Regards from the thief in the word garden

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REGARDS FROM THE THIEF IN THE WORD GARDEN

by

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I. POEMS
LETTER FROM THE ISLAND PARADISE

After these years of trying,
we finally hit the current
that flows directly
from me to you.

Still, every letter I roll
and poke into these bottles
floats its own fated time,
bobbing the sea to your private beach.

About my Island Paradise:
we eat the same limes and bananas,
makeup private headlines -
(thank you for your care in not sending
newsprint for the permanent inking
of our helpless tales of pride)
Catastrophes? Few, involving small animals meeting proper deaths.

Social events? We meet with the casual necessity of practiced flight to the bomb shelter.

New News? Oh, no, there is none.

I have warned you not to dream uncomfortable visions of me sprawled in the sand, in the sun with mangoes injected with alcohol, iced, or rotting until parrots come — long after we have adjusted our desires to what is yet possible this night.

If this is paradise, I must think so. And every day forget the life you live. Nothing will have changed when you receive this. Green bananas replace those we eat, rain comes on time everytime.
As I drop this letter into the sea,
I hope the love I send is not concealed.
And always I imagine the bottles,
yours with your letter, mine with mine,
colliding midway in the sea, and bursting
the papers with our personal signatures
floating away to their own wordless land.
GENEALOGY

yet time was sacred
you chanted -- here, here

always we smelled our voices
fouled by practice

we scratched a grave
into the mud

you breathed your word
silence

the mud closed
we planned our vigil.

we saw the moon launched
stars pinned to their sockets

avalanches raking the last men
who said the world was real

high revel of young men
floating stick boats in mud
we jumped in a car and drove
past a hamburger stand

hitchhikers and gilt doorways
a man selling keys to a lock

we could buy later
when we learned the value of money

we met the wizard and fainted
trying to mimic his song

he said -- you will see, you will see
but never sing like me

what were those links
those taut bands

that held us just too far away
close enough to imagine razor blades

could save us
or a heritage on fire
REGARDS FROM THE THIEF IN THE WORD GARDEN

I steal words for the painless decency
I feel in having harmed no living thing.

If you challenge me to force them
into patterns, I will say they grew

at their own risk, straining from
the one mouth always open

that says die or grow, and screams
Roget's text into my ears.

Diagram this sentence: The anemic rat
sat in the garden eating misery,

all agonies, joys, indifference,
grew too fat to walk, was caught by a man,

jealous, another thief bloated
on delicious words who found

his potential mouth swollen shut.
SHOES

I come to buy shoes for trees whose feet coil into the ground. I know this town, I saw bank buildings grow, the pavement spread like honey, the mayor sneak out one afternoon to stamp his footprint into wet cement. Before I forget, a yellow flower asked for an apron.

In a poolhall down the road I lost my watch to the flip of a coin. The city hall clock tower sends its shadow to the last alley by the railroad yard. A bartender said the mint would be moved here from Denver, with it more business, more workers with longer thirsts, eyes for his waitress, scraps for the cat.

Trees, I forget your sizes. You gave me a reminder, but I have only a handful of bark, bits of your hair, your smiles when I said I might take time to dynamite the lumber mill. But that would be dangerous, I, too, am a vagrant, I could never tell the judge my family lives in the forest, between earth and air.
The city surrounds me now, I can hardly remember why I came. It's five o'clock, city folk drive home. I would stand in a busy lane of traffic asking each car to go a little slower, but I still must find the shoe store, an apron for the yellow flower, and cannot rest here wrapped in neon visions.
THE ANGEL OF DEATH

The angel of death
crushed by a dumptruck
sprawls across two lanes of traffic.
Who will move her?

Windblown garbage heaps at her lee,
cats and rats
hire vans
move to the country.

Artists wrenched from public places
congeal into knots of controversy
"There's something real here," they urge
and go on eating the angel's rotting flesh.

Satiated, they march
down rusted trolley tracks,
"Remember the squeaks and wobbles
sparks and electric smells?"
The angel of death arises
lurches onto a bus to the suburbs
deposits her dime and asks
the driver where he wants to go.
NIGHT SONG

Help?
Is it another crushed night
dripping life into the land?

The drythroated board of regents,
like a misplaced child, wailing bright
over a grown up trick found out?

Me, me and my arthritic horses
danced until the sores opened, until we
bled with knife-slashed Puerto Ricans.

Odd the blood runs coldly
through veins open to the nightlong cry.

driven into the wound, planting
limitations in a graveyard rocky field,
harder to open than mountains
of closing hearts dead asleep.
Death rolls out of night like a yawn,
mounts a blistered clock and rides

swifter than a patient maniac,
lost in forgetting blood on his lips,
found in memory of the next victim,

wondering if that deep ache
he knows as metamorphosis
sleeps inside, paralyzed,

dull to the quick hand's touch.

I clang shut like an empty cage,
the price I pay for sleep
is no surprise.
WANTING A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

if it comes I will be surprised
it will give no relief
or chance to revoke its license

if it comes I will be surprised
the bear who has lived in me will go away
promising to return when the hunters are gone

the hunters if they come will be stern
and unexpectedly kind to each other
when they find the cage doors open

if the hunters come I will be surprised
and surprised again to see the bear
return with a scale under his arm
frantic to tell me how much he weighs
LIMITS

I have hands like feet
scars for openings
an agile, yellow anger
coiled under a crackling glaze.

No place I can walk is exotic.
I refuse to believe the obvious.
Carrot, if you were anything else, I would not eat you.
Potato, if I fertilized your earth with my blood
what prayer could I offer your marrow?

I could live a simple death in the mind of a satisfied man.

The weather forecast from my brain:
necessity's tornado advancing like a birthday
traveller's warning whining like a bad joke
temperatures above or below boiling or freezing
Earth, I spread the warning like letters sown to grow words,
will you receive my body as a gift
given after merchants lock their doors
and refuse to open up for money?

A friend said, an ant won't interfere
with a truck, but a truck
will interfere with an ant.

I see Kafka's beetle biting his way through
a warehouse of truck tires, and drivers.
Giant grasshoppers leaping from New York
to Los Angeles, loaded with carcasses
of frustrated trucks.

Shall I wander the world
searching for the rose born to blush unseen
and sell the book rights?

Sit in the sun and laugh for the sad people crying?

I think, if I could write another word
THE NICE MAN

lurks in the supermarket
between low shelves sniffing
fresh boxes of Tampax, spying
up at old ladies underwear.

Women pity his aching groin,
want him to push their carts,
meet their husbands, understand
children screaming in the dark.

He leads them to the UNICEF can,
says take what you want,
a free lunch of blue eyed pain.
They pale, checkout, roll away.

Later, the nice man's in bed
with my wife. I urge him
to visit the neighbors, take
them roses dipped in blood and cream.
ON

when the semi-famous come
you don't know what to say
you say, humbly as time allows,
I'll try to bore you no more than the others

and go on about crazy acquaintances, drugs
what fanatics and politicians want

and on about travelling in time or mind
what you come home to

and go on through smoky alcohol wit, trying
not to breathe on each other, or confess

and so on with names from books, as though
they belong to you like a hometown holiday

and on through beseeching drunks, fools
proving themselves, praise lying dead on the floor

then stop
hope there is no
finite allowance of words
and go on
WRITING FIFTY POEMS IN ONE DAY

Words become less spectacular,
they lose their luster.
This is number one.

I read the obviousness of your eyes
wondering what language matters
and cautiously manage an answer with my ears.
The sun opens. Behind it night's windows
slowly close. We've come this far
on conscious horses whose hooves strike
once, twice.
There is no agony in this.
We have seen it done before,
the hungry caveman carves a face
into the rock and backs away to sleep.
He tends the fire until his eyes
tell him shadows laugh.
SECOND STRING OF THE FIRST GUITAR

"How many dogmatists owe their strength
to the accident that their hints
were not understood!"

Andre Gide

the conceptual representation
of reality
is always something I would rather
taste see feel hear touch
as above
with no hierarchy

2.

what the earth knows will be told
how cats walk without leaving the sky
will become theory
pursued by men forced back into earth
3.

how men foresee their deaths was foretold
in the second string of the first guitar

4.

trees that never felt wind will bear no fruit
a defiant message will seep from limb
like glacier
moving over the rocks of will
silt of ground will

5.

mice and timberwolves will mention the answer
mice to skywalking cats
timberwolves to the raucous guitars they eat
APPRENTICE

So be a finger painter,
challenge the Mona Lisa.
Why do you grin,
why do I ask?

I am a shepherd. I play night
like a flute. Someday I'll suck
the stars into my mouth.

Learn a one finger blues pick.
Work the two hands together
like a baker squeezing dough,
molding his tune.

I am a tyrant. I beg obedience.
Finding none I
bounce like an echo.

Steal a credit card,
charge time to a merchant's account.
relax and defend fragrant breezes
that flow warm from the west, mocking sunrise.
I am a relative of dominion.
Fattened livestock descend
like commas into the meat between lines.

Be a player of sad music.
Play deliberately.
Sing pictures of banks
where money soaks in wine marinade.

I am other trades the heart does not will.
A wet dog shaking off cold,
shaking off dangerous lust for the cold.
RESOLUTION

In green lakes they follow fish
down through rocks

examine bruised fins
saying -- that's been squeezed, this touched.

Under the wailings of their breath
small hands find a way
to wander over a man's surface,
fingers flick across

skin, feeling for color.
Seers watch themselves run

hard for the slick face of a cliff.
THE DESERT IN WINTER

What do I hear in your blood that sends stones rolling, pierces my glazed eyes? Why is it louder rumbling through the heart?

All sorrowful morning I watch her thin ears become butterflies, her eyes melt like ice.

At noon her nose sends out clouds of hornets, jubilant messengers to her shrinking hands.

Her feet, stretching into another room, were finally all she could bury.

When wind and my hair are indistinguishable

I lie down pretending hair was a tool of the soul I have forgotten to use.

No rattlesnake can tell me this feeling is too abstract, without constrictions of sadness.
Like a king who removes courtiers' masks,
I resolve that death will fear me,

until he sends a search party
dressed in scaled moods of love.

The revolving crowd demands a fanfare
from the full dress band.

My dances are private, to be performed by feet
while hands walk through an encyclopedia,

fingers fixing on explanations, how Mexican
children learn one chair in the house

es la silla and the place blood lumps
in the chest es la corazon.

The desert in winter reminds I am never alone,
this sack of contradictions slung over my back.
II. STORIES
SALAMANDERS VISIT CLARENCE

Shoes started arriving last week. First day a WWII paratrooper boot. Next day a ballerina slipper. Next — so many boxes I stopped opening them. None matched. I put them on a closet shelf. Then on the closet floor until the closet was full. I thought they weren't good for anybody hidden away. I lined every room of the house with them. Salamanders started appearing after the shoes were in order. Each salamander took on the color of the shoe and a shape and size that made living inside it comfortable. This morning all the salamanders perched on the toes of their shoes (the open toed shoes were vacant) and stood rigid until I had inspected them. The paratrooper salamander had a lump on his back. He was camouflaged a scruffy black. The ballerina salamander's sequins glittered faintly in the early light. They acknowledged my sovereignty by waving their tiny hands. I ignored them and they went back inside their shoes to do whatever they do. I had hoped some communication would be possible — considering their apparent desire to placate me. Suddenly, they gathered in the room center in a formation I thought hierarchical. No one told the others what to do. They crawled off their shoes to their places. The paratrooper salamander stood at the rear in his own file, his own row.
I supposed that he was isolated because his ferocity would interfere with the maneuvers or that he was to have no part in them. There was no way to tell. The ballerina salamander wove through the formation selecting salamanders in the shapes of a tennis shoe, a hiking boot, and a bare foot. I was delivered no bare feet. The four salamanders went to the front of the formation. The bare foot wriggled its toes as though feeling for familiar ground in darkness, the hiking boot plodded methodically, the tennis shoe bounded and squeaked, and the ballerina tiptoed as though afraid to step on anything. The assemblage crept toward the door. The tennis shoe leaped to the doorknob and twirled it. The hiking boot kicked the door open. The ballerina led the surge outside. The bare foot squashed the paratrooper salamander with an assured stomp and ambled out the door in a satisfied totter. I closed the door and remembered how I had wanted to talk to salamanders, to show them some sign of interest, but they were gone. After scraping up the paratrooper, I looked outside hoping to see where they were going. They were searching for mates and I wished them luck.

PARTY

"Clarence, you've been acting strangely in such a marvelous way. We wondered if your research might be troubling you?" (said Betty Bonshaf, the librarian, who cares)

"Gentlemen, isn't this wrangling self-defeating? Isn't
it time we discussed things seriously? Where is the sense of it, Clarence?" (said Wilbur Propper, LLD, professional conciliator, who honestly promotes good causes)

"Narcotics are the real menace. Why, if I had my way those pushers would never,.ever........ever!" (said Martin Gale, Sheriff, higher than his sons. He was honored recently for professional restraint and conduct enhancing the image of law enforcement. His wife specializes in Icelandic cuisine -- all done without recipes, which she considers childish)

"I'm sure some of the local boys would clear away these awful weeds." (said Minister Minbog, whose church grounds are maintained by the ladies auxiliary to the men of the church. Upkeep of the grounds by the ladies was suggested by the men at Minister Minbog's inference that the ladies needed goals benefitting the community. The men agreed and elected ushers to serve the following month)

"Naturally, death is the only common friend of mankind." (said Jean Flambeau, the foreign exchange student. His dissertation, "The Power of Positive Existentialism," has been heard and rejected six times by the faculty committee. Rather than moving on, he has prepared a systematic conspiracy by which he intends to sew up the committee in his thinking. The vote gets closer each time so there need be no rewrite of his next submission)

"Aren't you sleepy, Betty?" (said Martin. His eyelids
sagged more than usual. Earlier he had asked if Betty would escort him to the library to pick up a reserved book. He could have entered with his skeleton key but he explained to Betty that he would feel better if she were there to make things official. She agreed and told Martin about new legal publications expected by the library. These concerned riot control, which had been discussed warily at recent conventions.)

"She's sleeping, Martin, and you did it." (said Jean staring at the Sheriff. To Jean the Sheriff was no threat and a politician. Jean is armed constantly with intricacies of studied logic -- its value would show up in committee. Times Jean wanted no more philosophy he'd knock late and we'd play gin, cribbage, and his favorite, double solitaire. He'd ask about my research and how can a scientist set out to discover something. He would refuse to quit cards until I had blurred away into a tumescent fuzz and he'd begun to win. Then he'd thank me and I'd welcome him and he'd leave briskly, at the pace of a hard working man with home in sight)

"You've done it again, Clarence, clever man." (said I to me who had enough. Minister Minbog collided with Betty who lurched to her feet after Sheriff Gale left. The minister pardoned himself gracefully. "Pardon me, my sermon, you know." I leaned over to help Betty to her feet. She was gone and I turned round the empty room. Thank you, I said, thank you all. Heading for bed I imagined that parties are always like this, even when some preoccupation keeps you from noticing)
The sidewalk has not always been the sidewalk. Previously it was sand, water and cement. Like the mixture of any three things intended to produce one, no two will do without the third. Thus it is with all combinations. Eliminate any of the components and the whole will not be the same. There may be a use for the result of neglecting the inclusion of one element but this use cannot be the same as the one for which inclusion of the missing element was intended. Sidewalks are for more than walking. Some are for wishing they were not there and, although it need not be mentioned here, vice versa. (Latin teachers are often older than Latin -- perhaps an element was left out) Some sidewalks may contain other elements we may consider nonessential. Dead birds and workmen's fingers may be included here. Thank nature, any such nonessential ingredients such as these will be worn away if exposed to weather or walking since at least in the old days shoe soles were made of leather. As nonessential elements are missing they may be considered existing nonelements. This is readily seen. Suppose chocolate were included in the mixing of cement for a sidewalk. Only a fool or dreamer would think of a chocolate sidewalk. Fool or madman. So the aberration of considering existing nonelements brands these mad or foolish dreamers aberrant and therefore nonessential to the makeup of society -- which consists only of elements. The problem becomes one of simple definition.
To put it more concretely, the free democratic process of identifying aberrants follows like smoke follows fire or sidewalks -- society discovers the existent elements and mad, foolish dreamers invent the nonexistent, nonessential elements. The value of this process becomes obvious when we see how such aberrants are identified. Now is when their heads come in contact with sidewalks, usually accompanied by old fashioned leather soled shoes. This process describes the further essential uses of sidewalks and how they may come into fashion by necessity. This evolutionary use of sidewalks may disappear quite naturally when the aberrants have all come in contact with sidewalks. So, as usual with such widely used but narrowly understood creations of the properly constructed mind, the sidewalk has been vastly underrated. This situation must be rectified and I feel no small pride in being the first to point it out. I am presently compiling a list of essential uses for the sidewalk. These, I am sure, the society will accept. Some are: walking, sitting, standing, crouching, lying, eating, and eliminating. Think it over, it's your sidewalk.

HOUSE AND GARDEN

Huge green flushweeds surround my angular house. They took over the small lot strangling the garden that was here when I moved in. The garden was surrounded by a lawn that had taken years to knit. I bought the house for the garden
but once inside I have forgotten and rarely think of it. Now flushweeds remind me of raw, purposeless moments when I consider confining their onslaught to the garden. But they took hold and now press close higher than any window.

The story or history of my house interests me. The house was first built (first, because it burned down in 1952) in 1928 by a carpenter discontent with nails. He fit and polished every joint and seam. When finished, the house was sold because of difficult times. A succession of tradesmen owned it until the fire of 1952. It was immediately rebuilt but not sold until a year before I bought it. Today I own it outright because of my practice. From inside, I watched the neighborhood convulse and push up a new house every week. Paved streets and concrete sidewalks came last spring with the flurry of plants and animals. I had one party in my house and expect to have another soon. It's particularly well suited for parties and several of my guests remarked they'd like another.

CLARENCE STAYS UP

I sat at my desk wondering if anything of my speech to the society had reached them. Perhaps I had spent too much time with the riddle. Couldn't I have told them straight out. No, not then, but maybe soon. If I had been sure they would understand -- but how could they? What if I said it wrong. What if I said nothing at all??.....the salamanders
never had a chance — who would believe that?

He sat on the desk facing me, legs and arms folded.

What are you doing in my house. "Yes, I see," he said.

"Clarence, you've done it again. You know that I only come around to remind you that you're making too much of this. You shouldn't feel bad about it because I've been busy all week. Clarence, we must get together more often." You don't belong here you know too much. "Tell me about it, Clarence, all of it, leave nothing out -- and don't make up things you think I'd like to hear." I turned off all the lights in the house. I don't want you to see me talking.

"Of course not, make yourself comfortable, relax, take off your shoes, take your time, make it fun, make it not matter." —do you ever look behind you holding aces and eights and feel your trigger finger poking you? I dreamed a girl mis­took me for a prowler and shot me in the side. I died and asked her why she had not asked who was there. How it could have been easier. Stop the car, you passed another hitch­hiker. Those build up. You win the hand, you wake up, you get where you're going -- and none of it matters. What does matter? I once searched for and found a young bristlecone pine. I...

"Please, Clarence, you're rude. I'm here to help if I can. Television calms you -- why not turn it on?"

There's nothing on. "There's nothing on. You'll make me do it. No old movies, nothing."
WATCHING TELEVISION

.....sure you recognized them folks that was Tony and the Tourniquets on Rude Records singing Cutting Off Your Blood and Bruised and Swollen Over You their new hit that should open all the arteries to the top of the charts courtesy of NU-VU before continuing INCISOR our in depth dive into the heart of humanity some late ball scores Snapdragons 0 Dull City Death Farm 0 and in another monumental struggle it's Salamanders -1 Joystick Crucifixion Band 1971 before resuming INCISOR remember later in the show we'll present Ronny and the Realguys in their debut network performance you may be the viewer fortunate enough to deduce their disease so keep watching NU-VU and keep sending in your entries to the Heart-stopper of the Week Contest you know that startling piece of information you think may be chosen by our panel of judges to be terminal knowledge

Now, IN CI SOR con ti nues del ving in to the re a li ties of life in the a ver age A mer i can house hold. Dig deep in your souls and grab a hold 'cause here we go with Solomon de Sult, take it away, Sol

(I told you there was nothing on I don't want to watch television I want to clean out my garden I want a pet I want to plan a party I want to walk and run I want my feet to explode I want sirens and dancing laughter and lullabies I want peace sleep nothing on drugs liquor everything you have)
("Clarence, you're upsetting yourself. Relax, you may learn not to be so hard on me")

Thank you hello again folks as we tune in to our continuing Dramareal featuring Harvey and Sylvia at home we hear Harvey say:

DRAMAREAL

"I'm going bowling now."

"What day is today?" said Sylvia.

"Bowling night."

"I'll see you when you get back." Sylvia finished drying the dishes and sat at the formica counter fumbling through her new copy of Better Living looking for a new recipe. Harvey stood with his hand on the plastic doorknob going the list of items necessary for his night out bowling.

"I forgot something," Harvey said.

"A tablespoon of mustard?" said Sylvia.

"No, got that, salt too."

"Well, you always forget your shoes."

"Where are they?"

"Same place I always hide them."

Harvey strode like a chugging train into the kitchen and opened the olive oven door. "Why don't you think of a new hiding place?" he muttered. "You hide everything in the oven, why not the stereo cabinet or your father's tobacco stand?"

"Would you ever look there?"

"No."
"Well."
"You want to make things easy for me, don't you Sylvia?"
"I thought you were going bowling. You could stay home and read."
"Give me that magazine."

Sylvia handed Harvey the magazine. He sat at the counter where Sylvia had been. He examined a recipe for Spanish Deviled Eggs remembering the Mexican waitress at the bowling alley who brought him his dripping bottles of Schlitz. He stood and handed the magazine back to Sylvia who had snatched his bowling shoes from the oven. She held them by the strings, her arm outstretched.

"Go bowling," said Sylvia.
"Quite a recipe. Will they be ready when I get home?"
"When will you get home, same time?"
"Depends. When I get home. How do I know? I don't like to read."

"Me too," said Sylvia, "you raped me," said Sylvia, "you had it all planned and you raped me." Sylvia dropped the bowling shoes onto the vinyl floor and slumped back against the olive oven, sobbing. "You planned to rape me. I knew you would. You looked like a rapist the first time I met you."

"So what. You were no easier than Betty Lou and she thanked me. She was grateful."

"Go bowling," said Sylvia, "I have to boil these eggs."
"How many?" asked Harvey. "I'll be mighty hungry."
"You owe me something," said Sylvia.
"I'll write you a check," said Harvey.
"Don't go bowling -- stay here and talk to me."
"Take off your clothes," Harvey said, "and get out the mustard."
"You have the mustard in your bowling bag," said Sylvia.
"I'm going bowling," said Harvey.

Harvey and Sylvia lived in a modern apartment complex with ice machines on each floor. They had hoped to rent a groundfloor one bedroom but settled for a third floor two bedroom. Harvey wanted a den. Sylvia bought pink curtains.

Tonight Harvey would get drunk. He told himself so and was relieved that later there would be no bothersome decision. He drank viciously throughout the regular league match and managed to raise his average two pins. Around midnight he found himself thinking of how easy Sylvia had been. She cried intensely and pleaded unconvincingly. Rape was everything up to penetration -- then she enjoyed and no longer tried to fool him. Harvey recalled their first real night together...

...after making love, Sylvia rolled away, her back to Harvey. He slithered her way and discovered the slimy wet spot on the sheet.

"OOoeeow!" said Harvey.
"Huh?"
"OOoeeoweeow!" said Harvey with practiced emphasis.
"What's wrong?" said Sylvia. "What does that mean?"

"Okay, what's it mean?"

"I didn't see the pigeon fly by."

"You don't pay much attention."

"He must have been a big one -- did you see him?"

"He was two inches long and hovered over the bed for five minutes. He was in a big hurry and flapped real hard and dropped it and flew away. Read or go to sleep."

Harvey gave up on the Mexican waitress and went home. Sylvia was waiting. "Will you talk to me now?" she said.

"Well, first this big airplane, see, it flew over the building and dropped me a note that said see you next week so I signaled it with a mirror the next time it came it dropped me a rope and pulled me up. The plane was empty so I flew around in circles for a while -- then came home."

"Is that all?" Sylvia said.

"Yes," said Harvey, "where are the Spanish Deviled Eggs?"

"They're not Spanish, they're plain deviled eggs."

The wind that had blown Harvey in continued whining at the doors to their apartment. Harvey noticed the first owl.

"Would you have it any other way, dear?" said Sylvia.

"The poor furry can't fly in this wind."

"Those are feathers," said Harvey.

Two months later thirty five owls inhabited the H/S household. They clung to backs of chairs and did not move.
"Have you ever been to Carlsbad Caverns?" said Harvey anxious to tell of his spelunking days.

"Yes," said Sylvia, "I was born and raised in a cave. My best friends were bats. I never had a doll. They'd carry me off into passages and chambers where no human being had ever been. They taught me all their secrets. Finally, they gave up on me. I couldn't fly. We practiced and tried everything. Then my parents moved to Labrador and that's when I met you, remember?"

"This place is beginning to look like a cave. You let the owls in," Harvey said.

"You never complained."

"I only noticed the stalagmites today."

"The last time mother wrote from Labrador she said ice caves are much less comfortable with the dripping and all."

The wind stopped, the owls unhooked themselves and flew off to trees or barns or museums to stare back at the tourists glaring at them and then the crisis came.

"I'm going bowling," said Harvey.

"You enjoyed raping me," said Sylvia.

.....this is Sol de Sult saying that's about it from this end. See you next time, keep watching, goodnight.

CLARENCE READS
"See Clarence, you were wrong." I know. "There was something on" I didn't want to see it. "Then read it -- here's a book I brought for you. Open it anywhere, I'm sure you'll find it enlightening."

Ch. 1 HOW GODLINESS REVEALED TRANSCENDENTAL NARCOSIS TO THE UNNATURAL, MYTHIC PALLOFANS DESERVES MORE THAN THIS SHORT SPACE

Ch. 2 REDD NEKK AND BLACKWHITE, THE SPOTTED WONDER BOYKID, FACE NUMEROUS PERILS AND OVERCOME THE HORRIBLE, DANGEROUS LONGHAIRES

Ch. 3 THE WORLD'S MOST NEARLY PERFECT RUDE MAN AND THE WORLD'S FINEST SMALL DOG FIND INFINITE JOY IN RURAL AMERICA

Ch. 4 STILL LIFE

"I'll leave you to read now Clarence. Try to organize things. You know, get something out of your life."

Clarence began reading somewhere in chapter four.

"..."That's a cheap trick, Sylvia."

"It's not too much for you to do." Sylvia sat crosslegged on the edge of the bed. "It's easier for you to say no than for me to ask you to do it."

"Cook me something first," said Harvey.

"Why should I let you bribe me? You raped me. You won't even deny it."

"Damn, Sylvia, it's not even dark."

"I'll tell you what happens when you want something. You want it now. You go bowling, you make up stories, you waste time all the time and it's all now, right now -- when you want...."
"Tell me more about your cave -- and your mother in Labrador -- and how you didn't want it. Tell me, Sylvia."

"All right. You read to me and I'll cook you something -- then you do it and see if it doesn't turn out the way you want."

"Read what?"

"That book under the cookbook. It's funny -- maybe you'll calm down."

Harvey opened the book and began reading to himself. He laughed hard and freely, his head gyrating like a wind battered balloon. "The damn things are chameleons. Chameleons, Sylvia. Listen to this -- 'Shoes started arriving last week. First day......'"] He laughed harder and louder.

"Okay, I'll do it. Just remember, whether or not I raped you, it didn't hurt -- now did it? Where's the mustard?"

"I guess not," said Sylvia grinning like a salesgirl with the money in her hand.
THE GAP

We should throw in the bodies first said one, a dwarf on the edge of the crowd. His ideas provoked an opposite reaction from us of the inner circle who decide for action. We can't throw in the bodies -- our glares reinforced the dwarf's antithetical ways. The others on the other side of the gap would see us, take our gesture as concession to their unspoken warning. Throw in the furniture -- we agreed. Throw in the tools, the skills. Save the weapons. The dwarf on the edge of the crowd shouted -- Throw in the weapons, throw in the weapons. We had to silence him. We decided we might throw in the bodies. The gap would serve us. We saw that if the gap were to be filled, it should be filled with substance to support our weight. We could investigate those on the other side, to understand why they take no action to fill the gap in the interest of us all. The elder Woz offered his hands and feet. He affirmed his wisdom. We drew back at the thought of him leading us without hands or feet. Some of us were hungry, could not ask for the efforts to stop so we could eat. We had to keep working until the gap was full. We all knew the bodies had to be carried across. The sky was green, the clouds full of gentle violence. If the gap filled with rushing water nothing we could throw
in would stay. The dwarf now silent could offer us no oppo-
site. Rain. We drug the bodies back to the village. Those
on the other side of the gap were yet standing silent as we
lost sight of them. In the village we met in the central
meeting hall where shouts of — Throw in the.......roared
against the heavy walls beneath the high domed ceiling. We
would need silence. The elder Woz so demonstrated by remaining
silent. The shouting quit. The dwarf unable to speak stood
in the doorway. Woz spoke: The gap has been ours, among us
for time we cannot remember. Its emptiness has come inside
us. We no longer feel ourselves full while the gap's emptiness
hollows us. To signs we must turn our eyes. The dwarf in
the doorway holds up a sign -- Throw in the bodies. We ignore
him. The elder Woz having confirmed his wisdom leads us to
the central well. Us of the inner circle. We surround the
well. We urinate. The well throbs. We will sleep strong
tonight. Tomorrow the gap will be filled. We sleep. The
droning of those on the other side of the gap calms us, we
know the drone will fill our ears when we wake. The dwarf
does not sleep with us. He takes his sign to the gap. By
light of the fires of those on the other side of the gap
he writes with a stick in the earth -- Throw in the bodies.
We wake with first light, still hungry, yet have no time to
eat. No time to do other than consider how the gap is to be
filled. We are weaker. We will be weaker. Today is the
short day. The gap must be filled before long. Our lives
fill with murder, theft. No one is safe, so one defends himself. We are alone with our needs, we recognize the reason for the needs of those who must steal, kill. We kill, steal, but no one can find the dwarf or think of the right thing to throw into the gap. We gather, we return to the gap taking our emptiness which we begin to cherish. We hold our vision to those on the other side of the gap until one of us sees the writing on the ground. Throw in the bodies. One remembers the rain of yesterday. The gap is dry. The gap is always full of water when rain comes except today it is dry. Woz offers to sacrifice his ears, his nose -- we know his way. Our thirst, forgotten wince yesterday, returns. We wish the gap were full of water. On the other side of the gap they drink from gleaming urns. They drink ashes from their fires of the night. They are sustained by the ashes, we feel a sadness for their odd ways. Woz asks for counsel, we suggest things to be thrown into the gap. Furniture, tools, skills, the dwarf's silent suggestion to throw in the bodies. Yesterday we failed. Today we know we cannot repeat yesterday's failure, although we can fail today. We do not speak of our clothes, we have none. Maybe Woz is not so wise but wiser than we think when he offers himself to fill the gap. We do not tire of this, our lives rest on the edge of noble illusion. We have our village, meeting hall, well, path to the gap. The path back to the village we walk less proudly than the path to the gap. We have those on the other side. We are
not sure why they stand silent. Woz has told us they are just there, since it is as yet impossible to cross the gap we need not let their presence trouble us. Illusion? We are not sure we fool ourselves, we can wonder what those on the other side think of us. They know, they must know we are trying to throw something into the gap so we can cross -- do they think we want something of them? Woz once said the dwarf knows tales of those on the other side. That is why he was allowed to urge us to throw the bodies into the gap for so long. Now at midday we have done nothing to fill the gap. The dwarf sits with his stick scratching the earth. The stick moves, his hand follows, no one wants to know what it is writing. We heard all we wanted to hear from the dwarf while he could speak. The stick guiding the dwarf's hand is only another shout to throw in the bodies. The bodies, we forgot to bring the bodies. Woz has said nothing of them so it is all right. If the bodies were necessary today we would have brought them. As we look around, see the dwarf drag in the bodies, we are no more amazed. Although we have no firm basis for belief he comes dragging in the bodies. He does not sweat. We are relieved because the dwarf is dragging in the bodies. We feel the eyes. If it is recognition it is half ours. Half ours, half those that see it in our eyes. The bodies in, the dwarf drags up all the sticks that look like the one he used to scratch in the earth. If it is a fire he intends we will not look. We cannot warm
ourselves at his fire. The gap must be filled, we are no less able to see it through the dwarf and his interlude. We are a lonely people determined to fill the gap. Here is our meeting hall, our path, the musty sweet smell of our beds we are anxious to find at night, to leave in the morning. In the light on the edge of the gap we see still visions of those on the other side of the gap. Something new would help to entertain us. We wonder why Woz is silent. And he does not and does not speak.
"I can't stand mutton, I can't and I never will," I said, more to myself than to the wall, more to the wall than to Birdheart. I stabbed a bite of the foul mess with the US Army surplus fork and poked it in my mouth. My stomach churned fast and loud. Birdheart knows how mutton grieves me but she keeps trying every recipe her East Texas aunt used on old Uncle Doke. Like Aunt Laurel, she concocts all kinds of sauces for disguising mutton's natural rotten taste.

Doke would draw in the rancid slop from his wooden mixing spoon and spit ten feet across the kitchen. He'd throw his chair over backward until the mutton and sauce, his mess, and the odor were all gone, wiped up and tossed out by Aunt Laurel who never lost a touch for disappointment. Doke'd stroll in later casually, like he just got up from a peaceful nap and Laurel would never let on that her knotty, scrambled hurt lasted until he dried the dishes and kissed her forehead. He'd pour his nightly shot of bourbon and settle into his scuffed leather chair in the livingroom and read books Aunt Laurel couldn't understand. Doke called them his outside interests so she wouldn't ask about worm breeding or the aeronautical achievement of Japanese kites. She snuck an occassional look and always came away pleasantly mystified.
"You know Old Doke finally did learn to eat it," Bird-heart said, raking the Old Alabama Mansion Style Worcestershire Sauce soaked mutton off my plate and asking what it was I wanted to eat if she couldn't please me. It was a tradition she thought we'd keep up because we couldn't count on her other relatives.

"Anything else. Anything -- the chicken from yesterday, or nothing else. I'll eat my vegetables," I said and stuck three bite-size chunks of sliced carrot on the US fork. "We got to get some silverware that's silver, someday."

"You know Old Doke died right, don't you? Aunt Laurel told me the last thing he said was that mutton wasn't so bad after all and right then he could've eaten a mountain if she'd cook it for him," she said and her face scoured up.

I wasn't much for more of that story, and she would tell it again if I didn't eat fast and get out. I told her I'd eat it and she shut up rushing around to get the damn stuff back on my plate. Sneaky Old Doke had gotten me again I knew, and I wished he was around to see me hustle out the kitchen door so I could puke and go get the specialty at Mister Jimmy's Cafe just up the road. Now, nobody knew when Old Doke had lied, always or once, but the critter did get out clean like they said.

Some of the Old Alabama Sauce squirted on the front of my shirt because I didn't lean far enough over the garbage can right outside the back door. But I thought Jimmy would take
it to be something got on me at work or I could tell him a
wad of tobacco from a passing pickup truck caught me looking
the other way. He spits, himself.

"Vernon, another one of those nights?" Jimmy satisfies
his mind in funny ways. "How was the sauce tonight? Looks
like you didn't move too quick." Jimmy hops on me like a
cheap suit.

"Vernon, did you eat it?"
"Yeah."
"Again?"
"Uhuh."

"Then you'll want the specialty, one specialty for Vernon,
make it special."

"I'm a sad man tonight," I said wanting Jimmy to hold up.
"Something you ate?" Jimmy said easily. I knew he wasn't
funny but he knew it more than me.

"What was it Old Doke died of?" said Jimmy.
"Complications."
"Of what?"

"If I knew, he would've." I wasn't any more for this story
than when Pastor Whitmarsh said even if Old Doke outright lied,
he still went to heaven. Pastor took in facts like a meatgrinder
and always made a good tasting sausage. But the whole congre-
gation knew he cut the wine with vinegar.

"Aren't you tired of this conversation?" I asked Jimmy,
pulling papers out of my shirt thinking how easy to show him
the way convulsions pile up.

"Yeah," he said, "you're the only customer anyway."

I only kicked him hard in the temple once with my hard toe boot. He quit squalling about his mashed toy truck so I was stuck with my energy. I shook some and finally picked up the truck he'd left lying in the driveway for two days. Soon he would wake up and forget what it was all about so I thought I'd go in and kiss Birdheart before he came to because if he saw me he'd remember.

Birdheart asked what was that kid doing sleeping in the driveway right where somebody could run over him like I'd run over his truck. She was busy making wax apples out of old candles and food coloring and said you could never ever see a picture without the letter y in it. I said, "Why?" and she said, "That's why, what are that kid's parents going to think if he doesn't wake up pretty soon?" I kicked him easy and if he doesn't wake up I'll drag him over to the horse pasture and they'll think he got kicked by a horse. I've seen those horses kick the fence, they knock holes anywhere they want.

I drug her to bed. She complained about itching. I asked if I should call the trailer movers to have them haul us around town. She couldn't understand how that had to do with itching or the kid's body stretched out in the driveway where anybody could see it if all they did was come home or
go out. She said I was forcing something on her and the apples were just about set up so could I look out and see if the kid was still there.

I peeped out the window, he was sprawled face down like he'd been kicked in the head or something, and I laughed nervous thinking I better move him or how would I explain how the horse kicked him all the way over from the horse pasture. Another kid from the same family ran over and nudged the body with his toe, trying to see if he was playing possum, and I didn't notice until I looked up her leg that it was a girl about fifteen and filling out. I was sorry the kid was dead.

Birdheart was tending her apples. They'd come out nice with red and green-yellow blotches on the brown that sunk into the yellow middle. The young girl had him about naked I could see when the car drove up and from the way it stopped it was the parents. They had some fits and finally covered him up without seeing me.

We climbed into the pickup just as the ambulance rolled off slow. It wasn't fun following it out the driveway because we thought they'd go to town like us.

Jimmy threw down the paper and bent over clutching his guts like when a cowboy hooked him in the stomache with his pool cue after an angry game of eight ball.

"Did they find out?" Jimmy asked.

"No."
"That's good, nobody should know about this," Jimmy said and picked up the newspaper. "I ain't seen about it," he said, scanning the front page like he'd find it there.

"So it's not true, it don't hurt any less."

"If I could only read about it somewhere," said Jimmy.

I took no time whipping out more papers I'd held back before because Jimmy had to warm his hotdogs for sucking. He said it was necessary they barely burn his lips or else he might as well be home doing something unnecessary.

The terriblest part was it was awful how they buried the kid. They paid hundreds of dollars for a deep pit with fifteen or twenty neighborhood men walking around in black suits by the deep pit dug by old men in the rain with nothing but their shovels to keep dry. I stood around after the parents and heavy titted fifteen year old girl had left and I hollered into the mound of dirt that it might as well had been the horse because you're just as dead. I could see doubt cast on my purpose so I headed home again to see Birdheart because she wouldn't come with me to the funeral. She'd said it wasn't any good I'd be doing and she wouldn't confirm it by her presence which was fine with me.

Uncle Doke said the easiest way to get home is never to leave. But it was easy for Doke to say because he never did. Birdheart would have known I was trying to get back to her but she couldn't see me and telling was no good. I stopped at Jimmy's in hopes of a good meal and some warm into my body.
because the funeral left me cold wondering at how easy the folks gave up their kid.

I sat down at the counter where Jimmy was reading the Tucson paper and drinking coffee with his hotdogs. Without looking up he said, "See this article here, Vernon, it says let's look into the future and see what's to come and goes on about our food supplies running out and it being a new source of nutrition values because we eat other things like eggs anyway. But it's a goddam insult, Vernon."

"Huh?" I said. It was hard forgetting the kid, he was dead, and I thought maybe his sister would be lonely.

"Cannibal!" said Jimmy, "it's cannibal and the Bible says so."

Jimmy dipped his hotdog in the coffee. I went to the dump to check around for old furniture and tires. Some bum I didn't recognize was stacking good tires with some tread and not too big holes and I parked the pickup close enough to watch. I thought I could easy run him off by saying I was the law and would put him in hardship if he didn't move along. He kept stacking the tires without looking at me sitting there on the hood of my pickup. I was madder all the time so I figured to let him have it the first time he looked up. He kept stacking the tires higher until he had to throw them up to the top and only about one of four got a tire balanced. He wouldn't look so I thought I'd have to laugh. Finally he said, "Old ones won't stack like new ones." I said yeah because I saw it was
true. I considered backing my pickup to the pile and helping
him stack but if he wouldn't say any more than that, why bother?
Some of the tires would have brought a dollar down at Ray's
Conoco. I chuckled thinking Ray probably dumped the tires
himself and knew he'd be getting them back from the more indus-
trious bums passing through. I sat still on the hood knowing
that eventually the foreign bum would stack as high as he could
and then what?

Jimmy thumbed the newspaper. "You must've done something,
if you think I'm going to listen more, get to it."

"I was just showing how it pays to help a man."

"Look, here it says someday folks'll be crowded together
so much that all you'll hear is a big movie house roar and you'll
have to scream. What did you do with the tires, Vernon, take
them to Ray's or build a bonfire?"

"Not hearing you would be a privilege," I said. The tires
fell on the bum all at once and even when he was pinned he
wouldn't look at me, he only talked ordinary like to a plant,
saying I reckon you'll need water to grow.

"Sometimes I'm too easy to get along with," said Jimmy.
"Look here, there's new information about how to prevent train
wrecks with satellites. And a free beer bust for the new mayor.
They say he can't drink no more anyway. And some kid got kicked
to death by a horse."

"That ain't true," I said. I saw a tire wedged in over the
bum that I could jerk loose and let him out from under the pile.
"No?" said Jimmy. He folded the paper carefully and looked at me dully, like a steer about to have his head split.

"The kid ain't dead."

"No?" said Jimmy.

I saw the bum wouldn't ask me to get him out, his skin was beginning to turn. I thought I'd get to a phone and call up Heavenly Rest and tell them there's a county job waiting and for ten bucks I'd say where. A case of beer and a quart of whiskey, not the best, but adequate. A gurgling started down in the pile. I jerked the one tire figuring the bum would wake up and get on his way if he didn't die and if he did, I'd find him the next day. I'd be back for the good tires anyhow.

"Says here there's plenty animals smarter than us but we can't understand how because we ain't them," said Jimmy reading the long columns in the back pages next to the ads for complete motor overhauls and a house full of carpets for $299, no matter what size.

"You going to give me the specialty?" I asked. I was warmed and dry but still hungry.

"You didn't say you wanted it."

"Why else would I sit here listening to you?"

"Got me," said Jimmy, "one specialty," he hollered through the window to the kitchen and walked around through the door to heat it up.

I said loud in to Jimmy that Birdheart's sister was born
with big tits. Nobody family talked about it but sometimes they'd play with them in the closet because it was an oddity.

"You ever see them?" said Jimmy.

"When we were visiting the folks in Lubbock. But they were regular size then because her body had caught up."

Jimmy shoved the thick stew through the window. "Fresh batch today, put in some rutabaga, chopped small, you don't get too much at once."

I stuck the spoon straight in the middle of the stew and it stood by itself. "How long this stuff last after you start watering it?"

"About a week."

"Looks like shit."

"What kind?"

Jimmy knew that was a hard question I'd rather avoid.

Birdheart and I first got to town and moved into that shack by the San Pedro when we only had cold water inside and an outhouse. Ray's pump truck came over when the pit got full. Ray said it looked like something besides humans were using it because of all the different sizes and colors and hardnesses. We laughed, we knew our diet wasn't the best. Next day she told me she heard noises and got up quietly since I had to get up early and look for that job I finally got at the courthouse. She said animals were lined up from the mesquite by the river clear to the outhouse. Coyote, fox, deer, javelina, ground squirrel, skunk, procupine, mountain lion, something she didn't
know what it was, and a baby giraffe. I thought she dreamed it but she swore she would have woke me up except I'd sleep in and not look for a job which we need bad for the inside facilities. She said the animals were giggling so I told her we wouldn't want them in the house late at night or we'd never get any rest. That's why we never got an indoor john.

"That's bullshit!" said Jimmy.

"Maybe so but tasting is the only way to tell if you're confused on the other differences." I was done eating and almost done talking. "Reckon I'll drink some whiskey tonight if you want to stop."

"You going to turn in your news to the courthouse tonight?"

"No."

"Okay. After closing."

"Nobody else is coming in this late?"

"No, see you in about an hour, got to plan tomorrow's menu."

"No. Aunt Marvella's Astroinfo says avoid social contacts and what if Jimmy comes over? You'll want to pass out after," said Birdheart.

"Go to bed," I said, reaching the whiskey.

"There's nothing intimate about it, go ahead, say it, there's nothing intimate about it." Birdheart passed the shot glass.

"How do you get a social disease from an intimate act?" We both knew I wasn't supposed to remind us of the clap. Birdheart hustled off to bed in a snit. The first snit she got
into when we were newly married didn't fit so she worked herself around to fit the suit. The whiskey was going down easy.

I peeped out the window just before the ambulance drove in. The bum from the dump hopped out and slid the kid's body onto the ground and jerked off the shroud. He bent over the body and I poured another whiskey. I peeped out again and the kid was clearing the fence, floating into the horse pasture. I sat down at the Virtue Bros. dinette set and hoped Jimmy would get here soon.

When I looked up the bum was stirring his whiskey with a little finger. "We messed up, Vernon," he said.

"Who?"

"We didn't do it right the first time so we gotta do it all over again. The kid knows he's got to get kicked by the horse so do you mind if I sip with you until it's done?"

"You leave that ambulance parked in the driveway," I asked. One of the biggest nuisances of living in a trailer park is not having enough room to drive and park at the same time.

"That's where the kid is going to land. No reason to make any more extra work for ourselves."

"How come you look at me when you talk now?"

"This is a social call, Vernon, just passing time."

He went on about the need for preciseness in the operation and how he'd got the whole stack of tires to Ray's and made enough to rent the ambulance. The buckskin stud lifted one hoof and trotted toward the alfalfa field, ears up, snorting.
LET ME IN I WON'T GO AWAY

I pounded the door of course if she's home or not. She must be home I saw her park her gray Opel in her regular parking space and hurry into the trailer looking around like she knew I was watching except she can't know about my telescope. I hit my knuckle on a nail that she might have used to hang a Christmas wreath or notes to her visitors. Again of course it comes clear that the trouble with my part of the world is texture. Too rough with nails sticking out for anybody who pounds to get cut. This nail bent and rusted because after her last message she left it stuck in the door, not thinking somebody new to her house would stick a knuckle on it only trying to see if she's home. While she doesn't answer I'll bleed and maybe she'll feel how the texture got me if I show her the nail. I heard she is not hard but soft as I thought seeing her through the shades when before I tried to find her home. I should have touched the door for the nail then but saw her home and being polite only watched. She saw what she looked at when looking at her man, her other man on top of her hair and face and his toes curled while she looked through his hair topping the long flat head. Smiling like that at each other I couldn't just go in and say hello because what if they got upset and wouldn't let me come back.
And seeing them happy I knew that if they knew I saw them laughing and scratching each other they would be sad. I think they would not want to share their fun but this could be me. I would gladly claim not to be a voyeur such as one who peeps on anybody. But not an accident I saw her sweat and get up to fry the eggs her other man sat down to eat while she washed from a pail right there in plain view from the window. I wish the nail could have been seen or I knocked on the door then when texture was her soft wet hair and not blood drying on my knuckle.

She is not unknown to me, I learned my telescope the same day I bought it, but she wouldn't recognize me even the blood will dry before she gets here I'm sure she hears the pounding. I look at the nail and her house now is rough and necessary that she comes to see who I am at the door even if to say no. I know her very well all her body shines after the shower and the playful way she looks naked at herself in the mirror. But not knowing me I think she can't worry or be scared just because I'm bleeding. She might get out band-aids and wrap up my finger so no infection could keep me away when we get to know each other and understand the dangerous door I pounded because of the other metal walls around the trailer. Her walls would take knocks better than the nail but to get in through them I would be a different man again and not sweaty with eggs on my mind and frying them not a good idea.
Well if she thinks the moon is flat looking through my telescope set up in my backyard to see the craters sometimes Saturn when it's there. Well maybe so. I know different when I saw the telescope work in the store it was different from anything because texture. The craters up close are easy to see as a hill in your backyard that you climb with your eyes the broken rocks and dust can't hurt your eyes if you can see you climbing up the hill and over down the other side.

She worries me and herself if she doesn't come and see why I stand at the door thinking of this thing. This not pounding on her door for the nail.

If she would come to my house or only look in I could open the door right away or take her to the telescope to watch her neighbors in the trailer court or her trailer to see who comes knocking to see her.

Christ the tv didn't work again how could I have stayed home and thought about her. I liked the shows not telling me about anything but flat because a good sign is seeing through it all. The people mashed together all on the glass surface and talking like it was somebody out there listening who would answer or write letters saying I saw you. I am called dumb and worse to like it not textured but that's what makes the trouble of the world go away when I see things flat and glass that have nothing sticking out at me.

I hear her now walking in the trailer and how could she not want to know why it's me out here. I don't know but see
it in eyes at my job where people come in blind and leave blinder paying for it. The doctor says don't discourage the customers telling them you can see the way you want if it looks the same all the time why get eyeglasses because you only pay to see what everybody else sees the same way only now you can still remember how it was to see your way. And because it's cosmetic jewelry he sells also to get them to want the most expensive kind like other people wear. But I say why pay to have what other people who see good without help don't wear around the head hurting the ears and nose. The doctor keeps me anyway I'm doing a good job not talking into their ears because likely they can't hear or wouldn't see the fancy glasses on my face.

She is without helps for ears and eyes I know sure. It is not that way in paradise and I am not a funny man or stingy she can tell by the flowers in my car.

Today I ran fast picking flowers from backyards where I didn't have to worry about the owners seeing me or if they did they wouldn't have time to call the police I'd run away because I know hiding places by fences, in trees and under trailers nobody can find. Mrs. Bennett talks to me every once in a while about what could happen to her roses because as soon as she plants them I dig them up they're in the way by her fence when I jump over it coming home from getting flowers for a special person like this pretty girl in the trailer. The roses never have time to bloom which could be
a mistake since what pretty girl can't be interested with flowers. Left in my car they are my way of not worrying her inside with some phony thing like flowers stuck in her face for her to say -- Oh how nice, let me water them. Rather she should say -- Oh, it's you, let me meet you without silly flowers. And roses have their thorns her hand could get cut like my knuckle from the nail. I would be the cause of her blood except that she is not the cause of mine or I hit the nail myself just knocking on her door wanting to say hello, I notice you, if so far only through my telescope. Or I could give these flowers to somebody not special as a lady on some streetcorner not imagining me as I drive by thinking how wonderful her legs end in feet that touch the concrete and carry her away with her new flowers. Inside the trailer her feet pound the floor she is wanting to find out what I want but can only think of where to hide or am I being silly since she doesn't know me.

Okay then why not? I could be not at this door of hers or as easy somewhere else to waste my time waiting to show her. I could be flying too fast to stop my balloon over her house and not think of her without my telescope or her eyes turned to the ceiling wondering if her ears hear what she can't see. Inside the trailer her feet pound the floor she is wanting to find out what I want but can only think of where to hide or am I being silly since she doesn't know me. I pound her door harder again with my good hand that isn't bleeding and
hit it real hard pound after pound until I think it's weak enough just to break down and go in to her where she won't have to put up with the noise because inside I wouldn't talk much with her if she just opens the door and sees it's me and that I have made up my mind to be near enough this time so that we are too close to talk or make many noises at all.

I hear her walking again and her feet are pounding like my good hand on the door and luckily this time I miss the nail and my good hand stays good because I don't hit the nail any more. Maybe I should have the flowers from my car that she could see looking through a crack in the curtains over the door window and she would see the smile and the flowers promising that if her texture is too rough I will leave anyway and never remember her. But she doesn't look only keeps pounding the floor with her feet and I keep knocking and pounding now she must know for sure it is me and how long can she stay in there without opening the door and telling me in her own voice something if it is only that she has something else to do.
Salvatore, the man with large muscles, sat in the dining car drinking rum on the rocks. Or, was it the lounge? the downstairs economy lounge on American Airlines flight ninety-five to Denver? No, it was the AMTRAK mid-train dining car eventually bound for Denver after every intermediate stop. Salvatore crushed an icecube against his forehead. His fourteen year old daughter, Sally, locked in her bedroom in Kansas City, wondered where she would be when her belly button popped out. Salvatore thought it only a failure of technique that prevented his lifting the chair and his two-hundred-fifty pounds off the dining car floor.

High above the boring plains of eastern Colorado the jumbo jet zoomed toward Denver.

Salvatore crushed the menu into a popcorn ball and locked it in his armpit. Hamburger steak, bleu cheese, milk.

Gina examined the car repair bill, $38 owed to K. C. Karl's Allnight Generator Repair. Salvatore would first hand her the check, then kiss her, ask about Sally and the car, any phone calls, new bookings?

The Sky Lounge playbill read -- Salvatore, the former structural physicist, performing hourly, specializing in feats of physical wisdom. But Sal had taken the train.
Sally unlocked her bedroom door and opened it a crack. "Mom, can I go to the airport?" Gina dropped the Melmac plate, "I'm not speaking to you until we talk to Mr. Barnes," she said.

Sal had flown to Denver and back twice. Both times his agent said he'd call if the airline was amused. $100 per flight seemed adequate three or four times a month, but when they said -- and of course a free trip to Denver -- Sal smiled.

By counting the rail clicks on one hand, seconds on the other, Salvatore calculated that the train was traveling fifty-eight miles per hour, near top speed.

"Fifty-eight miles per hour?" said the grandmother seated opposite Sal at the linen clothed dining table.

"We're rolling," said Sal, "make Denver by noon, day after tomorrow."

"How can you tell?" said the grandmother, gazing out the window at the metaphors flashing by.

"I know the engineer," said Sal, "we always run fifty-eight through this stretch." Sal grabbed the grandmother's purse.

"Not so fast. I don't carry cash and you can't make me sign the traveler's checks."

Gina started the Impala. Sally sat in back. "You cooperate with Mr. Barnes, he only wants what's best. And you better tell who did it or your father will be very angry." Sally lay across the back seat. It was awfully uncomfortable in Charlie's Renault. But Charlie was patient and they got home before nine.

Mr. Barnes fumbled with his fly in the faculty mens' room.
Another unwanted pregnancy. Why didn't his girls come to him for advice? He punched the hand drier button. He'd teach them plenty once they'd gotten over the frivolous morality Mrs. Plank handed out in health class. Strolling back to his office, his hands puffy and tingling, he wondered if Principal Crawford would ever understand the necessity of communal bathrooms.

"I've never seen a purse like that," said Salvatore.

"It's the only one in the world," said the grandmother.

Slim Barnes memorized his confidential counsel. Three options. County home, any compassionate relative, or cousin Phil's contact in New Orleans.

Salvatore pulled off his silk tee shirt. "What do you think?"

"You have large muscles," said the grandmother. "Where did you get them? Are you an athlete?"

"I was, before I learned to specialize."

The Sky Lounge Crowd clapped and hooted. "Where's this phenomenal show?" bellowed one passenger. "You're it," said another. They will amuse themselves, thought the steward.

He scurried to the storage room adjacent the ladies' lounge and peeled black electricians' tape off the hole that afforded a tantalizing view of the women's can.

Gina stomped the gas pedal and the purple Impala jumped the Hopkins High School parking lot curb.

"Marvelous," said the grandmother.
Salvatore wanted to perform for somebody. He'd rehearsed at home but Gina and Sally always watched from far away, as though he was doing nothing much interesting over and over and over. Once Sally suggested he pit one hand against the other, see which squashed which.

The grandmother would do. Sal picked up the salt shaker, screwed off the top and dumped the salt. "Watch this," he said.

Mr. Barnes sat squarely behind his desk, back firm, arms lying outstretched. No one knew how hard he practiced looking official. He should be working on something when Sally brought in her mother to discuss the alternatives. He scrawled a note on the floor plan for the communal bathroom. — Evil is in the eye of the beholder: Mrs. Plank can be taught to teach another way or she can pack her bags. —

"I'm not talking to that old goof," said Sally. The baseball team walked by giggling. Gina kicked out at the batboy, adjusted her expensive wig and stomped away toward the Counselors' Office. The baseball team returned like a barefoot army and climbed into the back seat with Sally. It was all right, she knew most of their names and, once, in health class, she had a searing, healthy daydream about the powerful first baseman.

"We're slowing," said Salvatore, "do you play pinochle?"

"Short delay, folks, track's blocked ahead," said the conductor.

"She won't come in here," said Gina, "she said she wouldn't talk to any old prick in this building."
"You guys again," said Sally. The baseball team broke into muddy sweat.
Salvatore bit through the pinochle deck.
"You have strong teeth, young man," said the grandmother.
"I can say the same things out there that I can in here," said Slim Barnes, wondering exactly when Sal would return from Denver.
"Taking on more passengers, sorry for the inconvenience." The thundering, drunken boarders swarmed into the dining car. One, a very thin, baldheaded man with a drink in each hand somehow scooped up the hamburger steak as Sal swept broken glass off the table.

In Kansas City, Sal had been reading the Star. Revenue bond proposed to match federal funding for construction of new railway terminal. "New railway terminal," he said absent-mindedly as he slid into the front seat of the taxi, eyes fixed on the artist's conception. He did not look up until the taxi driver said, "Here we are, buddy, $5.50."

"Have any of you boys seen my daughter Sally?" The baseball team had closed the trunk just in time.
"We'll take my car, she can't have gone far," said Slim Barnes, anxious to explain his plans for the liberalization of education at Hopkins High.
"Tasty burger," said the thin, baldheaded man, "better than that plastic mush on the plane. That earns you a drink, sir, do you prefer bourbon, or bourbon?"
Sal was squeezed against the double plate window, squeezed, that is, as far as his muscular torso allowed. In the old yellow brick railway terminal in Kansas City, Salvatore invented a new life. It seemed easy at the time, a natural outgrowth of his mortal fear of flying. He collected ashtrays in the depot until a security guard asked what he thought he was doing. "Inventing a new life," said Sal, piling the ashtrays around the startled cop's feet. "All clean, all empty." The ticket to Denver cost $78, Sal wrote a check, tore the vinyl book in two halves.

"What's going on?" said the grandmother.

"Emergency!" said the thin, baldheaded man, and all the recen boarders shouted, "Emergency, emergency!" and began ordering drinks from the slightly confused dining car waitress.

"What's going on?" said the grandmother.

Sally squirmed in the darkness, pounding against her mobile prison. "We better let her out," said the pitcher. "Wait until they're gone," said the shortstop. "Let's hotwire this jalopy and take her to my place," said Coach McGee. He always listened to his boys' idle taunts and boasting in the locker room.

Slim Barnes accelerated smoothly onto the expressway.

"We'll wait at your place, where else would she go?"

One of the boarders shouted, "Four serving two," and smacked the avocado toward the other teams' tangled waving arms.

"For a coach you ain't all that bad," said the utility infielder, handing McGee a freshly popped can of beer.
"You can't eat the ball," said the thin, baldheaded man. Sal downed it rind and all and grinned everywhere at once.

"Yeah, for a coach you're all right," said the catcher, passing out his coveted Mickey Finn playing cards.

"Must you drive so fast, Mr. Barnes, we just had the generator replaced and, oh, this is your car, how's your generator? You just never know about those things," said Gina. Slim Barnes decided a simulation would most effectively demonstrate to Gina the essential nature of communal bathrooms. "Suppose we both had to go at the same time."

"Emergency! He ate the ball!"

"Hey, aren't you Salvatore, the former structural physicist?"

"I take this train for peace," said the grandmother, "and peace I'll have."

"It's all right now, ma'am," said Sal leaping onto the table top. "You have heard about me, read about me, seen my pictures, it's me, Salvatore, the man with large muscles." He tore off his pantlegs crotch high. He knew his new life could wait, or rather, be reinvented when a propitious moment arrived. "Bring me your uncrushable, antimagnetic, lifetime guaranteed gadgets and I'll show you how little effort is required to destroy them."

"I never thought about it before, you'll excuse me, but it must be lonely counseling students all the time. I mean, no adults to joke with?" said Gina as a sudden turn rolled her onto Slim Barnes comfortable shoulder. She sat straight up
and adjusted herself. "Where can poor Sally be?"

Coach McGee tossed his empty beer can at a police cruiser. "Goddam pigs," he said.

Salvatore remembers.

My last government job, I was systems engineer, we laid sensors all over the Wheat National Park. Heat sensors that could detect one burnt out match landing in a forty acre field. Light sensors to betray the waste of power in unused bathrooms. Pressure sensors that located lost children or gave us a daily head count. Motion sensors for traffic regulation. Attitude sensors that would inform of any visitor imperfectly respectful of his national park. Debility sensors that belled staff doctors in case of imminent injury or death. Forecasting sensors for weather, garbage buildup, and general logistics. Sound sensors, perversion sensors, roadwear sensors. Best of all, overseer sensors that insured efficient operation of all the humming little devils. I wired, painted, and turned on the big computer who heard (?) it all. I couldn't stay to run it. I was to be sent to Guatemala on a secret mission. I quit.

May 5, 1764, in Genoa, greatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreat grandfather Lorenzo ate two bushels of spaghetti. He was revived two days later by a large sausage and garbanzo salad. So I am here.

"You're old enough to die," said the grandmother.

"How could we stand each other if we didn't have compassion?" said the thin, baldheaded man.
Gina thought Slim Barnes would drive slower. "I don't know, Mr. Barnes, about Sally. She's a problem we're going to have to face. She always said kind words about you, don't fool yourself, she always reminded me how to walk when you're around."

McGee swapped two rubbers for one can of beer. "Luck," he said.

Sally, stuck in the trunk, remembered the spiritual way out of any seemingly compromising situation. She counted her eyelashes and thought of carefree hours before the makeup mirror.

"But what difference," said Sal, "if we are destined to change or free to change."

"You study," said the grandmother, "all of western intellectualism leads to lobotomization." Nothing would deter her. "It's a simple problem, there's no need to break things, we always seek satisfaction yet sublet the satisfied to stupidity. How was your Roquefort? You don't see those blue lumps much anymore. My husband always said they were mold, eat them."

McGee wiped his brow with a borrowed handkerchief, "Is she breathing?"

"Fine looking home, Mrs., ah....."

"Gina, call me Gina, Mr., ah............."

"Slim."

"Denver, Denver," droned the conductor.

The first baseman drove a sharp line drive up the middle.
He rounded first, tore for second. "Slide, slide!" shouted McGee.

Two months later, in Kansas City, Sally threw out the first ball from the Hopkins High Queen of the May Spring Revel Baseball Game. Sal and Gina nestled together and nodded proudly. "Who would have thought?" said Sal.

Sally shifted her gown and glanced under the bleachers at the raggedy kids collecting anything that fell through. She had chosen one name appropriate for boy or girl, but now it didn't matter. She hoped there would be no extra innings, her organdy was rented for five hours.

The thin, baldheaded man bounced dully off the bridge abutment and his body caught fire from the blazing gasoline. Minutes before, he had breathed his favorite elegy for the railroad. "Roll 'em," he said.

Slim Barnes adjusted his chair behind the recently refinished walnut executive desk he had been granted along with principalship. He rolled several bright yellow pencils across the desk, onto the tile floor. "Miss Preston," he buzzed over the intercom, "I'm out of pencils again."

Sylvester Rhinehart McGee totaled the cigarettes owed him by fellow inmate. He was rich. He could afford to buy uniforms for the softball team. He tinkled his fingernails along the tungsten steel bars, the only kind fit for a secure prison, and managed an almost inconsiderable grin.

Salvatore sat amidst his new life wondering how he, of
the world's intentional oddities, had made a hit on local TV. His heart sagged, he noticed a scuff on his new wingtips.

Gina leaned against his atrophied left deltoid and whispered, "I'm pregnant."

The conductor surveyed the empty dining car angrily. Why shouldn't these modern travelers bring their own lunches? he asked. Metaphors swirled by outside the amber window. "K. C. to Denver, all aboard," he shouted, as he gulped his last dramamine against the motion sickness that would never come.