

# CutBank

---

Volume 1  
Issue 39 *CutBank 39*

Article 1

---

Winter 1993

## CutBank 39

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

(1993) "CutBank 39," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 39 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss39/1>

This Full Volume is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

archives

# CutBank 39



Pattiann Rogers • Jim Harrison • Gary  
Gildner • Walter Pavlich • Mark Levine  
Interview with Galway Kinnell

Winter 1993





# CutBank 39

*where the big fish lie*

Co-Editors: Judy Blunt, Bob Hackett

Fiction Editor: Mary Vanek

Poetry Editor: Matt Yurdana

Art Editors: Julie Zankner, Tom Nybo

Associate Fiction Editors: Kristin Bloomer, Donna Oetzel

Assistant Poetry Editors: Ryan Benedetti, Charles Blakemore,  
Henrietta Goodman, Wendy Guild, Victoria Rostovich,  
Karin Schalm

Assistant Fiction Editors: Leigh Tillman, David Belman, Michael  
Uradnik, Amy Hayter

Faculty Advisor: Jocelyn Siler

*CutBank* is indexed in *The Access to Little Magazines*, and available on microfiche from Gaylord Brothers, Inc., P.O. Box 61, Syracuse, NY 13210. It is also listed in the *Index to Periodical Verse*.

*CutBank* is published twice a year by the Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUM). Subscriptions are \$12.00 for one year; \$22.00 for two years. Sample copies are \$4.00. A discounted rate is available for students of the University of Montana.

Please address all correspondence to: *CutBank*, Department of English, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812.

© 1993, ASUM. Rights revert to the author upon publication with the provision that *CutBank* receives publication credit.

Winter 1993

## CutBank 39

		Fiction
CLAIRE DAVIS	13	<i>Trash</i>
		Essay
AMY LINN	49	<i>Gaining Touch</i>
		Poetry
PATTIANN ROGERS	1	<i>The Need to Adore</i>
	3	<i>The One True God</i>
	5	<i>This Kind of Grace</i>
JEFF CRANDALL	7	<i>The False Morel's Formula</i>
PAUL J. CASELLA	9	<i>Food and Lumber</i>
WALTER PAVLICH	35	<i>Newness</i>
GARY GILDNER	37	<i>First Poem from Slovakia: A Dream in the Carpathians</i>
DOUGLAS WOODSUM	39	<i>An Impartial Answer</i>
M. EARL CRAIG	41	<i>Some Lilac from My Mother</i>
MARK LEVINE	43	<i>You</i>
	45	<i>Seconds</i>
WILLIAM JOLLIFF	77	<i>Able Hall's Belgiums</i>
JIM HARRISON	78	<i>Coyote No. 1</i>
DENNIS HELD	79	<i>Satan Owns a Boneyard</i>
TOD MARSHALL	81	<i>Genesis</i>
KEVIN GOODAN	84	<i>St. Patrick's Day at the Oxford Bar</i>

Interview

BETTE TOMLINSON 86 *Interview with Galway Kinnell*

Art

STEPHANIE FROSTAAD vi *Tree Study*  
DANNY DETTLAFF 11 *Fish Eye's View*  
DANIEL MEAD 12 *Untitled*  
CARMEN HOOVER 34 *Wolf's Museum*  
E. TRACE DRURY 47 *A State of Bliss*  
HARRY WILSON 48 *Imperial Dollar, Nicaragua*  
LUCINDA LUVAAS 75 *African Safari*  
MARGO KREN 76 *Shoes*  
JOE BATT 85 *Untitled Cowboy*  
LUCINDA LUVAAS 92 *Family Outing*

Book Reviews

B.J. BUCKLEY 93 *Hua Hu Ching:*  
*The Teachings of Lao Tzu*  
translation by Brian Walker  
LEE EVANS 95 *River at Wolf*  
by Jean Valentine

98 Contributors' Notes

# CutBank

*where the big fish lie*

*CutBank*, a Montana magazine with a longstanding tradition of literary excellence, invites you to help continue that tradition. Recent contributors include Pattiann Rogers, James Crumley, Louise Erdrich, Patricia Henley, and Jim Harrison. Published twice a year; perfect bound.

- One Year \$12.00     Two Years \$22.00     Sample \$4.00  
 Donor \$50.00     Patron \$100.00  
 Sponsor \$250.00     Benefactor \$500.00

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET OR P. O. BOX \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

Selected back issues of *CutBank* are available now for \$4.00 each.

- No. 27/28: Russell Chatham, Michael Dorris, Louise Erdrich, Melanie Rae Thon, Robert Wrigley.  
 No. 29/30: Albert Goldbarth, Lowell Jaeger, William Kittredge, Greg Pape.  
 No. 37: Christianne Balk, Rick DeMarinis, Kate Gadbow, Robert Olmstead, David Romtvedt.  
 No. 38: James Crumley, Tracy Daugherty, James Galvin, Rodney Jones, Montana Visual Arts Sampler.

CutBank ▪ Department of English  
University of Montana ▪ Missoula, MT 59812



Stephanie Frostaad



*Tree Study*  
charcoal

Pattiann Rogers

## *The Need to Adore*

There is a need, a craving I have  
to adore something as charitable  
as the rambling scarlet sea fig, fruit  
and blossom surfeiting the shore,  
and something as certain as the undeviating  
moon, moving like a gold marble  
down a groove, exactly along its golden,  
autumn corridor.

I have a passion to love something  
as ministering as the morning penetrating  
clear to the bottom of the pond, touching  
the earth-side and sky-side of each leaf  
of white water crowfoot, hornwort,  
enclosing the blooming parsnip, petal-side,  
stem-side, surrounding tadpole shrimp,  
carp and cooter and mollusk, mud-side,  
rock-side, to love something possessing  
such lenient measures of inner  
and outer circumference.

I know my hunger to worship something  
as duplicitous as the peaceful aardwolf  
and as fearsome as hounds on a fallen doe,  
something as pliant and amenable as honeysuckle  
vining a fence, as consummate as stone,

as fickle as jellyfish threads in a sea current,  
to worship with abandon that which is as weak  
as the neckbone of a button quail, fast  
as fires on the Serengeti, silent  
as the growth by grains of rock spires  
in a damp cave, something that sails  
in waves like needlegrasses across  
the summer afternoon and something that falls  
like fragrances of pine mold and mushroom  
in forests filled with rain.

There is a need, my obsession, to submit  
wholly, without reservation, to give entirely  
to something lucent enough and strict enough,  
fabled enough and fervent enough to encompass  
all of these at once, something rudimentary  
enough to let me enter, something  
complete enough to let me go.

Pattiann Rogers

## *The One True God*

He brings forth scarlets, mussel-greys,  
rancid yellows and the long, horizontal  
violets of evening, as if they were seductive  
tones strummed from a guitar.

Like cloud shadows skimming  
over broken rocks and down hills easy  
with foxtail barley and velvet timothy,  
he rolls and rolls fast, naked,  
head-over-heels round and round  
and round the earth.

And he carries the wild surf ruffling  
and cresting to the shore  
like a flowing cape he holds  
from his shoulders as he races.

He runs his hand through the ground  
and up the inner trunk of the laurel cherry  
in spring, pushing before his fingers  
earth-light like white blossoms forced outward  
through a thousand pores.

He screeches winter-tangled branches  
of peachleaf willow and coyote willow,

hums hot and hazy vernal grasses, croons  
crocus buds, sweet everlasting  
and meadow rue.

He swallows like midnight, shapes  
like a mountain in the vision,  
defines like a cricket's triple trill  
in an empty corridor. He shrinks  
to the dovekie's gesture at its feeding,  
swells to rain-on-wind plummeting  
down a rude arroyo and out  
onto the wide, wheatgrass prairie.

He spews white-winged ash, pea bullets,  
oak pellets, nannyberries, drupes  
of pitted fire and snow pollens  
into the sky by the millenia.

And I, in truth, I am the one  
by whom he is known.

Pattiann Rogers

## *This Kind of Grace*

Let's bless the body before love.  
By rights we should, every detail.  
We could use water, spring water  
or rose, minted or bay rum. A touch  
to the shoulders—*bless these*. A drop  
behind each knee—*sanctify here*. A sprinkle  
to the belly, yours, mine—in *heartfelt  
appreciation*.

I could dip my fingers into oil cupped  
in my palm, sweet citronella, lavender,  
clove, trace your forehead, temple  
to temple, that warm, assertive  
stone—*so glorified*—perfume the entire  
declaration of your spine, neck  
to tail—*so hallowed*.

We'd neglect nothing, ankle, knuckle,  
thigh, cheek. And for the rapture  
of hair, scented with sweat or the spices  
of cedary sages and summer pines,  
in which I hide my face—*praise  
to the conjoining hosts of all  
radiant forests and plains*.

And imagine how I'd lay my hand,  
move my hand carefully on and around

and under each axil and hummock and whorl  
between your legs, the magnificent maze  
of those gifts—*thanks to the exploding  
heavens, thanks to all pulsing suns.*

For these cosmic accomplishments:  
this delve of your body, a narrow  
crevasse leading into earth-darkness;  
this assertion of your hands, light  
winds lifting, parting, pressing  
upon supine grasses; this rise, the tip  
of a swollen moon over black hills;  
this sweep of union, hawk-shadow  
falling fast across the open prairie  
into the horizon; for this whole blessed  
body, *for what we are about to receive  
together tonight...truly, ardently,  
ecstatically, boundlessly  
grateful.*

Jeff Crandall

## *The False Morel's Formula*

They've isolated the toxin  
of the False Morel, edible  
for centuries with only  
an occasional  
unexplainable  
fatality. Picture this crumbly

runt of a fungus  
with its crisp, fried-flour  
skin and knobby  
demeanor, looking  
a little like an apple fritter.  
The volatile poison

(and suspected  
carcinogen) the same  
unpronounceable chemical  
manufactured for Apollo  
missions to the moon:  
A rocket fuel.

Consider the mushroom  
hunter, bypassing the Warty  
Puffball, the creamy  
Bear's-head Coral and even



peppery gilled Angel-wings  
to nibble, instead,

upon the raw  
bonnet of the False Morel.  
Bite by bite each custard piece  
eases toward the high  
threshold of toxicity.  
There are no symptoms

until the body's valves and pistons  
quicken, and the hapless morel  
connoisseur, glutted with manifold oxides,  
is propelled,  
disgorged and flaming toward  
the cold, blank face of night.

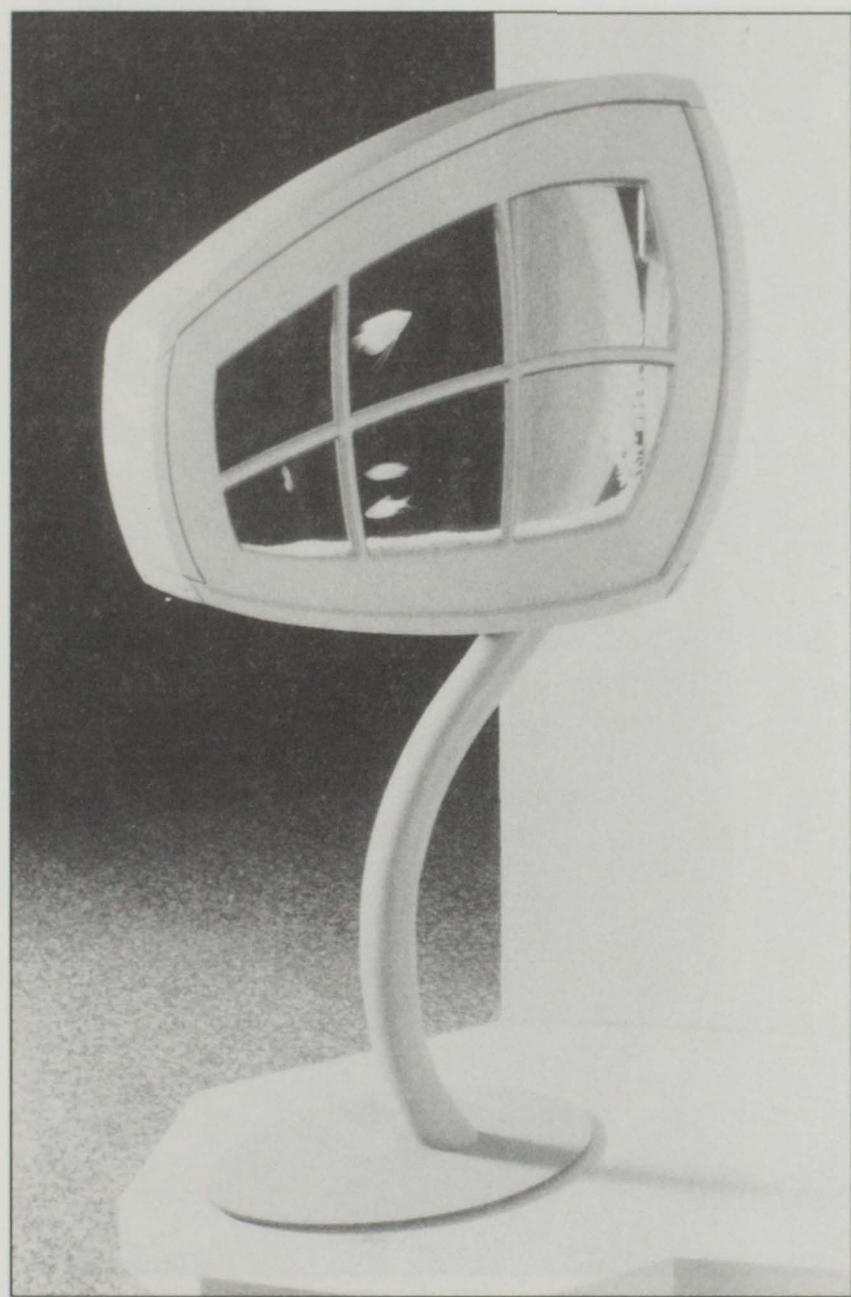
Paul J. Casella

## *Food and Lumber*

Where were *you* after the flood?  
I searched the entire hold.  
The mold was tight-lipped.  
The barnacles were stubborn.  
You have good friends  
in single-celled organisms.  
There was a forest down there:  
your palm prints on the vines,  
beetles with your face drawn on their backs,  
cobwebs that turned to water when touched,  
puddles turning to dust,  
the damp wood evaporating,  
wooden pegs twisting themselves out of their holes,  
the ribs of the ship exhaling,  
cages and cabinets, like alveoli  
of a lung that will collapse,  
the keel growing a tail  
made of sludge and warm water,  
cider fermenting in wooden barrels,  
limes, lemon peels,  
a colony of stone crabs  
crawling over each other  
in a mound by the anchor,  
the black grease abandoning the chain,  
the jealous scum watching

from the edges of the portholes,  
a rope made of hemp  
uncoiling,  
spider mites collecting seed husks  
and rat hairs for their nests,  
a slow viscous film  
forming on the handles  
of trunks and doors,  
your yellow sea slicker  
on its hook by the stairs  
like a ghost on a diet  
it sways against the sway  
of the ship.

Danny Dettlaff



*Fish Eye's View*  
*Furniture Design, Aquarium*

Daniel Mead



*Untitled*  
*Pastel, Charcoal*

Claire Davis

## Trash

John Root Pratt scraped his breakfast dish clean into the garbage pail tucked under the kitchen sink. He could hear his wife, Tillie, singing down in the root cellar. She was slightly off-pitch. He found it comforting.

"Tillie," he called down to her and waited.

She came to the bottom of the stairs, jars tucked under her arms and carrots suspended in a sling of newspaper between her hands. "Just coming up," she called, looking small and gray on the stairs.

He took the carrots, their tips withered black. "Want me to take these to the compost?" he asked.

Tillie shook her head. "You go on," and she lifted her face to him as she had every morning of their forty-three years together.

John brushed her with a kiss. "We're getting too old for this," he said and put on his John Deere cap and wool coat.

"We were too old yesterday," she said laughing as she opened the door for him. "Soup for lunch."

John walked his fields following the treeline bordering the south-most pasture from the highway, treading on fallen leaves that sweetened the air with decay. He was careful to keep his eyes averted from the subdivision rising like a blister on the far side of the road, focusing instead on his fields, the crop, the leaves underfoot. He loved autumn—it was the green of summer well used and spent, a time to let the year's labor account for itself. He squinted into the thin sunlight and opened the top button of his jacket.

Raccoons had raided his cornfield, but still it would be a good crop. His father had liked to say, "The good years diminish the poor." John looked over the tall corn and although he was not a steady church-going man, he liked to believe he knew God's presence when he met it.

He routinely walked the field's edge along the highway. Up ahead, in the ditch, a pair of dogs worried an industrial-sized black plastic trash bag. The plastic stretched between their fighting.

"God damn," he said, rolling his hands into fists. "Can't keep their garbage home." He searched out a large stick and approached.

"Go on, get!" He raised the stick, figured them to be vacation dogs, shagged out of the back seat of a car at the end of summer. The smaller of the two, with sides shrunken and back arched, slunk off with its tail ratty between its legs. The other, a larger long-haired breed, stayed, trying to pull something free of the bag.

John picked up a rock and hit the big dog square in the side. The rock hit with a hollow sound. The dog scuttled into the leaves and ran off yelping while the gaunt dog remained sitting at a distance. The bag's white plastic tie, still looped, had slipped off and lay in the dirt. He glanced at what had slid partially out of the bag.

It looked like the leg of a brown Swiss calf. Why in God's name would someone waste good meat? He stepped closer and the leg angled oddly, and then he realized it was no cow's leg, but a man's, severed with its fuzz of soft blond hair still curling tightly against the white skin. He looked down at his own squat legs in surprise for a moment.

A fly crawled up onto the leg, opened its wings to the sun. John lifted the plastic, looked into a jumble of body parts, seeing what might be the crook of an elbow, a nipple. He shifted the bag so that the half-exposed leg slid back into the dark. The fly buzzed inside the bag.

John straightened, staring down the highway, his arms slack at his side. At his back, the corn clattered in the breeze, a blue jay screamed. The air smelled of meat gone bad. A car drove by and then another and then none. He reached down to the bag at his feet and twisted the plastic opening closed in a knot.

He paced off a short distance, returned to stand over the bag. Something must explain this, he thought. Maybe it would come clear if he gave it time. The sun pierced a patch of clouds while a rooster pheasant strolled down a row of corn. The skinny dog was panting as it lay in the dirt, tongue spread over one foot, still watching. He should call the police. The dog's ears lifted and it raised to its feet.

It was clear he couldn't leave the bag. He looked down the length of highway and then carefully hefted the bag. It hung at his side in odd bumps and sags—then he turned toward the house.

With each step the bag swung, throwing his gait off. The dog trailed at a distance. "Go on, get!" he yelled and took a threatening step. It backed up, trotted off to a safer distance. John put the bag down, looked around the fields as if for an answer, then hunching his shoulder swung the bag around and over. He flinched as it thudded against his back, but it rode easier, high on his shoulder. It had the weight of a good-sized bale of hay, or better yet, a young calf. He used to carry his boy this way.

It rolled almost comfortably back there. Looking out over the fences he knew personally, he hoped he might see Ben or his boy



in the neighboring field. They could stop. Talk. He could show them a thing or two, he thought matter-of-factly. He turned to look for the dog, but it had disappeared into the rows of corn.

Back in his yard, John walked to the burn barrel, a rusted oil drum next to the garage. He swung the bag off his shoulder. It bumped against the metal, ringing softly. John eased the bag down into the barrel, settling it in the soot of old newspapers, cardboard and wax milk cartons. Ash drifted up.

In the kitchen, the radio played and Tillie was swaying in place at the cutting board. John took his jacket off, hung it on the peg behind the door. He walked to the sink.

"Remember Carmen Miranda?" Tillie asked. She held an onion behind her ear.

He scraped bar soap up under his nails. Tillie walked up behind him. "You're back early."

The water steamed out of the faucet and stung his knuckles. An old song he could almost remember played and out the window, across the yard, he could see the burn barrel.

"A penny for your thoughts," Tillie said softly into his ear.

He wiped his hands and turned to her. Her eyes were the same blue as when he'd left that morning. "It don't matter," he said.

"John?"

"I found something. I got to call the police."

"What?" Tillie's voice raised. "What's happened?"

"Found a bag full of a man's body parts. It's in the burn barrel." He hesitated. "You want to see?" And even as he asked, he wondered if it was right to show a woman a thing like that. Was it right to show her? And yet it seemed the years spent at her side gave him the right to ask it of her. "It's just out there." It became

important that she see it too.

Tillie backed away. "No," she said then crossed to the stove and turned on the gas under the coffee pot.

John followed Tillie, put his hand on her elbow. "It's just out there," he repeated. He waited until moisture hissed from the coffee pot, then walked into the living room and called the police.

John sat across the kitchen table from their son, Karl. Dishes rattled in the sink as Tillie washed the coffee cups the police had used earlier. Under that, he could hear Karl's pregnant wife snoring on the living room couch.

"This county's always been a dumping ground for Chicago trash," Karl said, grinding out a cigarette.

A cup banged on the sideboard. The overhead light was yellow on Karl's face. He looked fleshy in the starched, white shirt. Like a banker. John looked down at his hands in embarrassment.

Karl's voice dropped. "Mobsters. Probably drug-related."

Tillie turned from the sink, wringing soap from her hands. "That's enough," she scolded.

"Dad should be on the eleven o'clock news." Karl walked into the living room.

The TV clicked on. John stood up from the table. "You going to come see?" he asked.

"I got to finish these dishes," Tillie said. And that was like her, John thought. He had always taken pride in her composure, her tidiness—a woman who knew what belonged to each part of the day, and these dishes just another part of another day, as though the stack that mounted on the sideboard had not been the result of detectives breaking for coffee at the house. She moved with a

purpose, cups clattering onto the drying rack. "I'll be right in," she added but remained standing with her back to him at the sink. In the living room, Karl sat on the floor in front of his wife, his head resting against her belly that slumped off the side of the couch. She smiled, the cushion damp beneath her mouth. John sat in the easy chair. They were the first item of news for the evening.

It all looked so neat as he watched the footage of his south field, then a quick shot of the barn—empty this past three years when it had gotten too much for him to manage the herd without Karl—and a close-up of the burn barrel. The reporter faced into the breeze.

"You're going to miss it, Ma," Karl called. "Hey, look at you, Dad."

John watched himself on camera. He looked thick. The weather-scrubbed barn behind him, which he'd always admired for being burnished down to the heart of the wood, looked shabby on the small screen. The sheriff came on briefly, while behind him two men hefted the black plastic bag onto a stretcher. John remembered that he'd meant to tell the men they wouldn't need it, that the weight sat easy enough on your shoulder if you leaned forward a bit. But he hadn't said that. There he was on TV, looking startled, saying what he'd supposed they wanted to hear. "Yes. Quite a surprise."

John stood up, knowing now a person could not always believe what he saw. Tillie waited in the doorway, studying him. He walked past her, out the back door and into the yard.

He stood in the cold and shoved his hands into his pant pockets. Moonlight congealed on the elderberry bushes and the remains of Karl's old play fort canted into the shadows. He started

walking away, and when he heard the storm door bang shut behind him, he looked back to see Tillie come out onto the porch, pull a sweater over her shoulders and step down into the yard after him.

They went out through the orchard, his steps turning on fallen apples that had bruised and slumped into the ground. They passed the storage shed and empty cowbarn, through the rows of field corn with the leaves flagging in the breeze, until he came out on the far northern field and stood on a hill, his breath churning the chill air. Tillie stepped close and pressed a sweater over his shoulder.

He looked south. "You see," he said, "from over there." His finger followed a pinpoint headlight moving down the highway. "Can you imagine? All the way here to put such a thing on my land."

Tillie leaned into him, but he felt separate, as if the act of walking out into his fields this morning had left her too far behind. He looked into the night.

She ducked her head and whispered, "Don't think about it," and snugged the sweater tight around him again.

John turned to her. "How do I walk my own fields again?"

Tillie hugged her arms around her.

He asked, "Why? What did I do?"

The next morning a hard frost scabbed the few remaining squash in the garden, but by ten o'clock the clouds had broken, the frost melted and John found himself walking to the south field, not first, as he normally did, but last, as a thing worked up to.

He had started finding his way there since breakfast where he

sat longer than usual, drinking *two* cups of coffee and reading the newspaper slowly. He was on the front page. Inside were pictures of the police with shovels and teams of dogs searching his fields. He sat spread over the paper, breathing through his nose.

"Karl might have been right," he said. "Police think it had something to do with drugs and organized crime."

"Why do they think that?" Tillie asked, buttering a slice of toast.

John cleared his throat, then spoke each word as though he were counting change. "His head and hands are missing."

Tillie settled the butter knife onto her plate, glanced out the window. "Does that make sense?"

"I didn't notice them missing," he said quietly.

Tillie sat back. "You looked?"

John glanced up.

"I supposed," she offered, "it would be the natural thing to do—"

"At first I thought it was just meat, something off the rendering truck, maybe, I don't know, but I saw it was human then. And I looked."

Tillie stared down at her hands. John sensed her backing away as she had yesterday. He waited for her to ask what he had seen. What he had felt when he looked into the bag. He waited for her to ask how he could sleep after seeing that. He was afraid she would ask and he would have to admit he had slept well—after a while. Tillie remained silent. "I should go now," he said, spreading both hands on the table as he pushed his chair clear.

Tillie shook her head. "I saw my father with his arm in the thresher. I've seen body parts before." She paused. "wasn't much

help yesterday.”

John rubbed a hand over his eyes. “You going to be all right?” he asked.

“You want me to come along?” she answered.

As Tillie lifted her face to him, he turned away, left the house and walked to the north field as it had been his job to do each day of his adult life. The fields were his, given into his care. He had never taken that obligation lightly. As he walked, he told himself it was garbage—trash he’d found, like the styrofoam cartons from fast-food joints. Or a careless litter of kittens. He wondered what his father would have thought of it all. John walked down the crest of a small hill, looking over the fields to the rows of blank-faced houses in the near distance—subdivisions, curbs, gutters, driveways and roads. Waste. But then his father had not known about such things. That was before the highway and the trash it spawned.

John walked carefully over the plowed field. Maybe next year he’d rent the field out. Ben could use the extra hay. I *am* getting too old for this, he thought. He ran his fingers through his thin hair and looked across to the highway where he’d found the bag. A car was parked on the side of the road. He could see a young man standing on the gravel shoulder.

John hurried, his feet sinking into the fresh-turned soil. There were others in the car. John slowed as he approached the ditch. The man had a sweater tied in a bright yellow knot around his waist. His hair was red and burnished bright in the sunlight. There was laughter from inside the car and a door opened for the young man. Another car passed slowly. John could see an arm pointing to him, to his fields.

He stepped into the ditch. "You got some business here?" he shouted.

"Just looking," the man squinted down at John.

John stooped to pick up a wad of paper and a pop can. He pressed the paper into his jacket pocket. "This is my land," he said.

"Hey, Mister, we're not bothering anything. Listen, it's a nice day."

"It was." He held out the pop can.

"This is public road."

"That's the road," John pointed to where a car drove slowly by, "and that's public road," he pointed to the sloping gravel shoulder, "but this is *mine*." He pointed to the ditch.

The young man backed into the opened car door and laughed. "You crazy, old man?"

John fingered the battered can in his hand. He threw it as the car pulled away, gravel popping from the tires and the shouts of the young people trailing like exhaust.

John watched until the car winked out into a curve. He turned, facing the road that wound through the rolling countryside and eventually leveled out in the suburbs of Chicago, to be swallowed into the city itself.

"Go ahead," he said, wiping his hands on his pants and confronting the faultless blue of the sky. "You bring Your garbage here."

Frankie Aldtenburg's "All Concertina Band" played every Friday night at the Elk's Club. Although Tillie had often asked John to go, this was the first time he had suggested it to her. The idea had

come to him as he'd pulled off his work boots, and then his white cotton socks—they were still clean after a full day. He looked down and saw his leg hairs curling dark and blue veins rooting beneath the pale skin. He pulled at the hair, watched the skin pimple up beneath it and snap back when released. It was at that moment, with his eyes tearing slightly and his breath squeezed in his throat, that he thought of dancing.

At the club, in the Bull Elk Room, Frankie Aldtenburg sat in a wooden folding chair, center stage, his metal walker standing companionably alongside. The drummer brushed a slow shuffle on the snare, while his foot kept the one beat on the bass, and the high-hat floated in the yellow stage light. The other concertina player sat to the right and slightly behind Frankie, squeezing rhythm in chords.

As John and Tillie walked by, fellow Elks and neighbors nodded their heads, said, "A little dancing, hey John?" and "How's by you?"

They sat at a table near the three-piece band. Frankie played polkas and waltzes and limping two-steps. Tillie ordered a Manhattan. John drank highballs.

Between songs, John leaned in toward his wife as though to speak, only to fall silent. He wanted to explain how he had found himself here, to draw a connection from his pale legs with their curling hairs to the bright dance floor and old man Adltenburg wheezing out melodies on the concertina. He knew it had something to do with finding your legs under you.

During the break their neighbor Ben stopped by the table, his head politely inclined to Tillie. He rested a hand briefly on John's shoulder, his voice funeral-soft. "How's it been, John?"



John eased back in his chair, looked up at Ben through the rim of his raised highball. It made his face look water-streaked and ruined. John knew what Ben was feeling, relief that it wasn't found on his property—that thing like an accusation from God Himself. "Fair to middlin'," John replied and smiled. "Corn's looking real good. Bumper crop with all that early rain. Hear you had some bad luck with that new soybean."

Ben leaned back on his heels, looked up at the ceiling a moment, then back at John. "Had better years." He nodded to Tillie then to John before he strode back across the dance floor.

At the end of two hours and five highballs, John let it all drift. He raised his face to the shine of stage lights, and as Frankie trailed out of a waltz and into a schottische, John asked Tillie to dance. On the floor they stood next to each other, John's hand riding her hip. Of all the dances, the schottisch was his favorite, with its practiced shuffling step and determined movement forward.

His mother had taught him it as a child, out on the dirt of the chicken-pecked back yard, humming the oom-pa-pa beat under her breath, the hens racketing out of their way. His father watched, shaking his head at such nonsense. His father would walk him through the fields instead, tell him, "You put yourself down and stay. Then you see what God provides." He would open his arms, gathering in all the crops and years in one gesture.

John felt himself stumble. Tillie kept dancing. He threw his head back far on his neck and shouted, "My father named me John Root."

"Yes?" she asked.

He circled the dance floor with Tillie, planting each step reck-

lessly, his body bearing down as if to pack the earth beneath them.

For a week, each morning John lingered over breakfast, ate each item slowly, then walked out to the fields with the same deliberation. Things seemed normal again, as though the sin in that bag had never been committed or his discovery of the bag had been only a glancing blow after all. If he tended to fall asleep a little later, or startle awake in the dead of the night, he told himself it was no worse than when he'd worried about musk in the corn, or when Karl had sickened with chicken pox as an infant. He saw how Tillie watched him from the corner of her eye.

On the eighth morning he came back from the barber with the back of his neck clean-shaven and the tips of his ears revealed white where his field tan never reached. Tillie was packing squash into scalded jars, wringing the lids tight. She lifted each jar to the light before immersing it in the hot bath.

"They stop talking when they see me," he said.

"Why ever?"

"It's like I told them some secret they don't want to hear about."

"It could have been them," she said, turning down the heat under the canning kettle. "The highway runs along every one of these farms. They don't want to know it could have been them." She put her hand on his arm. "Listen to me. You got to listen. You're a good man. You've spent your life working to feed others—"

He shook his head, swaying lightly on his feet "I truck my grain to the elevator, sell it cheap as dirt. If my father grew wheat that year, he saw the bread, knew the bakers and the families who

ate it. Do I see the bread my grain makes? No, I take it on *faith*. I take it on faith, but I *know* some middle-man is stealing from that broker to sell to some company baker, who's stealing from the workers and the chain grocers are piling food in dumpsters because it's two days past shelf life in some *city* and people don't buy it because they're buying booze or drugs or lottery tickets. And then they come out here to take a crap on my land, like they knew who they were coming home to."

Tillie slapped her hand down on the table. Her body settled like dust into the chair. "It was trash, coming down the highway—it stopped at the dark bend in the road. There was no knowing behind it, John. Just chance." And he willed himself to believe that as he knelt and she rocked him in her arms.

Later that evening, on their way to Edgar and Anna's for their regular card game, John drove the road as he thought a stranger might. He counted the dark stretches of unlit fields. The fields became random, the dark accidental. He breathed deeply and when he smiled to himself he felt his skin stretch.

The six men ringed the dining room table, each one alternately sitting out a hand. They played five card stud, high and low, and aces and jokers wild, while Ernest always added a bump and a wiggle. They drank beer from amber bottles that Anna carried to the table, waved their cigarettes and spat small bits of tobacco from the tips of their tongues.

After a few hands, John took a long pull at his beer, looked into the bottle and asked, "What do you get when you mix beer cans and mobsters?"

The others fell silent.

"A Chicago landfill," he answered.

The men laughed uneasily at first, then loosened up with

Charlie's belly laugh.

"I don't know if we should be joking . . ." Anna said and faltered. Tillie looked over at John in surprise. He could feel her confusion just as he could feel the approval of the others. Their relief.

"They should all do each other in," Ben said, and the group looked to John.

"Garbage," John said looking away from Tillie. He leaned over Ben's hand. "More garbage," he said, his laughter erupting like a bark.

"I didn't deal it," Ben scowled at Hank.

John sat out the next hand. Perhaps it didn't matter after all. And even if it was an accounting as his father had promised, and if God had given him this, then John had looked deep and he had not found *himself* wanting, only the world.

Ben excused himself from the table.

Charlie raised his voice over the general laughter. "Speaking of that. I heard from Clifton that his department thinks it might have been sexual. He got a report some guy's been missing since a week ago Saturday."

"Sexual?" Hank asked.

Charlie nodded. "As in *homosexual*."

John set his cards down.

"Said he was canvassing in the suburbs for AIDS or something."

"You calling?" Edgar asked John.

John folded. Edgar split the pot with Charlie, and Ernest dealt the next hand. John listened to the cards hit the table with a soft sound like slapped flesh. Their voices hummed in his head and he sat with his cards flat on the table. He didn't understand what it was—how the word sexual had *changed* things, or why it had

done so. He felt his breathing grow shallow. But it had. He remembered lifting the bag, how it hit his back, that fleshy contact he could not allow himself to believe at the time.

John stared at the cards face-down in front of him.

Edgar spoke up. "Well it don't matter. Still garbage, ain't a John?"

John straightened his back, looked around the waiting circle of men to where Tillie sat with her eyes down on her hands. "arbage," he agreed.

Ben entered the dining room from the kitchen, a black plastic trash bag in his hands. He dropped it on the table in front of John.

"Must be for you," he said.

John's face whitened as if slapped. He sat looking at the bag as Ben turned away, laughing.

"John." Tillie left her chair next to Anna, moving to his side.

He looked up and the group fell silent. He glanced at Tillie, then down at the bag. Tillie moved her hand toward it, but John stopped her.

"No," he whispered, wanting to spare her what he wouldn't have a week ago.

Ben stepped forward. "It's nothing," he said. He laughed awkwardly. "Just a joke." He ripped into the bag; sandwiches scattered out. "It didn't mean nothing."

Later that evening, back home, John called Karl long distance. In the background he could hear Karl's wife questioning "Who is it? Who is it?"

"Sell the damn place," Karl said.

"It was supposed to be yours," John answered.

There was a long moment of breathing on the line, then "I don't want it, Dad. Look what it's gotten you."

John couldn't argue that. He sent his love and hung up. He tried to watch television, and later, in bed, he tried to rub himself alive, and failing that, to press himself limp into Tillie. She tried to help, her hands stroking him, but he remained limp, the moonlight illuminating a piece of himself, a piece of her and something of them—all their parts jumbled in the dark room.

He got up, dressed and left the house. In the yard, he found himself walking to his tractor, an old Allis he'd bought almost new in fifty-four. His hand ran along the dent on the right wheel cover, from back in sixty-seven. He swung himself onto the cast-iron seat that knew his spine better than he did. The engine stuttered as he choked it back to life. The night fled, closed down to two converging circles of light from the tractor's high beams. He backed over to where the disk rested, the rows of hard metal plates buried in wilted ragweed. He hitched it to the tractor, belly-down in the damp weeds, a stone for a mallet to hammer in the cotter pin, then looped two lengths of chain over the hook on the back of the tractor. He hiked the disk lever and the round plates lifted up to the trailer wheels. Standing in the dark, he admired the gleam of frosted metal—blades he still honed himself, just as his father had, in the off-season. The damp on his shirt was like a second skin, already stiffening in the cold. The porch light went on as he pulled onto the dirt road leading from the yards to his fields.

The moon was low on the horizon, a small sickle shape his grandfather had used as a portent for harvest in a time when soil was clean. He could have driven the road with the lights off, though the moonlight was feeble. But he kept them on to skitter over the road with each bump, leap up onto the trees like someone whose line of sight is jerked this way then that by the rush of

objects thrown at him. He shifted down for the rise leading into the south field, the engine warming him, the exhaust cap popping with small contained explosions, metal ringing each time it slapped back down. The wheels churned gravel and then he was over the hill and idling, the corn marching in straight rows out of the tractor's lights. He could see eyes lit red and sparking through the corn rows.

He slipped into gear, rolled forward and the corn rustled through the headlights, snapped like teeth clamping down beneath him. Over his shoulder he could see the ten-foot-wide swathe behind him, mowed flat against the wall of corn on his left. He steadied his hands on the wheel, feeling his heart banging in his chest like the pheasants that shotgunned out of the corn scattering into the dark. There was an excitement he had not anticipated, an intense joy rising up from his stomach and he shouted into the drone of engine and snapping corn, nearly rising from his seat to lean over the wheel, the night cut with lights, the dark revealed.

Halfway back across the field, he saw Tillie crossing the ruined path. Her hair was loose down her back and she hugged herself as she stumbled over the flattened corn. In the light, she looked startled. He shifted to neutral and pulled the brake.

"I can't see very well," she said as she neared the tractor. He offered a hand to her, and she climbed up onto the wheel fender next to him. "John, you could wait until morning . . ."

But he shook his head, engaged the gears. "I know this field," he shouted, thinking how well he knew it—better than his own body, maybe as well as he knew Tillie's. She nodded for him to go on then, her arm tight to his waist, her other hand gripping the

wheel cover she sat on.

They mowed the next row, and then the next, nearly a quarter of the field scraped flat, the remainder bristling at the edges of the light. Tillie was slumped against John. He could feel her weariness and the joy turned in him like winter storage, flat tasting, then soft and bad. He turned the tractor at row's end, driving on.

This was what it came to, he believed. The final leveling. His father's body leading a three-car cortege. John's son, Karl, an accountant. John's own life work just so much trash. His stomach cramped and he put in the clutch, shut off the engine. He stepped down from the tractor, crouched next to the fender, taking deep breaths through his mouth. Tillie was at his side, stroking his forehead and trying to shrug her sweater over his shoulders.

He turned to look over the broken field and stopped. A pair of eyes winked in the near distance at ground level. John started to laugh, pointed them out to Tillie. "Goddamn raccoons," he said. And then the eyes rose up a foot, burning, floating effortlessly higher and held at a height even with John's own. His back arched then sagged softly. And then he made out the shape of haunches and shoulders, a narrow head with a rack and flagging ears. The deer moved across the broken corn, feeding in the silence. The smell of corn was like a bruise in the air and he put his shaking hands in his pockets.

"I'm sorry," Tillie said, "for what happened at Edgar and Anna's. It was . . . an ugly thing for Ben to do."

John sighed, his breath gelling in the cool air. The earth sounded hollow beneath his feet. He judged the depth of frost at six inches.

She tried again. "I didn't mean to hurt you—"



"No," he said, "you didn't." He turned off the tractor lights, hefted the disks back to trailer height. They walked clear of the tractor, crossed the standing rows of corn until they came to the creek skinned with ice. He could hear water rustling beneath.

"All these years," she said. "Shouldn't I know how to help you?"

He turned, following the creek away from the road. Tillie's fingers were tight on his arm. He said, "When I first saw it—when I first saw it I thought, for just a moment, that it was my own legs someone had cut out from under me and I just didn't know it yet." John stopped and peered down into Tillie's eyes. "Isn't that strange?"

Tillie's eyes were bright in the dark. "No," Tillie said. "We've been hurt."

John sighed and straightened up. He looked over his shoulder toward the highway. "Know what I did? Stood in that road and told God, Go ahead bring me Your garbage." He looked at Tillie. "Dared Him." John released a shaky laugh. "Back at Edgar's house—when Ben brought out the bag, I thought He'd answered, sent me the damned head and hands."

Tillie squeezed his arm.

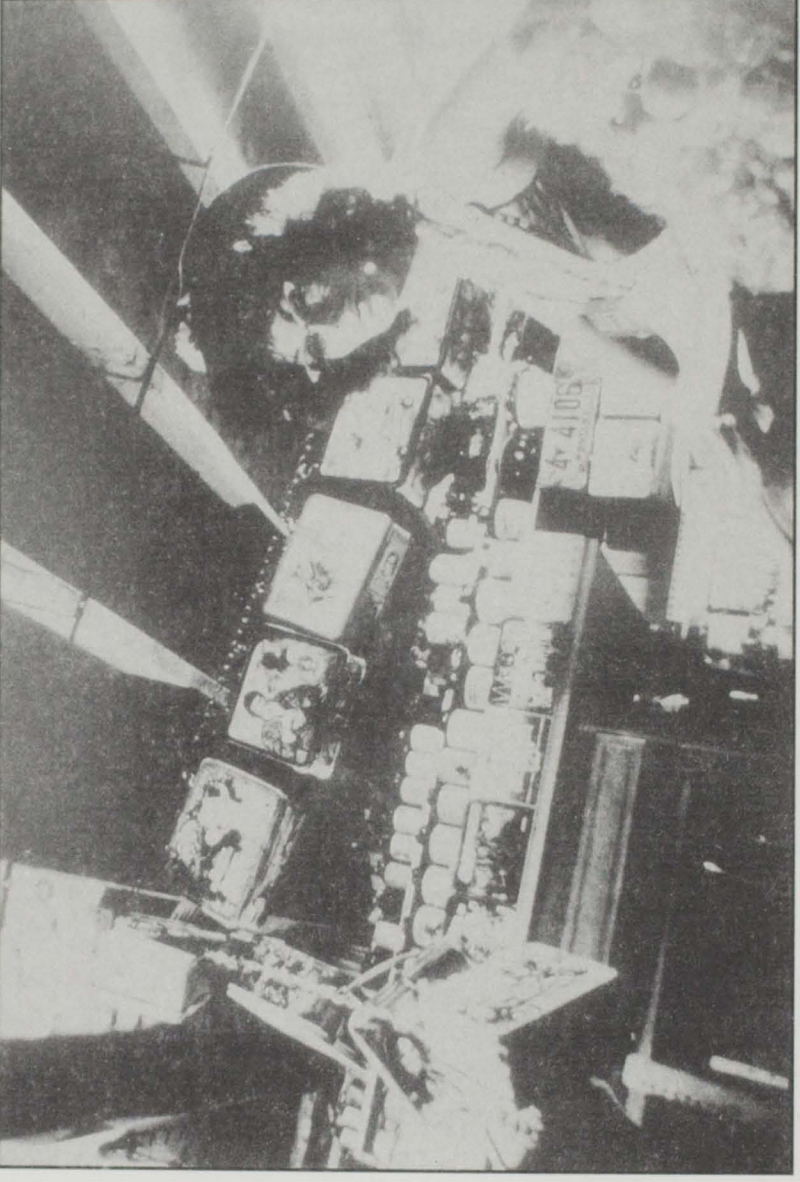
He thought about what had come to him in the field just now, what he had thought of when he saw those eyes alive and rising, how he had again felt the soft hit and roll of the bag on his shoulder—"I called it—no, *him*—garbage, Tillie. As if I hadn't *seen*."

John Root leaned into Tillie and lay his head on her shoulder. He listened to her breath, cavernous in her body. He wrapped his arms around her, lending his own small weight to hers. The creek wandered in a lazy tangle, washing the soil, moving into neighboring fields past the homes of friends, beyond to where houses

squatted in packs and dogs barked and ran the length of their chains. He stared into the distance to see inside the houses, to where people shed soiled clothes, lifted tired legs into beds and drowned the noise of the dogs, the highway, and their own slow dying in the muffle of quilts and the soft slap of flesh.

Carmen Hoover

Wolf's Museum  
Photograph



Walter Pavlich

## Newness

It is the just-weaned calico pulling on a just-pruned length  
of jasmine twine with her teeth. It is this claim:

*This is mine and I have no use for it.*

It is the dove's head after an unforecasted rain.

It is a root beer stain on the selected poems of the poet  
who died last Friday.

It is hearing Rosetta Tharpe sing "*I'm gonna move to the sky.*"

It is the memory of driving the nursing home laundry econoline  
van full of rolling turds and piss and death.

It is the sun not making any noise.

It is the mouthpainted river, the footpainted sea.

It is the extension cord needed for the electric hummingbird.

It is the music box picking up where it left off mid-song.

It is how well sparrows blend with the dead gazanias.

It is the heart thirty-five years old and numberless.

It is the perfect seal of a tomato.

It is the star between two crows.

It is not pear leaves shaking, but wandering in place.

It is cat being, bird spirit, dog soul.

It is playing music loud sometimes, so your insides can hear it.

It is lamb blood on the kitchen floor.

It is the moon nude.

Gary Gildner

## *First Poem from Slovakia: A Dream in the Carpathians*

After I died I began to wonder  
where my grave would be. On a hill  
among shady trees? Near a golden river?  
In the center, oh God, of a buzzing cloverleaf?  
An old friend I hadn't seen in years came dancing by  
wearing a bow tie and a stovepipe hat, and said, "It's bad,  
not having any home—I know—but what *I've* done  
is leave a note, with arrows pointing out the way,  
funny directions to make everyone laugh."  
We laughed at the brilliance of this notion  
and then, doffing his hat, he was off, oddly dodging  
the monuments and stones crowding around us,  
as if playing a kind of cops-and-robbers.  
I woke. The room was lit with sky, with fall, and a coppery  
light from at least three countries—  
and the warm girl smiling beside me  
whom I loved, had loved last night in the mountain's  
glow, said, "Well, here we are on Baba, did you sleep OK?"  
I told about my friend, his brilliant plan, his hat,  
and how he scampered off, apparently in a cemetery.  
"How strange," she said, looking sadly away,  
"I dreamt you were dying, I think in a theatre—  
I was crying, sick with grief, and yet I wanted,  
terribly, to fuck you one more time. I even  
used that word, I didn't care who heard me.  
Oh, but it was all right, you whispered kindly,

like an old doctor, both arms reaching up  
to help me down, considerate of my dress, my hair,  
and saying—they were your last words—  
you had a long, important speech to make and would be  
practicing now. That was the hard part, darling—  
your being so nice about it, so polite.”

Douglas Woodsum

## *An Impartial Answer*

You asked me if the ocean changed my life.  
I grew up on a point of land, the sea  
On three sides, every window in the house  
An ocean view, every wet view part wind.  
The light and the tides change and the wind changes  
And I have changed the way I look at waves.

Besides the waves that break on the shore, waves  
Appear in my dreams. The sweet song of life's  
Blue mother comes to my bed. She sings, "Change  
Is always possible; it rules the sea."  
She sings and hums of change. I wake; the wind  
Dies, the waves subside to glass, and my house

Holds solid as a ship. But soon the house  
Will shake in wind enough to slosh small waves  
In toilet, sink or tub, gale gusts of wind  
That rock my bed and overturn boats. Life  
After life, we mourn the drowned, but the sea  
Is innocent. It's not the sea; it's change.

The tail end of a hurricane brought change.  
Tides above normal flooded the well-house.  
I turned on faucets and out came the sea.  
Weeks later I still washed in the trapped waves  
That sunk themselves into the well. The life  
Of the storm long gone, gone with the white wind,



But still salt in my shower. I've seen wind  
Break boats from moorings, the wrecks that change  
People's fortunes. I've seen ships go down, life-  
Boats flip spilling women and children. Houses  
On the sea sometimes sink and sometimes waves  
Barge in and take some small thing out to sea.

I learned to fear from my neighbor, the sea  
And to love the power and shape of wind  
In a sail pushing a boat over waves.  
And I learned to weigh the sudden changes  
Reflected in water. But take this house  
Inland, I don't think it would change my life.

The ocean winds and waves don't rest ashore.  
They change into shapes borne far from the sea.  
Spray flies. All lives, all houses have ledges.

M. Earl Craig

## *Some Lilac From My Mother*

*Lilac. I say lilac. I say  
The lilac in the park  
has nothing on me.*

It's raining and the wet lilac  
has overtaken the park.  
The lilac doesn't breathe  
heavily, or sing to itself, or  
stop to ponder park boundaries  
for even a moment.  
It moves noiselessly  
through the chainlink fences  
that keep the stunned children  
from following. It rolls over  
even the tallest trees  
and pushes on down the streets,  
stopping traffic everywhere,  
the intersections choked  
and people abandoning their cars.

I think I'm just frustrated  
because the lilac knows  
where I am; because the lilac  
has everything to do  
with the way I hold my hands.

I used to feel I knew  
just where the lilac was,  
and when. I used to feel  
some sense of control, as if  
that damned lilac in the park  
had nothing on me.

But now the lilac is  
coming. The thick trees  
and the fences  
and the traffic lights  
are all weeping for me.  
They are sorry they couldn't help.  
Now the lilac is at the door,  
a cool, quiet rustling  
as it overtakes the porch,  
and I'm remembering a time  
when the lilac was in a small vase  
on the kitchen table. I am trying  
to understand, and no longer sure  
if it was ever not like this:  
me watching from my window, everything  
slowly swallowed, one minute  
my front yard filling up and now,  
now this window  
going dark.

## Mark Levine

### You

The screen goes blank. The thornbush on the blue  
screen goes blank. A burning log drops  
into the soggy peat. You: you can stop talking.

This whole production—costumes with silver stripes,  
feathers, glue, wet tongues, skin  
that looks like skin—you can stop it now.  
The sawdust stage, the crooked red scaffolding.  
You can practice stopping it.

Is anything moving in the dark? We close our eyes,  
we listen to the fluttering sheets, the blue smoke—  
Are we moving? With the darkness taken away,  
can you move your legs? I can.

I would like to say something. The blue

thornbush has stopped speaking and burning.  
The sun will not pass through the wet berries.  
Men have set down their shovels  
in flat lanes of cleared peat. The last  
plane flies into the screen silently.

I would like to say the film was not allowed to end.  
I throw up my hands: no scars.  
No pictures fading across the flat lines

of my body, not even when we add  
singed hair, a painted shirt.

On the white table I read the numbers printed on my pill.  
On the white table I lie with my pill  
beneath the light and the last remaining figures  
in their white shoes. I listened

to your tape but could make out nothing  
with the birds squawking in the background like  
burning leaves. To see the drifting sheet—  
coming down on the body  
like a silent white bird with yellow eyes.  
Coming down on the body like a body.

Mark Levine

## Seconds

The caption of this photograph is "Man hit by falling ice."  
In the chapters that follow, the theory of the cosmic  
second-hand unfolds in layman's terms, with reference  
to the sand-dollar and DNA.  
Is dinner ready yet? How long has dinner been ready?  
Despite the sun, it grows warmer here each day.

The question remains: What *hasn't* been lost? Who made off  
with the last poem—the one I was saving my all for?  
I gave my itemized collection of used things  
to the government, on the condition it be returned  
with interest when "the need arises." I can't be sure  
but I think the need is arising. Signs include: increased

appetite, bus trips to abandoned villages, prophetic  
dreams in the third person, the composition of unresolvable  
fugues

for cembalo and God.

When will the mailtruck arrive?

I belong to a club that each month gets sent splinters of the  
Sphinx

concealed in boxes of Syrian apples. The *real* Sphinx:

a shape with lion body and the head of a man.

Chapter twenty concludes: "In the future

it is theoretically possible that the head will be considered

a body part." Oh prophets of Babylon and Islam and Judea  
in your studded necklaces of glass and bone,  
hear me: I cannot see a "future"

for myself, or my double, or his double.  
Where are you taking us with our written consent?  
Will there be painted bars across the windows?  
Will there be elections each Tuesday, and time-clocks  
surgically implanted in our glands?  
I am here at your disposal to second the motion.

Surely this moment has been written by professionals  
with much to lose.  
Surely it cannot go on much longer, the desert carnival.  
"Surely"—Did I say that? I can't remember what I said,  
whether I said it, whether all along without my knowing  
I have been speaking someone else's lines.  
Someone small. Someone perfectly dangerous.

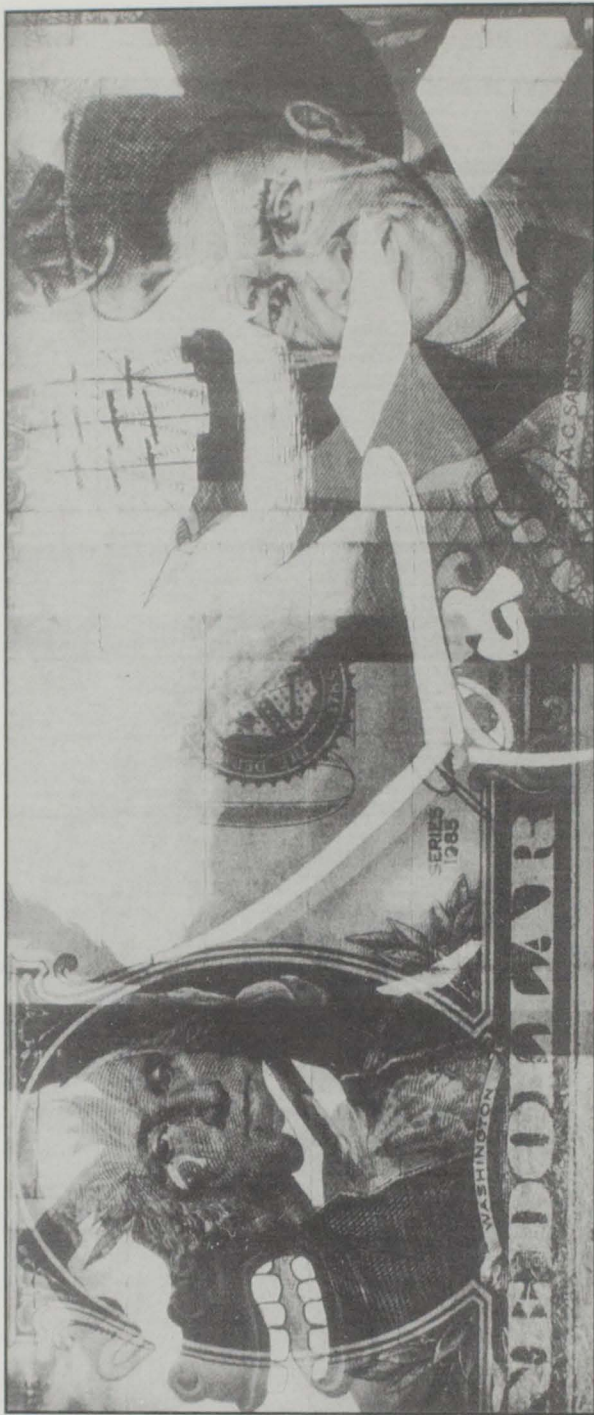
A State  
of Bliss  
Ebony Pencil



E. Trace  
Drury



Harry Wilson



*Imperial Dollar, Nicaragua*  
Photograph

Amy Linn

## *Gaining Touch*

The morning is clear and strangely balmy for Chicago in July, and I am sitting in the front seat of my sister's Subaru station wagon, handing back a Diet Coke and Egg McMuffin to my fifteen-year-old niece, Cindy, whose mother is dying. Cindy's mom, my sister-in-law, went to a doctor five weeks ago because she thought her ulcer was acting up. "You have cancer," the doctor told her. "You have so many tumors in your stomach, there's nothing we can do."

My own sister — my only sister, Judy — sits behind the steering wheel, sips coffee, eats a sweet roll, tosses quarters in the toll booth basket, sways in and out of the Cub's game traffic heading for downtown, tells me she could do this "with her eyes closed," tells Cindy, at the appropriate moments — "What a riot!" and, "You're kidding!" Cindy is telling stories about parasailing in Israel.

"They strap you into this harness, it's like a parachute," Cindy says, "but you've got a line tying you to the boat, and when the boat starts going, you fly up in the air. And once you're up in the air, the guys in the boat can't hear a thing you say. So I'm parasailing with this other kid — they let two of you go up at the same time—"

"You're so brave!" I turn to Cindy.

"And this other kid," Cindy says, "he's screaming to me, he says he feels kind of sick. And then he starts barfing, and it's flying back in the wind and hitting me. It was so disgusting. And we're both yelling, 'Get us down! Get us down!' But the guys in the boat

can't hear us. They wind up taking us on a thirty-minute parasail—"

"You're kidding!"

"And when they got me down the barf had dried all over me. It was so gross I couldn't believe it. I made my dad buy me a new bathing suit."

"Wait a minute," I say, "how did you get—"

"Oh Jesus," my sister Judy says, "excuse me, but Jesus, I just used this off-ramp yesterday, how can they close this off-ramp? I can't believe this, they just close an exit overnight?"

The Ontario Avenue exit, the sign tells us, is closed for repairs.

"It's so weird to be in traffic and on a highway again," I say. "In Montana you never see traffic unless it's—"

"Jesus," my sister says.

When we get to the hospital, it's impossible to find a parking space. Judy reaches for some Mike and Ike candy in her purse and pops some like pills while she circles the block. Northwestern Hospital sits in a neighborhood of upscale condos and department stores built with faux Italian marble. We pass shoppers clutching bags from Marshall Field's, women in tight white dresses and dark sunglasses, men with the flat, pale, Slavic look—dark hair, thick features, pasty skin. In winter there's not a city in the country where people look more sickly. These are the type of men who wear fur hats with flaps over their ears, who smoke cigarettes on State Street when it's ten below and the wind whips off the lake on a personal mission to search and destroy.

Cindy is telling us about a friend on the school volleyball team whose shorts fell off after she went up to spike a ball, and the girl just played for a while in her underwear while everyone collapsed

on the floor, laughing.

The three of us give up looking for spots on the street and pull into the underground hospital parking lot that charges twelve dollars for the first half-hour. My sister and I trade stories with Cindy about embarrassing episodes in high school, and a nurse on her way out holds the hospital door open for us.

I'm amazed. The lobby looks upscale hotel-ish, complete with baroque paintings on the ceiling and a uniformed man at an information booth who could pass as a bellhop. The three of us walk into a carpeted elevator. Cindy is wearing cut-off blue jeans rolled up twice above the knee, a plain white t-shirt, black leather belt, black Doc Martens and white ankle socks. She and my sister check out their reflections in the shiny metal behind the panel of buttons, and my sister pushes number fourteen. "At least I'm having a good hair day," my sister says.

On the panel above the door is a list of the different departments in the hospital. For floor fourteen, there's only one word. Oncology, it says.

This is my first time up to a cancer ward. I have no idea what to do, and have only the most painful scraps of family history to guide me. I imagine my sister-in-law lying in a hospital bed, her tiny, odd frame even tinier now, skeletal with cancer, entwined with tubes and, somehow, existing. I think about my own assorted journeys to hospitals for the odd mishap, and the way my sister, Judy, looked in those beds during the months long ago when she had a kidney disease and it looked like she might die. I think about my brother, Mark, who lived in an iron lung in the days when parents were only allowed to visit for half an hour a day, and lived six months in a sealed-off room with a cast from his

toes to his shoulders, and the nurses who fed him wore masks over their faces. Visitors could wave at Mark from behind a plate of glass that a black woman kept clean with ammonia and rags. He was four years old.

Polio did this to people — made them scared for their lives. Made mothers keep children inside during long, scorching summers when the best relief for a fidgety child was a dunk in the public pool or a sip from a public fountain in the park down the block. Touching things could kill you, people said, and it was true. Germs were everywhere, the doctors told my parents, and this was supposed to explain something.

But my mother didn't like being afraid. The germ frenzy reminded her of anti-communism, and anti-Semitism, and all the things that made people so frightened they were willing to turn in their neighbors in, or kill people, or simply stop lifting their heads to look around. And so my mother took my brother to the zoo on a hot, July day in 1949, and gave him a drink from a fountain, and two weeks later, her firstborn couldn't sit up. He could barely move enough to cry.

The elevator doors open to the fourteenth floor. Cindy slumps into a chair by a lone table, bare aside from a Scrabble and Monopoly game. Judy throws her purse onto the empty blue couch that matches the soft blue carpeting. The place is discreet, almost church-like in the way that it tempts me to whisper — temple-like, I correct myself. My sister-in-law and brother have taken pains to reclaim a Jewish heritage that the rest of us — my parents, sister and I — have either denounced or ignored. My father changed his name from Kaplan to Linn shortly before he married my mother. He said he was desperate to get a job and no one

would hire a Jew. My brother changed his name back to Kaplan before Cindy was born, and my father still hasn't forgiven him.

I sit on the couch and start going through my backpack, pretending there's something I'm looking for. Cindy leafs through a *People* magazine. My sister's manic; she won't sit down. I take out a legal pad and start writing.

*Even in times of tragedy, I write, we retreat to separate corners. Isolation.* I write, then stop. Writing is just another retreat that's isolating.

A couple gets off the elevator holding hands; it looks like a mother and a daughter. A lone man approaches from down the hall and walks past us to the patient rooms.

"That's Mr. Johnson," says my sister. Her own hands are in her pockets. "Mr. Johnson's here because his son has a brain tumor. It's really sad." Judy barely bothers to take a breath. "I hope Ed is here today," she says. "Don't you like Ed?" she says to Cindy. Cindy nods.

Ed is the gay nurse who everybody loves, even my father, which is amazing, since my father rarely loves anyone he can't control. Ed gives morphine injections best; Ed helped drain the fluid surrounding the mass of tumors in Janet's stomach. Her abdomen is so swollen, she can't eat. She can only suck ice chips, or on good days, a Popsicle.

Last week, Jan had told Ed she was scared she would never see the sky again. Ed disconnected her intravenous lines and wheeled her bed into the visitor's lounge. Ed parked her near the elevator bank, where a floor-to-ceiling window allows views of a massive stone building across the street, and above it, blue sky. Jan stayed there for a long time, until she had to go back to her room. The tumors were pressing on her lungs, and she was finding it hard

to breathe. She asked Ed whether she could ever go home, and he told her there were choices she could make. Choices about where to die. "Thank you, Ed," Janet said. She never asked about going home again.

Ed steps off the elevator just as my sister is talking about him. "Ed!" Judy says, "meet my sister, she just flew in from Montana."

People in the Midwest seem to find this fairly amazing, as if Montanans live somewhere beyond the arctic circle and never get a chance to leave. But I've gotten used to this reaction to where I live. I am the visitor in this family, the one who arrives from New York or Miami or Alkali Lake, Canada and who leaves as quickly as possible. Right now, I just want to help my brother — I just want to see Jan, I keep telling myself, even as I know that for decades I've made a point of avoiding them. It's been years since I've even been inside Mark and Jan's apartment. I can't begin to tell myself now, a day after landing in Chicago, that anything I've ever done in my life has actually helped Mark. Or Janet. Or Cindy, whose clearest memory of me, I imagine, is that a few years ago at a family get-together in Arizona (I flew in from Philadelphia) I french-braided her hair.

"Hi," Ed says to me. He takes my outstretched hand and walks past me to the ward. I can feel myself not liking this man. I feel guilty that he doesn't know me already.

Cindy gnaws a fingernail. Her knee pumps up and down and her foot taps the floor. She is long-limbed, dark, coltish. She looks nothing like my brother, who had a spinal fusion that stopped his growth, whose hips are crooked, whose right leg is an inch longer than his left. She looks and acts nothing like her mother, who has a genetic abnormality that gave her a stutter and a seizure disorder.

der, who had a single mole on her face that would kill her, and who at four-foot-six, could medically qualify as a dwarf. Cindy was taller than her mother when she was seven years old.

"I'm going to go say hi to my mom now," Cindy says, and disappears down the hall. The nurses don't want too many people in Jan's room at the same time. I wait, obedient, to be given permission to follow.

"Jan will live at least a few more months," my parents have told me. My father didn't want me to make this trip to Chicago. He said it would be too upsetting.

"Death is supposed to be upsetting," I told him.

"There's nothing you can do," my father went on. I had called him and my mother from Montana to tell them I'd bought a plane ticket — I was desperate to come in to see Mark and talk to Jan before she died.

"Why don't you wait?" my father said. "Listen, kiddie, there are so many of us there each day now, the staff is getting upset with us, they tell us we're in the way. There aren't enough chairs in the waiting room, really honey, some days it's me and your mother and your sister and Sylvia and Sheila and Cindy, and Sheila's husband Jim, he's here from Colorado, and last week the Goldsteins flew in from Salt Lake City, and the rabbi has been here, and so has Mindy Seifer, Mom's old friend, you don't know her, the one who's in the wheelchair..."

I remind him that I know Mindy Seifer very well.

"You can't remember Mindy, can you?" he says. "I just don't think there's any room for you, and besides, there are so many people here already, you won't even get a chance to be with your brother."



"I want to get a chance to see Jan while she's alive," I repeat. My father is old and nearly deaf, which gives him license to yell at people and not to hear them. "I just want to give Mark a hug and tell him I love him."

"It'd be better if you didn't see her," my father says. "It'd be better to remember her the way she looked before."

She was tiny and pale and wore thick glasses and a lime-green and hot-pink dress above chubby knees. It was 1965 — I was nine; my sister was sixteen. My brother was twenty, and in love. That's when I first met Jan. That's how she looked.

Jan and I didn't hit it off. I wasn't happy when she and my brother got engaged. My brother had a handicap, and I wanted him to marry someone perfect. I fantasized that people with physical troubles needed to find a balance in the world by matching up with spectacular physical specimens. Fantasy was important to me in those days; reality let me down. My brother was going to leave the family to marry someone who didn't look nice, had a handicap herself and wasn't very friendly.

I was an ugly little kid and the whole thing confused me. In my friends I looked for bubbly, lush-haired redheads and big-eyed blondes who with their glitter made me, the dark, sallow-eyed girl, feel brightened. What made Mark love Jan? Ugliness and a sharp tongue wasn't sexy, I knew that. I couldn't imagine my brother and Jan even lying close to one another. Sex was for pretty, popular people; sex was for blondes. Sex was for my sister, who peroxided her hair and climbed out her window to ride in smoky cars with dangerous boys like Tex Henry. Sex was not for my brother, who played bridge with Rick Friedman, a guy who weighed 350 pounds and brought an orange crate to sit on

when he came to the house because he didn't want to break the furniture.

I never saw Jan and Mark kiss until the day of their wedding, a week after Bobby Kennedy was killed. And what I remember about the wedding was how happy they looked, and the fact that Bobby Kennedy had just been shot. The whole family remembers the wedding that way. "Oh, yes," we all say. "Remember how the rabbi mentioned Bobby Kennedy?"

At a big fancy dinner party the night before the wedding, the entree was quail. A tiny bird lay on my plate, bones charred and skin brown. I refused to eat. I was eleven years old and a flower girl. I wore a mint green, floor-length dress with puffed sleeves that I thought looked as good as Anne's did in Anne of Green Gables. I wanted to catch the bouquet that day, just to make sure I'd get married. But my sister, Judy, who was eighteen then and in love with a jazz piano player named Bob Aarons, jumped up in her new black pumps and her long brown hair bounced on her shoulders and she snatched the white flowers and held on. I was mad at my sister for a long time after that. I was mad at Jan, too.

Jan seemed to pick on my brother. She had an odd habit of telling us stories about how stupid or cloddish Mark was, as if she expected us to enjoy sharing in her contempt of him — as if she thought we'd all sit with her and shake our heads and laugh with her about what a dope he could be, this lawyer husband of hers, this University of Chicago grad who would stick his head in the fridge and bellow "Jan — where's the butter?" when two sticks of it were right in front of his nose. Perhaps she sensed a conspiracy that none of us were honest enough to admit.

For years we'd held Mark at arm's length. Was it because he talked too loud and sat too close and told boring stories? Was it

because of Jan?

My father's emphysema got worse when he was around the two of them. My sister Judy lived in Chicago but rarely saw them. I'd spent only one memorable moment with Mark and Jan since I graduated high school.

I was hospitalized three days for an asthma attack, and couldn't breathe without the IV in my arm. I was nineteen. My whole family had gathered together for Thanksgiving. No one came to see me but Mark and Jan. They asked the doctors to put my IV on a roller, so I could take a walk with them down the hall. I walked down the hall with them. I was happy.

I hear footsteps and look up to see two of Jan's relatives approaching — her mother and her sister, Sheila. I recognize both of them immediately, even though it was twenty-four years ago — the day of the wedding — that I last saw Sheila. Neither of them recognize me. I introduce myself. They tell me I look different and push past me to talk to my sister, Judy.

"Jan isn't breathing well," they tell Judy. "Her blood pressure is falling."

My niece, Cindy, is close behind. "Did you see your mom?" I say to her, absurdly.

"Yeah, I saw her," Cindy says. She's chewing gum loudly like any normal fifteen-year-old. "My dad said I should tell you to wait for a minute before you come in. He says he'll be right out to get you." Cindy smiles and tosses back her long hair. Everyone stands around looking at each other. I want to ask Sheila, "How are you?" but it doesn't seem right.

Judy excuses herself to go down to the cafeteria and bring back juice and coffee for everyone. "Could you get me a club soda?" I

ask her. She nods yes and I watch her walk away. "Don't leave," I want to say to her. But I don't say things like that. I watch the elevator go down, come back to fourteen, and open and close, open and close. No one gets on or off; the machine seems to be stuck at this floor. I'm afraid to go anywhere, even though the elevator begs me to do it. I'm afraid if I leave to get a newspaper, or a magazine, or to take a walk into the sunshine, my brother will come out looking for me and I won't be there.

The last time I was with Mark and Jan, we walked along a sidewalk at sunset. I was striding too fast for my brother, who lately has felt the affects of his polio coming back, and wears a brace to keep his ankle from flopping. Jan walked even farther behind. The three of us had just shared hotdogs and under-cooked hamburgers at a family picnic. It was just a month before Jan was diagnosed with cancer, and there was nothing about her appearance that would have given us a clue that she was dying. I'd flown in from Missoula, mostly because I wanted to see my sister. I walked fast because I couldn't think of anything to say to Mark and Jan.

A group of kids passed by in a souped-up Chevy; the teenaged driver was speeding up to a stop sign and slamming on his brakes, and on the hood of his car sat three kids who looked drunk enough to think this was a good idea.

I started screaming at them. "Hey, get off that hood!" I couldn't believe my voice. I sounded like a Chicago cop. "Get off that car! Get off NOW!" I screamed. "What are you trying to do," I shouted to absolute strangers: "You think it'll be fun to die?"

I didn't sleep well that night. I lay in the guest room of my sister's house and listened to the sounds of snoring through the thin walls and tried to figure out what happened with me and my

brother, but there were blank spots in my memory where my brother ought to be. He left for college when I was seven. But before that — where did he sleep? What did he do after school? Did he talk to me? Where did he sit at the dinner table when my parents screamed at my sister and I refused to eat, and my dad cut my food for me in tiny bites with big hands that always seemed angry?

I remember Mark when he was older. He played guitar and sang Pete Seeger songs. He was in college already, probably nineteen or so — I was seven or eight — and he asked me once to come into his bedroom to sing with him, and he stood in front of me in his underwear, and I sat on his bed, afraid to stay, drawn to the music, afraid of flesh so close. I'd never seen a naked man, I wanted to see one. But I didn't want to see Mark in his underwear.

I remember Mark on spring vacations in Miami beach, his body in his swimsuit. His scars. They were clumsy, ropy with the unrefined surgical techniques of the day. The seams crisscrossed his stomach from hip to hip, and his abdomen bulged out in between. The polio attacked his stomach muscles: disintegrated them. Without muscles in your stomach, you can't sit up. The surgeons took muscle from my father's thigh, and grafted it into Mark's torso, and slowly Mark could sit and walk and best of all, swim, where he was weightless and free. One foot clubbed inward. When he walked, he rocked from side to side. He wore madras bathing trunks and went to Yale on a scholarship.

I'd never seen the scars on my father, where they cut his thigh for the transplant. My father's scars have faded, perhaps. And they are always well hidden.

I was four when my dad stopped touching me. He didn't hug or touch me for eight years, maybe ten, he told me. "I was afraid of my daughters: I was afraid I'd get sexual with you," he'd said when I spoke to him from my dorm room in Madison, Wisconsin. A college counselor had urged me to make the call.

Not long after that conversation I decided to cut school and take a Greyhound bus to Warren, Ohio, to try out for a job as a groom for one of the hottest riders in the country. Bernie Traurig had dark, curly hair and beautiful thighs in tight breeches and I fantasized about falling in love with him and having him seduce me behind the heavy oak sliding doors of the horse stalls. On the bus — a fourteen-hour ride — I sat next to a man who wore plaid pants and smelled. The man had an endless number of road maps, and he unfolded them with arms that knocked into mine and stretched nearly halfway into my seat.

My dad's arms stretched over me on road trips we took when I was young. My dad would drive, I would sit between him and my mother, and he was always pointing at something out the passenger window, his arm in front of my face, beefy, threatening, telling me to do something or look at something, very nearly grazing the tip of my nose.

Being on the Greyhound was something I'd thought would make me feel better, but the long miles and the company wore me down. I kept my face to the window — Cleveland was like a black and white movie too boring to watch all the way through. And then I saw signs with names that looked familiar.

Warren Ohio. Halsey Taylor. I'd memorized the words from the letters on the drinking fountains at my elementary school. I

didn't drink, I let the water hit my lips but kept them closed and stared at the letters. The teachers let you be drinking fountain monitor, if you were good. Chuck got polio from a drinking fountain, my mom had always said.

Warren, Ohio, the signs told me, was one of the drinking fountain capitals of America.

When I got to the stable, Bernie Traurig pointed out a stall and told me to braid the mane and tail of his favorite hunter-jumper, a regal bay with two sparkling white socks. The mare cost him \$65,000, Bernie said. He said he'd come back to check my work. He said if I got the job I'd have six horses like this mare to take care of from dawn until dusk.

I combed out the mare's mane and ran my hand down her neck to the warm silk of her chest, as soft as the breast of a bird. I'd never touched so much money in my life, and it was standing on four legs and ate hay. "How many welfare mothers could live off your price tag, baby — huh? What would Karl Marx have to say about you?" I crooned to the mare. As soon as I'd formed the questions, I knew I didn't want the job anymore. And six horses like this one would mean more work than triplets.

After I finished braiding I took a long walk in the woods, and from a branch already bare for winter, I saw my first owl. I'd always heard that owls were an omen; that seeing one could bring good luck. I watched the grey form until it flew away, and then I made a wish.

"Freedom," I said.

The footsteps come toward me, heavy and fast. Cindy is screaming, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" Her voice is like a child's.

Sheila, Jan's sister, is right behind her. "Cindy?" Sheila calls out. "Cindy!"

A nurse looks into the waiting room, sees me sitting there, looks confused. Everyone seems to be in a hurry. "Are you...?" the nurse asks.

"I'm Mark's younger sister," I say.

"I'm sorry, I was expecting to see Judy," the nurse says. "Could you come in here please? Could you come into this side room?" The nurse points to a door down the hall, and I open it and walk inside. Cindy sits in a chair rocking back and forth, back and forth. Sheila is kneeling on the floor next to her, holding her. "She loved you," Sheila says, crying. "This is the best thing," she says. "It's better that it was fast."

Cindy says nothing, sobs, hugs herself. "She was a beautiful person," Sheila says, "she loved you very much." I stand and watch, I want to touch them, I want to hold them. I sink into a chair not far from them and say nothing. I can't believe my heart is beating, I feel so still.

"Do you want me to leave?" I ask Sheila. Cindy and Sheila look at me with surprise.

"No. Stay here," Sheila says. Cindy's sobs are quieting. She's shivering now.

"Where's Mark?" I ask, helpless.

"He's still in there with her," Sheila cries.

The door opens. It's Judy, her arms loaded with orange juice cartons and cups of coffee, and she begins to chirp about the cafeteria and how long everything took. Why are we in here? she says.

"Judy," I tell her. "She's dead."

My sister freezes. "But I just was gone ten minutes," she says.



"I was just buying you a soda," she says to me.

My mother opens the door. "Your father is still trying to find a parking space," she announces. She sees Cindy's face.

"Cindy?" she says, and her grief has in it the break of an old woman's voice, and the sound, and the sound of Cindy's cries Mommy Mommy Mommy will haunt me for months. Now Cindy cries "Grandma, Grandma," and runs to my mother, and my mother lays her hands on Cindy's head.

I walk to my mother and hug her. I feel her breasts against mine. She is so thin now, so old. I haven't hugged her in a long time. We pull apart fast, eager to let some light come between us.

Mark comes in, sobbing, looks up to see me: "Oh God," he says. Cindy gets up and starts to run out of the room. "Cindy," Mark says, "Can you just stay here? Can you just hold my hand for a minute?"

"I have to go and call my friends," Cindy says, begging him. "Can I please go and call my friends?"

"Of course you can," my brother says. "Of course you can go call your friends."

Mark sinks into the chair that Cindy just abandoned. I sit next to him and put my hand above his knee and press firmly. I have no memory of my hand ever being on his knee before.

"Cindy was in the room," Mark cries. "Of all the times for her to be in the room." His voice cracks. "I can't believe she saw that."

"It was good that she saw it." I don't know what to tell him, but this feels right. "Cindy needed to be with her mother."

Everyone is talking, murmuring. "I didn't even get a chance to see her," I say aloud and hear how selfish it sounds.

"Jan knew you were here—I told here you were coming," Mark

tells me, and I don't believe him.

My father appears, talking about how long it took him to park the car and how expensive that damned garage is. My mother takes him by the arm to tell him the news. He doesn't have his hearing aids in. She shouts it to him twice.

"I'd like to see Jan," my sister says, and approaches a nurse in the hall. It'll take a few minutes to disconnect the tubes, the nurse says, then comes back and nods her head. My sister and I nearly run down the hall to Jan's room.

"No—no, don't go in there," my father is yelling after us. I don't even turn around. I pretend I don't hear him.

She is blue. Jan is blue-grey, with a white cotton blanket tucked around her at chest level. Her arms lie straight beside her. Her fingers are swollen. They don't look like real hands. But her eyes. One is half-closed and looks ahead; the other is wide-open and stares wildly to the left, and there is no peace, only agony, in their gaze into space. Why didn't they close her eyes? I say to myself, I thought they closed people's eyes.

Her mouth is crooked in a gasp, as if her last breath was filled with horror. Her collarbones protrude above a skeletal frame. I touch the blanket near her feet. I am whispering inside my head, Goodbye, Jan. Goodbye, Jan. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't get to say goodbye. I am apologizing, over and over, for the things I thought about her, for the way I avoided her. I want to be alone with her to say some kind of prayer, though I know none. But my sister is there, and then Jan's mother and Jan's sister, and then Mark, then my mother. This is the last time we will see her, and we don't want to leave.

I stand near her and memorize what I see. The flesh that cov-

ers her bones is bloated with the cancer and the fluid that drowned her. Sinews rise like sharp ridges in her neck; her head is a skull. This is the flesh that houses us, and if we are our flesh—if that is all life is—then what happened in this room? I can't take it in. I want to feel a spirit around us: this woman was just alive, ten minutes ago. Ten minutes ago, she was breathing and her daughter sat and tried to talk to her. But I feel nothing. I feel nothing sacred. I see only terror. I can't believe a person can be gone so quickly.

I move to the side of the bed, touch Jan's arm, hesitant, and leave my hand there. She is still warm.

"Oh, god," my sister Judy says. She too, is touching Jan.

I want to touch Jan's hair—it is grey. She turned grey in six weeks. She looks like an old woman. She is only forty-five.

Sheila, Jan's sister, comes in and starts taking pieces of paper off the hospital walls. *Get well soon* they say.

I begin to pack up Jan's clothes and carry the books in her room to the table outside. I help Sheila take down the origami hanging that she made and pinned over Jan's bed after Jan broke down and sobbed one day that she thought she'd go crazy, staring at the white ceiling. I am a wooden object willing to go wherever I am ordered.

I leave the room to see how Cindy is doing. She has stopped crying and is chewing gum again. I give her a hug. "I'm okay," she says, and smiles at me. "Did you reach your friends," I say. "Yeah," she says.

"You poor girl," my dad says and hugs her, and I can see her struggling to get out of his grasp. "You poor girl," he says, "life is going to be hard for you."

"I know, Grandpa," she says.

Nurses appear with clipboards and paper. They want to know what to do with the body. Mark has stopped crying now and is talking normally. "Do you need me to sign anything?" he is saying. I try to give him a hug. He is all bones and odd angles, and he's too anxious to stand still.

"What can I do for you, Mark?" I ask.

"Do you know what you can do for me?" Mark says. "You're the reporter in the family. Could you write her obituary?"

He's asked me the one thing in the world that makes me want to say no.

I am the reporter in the family. When I worked for newspapers, I talked to a young kid who watched his mother burn to death in an inferno inside a tunnel. I talked to a man on death row who stabbed an old woman seventy-two times with a bread knife and left his footprints in her blood on the way out the door. I wrote about an eleven-year-old kid who strangled his best friend, and the day after the story ran, the boy took a shoelace and hung himself in his cell. I wrote a story about a teenager who grabbed a seven-year-old girl on her way to school, raped her, stabbed her to death and set her body on fire. I tried, and failed, to talk to a teenager who tiptoed into his parents' bedroom, shot them in the head, painted their blood on the wall, turned the lights on and laughed. I refused, at one point, to talk to a woman who took her family to the waterfront in Oakland and watched all three of her kids fall off a raft and drown. I had to write an official explanation to my editor explaining why I had failed in my duties.

And then I quit newspapers. Never, I told myself, would I ever interview another grieving person. Never would I write another

obit.

"What do you want me to say about Jan?" I ask my brother. We sit at his kitchen table and he sounds strangely cheerful. No response seems appropriate anymore.

Mark tells me about where Jan went to elementary school, and how she went to Brandeis and was an English major, and how she got married and had Cindy. I'm trying to inflate the details so we can get this thing into the paper. The *Chicago Tribune* only runs the obits of the "important dead." A woman who raises a daughter and edits a medical journal part-time isn't going to make it.

"I was afraid I'd never get her out of Israel," Mark tells me. He is rambling now. Jan and Mark and Cindy were in Israel just four weeks ago, when Jan first got sick.

The trip to Israel was one of most dramatic things the family had ever done. When Jan's stomach started getting extended, she went to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem and told them her ulcer was acting up and "please don't make me stay — I don't want to ruin my vacation," she said. They put her in intensive care.

"The doctors thought at first it might be ovarian, but then they said it was melanoma," my brother tells me, as he's told me before. "It had already metastasized all over her body. She'd probably had it for five years, maybe more."

Day after day, Mark tried to get permission to take his wife home from Israel. The hospital refused; Jan's kidney's were failing — it was too risky. Finally, Hadassah agreed to release Jan if she flew back to the states with one of their doctors by her side.

An ambulance met the family, when they landed in Chicago. Medics strapped Jan onto a stretcher. She didn't protest. She'd been on a plane for twelve hours, and now she was home. The

driver hit the light, and ahead, finally, was a hospital where her family could visit and everyone spoke English.

Jan felt the pull of the ambulance — she'd lived in Chicago all her life. Even lying down, she could tell that the driver made a wrong turn.

"You're going the wrong way, you took the wrong exit," she shouted at him. "You're headed toward Milwaukee for chrissake! There must be ten signs that say Chicago, exit right for Chicago."

"Hey, I'm sorry," the ambulance driver said.

"And the guy," Mark tells me, "tries to make a U-turn in the middle of the highway!"

"Mark," I say. "Did Jan belong to any organizations? Did she do any volunteer work?" I'm gently trying to keep him on track. I'm drinking a gin and tonic, and it's helping.

Mark shakes his head. We talk about Jan for another half an hour. I work and work on the obituary until late that night. I can only get three paragraphs.

I am asleep in my sister's house, I am lost in a store, and I need to buy something important, I don't have money, I'm going to have to steal it, I have my hand on it when a man, huge, a black shadow of a featureless man leans down so that his nose is next to mine, he's right here in the room, I can feel his breath...

NNNNoooo! I shout in the garbled voice that crawls from the throat of the dreaming. I say it so loud I wake myself, and I'm amazed, and shaking. I've never shouted in my sleep before.

I turn on the light and try writing. I can't get Jan's face out of my mind.

I write: *I want to create abundance around me.*

I write: *Fate brutalized my brother once; that's all anyone should*

*have to bear.*

*I write: I'm thirty-five, and my father still tells me to look both ways when I cross the street.*

*I write: I think, therefore I'm fucked.*

The day of the funeral dawns brilliantly sunny. A cantor sings and the rabbi—the same one who married Mark and Jan—delivers the service. The immediate family sits packed into the front row of the funeral home. I cannot stop crying. The cantor's voice hits the same notes that must make wolves howl in the darkness.

Mindy Seifer, one of my parents' oldest friends, sits next to me in her wheelchair. When I was a girl I was afraid of Mindy. Her wheelchair and paralyzed body said to me that my brother might end up like that, that his legs might become two pieces of flesh that have nothing to do with walking. Now, I love the gentleness I see in Mindy. I love the familiarity of her face and the fact that she is still alive. Mindy doesn't recognize me at first, and she beams when I tell her who I am. I sit there and hold Mindy's hand. I am so grateful.

My sister sits farther down, her hands in her lap. When the service is over, she stands up and hugs her son and daughter and I stand behind her, watching. "I love you," she says to her children. "I love you, too, Mom," they say back.

At the graveside, we stand beneath a canopy and watch the coffin lowered into the ground. The wheels of the pulley creak. I'm afraid I'll start crying too hard and lose control. A part of my family has died, and I think about the wedding, and my young, hopeful brother, and his life with a loving outline, his future eased by the knowledge that he'd found a partner with whom he could

grow old and have a family, which he desperately wanted to do. The rabbi chants. Cindy sits quietly next to Mark. I am standing near my sister in front by the grave, until a girlfriend of a distant cousin pushes in front of me and blocks my view. The coffin hits bottom and the pulleys rest.

Just beyond us is a pile of dirt. We will fill Jan's grave. We will say goodbye by shoveling dirt on her coffin. We get in line and march toward the shovel, each taking turns scooping the dirt and throwing it onto the plain, wood box. My mother stands in line and I watch her frail body stoop for the shovel and push in the earth that falls like heavy rain on something hollow.

"Mir, no, don't do that. You don't have to do that. It's unnecessary," my father is calling to her. He repeats the same thing to me. "Please don't," he says.

I enter the line, and take the shovel. I want to do this right. I want to keep doing this, over and over, until it is me, just me, who has filled the whole grave. I take my one shovelful, and step aside.

"I have to talk to you," my cousin Marel says. She is wearing baggy white shorts and beach clogs.

My brother's home overflows with mourners, and the tables are crammed with food from caterers who huff and puff under the load of coldcuts and sweets as they march up the apartment stairs. People trickle in from the funeral. Many of them I've never met.

I haven't eaten all day. Eating seems a grotesque thing to do. But my relatives urge me to go to the table. Marel, a cousin who I was closer to than any other relative growing up, tells me the bagels are incredible. Marel says she wants my advice on moving to Washington to be with her new boyfriend. She wants to ask me what she should wear and things like that. She is giggling and



looks like she can't wait to leave so she can go work on her tan. "You've moved so much, I know you can really give good advice," she says. "How are you, cous'?" she says.

"Not so good," I tell her.

"How come?" she asks.

"Why do you think?" I say.

I move to the buffet table and start filling my plate, and I put some bread in my mouth. Suddenly I don't want to stop. It feels like eating is the whole proof that I'm still alive; the fact that life for me is still possible seems centered on my tongue. I know now why they serve so much food at funerals. It separates the living from the dead.

"Amy!" my uncle Harold calls to me. He is someone I've never had a conversation with in my life.

"I read the obituary today in the paper," Harold tells me. "It was a beautiful job, really nice job. I clipped it out to save it."

"Thank you, Harold," I say. And I mean it.

The prayers are said each evening. For a week, the apartment is constantly packed, and there's barely room to stand. I can't say the prayers, I don't know them; I've only been in synagogue four times in my life. Those who do know them read along with the cantor and glance at me every now and then as though I were a traitor to my people and my family. I lean on my grandmother's Steinway, touch the smooth wood, imagine her playing Scarlatti and Chopin. She willed the piano to my brother, which made my sister furious, since my sister was the pianist in the family and my brother quit playing in second grade. I stand and look at the Hebrew figures on the prayer cards passed out at the door. My sister stays in the kitchen cutting up the cakes.

Afterwards, it's another flurry of shocked recognition.

"My God, look at you," says my cousin Andy, who I haven't seen since I was twelve. "Meyer, look!" cries Dolly Zake. "This is Amy! You remember Amy — Neil and Mira's little girl." Dolly takes me by the arm and wants to know all about me.

My aunt Mona looks me in the eye and holds my cheeks between two fingers, the way she's always done. She kisses me right on the lips. "Don't be such a stranger," she says. "I have a feeling you think sometimes you don't have any family."

I start to cry. "I have to find my brother," I tell her. It's been impossible to get to Mark ever since the funeral. He is constantly surrounded by people, people touching his arm, people listening to his stories, asking him if they can help. I find him in a corner of the living room. He carries a scotch in his hand. He's broken down only once tonight, reading a prayer, a line about cherishing grief, for it is holy. I stand near him now and listen to what he says to a group of men from the synagogue. He is telling them the story about Jan in the ambulance. I hear in his voice the pride for Jan's spunk; I feel in him, stronger than I've ever felt it, the love he had for her.

"Mark," I say to him when he is finished, "can I talk to you for a second?" It's as if I'm on the edge of a canyon and every word has an echo.

We go into a narrow side room that passes as a den. Mark sinks into a worn green chair. I sit facing him, our legs nearly touching. How are you holding up? I ask him, and he tells me he thinks he's okay.

"Oh God, I don't know," he says. "I don't think it's sunk in yet." The drone of what sounds like a party filters in through the doorway. I look down at the floor, at my feet, and the familiar shape

of his.

"I'm sorry I haven't been there for you," I say to him. "I'm sorry we haven't talked more."

"I haven't been very good either," Mark says. He shakes his head, looks out the window, looks back at me. He is smaller than I realized. "I haven't done a good job of talking to you either," he says.

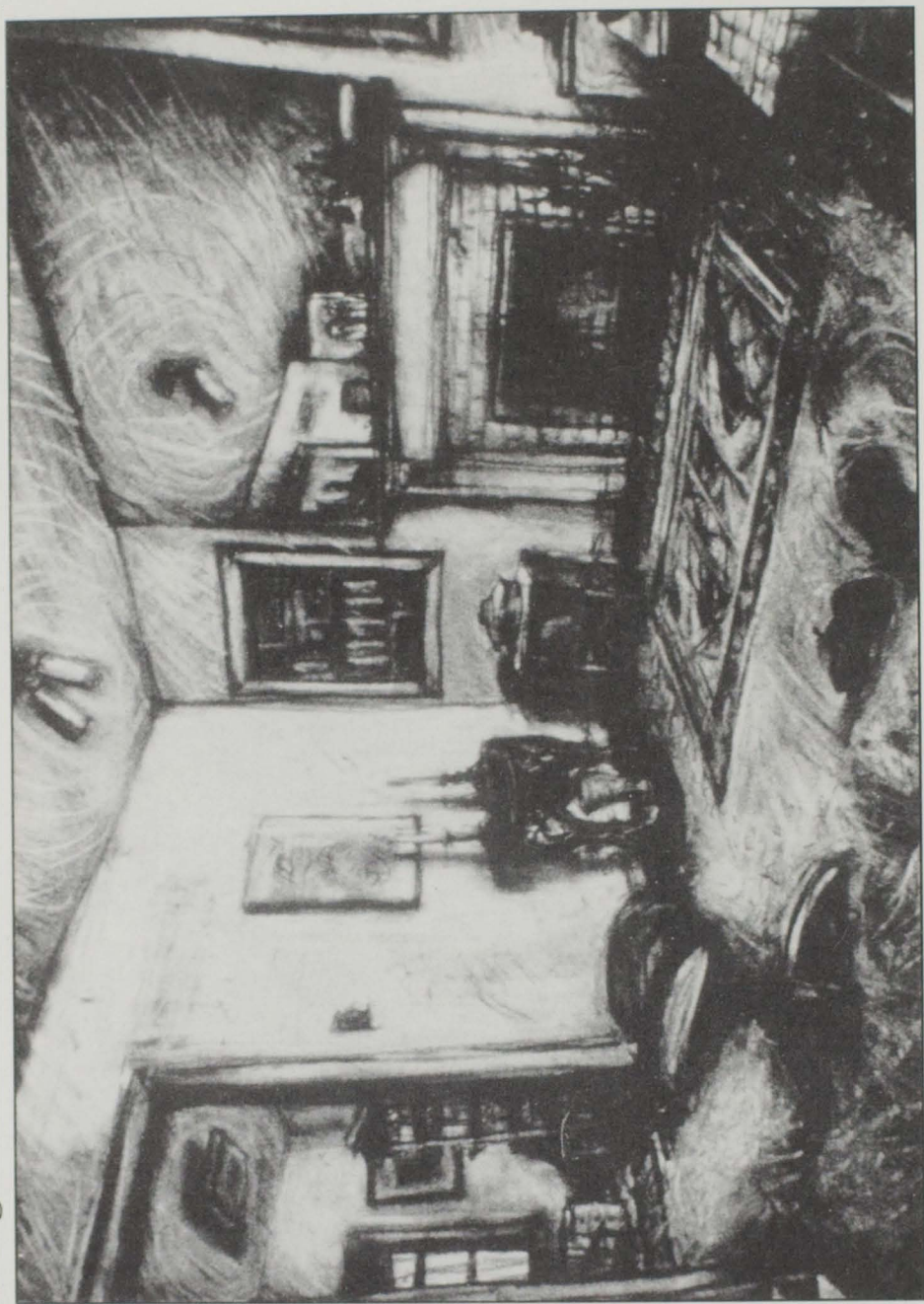
I put my hand on his knee and squeeze my fingers tight. I look at him, into brown eyes that I notice are flecked with green. They are beautiful eyes. Soft, kind brother's eyes. I'm uncertain, pull my hand away. "I love you, Mark," I say. He doesn't answer. He reaches for my hand, and pulls it back toward him. He just reaches for my hand and holds it.

Lucinda  
Luvaas

African  
Safari  
Painted  
Drawing



Margo Kren



Shoes

William Jolliff

## *Able Hall's Belgiums*

His mother blamed his ugly on the team.  
She'd jostled on the harrow all of April,  
right up till her time. So Able always  
said that he was dropped behind a horse  
and lay there in a pile sixty years.

Before their tawny manes were braided,  
before their tails were plied with red and silver  
twine, before they earned their keep by service,  
the lonely service of their great cocks, curved  
and dangling like the teeth of a hayrake, they stood

a single force before the shares and coulter,  
twin butts wide as a doddy house. Their russet  
backs and haunches, Able said, were broad  
enough a view for any man. He sang them  
"het" and "chk" and curried their shoulders.

They weren't bred for town, so when they came,  
the valley shook and knew. The man who'd lived  
behind them lay stretched in a wagon box,  
and they would only pull him once again,  
in draped parade, a pale and homely burden.

Jim Harrison

## *Coyote No. 1*

Just before dark  
watched coyote take a crap  
on rock outcropping,  
flexing hips (no time off)  
swiveled owl-like to see  
in all six directions:  
sky above  
earth below,  
points of compass  
in two half circles.  
There.  
And there is no distance.  
He knows the dreamer  
that dreams his dreams.

Dennis Held

## *Satan Owns a Boneyard*

Mephisto Motors, Used Parts and Whole  
Wrecks, nine miles out of town,  
the handmade I-beam gate patrolled  
by a three-legged mongrel, a hundred  
and fifty pound snarl with bad gums  
and oily fur. The boss is in  
the shed out back, no mask,  
joining iron with that resolute  
blue spark, slashing through steel  
with a torch, skrick-skrick and the air  
goes from zero to 2000 degrees in nothing  
flat, a cigar stub, unlit, tucked under  
one cheek and by god he's grinning  
as he looks out over his lot: an obscure  
Belvedere, a misspent Fury on cinder blocks,  
Valiant in decorous rust, seats blown  
like a milkweed pod, black Falcon  
up to its trunk in muck. "Meat," he hacks,  
"that car's bad meat and you're lucky if  
I take it off your hands, what the fuck  
you mean what'll I give you for it?"  
He's a perfect mimic, pisses your  
defeated words down into the mud.  
Try to pick up a tie rod or clutch  
plate, get a break on a camshaft.  
"Step inside, we'll talk."



He chucks a log into the oil drum.

"That car? The Gremlin? Forget it,  
that thing's a collector's item."

His gut shifts suspiciously under  
his coveralls, greasy and blue.

"Listen, you take it out, no guarantees,  
cost you a hundred, you want it or not?"

It's too much to pay, but you know  
you can't leave it, you want him  
to like you, to ask you to stay.

Tod Marshall

## Genesis

Every summer a farmer rolled the hay,  
created those fat piles we climbed on, leaped  
between, and even hollowed out to allow ourselves  
that little cave where we clustered close  
around a stolen magazine we'd snatched  
from the corner store, unseen, and near-  
sprinted the whole way back, a delicious  
and forbidden pornographic delight.

We dared one another to touch  
our engorged penises to the flesh  
of those glossy pages and we did it  
all knowing how your brother, soon  
to become a Marine, would have bruised  
our shoulders, how our fathers,  
if they could have stayed sober  
for an entire afternoon, would have  
beaten our bodies senseless, our mothers yelling,  
then crying in some other room.

And of course, they all got the opportunity  
and more, when your older sister discovered  
our touching each other without any hope  
of release, our too-young bodies swollen  
with desire, so gorgeous in that harvested hay,  
mist of late summer heat, her hand held  
by the man who drove the tractor  
through these fields, the one rumored

to have shot a dog for nothing other  
than happiness, its tongue lolling as it ran  
across the just-cut fields. When she pulled back  
the thrown-away blanket, our cover to that cavern  
of hay, she was hoping to uncover a place  
where she and he could twine together  
amidst that smell, that threatless odor  
of life and rot, of winter food for graceful horses  
and lazy cows, that smell so full  
and fertile, a natural aphrodisiac. We knew  
what they were there for and threatened to tell  
as we ran away, out of the field, and back  
to our houses, with half-unsnapped pants. Yes,  
we were kids, and yes, she told anyway, our crime  
eclipsing her little trespass, the reportage probably worth  
extra hours out on the town, cramped  
in a rusted pick-up. I didn't see you  
for a week and when I did the yellow-brown  
explained a deeper purple, a belt buckle or fist,  
screams, your burly father gloating with his hand  
hard against your throat. And then, just another  
week later, you moved, taking your older brother,  
that sister, far away, and I was never given the chance  
to say these words, constricted by the mute agony  
of childhood fear: to say that no, my hands failed  
to malform, curl up with some awful disease, and no,  
my eyes didn't rot, drop out like discarded  
marbles. And finally, no, I did not renounce the act,  
even after my father made me swear to never think  
like a faggot again. I guess he got his way. I turned  
out, in the end, normal as they say, and yet,

even if our caresses came not from love  
or any ultimate desire for each other or truth,  
but only the vigorous furnace of youth, finger-  
like flames of curiosity and touch, the beauty  
of an act beyond any bruise, beyond any after-  
church curses from spittle-spraying pastors, beyond  
any school-yard teasing from ruthless peers: a beauty  
that burns and endures. I will not  
remember the curved bodies of the women  
who decorated those pages in a blur of flesh.  
I will not remember the face of that man  
curled in anger and disgust. I will not  
remember your sister, that vicious  
bitch who called me a queer then threw  
a bottle from a truck window to scare me  
away from the curb. We were only eleven  
and I may not even remember your name, only  
the sweet scent of hay, that luscious first touch  
of another upon my body, an entrance  
into heaven, then the pulling back of a cloth,  
the pouring in of cutting judgment, that flash,  
an exalted cleaver heaved up on high by strained  
muscles, dropped in a reckless explosion  
of clarity, vision, of vicious white light.

Kevin Goodan

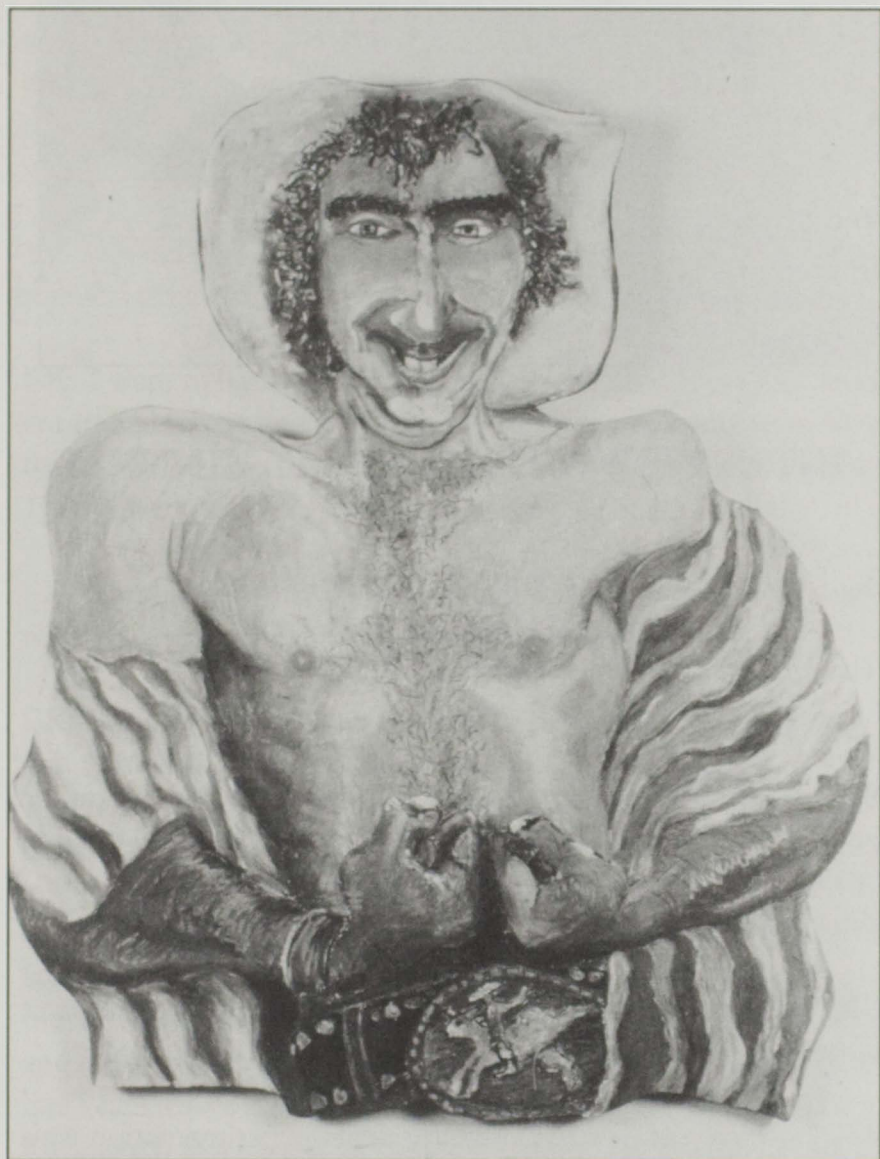
*St. Patrick's Day at the  
Oxford Bar*

Today every Irishman wants rebellion  
and gets it. The rain keeps us here. We toast  
every bad patron painting on the wall.  
We call the Indians here Irish  
because they rebelled and lost  
against the loss of land.  
Outside weather makes this Dublin.  
The bartender stops serving us.  
We rebel. We lose. The paintings say  
take pride in the hard life of losing.

The rain has stopped. This is not Dublin.  
The bartender still won't serve us. We leave,  
say the hell with rebellion,  
we're not good with loss.

for Mike Craig

Joe Batt



*Untitled Cowboy*  
*Oil on Wood*



Kirby Hoan

## INTERVIEW WITH GALWAY KINNEL

*conducted by Bette Tomlinson  
Missoula, Montana  
April, 1992*

BT: I remember hearing you deliver the welcoming address at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers in 1987. You said to all of us then: "While you are here, I want you to aspire to greatness." What do you mean by greatness?

GK: Something that's alive and has truth in it and gets more of what and who you are out onto the page.

BT: How do you view the language poets' experimentation with what and who they are?

GK: I think that it's interesting to them. It's not interesting to me. I don't write poetry of that kind, nor read much theoretical decon-

structionist criticism. I think, in principle, that it's good that poetry continue to have offshoots and developments. But I expect that poetry will always have a core and that core will be that in which a person simply tells what it is for the author to be here.

BT: Doesn't the telling of that core experience always have some political orientation?

GK: I want to try to understand experience a little, not just present it. See into it and perhaps illuminate it a bit. I suppose that that could be seen as teaching, but I see it more as discovering. The writer is in a different position than the reader.

BT: You have said that Patrick Kavanaugh and John Clare are recently of interest to you. How do they influence you?

GK: They don't belong to the golden tradition of poetry in English, which is a kind of desire to transcend our mortal life, in which things are turned into symbols quickly and become something else. Clare and Kavanaugh are peasant poets, one English and one Irish, and describe experience more or less the way they see it. Kavanaugh writes about potatoes and his little triangular farm, about his father and his mother and about drinking too much, whereas Yeats talks about the larger issues of Irish politics and the symbolic life. Those things are wonderful to write about, but Yeats leaves out ordinary, rough, plain, unmediated reality. Kavanaugh is a nice corrective. Kavanaugh is much beloved in Ireland, probably more so than Yeats. For the ordinary person who reads Irish poetry, Yeats is a little bit elitist, from their point of view. I don't think so, but Kavanaugh is like one of them and talks about the life that they know. Clare, really—the same situ-



ation. If you compare his poems about nightingales to those of Keats, you see the tremendous difference. Keats' nightingale hardly appears in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." There are a couple of lines about the voice, but Keats goes right into the symbolic world—the world of art. When Clare writes about nightingales, he creeps through the woods and parts the leaves and looks at them in their nests. He describes them as real creatures of our earth. Then he describes their singing. There's one poem which has ten lines which consist entirely of phonetic transcriptions of the various, different songs of the nightingale. It's amazing. He really knew the nightingale—he was its cousin. I think of Keats as the greatest of all lyric poets in the language. But sometimes I think that I like Clare just as well. Clare was a little cracked and spent much of his life in an asylum. That crack let in some light that a whole brain doesn't let in. So he understood some things in an odd, unusual way.

BT: So, the graceful simplicity of your lyrical style derives from a desire for the real things of the real earth.

GK: Yes, it's a turn I've taken toward the actual.

BT: What are you working on now?

GK: I'm writing poems about childhood, about my parents and about what I may have been like as a child. I'm writing about political issues and social mood. I'm writing some love poems, poems about sexual love and poems about despised things—trying to restore to them their dignity. One about flies—house flies—and one about shit.

BT: You have written poems that tell a story—but not in the way which is recently popularized as the neo-narrative.

GK: I think just to tell a story—it can be done in poetry, and certainly has been done, but in my opinion, prose developed as a more supple and adequate way of telling a story than poetry and in a way relieves poetry of the duty to tell these long stories that produced *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, and so on, but at the same time produced “Hiawatha,” and very dull nineteenth-century narratives. I really like poetry in which there is a deep and intense personal engagement. That’s my preference based, like most poets, on my practice. It is true that poet critics’ criticism is often a reflection of a struggle that they are going through regarding their own enterprises. So it’s quite mistaken of them to turn this struggle with their own work to a universal principle.

BT: You did begin as a formalist poet and evolved, like many of your generation, away from that style. What do you think about the recent return, by many young poets, to the strictures of formal verse?

GK: You can see the point of that position. When we turned away from formal poetry to free verse it seemed that poetry had become too stuffy, too boxed-in, too literary, too full of the whole baggage of poetic diction and had become incapable of talking about the ordinary things in an ordinary way. So it seemed a very healthy thing to turn to free verse. However, it’s no doubt true that there’s a lot of free verse that’s just prose cut up into segments. A poem must have form to be shapely, to give the sense of lastingness.

That's probably a good motivation for people to turn back to rhythm and meter. I would never do so myself. I would try to make my own free verse more solid. Rather than think that formlessness was intrinsic to free verse, I would try to make a free verse that doesn't arouse the anxiety that poetry is in a headlong slide to prose.

BT: How would you characterize what is alternately labeled a renaissance of poetry in this country and an irrelevant form?

GK: There is a large audience for poetry in this country, compared to what there was when I started writing. It is a very small percentage however, in comparison to the nineteenth-century, when Longfellow was a bestseller. But the audience for poetry now is a much more knowledgeable and interesting audience. The nineteenth-century audience wanted sentimental, wishful thinking and neither Dickinson nor Whitman could make a dent in that world. Our two greatest poets were completely ignored. It's no loss to lose that audience, really, because it allows another kind of audience to develop—which has happened. Probably half of today's audience is made up of people who write poetry themselves and I think that's good. I think this ferment, this thick and overlapping network of people who write throughout our country is a very healthy one. I don't think that there is any other country in the world that has poetry readings on the scale and of the frequency that we have. On any given night in the United States, it is almost certain that there are more people listening to poetry at readings all over the country than are listening in the rest of the world, combined. Our society is so filled with things that claim our attention, like sports, or television programs, or political de-

bates, or any of the things that fill people's evenings—really, the last thing that people do, because it's the hardest, is to sit down and read poetry. When you go to a basketball game, you don't give anything of yourself—you get. When you turn on the television set, you sit back on the couch and you just receive. With poetry, you not only have to say the words, you have to put your life and your feelings into those words and to understand them. It's no easy thing to read a poem. It's no wonder that poetry is a minority art and will always be—that's how it has always been. We're at an exciting time—the whole of poetry has changed in the last generation. All sorts of things that we thought were taboo, that were thought unworthy of poetry, that were thought too shameful to be written about, have now become the subjects of poetry. In a sense, you could say that poetry is just in its infancy, because we have just begun to realize that there are whole worlds out there that have never been articulated in poems. It's a very exciting time.

Lucinda  
Luvaas

Family  
Outing  
Oil on  
Canvas



## *Hua Hu Ching: The Teachings of Lao Tzu*

Brian Walker

Livingston, Montana: Clark City Press, 1992.

\$17.00; cloth.

Reviewed by B.J. Buckley

Most readers will be familiar at least with Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, or the Book of the Way/Path, which is a collection of brief, eloquent and succinct lessons in the art of living in harmony with the whole of creation and the whole of oneself. This small companion volume, the *Hua Hu Ching*, is a further collection of these elegant teachings, preserved throughout the years of repression and destruction of books in China by the Taoist tradition of passing teachings orally from one generation to another. These eighty-one sets of instructions were intended by Lao Tzu to be a guide toward the attainment of enlightenment and mastery of the illusory conflicts of this existence and toward "...the beginning of immortality"; they serve equally well as wise guidance for those of us still much mired in the difficulties of the commonplace and the struggle to find a good way, a right way, to live and be in the world.

In the thirtieth lesson, Brian Walker's translation begins, "Words can never convey the beauty of a tree...Language cannot capture the melody of a song." But Walker comes very close to capturing the bright notes and cadences in these poems; he allows Lao Tzu to speak to us. As we wander from the discussions of the Oneness of the universe, to lessons on the joys and limits of the senses, to instructions on gaining fame and worldly admiration ("...amass a great fortune and then give it away. The world will respond with admiration in proportion to the size of the treasure. Of course this is meaningless"), we find ourselves feeling that we are in conversation with someone; that as we form ideas and arguments, these are anticipated and countered, not by judgment, but with wit and compassion. There is a great deal of humor, as when Walker places the lesson on

"a person's approach to sexuality" under number sixty-nine. There's also a rare sense in the text that all humans are being addressed—Walker uses "she" as the personal pronoun interchangeably with, and a little more often, than "he," and many examples begin, "When a man and/or woman..."

Walker greatly admires and acknowledges the translation of the *Tao Te Ching* by Stephen Mitchell, who has also received much praise for his new translations of the Book of Job and the poems of the German poet Rilke. Walker does his mentor honor in his renderings of these "lost" teachings of Lao Tzu. His language possesses a clarity and a simplicity without being simplistic, and his translations of the most complex ideas never slip into the jargon of the academic. In his introduction, Walker mentions that he has come to think of Lao Tzu "...less as a man who once lived and more as a song who plays, eternal and abiding." Walker has brought these teachings across as a melody that is distinctly his own, yet not at all in discord with the eternal one he so reveres; we are lucky Clark City Press has been so kind as to play the song for us. The deep black *sumi-e* (Japanese ink painting) illustrations of insects and animals which are sprinkled here and there throughout the text—and which we assume to also be Walker's—are possessed of the same brevity, wit, and profound simplicity as the text, and they form an elegant descant.

## *The River at Wolf*

Jean Valentine

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Alice James Books, 1992.

\$8.95; paper.

Reviewed by Lee Evans

Jean Valentine's poem "The Under Voice" begins with an almost Blakian image of the homeless: "I saw streaming up out of the sidewalk the homeless women and men/...the homeless men like dull knives gray-lipped the homeless women..." and ends, surprisingly enough, in the birthing room: "And the under voice said, Stars you are mine, you have always been mine, / I remember the minute on the birth table/ when you were born, I riding with my feet up in the wide silver-blue stirrups." How we get from one place to another in the poems that make up Jean Valentine's new book, *The River at Wolf*, we can never quite be sure, but once we unlatch ourselves from the expectation of linear travel, we can experience this journey for what it is: a dazzling rush to the center of our lives.

Just as Valentine learns to trust the power of the "under voice" that dictates her short lyrical poems—the mysterious voice that links all things: poverty and birth, ecstasy and danger, and, most poignantly, in Valentine's work, mother and lover—we too must trust Valentine to guide us through the undercurrents of her own inexplicable life experience as a means of guiding us into our own. In these poems, more often than not, we see ourselves as though from under water, through "watery car lights across the child's white quilt," to borrow one of Valentine's exquisitely wrought images of this world always in flux. And yet, strangely, we emerge from these poems with the clarity we sometimes glean from dreams, even the dreams we can't quite remember upon waking.

In some ways, Valentine's book is an elegy for her mother. Chronicling the progress of a daughter's grief, these poems are strikingly self-reflexive, the speaker seeking identity through the mother, even in death. There is always the impulse to recreate the mother in



these poems, to retrieve the irretrievable, even though resurrecting the mother inevitably means resurrecting pain. Showing us, step by step, her own peculiar associational path back to her mother, Valentine writes in "Wish-Mother":

I love glass because of water,  
water because of blood,  
blood because of your heart,  
lapping against the birth door to my ear,  
over and over, my darling, my familiar. And my good.  
All the way home to New York my heart hurt.  
(The Second time you died this year.)

Strangely transformed by death into a "fish mother" in "Skate," the mother now wears an "other-worldly face/ not saying anything/ face I can never meet/ inside the inside face." Transformed, and yet desperately important to the daughter's vision of the world, of herself:

...under all the pieces of light,  
how could I get to you?  
Never leave you. Please you!  
Teacher, spine in my spine:  
the spelling of the world  
kneels down before the skate.

Valentine moves with deceptive ease through the fluid world of the mother-daughter relationship, especially when she reveals the felt, but seldom-described connection between our first love for our mothers and subsequent love relationships. Most explicitly described in "Seeing You"—a poem in two parts, appropriately enough: "Mother" and "Lover" respectively—this connection is subtly evoked through the repetition of earthly images. Mudbank, finger-spaces, garden are cast in the first section to portray the fear and longing of an unquenchable love for the mother and then recast in the second to show the long-awaited fulfillment of desire, complete with the

suggestion of the child's journey to this earth through the mother's body:

I dove down my mental lake fear and love:  
first fear then under it love:

I could see you,  
Brilliance, at the bottom. Trust you

stillness in the last red inside place.  
Then past the middle of the earth it got light again.

Your tree. Its heavy green sway. The bright male city.  
Oh that was the garden of abundance, seeing you.

Valentine can also be very gritty and direct in her treatment of this mother/lover connection. In "Second Mother," she writes of a brush with the sexual she had with a seventeen year old "half-girl, half-mother" when she was only four years old:

Then, by the river,  
Ha! Ha! I could have touched  
your bright white circles,  
your nipples' little red mouths,  
redder than my mother's.

*The River at Wolf* is a garden, challenging and rich, full of surprises, sensuality and promise—in short, well worth our attention.

## Contributors' Notes

Joe Batt is an artist from South Dakota. He is presently working on an MFA in ceramics at the University of Montana.

B.J. Buckley is a poet and writer who lives with her sweetie and two Newfoundlands in Florence, Montana.

Paul J. Casella graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and teaches poetry and writing at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa City. He also produces PTV: a video magazine of poetry set to images.

M. Earl Craig is a chronic student at the University of Montana. One swell guy. Loves the ladies.

Jeff Crandall is a poet living in Seattle, Washington.

Claire Davis received her MFA in creative writing at the University of Montana, where she is completing an MA in literature. She lives in Missoula, where she writes for a living and paints houses for leisure.

Danny Dettlaff designs furniture at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

E. Trace Drury is an artist living in New York City.

Lee Evans is a poet living in Missoula, Montana. Her chapbook, *The Fisherman's Widow*, was published by the University of Montana in 1989 as the winner of the Merriam-Frontier Award.

Stephanie J. Frostaad is a Northwest artist pursuing an MFA at the University of Montana. Her drawings and paintings investigate myth and metaphor in images of rural life.

Gary Gildner is currently a Senior Fulbright Professor at Safarik University in Presov, Slovakia. His most recent book is a memoir of his year spent coaching a professional baseball team in Poland, *The Warsaw Sparks*.

Kevin Goodan is currently an undergraduate in creative writing at the University of Montana.

Jim Harrison is a poet and novelist living in Northern Michigan.

Dennis Held lives in Missoula, Montana. He takes a size twelve shoe, extra-wide, sometimes a thirteen in the boot.

Carmen Hoover is a poet in the MFA program at the University of Montana and the literary editor of *The Independent*, a Missoula newspaper.

William Jolliff grew up on a farm outside Magnetic Springs, Ohio, and now serves as Director of Writing at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. His poetry has recently appeared in *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Webster*, and *Calapooya Collage*.

Margo Kren, Associate Professor of Art at Kansas State University, has had numerous one-person shows throughout the country. She received an NEA grant in 1982, and has attended Ragdale

Foundation and Yaddo. In 1989 she received the Governor's Art Award in Kansas and her university's Distinguished Graduate Faculty Member Award.

Mark Levine's book, *Debt*, will be published this spring by William Morrow in the National Poetry Series. He is a visiting member of the creative writing faculty at the University of Montana.

Lucinda Luvaas, a native New Yorker, now makes her home in the San Diego area, where she paints, creates sculptural constructions, and teaches studio painting workshops at the University of California, San Diego.

Tod Marshall is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and received an MFA from Eastern Washington University in 1992.

Daniel Mead is an artist living in Berkeley, California.

Walter Pavlich's latest collection is *Running Near the End of the World* (University of Iowa). It received the Edwin Ford Piper Poetry Award, and the Joseph Henry Jackson Award of the San Francisco Foundation. Other work can be found in issues of *The Atlantic*, *APR*, *The Yale Review*, *Poetry*, *Manoa*, *The Antioch Review*, and elsewhere.

Pattiann Rogers' fifth book, *Geocentric*, will be published by Gibbs Smith this spring. She has poems forthcoming in *Paris Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Triquarterly*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest* and an

interview appearing in *South Carolina Review*.

Bette Tomlinson is a poet and critic living in Missoula, Montana. Her articles, poems, and interviews have appeared in *CutBank*, *Kinesis*, *Whitefish Magazine*, and *New Letters Review of Books*.

Harry Wilson is a photographer from Bakersfield, California, who explores his interest in politics and art traveling widely in China, Central America, Africa, and the United States.

Douglas Woodsum is in the MFA Program at the University of Michigan and assistant to the director of the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont. He also has a stunning collection of some 35,000 wine and champagne corks.

# *the Cream City*

## REVIEW

### RECENT CONTRIBUTORS ►

Amiri Baraka

Amy Clampitt

Stuart Dybek

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Tess Gallagher

Donald Hall

Philip Levine

Mary Oliver

Marge Piercy

William Stafford

Cathy Song

Mona Van Duyn

Derek Walcott

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION 2 Vol. \$10.00

CURRENT ISSUE \$6.00

SAMPLE ISSUE \$4.50

*Please Enclose check or money order payable to ►*

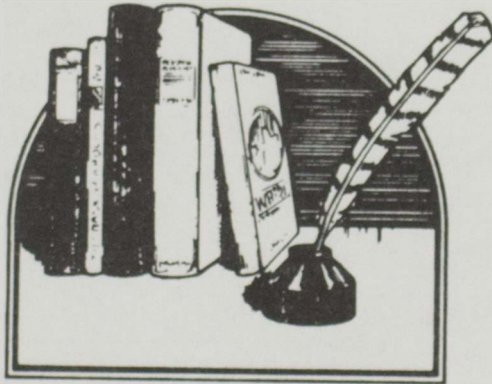
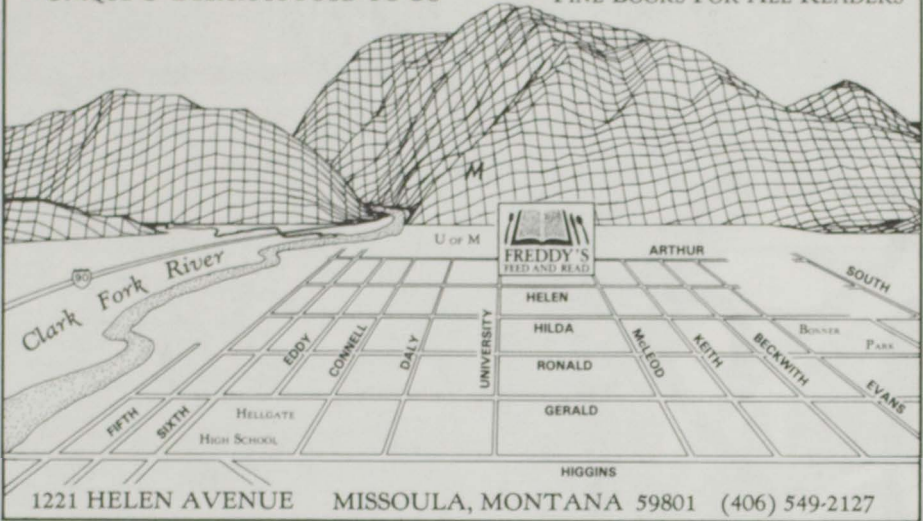
The Cream City Review, UWM English Dept., P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201

# FREDDY'S FEED AND READ

• UM'S CORNER GROCERY SINCE 1972

• UNIQUE & DELICIOUS FOOD TO GO

• FINE BOOKS FOR ALL READERS



# Fact & Fiction

BOOKS FOR ALL AGES

216 W. Main, Missoula, MT 59802 (406) 721-2881



# Everyday Discounts!

**10% off**  
All Non-text  
Books (students  
faculty & staff)

**20% off**  
Newly Released  
Cloth Editions  
(all customers)

**30% off**  
NY Times  
Best Sellers  
(all customers)

*Experiencing The World  
Through Words*

**UC** **Bookstore**  
UNIVERSITY CENTER UM CAMPUS

HOURS: Mon - Fri...8 to 6 Sat...10 to 6 PH. 243-4921

# sycamore review

Single issue: \$5.00

1 year subscription: \$9.00

*Sycamore Review*  
Department of English  
Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Make checks payable to  
Purdue University



## Volume 4 Number 1

- Interview with Charles Baxter
- Poems by Ricardo Pau-Llosa, David Kellogg
- Fiction by Stephen Dixon, Susan Neville

## Volume 4 Number 2

- Interview with Charles Simic
- Memoir by Arturo Vivante
- Poems by Brigit Pegeen Kelley, Dorothy Baressi
- Fiction by Patricia Henley, H.E. Francis

Back issues still available



With the support of the  
Indiana Arts Commission and  
the National Endowment for the Arts.

Join us August 15-21, 1993 for a week of workshops, craft lectures, and readings at Flathead Lake, in Western Montana. For a brochure, application, and scholarship information contact Center for Continuing Education, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812, (406) 243-2094.

Yellow Bay Writers' Workshop

ELIZABETH COX · IAN FRAZIER ·  
PATRICIA GOEDICKE · RON HANSEN



HELLGATE WRITERS, INC.  
Center for the Literary Arts

## Winter Programs, 1993

- **Magazine Writing Forum**, February 12-14: panels, workshops and readings with magazine writers such as Tim Cahill (*Outside, Esquire*), Bryan DiSalvatore (*The New Yorker*) and Perri Knize (*The Atlantic Monthly*); and magazine editors Gerald Marzorati (*Harper's*) and Ann Naumann (*Pacific Northwest*)
- **Eight-week Creative Writing Workshops**, beginning week of February 15: The Novel with Kim Zupan, The Family Story with Jeanne Dixon, The Art of Nonfiction with Perri Knize and Performance Art/Playwriting with David Braden

Hellgate Writers is a nonprofit literary center—based in Missoula, Montana—serving the inland west. Throughout the year, we sponsor readings, workshops, two-day forums, tours, writers exchanges and other literary events in Missoula and throughout Montana.

For further information, write Hellgate Writers, PO Box 7131, Missoula, MT 59807 or call (406) 721-3620.

