counting its age. I didn’t need to. Your arrival, Anastasia Alvarez, I felt had oiled the pulleys of my ascendant star, and it creaked not at all.

The following night after school the cast was posted outside the gym. I can’t say I was disappointed. I wasn’t. Neither was I depressed, or distraught or dismayed or down-hearted. I looked at the list and simply found drool running out of the side of my mouth. There it was: Mr. McDuff; yours truly; Mr. McBeth: Alfred Podgorney! I was the hero, of course, but Alfred wasn’t a rock, and Alfred wasn’t a tree. And furthermore, Anastasia Alvarez was listed as Mrs. McBeth!

Oh, Anastasia Alvarez, your father worked for the Union Pacific
you said. With its hot boxes, rolling stock and semaphores, where had the Union Pacific been with you? You told me your father thought acting was stupid!

I slurped and caught the drool before it ran down my collar. What else could I do? And I began to attend rehearsals after dinner.

Each night I peered out of Mr. McDuff’s swagger to see you and Alfred passing a candle like a relay team’s baton. When you had the candle, Alfred had one leg up on whichever prop was closest. When Alfred had the candle he dropped his leg while you pirouetted in dainty concentric rings around him. Then you had the candle again, then Alfred, then you, then Alfred. All the while Alfred’s right leg shot out and returned in classic Alfred fashion. It was all the same to him, shepherd or McBeth. Each time he pawed the scenery I thought I would throw up if it happened again, and each time it did happen again I was saved only by being inside Mr. McDuff.

After rehearsals at nine o’clock, the rule was that students had half an hour to get home. Alfred and I lived close to school. Anastasia, you lived more than half an hour away walking, because your mother picked you up right after rehearsals. I’m certain of this because at 9 o’clock Alfred and I both attempted simultaneous dawdles which were meant to include you and which both failed.

Anastasia, your father must have had a big Union Pacific pocket watch open when you got home. He liked things on time. He was a railroad man, you said.

And so because of the combined conspiracy of the Union Pacific and the P.T.A., Alfred and I found ourselves walking two consolation blocks together after a rehearsal.

“So what do you think of Mrs. McBeth?” Alfred asked me, and I thought I noticed his right leg break stride in a twitch.

“She remembers her lines,” I said.

The night was bursting with understatement, with half-formed leaves, with lightly swaying streetlights, with the nub of a new May moon.

“I think she’ll work out all right,” said Alfred, trying not to say anything so I’d say something.

“Yeah,” I said. “She hasn’t forgotten any lines so far.”

Alfred threw a rock at a streetlight, and I took a jump-shot over a low branch.

“Do you think she’s done this kind of thing before?” he finally
Michael Strelow

asked.

"Well one thing's for sure."

"What's that?"

"She's got nice tits," I said slowly.

"Fifty cents says they're not all hers," snapped Alfred.

"And you're going to find out?"

"Sure, why not?"

"How?"

"There are ways," he said as if there was some mystical state of knowing he had passed through from 7th to 8th grade.

"Good luck," I said. "But watch out for her old man. He works for the Union Pacific, you know."

"How do you know?"

And then it was my turn.

"There are ways," I said, and then turned in at my house with Alfred and the leaves and the moon and the streetlight suspended each in its own way.

Anastasia Alvarez, did your father come for the first performance of the play? Did he see Alfred dying many deaths before his final one? Did he see that it was you that made Alfred prance and paw his way around the stage like a trained bear? Alfred looked at your chest and lifted his leg to regain his voice then spun into the castle wall and teetered the foundation of our illusion. You stood there calmly, even serenely, while a prompter groaned to hold the set up until help arrived. Did your father park his engine on a spur track nearby to come to see all this? Anastasia, were you there in my vision of Alfred in the Methodist Church, the very Alfred you teased in and out of destruction, who forgot sixteen lines in the second act, who fumbled the hot wax while trying to see into your blouse, who gaped unseemly at you while you stood with your painted red hands, whose voice cracked from dryness while he tried to mercifully die? Did your father still think acting was stupid? Was your father there wearing his Union Pacific patch to witness Alfred consumed by you and the stage? And you remember the play after the play, don't you? It was at one of the soldier's houses. There in the fragments of potato chips I remember the scene like this:

Outside on the patio Alfred finds a tennis ball. He steals Anastasia's scarf and knots the tennis ball in for a keep-away game. I am the other side with Anastasia in the middle. Alfred overthrows me and the tennis ball-scarf lands on the low roof and gets caught in the
rain gutter. I get a clothes-pole with a hook on it while Alfred gets a ladder from the garage. While I fish for the scarf, both Anastasia and Alfred go up the ladder to the dark roof. Ten minutes later Alfred comes down followed by Anastasia who is wearing her scarf. Alfred at the bottom of the ladder with his right foot on the last rung relates a detail-less story about how hard it was to find the scarf on the dark roof. Anastasia comes down. The cast minus one applauds the end of the scene. Finally, Alfred taps my shoulder and hands me fifty cents and walks away.

While you were on the roof, Anastasia Alvarez, where was your father? Was he racing toward the western plains pulling empty cattle cars, mindless of his home and family? Did the Union Pacific care where you were?

On the Monday morning after the play with still three more performances to go, summer arrived on a south wind. The football field was scattered with thousands of long-necked dandelions strung in a scrawl—last fall’s message to the spring. And as we poured out of the locker room for the third period seventh and eighth grade gym class, we kicked and shuffled in the yellow dotted “i’s” and crossed “t’s.” Following us came Coach and the giant canvas ball.

You were watching us and the dandelions from the fourth floor study hall window, weren’t you? What did the dandelions say, Anastasia?

The giant canvas ball came to the center of the field in low bounds and lunges spurred by a hot tail wind. The teams split north and south, and the ball took its place with a final wallow, a big period in the middle of a message.

Coach blew his whistle and turned his back, and Billy Plotz came thumping up from the south, a legend of pumping legs and purpose. Billy reached the top of the ball clawing furiously and gained his feet as the lesser quarrels eyed each other below. Then Billy launched himself with the wind toward the north where Alfred stood at the rear of the pack gazing up toward the study hall window, back away from the action where dandelions waved as high as the tops of his sweat socks.

It was the wind that carried Billy, or it was the spring-fresh sap rising up his stunted trunk. But Billy caught an updraft of whichever and was lifted above us, gaining altitude for the first ten yards before beginning his blind downward glide path. We all spun away from the
day's grudges to watch the streaking Billy while the giant canvas ball lurched and started to follow wind-whipped through our midst.

Billy's head where the hair was streaking apart struck the gaping, gazing Alfred behind the left ear, and as the dandelions reached up to receive them both, the giant canvas ball came down and sealed them momentarily into the earth with its bulging equators before rebounding unattended toward the goal posts.

There is something in nature which collapses for a hole-in-one, for a tomato shaped like the perfect profile of Abraham Lincoln. At ten-fifteen that Monday morning we stared through the gap in imperative order to see the giant canvas ball incredibly bounce through the goalposts and score, an unerring journey of fifty yards after leaving the bodies of Billy and Alfred kissed to the ground.

What did the dandelions scribble across our playing field, Anastasia? I looked up to the study hall window where Alfred's eyes had been riveted, and there you were. Did you push back your hair then, or did you wave to me? Did you know about the fifty cents, the first hot summer wind, the trajectory of Billy Plotz? What did you show Alfred from high up there on the fourth floor that held his eyes and set him up like a rube for the windy carnival man? Were there two warm spots on that window when you turned away, Anastasia?

Maybe then Alfred was granted a vision like the one I had at the Methodist Christmas play. Perhaps not. It doesn't matter, because Alfred never so much as tried out for a play again. I got most of the leading parts from then on. That windy Monday morning Alfred received a slight concussion and two cracked ribs, so probably either going out or coming to, there was a moment of great lucidity that revealed something. I'm not sure. Alfred, on doctor's orders, was not even allowed to continue as Mr. McBeth, so a soldier finished out the three remaining performances.

Billy Plotz fared much better. He started to grow then, and some years later I saw him get as many as fourteen points in a high school basketball game.

The giant canvas ball next appeared at our end-of-school dance. It was suspended high in the middle of the gym and covered with bits of broken mirror so swinging slowly it shot back the colored spot lights in dazzling dream-like rays. Around the edge of the gym we danced, Anastasia, you and I. And we drank orange soda.

But your mother picked you up afterwards, Anastasia. Where was your father? and when summer came and I looked for your house
and found it empty, I was bringing you a polished fifty cent piece on a new silver chain that cost me $4.95. Your house was empty and the lawn was getting long around the “for rent” sign. I talked to a neighbor lady about you, and she said she never saw a Mr. Alvarez in the short months you were there. But then she said she never really asked either. Where was your father and that rattle and clank of trains that went everywhere?

What amazes me now—maybe you can explain it—is that a company as big and busy as the Union Pacific had enough time to send you at all, Anastasia Alvarez.
THE VIEW AT CEDAR BEACH 1956

This photograph brings you back like the eyes of the newborn. There's Alfredo still fishing. Poor fool, forever tangled in his line. Waves lost their color and Maria's hat faded to nothing. They're depending on the pier. That's how lives develop. To one side, a gull nibbles at a squid Alfredo counted on. Maria, a little dream, motionless. She loved him for the odds and ends fished out of his sweater. She loved his lean cold body smelling of sea. Not even the crease across her shoulder can change that.
IT HAPPENED IN ANDY'S TRADING POST, BILLINGS
for Andy Clair de Lune

Your father sang in 40 Sun Dances,
he wore a bear claw necklace.
You do not belong to this dim town.
Your long legs could roll away valleys
where children cluster, drawn to your voice,
bright beads about your waist.

It must have been a bear that spoke to you,
that young night under Pine Tree
when moonlight sifted over you like sleep.
When your left eye saw what the right would not,
you in your store, with no grass or wind,
poems instead of children spinning in your hands.
Saw and could not bear to see
and let the thin film drop.
The bear pitied you, took that eye
and sewed it into your heart.

In this town your fingers feed stars to open mouths.
Your heart flows moonsong to the wind,
grows too large for your huge hands.
You stand here, fill our heads with light.
Song spills through your bear-colored eye.
THE BOY'S POND

When the passionate dragonfly flashes
in the yellowing reeds among midday spray,
the still water blooming shallow
in the nymph green of the duck groats,
the boy who played on the calamus reed
raises the fishnet into the air
and snares the brood of waterfleas,
the dark cloud in the musselshell gravel.

Red blooms around the conjuring pagan;
the pond gleams fisheyed in the weeds.
The gray soul of the shore willow
grows audible over the sump and sedge
where the weak cry of the shunned prophet
resounds like a mouth of the spell . . .
The boy listens; sunk in his ear
are wind and pond and the shriek of a crow.

The noonday brightness is bewitched,
the glassy green algae-light.
The boy knows the water's place
in the different sparkle in his eyes.
He separates the reeds, the brittle yellow,
proudly strikes the frog-headed nod,
and hums and splashes and is the same
as he was once with an animal gaze.

And the pond is still the same,
like the time his mouth played the calamus reed,
your foot dangling in the yellow marsh
and your toes gripping the gravel.
When you see in the dream of the pond-green dark
the sedge, like hair, closing the circle,
this too is the boy's maturing—
for a while still your net hangs in the water.

Translated by Rich Ives
As the animals wake
their shadows move deeper into them.
Wearing a necklace of bone pebbles,
hunger arrives. The scraping of dull knives
leaves with the angel of dark noises.
The light at your feet
sleeps quietly in the dust.

Softly it begins,
the tender violence of staying.
Dreams of mating and fire.
Another hermit comes down from the mountains.
I, too, am not your father.
They say the Smith
is the slickest damn river
down county.
Put a pint in your right boot
and it will break upstream.
Or if your left foot happens
to be smaller
try it that way
but don’t count on it.
I am told this river
is all riled up inside and I
have come from Bent Mountain
with this commotion in place of my heart
and no intention of fishing.
I have spent whole
blocks of time studying Brueghel’s
Big Fish Eating Little Fish, where
someone with a sharp tool
has spent hours slitting bellies,
one right inside of another.
Don’t think I don’t know
the rewards of shutting my books.
If I didn’t
I wouldn’t be here in the first place.
I’ve already waded across
without twisting an ankle.
But I know what they mean.
All the drunks on the other side
are lugging huge Chinese bracelets:
loads of little silver fish
dangling on poles.
There's me walking beside the real water.
I'm going along, not even aware
I'm watching myself. Suppose my shadow
falls upon the half-seen prints
of carp feeding in the shallows
among the sick-green reeds, and suppose that moment
I glance away. It wasn't even me;
I was replaced. It was someone else
with eyelids and cheeks.

And when you get home
letters have come for you. Cream
and manila, you shuffle them
climbing the stairs: unexpected money,
postcard from Deyá, your
broker’s dead. I glance away,
and that moment you begin
to find in a linty pocket your old
fingernail clippings, and in your desk
on scraps of paper
notes in a foreign hand.
AFTER WHICH

Tell them you just work harder, take more work home, the life of the moment, life of a thousand years, get your hands up higher, suddenly, without the slightest reason. You couldn't have gone slower, built a house, bought clothes, washed them every day, after kissing a little while you went out again, walked easily at first, as if you had a lot of land. But you grew angry, struck her cheek, like an old man calling to his wife, a bird in his hand, we all know how it got there and the cat curved on the ground, panting. Adds to desire.

You do as you like, she said, nipped you with her thumb. Fish started to jump and all this in a strange lake with a shore of its own making, sending a curse over the world. You're worn to bits now, can't lift a finger, turn to water: if you don't drink you're worth nothing, after which you make a quick fire, let exceptions boil, as hot as a horse falling. If you look up she's starting to cry, as if it were spring.
WE SHOULD NEVER GROW JEALOUS

There are things that have not interested them for years, if he drinks just one glass of brandy, then lets up and uses the time to extract one tooth after another, his foot falling on his neck at the bottom of the stairs, snapping at her if she approaches: I'm telling truth now, you watch me forget to fall the next time, you with your hands so full, don't try falling on me, don't.

Or push me off, calls for an attitude toward me, when the water's low take a small hook for your supper, close your bedroom door, open it quick. I can no more pass through than I can prefer brick to wit, and if I take the hook immediately I sink to bottom.

Root there like a tooth ripening in the rippling mouth, the shore gets lost in mist, what do you see?
THREE HUNGARIAN PIECES

There's a hurdy-gurdy man on the block. His Csardas starts slowly, moves faster and faster, until your partner has been whirled into a state, birthdays, weddings, funerals, christenings, national holidays of one kind or another, there's always an occasion for dancing and drinking, always a Hungarian yelling, I drink when I'm dry, I drink when I'm sad, glad, I always drink.

After graduating from elementary school you enter high school on the advice of your Aunt Mariska, you meet a boy whose father is an authority, visit his home frequently. First he tells you your people migrated from Spain during the Great Inquisition, then he points to your body, You're covered with millions of fleabites, my boy, change to clean underwear!

A boy vanishes, gruesome stories spread throughout the country, soldiers appear everywhere, everyone's ordered off the street. Years later, it's discovered the boy ran off to Amsterdam to learn the trade of diamond polisher, his jewels known the world over. Now it's an accepted fact in Budapest that acquiring them is more important than quarreling, underselling your neighbor's produce: he brings it in from his farm on a barge, or a dirty rowboat, or a flimsy sailboat.
FATHER’S WALTZ

I sit alone in my front room, my best room, with my plants. I water them and they grow in the slanting sun. The patches of light cross my floor. They lengthen into the wall and fade when daylight turns to dusk in my front room as I wait for Peter. He will come today, I know. He and Mag are waiting for the baby to sleep.

My little great-grandson just two months old. He was crying like an orphan and I said, *Come, let me hold the baby. I can get him back to sleep.* I had to force her, that girl Mag. They brought him to me wrapped up so he couldn’t kick me. I put him over my left shoulder and his screaming sounded in my right ear, and far away. *Such a nice boy, such a good boy. Be quiet for great-grandma.*

*Maybe I better feed him.* Mag came close but I held on. He was being so good. *Grandma, he’ll quiet down after I feed him.* But I rocked harder. I could not feel my feet though I was kicking the floor, and she yelled, *Peter, Peter, Peter,* in my good ear and made the baby scream.

*Let me quiet the baby.*

*He needs to be fed, grandma, then he’ll quiet down.*

Liar. She was lying to Peter. My grandson. I held onto my great-grandson. I held him as tight as I could. They would take him away from me. They would not let me see him. He was two months old. Two months. And they would take him away.

Then Peter’s hands stopped the arms of my rocker. They are big hands, covered black with curls of hair. *No.* I kicked against the floor. *Please?*

*Grandma, he needs to be fed.*

Peter has crooked yellow teeth from smoking a pipe like his father and between his teeth are lines like black veins, and I let my great-grandson slip down my breast until Peter reached and grabbed him. The poor thing cracked his head on the arm of my rocker. The left arm. Not hard, but he screamed. His mouth was a big hole.

*Be careful. Why can’t you be careful?*

Mag was hugging the baby harder than I ever would and I could hear him screaming so loud it filled the room more than the sunlight. She unbuttoned her blouse and flapped it down and I saw with my
own eyes why the boy is so small. Her breast is no bigger than an egg. The poor boy could hardly find it. The nipple was hard and dark brown and sticking straight out like a withered root. I couldn't help it when I started to laugh. Mag thought she was so important. She helped him find that little root and he shut up and she patted his head and let his nose drip on her bare skin. She was crying, too, so her chest pumped up and down. Peter stood next to her and she hid her face in his chest while he stroked her head just like she stroked the baby's. Across the room they looked so small, like dolls. I was quiet for them. For my grandson, for his wife, for my great-grandson. But they will not bring him again. Peter will come alone today.

Peter is James' baby. He has promised to help me now. Do you need help, Grandma? He was still faraway across the room and the sunlight was stronger than he was. It slanted across him and made his face like a white mask and it showed how his hands played in his lap. Do you need help? His mouth stayed open like he was hurt. The pain is all I feel. I feel it instead of my feet, or my knee, or my head, and next to me I keep my mirror and in it I can see each part of my body. With the mirror I blinded Peter so he could not see me. That was morning. In the afternoon he asked, Do you need help? He was just strong enough to ask a question he should be strong enough to know the answer to. Only Father spoke in statements. And proclamations. And declarations. His prideful, booming voice. We're going to church. Come on, girls, we're going for a buggy ride. Go ahead. Go. You must marry him now. You made the choice yourself that night. I cannot make it for you. Leave me. It's too late to ask questions. Forget me. Forget your mother. Go. And Father threw up his hands and pointed his big arm out and away. He was a blur in front of me. Forget me, Peter. I have lived here, alone, all these years since your father left me. Forgot me. To grow old with my plants. I have my plants here. See how the sun warms them? See how they curl and float in the sunshine? He sat across the room as the sunlight turned gold and then orange on his face until the clock in the window chimed six and he stood up. He still did not know what to do with his hairy hands. Do you need help? I sat in my rocking chair staring at him. He was a shadow as the sun went down. Forget me, Peter.

At dusk James came to me. Leave me. But when you do, never come back. Have I loved you for nothing? He held my two hands in his. They were cold. Outside, Fay sat on the porch swing and it creaked with her weight. A big woman, with mousy hair, fur to keep
James' hands warm. Her eyes were animal eyes, dark and secretive, and she made him just like her, so that his hands trembled over mine. He loved her now. As it should be, they say. Have I loved you for nothing?

For something, mother. For the something that makes me able to love Fay.

I have loved you for that? Fay swung from the swing leaving it to jangle and see-saw empty while she stooped over my flower beds.

Yes.

And I said what was true in my heart. I hate her, James. I hate her. Leave me.

He wrung my hands in his. He was pale, with hollow black eyes, and he was losing his hair. From studying, he said. Only his nose had color. It was red, like a sore on his face. Mother. Mother. I don't want to go without your blessing. I'll be gone soon. To war, mother.

To Fay, James.

And war as well.

Don't go. I held his hands. They were soft, and I put them on my cheeks just under my eyes where I couldn't see them. Don't go. Have I loved you for nothing? Day after day I fed and loved James. He was so good, always so good. And early he became a man, after Edward left and I said, You're mama's man, now, aren't you, mama's boy? And we laughed and giggled. Then I was crying. Have I loved you for nothing?

No, mama, you have given me everything. But now I must love Fay, too, and children when we have them.

Fay? Children?

Yes, mother. Fay. We are already married. Don't you see? We were married this afternoon.

I don't know how my heart beats, all scarred and lumpy and full of pain with only sunlight to keep it warm now. Leave me. But he held tighter. Leave me! And he fell on his knees and choked like when he was a boy after Edward left. Fay was still in the garden. I could see her head with those black eyes spying on us between the slats in the porch rail, so I touched his head. It was hot and moist. I rubbed back his thinning hair. For twenty-two years he lived with me. Twenty-two years. He cried against my knee. The drops fell hot, then warmed, then cooled as they ran down my leg. They froze my feet in a cold
pain. Then I felt nothing. He could go to Fay. He would. He could go to war. He would. A man thinks only of himself. *Have I loved you for nothing?* And he looked up at me one long, last time.

*For everything.*

He stood up and fumbled for his sport coat, the one I bought him for his graduation. He wore it for a jacket now. It still fit. No. It was a little big on him, like his father's coats he could never grow into. *Goodbye, mother.* And he hunched into his coat and left. The screen door slammed behind him and I saw Fay straighten her big body. He looked so weak beside her, so small she would crush him. I watched them to the car. The headlights flashed against me. I turned and on the wall my shadow was a huge, black stain that blurred and ran into the dry wallpaper. He was gone. My James. In dusk. Now I wait for Peter, James' son. My grandson.

He was such a dark and ugly baby. He looked like his mother, fat and round and hairy and he sucked on his hands, sometimes both his mouth was so large. There was always something missing, even as he grew. A tooth, or a button, or a sock. Always losing things, leaving them behind until I made James quit calling me to find them. *I am not his mother.*

*But you are his grandmother.* My grandson, a dark, ugly baby then a fleshless boy, with his black, bowl-cut hair and his mother's shiny black eyes. He had her ways, watching me from behind doors and trees and out of upstairs windows until every time I turned around I caught him staring. He spoke only for his mother. A pampered, spoiled child. I don't know how he could love Fay. She did not respect his father. She crushed James and at his funeral she thought her look was the final one. It wasn't. She went up crying to see him and the minister held her in her grief like I held James when he was sick over the toilet. She shook and sobbed for the whole church to hear and bent over so near his face her dress lifted up from behind and showed the tops of her stockings creasing her fat thighs. When I went to pay my respects I saw it. She had left a trickle of drool down his cheek. The cheek of my son, Edward's boy. But it was too late to cry, though my eyes misted and I bumped against the front pew. As my elbows bump against these rocker arms. As I wait and watch the sun. My eyes shrink, then grow bigger and bigger at dusk. I watch them grow in my mirror.

Like they grew when I rubbed my eyes with jimson weed so they would sparkle in the bright lights when I was seventeen, when
Edward appeared before me in uniform from the dark shadows behind the orchestra and asked me to dance. It was then I felt light, lighter than the frills on my beautiful white dress. How he could dance. He held me with such care in his strong touch. A tall man, over six feet, with a mustache as brown and bushy as Father's. I loved him before I remembered his name. The boy I'd known who went away to the University two years came back a man. Such a man. And now ready for war. So ready I feared for him more than I thought I should, but less than I should have. The war changed him and he returned with his own eyes fearful and his tenderness something he laughed at himself for. But not that night, when I was seventeen, when his tenderness, his strong hands, swept me round and around until I felt weightless and airy. He kept me as his partner all evening and squired me from the boys, the younger boys with their pomaded hair and eyes that watched Edward and me with awe as we struck a pose, a picture. As we twirled, my long dress arched up and softly, so softly, brushed the creases in his sharply pressed pants. I could feel my dress touching him. At the end of the ball, the lights went out and a single spotlight in the balcony followed the dancers through the dark commotion. And then it was brilliant, more brilliant than sunlight. So brilliant my eyes must have shone like his lips when the rest of the dancers went still and the light followed us around the ballroom and everyone made way for Edward and me and we spun and twirled and circled in a light all our own and cast our shadows dancing on our schoolmates, on the orchestra, on the gaily decorated walls. I was never the same after. Never. Such a man he was then, until the war.

And what is there for a man to do? When nothing suits me. But you have to find something. There is James. There was James. My baby. Blond, curly headed boy, my only life after Edward left. There is nothing for a man to do. Nothing. Maybe Father. Shut up! There is nothing for a man to do.

Until he found the job away. Clerking as he'd done summers making his way through the University. He had the little store in Lamar and he stayed there alone above it in no more than an attic. On weekends James had a father, but I never again had a husband. His pride was his distance from me and his drinking was his distance from himself. After two years away like that he tried to come home but it was too late. He was too far away. He was like the raccoon that
Father caged when Bess and I were small. We watched it lose weight, refuse food, gnash at itself finally and we made Father let it go. He wore his thick pruning gloves and lifted it to the ground. We shouted our joy, but the raccoon sniffed the air and the earth for two days and not until a thunderstorm scared us all awake did we find him gone. *There is nothing for a man to do.* But it was not Edward talking. His eyes were shadows where he hid from me.

*There is James.*
*I must leave.*
*Where?*
*I don’t know, but I must leave. You don’t understand that. Perhaps you can’t. I’ll write.*
*You won’t. You can’t. If you go, never come back. Don’t write. Don’t lie to me, Edward. Never again. For a year you were in France and I never heard. I could not go out for fear of meeting people polite enough to ask after you. I became alone in this town. I became secretive and I hoped all the time you were gone that you were dead. Dead, Edward, so that your silence would mean something that I could tell people.*

*And now you are away in Lamar, and people think again that I have a secret I won’t tell and they avoid me. And James. He has no one to play with. No father except on weekends. James hardly comes to know you and then you’re away again. He feels your hands on him, a father’s hands, but they are shadows that haunt him, Edward. You haunt us. Both of us. I hate you.*

After I spoke, my own words horrible in my ears, he struck me. He struck my left ear entirely deaf. I could not hear him in the kitchen until I felt in my feet that something was crashing against the linoleum. I ran in and though it was dusk I saw him huge, his head almost touching the bare overhead bulb, surrounded by dishes broken and chipped and splintered, with pieces of bowl still wobbling at his feet. I followed him into the dining room, holding him by the belt, yanking at him. He dragged me to the maple hutch where I kept the china Father had relented and given me on my wedding day. Mama’s china, supposed to be her first daughter’s, and it was, though Bess did not think I deserved it, marrying young and so soon after I met Edward. And now Edward shook the hutch and rattled all the doors and drawers loose and grabbed at the precious dishes and platters and scooped through them like they were beans. He broke
them against the walls and the floor and I screamed and screamed. James ran from his room to help me pull at his father's belt, until Edward swatted me away. I fell and gashed my knee on a piece of plate and now I feel nothing in that knee. James pounded his fists against his father's thighs until Edward picked him up and held him, my son, head high. I screamed for fear that he would crash my boy to the floor, but he quieted then, and James went limp and Edward spoke in a whisper. I must leave, James. Take care of your mother. Let her take care of you. It's what she wants. What she needs. Someday, you'll leave, son. Think of me then. And I lay with my china, my knee bleeding, and the house, my beautiful house, was still.

I have loved him for nothing, Father. Father's strong, gentle hands bandaged my knee. Bess swept the china that should have been hers. I hate him, Father. I have loved him for nothing. Father patted my knee and picked me up in his strong arms and carried me like I was a little girl again. Like he did the day mama was sick and we went alone together to church while Bess stayed home to be mother's nurse. He clicked the horses just for me and they hurried down the elm lined lane and our faces were red and laughing, more full of merriment than the pair of cardinals peeking in and out of the forsythia next to the church. We played tic-tac-toe while the minister talked. And the horses were even faster on the way home, but we were going the wrong way. Father, why aren't we going home? He smiled, and the more I questioned him the wider his smile was and the faster the horses trotted until I was lost in my questions and his smile and the speed of the horses. I felt light. Then we were stopped just outside town where a band of wagons were covered with colorful curtains and little dark children ran around and hairy men and short women stood close to each other around a clear space of prairie. Father lifted me from the buggy and in that clear space he stood tall and spoke to the gypsies. They brought out bottles and balloons, and other people from town came. The clear space was full of people we knew, and a slim dark man came with a glass and a red scarf and he tied the scarf around my neck so it flowed down the front of my pink dress. In the glass were bubbles that floated to the top of the glass, and as soon as one popped there was another at the bottom. Drink it. Father was so gentle. It's a soft drink. Drink it. I drank it and the bubbles broke hot and tingling on my tongue and my throat burned but tickled, too. It felt so funny that I laughed and all the gypsies laughed and Father
laughed. I drank more and laughed again until I was finished and Father picked me up and danced round and around with me and carried me to the buggy where I leaned out and waved to the gypsies until we sped home.

Where mother was sick with Bess. Walter, Walter, she called from upstairs in her weak voice and I hid in the parlor. Father sighed walking up the stairs because he wanted to be with me. He said we could read. I would show him all the words I knew because I was better in school than Bess and the teachers liked me and Father knew it and he loved me. He loved to be with me and as soon as he was finished with mother’s voice he came downstairs and sat next to me. He looked tired and he smelled like the leather buggy seat. I leaned into his lap but he stood up next to me. You need to take a bath, young lady.

Why?

Your mother says you’re dirty. You were with the gypsies. And he winked at me.

I like the gypsies. I like the soft drink, Father.

He laughed deep in his throat. Don’t you tell your mother that. We’re already a pair of renegades today. Come, Katherine, let’s get you clean. He ran my bath water and he came in my room and took off my dress and carried me naked to the tub. Father bathed me. He rubbed my body with soap until I was red all over and then he towelled me dry. His big hands were as red as I was. He rubbed me with them until Bess peeked at us and he carried me back to my bedroom and dressed me in my white dress and brought me a book in the parlor. I showed him all the words I knew and we were happy there until mother called him away. Don’t go. Don’t leave me.

Just for a while. Only a while.

And after Edward left Father came to me. I knew again how much he loved me, how much he had always loved me. I wanted him to come help be a father for James, but he would not. He bandaged my knee and carried me to my bed. Now you will come live with us. Now that Edward’s left.

No. I will not be a burden.

And I choked and he looked down at me. Burden? Father, you are all I have now.

You have James.

My son, James, whose first thought must have been for Father, not
Edward, with Father there through his birth. James loves you, too. You could be like a father to him. Father smiled one last time and bent over and kissed my forehead, and that kiss burned more than the gash in my knee, and now my forehead is dead, even to sunlight. Don't leave. Don't leave me. You are all I have now. But he was gone, a black shadow disappearing across the door jamb. James rushed in to me and I held him so hard he cried out and I cried, too, but my left ear was ringing and I could hardly hear myself. I can look at each part of myself slowly, without moving. My forehead. My ear. My knee. My frozen feet. I can feel my pain without crying out. Father is gone.

Gone. Edward is gone. James is gone. Peter is my grandson. He is James' boy. He has a baby and I sit in my front room with my plants and watch them grow and wait for Peter, and for Mag. They will not bring the baby any more. He is a dark, hairy baby, uglier than Peter. They have named him Walter, for Father, and that is why I cannot love him. I cannot love any of them. Each of them is nothing to me, now. Though I wait for Peter in the lengthening stream of afternoon sun. Day after day I wait for him. He is all I have. He comes and he leaves and all the time he sits in my stiffest chair. His hands play with each other because they have nothing to do now that he will not bring my great-grandson. His hands are weak. Weaker than James'. And Edward's. Father's hands were strong. Huge, red strong hands. He is gone, and only my hands are strong. They must be strong. They grasp the ends of these rocker arms and pull and I rock up and down and up and down and I watch my shadow move in dimmer and dimmer fits against the wall.
IN MISSOURI COUNTRY

You saw from a distance,
how no one town held them
as they held to each other,
with sparse, leathery roots.
Yet the landscape they traveled
stayed as constant as the wind.
A long brown snake, the Missouri cut
through a hundred miles of prairie
and another hundred
and another.
Your own perspective stood silent
before that sense of space.
The family moved but always
cottonwoods huddled by the river,
where they picnicked, Sundays,
near the town.
No one town had a name as long.
Missouri flowed along the tongue
with cottonwood, gooseberry,
chokecherry and willow.
Children were warned away
from the rumbling undertow.
They learned the still,
surface float
that would ride to a neutral current.

Looking back, from a distance,
you still heard
the meadow lark's five clear notes,
saw five children,
like five fence posts
where hawks perched,
strung along the horizon.
Their lovers, too, appeared,
silent on the horizon,
strung out in the bar rooms.
Hide and seek among the poker games.
In Missouri country,
clouds took more shapes
than the mind could encompass,
changed as fast
as the reach between lover and loved,
father and children.
You mused on a dry, still-faced land,
tuned to the river.

When your gaze ran full of distance,
the horizon came unstrung.
You saw how people leaned
to draw that distance in.
Their roots were thin wire,
searching out a radiant current.
They played for a strong hand
on space.
Out of Yuma and heading west, you feel the lift of air: a thermal dares you to try your wings.

There is a dance of heat way down the road, a swaying atmosphere, and suddenly you see the dance turn clear as ice and above the ice, a mountain that is not there.

A floating island and a cold inland sea: too much for the mind to take in such a heat. You bat your eyes and caves of wind take form. The island undulates in dance. You think you see a ship.

The desert dips, and your mind is slow to follow your body down. Heading toward the end of sky, the bus realizes the road. You see the mirage with another set of eyes. You see the mountain real as the wind against the window you count your own eyes in.
You've got to leave this land again before it hurts you into a sin the years will not ease: a constant fear swells in your groin, and there's a singing in the trees your blood wants to beat time to.

Easy it would be to stay and dream, to walk wolf these woods and fields, to play what you've always been and are afraid to be. You know there's a crescendo building in your blood, a raging conquistador, wild sailor, part pilgrim looking for a Mecca he'll never find. Or find and lose and find again.

Dreams you once had in a bad time come back to haunt your ears: sounds of music too sensual for light drum dark in the soft trees, and the leaves begin again to dance and shapes take form, lovely and green.

You see the muddy river clear, sirens naked on its banks. A wild urge silent on their lips tells you plain this land will always sing you back, quick with dream, your hands always poised for overture.
AUTOBIOGRAPHY, CHAPTER XI: PRELUDE TO WRITING

I am dreaming. I am sitting here dreaming. It is raining and a good time for dreaming. I do not know whether the poetry will come today. If it does, I will be ready for it.

I think it is going to come soon. There was an image of a footbridge a moment's eye ago, and a river under it. The water was still with a scum on it, and what looked like, from that distance, a paper boat. It could have been a paper sack. But that doesn't matter. Sack or boat.

* * *

A limestone bluff to the north. I think I see a cave, wild flowers at the mouth. Steps leading down from the top. I walk down them. Someone has lived in this place. In powdered stone, the soft imprint of a thigh. Ants trail across the dunes.

Strange how the wind writes on water. The wind carries the scum away, and the sky floats by the mouth of the cave. Someone is looking out across the river. It must be me, but I do not know the eyes. They are a long way back, and they see only the reflection on the water, not the water itself. They are looking at the falling sky.

* * *

The water is suddenly white with geese, which see something startling. The geese do not fly; they paddle dumb and careful circles around one another, timing each stroke with the certainty of flight. I am sure of one thing: they want to know what it is amazes them before they try the heavy sky.
On the bridge, someone has left a grandfather's clock. Its face is peeling in the rain, and the short hand is missing. I turn the key: there is an odd sound, like sunlight striking leaves, or kisses in dark old doorways. Something is going to start in a minute if I keep turning the key.
DREAMING THE CABBAGE PATCH

Don't mull it over with your fingers. Don’t ask whether you’re here because you took Mother’s advice on how to carry scissors, closed, points down, don’t run. Don’t brood about whether sardines are hermetically sealed. It doesn’t hurt to give up clocks. Give up cutting and pasting articles. George Seversen Crawls 1,000 Miles for Jesus. Shoe polish and suicide require too much concentration. Have confidence in yourself. Pick lint. I know you can find the bathroom. Watch cobwebs. Think of Howard Hughes urinating into Mason jars. Nobody cares if you eat out of tin cans. Sit on the couch, watch it snow, think about mending your head with vinegar and brown paper. Read Peter Rabbit.

I know your hands remember how summer folded up on itself like a steel vegetable steamer. Panic is a bad smell from old kitchens. Think of cabbage moths feasting on finger leaves.

It is of little consequence that your fingers play Debussy in the flesh of his back. Indulge the thick taste in your mouth with sauerkraut. Ignore old friends. Read Peter Rabbit. Imagine black-eyed peas, bloating and sprouting in loam, unfolding like cabbages. Dream of your French braids, Grandma’s narrow walk. Dream forsythia, thickets with burrows. The tar baby. Soft-boiled eggs and milk like cream on the ferry to Denmark.

Though your hands shake, you’re dreaming away the ghost of the woman who’ll take your place. The one in the sunhat, tending the spring garden and laughing.
THE REST HOME

If there were windows here,  
who would give them  
names, who could  
recognize the light  
they offered after dusk  
& not be disappointed?  
Then someone remembers:  
It was always Wednesday night,  
in the dark outside  
the Baptist church,  
I was nine years old, & listening  
to the hymns of dead centuries,  
the mind of the prayer  
meeting sounding like many Bibles  
opened at once,  
& the long windows  
that looked like tilted boats.  
Here the choir is stable, fishermen  
who succeeded, a fern  
near the nurse's station  
grows unshaken by faith, miracles  
live in the slow games  
of the day room, & memory,  
which could not die,  
hangs like ammonia  
over every bed.
THE VISIT

She watches me carry vegetables from the garden pictures life as the embrace we plan on the stairs.

In the morning the cat dreams birds tries to leap off her bed through a closed window. Awake now he shakes himself—the birds are real.

The photographs she takes of our quiet house reveal figures fleeing the light of her flash, the white knees of one, long coat of another, the almost familiar face, hands on the coffee table.

She worries that all was not as it seemed; her letters hint at the unnamed presence. Finally she writes: "I have not, as I thought, lived alone all these years."
Huts are fashioned
with rhubarb to the ground,
the air dizzy with bees.
Along the rain forest
ants loosen the earth
and tunnel deep for loneliness.

The fever explores
your thigh; women
are nursing invalids
from this hot country.
(In delirium, the expedition
through the Alps, a boat
to Africa. Sails quarrel
with the wind.)

You lie in a hammock
breathing the cotton soaked sweat.
Slaves dance naked through trees.
You imagine
the eye of a panther
skinned to death by flowers.
PROVERBS

Everything falling into it and not coming back,
like coins into the bottomless pulpy hand of a leper,
the palm is a round mouth without teeth
straying over velvet and doorknobs.

Like coins into the bottomless pulpy hand of a leper,
everything in the world seeks a burrow or is one.

Straying over velvet and doorknobs,
Breath lets itself in and out without a key.

Everything in the world seeks a burrow or is one:
the egg, the fist, the tongue, and the soft mouse,
Breath, letting itself in and out without a key.

The resemblances of the body are too many to be counted:
the egg and the fist, the tongue and the soft mouse,
the skull and the one bright kettle on the shelf.

The resemblances of the body are too many to be counted
by the eye or the needle, their straight and silver glance.

The skull and the one bright kettle on the shelf
bless the knees at the brunt of the body.

By the eye and the needle, their straight and silver glance,
the throat is blessed, the wing of the answer.

Bless the knees at the brunt of the body,
Sadness, sleeve of the hours.

The throat is blessed, it is the wing of the answer.
A window is a door both open and closed, swallowing birds.

Sadness is the sleeve of my hours,
a palm, a round mouth without teeth,
a window, a door both open and closed, swallowing birds,
everything falling into it and not coming back.
I am a poem
a simple little serious poem
I like the way I am
and I shall stay this way.

—Skip Erfle

Editors' Note: When Ralph Burns showed us some of the student poems from his residencies in Montana's Poetry in the School's program, we were amazed, as we think you'll be.

Our special thanks to the teachers and principals at Fort Smith, Mt. Rapelje, and Crow Agency. Also to Pat Simmons, coordinator for Montana's Poetry in the Schools program.

But most important, thanks to the authors who have given us these poems.
Poetry-in-the-Schools’ unique aim is to illuminate for students a thing already their own, their “voice.” When a poem issues an acceptance of itself, (informing what Stanley Plumly terms “the mind neutral in its own nuance”) it necessarily assumes an emotional accuracy. The following poem speaks explicitly about self-acceptance, and it was written, appropriately enough, in lieu of an exercise I had “assigned”:

THE CLOWN

Because I am a clown  
people laugh at me  
because why I wish I knew  
because maybe they think  
I’m crazy  
because maybe they do like  
me and I just don’t know it  
because I am wonderful  
I am going to do some magic  
for you  
because I have a purple  
hat with a dinosaur sticking  
out  
because maybe I am  
a good clown.  
—Melanie Dianne Potts — Fort Smith

These kids, for the duration of the poem, trust themselves, and their poems shape their experience — the poetry is more interesting, more assertive. Best to listen, then, for their individual imagination’s logic, suggesting certain guidelines (possibly using one or more of the five senses), or forms (often the villanelle renders surprising results, especially in younger grades, shaping the obsessive sounds particular to a more random and subjective landscape.) Regardless, I push these poets to travel largely by their own landmarks. Best to let them tell in their unashamed way which mountains “talk about their lives and
how things are going" and where they can be found. The following Mt. Rapelje poems were written by grades 5-12. Notice the poems that draw their strength from refrain or motif lines — these were written by the 5-6 grades after writing a group villanelle:

THE MOUNTAINS

Some mountains go crazy
they talk about their lives and how things are going
Sometimes I wish I could fly

The cows got it made at the fence post
The bulls got upset at the barn
Some mountains go crazy

A man just got a pie
A girl found a penny
Sometimes I wish I could fly

The wheat jumped at the barley
The crows landed on the scarecrow
Some mountains go crazy
Sometimes I wish I could fly
—Deanne Maatta—

DAYS

The children work fingers to the bone
Their fathers work till dusk
The earth is tingling at their feet
The chalkboards get hay fever
The clouds are jumping to conclusions
The earth is tingling at their feet
The day is marching by quickly
My nose is green with envy
The earth is tingling at their feet.
—Nancy Erfle
TWO MEN IN A BOWL

Two men in a bowl and beer
some crackers look out.

On the rims with some
rocks a gun and a moose.

I like her she likes me
I love her she loves me
my mother of course.

Beer some crackers look out

In the dungeon I lay sad
yet gay hurray.
On the rims with some
rocks a gun and a moose.
—Skip Erfle

FEAR, SCHOOL, SUNDAY

What if a man were to dive
and in diving learned it was bottomless?
—Tammy Wodrich

The spine takes a long time
to develop
but ice can make it crumble
on and on through
time.
—Connie Hassfield

SQUARES ON THE CEILING

The number one
smells like
wind blowing over mahogany,
the color orange, the wings
of a deceitful angel,
a blue day.
The color black
sounds like footsteps
in the hall, the turning
of pages,
a person crying.

The voice of a dime
sounds like the color
green, a baby
crying, a sad song.

A circle feels like
a black stripe,
a giraffe's spots,
Sunday.

The taste of ice looks
like a piece of bacon,
a corvette, a prefix.

A triangle tastes like
the color pink,
a jaguar's dinner,
a song.
—Connie Hassfield

THE BURNING OF BOOKS

Mona Lisa lost her originality
and was just another detailed painting.
There were no more words left
to describe
her face no one left
to decipher her casual mood.
—Charla McFarland

REMOVAL OF WORDS

This room is the ending of
history, enjoyment and silly
love poems. The only table
is a hard oak with no
special designs at all.
The ground is cold and waiting
to be written about.
—Kenny Mosdal
NOAH

Small light raindrops landing
on my window pane
It might not be too bad of a day
But the delicate taps on my roof
has become like the dance
of a thousand elves shaking
the rafters
Sheets of water at my doorstep
wash the welcome away,
the house of a weird old man with his
finished masterpiece looming up
to the treetops.
Weeks of hammering day and night
truckloads of lumber
that wrecked the neighborhood
But now the yard is silent and the vessel
is locked up tight
I grope my way through the streams
from the sky
and pound on a large wooden door.
Nothing.
—Martha Jones

Outside the step the dog munches
lazily on the morning newspaper and drags
it to his favorite place.
—Tammy Wodrich

Crow Agency was perhaps my most educative visit. Students wrote poems about the most original and simultaneously traditional element of their persons, their names:

CHIEF CHILD

My name is from mud
my name goes into my hand
When I sleep my name goes
out into the woods and hills
It goes to be born and I
am asleep on my bed
My name bothers me when
I sleep and it wears a striped
shirt and tastes like ice-cream
My name leaves from my legs
is an ant and goes back
into my body. Tomorrow
my name is a horse
and it bothers me too
Its fun when she bothers me
—Jennifer Chief Child

WALKS OVER ICE
My name can walk and it is a 12
letter word my daddy's father gave it to him
but you can not take it away. My name
is as long as an elephant's trunk.
I love my name and I am going to keep it.
My great, great grandfather can. I got
my name by him. He was in a war
in the winter crossing the ice.
He was the only man that made it across.
—Roberta Walks Over Ice

KEVIN OLD COYOTE
My name came from young coyote
but they changed it to old coyote
My name is Indian pudding
boiling in a pot. My name looks
like an old man coyote and young
man coyote. My last name kills elk.
—Kevin Old Coyote

The following are random selections written by students from both
Fort Smith and Crow Agency:
I didn't go to school because the sun looked like horses running in the river and a tree looked like a burning lamp.

The sidewalk was a spool of thread and the fence tasted like a dirty sleeping bag.
— Dan Hopley

My name sounds like a waterfall in a tulip.
— Jodie

My name sounds like a cat in the kitchen
— Cindy Rouse

FLOWERS

The flowers are almost dead they will be dead tomorrow
The weeds are strings
The sky has a big head
The stars are glass
— Martha and Lori

GOOD AND BAD LUCK

If you find a horseshoe you will have good luck
If you go under a ladder you will have bad luck
If you find a feather you will have good luck
If you go under a fishing pole you will have bad luck

The cat has six eyes.
— Glynda Rondeau

HAIKU

Time is like a snow crying on the ground over ants and orange roots.
— Frances Deputee
THE RED ROOM

I touched the wall
and it felt like a zebra
with no eyes. In the room
I heard five bats
that flew away
— Michele Stewart

The wind is wild
The leaves whip
in the wind
The wind is wonderful
— Marlo Moehr

THE EYES

The boy’s eyes fell
off his face and
he started to run
after it. Joe with no
eyes went to bed.
— Neta Old Elk

WHERE WORDS COME FROM

A long long time ago I found
a pencil
Long ago you didn’t know what
a pencil was
It started to write all kinds
of words
I didn’t know what the words were
so I asked my dad
He didn’t know either
When I walked back to the pencil
it was trying to say things to me.
— Kendra Forney

Coffee is a brown water
coffee makes us warm
when it is cold
coffee makes you small
coffee makes you feel
like dancing
— Lavonna Little Owl
WHERE WORDS COME FROM

Words come from cow
or tiger or newt
New words come from
things like ants and eels
though they don't wear
pants and a robin flies
through the air and bends
his nose when he crashes
and the eagle likes to eat
even though he loses his claw
by flying after rabbits
and trees lose their leaves
because they don't yell
because they get replacements
everything yells and it
gets replacements but
tomorrow words come from
my brother and he is loud.
—Daniel Redden

THE PURPLE ROOM

A dog sits in a tree
crying
Yesterday I saw
a monkey eating fruit
salad
—Tammy Sue

Copper sounds like an elephant
jumping through the sky
Blue is like a fox rhyming
with a hen
Poetry is like dancing
with all the colors in the world
Colors are like jumping
with a friend.
—Kelly Slattery

Cold is a fat dog.
—Darren McDonald

Cold is a bone.
—Roberta Walks Over Ice
Most Montana Poetry-in-the-Schools residencies last for at least one week, enough time to do a lot of lying. Occasionally, a kid goes crazy (often a “slow learner”), “sees,” as Kenneth Patchen might, “Shakespeare in the moon,” and lies his/her unique way to the truth. I just like to watch them go crazy.

*Ralph Burns*
WHEN THE PHONE RINGS AT NIGHT

birds settle blackly on the line outside and listen in: sly chirps behind the words a friend is drunk it's three AM, bars closed, and what am I doing? Dazed, my wife says "geese in the fall", her arm becoming fact on the bedclothes, her shoulders rolling.

Out there something waits for shape something in the night like cat fur rises to the brush of a hand.

The birds get louder. I'd tell him don't talk, we're tapped, but he might come over. Rivers run between us fast under a thin ice-glaze. The ice could crack, he'd drown, and who'd be guilty? Air hisses on the line. My wife shifts. The birds have flown off bored, but if the night had wings or arms it would soften at their cries, and open, open.
LIBRETTO: FOR
THE FALL OF THE YEAR

Except for the red-oak's splash,
an occasional jay,
or the breeze
sliced
by the sumac leaves,
the trees have been empty for days.

Our vision's cleared.
Now we see
all the way to the lake.
Light rips
the water at the wave-tips,
cuts bright doors in the town's west edge.

That's where we want to go, Sally,
out to the lake
to cruise on the jingling sparks,
canoe like the fools
we are for the lightning
rippling
slowly like fat water snakes on the swells.

*

Dip oar
and the water whorls at its blade
like a shoulder flexing.
We
and the lake pull by.
Reflections
quiver, slip with our strokes. The roads
and the trees, we ourselves
fan out in
waves from the prow. Your hair
and a road wind trellised in the limbs.
Where does the body end?

*

This is the road I'll take, gone blond with dust.
   I'll stroke,
You steer.
   We'll ride on out
that lithe geometry of water lights.

Remember this: we've named the fall a clearing. Pull
for the bright west edge.
MULBERRIES

I brush into a pile
the fallen mulberries,
good for nothing but to make us
slip and break our bones,
and so I give them to my youngest
trees, to my linden and my birch,
to nourish them.
I never want my children
to eat mulberries,
because once upon a time
I had to live on them,
sitting with my sister
in the branches. We were
bitter, having nothing else,
nothing save mulberries
which we work now
into proverbs, as I sweep
into a pile the fallout-
dusted twigs
which are good for nothing
in modern times
though the Chinese found them
first-rate for paintings
on silk, and children once
took them into their bellies
with defeat.
Tonight the moon
Is tacit as usual. The crickets
Rub their knees to sing.
Rub my knee
And I will sing. Man has no place
In the fantasies of moths. Do I love you?
The answer must empty pitchers.
I know when figures are made of dust
They will be frail figures.
I can tell you that their fingertips
Will not be smooth. Perhaps
Broken, perhaps missing altogether.
I don't know what energy is released
In dreams, but let it nod.
Let it fall like a breast released
From its binding, a supple,
Rounded fall.
Horses steam with frost
as the groom tethers them.
The first flakes slow
the carriage, and no one looks
at roads going wild with white.
No one breathes until they're
safely by the fire. Winters
in this novel, young women
fold their tippets and stay
inside with their fathers.

In another world we stay inside
and watch the radar weatherscope.
Years flash their record lows
on the screen, and in the photo
we see ghostly clouds grazing
our map in April with snow.

We won't remember what we said	onight, or how we lived here,
hardly touching. Snow touches
everywhere, the crocus that opened
by the porch of this house,
the separate porches where we'll stand
looking back on a spring so white
we can't see anything.
CITY SLICKER

Collapsing in his wheelchair, as bulky as a barn full of animals. His mouth open a crack, I walk in. All these heavy words inside like tired cows grown fat. I poke around in the dark, looking for something to keep.

Skin is peeling off the roof of his mouth. Breath seeps out through cracks in his dreams. It seems I am a stranger here, in this ruined farm of my father.

I walk back into the big city of myself, twirling my certainties, driving my poems to market.
AT THE SCENE

The pictures
aren't painted so easily anymore.
I labored a night
at a murder scene.

I stood there
writing a poem
using the cold hands for reference,
systematically
checking my pulse when it raced,
and then afterwards
at the typewriter
I knew the correct order
of events.
Flinching to avoid the collision course
with death
that my uncle and others
have taken,
and the shaping of the eyes,
the pupils that roll on forever
in the dreams of the onlookers.
CUERNAVACA: DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

The cemetery
had been razed
the house
set
its foundation
on rain
the good
dead
one morning
awakened
a shovel
a backhoe reaching
into their empty
chests
mud-nests
up toward the sun.
Cuernavaca
you had no right
I knew nothing
I would live here
mute
with my hands
remember this day
of the dead
the policeman
who once
sitting here
saw
a ghost
his wife swore
Christ
must be alive
here
disappointed
or Demas
who died
unwillingly.
Give me this day
of the dead
the rumor
the newspapers
the week everyone
ran to Cuautla
for fear. Here
I will hang
my clothes
this roof
where once
a ghost walked
here I will step
my life
out of them
have them
be empty
loom
naked while
the wind
pours
through them
this is where
I step my life
out of them
this is where
the wind
the dead
hand over
what they lack.
HEAVEN FOR RAILROAD MEN

You're still a young man,
he says, not to his son;
it's his bitterness
he's talking to
and at the restaurant
he orders a fourth round
before dinner,
with mother wiping her glasses
at the table, still believing
she's not going blind.

I help him from his chair
to the john. He pees slowly,
fingers like hams
on his fly, a complex
test of logic
for a man this drunk.
I'm splashing cold water in his face

and he tells me he's dying,
don't say a thing to your
mother and please, Dave,
don't ever remember me like this.

I remember how you said you'd love to
ride the baggage cars forever,
passing prairie towns
where silos squat like
pepper shakers on dry earth.
Father, I want to be six again
and sway with you
down the sagging rails
to Minot, Winnipeg and beyond,
your mailsacks piled
like foothills of the Rockies,
you unloading your government Colt,
unzipping your suitcase
for Canadian inspectors.
Father, when I touched you
I was trembling.

The heaven
of railroad men begins
with a collapsed trestle.
The engine goes steaming off
into nothing.
There are no rails to hold you,
you're singing country western
at the top of your lungs,
you go flying forever,
the door standing open,
sacks of mail scattering
like seed into space.
I f  Y o u E v e r G e t T h e r e , T h i n k o f M e
M i c h a e l H o g a n
E m e r a l d C i t y P r e s s , 1 9 7 5
T e m p e , A r i z o n a
$ 1 . 5 0 , p a p e r b a c k

S o o n I t W i l l B e M o r n i n g
M i c h a e l H o g a n
C o l d M o u n t a i n P r e s s , 1 9 7 6
A u s t i n , T e x a s
$ 5 . 5 0 , p a p e r b a c k , s i g n e d

I n t h e s e t w o c h a p b o o k s , M i c h a e l H o g a n c o n t i n u e s t h e w o r k h e b e g a n i n h i s f i r s t b o o k , L e t t e r s F o r M y S o n ( U n i c o r n P r e s s , 1 9 7 5 ) . H o g a n , n o w r e l e a s e d o n p a r o l e , w a s i n p r i s o n f o r s o m e n i n e y e a r s , c o n v i c t e d o f a r m e d r o b b e r y , i n v o l u n t a r y m a n s l a u t h e r a n d f o r g e r y . I m e n t i o n t h e s e b i o g r a p h i c a l f a c t s n o t b e c a u s e t h e y a r e i m p o r t a n t t o t h e r e a d i n g o f t h e p o e m s , b u t b e c a u s e I c a n ' t d e n y t h a t I f i r s t a p p r o a c h e d H o g a n a s a n o d d i t y . W i t h t h e s a m e c u r i o s i t y t h a t m a k e s m e l o v e g o s s i p , I t h o u g h t I w o u l d r e a d t h e s e p o e m s a n d f i n d o u t " w h a t i t w a s l i k e " t o b e a c o n v i c t e d p r i s o n e r , g e t a " f e e l " f o r l i f e o n t h e i n s i d e . C e r t a i n l y H o g a n d o e s p r e s e n t s o m e o f t h e r e a l i t i e s o f p r i s o n l i f e , a n d i n v i v i d d e t a i l , b u t n o a m o u n t o f p o e t r y r e a d i n g w i l l e v e r m a k e m e k n o w t h a t k i n d o f i n s t i t u t i o n a l l i f e , t h a t d e n i a l o f f r e e d o m .

W h a t I d i d l e a r n f r o m t h e s e p o e m s w a s s o m e t h i n g a b o u t m y s e l f . H o g a n ' s t h e m e s a r e t h e i n e s c a p a b l e o n e s o f p e r s o n a l v u l n e r a b i l i t y , t h e d i f f i c u l t y o f f a m i l y r e l a t i o n s , l o n e l i n e s s , c o n c e r n f o r o t h e r s , a n d t h e n e c e s s a r y a c c e p t a n c e o f t h i n g s a s t h e y a r e . F o r a p r i s o n e r , t h e s e k i n d s o f h u m a n r e s p o n s e s a r e h i g h t e n e d i n a s p e c i a l w a y . F r o m a p o e m a b o u t t h e s t a b b i n g d e a t h o f a f e l l o w i n m a t e a n d p o e t ( " F o r A P r i s o n P o e t , " I f Y o u E v e r G e t T h e r e ) :

He was killed because he forgot fear;
because when looking at the sparrow perched
on a concertina bale
he learned to see the bird and the barbed wire.
Even worse, mornings when the sun
raged against the white walls of the compound,
he was able to see only the sparrow.
From then on his days were numbered.
Somehow Hogan keeps taking these kinds of risks, exposing himself through attention to the life around him. He never falls into self-pity or self-congratulation, staying more or less in the background as he focuses on his fellow prisoners, the guards, people remembered from childhood or two old men watching the sky.

_Soon It Will Be Morning_ is the stronger book, the poem more carefully done as Hogan continues to work on his sharp clear style. His ability to gain imaginative insight shows itself again and again in these twenty poems, some of them quiet beautiful lyrics. Shifting viewpoint, Hogan writes out of concern for the son he hardly knows:

December 18, 1975

You meet your father after nine years.  
At least that's who they say he is.  
So you look for something in the eyes or mouth,  
you speak quickly putting him at ease.  
Everyone thinks this visit is important.  
But they don't know about the dream.  
They don't know that you are in the dream  
and also the one dreaming.  
He hugs you and that seems important,  
so you hug him back.  
You know there should be something  
familiar in all this.  
You are a boy embracing your father.  
You are that same boy watching yourself  
embrace your father.  
To think that somewhere nine years ago  
you did this in the same way,  
doesn't make it more real.  
Still, it is difficult to leave at the end  
and, even when the guard comes  
and the chairs are pulled back,  
you do not awaken.

And then this, the last poem of the group:
January

You are alone. You are more alone now than you have ever been.

Somewhere, at the back of the house perhaps, or from a drain on the garage roof, water is falling. The rush of water seems a long way off but the rain is close and the uncaring wind. And the cold following you from one room to the next is close.

Your father lies awake staring at the dry ceiling of his cell. You cannot pull his features together. His face, pale and transitory, is like snow melting now beneath the elm tree. It brightens once and is gone.

These poems do what good poems should do—leave a full silence behind them. But I want to include one more. This because I like it; because it shows how Michael Hogan keeps on.

Passing Through Virginia

The boy balanced on the big root watching the helicopter seeds of maples spin like dying insects is waiting for life to begin. He doesn't suspect that his green eyes are more alive than those speeding by him in cars.

It is difficult to learn not to be waiting and thinking: surely the best days of my life are yet to be lived somewhere else any place but this is where love is and where life will truly begin.

The crickets know nothing of such things. Out behind the garage in the high grass among the helicopter wrecks of spun-out maple seeds they sing of this day, this summer that is all their lifetime.

Sylvia Clark

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The Traveler
Andrew Grossbardt
Confluence Press
Lewiston, Idaho 1976
$2.50, paperback

In the two dozen poems of *The Traveler*, there is the strong feeling we are being told something, and that it is important to listen. The poems are like news items from worlds we thought we knew about, told to us in parable fashion by the traveling poet whose job it is to observe and pass on.

It is easy to see where this "traveler" has been. Most of the poems have some real place names in them that tie them to certain areas such as Mexico, or the West, East, and Midwest of the United States. Most of these places... Kansas, Montana, Idaho... have built-in images and memories for us that Grossbardt recognizes and uses in odd ways. He jars you from your general idea to a specific image that becomes almost the reason for what you thought.

*Listening to Missouri in March*

Tonight, after all these quiet months
there is a new sound
threading the silence. From the still

brown pasture
back of where the garden ends for good
insects are hatching.

I can hear them now like a rush
of delicate metals
touching for the first time.

This relationship to the places named in the poems, while attractive because we recognize them, and therefore feel comfortable, is probably the most superficial. What comes out strongly, and what *should* come out strongly, is information, news, of the poet himself. The way the poems are begun in story fashion with first lines like "East of here," "Somewhere to the east," "In late summer, the water low," "Somewhere," "Everywhere," places a certain warning to the reader/listener to pay attention. This obscures for us the poet's relationship to the places and events he is describing. When you start
to see this relationship, you see not only a traveler, but a wanderer, a staggerer, a discoverer, a blunderer . . . everything we all are. In the beautiful poem "The crossing" the day is spent traveling and then

near dusk I stop and watch
the western border of sky
fade to a dull copper flush

today I was annoyed by the light
tonight I am angry with the darkness

Most of us see travel in terms of getting somewhere, but Grossbardt is equally concerned about leaving. He refers constantly to what is left behind besides time and landscape. It becomes apparent you can't take things away without leaving as much or more than you are taking.

. . . the roads are in mourning
they have languished so long
they no longer understand
what it means to be a road
I pass like the air
like a wind walking among clouds
and what I leave is the shape of air
already burning in the morning's first fires

where no man has gone
today is the same
and different . . .

These poems are what come from arriving and leaving. They are like decals on the car window . . . proof of having been there. How much they cost is another story. The poet understands what is traded for what, and knows that poems must live by themselves. The final lines from the first poem in the book, "In its own cold," give testimony:

. . . Inside, I feed whatever
burns into the fire. What I leave behind
will learn to stay out there in its own cold.

Quinton Duval
Nancy Steele's impressive first book explores a stamina, perhaps even a rage, for a certain clarity of nostalgia, or "memory that refused to be stunted." These are courageous poems, "tracking" back "an ancient language/ for tongues that try to swallow themselves," and we sense in them something more than writing poetry, something more obsessive "in a throat too parched for music." A good example is "The Cremation," a short poem dedicated to the poet's mother, and, to use Tomas Transtromer's metaphor, "intense as a bullion cube." Right on the brink of sentimentality, it lingers just long enough to taunt, and then burst:

Your ashes toss
in my blood.
I am drywood
spine-burr
twig.

Thinking of you
small flares sweep through me
like grassfire.

A dry itch at the throat
sputters
the whole length
of my longing.

What is it that burns
beyond flame or flesh?
Some wounded bird
I can't smoke out
hovering on the wings of fire.

More concerned with interrogating than with answering or prescribing, Steele exhibits an uncanny sense of control: "What sort of bird appears at that knothole/ so new to flight that it's sacrificed/ when the limb it rides goes down?"
Similarly, the last two stanzas in the last poem, “Apology”, concern a question:

What animal
have our dreams scared
deep into burr and gnatsnake?
Our skittish sleep is its appetite:
recoil and shudder
toward what it craves.

Outside the gourds, bloated on August,
clutch their emptiness
climb the walls of grass
like a ward of idiots.
Tonight we hear them
fatten on nothing
banging their faceless heads
into human features.

The willingness to risk noticing the “critical” thing in a landscape, inner or outer, and the severity of vision to bring it home, to rob it of its power, or to raise it to innuendo, makes these poems worth reading. They are alive and gutsy, and they leave us waiting anxiously for Nancy Steele’s second book.

Ralph Burns

Out-Of-The-Body Travel
Stanley Plumly
Ecco Press
New York, $6.95, hardcover

One thing good poets do is to remind us of things we should all know, things we did know once, but have forgotten. That is, they remind us of what we have left behind in the mad dash to escape our histories, or merely the fear of sounding trite. They bring us back to our references. Their poems say, Look here, friend, we all fall asleep too easily these days. Follow me.

And so we follow Plumly back, into that childhood where our kin still matter, where weather matters, showing us always it belongs:
Winter is one long morning.
She will get into the car, it will be
snowing, the car will go from here
to there, in time, the car’s tracks,
like the scuff marks on linoleum,
will outlast the traffic, then disappear.

Many of these poems are portraits, the simultaneous remembering
of persons long dead (at least to these scenes) and the speaker’s place
among them — apprehended in part through the writing of the poem.
This constant positioning expresses a desire throughout the book to
acknowledge that side of one’s self which is determined by birth and
lineage. In “The Tree,” Plumly sees the various names of ancestors on
a genealogical chart as forming

the stalk of the spine as it culminates at the brain,
a drawing I had seen in a book about the body, each leaf
inlaid until the man’s whole back, root and stem, was veins.

His life, then, becomes in part a gathering of all old ghosts, and at the
same time a conduit through which a larger continuity in blood is
flowing. The recognition of what necessitates us begins our lives as
free individuals. We place ourselves at the cross of this duality.

Children with child. The night Alma
Schultz hanged herself her baby had
not been born. But it lived, blue ash,
blue coal. It came out into the room of
fathers twice tied to its past and flesh

of the flesh of her father. Alma was older
and taller. We were children. It was summer.
The dead go down and down, we were told,
in new clothes and a book. And rise among angels
and our father’s ghost. In shadow, yes, in light.

Family portraits are bound at times to be inaccessible for those
unrelated to the subjects. These poems are no exception. What must
carry us through them, then, is tone: and here that tone is one of
continual blessing. Blessing the father in the dream, “grinding bone
back into dust,” working his shift
only to lie down
among the million
upon million
and rise again,
individual, to the wheel.

Blessing the mother, and passage itself, as expressed in the passing of a train:

The whole house shakes — or seems to. At intervals, the ghost smoke fills

all the windows on the close-in side.
It's our weather. It's what we hear all night, between Troy and anywhere, what you meant
to tell me, out of the body, out of the body travel.

Rick Robbins

The Illustrations
Norman Dubie
Braziller, 1977
$3.95, paperback

Dubie's third book is a kind of well-lighted historical tour, and the lights, or "lustres," are Dubie's own, widely varied, but immediate. Through certain historical presences and personae, he achieves a distance allowing him expression of his own stylistic nuance, his unique idiosyncracy, as it were, put to music, as in "Horace":

Along the borders of the Sabine farm,
Runners of strychnine and lime,
A bearded man stands in a wheelbarrow
Singing. And why not? Give him
The vegetables he wants.
Or knock his brains out with the loose
Curbstone from the well. The Goths
Have been defeated, and Maecenas was his friend.
We meet eye to eye. He will braid the silk
On the husks. This man is drunk.
The cloudburst sends you running for the trees
And one woman reaches the house. He is still
Standing in the wheelbarrow, soaked and loud.
The poor canvas theatre in the provincial town
Drove him out. Here in the hills
Caesar is a spectacle of dead trout
Washed with smashed mint and lemons.
What have I kept back?
Only this: there is no way to leave him.

On the other hand, Dubie often creates this “confessional”
understatement through a denied or low-pitched intensity of voice,
telling more by choosing not to tell, as he does with the notion of
history and its study in “The Moths”:

Indians stood on a hill in Bath and watched
The woods burn all afternoon, the dark smoke
Rising from the very point of the peninsula.
They believe that if you know everything

About your past you had better also know
The present moment; the risk
Isn't that you'll live in the past,
But there and in a future
That repeats the past . . .

*  *  *

And my mother pale with her red hair rests,
At midnight, looking out the kitchen window where
All summer the fat moths were knocking their
Brains out against the lamp in the henhouse,

But now the moths are replaced with large
Flakes of snow, and there's no difference, moths
Or snow, for their lives are so short
That while they live they are already historical

Like a woman who knows too much about
The day before, who knows herself too well
There at the window, and who sadly
Touches a child's blue waterglass
As the old standing-clock in the hall begins
To slow and climb, slower and slower,
Through a thousand gears and ratchets
Into what she knew best, and

Into tomorrow.

No assuming dialectic here, no tour guide, Dubie relies wholly on his eye and ear. "This song,/ Which blames the memory, is wrong and not wrong/ Like a girl/ Showing her breasts to a boy in a cemetery." These poems carry an honest insistence on style rather than relation, or meaning. They are like the barbarian's venison in "Elegies For The Ochre Deer On The Walls At Lascaux": "historical and ochre," and like "the corpse dressed in purple on the sofa," alone, but most importantly, they are necessary, like the lights that disappear between a stage and an audience.

Ralph Burns

The Elements of San Joaquin
Gary Soto
University of Pittsburgh Press
$2.95, paperback

Gary Soto's first book opens with chronicles of isolated and hence painful lives. Soto's people are "Far from home," but never far from degradation or violence—"Angela beaten and naked in the vineyard." Their condition is one of victims in fear of that violence which Soto knows can strike anyone, "Rachel and Maria, the dull mothers," or Tony Lopez, the local barber and pusher.

Because blood revolves from one lung to the next,
Why think it will
After tonight?

Given human life in these terms, it's not surprising that Soto turns, in a series of poems, to what is more elemental, "Field," "Wind," "Stars," and here, "Sun":
In June the sun is a bonnet of light
Coming up,
Little by little,
From behind a skyline of pine.

The pastures sway with fiddle-neck
Tassels of foxtail.

At Piedra
A couple fish on the river's edge,
Their shadows deep against the water.
Above, in the stubbled slopes,
Cows climb down
As the heat rises
In a mist of blond locusts,
Returning to the valley.

In contrast to the earlier poems, these read at least partially as a search for things which can be valued on their own terms.

But the real strengths of this book lie in the people and events which Soto remembers and finally values. "Braly Street," the last poem, is a quiet and astounding tour de force. There, and in poems like "In December" and "Emilio," the eye is as clear and unflinching as here, in "History":

That was the 50s,
And Grandma in her '50s,
A face streaked
From cutting grapes
And boxing plums.
I remember her insides
Were washed of tapeworm,
Her arms swelled into knobs
Of small growths—
Her second son
Dropped from a ladder
And was dust.
And yet I do not know
The sorrows
That sent her praying
In the dark of a closet,
The tear that fell
At night
When she touched
Loose skin
Of belly and breasts.
I do not know why
Her face shines
Or what goes beyond this shine,
Only the stories
That pulled her
From Taxco to San Joaquin,
Delano to Westside,
The places
In which we all begin.

It's not hard to understand why this book won the United States Award of the International Poetry Forum. If the best poems are gifts, then with this book we're all rich.

Lex Runciman
Editors’ Note

As you may know, *Cut Bank* is funded primarily by the Associated Students of the University of Montana, and we are always grateful for their support. What other income we receive comes from sales, subscriptions, and, in the case of next year’s issues, a grant.

For those of you who have enjoyed our spring issue, we ask that you consider subscribing to *Cut Bank*. You’ll receive a discount on the bookstore price of each copy, and as soon as each issue is published it will be sent directly to your residence. Just fill out the form in the back and pass it along to us.

In an attempt to increase our revenue, we have decided also to accept advertisements, beginning with the fall issue. Anyone interested in placing an ad can write us at the address on the inside front cover. We’ll send you a statement of policy and rates.

From the response we’ve received to our first two chapbooks by John Haines and Mary Swander, we’re convinced there is an audience out there for these shorter format, carefully produced books. Copies of both titles are still available, and can be ordered prepaid from us.

Next year, we intend to print two more titles—our budget permitting—and hope that by their continued good reception we can establish the chapbook series as an important part of *Cut Bank’s* operation.
THOMAS AVERILL’S latest project was *A Calendar of Kansas History, 1977*. One of his stories appears in the anthology *Volunteer Periwinkles*.

JANE BAILEY’S new book, *Tuning*, is due in early ’78 from Slow Loris Press. She works in Montana’s Poets in the Schools program.

JIM BARNES is co-author of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel* and has poems appearing in *The Nation, Chicago Review, Poetry Northwest*, and others. He’s hiding out in northern Missouri, waiting for rain. He co-edits *The Chariton Review*.

DEBRA BRUCE has had poems in the *Iowa Review, Southern Poetry Review*, and others. She has a chapbook forthcoming from Burning Deck Press.

RALPH BURNS is a student in the Writing Program at the Univ. of Montana. He’s worked in Poetry in the Schools programs in Arkansas and Montana. And he makes great Texas chili.

REX BURWELL has poems forthcoming in *Chicago Review* and *Shenandoah*. He edits *Lemming*.

JAMES CERVANTES edits *Porch*, a new magazine of poetry. His MFA is from Iowa.

SYLVIA CLARK’S poems have appeared in *Cut Bank 5 & 7*. She co-edited this year’s *Gilt Edge*.

QUINTON DUVAL lives in Sacramento, and has had poems recently in *Poetry Northwest* and *Quarry West*.

DONNA FRENCH has studied with Tess Gallagher and Richard Shelton. She won Kirkland College’s Watrous Prize for Poetry in May, 1976.

STUART FRIEBERT’S latest book is *Up in Bed* (Cleveland State). Currently he’s guest writer in residence at Pitzer College in California.

CAROL FROST teaches at Syracuse University and has a chapbook, *The Salt Lesson*, from Graywolf Press. Her poems are forthcoming in *Falcon, Shenandoah, Pebble*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

FRANK GRAZIANO is the editor of Grilled Flowers Press. His chapbook, *Desemboque*, is due soon from Floating Island Publications.


ALBERT GOLDBARTH currently lives in Ithaca, N.Y. His newest collection is *Comings Back*, from Doubleday.

FRANK HIGGINS has a book, *hello hello*, from BKMK Press. He’s another Missourian.

RICH IVES has poems and translations forthcoming in *The Malahat Review*, and *The Chariton Review*.

MILES KROGFUS is in the Ph.D. program at the Univ. of Minnesota. He’s had poems recently in *Antaeus*.

ROSEANN LLOYD grew up in the Ozarks, and has an MA in Scandinavian Language and Literature from the Univ. of Minnesota.

KATHLEEN LYNCH lives in Pullman, Washington. She’s had poems in *The Chariton Review* and *Hard Pressed*.

NELLJEAN McCONEGHEY holds an MFA in Poetry from the Univ. of Arkansas, and is currently teaching Psychology at Cecil’s Junior College, Asheville, North Carolina.

TOM MITCHELL’S poems are forthcoming in *Barataria* and *New Orleans Review*. He’s in the MFA Program at the Univ. of Montana.
MELINDA MUELLER is a botanist living in Seattle. Her chapbook, *Private Gallery* was published by Seal Press in 1976.

TERRY NATHAN is a former editor of *Uzanzo*, now in the MFA Program in Missoula.

GORDON PRESTON recently had a poem reprinted as the fourth in a broadside series from Malpelo Press. He lives in Santa Rosa with a fine Irish woman, their house has been home of the poetry diddey-wah. He thinks he is really Perry White.

DAVID RAY'S recent book is *Gathering Firewood*.

TOM REA lives in Missoula and has worked for the Wyoming Poetry in the Schools program.

MARY RUEFLE works in a target factory in North Bennington, Vermont. Her poems have appeared in *Intro 8, Omega*, and *Prism*.

MAXINE SCATES has had poems recently in *Road Apple Review*, and forthcoming in *California Quarterly*. She lives in Eugene, Oregon.

ROBERT SCHULTZ holds an MFA from Cornell. His poems have appeared in *Road Apple Review, The Greenfield Review*, and others.

LAUREL SPEER'S poems have appeared in *West Coast Poetry Review* and *Kansas Quarterly*, among others. She lives in Tucson, Arizona.

KIM STAFFORD'S first book, *A Gypsy's History of the World*, is available from Copper Canyon Press. *Braided Apart*, a book done in collaboration with his father, was reviewed in *CutBank 7*.


RON WALLACE'S poems have appeared recently in *The New Yorker, Poetry, The Nation*, and others.

IRENE WANNER is a native of Seattle. Currently she's in Iowa City at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. "Saturday Night" is a chapter from a novel in progress.

JOHN WEINS recently graduated from Davis High School in Yakima, Washington. This is his first publication.

ANN WEISMAN is the English Instructor for the Blackfeet Community Free School. She also teaches with the Blackfeet Extension Service of Flathead Valley Community College.

DAVID WOJAHN has work forthcoming in *Dacotah Territory, Hanging Loose, and The Chariton Review*. He lives in Minneapolis.

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magazines received


*Beloit Poetry Journal*, (Vol. 27, Nos. 1 & 2), Robert Glauber, David M. Stocking, Marion Kingston Stocking, eds., Box 2, Beloit, Wisconsin 53511. 4 issues/$4.00.

*Bits*, (No. 5), Dennis Dooley, et al, eds., Dept. of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 44106. No price listed.

*California Quarterly*, (Winter/Spring ’77), Eliot Gilbert, et al, eds., 100 Sproul Hall, Univ. of California, Davis, CA 95616. Special Double Issue $2.50.

*Chariton Review*, (Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall ’76), Andrew Grossbardt and Jim Barnes eds., Division of Language & Lit., Northeast Missouri State Univ., Kirksville, Missouri 63501. $7.00/4 issues.

*Faire*, (Vol. 3, No. 1), Ted Duncombe and Jennifer Merrill eds., Box F-92, Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington 99362. $5.00/3 issues.

*Fiction*, (Vol. 5, No. 1), Mark Jay Mirsky ed., English Dept., City College of New York, New York, N.Y. 10031. $1.00 ea.

*fiction international*, (no. 6/7), Joe David Bellamy ed., Dept. of English, St. Lawrence Univ., Canton, New York 13617. $5.00/2 issues.

*GiltEdge*, (No. 3), Sylvia Clark and CarolAnn Russell Nord eds., c/o Women’s Resource Center, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812. $3.50 each.

*Grilled Flowers*, (Vol. 1, No. 2), Frank Graziano ed., Univ. of Arizona Poetry Center, 1086 Highland Ave., Tucson, Arizona 85719.

*Kayak*, (No. 44), George Hitchcock ed., 325 Ocean View Ave., Santa Cruz, California 95062. $4.00/4 issues.


*Mr. Cogito*, (Vol. 3, No. 1), John Gogol and Robert Davies eds, 8744 S.E. Rural, Portland, Oregon 97266. $3.00/3 issues.

*Pacific Poetry & Fiction Review*, Patricia MacInnes ed., School of Literature Office, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92182. No price listed.

*Poetry Texas*, (Vol. 1, No. 1), Paul Shuttleworth and Dwight Fullingham, eds., Division of Humanities, College of the Mainland, 8001 Palmer Hwy., Texas City, Texas 77590.

*Sou’wester*, (Winter ’77), Jana Sawyer Pruitt ed., Dept. of English, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois 62025. $4.00/3 issues.

*Three Rivers Poetry Journal*, (No. 9), Gerald Costanzo, Ed., P.O. Box 21, Carnegie-Mellon Univ., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213. $5.00/4 issues.

*Western Humanities Review*, (Winter ’77), Jack Garlington ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. $6.00/4 issues.

*Window*, (No. 3), Dan Johnson et al., eds., 5065 Bradley Blvd. No. 6, Bethesda, Maryland 20015. $6.00/4 issues.
books received

*Apricot Two Step,* by Ernest J. Oswald, poems, $1.50.

*Comings Back,* by Albert Goldbarth, poems, Doubleday, $4.95.

*Couplets,* by Robert Mezey, poems, Westigan Review Press, $2.00.

*Eighteen Poems,* by Robert Burlingame, poems, Poetry Texas, no price listed.

*Familiar Poems, Annotated,* by Isaac Asimov, criticism, Doubleday, $7.95 hardbound.

*Ladder of the World's Joy,* by Sarah Appleton, poems, Doubleday, $4.95.

*Learn to Love the Haze,* by Robert Roripaugh, poems, Spirit Mound Press, $2.95.

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*Mirages,* by Stanley Burnshaw, poem, Doubleday, $5.95 hardbound.

*Ninety Notes Towards Partial Images and Lover's Prints,* by Tom Montag, poems, Pentagram Press, $1.00.

*Non Sequitur O'Connor,* by Peter Klappert, poems, Bits Press, no price listed.


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*Sucking on Rattlesnake Bones,* by Paul Shuttleworth, poems, Texas Portfolio Chapbook, $2.00.

*The Arable Mind,* by Martin Grossman, poems, Blue Mountain Press, $2.00.


*The Elements of San Joaquin,* by Gary Soto, poems, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, $2.95.

*The Hocus-Pocus of the Universe,* by Laura Gilpin, poems, Doubleday, $4.95.

*The Postcard Mysteries,* by Albert Drake, stories, Red Cellar Press, $2.50.

*The Road to Black Mountain,* by Joseph Bruchac, fiction, Thorp Springs Press, $4.00.

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*The Zodiac,* by James Dickey, poem, Doubleday, $6.00 hardbound.

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