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### Hat, candy, stone

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HAT, CANDY, STONE

By

Stephen G. Thomas

B.A., University of Illinois, 1971

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

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Approved by:

Madeline DeFrees  
Chairman, Thesis Committee

John G. Stewart  
Dean, Graduate School

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NOW TO THOSE QUESTIONS ON PREGNANCY

She is crazy  
with pregnancy.  
She designs impossible mazes.

If you can get her to talk,  
she will give a frenzied analysis  
of the details,  
smoking cigarettes.

If you can get her  
attention to her swelling,  
she will feel it  
and say there are two  
furry lumps there,  
much like rabbits.

A SNAPSHOT OF MOTHER

They have brought her withered leg  
to the hot springs for the cure.  
She calls him Dad.

All day long  
their two girls  
race over the trunks of fallen trees  
through the drifting shade and sun.  
At dusk they turn spectral  
shapes among the branches.

He wears a slouch hat  
almost all the time,  
and when he takes it off  
you don't recognize him.

When the sun comes up  
they are gone,  
and when last you saw her  
she limped.

## A BATH AT THE MOTEL

This turquoise bathroom is paid for with pounds sent unofficially from England.

She sat in the sand and lifted her skirt to unlace her high, northern boots. She held her skirt and his hand. She made him walk along the water, and they felt periwinkles pressed with their feet into the sand.

He lays out his leathers carefully on the bed. There are stars along the new sleeves.

She is with the crew on Main Street. The motorcycle is ready, locked in the truck. They will be late coming from the clubs.

He holds his stitches out of the water. In the morning, she will help him dress.

He drinks whiskey to go to sleep.

## TURN ONE

Damn  
he said  
in the foam.

The velocity. The angle. The line.  
He had broken the laws.

His glove piled on the heel of his hand  
like a runner pushed against the door.

Glass spun from thread in air  
chunked and scarred.

Heat  
and a spinning wheel.

Should he take the helmet off and listen  
or continue head down  
watching reflections of streaks?

Hot and white he  
lifts it stiffly.  
He will give it one chance  
to catch  
or begin the walk back.

## ONE NIGHT AT THE HAMILTON

After a certain point,  
Mr. Rebus, who was an old man,  
burned almost quietly in his bed  
in the Hamilton Hotel.

But even earlier,  
it had been too late  
to breathe enough to scream.  
His eyes could bulge,  
but he couldn't get up  
if he wanted to.

The smoke is the thing  
in a mattress fire.  
It was the sheet  
that came up  
with the last gasp of flame.

Mr. Rebus always went to sleep  
very late by radio.  
Sleeping was hard to do.  
When it came,  
the fallen ash smouldered.

New lovers next door  
woke to the knocking  
and came into the hall.

## CHURCH BELL COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

The beating of steel drums  
rips the skin off the night.  
But where is the bell silent?

He probes with his head the ground  
to feel through the darkness  
the weight of a bell  
hanging lime-encrusted,  
vibrating unsounding  
in the frigid breeze,  
or leaning on a bruised lip  
against concrete,  
its other side  
sinking in the dust.  
Probing with his shaven head  
the hard  
now soft earth.

In the day opening light  
the bell is not ringing  
on a spoon or toast.  
In the mirror his body is a bell  
of flesh without clangour.

His eyes peel back  
the boards and shingles  
to find the secret bells  
in Massachusetts and Ohio  
in rows of pictures on the walls.

He waits for strangers  
to talk of towers.

## HAT, CANDY, STONE

We climbed from the car. The street was very clean, and there were flower boxes along the curb and baskets of living flowers hanging from the street lamps.

When we climbed from the car, there were two young women in short dresses. With one of them I exchanged obvious glances.

We went into a store, and my master bought a hat.

We went out into the sun and walked along the quiet street.

There was a thin man bending over something; we could see him through a doorway. The shop was not well lit.

There was a row of wooden seats against one wall and an empty glass display case, standing by itself on the carpet.

My master said, "I want this hat blocked."

We sat down at a small table on two white chairs where sunlight came through the front window.

The man, quite gray-haired, came from the back room with a stone. I felt pleased that we had come here to have the hat blocked by a gentleman on a warmed stone.

The man took the hat. I saw that it was precisely the stone for that hat.

My master was wearing an overcoat and watching the man.

The young woman came in. She walked over to me and put a piece of candy in my mouth. My master glanced at me and smiled slightly. The man didn't look up from his blocking.

The young woman moved against me, and I could feel her legs.

My master can appreciate the needs of a young man.

My master put the newly bought and blocked hat on his head. It was a good hat for him. We left the shop. The young woman remained inside with the man, who had never spoken.

We got into the car. We were both pleased.

My master can appreciate the needs of a young man.

## THE WANING AND WAXING OF THE SUN

Diane is walking her bicycle along the sidewalk, and I am walking beside her. Because it is spring, and the day is warm, there are a lot of people on the street. Most of them are kids. Diane and I aren't saying anything, but we are content not to. A street cleaning machine spraying water might be going along the street, but there isn't one. Kids are huddled over something in the lot across the street.

Jolyn lives in this building, which has six floors. The front is brick and concrete, and mostly dirty windows. At the top of the building there is a keystone, but there is no arch. We ring the buzzer, and the door unlocks. Diane brings her bicycle in. Jolyn is waiting for us at the door. Diane leaves her bicycle in the hall, locked up, as if that matters.

In Jolyn's small bedroom, the two girls are quiet. The shades are drawn. With the sun behind them, they are the color of parchment. The room is stuffy. The three of us are crowded in the half-light between the old bureau and the bed. Jolyn is sitting on the bed, and Diane is leaning against the bureau. I stand near the door.

Diane hands me a small pipe of hash. She does it to taunt me. I take it for form's sake. I hand the pipe to Jolyn and leave.

I head back for Diane's place. They had me trapped. They had started to work on me, but I got away. It is better on the street, but I can still feel them. I decide to jog. Now they are probably plotting against me. I run and listen to the ring bouncing at the end of my jacket zipper.

In front of the church with two spires, there are black men leaning against the walls. That is across the street, and there are vacant lots on either side of the church. On this side of the street, I run past a burlesque house with life-size girls, poorly painted on the front. They wear fringe and jeweled tassels. The red-lipped girls are white, with their hands held over their heads like belly dancers, but the men standing there are black, have their winter coats on and their hands in their pockets. They don't even look up when I go by.

I turn the corner. A tug is pushing two barges down the river. I am still running. I have hit the right stride, and feel good now. I just have to get there. I cross the river. The bridge is swaying slightly under the full load of cars. I think about stopping to look into the water, but I just glance at the tug and its

wake in the spring brown river.

There are trees along the brick parkway. It is a different neighborhood on this side of the river. Catholic boys in uniform, lined up, are just being let out of school. I can see them over the wall. I have hit a good pace and am breathing well as I run.

Behind the cyclone fence is a metal products plant. Everything is gray or rust colored. The buildings are all alike, long and in rows. The roofs all slant to the same side, and when I have run on and look back, I can see the sky-lights are open. The light of blue and orange sparks glows inside.

This is the street. A black man stands with his hands against the top of the squad car, but the cop is sitting inside looking up at him. I can feel the blood in the skin of my face.

Diane is there when I open the door. Her bicycle is in the living room. Diane is in the kitchen. She has the cannister out on the kitchen table. The lid is off, and the small envelope that suitcase keys came in is beside it. I slip my thumb in. I raise my thumb, close a nostril with my knuckle and suck the powder up. I know what will happen.

The kitchen table is gray, but some sunlight is still coming through the window. It is hot and close in the

kitchen. I am standing near the table. Linda comes in. It is something about my sister. I am trying to take some vitamin C. The tablets are falling off my hand onto the floor. I have too many in my hand. I am trying to put some back in the bottle, and some are dropping on the floor. I can't hold my head right. I can't tell what she is saying. My sister lives on the South Side, in Roseland with her husband. I am breathing hard through my mouth, because the kitchen is so small. Diane is trying to subvert me. I know Linda is acting like nothing is wrong. She looks so wholesome. She has a navy blue skirt on. Somehow, Diane is trying to get a message to my sister. She lives on the South Side now, and that is so close that it makes me feel uncomfortable. Linda is here to say something about my sister, and Diane is helping her check up on me. There are vitamins on the floor. Diane won't smile, but I know she wants to. Linda doesn't look at me or the tablets on the floor. I am so tired my head hurts.

Diane doesn't say anything when Linda is gone.

Diane sits beside me on the stoop. She seems to be reassuring me by sitting with me. The black kids in this building are killers. Tony comes up the sidewalk toward us. He lives here. We do some of the dap, and he goes in. The black kids in this building are friends of mine.

In back, on the steps, Diane cooks thick hamburgers on a grill.

I go to sleep early, but I wake up early. I wake up worrying about my bike getting ripped off. It's hard having a motorcycle in the city. The kids in the building watch it for me, but there are people out to kill them, people who would wreck my bike. When I go out, the sun is almost visible. Someone has messed with the clutch lever. The whole bike may be gone tomorrow. I get the clutch lever back together with a bolt that will hold until I can get the right piece. Diane is in bed.

When I leave, there are a few black kids on the steps. They nod when I leave.

Traffic isn't bad this early. I'll stay off the expressway for awhile.

## IT'S EASIER WHEN YOU'RE OLDER

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Here we are again."

"No we aren't."

"Whatever," he said. They had finished eating and were drinking coffee. "How did you say your baby died?"

"I didn't."

"How did she?"

"She died of the flu."

"Babies don't die of the flu anymore."

"I'm sorry. Mine did."

"Was she weak?"

"Not especially."

"Did it hurt when you had her?"

"Some. Jesus, David, what are you doing to me?"

"Sorry. You're as long and beautiful as ever."

She didn't say anything but turned her head, and he looked at her and smiled.

They were sitting at a table outside. The grass was very green, but the leaves on the trees and bushes were just beginning to unfold. There was a slight breeze that was still cool, but away from it the sun was warm.

"Your hair is long," she said.

"I can't afford to get it cut."

"Is that true?"

"I trim it some myself. Do you want to go back that way?"

She didn't say anything but pushed her chair back and got up. They walked around the corner, along the side of the restaurant. There was a shop there that sold pottery and that sort of thing. They went in, but neither of them was especially interested.

Outside, there was a maple tree and a bench, and they sat down and looked at the river.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked.

"No."

"Then why so quiet?"

"I don't know. It's just strange to see you. I think more time has passed for me than you."

"Maybe so."

They got in her car. She drove, and he looked at things. They didn't say much.

The apartment was a nice one, spare and quiet. When they got there, Jon wasn't home yet. David watched television, and she worked on dinner.

Jon came home, but they didn't know each other well.

\*

\*

\*

Her breasts slipped with a gentle motion from beneath her sweater.

"You really look good. Better than ever. Do you have stretch marks?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Vitamin E, I think."

"Really? I didn't know Ladies' Home Journal had gotten to that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. I'm sorry. We've been leading different lives, that's all." He was looking at her in the half-light. "Are your breasts fuller?"

"A little."

"Did you breast feed?"

"Yes, David."

He was trying to trace the veins as lightly as he could. His fingers trembled.

"You're lovely. It's terribly old-fashioned, but I think it's the right word. Did the boys like you when you were teaching?"

"I suppose so. Nothing was very overt."

He ran his cool hand down her side and kissed her.

\* \* \*

They were standing on the porch. It was cloudy and cold again.

"Thank you. It was very nice," he said.

"Well, come again," Jon said.

"Yes. I hope so," he said.

She was cold and tall and had her arms folded.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

\* \* \*

It was not an extraordinary trip. A fuel line connection came apart just as he got into Colorado, but he wanted to stop in Boulder anyway.

He ate apples and crackers and drank coffee from a thermos. The radio didn't work, but it didn't matter. He made it to California in twenty-three hours. When he was traveling, he didn't like to stop.

When he got there, he had to wait for Jim to get home from work. They said hello, and he went to the bathroom and washed his face.

"Want to take a look at it?"

"Sure," he said.

They went out and downstairs. Jim unlocked the garage door. They went in, and Jim pulled the string on the light. The motorcycle was all together except for the fairing on the floor.

"It's really nice," he said.

## HARVEST

John and I decided to go to town.

There were clouds, but at times, we could see the blue sky. The sun was almost always burning in the clouds. It was cool and invigorating.

The road was not often used. Grass grew between the dusty ruts. There were old fences along both sides. Thick trees, oaks, hickories, and some maples grew on the left. The underbrush was heavy, good cover for rabbits. Sometimes there were spots where the lower growth had been thinned by cattle.

There were woods on the right too, but often there were fields of corn and beans between the road and woods further back.

We came to a farm. Everything was quiet. No one seemed to be around. A horse looked up from his grazing in the barnyard. He had cropped the grass down to the dirt. Only the tough and sticky chickweed and some thistles were left. The red barn was sagging and leaning, and there was a door open for the horse to go in and out. It was a good-looking horse, about a year and a half old.

We came to a gate across the road just past the barnyard. It was a wooden gate, fastened with a piece of log

chain and padlocked. We climbed over the gate at the hinge end.

Leaves were drifting down onto the road, and we could hear the acorns and hickory nuts dropping through the branches and into the drying underbrush. Here, there were woods up to the road on the right side too, and it was darker and cooler.

The woods on the right stopped at a fence, and a half-cut field of soy beans began. With strips opened up in the field, the stalks with their hanging pods looked brittle and frail. The ground in the field was covered with withered leaves. Although there was no one working in the field, dust hung in the air.

John said, "Do you suppose Daniel could interpret that tree?"

We stopped and looked at an oak that was wide-limbed and taller than the hickories around it. The lower branches were long and touched the ground in places, and some branches had broken off because of their weight.

"We will have to see if we can see it from a quarter mile," I said.

"Didn't you notice back that way?" he asked.

I said I hadn't.

"I don't know if a quarter mile is the end of the earth anyway," he said.

I said, "We have to think of it in context."

We stood and looked at it, and listened and watched for squirrels. Acorns dropped through the leaves. The oaks were still about half green.

We walked on, looking into the woods and out across the field. Ahead was another farm house.

We climbed another gate, and a white dog came barking from where he had been lying on the porch. There were two green chairs on the low porch. The dog didn't bark much, but he didn't come up to us. He stood in the yard and watched us pass.

We looked back and saw the oak.

The sun shone briefly through the clouds and trees. We came to a dip in the road that was filled with rocks. In the Spring, water runs across the road there, and the rocks make a base for the ford. On foot, you must climb along the fence to get over the water. Now it was dry, and we walked across the rocks.

There were always leaves falling. They drifted slowly, because there was no wind.

There were trees on both sides of the road ahead of us, and we could see the house as through a tunnel. Because it stood out so in the open field and was so white, it seemed to glow unnaturally within the frame of trees.

A rabbit crossed the road unhurriedly in front of us. The corn would rasp softly against itself from time to time.

The woods were on both sides of us again. The house grew before us as we walked. When I concentrated on parts of it, it seemed to grow in distinct steps.

We crossed a gate and came out of the woods. The house, now surrounded by grassy weeds like millet and occasional stalks of wild corn, seemed strikingly isolated. It stood in a wide area free of trees except for a few that grew against the stone foundation.

It was a big house. There were windows set in the steep roof. The house had large windows, but most of them had been broken. In some places, cracked panes or corners of glass remained in the frames. The house seemed remarkably open that way, and inside, there seemed to be few areas where light did not reach, even on that overcast day.

Wall paper was stained, faded and falling from the walls. Most of the woodwork, some of it mahogany, was still in good condition. Some of it had been pulled off. There was a big fireplace and a weed mower in one room.

We went in and out of the house. There was dust on the floors. The clouds thinned some as the sun was dropping, and looking out the windows, the weeds were a delicate yellow. John, sitting in a window, looked like a photograph.

Inside, it felt as if the house was going to be torn down. The back steps had nearly collapsed. We moved in

and out, and sometimes sat and looked.

John thought we should go back.

We started back. Insects rose before us with each step, and the small seeds fell in our shoes.

We climbed over the gate, and it was cooler in the woods. The sun was lower in the trees. It was easier walking in the two dusty tracks of the road than it had been in the weeds around the house.

I wasn't so conscious of things walking back. I felt we were moving more quickly, and the trees and fields seemed to fall away. But I saw a crumbling remnant of a shack I hadn't noticed before. A breeze sifted through the trees.

At the farm house, the dog came from his porch again, barked and walked back.

The barb wire between the old hedge posts was rusted and spliced.

Ahead on the left was a farmstead. The barn was a poor one, but shingles and boards, still not gray, indicated recent repairs. There was a crib and another small building. They too were old and patched.

There was a white picket fence around the house and patches of flowers along it, some still in bloom, some collapsed and brown. The house was a white, two-story one, but not large.

Two young women, dressed in blue jeans and flannel shirts were in the yard. One had a red bandana holding her hair. We waved to them.

"Come on in," one of them said.

John opened the gate in the picket fence, and we went in. A man came out the door on the side of the house. He was dirty from working in the field. He was eating a sandwich.

"We'll be in about ten," he said.

Another man came out and nodded hello to us. The two of them walked toward the back of the barn lot. One started a corn picker and went down the end rows of a field behind the house. The other man was behind the crib.

"This is a nice place," I said to the women.

They didn't say anything, but nodded acknowledgement. One of them had a round face with delicate skin, small lips and expressive eyes.

There was an inoperative windmill behind the house and a fruit cellar near it. There was a calf in the lot behind the house.

The other young woman had dark hair, and a round face too, but it was not so strikingly oval as the other's. She had a broad nose. I was struck by their simplicity.

The one with dark hair invited us in. In the

kitchen, they had us sit down at the table where the men had eaten their supper. They brought out a plate of meat from the refrigerator, a loaf of bread, and baked beans they heated for us. Then they gave us coffee. As we ate, they cleared the kitchen of what we were not using, and when we had finished, they cleaned what remained. They worked with their sleeves rolled up.

We sat down in the living room. They had an old TV.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"We have what we want," the blonde woman answered.

"Good."

"We had a good garden," she said.

They were both sitting with us. The TV was on, but the sound was barely audible. We could hear the tractors working. It was dark now, and the night was calm.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Two years," the dark one said.

I looked at the women. They seemed strong, and lovely, and tired from a day of hard work.

"You'll stay?" the one with dark hair asked.

"Sure, stay," the other one said. She smiled.

They had not smiled before. John and I said all right.

The dark haired one brought two sleeping bags from upstairs. They went out to help the men in the crib.

John watched TV. I followed the women outside. They were dumping a wagon load of corn. The only light came from a small bulb hung from a rafter. One of the men went up into the top of the crib in the dark. Ears of corn were pounding against the boards.

The women came to the house. Then the machine sounds stopped. You could hear insects outside. The men came in, dirty and wearing jackets.

"Hi," one of the men said.

"How you doing?" I asked. John was almost asleep, sitting on the old couch.

"Tired," he said.

"How's the corn?"

"Pretty good," he said. "There'll be some to sell, I guess." He went into the kitchen to clean up.

John and I unrolled the sleeping bags on the floor, undressed and got in. We were near the wall, out of their way. The TV was still on, but the sound was turned down. The four people were in and out. The overhead light was on in the kitchen.

They were still doing something when I went to sleep.

**VIEW FROM THE NEW BLUFF**

The earthquake would make a mountain of mud.  
Clay pushed in crumbling slabs through the black dirt.  
There are broken boards and scraps of metal.  
Kids crawl the shifting heaps.  
The school is in the basement.  
There is dirt piled out the windows.

Standing on the new ridge,  
we watch wild squirrels  
crowd a dog to death,  
all with bared teeth.

Underneath the street  
a black man rushes up  
with hands full of string.  
He makes a ragged cat's cradle.  
He gets close to your face  
and says he'll fight a sailor.

## TEXAS WAITRESS

## Scene 1

You hear that  
clattering of dishes  
the higher chimes of silver ware  
there the machinations of the cash register.

Condensation at the window corners  
the smooth silent feet  
those brace-lever loaded arms,  
these are what you notice  
sitting on your booth bench  
too far for you from the table.

That is the key  
that holds her hair.  
There  
she bends over.

## Scene 2

Isn't this not the weekend?  
Not the weekend, but those are her cowboy's boots  
lost in the grass.

Perhaps someone on that bus  
has mistaken the day.  
Probably those far cows have no weekends.

This is the day for her legs to be alive as snakes.

## Scene 3

Fuses explode in this house with regularity.  
The sole source of heat is this old tube  
glowing and humming  
turning itself  
on and off  
standing watch over the low bed  
and the clock on the shelf.  
You might suppose that blanket was hung to discourage drafts.  
It was not.

This isn't a big house  
but the refrigerator stands aloof  
in a room to itself  
necessitating being gone to  
like the toilet  
who too lives alone.

Notwithstanding  
life itself is in the big room  
a small room crowded with life.  
Dogs there engage in anarchy  
and violence against one another  
crashing balanced pots off the stove  
or in-caving the doors to the sink cabinet.  
Flesh under the blankets  
is sometimes kneaded by outraged feet  
while fangs slash the air.

At certain unprescribed moments  
there may be seen human bodies  
standing just so from the stove  
bare as admirable objects.

More often they are hidden  
blanketed away in their private place  
only vaguely akin  
to the staid appliances  
and whirling canine forces.